Freedom Found in Defiance

by Sensiblytainted

Summary

Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter have had a three-fold bond - soul, mind, and magic - since
the age of seven. They are now eleven and ready for Hogwarts, but is Hogwarts ready for
them? Harry, abused by the Dursleys and sold into slavery, had nearly become an Obscurus.
Draco, stolen as a baby and abandoned in the Muggle world, spent over a year as a sex-slave.
Fate brought them together, and together they fought for their freedom and overcame
desperate odds to survive. Now, magically powerful and with two years of Malfoy training,
Draco is ready to take on anyone who gets in his way of protecting Harry and stopping the
Dark Lord. Standing at his side, an equally powerful Harry is determined to make sure Draco
wins.
Summer Before Hogwarts

A/N: This is the sequel to Freedom Bound in Chains. If you want to understand what led to the circumstances and personalities of the characters in this story, please read FBiC first. However, it is very dark and details the trauma and abuse suffered by both Harry and Draco. A brief summary of FBiC is as follows:

Draco was stolen as a baby from his DeathEater family only to be abducted again six years later and turned into a sex-slave on the Muggle blackmarket. The Dursleys sell an abused Harry to the same group when he's seven years old. Brought together, the boys form a magical bond, escape to live with a Muggle who is caught up in the mob, and eventually get discovered by the Magical world. However, neither world considers them normal: Draco has been forged into an Alpha while Harry finds freedom in submission. This is the story of how Harry becomes bonded to Draco Malfoy and a ward of the Malfoy family.

I will do my best to make Freedom Found in Defiance stand alone. I will refer to events from FBiC, but I will try to do so in a way that it is still understandable to those who have not read the first story.

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FREEDOM FOUND IN DEFIANCE

Warning: This story will cover topics such as: Child Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Homophobia, Slash (male/male relationships), Shota/Chan (children together sexually), Alpha/Omega, BDSM, Ownership/Claiming, Body Modification, Bullying, Violence, Death/Murder, Toys, Voyeurism, Rape, Cross-Dressing, Gender Fluid characters, and other sensitive topics. Please be aware of this BEFORE reading.

If such topics are triggers to you, please don't read. I welcome any feedback but only in regards to making my writing and/or story better. Please don't send me verbal abuse because I write about dark topics that I feel need to be addressed. I, in no way, endorse child abuse or pedophilia.

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May 1st, 1991

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Draco walked across an empty room. His feet sank into the plush carpet at his feet. All was quiet, all was still. He walked toward a dark window. There was nothing beyond it. Just as he was about to touch the glass it seemed to melt. Draco's heart began to beat harder as he stepped through to the other side.

He was standing in a white room: the floor in white tile, the white walls bare, the white ceiling flat above his head. It was like standing in a large, white box. In the far right corner there was a large pile of something covered with a stark white sheet. It formed a type of lumpy pyramid as tall as Draco at its highest point. His lungs began to scream; he couldn't draw a single breath. With a shaking hand, he reached forward and pulled the sheet away from the pile.

At first his brain didn't register what he was seeing. Then with a feeling of a knife tearing through his
gut, he recognized arms, legs, and heads. Dead bodies... dead children... a pile of corpses as tall as he was.

He was screaming now. Screaming like the whole world was ending. He grabbed hold of a limp, cold arm and pulled. Harry's dead body tumbled from the pile, green eyes faded... staring... empty.

Wailing, Draco collapsed to his knees as his whole world crumbled around him. He pulled Harry's lifeless body to his chest as he sobbed. Harry's skin was waxy and cold... repulsive. The smell was nearly overpowering. As Draco looked down at the body in his arms, the corpse's head fell limp at an unnatural angle. Harry was dead and never coming back...

Draco sat up, drenched in sweat, heart thundering in his chest, tears streaming from his wild eyes. Cool hands touched his wet cheeks and Draco flinched, a sob rising in his throat.

"Shhh..." a sweet voice soothed him. "I'm okay... I'm here, Draco... Yours..."

Draco whimpered as his eyes focused. The room was shrouded in shadows, the sun not yet risen, but he could just make out Harry with his bright green eyes and messy black hair sitting next to him in their bed. He slowly released the painful grip he had on Harry's thin wrist and flung his arms around his boy. Harry molded to his chest and hummed with -happy love.

Harry's warm, gentle emotions filled the bond and eased Draco's terror. Slowly his heart beat calmed and he was able to breathe normally, his harsh panting gasps quieting. *Love you,* he whispered telepathically into Harry's mind.

Harry smiled against Draco's sternum and turned his head to rub his cheek affectionally against Draco's sweat-damp chest. Not quite able to smile yet, Draco lay down, pulling Harry so that the shorter boy lay sprawled half on top of him.

The dream haunted him. The icy terror of having lost Harry, of having failed him, wasn't easy to shake. The fact that it was an actual memory and not just his imagination made it all the worse. An Unspeakable, Pandora Lovegood, had been summoned by Lucius when they had first been found to study Draco and Harry's magical bond. It was rare, even for a twin bond, binding them at three points: magic, soul, and mind.

Instead, what Pandora found in her examination was the Black core of Voldemort's magic that was still attached to Harry's own. In her attempt to discover how to free Harry from that evil, she had created clones to experiment on. Failure after failure, she had eventually brought Draco to that cold, white room.

It was there that he'd seen with his own eyes the pile of Harry's corpses, all of them killed painfully in the course of Pandora's experiments. In fact, he'd participated in one of those experiments. He'd looked into Harry's green eyes and watched as the boy was torn apart by magic, felt it in the artificial bond Pandora had established between him and the clone. Draco had watched helplessly as Pandora had cast the Killing Curse and killed Harry right in front of him. The memory wouldn't leave him, even after two years.

Pandora had died studying the Black core inside Harry, but she had left Draco her notes. Notes she had told him never to share with anyone. Not that he would. If the world discovered Harry had Voldemort's Black core in him, they'd be terrified. They'd lock Harry up, maybe kill him trying to get it out. Draco wouldn't allow it.

Eyes silver and fierce, Draco stared up at the ceiling and held tight to Harry's warm, sleeping body. Harry was HIS! Draco was going to save him... He was going to protect him... and he'd DESTROY
anyone who got in his way.

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Draco and Harry, wearing nice slacks and sweaters, arrived by portkey just before noon to a small stone circle placed in a field in Ottery St. Catchpole. The weather was a crisp 14 degrees Celsius/ 58 degrees Fahrenheit, but the sky was blue and the sun was bright, making it feel warmer. They carried two small, wrapped packages each. Ted carried even more while Andromeda carried a happy toddler on her hip.

It was May 1st. They were scheduled to return to the Malfoys for the month of May, but it had been arranged that they could attend Beltane and Dee's 3rd birthday celebration with Andromeda and Ted first. Draco and Harry would portkey back to Malfoy manor as soon as the party was over.

A huge pavilion had been set up on the far side of the stone circle. There were wooden picnic tables, balloons, streamers, and a gaggle of redheads of all ages with a few blonds and brunets scattered here and there. Laughter and shouts filled the air. Draco's lips tilted into a faint smile as Harry's emotions came across the bond - happy excitement.

Ron spotted them first. The redhead came barreling over to them, his freckles bright on his ruddy cheeks. "Draco! Let's try and get 'em to play baseball!" - Ron had been roped into joining Draco and Harry's summer baseball team and had become an enthusiast. Quidditch would always come first, but baseball came a close second.

"Hello, Ronald. Let us get settled in and say hello to everybody," Andromeda cut in, smiling.

Ron went an even darker red as he kicked the ground. "Hello, Mrs. Tonks."

Draco led Harry and Ted over to the gift table while Andromeda and Dee headed toward Molly at the food table. Bill, the Weasley's oldest son, was sitting there with a redhead toddler on his lap. Septimus Weasley, otherwise known as Tim or Timmy, saw Draco and his pale blue eyes lit up. A smile broke across the toddler's face and he reached for Draco eagerly.

"Hey, Draco. Hiya, Harry," Bill greeted with an easy smile. He was a dark tan and his hair a bright copper from spending most of his time in the deserts of Egypt as a Curse-Breaker. "Good morning, Ted. Happy Beltane."

"Happy Beltane, Bill. You look well," Ted answered politely, setting his packages down.

Draco ignored Timmy's reaching hands and ran his fingers gently through the boy's thick, wavy red hair. "Happy birthday, Tim," he said softly.

Harry ducked in next to him and gave the baby a heart-felt kiss on the cheek. "Happy birthday, Timmy." He looked up through his bangs and round black glasses, smiling shyly. "Happy Beltane, Bill."

Bill's face softened even as he held onto the squirming toddler who was trying to get closer to an aloof Draco. "Are those for the kiddos?"

"Yes!" Harry gave a happy grin and placed the two presents on the pile.

Draco did the same with the two he held and took Harry's hand. "See you around." He led them into the crowd, ignoring the way Timmy's eyes followed him intently. Draco knew if he gave Tim attention, he'd never get rid of the boy and he wanted to have some fun before he was stuck babysitting all afternoon.
He led Harry toward the stone circle. A tall pole had been erected in the center. Long ribbons of every color hung limp around it waiting for the dance. Most of the kids their age were gathered there. The girls were in bright, long-sleeved dresses while the boys wore pants and colorful sweaters. Harry had chosen a pale purple while Draco wore a deep sapphire blue.

Ron, Ginny, Luna, and two kids he didn't know looked over as they approached. Luna, thick blonde hair filled with colorful ribbons, saw them and smiled. She had on a sparkly gold dress with pink ballet shoes and tiny, real cucumbers hanging from her earrings.

"Prince Draco, Prince Harry!" she said happily and gave a graceful curtsy.

"How are you?" Draco asked softly as Harry gave her a quick hug.

After the experiment with Harry's clones, he'd seen Luna's mother in a different light, but Pandora had tried to help them and had left Draco notes so that he could figure out how to save Harry. This girl with big blue eyes and vacant smile had lost her mother because of them. It made him feel responsible for her in some way.

"The devas are bright and happy today," she answered whimsically.

Ginny loped her arm through Luna's, her face a bright red the way it was whenever she was around Harry and Draco. "Are you dancing this year? Please, Draco?" Her usual braided pigtails had been exchanged for a messy bun. She wore a pretty, pale green dress and had white ribbons in her hair.

- nervous anticipation -

Draco caught and held Harry's deep green eyes. They had sat out on the last two Maypole Dances. Harry loved watching. He thought it was beautiful, but he was terrified of messing it up. All the spinning and interweaving of the ribbons seemed too complicated.

* Just follow my lead, * he decided, telling Harry across the bond. They were going to Hogwarts in a few months. This would be a good test of Harry's nerves and show Harry that he was more able than he thought. *Remember the whole point is for the ribbons to get tangled. You can't do it wrong. * Looking away from his boy, he gave the girls a polite smile. "Yes. We'll dance this year."

Ginny gave a happy squeal and darted toward her mother to tell her the news.

- anxiety trust - "Yes, Draco," Harry said softly, head ducked submissively.

Draco ran his thumb gently over the back of Harry's hand.

"Draco, this is Hermione and Neville," Ron stood leaning on a stone from the circle and gestured carelessly to the two brown-haired kids Draco didn't know. "Mum invited them this year when she heard about Hermione." The redhead leaned closer and whispered, "Hermione is a Pleasant. She's being fostered by the Longbottom family."

Ron's whisper wasn't quiet enough for the two kids not to hear and the girl ducked her head so that her frizzy hair hid her face. The boy's chubby cheeks went red, but he said nothing, shifting his weight unhappily.

Muggleborns were getting taken from their Muggle families more and more often now. The first few were older and attended Hogwarts already. They had been pathetically grateful for being fostered by a Magical family and a few had even been open about the abuse they had suffered there. Such stories had increased the popularity of Loretta's Law.
As more families began to foster Muggleborns, an amendment to the law was created for all fostered Muggleborns to change their names to match Loretta Pleasant's. It was said they did this to honor the girl who had inspired the law that protected and saved them, but Draco took lessons from Lucius and saw another reason behind the name change: it was so that the fostered Muggleborns could be more easily identified.

One reason for this was to prevent the accidental corruption of a Pureblood line. If a Muggleborn was fostered by a Pureblood family, a courting family might assume they were legitimate heirs to that line. A marriage between a fostered Muggleborn and a Pureblood would corrupt the line and had to be prevented at all cost. Of course, there were those like the Weasleys who didn't care about blood purity and were considered blood-traitors because of it even though their line wasn't technically corrupted yet.

In any case, as Loretta's Law became more and more popular and kids were taken from their families at a younger and younger age, the rightness of it had become murkier to Draco. Lucius speculated that Muggleborn fosterlings would become a type of servant to the adopting family and a symbol of status. If the child was actually abused, all the better. They'd be desperately loyal to the family who wanted them.

Draco had never met a Pleasant in person and he was slightly curious which way this Hermione fell. Was she an abused child or had she been swept up in the Pureblood demand for a Muggleborn to foster?

"Thanks, Ron," Draco said calmly and reached forward to push the girl's hair away from her face so he could see it. "Hi, Hermione. I'm Draco Malfoy. This is Harry Potter. It's nice to meet you."

Her expression was guarded; she had already learned a degree of shame for what she was. However, she hadn't flinched when Draco moved his hand toward her face to touch her hair nor was she afraid to look in his eyes.

"I've read about you in the papers, of course," she stated stiffly. "It's a pleasure to meet you." She then gave an unpracticed curtsy.

Draco gave her a cool smile. He doubted she had been abused, or at least not to the extent Draco would consider abuse. Not like he and Harry had been in the Blackmarket Hold where survival had been a very real daily struggle and not like Percy who had been molested for most of a year by a mysterious man in the Gryffindor dorms.

"Have you ever danced around a Maypole?" Draco asked casually, losing interest.

"No," she admitted reluctantly and flushed red in embarrassment, clearly sensitive to being made to feel lesser.

"I haven't, either!" Neville chimed in suddenly, still red in the face. His eyes darted nervously, unable to maintain contact long. After his outburst, his voice dropped significantly. "I… My family doesn't… celebrate… much…"

Draco lifted an eyebrow. It was the boy who actually showed evidence of abuse and he was the Pureblood. Neville was shorter than Ron but a little taller than Draco. He was plump with mousy brown hair and brown eyes. There weren't any marks on him, but with magic there wouldn't always be.

"It's my first year, too," Harry chimed in after receiving Draco's subtle nod. He gave Neville and Hermione a warm smile. Hermione visibly relaxed, but Neville remained tense. "Draco says you
can't do it wrong. The ribbons are supposed to get tangled."

"We can show you baseball, too!" Ron jumped in enthusiastically. "It's a Muggle game, so I bet Hermione knows about it. Draco is the team captain on the summer team we belong to. We're the Yellow Jackets!" he told them proudly, puffing out his chest. "We took second place in last year's tournament. Practice starts again next month. It'll be our last tournament before Hogwarts, so we gotta win it!"

Draco smirked. "Oh, we will," he said confidently.

"Why are you wearing a collar?" Hermione suddenly asked, eyes looking intently at the black leather collar that sat snug around the base of Harry's throat and only partially covered by his sweater.

Harry's hand lifted to cover the collar protectively. He still harbored a fear that someone would take it from him. It symbolized Draco's claim on him, the loss of which terrified him to this day.

"It's some Muggle fashion," Ron answered annoyed. "Don't you know that?"

Hermione went red in the face, frowning, but before she could respond, Draco thought it best to leave. Chokers were a fad among Muggles, but they were usually worn by girls and didn't usually resemble dog collars. It would be best if the Wizarding world didn't realize that.

"Come on, Harry. Let's get some food." He took Harry by the hand and gave a polite nod toward Neville and Hermione. "You are welcome to play if you would like to join us."

As soon as Molly saw them, she gave them huge hugs. She had Dee on her hip. The little girl was always smiling and giggling, her dark brown curls bouncing and her blue eyes sparkling. Where Tim was silent and hadn't spoken yet, Dee babbled and giggled constantly. She was a delight and everyone doted on her.

Draco caught sight of Madam Longbottom. She was a severe woman who wore dark maroon and black even on this bright and festive day. Her hat and bag had animal fur and feathers. Death seemed to shroud her.

Everyone ate and drank, the adults getting a bit tipsy. Eventually they gathered the kids who wanted to participate in the Maypole Dance. Harry and Neville looked very nervous and anxious as they took up their ribbons. Ginny was the complete opposite. She had been crowned May Queen again this year and wore a huge crown of white and pink flowers. Luna smiled vaguely, looking content, while Hermione had a frown of intense concentration. Ron just wanted to get it over with and play baseball. Draco shook his head and gave Harry a reassuring smile.

Bill began a happy jig on the fiddle while Ted piped along on a flute. Andromeda and Molly shook tambourines. A jaunty song somehow came out of all the noise and Ginny began to skip around the pole, pushing everyone along. They ducked and jumped over each other's ribbons. It soon became a game and they ran around laughing and spinning. Their ribbons became shorter and shorter until they all met together at the base of the pole, red-faced and out of breath. The adults clapped and roared their approval and fathers came to lift their daughters on their shoulders. Ginny and Luna looked thrilled, but Hermione stood alone next to Neville with no father to speak of. Even Dee was lifted carefully onto Ted's shoulders.

Ron was able to wrangle ten people into playing baseball not long after. Draco was always catcher and Harry always played pitcher. Ron, Arthur, Bill, Ginny and Molly were the Reds. Andromeda, Neville, Hermione, Luna, and Ted were the Nots. They took turns fielding and batting in turns. Having more adults on the team gave the Reds the advantage during batting, but the Nots had the
advantage during fielding. It was a close game, but the Reds took it in the end much to Ron and Ginny's delight.

Dee and Tim opened their presents shortly afterward. They received clothes and a few toys. They even blew out the one candle on their shared birthday cake. It was shared because Molly and Andromeda had both gotten pregnant on Samhain, or Halloween, night while they were caught in a faery ring. Exactly six months later, they had both gone into labor on Beltane or May 1st. The women claimed it was because the babies were special and had a special connection to nature, but the truth probably had something to do with fairy magic.

As the sun began to set, a bonfire was lit. Bill and the other adult males leapt over the flames to the applause and gasps of the watching crowd. It was a purifying ritual while the Maypole was masculinity wrapped in femininity, the symbol of fertility and sex. Draco knew most of the couples here would be getting it on tonight and he looked to Harry, his everything.

The firelight softened the boy's face and illuminated his happy smile. Draco squeezed his hand and pulled him closer so that he could stand behind him and wrap him in a hug. *Love you,* he whispered into Harry's mind.

*LOVE gratitude happy* - came rushing back.

Draco smiled and pressed his face into Harry's messy black hair to hide it.

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June 28th, 1991

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Draco was sitting on the couch, leaning against the arm. Harry was on the floor between his legs, Draco running his hand rhythmically through Harry's soft, messy hair. They both had Earth Science textbooks propped up in front of them. The living room fireplace flared with green fire. Draco looked up lazily, expecting Dora to step free with Andromeda and Ted. His eyes widened however when Dora practically leapt through the fire and spun around, her open school robe flaring, her hair a bright, flaming red.

Andromeda strode from the fire equally up in arms. "... no thought to what this would do to the family!"

"What, Mother? Represent the family with honor?"

Dee, who had been asleep on the rug with a blanket and pillow, sat up and began to cry. Harry looked up at Draco and received a short nod. He then immediately moved to the baby and pulled her into his arms. She quieted, watching with big blue eyes as her older sister and mother continued to scream.

"Honor! That's a fine thing to put on your grave! I'm sure it will be very comforting!"

Red in the face, Dora grew a few inches to be slightly taller than her mother and stepped forward so they were less than a few inches apart. "I like how much faith you have in me! I haven't died yet, Mother!"

"The Aurors is no place for you, Nymphadora!"
"And you think you know what my place is? I'll decide my own place! I will be starting the Auror program!"

"You thoughtless, stupid girl!" Andromeda lifted her hand to strike her daughter across the face, but Dora knocked her arm away with enough force that Andromeda staggered. "I'll grab my things," Dora said coldly, her hair turning a dark, jet black. "A friend will put me up."

Ted looked sadly on as his daughter stormed past him to the stairs up to her room. Andromeda, furious and crying, stomped into the kitchen without saying a word.


Harry stood very carefully, shifting fourteen-month-old Dee onto his hip. The sound of the little girl quietly crying and whimpering was loud in Harry's ears and - remorse guilt - flooded his heart.

"This had nothing to do with you." Draco came up behind Harry as they reached the second floor landing. He slipped his fingers between Harry's skin and collar, pulling it snug against Harry's throat in warning.

Draco maintained his grip as they ascended the stairs to the third floor. He walked behind Harry, arm stretched up to maintain his hold on the collar. By the time they reached the top, - calm acceptance - had replaced the heavy emotions from before.

They found Dora in her bedroom. Her Hogwarts robe was gone. In its place she wore a pale blue, baggy button up shirt tucked into pale blue jeans with huge pink flowers all over them. Her light brown belt matched her work boots. She had rolled the shirt's sleeves to halfway up her forearm. Her hair was short and frizzy around her head, still a dark black. Her eyes brightened to blue, matching Dee's, when she turned and saw them in the doorway.

"Well, we knew it would be like this," she said ruefully with a smile, her hair going brown. "I'm sure it will blow over in a few months, maybe a year tops. You boys will be going to Hogwarts in a few months, so you probably won't even notice."

Dora hefted her duffle bag over her shoulder and came over to ruffle Dee's curls. "I love you, little Dee Dee." She kissed the baby’s chubby cheek. She turned to Harry, giving him a sweet smile. "Just Owl me if you need anything, okay? We're family. No matter what."

"I love you," Harry told her tearfully. "I'm sure you'll do amazing as an Auror."

She flashed them a seemingly carefree grin and turned to Draco. His grey eyes watched her calmly. She handed him a thick envelope. "I catalogued all the good hiding spots in Hogwarts as well as a few interesting little tidbits. Give 'em hell, will ya?"

"Good luck."

Dora patted his shoulder bracingly once before pushing past him on the stairs, leaving for good. They could hear Andromeda yelling something to her before a door slammed loud enough they could hear it on the third floor. Dee put her head down, tucking it against Harry's neck. Harry stared wide-eyed at Draco.

The blond pulled Harry into his arms, Dee held safely between them. Like the baby had done to him, Harry tucked his face against Draco's neck. "It's going to be okay, Harry. They'll make up. Dora's gonna be great and Andromeda will be proud. Trust me."
"Yes, Draco," Harry answered softly, relaxing into Draco's hold.

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July 2nd, 1991

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Just shortly after dawn Narcissa carried the letter the boys had brought to her from her older sister down to the informal breakfast room. It was one of her favorite rooms. It had cream wallpaper with a pale brown diamond pattern. The ceiling was white, but you could see fat wooden beams crossing along the top. A soft yellow chandelier that looked like bare tree branches with about a dozen golden candles hung from the center.

Making the room look bigger, there was a big golden-framed mirror on one wall that sat above the wall's halfway mark. Underneath the mirror, on the lower half of the wall, was white wood with a small lip at the top. The table was dark and carved in a rectangle that could fit three dinning chairs on the long sides and one chair at either end. The floor was polished hardwood, and there were two narrow windows that stood floor to ceiling and showed a small hedge garden. On the center of the table was a low bowl of white flowers and two golden candlesticks with white candles lit.

Each place setting had china plates that sat on top of each other, each slightly smaller than the one on the bottom with many silver forks, knives, and spoons surrounding it. It was a picture of elegance and high-born etiquette, and Lucius matched the room perfectly.

He was already dressed immaculately for the day, his long hair tied back at the nape of his neck, his day robes perfectly tailored to his form, and his cane resting against his chair. His eyes softened as he took in his wife. Narcissa was adorned in a white dress that was reminiscent of Grecian robes. Large pink flowers graced the semi-sheer fabric. Her long golden hair was pinned up on her head, revealing her long neck.

"Good morning," she greeted her family.

"Good morning, Narcissa," Harry answered back, smiling.

"Good morning," Draco said more simply.

"I received a notice from Andromeda," she informed them as Lottie, one of their two house elves, began serving. "Nymphadora graduated the top of her year."

"A fine achievement," Lucius praised and cut his eyes meaningfully toward Draco. "It is a good example to follow."

Draco ignored this. He would do as well as he wanted to, but Harry felt sharp - anxiety - always needing to please. Draco squeezed his hand firmly under the table.

"She has also been accepted into the Auror Apprentice program," Narcissa added.

"If that is the course she'd like to pursue, she clearly has the scores for it." - Lucius's words were supportive, but his tone expressed doubt.

"It's a dangerous field," Narcissa agreed quietly. "Hopefully Denebola will pursue a more peaceful course." Her worried eyes fell on Draco.
Draco gave a careless shrug. "It's not something I'm interested in." If he needed to kill someone or investigate something, a group like the Aurors would only slow him down.

Not knowing his thoughts, Narcissa gave him a relieved smile and returned to her breakfast, the conversation dropped in favor of discussing the playdate they had scheduled with Draco and Harry's "closest" friends.

These friends were the ones approved by Narcissa of course; families loyal specifically to Lucius Malfoy. Pansy Parkinson, a member of one of the twenty-eight Sacred Bloodlines, as well as Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle - Purebloods but whose lines were contaminated a few generations back by Halfblood spouses, preventing them from being considered one of the Sacred.

As luck would have it, Draco didn't mind his mother's choices. Pansy was an emotional girl and sometimes thoughtless, but she was quick and witty. She also genuinely liked both Harry and Draco. More importantly, she was obedient, prepped by her own mother to make Draco happy as a potential mate.

As for Vincent and Gregory, they were products of too much inbreeding. Their two lines had this strange chemistry, intermarrying again and again. Even now Vince and Greg's mothers were sisters. Their fathers were first cousins. Thus the uncanny resemblance: both blond, hulking boys with watery blue eyes. They also had difficulties with reading and writing.

Vince especially had a hard time with words. When he spoke, it was slow, making him sound dumb. Most people didn't have the patience to wait for him to get them out and just bowled right over him. It was a shame because Vince was remarkably insightful, which Draco had used to his advantage a few times already.

As their mothers sat in a garden having tea, Draco led the others toward the woods. It was hot and the shade and privacy were welcome.

"Of course father doesn't think I need to bring all my dresses with me to Hogwarts. I know I can't wear them under my uniform, but I want to be prepared for any eventuality," Pansy chattered on to Draco as they walked between the trees. Harry, Vince, and Greg were slightly ahead of them looking for birds in the trees and other animals, their soft voices a soothing backdrop. "Slytherin has a reputation to uphold, after all," she continued, tucking her shoulder-length black hair behind an ear as she looked over at him with bright eyes and flushed cheeks from the exercise.

"I'm not going to Slytherin, Pansy," Draco told her with a wry smile.

Pansy almost tripped, too busy staring at him to see the tree root in front of her feet. "You can't be serious! You're the very definition of Slytherin!"

Draco smirked and came to a stop, leaning back against a tree and folding his arms smugly across his chest. "Which is why I won't be in Slytherin."

She could only gape at him, wide-eyed.

Grey eyes watched Harry. The boy looked so small compared to the taller, bigger Vince and Greg. "I'm not going to be separated from Harry. He'll have more supporters in Gryffindor."

"Gyffindor!" Pansy gasped. "He's not a Gryffindor, either, Draco!"

He chuckled. "Neither am I, but I'm even less a Hufflepuff."

Pansy made a choking sound. "I would say so!"
"Gryffindor is where we'll meet halfway."

"Even if that were true, how are you going make that happen?" Putting her hands on her hips, she stood across from her friend with a very demanding expression. "You don't just get to pick!"

Draco stared unblinking back at her, eyes sharp. "I will."

She huffed, crossing her arms and looking away. She could never hold his gaze when he got like that. "Are we allowed to be friends in this plan of yours? You know Gryffindors and Slytherins don't get along."

Draco pushed off the tree and tugged playfully at her hair. "I'd never let a good resource go untapped."

She scowled, making him laugh. "Gee, thanks."

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July 31st, 1991

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One month later, it was the last night before they head back to the Tonks'. It was also Harry's 11th birthday, and Dobby woke them before dawn to deliver a very important letter.

- relief gratitude joy - sang through the bond as Harry clutched his acceptance letter from Hogwarts. No matter how much Draco had reassured him that he was going to Hogwarts, Harry still thought it was possible for the school to decide they didn't want him.

Draco smiled as the messy-haired boy beamed happily at Dobby and thanked him profusely. He was practically hugging the letter to his chest. Dobby, of course, gushed about how great Sir Harry was, and the two babbled over each other with huge grins plastered across their faces.

"Enough," Draco chuckled and gave a yawn. "I suppose we might as well start our day."

"Do you think we can go shopping today…?" Harry trailed off - guilty excited. He ducked his head and let his bangs hide his eyes.

"I think Narcissa will be thrilled to take us shopping," Draco answered wryly. The woman genuinely loved to shop.

Sure enough once they dressed and made their way to the breakfast room, Narcissa took Harry's letter with a happy smile. "Congratulations, Harry! I do believe this calls for a little trip to Diagon."

- happy -

They made trips to Diagon a few times a year, but today felt different. It felt like Harry was seeing it for the first time. All the buildings were sort of wonky and leaning toward each other and toward the cobblestone street. Most of them had huge windows so that you could look in without going inside. There were shops selling robes, shops selling telescopes and strange silver instruments Harry had never seen before, windows stacked with barrels of bat spleens and eels' eyes, tottering piles of spell books, quills, and rolls of parchment, potion bottles, globes of the moon…
"May we get our wands first?" Draco asked Narcissa politely, his grey eyes gleaming. He was very much looking forward to being able to wield spells.

"Of course!" She led the way easily through the gaggle of witches and wizards. People seemed to realize who she was and part for her.

The boys followed in her wake, walking hand-in-hand, causing excited whispers to erupt behind them wherever they went. Lucius came after, expression impassive, his silver cane-head gleaming in the morning light. There was an even wider space around him than his wife, giving him plenty of room to keep an eye on his family.

Ollivander's wand shop wasn't too far down the alley. It had a grey exterior and seemed kind of slumped. Two rounded-out glass windows with several window panes revealed a very narrow interior with shelving floor to ceiling with slender boxes of wands. A tiny bell chimed when they entered. The boys stood next to Narcissa with Lucius lurking behind them as usual. There were no lights on in the building. The only the light came from the front windows. It cast the back of the shop and the narrow walkways in deep shadows.

A man with white frizzy hair that stood up around his head appeared out of the gloom. He wore a frayed coat and a grimy white shirt with a thin scarf tied around his neck. He should have looked ragged, but the energy around the man made him seem eccentric instead.

"First customers of the day," the old man spoke softly, a leering grin appearing on his face. He had milky white eyes, but he wasn't blind. He looked dead at Narcissa and said, "Willow, nine and a half inches, unicorn hair. Very supple wand. Good for long incantations."

"Yes," Narcissa inclined her head, smiling in amusement. "It has served me well."


Lucius said nothing. He remained stoic against the old wizard's gaze.

Draco took a subtle step forward so that he was slightly in front of Harry when those eyes fell on them. Harry moved in closer to his protector, but he kept his head up and his eyes even. His public mask was firmly in place.

"Ah, I can tell you'll be a difficult one," Ollivander murmured. He lifted his hand as if he was going to stroke Draco's face, but he stopped before his surprisingly graceful fingers came in contact with Draco's skin. Muttering to himself, he disappeared among the gloom.

"There are only three core types used in the UK," Narcissa informed them when Draco turned curious eyes up to her. "Dragon heartstring, unicorn hair, and phoenix feather. The way the core is combined with the variety of woods and the length of each wand makes each one unique."

"Quite so!" Ollivander enthused as he returned as suddenly as he had gone. He had an arm full of about nine wands. "The wand chooses the wizard. That much has always been clear to those of us who have studied wand lore. These connections are complex. An initial attraction, and then a mutual quest for experience, the wand learning from the wizard, the wizard from the wand."

He set the wands on the counter near him and opened the first box. A very dark wooded wand was lifted from the padding inside and handed to Draco to try. Draco took the wand and frowned at the sensation of freezing cold, as if the wand were ice. Ollivander snatched it away, muttering again as he quickly re-boxed the wand and presented the second. This one was very pale. Draco grasped hold
and they felt a rush of magic and then the sound of something toppling in the back. Harry's eyes went wide.

"No matter," Ollivander dismissed and snatched the wand away. "Let's see…"

Draco tried four more wands. It was the eighth that lit up with a soft light like a sunbeam, warming the air around them and sparkling gold.

Harry gasped - joy awe love - his green eyes bright and happy behind his glasses.

Draco gave him a smirk, his head tilted proudly as magic seemed to shimmer under his skin. This was his wand, no doubt about it. His hand made a possessive fist around the slender bit of wood.

"Hawthorn, ten inches, unicorn hair," Ollivander murmured in pride. "Semi-flexible. A very protective wand and versatile. This wand is full of contradiction and embodies duality."

"Thank you, sir," Draco told him politely, giving him a half bow. "It is perfect."

"May I see it?" Harry asked shyly.

Draco unclenched his fist and presented his new wand on both palms so his boy could see.

Narcissa leaned down slightly to also get a good look. It was beautiful really. Dark, nearly black at the handle, it had a slightly raised lip and then became a shade of brown. It was very smooth and straight, no curves or bumps or knots.

"A very good wand," she approved.

"Now… Let's see which wand chooses you, shall we?" Ollivander asked, looking eagerly at Harry.

Harry blushed, but he kept his head up.

Again Ollivander reached out, almost touching Harry's face, before turning and heading deep into his store. Harry waited nervously, holding tightly to Draco's free hand. A thought had come to him.

What if none of the wands wanted him?

* You will have a wand, * Draco stated firmly into his mind.

Harry's blush deepened, but he relaxed at Draco's proclamation. His confidence didn't last long, however.

Ollivander tried over a dozen wands on Harry and they all rejected the boy - the curtains caught on fire, one whole section of wands had flown from the shelves making a huge mess, Ollivander's hair had turned a puke green, and one wand actually bent in half, much to Harry's horror.

Harry's hands were shaking now, terrified of grasping another wand. Tears filled his eyes, but they were forbidden to fall, trapped behind a public mask that was about to crumble any minute.

Draco stood behind his boy, wrapping him in his arms. * You'll find your wand, Harry. Be patient. *

He would have soothed Harry, telling him it wasn't his fault, but he knew from experience that when Harry felt guilty, comfort only made him feel worse and not understood. Harry needed to be controlled, punished, or given tasks of atonement. It was the only thing that made him feel better. However, Draco's options were limited as they stood at the front of Ollivander's shop with Narcissa
next to them and Lucius behind them. All he could do was give a warning pinch to the soft tissue of Harry's lower stomach.

Harry lowered his head in acceptance at the small sting - shame fear submission.

"Here we are!" Ollivander's voice came loud from the back of the room. He appeared a moment later with a single dusty box in his hands. "Nearly eighty years old, it is. Give it a try."

Harry didn't move to take it. It had a dark brown handle that looked like the bark of a tree, uneven and rough. The section above the handle was a little thinner and lighter, but it still wasn't as polished as Draco's before smoothing into five inches of polished, smooth wood.

* Take it, * Draco ordered.

Harry's hand immediately lifted and grasped hold of that rough-hewn handle. Immediately, streamers of red, gold, and silver spilled from the tip like ribbons. Warmth radiated up his arm and pooled in his belly. Harry gave a shocked gasp and looked almost desperately up at Draco as the blond came to stand beside him.

* Good boy, * Draco praised, briefly touching Harry's flushed cheek.

Harry ducked his head and practically melted as Draco pulled him protectively against his chest, hugging him with Harry's new wand trapped between them. Harry was shaking in reaction, nearly overwhelmed with emotion - relief gratitude unworthiness.

Draco looked up as he pet Harry's hair, the boy's damp face pressing against his collarbone. Ollivander stared back with weird intensity. Draco tightened his hold on Harry and lifted an eyebrow. "What is it?"

"Eleven inches, holly, phoenix feather. Nice and supple… But it is curious, very curious…"

"What's curious?" Draco asked sharply.

"Is there something unusual with his wand?" Narcissa asked a bit more politely.

Harry unfolded from Draco's embrace, giving the blond more room to move if he had to. He clutched his new wand to his chest.

Ollivander's white eyes stared unblinkingly at Harry. "I remember every single wand I've ever sold, Mr. Potter. It so happens that the phoenix whose tail feather is in your wand, gave another feather - just one other. It is very curious indeed that you should be destined for this wand when its brother gave you that scar." He lifted and pointed with a slender finger directly to Harry's forehead.

Draco felt Lucius go tense behind him and would have rolled his eyes if his heart wasn't pounding a mile a minute. Lucius had withdrawn from Harry since Pandora's death. He was certain the boy was doomed or would become possessed by the Dark Lord. He'd done all he could to convince Draco to break his bond with Harry and had only grown colder and more distant with each of Draco's refusals. This would only reinforce Lucius's paranoia.

- horror acceptance sorrow - It wasn't news to Harry that he was a disgusting freak. Draco was his only redeeming grace, so it didn't surprise him that he had the same wand as the monster who had killed so many.

"The Dark Lord's wand was holly?" Draco questioned, deciding to address Harry's world-view later. Narcissa's hand clutched his shoulder fearfully.
"No," Ollivander answered in a whisper, his attention shifting to Draco. "Thirteen and a half inches, yew, phoenix feather. A powerful wand, terrible but great."

"Then it's not the same," Draco declared to everyone in the room. He took Harry's hand. "Come on." Looking up at Narcissa, he informed her, "We'll be waiting for you at Madam Malkin's."

Harry obediently followed in his wake, his hand securely clasped in Draco's. The magic of the day had disappeared. He hardly looked around, his head ducked and his face hidden, his mask having fallen away. His new wand was still in his hand and he stared down at it numbly.

"Good morning, madam," Draco said politely as they entered the robe maker's shop.

The plump woman gave a big smile. "Mr. Malfoy, Mr. Potter, good morning." Other customers began to whisper loudly, all eyes on them. Even Malkin's assistants had stopped to stare.

"Before we go for our fitting, would it be possible to use your lavatory?" Draco asked, using the high-class manners Narcissa had drummed into them over the years.

Malkin, of course, gave permission and pointed the way even though it was staff only. It was partially hidden by a staircase and a mountain of swatches and textile materials. Draco pulled Harry into the small space with him. It was tiled with a toilet and sink, barely larger than a cupboard, but it was spotlessly clean.

Draco shut the toilet lid and had Harry sit on it. "Give me your wand," he ordered lowly.

Harry obediently lifted his wand, eyes on the floor.

Draco took it from him. As soon as his fingers closed around it, he could feel a response. A low hum that resonated deep in his bones. It wasn't his wand, but it was his twin's and it recognized him. He gave a slow smile, eyes on the bowed head of messy black hair.

*Look at me,* he told him.

Harry's face lifted, his green eyes going round behind black-framed glasses.

Draco stood, posture commanding and arrogant, feet braced, hips canted. He held Harry's wand up to his mouth. Pink lips parted as silver eyes stared down at him and a slick tongue pressed firmly against the wood. Harry's breath caught at the sight, his eyes glued to Draco's mouth.

Heart pumping steady and strong in his chest, thrilling in Harry's attention, Draco slowly wrapped his tongue around Harry's wand and dragged it down the length of the stick. Sensually up one side and down the other until the whole thing glistened slightly from his spit. Harry was panting softly, cheeks burning red and feeling hot.

*You're mine, Harry. All of you. Every inch. Everything of yours is mine. Even this,* Draco whispered into his twin's mind. He placed the tip of the wand at his lips and slowly slid it into his mouth, pressing it in until it hit the back this throat before sliding it just as slowly out. "Open your mouth, Harry."

Harry opened his mouth, Draco placing the wet wand horizontal so that he was biting down on it in two spots. His tongue lapped at it, sucking Draco's spit from it.

"Don't drop it and don't hurt it," Draco purred. "Don't make a sound."

He pushed open the red day jacket that Harry had chosen to wear that morning. As Harry's breath
caught, Draco slowly untied the thin, maroon tie at Harry's throat and unbuttoned the pristine white shirt. He thumbed the boy's nipples before pinching them sharply.

Harry arched into the pain, his eyes squeezing closed. He didn't make a sound.

Draco smiled softly, filled with love. He left off torturing Harry's nipples. Still smiling he undid Harry's belt and button, unzipping the boy. Neither of them wore underwear. Draco knelt and pressed his face into Harry's crotch. He wrapped his arms around Harry's thin waist as he began to slowly lick in circles around the boy's small member.

Harry was sweating now, his whole body arched in a tense line. Draco got him nice and wet and stimulated before turning his head and bit viciously down on his favorite place on Harry's inner thigh.

Harry went rigid, not breathing as the sharp pain shot through his whole body like lightning. The second bite on his other thigh nearly made him scream. He would have if he'd had any air at all. Tears soaked his face.

Then Draco was licking him again, between the two points of molten agony. Harry's jaw loosened, the wand trembled, but he caught it with his teeth at the last minute. Hot, searing pain and throbbing pleasure - he couldn't get his breath.

Yours, I'm yours, Draco, magic's yours, body's yours, free me, save me, hurt me, Draco, yours… Thoughts and words filled up all the spaces not filled already with the pain and pleasure, trapped and unspoken, chained by Draco's order of silence… and he was coming apart!

Draco's shoulders and face were damp from sweat. Harry's pleasure and pain had stormed the bond, bringing him over the edge with his boy. He shifted his hips, his hand lifting from between his legs. There was a small damp spot in his pants from where he'd cum. Mostly clear and only a small amount, it wasn't like Raymond's cum yet, but he knew in a few years it would be.

Harry lay in a limp puddle on the toilet seat. His shirt and jacket hung open, his wand between his teeth with his chin and chest slick with drool. His pants were falling off his hips and exposing his wet, now limp member. He was a gorgeous sight. Draco leaned up to kiss Harry's drool-slick mouth, his tongue tangling with Harry's around the wand between Harry's teeth.

"Good boy," Draco praised, breathless and hoarse, as he leaned back. "Now get dressed. Malkin's waiting."

- LOVE gratitude - Harry spat out his wand, catching it in his hand. "Yes, Draco," he murmured softly. He looked down at his wand and felt warm again. The two bites on his thighs burned and throbbed like acid, comforting him. Whatever the wand hand been, it was Draco's now, just as Harry was.

He held it carefully, cherishing it, as he clumsily buttoned his pants and shirt, straightening his jacket. Draco's warm grey eyes watched him as he leaned against the door. Harry felt safe under that gaze and smiled softly as he washed his hands and face, running his damp fingers through his hair, trying to smooth it down.

Draco pushed off the door and kissed Harry's cheek. He took the boy's hand and led him back out into the shop. Narcissa was there, Lucius was not.

Narcissa gave them a serene smile. "Are you ready for your fitting?" she asked.

Madam Malkin fitted them herself. She put them up on stools in front of the big mirrors while her
assistants worked on a few other people. Draco arranged it so that Harry was to the left of him on the outside of the line next to no one but Draco. Draco on the other hand was next to a tall teenager around thirteen or so. He had cropped dark brown hair, heavy dark eyebrows, and thick lips. His dark eyes met Draco's in the mirror and he gave a sharp grin.

"Going to Hogwarts this year?" the boy asked, his voice breaking toward the end.

"Yes." Draco continued to watch him with no expression.

"I'm trying out for Chaser this year. Interested in Quidditch?"

"We'll see." Draco shifted his attention to Harry for a minute, checking on him, but Harry was standing calm and patient as Malkin measured the slight changes in their dimensions from last year.

"Potter, huh?" the boy said, voice low. Draco snapped his attention back to him. "Wouldn't think in a million years a Malfoy would get involved with a Potter."

"That so?" Draco asked quietly, a dangerous glint in his eye. "How rude of me. I don't believe I caught your name?"

"My name's Pucey, Adrian Pucey. Third-year Slytherin." Pucey gave another sharp smile. "What House are you hoping to get into?"

"Oh, I have a feeling the Hat will know exactly where to put me," Draco drawled and gave a sharp smile of his own.

Chapter end.
“You boys look lovely in your school robes,” Narcissa said in approval as the boys came over after their fitting. “Let me take your jackets.”

It was nothing but the truth. The robes were tailored perfectly to their forms. Harry was still very thin, even with the nutrient potion he still took once a month to try and reverse the damage of long-term starvation. Despite his small stature, however, he looked healthy. His hair was thick and glossy, his eyes bright, his skin a golden hue from playing baseball most of the summer. Draco stood a few inches taller and was slightly thicker than Harry, but he was by no means a big child. He possessed a slender build with whipcord muscle underneath his scarred skin. His hair had been bleached pure white and his cheeks and nose were slightly burnt from his time outdoors.

“Thank you, Narcissa. They feel very comfortable,” Harry answered with a happy blush and handed over their day coats.

Narcissa folded them and cast a spell to shrink them to the size of matchbooks before placing them into her pocket. Looking over, she met Madam Malkin’s eye, silently telling her that she’d be paid later. Harry could still get a bit sensitive if a lot of money was spent on him, so she was in the habit of paying out of his sight. Turning a charming smile to the boys, she asked, “Are we ready to go?”

Draco eyes were still cold from his exchange with Pucey and his answer came out a clipped, “Yes.”

Narcissa ignored Draco’s attitude. “Lucius is waiting for us at the bank. He had some business there and he also wanted to let Harry see his Potter vault now that he is eleven.”

Harry put his hand in the blond’s - calm love - flowing through the bond.

Draco melted. He squeezed Harry’s fingers in thanks, his eyes thawing.

They had a little bit of a walk. Gringotts was at the very end of Diagon Alley and the crowd was even thicker than it had been that morning. Draco kept his face perfectly blank as people gasped and pointed at them. A few even dared to take pictures, not that it would do them any good. Draco and Harry never went out without Narcissa or Andromeda placing a Distortion Charm on them, so any photographs taken would come out blurry as hell.

Harry kept close to Draco, but he wasn’t too overwhelmed. His thighs still throbbed hotly with every heartbeat and it made him feel secure even in the press of people. He felt utterly confident that Draco would handle anything that came up. Instead, he was more focused on the new school robe he wore. The robe material was soft and smooth under Harry’s fingers. It was, of course, the most expensive school robe Malkin made. It sort of swished as he walked, reminding Harry a little of a gown. A smile peeked out at the corners of his mouth. It also had built in pockets so they could store their new wands.

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Harry’s attention was drawn upward as they reached the bank. He gaped at the intimidating building, lips parting. It was tall, white, and crooked one way and then another, standing several stories tall. Two burnished bronze doors stood open with a goblin in a uniform of scarlet and gold standing to the side. It wielded a short spear and looked at everyone walking past with the most ferocious glare. Narcissa ignored the creature and Draco followed her example. The three of them stepped into a marbled entrance hall about ten degrees cooler than the outside. Another set of doors, these silver,
stood just inside with large words inscribed in cursive on them:

*Enter, stranger, but take heed of what awaits the sin of greed. For those who take but do not earn must pay most dearly in their turn. So if you seek beneath our floors a treasure that was never yours, Thief, you have been warned. Beware of finding more than treasure there.*

The silver doors made a groaning sound as Narcissa waved her wand at them and they slowly opened inward. Two more goblins stood just inside the second entrance, looking nearly identical to the goblin standing guard outside. As they walked passed, the goblin next to Harry gave a wicked grin full of very sharp teeth. Draco pulled him forward and Harry saw a vast marble hall. Hanging from the ceiling, there was a huge, gold chandelier with crystals hanging from it, sending light to every corner. Long counters stretched along its length along both walls with several different doors leading off to the vault passageways. At each booth, a goblin sat to deal with customers. There must have been a hundred of them.

Lucius had been sitting at a bench by the doors, waiting for them. He greeted his wife with a shallow inclination of his head. Narcissa mirrored the gesture. She and the boys followed him toward one of the empty counters. “Lucius Malfoy and family. We’d like to escort Harry Potter to his vault,” Lucius drawled.

The goblin was dressed in an old fashion suit and stared up at them as if they were disgusting. “Wands please and Mr. Potter’s vault key.”

The four of them handed over their wands and Lucius produced a small golden key with a capital P in cursive on the end. The goblin examined all of these for several long minutes. Harry glanced at Draco and Lucius, but neither of them seemed bothered by the wait, so he decided nothing must be wrong.

Eventually, the goblin hopped down and asked them to follow. They made their way toward one of the doors at the back that led to the vaults. The chained gate was locked and secured, but the goblin waved his gnarled hand and it opened easily. They all received their wands back, but the goblin kept the key. They were led into a rough stone passage that had a cart and tracks. It was a tight fit in the steel cart, so Harry had to sit on Draco’s lap.

They shot forward, Harry giving an involuntary cry. Draco’s arms tightened around him to keep him in the cart. It was like riding a broom that you had no control over. They went up and down and zigzagged in crazy directions. Vaults whizzed past. They even shot through a huge cavern with a huge, chained dragon sleeping at the bottom. When their cart came to a violent halt, Harry and Draco were grinning while Narcissa looked a bit green. Lucius lifted his eyebrow at her as he offered his hand. She took it with a haughty tilt to her chin, making Lucius’s lips twitch into a quick smile.

They climbed out and walked toward a huge golden vault door with the number 687 inscribed on it. As the goblin was opening the door, another cart zoomed by with a huge, bearded man who was screaming. Draco chuckled while Harry giggled. The Potter vault swung open and they all looked inside to see piles and stacks of coins like a pirate treasure filling half the room. The coins were taller than the boys in some places, and there were a few chests that contained some photos and documents as well as a couple journals. Lucius stood to the side and spoke softly to Narcissa as the boys explored.

Harry had come to accept that he’d had a family before the Dursleys and that they were good people unlike what he’d been told, but he still didn’t quite feel attached to them. It was just something he couldn’t completely wrap his mind around. After all, he was a freak who deserved nothing. He couldn’t imagine anyone except Draco wanting him. However, he happily helped Draco look through the few chests for things of James and Lily. For Remus’s sake. The man still deeply grieved
the loss of his best friends and Harry cared about him, but they didn’t find anything. Most of this was from James’s parents or even older heirlooms.

“I heard everything of theirs was lost in Godric’s Hollow,” Lucius murmured when Draco mentioned it.

Draco frowned. Just how much damage had the house taken? Now wasn’t the time to grill Lucius, however. He took Harry’s hand and asked his boy, “Are you ready to go?”

Harry looked up at the blond through his fringe. “Should I give some gold to Lucius and Andromeda for taking care of me?”

“I take care of you,” Draco gently corrected and shook his head. “No. This is ours for after school and we move out on our own.”

Harry accepted that, trusting him to know best. “Yes, Draco.”

They were leaving Gringotts and heading toward the bookstore when a loud booming voice called out to them from the street. “Arry!”

The man was standing in front of them. He’d been searching for something in his pocket in the massive patchwork leather overcoat he wore when he’d seen them. It was the massive man who had been screaming in the bank cart. He walked back up the steps, stopping four down from them and still he towered over them, standing twice as tall as an average man. He had to have been nearly twelve feet! He was wide, too, nearly three times as wide as a normal-sized person, with a long mane of shaggy black hair. He would have been terrifying but for the fact joy suffused his face, a grin clear even through the thick, bushy beard that covered nearly half his face.

“Havne’t seen ya since you were a little ‘un!” he boomed.

“You knew Harry when he was a baby?” Draco asked, head back to look the man in the face.

“Took ‘em from Godric’s Hollow, I did! Such a small thing!” the man’s joy transformed into a very real sorrow. Tears began to glitter in his beetle black eyes. “I didn’ know what they’d do to ya there. Makes me right sick just thinkin’ bout it. Pr’fessor McGonagall said they were the worst Muggles, but with You-Know-Who’s followers still runnin’ about, thought it was the safest place for ya.”

As - unease confusion - jumped through the bond, Draco stared in wonder at the strange being before him. The hairy man seemed to be completely unable to not speak his true feelings and he was clearly in the know about sensitive topics. Draco was instantly intrigued. He’d never heard a first hand account of that night before.

“Rubeus Hagrid,” Lucius said with a sneer, introducing the man since he clearly was unable to remember to do so himself. “Keeper of the Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts.”

Hagrid’s eyes narrowed as he stared down at Lucius. “You best be takin’ care o’ our ‘Arry, ‘ere, Malfoy. There’s a mighty lot of people who care ‘bout him.”

“Thank you, Hagrid,” Draco interrupted, seeing the tightening of Lucius’s lips and knowing what that meant. “They’re taking very good care of us.”

Hagrid turned his attention to Draco, his face softening. “I reckon they are with you lookin’ out for ‘em. Pr’fessor Dumbledore told me ‘imself you’d never let anythin’ hurt ‘Arry.”

“We’d love to stay and chat, but we still have quite the amount of shopping to do,” Narcissa cut in
“I’d like to treat ‘Arry to lunch, if I could?” Hagrid suddenly asked. “Seein’ it’s his birthday an’ all. I’d a made ‘em a cake if I knew I’d be runnin’ into ‘em ‘ere.”

“Lunch sounds like a great idea,” Draco answered with a big smile. He gave Lucius and Narcissa a pointed look. “Why don’t we take a little break? You could get some things done and pick us up at the Leaky Cauldron in an hour.”

Hagrid looked like he’d won a very special prize.

At first Narcissa protested, making excuses, while Lucius gave Draco a cold, disapproving stare. Draco shot down every excuse and met Lucius with indifference. A few minutes later, Draco and Harry were walking beside Hagrid back to the Leaky Cauldron.

Harry shot Draco a look. He knew that expression. Draco had a purpose. He wanted something from Hagrid. Anticipation determination - strummed through his veins. Being useful to Draco, helping him, gave him the biggest rush. It reassured him that he could be good; he was more than a freak who cursed everyone around him. So Harry smiled up at Hagrid and chatted with him cheerfully all the way to the pub his goal burning in his mind. He needed Hagrid to be at ease so that Draco could get what he wanted from him.

As they settled in at a table, Hagrid sat in a huge chair as thick and wide as a tree trunk. Draco gave the massive man a smile, casually stating, “It’s lucky we ran into you today.”

“Had an errand to run for the Pr’fessor, I did,” Hagrid said in a whisper that was as loud as a normal speaking voice. His dustbin-sized hands patted his breast pocket. “Had to pick up an important item.”

Curious as he was about that, Draco was more interested in the night Voldemort attacked Harry. “Headmaster Dumbledore must trust you a lot. And the Ministry, if they sent you to get Harry.”

Hagrid guffawed, a short booming laugh. “The Ministry don’t approve of people like me. It was Pr’fessor Dumbledore who sent me. Knew before the Ministry did that somethin’ had happened. Felt the Fidelius Charm fall as he’s the one who spelled it there.”

Harry, now knowing Draco wanted details of that night, made his eyes big and his voice soft. “What was it like? What did you see, Hagrid?”

Hagrid gave Harry a worried look. “I shouldn’a mentioned it.” He cleared his throat gruffly and tried to change the subject. “Ya look so much like yer father, ‘Arry. Woulda recognized ya anywhere. Got yer mum’s eyes, though. She was a right beautiful witch.” He gave a loud sniff, tears in his eyes. “I tended the grounds when they were in school. Full of life, they was. By the end, they were so in love.”

Harry had heard similar tales from Remus. He was the one who had found them in America and brought them back two years ago. The Malfoys may have forbidden contact between them, but Andromeda hadn’t felt the same way. Remus had visited as often as he could the months they lived in London. He couldn’t replace Liam, their adopted brother in New York, but he had come close.

“Thank you, Hagrid. I know. You may remember Remus Lupin. He’s a good friend and he told me a bit about them,” Harry said, pushing his glasses up his nose. A shiver went down his back as Draco caressed his thigh under the table. “I know it’s hard, but I’d like you to tell us what happened that night. Others have told me what they know, but none of them were there like you were.” Green eyes intense, he added, “Please?”
Hagrid looked from one small boy to the other, but he kept coming back to Harry’s unwavering stare. “It wasn’t a good night, ‘Arry.”

“I know.” Harry felt his heart pound in his chest. “But I need to know what it was really like. I deserve to know.”

“I suppose ya have the right,” Hagrid acknowledged reluctantly. Taking a deep breath, he blew it out, ruffling the hair on both of the boys’ heads. “I was in me cabin when I got the summons from Pr’fessor Dumbledore. He told me to fetch ya, Harry. To keep ya safe and bring ya to ‘em. I can’t ride a broom on account of my size, but I had a motorbike I was fixin’ up for a friend. It was dark as pitch and I figured I’d not be seen, so I flew it to Godric’s Hollow.

“Ya see, I could find the house easy, as the charm was broken. I remember it bein’ so quiet. There were no lights on in any of the houses. Not even street lights. There was that horrible mark, just floatin’ in the sky. Green and sickly, the skull and snake. The Dark Mark. You-Know-Who would put it up above his targets, like a signature. It was fadin’ even as I watched, blowin’ away. The house was dark and kind’o fallen in toward the center. I was mighty scared you was hurt, ‘Arry, but I was afraid to go in and make the house fall down because of my size, but outta the dark doorway came a man holdin’ ya. You were such a tiny thing!” He sniffed again.

“Who was the man?” Draco asked lowly, riveted on Hagrid’s story.

“Sirius Black,” Hagrid admitted, anger rumbling in his voice. “I didn’t know what he’d done at the time. He looked crazy upset. He was cryin’ and scrammin’. I was worried about ya, ‘Arry, so I told ‘em to hand ya over. That Pr’fessor Dumbledore was gonna keep ya safe now. He didn’t wanna let ya go, but he was goin’ on about getting revenge. I told ‘em ya needed takin’ care of. There was blood. On yer head there.” He gestured with his huge hand toward Harry’s whole head, which wasn’t helpful, but both boys knew Hagrid meant the lightning bolt scar that sat slightly to the left on his forehead. “It was bleedin’ and ya wouldn’t wake up, so he gave ya to me. Told me to take care o’ ya. Fit in one hand, ya did. Then he told me to keep the bike and he just dissapeared. Apparated somewhere. The next day he went after poor Peter. Killed ‘em and all them Muggles.” As if remembering he was talking to Harry and Draco, Hagrid’s eyes went wide and he rushed to assure them, “He’s in Azkaban now. He got what’s his. You don’t have’ta worry about that!”

“Who was he? Why was he there?” Draco asked, surprised by the emotion in the massive man’s voice.

Hagrid gave a tired sigh. “He was best friends with ‘Arry’s dad. Like brothers, they were. Him and Remus and Petter. Thick as thieves. Black was the Secret Keeper,” he confessed and looked sadly down at Harry. “Told You-Know-Who where to find ya. Betrayed your dad and mum.”

Black must have been a terrible person. Harry couldn’t imagine betraying Draco - protective devotion. He leaned against Draco’s side and said firmly, “I’m glad he’s in Azkaban then.”

Draco grabbed Harry’s hand, pulling it into his lap, and squeezed it. “Where did you go after you had Harry?” he prompted, pushing the story along.

“Flew to Surrey. Carried ‘Arry in my arm the whole way. The bleedin’ stopped and I cleaned ‘em up as best I could.” Hagrid reached out to pat the top of Harry’s head.

Harry tensed, expecting to nearly crumple under that giant hand, but Hagrid was surprisingly gentle.

“I’m sorry, ‘Arry. More sorry than ya will ever know that I left ya there.” Hagrid returned his hand to the table and straightened his back as if to brace himself for some horrible truth. “Pr’fessor
Dumbledore was waitin’. He turned all the lights off, made it nice and dark. No one saw as I pulled up. Pr’fessor McGonagall was there, too. She told us she didn’t like the looks of those Muggles. Like I said, Pr’fessor Dumbledore figured it’d be the only safe place fer ya. Said there was special wards there on account of the woman being yer mum’s sister. Even still, it was mighty hard to let ya go. Pr’fessor Dumbledore placed ya in a protected basket and left ya on the stoop with a letter. We waited to be sure the woman would take ya in and she did, so…” Fat tears wet Hagrid’s cheeks. “We left ya.”

Hagrid’s sincere distress compelled Harry to reach out and pat the man’s massive hand. “It’s okay, Hagrid. I’m not upset.”

Hagrid nodded and dug in his pocket, sniffing.

“Thank you for telling us the story,” Harry continued, trying to soothe the man.

Hagrid pulled out a handkerchief as big as a towel and a round package tumbled onto the table wrapped in brown paper and tied with a string. Draco reached out to hand it back to the man, but as soon as his hand closed around it he felt a hot pulse of magic throb up his arm. It was like a soft kick to the stomach. Hagrid was too busy blowing his nose like a trumpet to notice the way Draco’s whole body froze.

Harry darted a glance at Draco’s face, looking for that terrible blankness that preceded one of Draco’s horrific flashbacks, but instead the blond’s eyes had gone silver the way they did when he was utterly focused on one thing to the exclusion of all else. Harry stood and walked around Hagrid to stand at his other side, making the man turn his head to look at him, away from Draco and the way he was clutching the package on the table.

“Do you need another drink, Hagrid? Or something to eat?” he asked politely. “I feel bad asking you to talk about it. I didn’t mean to make you upset.”

“Don’t ya worry about me, ‘Arry. I’m okay,” Hagrid protested and blew his nose a final time.

Draco was barely aware of Harry and Hagrid’s conversation. The round package was warming under his hand. It called to him. It was like his wand, but different from it. It felt more powerful, but also like it would only do one thing. For some reason it made Draco think of a gun even though instinctively he knew its purpose wasn’t to cause harm.

He was tempted to unwrap it, but he was smart enough to realize unwrapping something that powerful in the middle of the pub would be extremely stupid. His mind raced, but he already knew he wouldn’t be able to keep it. Stealing it would only get him in unnecessary trouble. It’s not like Hagrid wouldn’t know who took it, so Draco forced himself to hand it over.

“You dropped this, Hagrid,” he said, voice rougher than he expected.

Hagrid’s eyes went wide and he quickly stuffed the package back into his pocket. “Sorry ‘bout that. Ya shouldn’a seen that.”

Draco nodded in perfect agreement as Harry came back around to retake his seat. “It was very magical,” he admitted, wrapping an arm around Harry and pulling the smaller boy against his side.

He met Hagrid’s gaze, eyes narrowed thoughtfully. “Wonder what it is.”

Hagrid leaned forward, whispering. “Pr’fessor sent me to pick it up from Gringrotts. Only thing in the vault, it was. I reckon it’s mighty important, so it’s best the likes of you and me stay outta it.” He straightened again. “Right! Let’s eat!”
Just then Tom, the barkeep, brought over their shepherd’s pies. They talked of simple things, mostly Hogwarts related. Harry even tried to explain baseball to the man, but it was a lost cause. Before they knew it, the hour was up and Narcissa and Lucius appeared.

“Don’t concern yourself with the tab,” Narcissa politely informed Hagrid. “It’s been settled. I hope you have a pleasant rest of your day.”

Hagrid turned and scooped Harry up into a hug. Harry’s feet dangled off the ground nearly three feet. Draco tensed, but he slowly relaxed as he sensed no fear or pain from Harry. “Good luck to ya, ‘Arry. I’ll be seeing you again at Hogwarts.”

“Bye, Hagrid,” Harry said with a smile once his feet were on the ground. “Thank you for lunch. I look forward to seeing you again.”

Hagrid gave another big grin before making his way out of the pub.

Draco took Harry’s hand possessively.

“Now that your… curiosity,” Lucius drawled with cool disdain, “is assuaged, may we continue to purchase your school supplies? The day grows late.”

Draco gave his father a sweet smile. “Absolutely, Lucius. Let’s go.”

Lucius cut his son a cold glare before turning on his heel and leading the way back out onto the alley, his robes flaring about his feet. His cane made a sharp tapping sound with every step, emphasizing his displeasure.

Narcissa took up the rear this time. When she caught Harry’s worried look, she gave the boy a discrete wink and smiled when it made the tension in Harry’s shoulders melt away. She had come to terms long ago with what it meant to have Harry Potter as her adopted son. The boys would make associates out of a wide range of people and would naturally deviate from the more expected Malfoy allies.

Lucius had yet to fully resign himself to that fate. She understood his discontent, but it was far better to face reality and adapt as quickly as possible than to resist and possibly lose Draco’s confidence. Likely the Keeper of the Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts was just the beginning, and, as unacceptable as the half-giant was as a person, there was a strategic advantage to becoming his associate that Narcissa could recognize. The least of which was the man’s loose lips and close relationship to Albus Dumbledore.

Draco shot his mother an amused look as they entered the bookstore and Lucius stiffly informed them he would meet them at the counter before striding off. Narcissa’s lips twitched and she guided them easily to the shelves dedicated to Hogwarts’ school books. There were several other kids and parents, but Narcissa easily maneuvered them to the front.

The list was pretty extensive: *Magical Drafts and Potions, Standard Book of Spells Grade 1, Dark Forces: A Guide to Self Protection, One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi, A History of Magic, A Beginner’s Guide to Transfiguration, Magical Theory Grade 1,* and finally *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them.* That was eight books in all and they weren’t exactly easy reading.

“Do we really need two of each?” Harry asked, nervously pushing his glasses higher up his nose.

Draco considered that. “In class, we’ll likely need to use our own textbooks, but we could share the supplemental texts.”
Harry smiled happily at that.

“It’s not as if we don’t have the money,” Narcissa scolded lightly, putting back one copy of both *Fantastic Beasts* and *Magical Theory*. “I also suggest reading *Hogwarts: A History*.” She grabbed one and placed it in their basket. Moving away from the crowded school section, she led them toward a less busy aisle. “Why don’t you browse the shelves for some pleasure reading,” she suggested. “I’ll grab Lucius and meet you in a few minutes at the counter.”

Draco nodded and took Harry’s hand. He led him deeper into the store. “You did great with Hagrid, Harry,” he said warmly. Finding a shadowed corner, he pushed Harry against the wall.

Green eyes looked up at him with unconditional trust, pride happy sizzling through the bond. Draco felt a type of hunger begin to burn through his core. “Such a good boy,” he practically growled.

Harry was panting now anticipation desire love burning deep in his gut. He watched with wide eyes as Draco slowly, deliberately leaned forward, silver eyes burning into his own. Harry gasped as their lips touched.

With torturous gentleness, Draco slowly licked at Harry’s lips before sliding his tongue softly inside. Then, leaning his full weight against the smaller boy, he grabbed a fistful of Harry’s hair and kissed him hard, sucking roughly on Harry’s tongue before lashing the roof of Harry’s mouth with hard, fast strokes. Harry moaned, deep in his chest, and clung to Draco’s shoulders.

Mouths breaking apart, dizzy from lack of air, they leaned against each other, panting. Harry’s glasses had fogged and both of their lips were red and swollen, a thin, glistening strand still connecting them. Draco pulled back, breaking the connection. He randomly grabbed a few books off the shelves and made his way toward the counter, a cocky strut in his step.

Harry, blushing, followed after the blond, wiping his glasses clear on his robes before sliding them back on his face. His whole body tingled, the bites on his legs and in between throbbing with heat.

Narcissa lifted an eyebrow at the books Draco had grabbed: *Moste Potente Potions* by Phineas Bourne and *Fifteenth-Century Fiends* by Belvedere Babcock. She didn’t say anything, however, and neither did the clerk, who was too busy staring at Harry to really notice anyway.

They made their way to the apothecary next. Lucius remained as cold and indifferent as ever. They quickly bought the necessary ingredients for First-year students as well as two top-of-the-line potion cases. Herbology gloves, earmuffs, and other tools were also purchased there. They were just leaving, the little bell above the door chiming, when they ran into Hagrid once more. The half-giant was grinning ear to ear. In his hand, he carried a massive birdcage. Within it, a large white owl with a sprinkling of black dots stared back at them with huge golden eyes.

“Happy birthday, ‘Arry,” the man boomed, ignoring the Malfoys completely.

Harry stared at the caged owl, too surprised to feel much of anything.

Draco gave Hagrid a surprisingly warm smile. “Thank you. Your gift is beautiful.” He accepted the cage, having to hold his arm completely extended. The owl was surprisingly heavy and his eyes widened a second before Narcissa cast a feather-light charm on the cage.

“Thank you,” Harry whispered deeply grateful. He lifted a finger and ran it over one of the slender bars.

“She seemed mighty eager to be out’ta that store and I figured I had a few birthdays to make up fer,”
Hagrid said cheerfully and gave the boys a wink. “Specially as seeing I didn’t even get’ter pay for lunch. Well, I best be off. I’m sure the Pr’fessor is anxious fer me to get back.” He reached out and gently ruffled Harry’s already messy hair before striding away.

Narcissa and Lucius said nothing about their new pet. Narcissa simply took Harry’s arm, Lucius took hold of Draco’s, and they Apparated home.

“Draco, a word,” Lucius said, eyes chilly. He turned on his heel and climbed the main stairs without looking back.

Draco gave a sigh. “Unpack our new things,” he told Harry.

“Yes, Draco,” Harry answered obediently. He eagerly accepted the birdcage, the owl disgruntled and fluffed up from Apparating.

Draco brushed the boy’s cheek with his fingertips before turning and following his father to his study. He already knew what the conversation would be about. The study door was open and Draco saw that Lucius was pacing, which was new. Usually the man stood at the office window stiff as a board with his hands clasped at the small of his back. Draco stepped inside, gently shutting the door behind him. It shut out the light from the hall and cast the room in shadows. He leaned against the door, expression bored.

Lucius sighed out a loud breath before turning and facing his young son. Draco had grown in the two years he’d been in Lucius’s custody, but he was still so small, so young. Draco thought he knew so much and could handle any problem thrown his way, but he’d been sheltered whether he knew it or not. By his age, by his traumatic past, by the Malfoy name, by his bond to Harry Potter, he hadn’t truly faced an adult situation or the consequences of one since he’d entered the Wizarding world. But they were coming, consequences and situations both, and soon it’d be too late to turn back. Soon Draco would be in Hogwarts and farther away from Lucius’s sheltering mantle. A knot of frustration and panic choked him, Lucius’s hands fisting at his sides. What could he say to convince his son to turn back? To give up this foolish belief that he could triumph against the Dark Lord?

Draco sighed, a softer sound than his father’s, and pushed away from the door. He strode forward, grabbed Lucius’s fisted hand, and walked him to one of the armchairs in front of the desk. Lucius didn’t resist, maybe curious about Draco’s intentions. Draco very rarely touched people, except for Harry. The skin to skin contact made Lucius go quiet and take notice. With Lucius sitting and Draco standing in front of him, they were very nearly eye-to-eye. Due to the Malfoy curse, Draco was a younger copy of his father, nearly identical. Grey stared into grey; the moment lingered as each weighed the other.

“You’re pretty self-interested. I can trust in that,” Draco said softly. “I’m your only chance at a legacy. Your greatest fear is the Malfoy line dying with me, because of you.”

Lucius felt cold, howling rage gripping his insides with frozen claws.

“Focus!” Draco hissed, eyes narrowing dangerously. “Listen.” He waited for Lucius’s breathing to even out before continuing. “You’re so caught up in this vision of the future, you can’t see what’s right in front of your face.”

“What’s that?” Lucius breathed without inflection, a thin layer of black ice encased over a dangerous emotional storm.

“I don’t give a fuck about your legacy. Never have,” Draco stated with brutal honesty, but before Lucius could react, he added, “That doesn’t mean you won’t have one. I don’t need to care for it to
exist, do I? As long as I’m alive, as long as there is the potential of me having the next male Malfoy, your legacy exists no matter what I think or feel.”

Lucius grinned humorlessly. He knew that very well, actually. It was a reality he faced every day.

“So let’s help each other,” Draco gave a bloodthirsty grin of his own. “I will vow to take into consideration the Malfoy legacy from this point on with the intent of furthering it. In exchange, you will cease this constant fight against reality. I am bound to Harry Potter and he is bound to me. I will take on the Dark Lord be it through Harry or beside him, and I plan on winning that fight.” Grey eyes beginning to burn silver, Draco reached forward to grip his father’s jaw. “In exchange for my vow to care about your ridiculous legacy, you will vow to get on board with my plan to defeat Voldemort. Truly and whole-heartedly get on board, without reservation and without this obsession of breaking my bond with Harry. You’ve had two years, Lucius. Give. It. Up.”

Lucius reached up and took Draco’s small hand in his own, pulling it away from his face. “I don’t doubt your resolve, Draco. A Malfoy’s will is a diamond-headed spear. It is what has driven the Malfoy family forward and kept our line alive even under this impossible curse.” His eyes went silver-edged, mirroring his son’s. “It is not your will that I question, it is your assessment of your capabilities. It is not possible for you to defeat one such as the Dark Lord. His power… It is unlike anything you have ever seen. How can you expect me to believe you can defeat him when he will most likely return by possessing Harry’s body? Even their wands are the same, Draco!”

“I will do whatever it takes to save Harry,” Draco answered simply, tone casual. “If that means toppling governments or creating my own army. If that means mastering every Dark Art there is or possessing Harry myself. I will use every thing, every skill, every one at my disposal to do it, but I will save him.” He slid his hand from Lucius’s grasp. “That includes you.” Draco gave a cocky, closed-mouth smile. “So. Are you ready? To join me? To throw all this energy you waste trying to ‘save’ me from Harry into actually destroying Voldemort? Because I could use your expertise in Dark Magic.”

Lucius felt time slow to a crawl. His heart pumped like the pistons of a runaway train. Adrenaline saturated his system.

Draco wasn’t wrong.

The first year he’d had his son back, he had been obsessed with revenge. Railing at the world, he’d hunted down the one responsible for his son’s disappearance, blaming them utterly for what had been wrought on his son’s mind and body, blaming them for the destruction of the Malfoy line. He’d shifted his focus to ways to break the bond between Draco and Harry. He’d scrambled for arguments that would convince Draco to break it. He’d researched rituals that could accomplish such a thing without utterly destroying Draco’s mind or magic in the process. He’d failed at both.

By the second year of Draco’s return, Lucius had begun to truly panic. As the evidence of Harry’s connection to the Dark Lord became more and more apparent, he’d become utterly certain the Dark Lord would return, spelling Harry’s - and through him Draco’s - certain doom. Every plan Lucius could conceive of eventually developed too many flaws or depended on too many happenstances to be relied on. It always kept boiling down to trying to convince Draco to willingly dissolve the bond, which was a fool’s quest. Draco would not relent.

So.

Lucius stared into his son’s eyes and saw his fate. He could give in. He could make an Unbreakable Vow with his son in exchange for one from Draco. Or he could continue to work to preserve Draco’s life at odds with his son. Lucius knew if he chose the latter, he’d eventually lose Narcissa as
well. His wife had long ago cast her fate with their son’s. However, if he chose to work with Draco’s insane plan and lost… Well, everything would be lost, but the same could be said of the latter choice as well.

If he chose to continue to work against Draco’s ultimate goal of Harry’s salvation, and Draco lost as Lucius feared he would, what would he really be able to preserve? How much of Draco could possibly be saved if the Dark Lord gained ascendancy and dominated the Wizarding world? The very best Lucius could hope for would be to convince the Dark Lord to keep Harry Potter alive and imprisoned, a type of slave to the Dark Lord’s whim, just to keep Draco alive. To be honest, Lucius didn’t even believe that was possible. Draco wouldn’t allow it. His son would kill Harry himself and die with him before allowing that. So really what did Lucius have to win by choosing the second option? The truth of the matter was that there was more to be won by choosing to join his wife and son. His only real choice, as impossible as it seemed was…

“Very well,” he rasped, heart thundering in his chest. “Yes. I surrender. I will make the Vow.”

Eyes half-lidded, Draco gave a slow smile. “That’s good,” he said sweetly and offered his hand. “Dobby!”

There was a compact pop as the elf appeared next to Draco. Dobby stared up at Draco with clear devotion. “Yes, Master Draco sir?”

“I’d like you to bring Narcissa here. Immediately,” Draco told him.

Dobby disappeared and not five seconds passed before Narcissa appeared with a grimace as she was travelled into the room by elven magic.

She staggered, catching herself on the back the arm chair across from the one Lucius sat in. ‘Draco needs you. Will you come?’ the elf had asked in a rush. She’d barely gotten out her answer of ‘yes’ before the world had turned inside out. She caught her balance quickly, however, as she noticed the way her son and Lucius had clasped forearms and seemed to be having some silent contest of wills, staring each other down.

“Narcissa,” Lucius said gravely, never once looking away from Draco. “Please be our binder.”

Chapter end.
A/N: Hello, all! I had a few people ask about updating schedules. I have a feeling that the start of this story will be a bit irregular as I get a feel for it and work out plot, BUT the goal is to update every Sunday afternoon or evening. Chapters might come a day or so late for now, however that is the schedule I’ll eventually adhere to. Thank you so much for all the comments! They are definitely fueling this story.

Secrets

Lucius made his way purposefully toward the dungeons below the manor. Narcissa was asleep in their bed, a subtle spell he’d cast ensuring she’d stay that way. The boys had left to Andromeda’s a week ago at the start of August, so the manor was silent and still, feeling empty. A cold smile turned up the corners of his lips as his booted feet stepped with a muffled click onto the rough, stone floor of the dungeon. It was dark, his Lumos flinging dark shadows along the walls as it illuminated his immediate area. It was cold and damp, his every step creating strange echoes.

The cell he wanted was at the far end. A thick iron door with no windows or flaps cut into its surface sealed the cell into an inescapable prison. Runes were carved into the smooth, cold surface, making it unbreakable and masking the presence within. Wards spelled into the doorknob and across its surface made the hairs on Lucius’s arms stand on end, the magic deadly to any who attempted to break in and steal away Lucius’s prisoner.

It took several minutes to pass through his protections, but eventually the heavy door swung inward and his Lumos rushed into the dark hole. A woman was crouched in the corner. Tears streaked her face even as she held up an arm to protect eyes that had been blinded by darkness for days. Matted, curly black hair fell past her hips. Her naked body was marble white and unblemished except for the faint shadow of the Dark Mark on her inner left forearm. She was tall for a woman, a few inches shy of six feet, but you’d never know it the way she was curled into a ball, back pressed hard into the corner of her cell.

Dark eyes, heavy-lidded and lined with long, thick lashes blinked rapidly, her skeletal-thin arm slowly lowering. Lucius stood towering above her, watching with cold apathy as she adjusted to his presence. She bared her teeth in a death-head grin. Using the wall for support, she stood, her long hair covering most of her breasts from his view, but hid nothing else.

“Bellatrix.” Lucius said her name with cold hatred in his voice.

It was she who had stolen Draco as a baby and hidden him overseas under the Fidelius Charm. It was because of her that Draco was kidnapped by a pedophile and then sold as a sex-slave. It was because of her that the Malfoy name was in danger of dying out after nearly four hundred and fifty years of surviving a powerful Lineage Curse.

“I want my sister!” she rasped painfully, eyes glittering madly. “I want Narcissa!”

Lucius chuckled. “Eight months in my dungeon, Bella, and you still think to make demands.” He stepped forward and viciously grabbed her face. She flinched back, both hands coming up to claw at his sleeve. His robes were spelled impervious, so he hardly felt it. “I promised you that your suffering would never end, sweet Bella, and I keep my word.”

He flung her away from him and her head hit the hard stone wall with a crack. Dazed she sank to the floor, leaving blood in her wake as the rough wall tore her delicate skin. Bellatrix hissed, face
contorted with an animalistic rage, as she clumsily tried to pull herself back to her feet. She made it to her knees and swayed, one long-fingered hand splayed against the wall for balance.

Lucius grabbed her by her matted hair. His fingers encountered warm wetness and he grinned cruelly down at her. “You heal so nicely, Bella. Not a mark on you after our last bout of fun.” His eyes glittered a cold silver. “Not like my son, whose scars will never completely fade even with the most potent healing cream.”

“And what scars would you have left had he been left with you!” she snarled up at him, panting with mad fury. Suddenly she was laughing, wild peals that filled the cell. “A little boy who lusts after other boys! Can’t have that! It would taint the Malfoy name!”

Vision going red, Lucius hauled her up and put his hands around her throat. She made not a sound, not even able to choke he squeezed so viciously. His heart thundered in his chest, filling his ears with a repetitive booming.

She wasn’t wrong. He would have made sure Draco understood how abhorrent it was to even think of another boy in such a manor. He would have trained him perfectly to uphold his position as a Pureblood with pride and honor. Draco would have been glorious, a woman worthy of him on his arm who would produce a son made in the Malfoy image. It enraged him that Bellatrix thought what Draco had suffered was in any way better. His son had survived, he’d grown hard and powerful, but he was corrupted and flawed. To imply that the monstrous acts committed on his body were preferable…

Lucius snarled and released the woman. She collapsed unconscious, her face swollen and nearly purple, her bulging eyes vacant. With practiced ease, Lucius cast three healing spells in quick succession. It did nothing for the deep bruising that bloomed along her throat in the shape of his fingers, but it reduced the swelling and helped oxygen saturate her blood. She coughed and sputtered, slowly regaining consciousness.

“Get up,” he growled dangerously.

She was almost on her feet when he lashed out, kicking her in the stomach hard enough to fling her against the wall and bounce off, landing sprawled at his feet.

“Get up!” he bellowed, grabbing her by her hair and hauling her up.

She coughed and sputtered, arms crossed protectively over her middle. He let her go and watched impassively as she staggered and leaned against the wall. Black eyes glittered malevolently back at him.

“You’re going to make yourself useful for once, sweet Bella,” he told her with dangerous sweetness, “and help me keep the Vow I made to my son.” He reached for her with the hand that bore very faint lines just barely visible.

Bellatrix was screaming before he even touched her.

…

It had taken Lucius a week to prepare the ritual site. Lughnasadh was the first of the three harvest festivals and technically was celebrated August 1st or at least on the Sunday closest. Still, the power of the season was strong and it suited him just fine to have other pagan celebrators not in attendance. He didn’t expect company, but he’d still spent hours every night for a week laying down runes and wards to repel wizards and Muggles alike.
The moon was an hour from rising. The sky was clear, each star seeming to pierce through the black veil with almost brutal force. Lucius had created his ritual circle with pebble-sized clear quartz on top of the tallest hill in Wiltshire, referred to as Long Knoll. Dried grass had been burnt along the inner and outer edge of the ring, leaving runes dawn in ash.

Lucius walked up the hill with deliberate focus from the northern side, walking in a straight line south as best he could. Long Knoll stood two hundred and eighty-eight meters above sea level at its highest point. His circle was on a small flat shelf of green grass just near that tip, and as he crested the hill his prepared ritual site came into view.

His sister-in-law was kneeling naked, her shins pressed firmly into the ground as her butt rested on her heels. Each wrist was bound by strips of thick leather and magically welded to the ground on either side of her hips. She was placed just inside the circle at the southern point, the direction of Summer and Fire. Her hair had been tied back by another strip of leather at the base of her neck and left to hang long and tangled, pooling on the ground behind her. She was no longer cackling madly or screaming in terror and rage. She was staring up at the stars with an almost childlike wonder.

A man of about thirty years was bound in the center, arms and legs, unable to move more than his head. He had on rough linen pants, his bare chest etched with scars and muscles. His dark eyes were riveted on Lucius, hatred and fear a potent mix within them. Lucius wore identical pants and was also bare-foot and bare-chested. His long, white-blond hair had been pulled up into a bun high on his head bound with a strip of freshly tanned leather.

“Who the fuck are you?” the man spat with a distinctly American accent.

Lucius ignored him. Lughnasadh was a harvest festival, but it was also a summer one. Any spell could be worked at any point in the year if you were creative enough. All things in the universe were connected. However, there were distinct advantages to working certain types of spells in the correct season and an even further boost if you worked it on a day of Power, such as the quarter days - the Solstices and Equinoxes - and the cross-quarter days - the four festivals that sat between them: Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh, and Samhain.

As a family called to the Dark, they celebrated the Darker half of the Wheel with more zeal, which so happened to begin with Mabon - the Autumn Equinox - then Samhian, Yule - the Winter Solstice - and ended with Imbolc. Lughnasadh, however, as both a harvest festival and sitting at the Summer and Autumn’s cross-quarter just so happened to be exactly what he needed.

Summer: Fire Season; it was symbolized by Sword or Flame or Wand. Its seat of power was in the South. Passion, courage, lust, creativity, fertility, virility, desire, romance, force, and enthusiasm were enhanced by the season. Spells and rituals Fire-based would be increased ten fold during summer and revolved around banishings, new beginnings, destroying the old to make way for the new, and obtaining desires. All of which, Lucius so happened to be in need of.

He stepped counterclockwise around his circle as he wished to enact an ending not a beginning and lit the torches placed at eight points around the outside of the circle. The man continued to spit threats and profanity as Lucius moved. Bellatrix continued to gaze at the stars. Once all eight were lit, the torches spread light until the circle and everything within it was clearly illuminated, but they weren’t as large as a bonfire that would draw the notice of outsiders. Lucius trusted the wards he’d placed to keep things private, but there was no sense in asking for trouble.

The quartz crystals that formed the circle glittered with white light. Directly in front of Bellatrix a piece of amber bigger than a water melon sat taller than it was wide and was vaguely shaped like the silhouette of a man. The firelight seemed to glow in the amber’s depths and the American grew quiet. Even a Muggle could sense the power gathering on the hilltop and in the stars. Lughnasadh
celebrations usually began in the day under the sun, however performing the ritual at night would heighten the harvest aspect of the festival while still allowing Lucius to draw on the aspects of Summer.

He knelt before the amber and lifted his hands in supplication. “I call the circle to life in honor of the Great Mother Tailtiu who worked the soil so that it would be fertile until She died of exhaustion. I call upon Lugh, her blessed son, who fought a vicious battle with Crom Dubh, a being of blight and pestilence. I call upon Lugh who triumphed and bestowed upon the people the first harvest of grain thus ensuring the people received the Great Mother’s gift.”

He met Bellatrix’s eyes, her attention now focused solely on him. They were revealed to be a dark, ocean blue in the torchlight. He gave her a dangerous smile and stood. She moved not a muscle as he approached her, pulling a dagger from his pants. Quick as a snake, he grabbed her by her hair and cut her ponytail just above the leather tie. She sucked in a quick breath as her now short hair fell into her eyes and over her cheeks, just barely falling past her jaw.

Lucius had already turned away. Kneeling once more before the statue, he dug a shallow hole and coiled the nearly three-feet of dark black curls inside. “I make this offering to the Great Lugh, be he satisfied.”

As he buried the hair, covering it with the displaced earth, a faint hum seemed to rise from the hill itself. Lucius grinned sharply, white teeth flashing in the light. His offering had been accepted.

He stood once more and faced the man tied on the ground. “I make this offering to the Great Lugh, be he honored.”

The man yelled, terrified, as Lucius approached with the dagger in hand, but Lucius merely cut through the leather straps, freeing him. He set the knife on the ground before the Muggle. The man scrambled to his feet, eyes wild and panting.

Lucius regarded him calmly. “You cost me quite a lot of money, you know. I sent my informant out to find you nearly two years ago. They’ve been keeping tabs on you since. Then I had to pay to have you brought here as quickly as possible,” he said almost conversationally.

“I think you have the wrong guy,” the man said lowly, beginning to eye the knife.

“Do I?” Lucius asked gently and began to stalk him, making the man walk in a counterclockwise direction to avoid him. “Are you not one of the people who worked the place referred to as the Hold? I was told it was your job to make pick ups when a luckless child had been found and bodyguard duty when buyers came on board.”

Sweat gleamed on the man’s face and chest. His eyes darted frantically around the circle. He’d already discovered there was some type of invisible force keeping him inside. “I don’t know what you’re talkin’ about.”

Lucius voice hardened. “Your denials bore me.” He strode forward, making the man cower back against the invisible wall. “We both know who you are.” He bent and snatched up the dagger and very deliberately placed it in the man’s hand. “There are only two ways you’re getting out of this circle. By killing me or dying. Are you ready?”

The man lunged.

Lucius, heart thundering in his chest, knocked the man’s arm aside and shoved him from behind as he stumbled past. The thug slammed against the invisible wall and bounced off, grunting, his nose
broken and bleeding. Spinning around on his knees, he bared his teeth like an animal, eyes locked on Lucius.

“You were there on that filthy boat. You even interacted with a blond child who was kept in the dark depths, a type of pet to your boss.”

The man jumped to his feet, slashing the dagger out at throat level, but Lucius leaned back and kicked him in the gut. The thug slammed once more against the barrier, this time the back of his head impacting with painful force. Groaning, the man collapsed half-unconscious on the ground.

“Brought him food on occasion, made sure he was doing his job keeping the other kids in line.” Lucius stomped brutally on the man’s hand, making him scream and release the dagger. “You may not remember his name. It was Draco.” He grabbed the worm by the hair and pulled his head back. “Draco Malfoy, actually. My son.” And he slid the blade with graceful force across the front of the man’s throat.

Choking and sputtering, the violent gush of blood slowed as the thug bled out. It was an easy death, too easy for filth like him.

Lucius tipped his head back and roared his fury to the heavens. The hum within the circle became a physical force that pressed against his skin and resonated in his core. He glanced down at the thug he’d killed and cast a wandless severing charm to remove the man’s head completely.

Gripping the man’s hair once more, Lucius lifted his trophy. Blood dripped from the neck and hit the ground with a sound like rain. Lucius placed it before the amber statue and knelt. Bellatrix sat across from him on the other side of the stone, eyes bright and cheeks flushed with lust. Her wild dark curls framed her face beautifully. Lucius felt heat pool in his groin as he stared into her eyes.

The amber was glowing with its own light now, brighter than the torches. Lucius, filled with power from the ritual, easily summoned Bellatrix’s left cuff from the ground, pulling her arm with it. She was yanked slightly forward and off balance, her right hand still held on the ground at her side. He held her wrist in place with his left hand and picked up the danger in his right.

He’d been researching how to break magical bonds for years, hoping to convince Draco to sever his tie to Harry. As soon as he’d made the Unbreakable Vow, he’d known exactly what he’d have to do, and he’d known exactly what ritual to use. He used her Mark as the focus, basically teaching the spell what to target. Bellatrix screamed as he cut into her flesh, outlining the Dark Mark. Blood quickly coated her arm, obscuring his view, but he knew the shape by heart. He carved into her flesh, tracing the faded skull and snake again and again.

Lucius ignored her screams. Chanting in a mix of Latin and old Gaelic, he called upon the power of Summer to break bonds and destroy. He invited it to burn out the old. He called upon the Great God Lugh, the one he’d summoned and honored with sacrifices and battle, on His cross-quarter day, Lughnasadh. He asked the God to grant him this boon.

Chanting, praying, spell-weaving, Lucius swayed with the building power. Bellatrix’s arm remained pinned on the head of the brightly glowing amber statue by the ritual and leather. Her blood coated the stone, somehow not diminishing its light. She thrashed in agony as the raw, wild magic flooded her bond to the Dark Lord. In minutes, she had screamed herself hoarse.

Yelling over her, Lucius lifted the dagger from her skin and flung her arm away. Panting, adrenaline and magic nearly shaking him apart, he deliberately placed his left arm atop the blood-soaked amber statue. Calling for the God one last time, he stabbed the dagger brutally down into his Dark Mark. It was like being struck with lightning. Pure power - red hot and searing - rushed into his body. The
pain was indescribable. It whited out everything…

When he came to, the sun was beginning to rise. The statue had gone dark with Bellatrix’s and his blood drying on it. The dead-man’s head was in his line of vision, as well as Bellatrix who was slumped unconscious behind the statue. Lucius sat up slowly. He felt strangely empty and yet had crystal clear focus. He felt the way his hair slid around his shoulders, having fallen from his bun; he was aware of the sharp smell of grass and blood; he noticed all the facets of each quartz that ringed him in; but mostly he stared at the white scar tissue on the inside of his left forearm. It looked like an abstract blob in no particular shape. The edges were spider-webbed and thin like a star burst. It was faint and only slightly raised, looking decades old.

He was alive.

He could still feel the hum of magic in his core.

The ritual had worked, and he hadn’t lost his mind or magic. His bond to the Dark Lord had been broken.

Lucius flung his head back and laughed.

August passed mostly uneventfully for Draco and Harry. Remus visited nearly every day and supervised their explorations into London, but baseball was over and Andromeda was withdrawn and brooding over Dora. They usually made a few visits to the Weasleys when they stayed with Andromeda, but she wasn’t feeling up to it and Molly had her hands full preparing another child for their first year at Hogwarts. Draco would have insisted, to see Percy, but come September they would be living with the older boy, so he let things be.

The boys returned to the manor to spend the last three days of August with the Malfoys. After dinner, Lucius asked them to join him in the parlor. Narcissa settled in her favorite chair. It was padded with no arms. She sat gracefully, her knees leaning to one side, her pale blue dress falling to the floor. Her back was straight, posture perfect. Her long golden blond hair sat coiled on her head. She gave a calm smile as Lucius handed her a drink of dark amber liquid.

He sat in an armchair at an angle to her own so that he could easily see the love seat the boys had chosen as well as his wife. The boys sat next to each other as was their norm. Harry, messy hair and glasses, was leaning against Draco’s shoulder, perfectly content as he listened to Draco and Narcissa talk. Lucius took a sip of his drink, feeling smug. He knew Draco and Narcissa were aware of his mood, but they were letting him set the pace. Narcissa was telling the boys about starting *Hogwarts: A History* together before they left for school and the picnic she’d like to have on the lawn for lunch.

Setting his drink aside, Lucius cleared his throat. All eyes turned to him. Even Harry sat up and regarded him attentively. He gave them a slow, smug smile. “I’d like to inform you that I have successfully removed the Dark Mark.” Three sets of eyes watched with bated breath as Lucius rolled up his sleeve past his elbow, revealing the new scar.

Draco rose from the couch and padded across the room. He grabbed Lucius’s arm and stared at the slightly paler and shinier skin and then looked up into Lucius’s smug eyes. “How’s this possible?”

Narcissa felt as if time itself had stopped and she stared unblinkingly at her husband.

Harry looked up at Narcissa. The look on her face was hard to describe, but it was clear that she felt something really strongly. He turned his eyes back to Draco, who was holding Lucius’s now scarred
arm and quietly demanding answers.

“I did enough research into breaking bonds,” Lucius explained. “I felt confident the ritual I had found would work.”

“Yet you told me nothing,” Narcissa said softly, voice strangely neutral.

Lucius tipped his head in acknowledgment. His smug smile melted into something more solemn. “There was nothing you could have done to help if everything went as planned, and I didn’t want you caught up in the vicinity had the magic become unstable.”

Narcissa said nothing to that, but her eyes clearly showed her dissatisfaction with that answer.

Draco released Lucius’s arm, asking curiously, “Is this because of the Vow?”

His son’s young, serious voice resonated in Lucius’s memory: “Do you swear to preserve Harry Potter’s life to the best of your ability? Do you swear to honor the bond between Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy? Do you swear to work toward the complete destruction of the Dark Lord Voldemort so that he can never return?”

He had agreed to all of Draco’s terms thus the three wire-like scars that wrapped his right hand, wrist, and forearm, the Unbreakable Vow now embedded in his very core. He had not required the same of Draco. Instead, he had simply accepted the boy’s promise. Binding Draco to something that could kill him would defeat the purpose of continuing the Malfoy legacy anyway, and the honest truth was that Lucius wasn’t sure Draco was capable of truly caring about something like that. Draco’s concerns would always revolve around Harry.

“The Vow did not require this specific action,” Lucius answered gravely, meeting and holding Draco’s eyes. “However, I felt that the Dark Mark could come into conflict with the Vow in the future and thought to preempt that eventuality. I also wanted you to know I am fully on your side now, Vow or no.”

Draco gave a slow smile that bloomed into a full grin. “Good to know, and congratulations.” He turned to Harry and green eyes caught his expectantly. “Grab Pandora’s notes, please.”

“Yes, Draco,” Harry answered and immediately left the room.

Lucius frowned. “Pandora’s notes? Pandora Lovegood?”

Draco crossed his arms and smirked. “You didn’t think I didn’t have a plan, did you? Harry and I have been working on them since she died, but we don’t know that much about magic, so it’s been slow going.” His expression turned serious. “You can’t use anything you learn in these notes for anything other than destroying the Dark Lord. I want your promise.” He looked back and forth from Narcissa to Lucius. “And you can’t share them with anyone. Not even if you think they could help you figure it out. I had a vision about them. The knowledge within could destroy the world. We can’t risk it getting out.”

“I swear it,” Narcissa promised easily.

“I swear,” Lucius echoed, giving his son a firm nod.

Draco nodded back, his silky hair falling around his face.

Harry returned with a thin leather-bond tome that was taller than it was wide. The pages were uneven and stuck out at odd angles. He passed it to Draco and stood at his side patiently.
“Dobby!” Draco called, tucking his hair behind his ears. The elf appeared. “A table, please.”

The elf disappeared and then returned, both hands outspread. Lottie stood next to him and she maneuvered the parlor chairs and love seats to the walls, making room for the table Dobby had brought. It was the one from the sunroom. The one Draco and Harry studied at during their lessons with Narcissa. It was perfect. Draco set the book down and opened it. Taking out the loose papers that he and Harry had worked on, he spread them out.

“Most of this is Pandora’s theories and experiments on magical cores. Then there’s the research she gathered by other wizards and witches into the study of the soul, which is definitely different from the mind, but other than that they really don’t know much for sure. They have lots of theories, though.” Draco turned a few pages ahead and pointed to a specific section. “This is where Pandora drew several points of connection between magical cores and souls. She completed some experiment that involved wands, a brain-dead wizard who donated his body to further their research, a few Muggles, a living Squib, and some animals both magical and Muggle. Most of it Harry and I don’t understand, but we do understand that she concluded that the magical core rests inside the soul. She believed them to be one-in-the-same, actually, based on her results.”

Lucius and Narcissa stared wide-eyed at the diagrams, complicated Arithmancy, runic formulas, and notes penned in a very neat, mechanical way that covered every inch of every page. Then they took in the more childish handwriting on the loose-leaf notes that the boys had been working on in secret for a year and a half. A lot of it was definitions as they tried valiantly to understand the extremely complicated notebook, but they had come up with some theories and conclusions of their own, too.

One page in particular stood out to Narcissa and she lifted it in her perfectly manicured hand. “She believed that the Dark Lord’s core is attached to Harry for the purpose of resurrection because it contains or is somehow linked to his soul. You’ve added here that it couldn’t have been purposeful, which might make it easier break.”

“Yes.” Draco nodded. “By all accounts, the Dark Lord came to Godric’s Hollow when he wasn’t supposed to have been able to. Sirius Black was the Secret Keeper. He was at the house first, but I assume he wasn’t there when whatever had happened happened. Hagrid didn’t get to the house until an hour and a half or so after whatever had happened, and Sirius Black was just exiting with a still bleeding Harry in his arms. Hagrid saw the Dark Mark in the sky, but it was fading. He saw no other Death Eaters. He heard no sounds. So if the Dark Lord came with anyone they had long ago fled. I’d love to question Sirius Black, actually.”

“What’s that have to do with Harry’s condition?” Lucius asked diplomatically.

“That it wasn’t purposefully done. The Dark Lord couldn’t have intended whatever happened that night. Something went wrong. He either meant to kill Harry and it backfired in a weird way or he meant to make a full transfer, but if he meant to make a full transfer, he would have brought Death Eaters. They would have expected his body to be destroyed and would have taken Harry, thinking he was their Lord. They didn’t. Harry was left, bleeding but relatively unharmed for Sirius Black to find and remove from the house. Therefore, I can only conclude that the Dark Lord tried to kill Harry, something weird happened, and the Dark Lord was struck with something that would have killed him. Somehow a temporary bond formed and a part of the Dark Lord’s core or soul, however you want to look at it, got attached to Harry in an effort to survive.” Draco looked to the messy-haired boy at his side. “This is where Harry’s theory comes in.”

The boy blushed a bit and shifted on his feet nervously, but then he settled and lifted his eyes. He pushed his glasses up his nose. “Since the Black core is only a piece compared to mine or Draco’s that means that the bulk of the Black core is still somewhere else. If it had died, the Black in me
would be more active and trying to survive. Right now it’s sleeping because the bigger part of itself is surviving, so it has no purpose, like clothes in a closet until you need it. If we can un-attach it without making it protect itself, then we could store it in a different place.” He carefully took the book and turned to a different page. “See, this is the diagram that made me think of it. See how the wand’s core surges when the wood is snapped, sometimes casting powerful, unintentional spells? It’s instinct. It knows it’s being damaged. It wants to survive, but a good wand maker is able to re-core a wand without the core reacting like that. It should be possible with me, too.”

“That supports what I saw during the experiment Pandora took me to witness,” Draco added, voice low and cold. “The Black core just… expanded and began gobbling up the magical core it was attached to to get more power, but the container couldn’t take it…” Draco swallowed down the nausea.

Narcissa and Lucius were silent for a long minute, just taking all of this information in. Eventually, she said, “So you think it’s possible to re-core the Black into another container, but there’s no one who would have experience doing such a thing without damaging Harry.”

Draco tilted his hand back and forth in a ‘sort of’ gesture. “Yes, but I think the bigger problem is making sure only the Black core is removed and not Harry’s core. We’re not sure how to separate them without the Black core seeing that separation as an attack. There are very few wand makers that can successfully work with double-cored wands. None of them are British. In fact, most of them are from India and China.”

“The answer might be here,” Harry admitted, gesturing to Pandora’s notebook. “But we don’t understand a lot of this.” Guilt laced his voice. “It’s taken this long just to get a basic understanding of what she’d found out.”

Lucius gently picked up another page of their notes. “Thank you for sharing this. We will apply ourselves to the problem and make unraveling its mysteries a priority.”

“Make a copy,” Draco ordered and placed his hand possessively over Pandora’s notebook. “We’re going to keep working on the original, and I want you to send me weekly updates.”

Lucius and Narcissa agreed, Lucius adding, “I want updates on your progress, as well.”

Over the next three days, Narcissa was very clingy, her sadness palpable. The boys took no lessons. Instead, they had picnics, rode horses, and spent a great deal of time talking about Pandora’s notebook and Hogwarts. They even started reading *Hogwarts: A History* together. The school was founded in 990 A.D., and a lot had happened there in the one thousand and one years since it had been built.

On the morning of September first, Lucius pulled Harry aside as they gathered in the receiving room in preparation of flooing to King’s Cross. The small boy wore his school robe open over an expensive white-button down tucked into tailored black slacks. If you looked closely, you’d see that the shirt’s white buttons were made from imported Arita porcelain and perfectly carved into the shape of daisies.

Harry also wore black boots that were actually a girl’s shoe. They had a two inch heel to put him at the same height as Draco with lace on the sides and back and were tall, coming above the ankle but not quiet to mid-calf. These particular shoes did not tie. Instead they buttoned closed and had one row of silk buttons on each side. Around his neck, a thin, black ribbon was tied into a loose bow and held his wide, folded over shirt-collar closed, hiding the leather collar underneath. Harry looked back
at Lucius with an open expression, black-framed glasses shielding his remarkably green eyes. His messy hair fell in a tumble over his forehead and his ears. He looked like a fine and proper gentleman with an eccentric flare due to his floral buttons and feminine shoes.

Lucius knelt. For so long he’d tried to hold himself distant from this strange child. Quiet and yet with a core of fierceness; intelligent and yet so unconfident; devoted to Draco in a way so few people were capable of being, vulnerable and yet strong; Harry Potter was a complicated mix of qualities. It was hard not to be fascinated. “I would have felt more anxiety about Draco attending school were you not accompanying him,” Lucius told the patiently waiting child. Green eyes blinked at him and Lucius smiled. He touched Harry’s cheek gently. “I am confident you will look out for him.”

Harry gave a big, sweet smile. Surprising Lucius, he stepped forward and hugged him gently around the neck. “I’ll take are of Draco,” Harry promised with utter seriousness before pulling away.

Draco came to stand beside him, taking his hand. He met Lucius’s eyes and gave a nod of acknowledgment. Lucius returned the gesture and got to his feet, his heart pumping with surprising warmth from Harry’s affectionate gesture. He was more strongly affected by Harry’s forgiveness than he had expected to be.

Narcissa gave each boy a fierce hug, but she lingered over Draco. Her son had cut his hair, so it fell exactly to his jawline. He had tucked both sides behind his ears, but a thin piece of his bangs too short to reach had fallen to frame his face. His grey eyes were clear and alert. His school robes were fastened, but she could see the collar of his white-button up. She knew he’d closed his robes to hide the fact that he wore Muggle blue jeans. On his feet were a pair of black, high-top shoes that were mostly cloth with a rubber sole, the brand Converse stamped on the side. She smiled with affection, knowing they’d never break him of his love for Muggle fashion.

“Be careful, Draco,” she reminded her son. “Remember the consequences of being seen as deviant or dangerous, especially at this age.” She had been determined to drill into his head the dangers of the Wizarding world discovering they were gay as well as the horrible consequences of seriously hurting or killing other children. She was certain Draco understood, but she would still worry.

“I’ll remember,” Draco promised, rolling his eyes. “It’s getting late. We should go.”

King’s Cross was a mess of people. For some reason Draco thought of the word gaggle. He wasn’t even sure what that word meant, but it sounded good. There was a gaggle of people. They made their way toward the end of the train and found Andromeda with Dee on her hip with Ted standing by a pillar. Ted’s whole face softened as he caught sight of his boys. Andromeda smiled, Dee reaching her little arms out toward Harry with a giggling laugh. Harry accepted Dee in his arms. The baby flung her arms around his neck with clear joy.

Ted shook Draco’s hand. “Do your best,” he told the blond. “Try and make as many friends as you can. You won’t get this time back.”

“I will,” Draco said to appeasing him. Friends weren’t exactly on his to-do list.

“Learn as much as you can,” Andromeda added, kneeling and pulling Draco into a hug.

“I will,” he repeated. He turned and pulled Dee into his arms. The little girl went willingly, her dark curls soft against Draco’s cheek as she pressed her head against his.

Harry hugged both Andromeda and Ted. They gave him different advice, basically to ‘have fun’.
Draco snorted in amusement. They knew that Harry always did his best and would make friends with everyone if it were up to him. Harry was also the one who enjoyed learning new things and would listen with equal attention to any lesson. Draco, on the other hand, only focused if he thought what he was learning could be useful. Once he focused, however, Draco was a very dedicated student, gobbling up as much information as he could get his hands on at an incredible rate.

“Bye, Dee,” Draco whispered into the little girl’s ear. “See you in summer.”

Harry gave her a hug while Draco was still holding her. “Love you,” he told her sweetly.

As Draco passed her back to Ted, Dee began to cry. Harry ducked his head - guilt - piercing the bond. Draco grabbed his hand firmly in his. He gave Narcissa and Lucius, who stood impassively, a wave before turning and giving a more casual salute to Andromeda and Ted.

“We’ll write,” he told all four of them and tugged Harry toward the train.

Their two school trunks followed them, Hedwig’s cage secured on Harry’s trunk. Lucius had spelled them weightless and added a magical tether. Once they were on board, they only had to tap them with their new wands to cancel both spells.

Most of the children and teens around them were loud and jostling each other. Parents were yelling out comments and commands. Laughter rose in bursts above it all. Draco cut through them with single-minded purpose, moving toward one of the doors of the train. He’d written Percy very specific instructions. Basically whichever of them arrived on the train first was to secure an empty compartment toward the back.

Through the open compartment doors, Draco could see kids getting settled on the two benches facing each other and lifting their trunks into the netting above. Draco continued down the wood-paneled, narrow walkway, often having to press himself flat to a wall so other kids could pass. The third to the very last compartment was empty. Draco left Harry there to stand guard and checked the last two on either side. There were kids in all of them with no sign of Percy. Draco turned back, shoving his floating trunk upward to duck under it, and hurried inside the empty compartment Harry was defending.

A girl about fourteen or so was saying something about she and her friends usually using this compartment. Draco put his hand on her arm and gently applied pressure, causing her to step to the side, and planted himself next to Harry in the doorway and looked up at her with a polite smile. “Sorry for taking your usual spot, but we’re new and promised our friends we’d save them seats. We’re all kind of nervous and promised each other we’d stick together. They won’t be able to find us if we leave this compartment and there’s six of us.” He’d already assessed that these compartments would only hold about six students comfortably, so his lie made it clear he couldn’t ‘share’. “If you let us use it this year, I promise we’ll make it up to you.”

By this point, another girl had joined the first and they had realized who Draco and Harry were. They agreed instantly and wished them a good ride with their friends. Giggling, they moved off. As Draco remained in the doorway giving his spiel to whomever tried to enter - only two more groups of students, all of which went away as easily as the first two girls had - Harry busied himself with their trunks.

Clever boy that he was, he decided to push and shove the floating trunks into the netting before tapping them with his wand and canceling the spells. He had to stand on the bench seats to do it, but eventually he got them in place. They were too heavy for him to lift without the spells. Hedwig’s cage he settled safely on the floor under the window.
A loud whistle pierced the air and the volume of voices outside the train increased. Draco looked out the window at the surging crowd of families and late students and, when he turned back, Percy stood in front of him. Draco gave a smile and stood aside, letting the redhead into their compartment. Percy looked a lot different from the thirteen-year-old boy they had first met. Now, Percy had just turned fifteen last month and stood at five feet seven inches. He was still thin but with wider shoulders. His eyes were the same brown, but he had new glasses. They were black and cat-eyed shaped and horned-rimmed. His hair was nearly the same, cut short in the back and longer at the front, letting the tight curls spill over his forehead.

“Percy,” Draco said in welcome as the older teen shut the compartment door behind them.

“Draco,” Percy replied, tone formal and stuffy.

Draco smiled, amused. Percy could act all high-and-mighty with everyone else but them. They had seen Percy at his lowest and their relationship required them to be honest and intimate with each other. “How are you?” he asked, patiently waiting for Percy to get comfortable.

The redhead took out his wand and cast the few locking and warding spells that he knew at the door. He turned back to the two eleven-year-olds and pushed his glasses up his nose. “I’m well, thank you.”

“We’re going to have to keep our eye on Pucey and his group.” Draco said, taking a seat next to Harry. “He’s already made some comments while we were getting fitted for school robes.”

Percy nodded and added, “His group consists of about twelve in Slytherin from various year groups Third-year and above with a few hanger-ons that change. There are a few in Ravenclaw who have also said some things that make me think they’re Dark sympathizers as well.”

Draco nodded, Percy had already told him as much in his owled reports.

The seats in the compartment were comfortable with padded benches and a slightly curved padded back. The window was small, but allowed them to see the platform outside. Another whistle blew, followed by three quick bursts. The train lurched forward. Parents stood waving as they train very slowly pulled out of the station. Soon bright sunlight came streaming into the window and the buildings of London began to pass by. The train gathered speed with another loud, long whistle blowing.

Draco returned his attention to Percy. The teen was staring pensively out the window. “No one’s bothered you at night?”

Percy turned his eyes to Draco. “No.” There was relief in his voice as well as gratitude. “The snake still works.”

“How faded is it?” Draco stood and crossed the narrow space between them.

Percy carefully lifted his glasses from his face and set them on the seat next to him. He turned sideways, facing the door instead of the window and pulled his red button-down from his slacks. He leaned forward, exposing his lower back. A faded red snake lay curled in a ball with its triangular head resting on its top coil. There was no movement, looking like a decades old Muggle tattoo. Draco lightly ran his fingers over it, noticing how it was too faded to see the distinct scales anymore. He could barely sense his magic. It was definitely time to renew it. Percy had his head bowed forward with unconscious submission as Draco examined him. Warmth bloomed in Draco’s stomach and he stroked the tattoo again, this time in approval.
“Are you ready?” he asked softly.

Percy nodded, but he knew that wouldn’t be enough.

Draco used his thumb nail to trace the outline of the snake. “Are you ready, Percy?” he asked again, always demanding a verbal answer.

“Yes. I’m ready,” Percy whispered.

“Make sure the compartment is locked tight. Take your shirt off and get on your knees. Bend over the seat.” Draco’s eyes flashed to Harry as Percy moved to obey. “I want you ready and sitting on the bench next to him. Leave your boots on and hook your heels on the edge of the seat. Spread your thighs.”

Percy had flushed red, but he was soon naked to the waist with his pants unbuttoned so that they barely covered his butt. He buried his head into his folded arms and waited. Draco’s attention was on Harry, however. The slender boy had slipped out of his robe, untied his tie and unbuttoned his white shirt. He then shimmied out of his pants completely. Draco had seen him dress that morning, but the image of Harry in thigh-high, black silk socks and black high-heeled lace boots still took his breath away. It made Harry’s legs look like they went on for days and Draco had the urge to lick the line where silk ended and flesh began.

Harry set his back against the padded wall of the compartment and set his heels at the edge of the seat as Draco had ordered. Then he spread his thin, pale thighs, exposing himself completely, his knees bent and held next to his chest by his arms. Percy was directly next to him, his chest flat on the seat, his side touching Harry’s booted foot. A white-silver dragon with blue highlights on each tiny scale was inked with incredible detail into the skin on Harry’s right side. The tattoo was Draco’s claim on Harry, telling the world the boy belonged to him.

It was about four inches long and three tall. It had tiny silver scales along its triangular snake-like head that doubled in size above the cat-like eyes to form two crests that rose off the back of its head. Larger scales also pointed outward along its back and long tail, reminding Draco of Harry’s messy hair somehow. Probably because the scales weren't in orderly rows but slightly jumbled and almost lying flat. Like Percy's tattoo, it was growing slowly larger and longer over time.

Two white-silver leathery wings curled upward like a bat's. It had four scaled paws with three, multi-jointed talons on each foot. Its body was muscular and round, also like a cat's. There were hints of blue in the shadows of the scales and wings, but mostly the dragon was a pure silver-white. Its eyes, sitting on the sides of its rounded face, were a deep, dark green - the color of Draco's magic - only a shade or two darker than Harry’s eyes, which were pale emerald in color.

The dragon’s wings were spread, the head arching in a sensual line as Draco watched. Its tail dropped to curl in a loose spiral on Harry’s lower stomach just above the boy’s groin. Draco knelt between Harry’s spread legs. He licked at the dragon’s tail, causing it to curl more tightly and Harry’s member to stiffen. Humming, Draco reverently put his lips to the top of the silk stocking and licked and sucked at them, soaking the material and wetting Harry’s inner thigh with his spit. He was obsessed with that transition from silk to skin, had been from the very beginning when his boy began wearing them.

Harry moaned quietly, his head falling back to rest against the wall, pink lips parting sensually. *Pleasure desire submission* - pooled through the bond like warm syrup, increasing Draco’s own desire ten-fold.

As Draco bit down on Harry’s silk-covered thigh, the boy arched in a beautiful line, thighs spreading
impossibly wider. The sounds of Harry softly panting breaths filled the compartment and Percy groaned into his arms. Draco used his palm to press firmly against Harry’s cock, pressing it against his lower stomach. His thumb caressed the juncture of his groin and thigh, making Harry shiver.

Draco turned his attention to Percy. He reached forward with his dominate left hand and scratched gently at the faded tattoo. Percy’s hips involuntarily rocked against he bench seat. Draco smiled wolfishly and asked again, voice husky, “You ready?”

Percy pressed is forehead into the seat and tilted this head down so that his mouth was clear. “Yes!” he stated firmly, sweating and wanting to get this over with.

Draco took his hands off both boys and unfastened his school robe, letting it hang open. He unlatched his pants and bent forward to lick a hot line up Harry’s small, hard shaft. Harry bit his lip hard, a muffled whine escaping his throat as shocks of almost painful pleasure burst through him. Draco, all silver-eyed and focused, stood and pressed their groins together. The blond rolled his hips sensually, the heat of the pressure making Harry’s nipples hard while the sting of the dry friction made him gasp. He watched through dazed eyes as Draco bit into his palm.

Draco’s magic filled the compartment with a deadly energy and his teeth sank into his skin like butter. The smell of hot, fresh blood saturated the air instantly. Draco reached over and pressed his bleeding hand against Percy’s tattoo. He pressed against the teen’s back in a rhythmic pattern, forcing the older teen’s hips to rock against the seat. Percy groaned and picked up the rhythm voluntarily. Draco grinned, sharp and bright as he watched the boy work toward his own pleasure.

* This one is mine, * he thought fiercely and his magic responded. Blood and magic absorbed into the snake. Slowly, it began to gain more color and life, recharging with Draco’s power.

During the course of Percy’s Third-year at Hogwarts, someone had been raping him at night, holding him down and taking their pleasure from his unwilling body. Draco had been furious; furious that Hogwarts wasn’t safe, furious that kids were being raped. He’d claimed Percy and put his protecting mark on him, turning him into his spy at Hogwarts.

Percy was writhing against the bench seat now, his head flung back, sweat darkening his hair and rolling down his extended throat. His face was slack with pleasure as Draco’s hot magic poured into him, reasserting his claim and protection. The promise of that absolute safety nearly brought Percy over the edge. He was grunting now, mouth working at the air as he teetered at the edge.

Draco’s face went pale as he lost a dangerous amount of power. His head dropped forward just close enough that Harry could lick in quick desperate jabs with the very tip of his tongue at his blood-smeared chin. The taste of Draco’s blood was intoxicating, and as Draco continued to rock against him pushing pain and pleasure through his entire body, Harry’s magic began to rise, catching and matching Draco’s power, bolstering it.

Draco’s eyes brightened as Harry’s magic joined his. His thrusting hips picked up speed, energy rushing through him. Percy came with a choked cry, his body going rigid before collapsing limply forward into his own mess. Draco ripped his bleeding hand away and shoved it toward Harry’s hungry mouth. Harry latched on as if he were starving and sucked and licked at the deep bite.

Draco groaned as Harry’s healing magic pierced through him with sharp stabs of pleasure that went straight to his core. He tore his hand away and grabbed Harry’s thighs, pulling the boy’s heels and butt off the edge of the seat. He bent over the smaller boy and rutted against him in earnest. Harry’s long legs and feet bounced as Draco thrust against his body. The magic tightened like a spring, green eyes glowed to match Draco’s silver, and then they came together, bodies tightening and Draco’s hips pressing in with bruising force.
Harry’s mind went blank as his toes curled. Draco collapsed to his knees, sliding down Harry’s sweat-soaked chest and resting his head in the boy’s damp lap. They panted and gasped, trying to get their wind back. Percy was just beginning to sit back on his knees, cheeks a furious red as he looked at the mess smeared across the seat, his stomach, and groin.

Draco slid off of Harry and sat with his back to the seat. He didn’t bother trying to do up his pants or cover himself. His whole body tingled with the aftermath of their orgasm and sex magic. He slapped at the outside of Harry’s thigh. Harry obediently sat up and sank to his knees on the floor. Draco grabbed hold of Harry’s hair as the boy turned and happily descended on his lap, licking and sucking Draco clean of the small amount of clear fluid that he’d ejaculated. Draco tugged hard on Harry’s hair, bringing the boy’s mouth to his face where some of Harry’s cum had smeared across Draco’s cheek. As Harry’s hot, wet tongue ran over his skin again and again, Draco turned his head and captured Harry’s mouth in a deep and nearly violent kiss. Draco’s tongue scoured every inch of the inside of Harry’s mouth, stealing the taste.

Percy, heart slowly calming, pulled his shirt on and fastened his pants. A few cleaning spells got most of the mess off the upholstery. Languidly, he watched the two boys make-out. The passion in their eyes and mouths was undeniable. It made him think of a particular Ravenclaw girl in his year. As Harry sat back, straddling Draco’s waist, a thin line of spit connecting their swollen mouths, Percy announced, “I’ve been exchanging letters with a girl. If I… if we…” He gestured at Draco and Harry meaningfully. “Do you think the tattoo will hurt her?”

Draco pushed at Harry, making the boy climb to his feet. He accepted Harry’s hand and stood. He fastened his pants and sat heavily on the seat. Speaking to Percy, he ordered, “Turn around. Lift your shirt.”

Percy faced the window this time and bent forward, lifting his shirt and exposing the now bright red snake with each tiny scale etched in perfect detail fading from blood red to almost black along each edge. It peered at them through yellow-green eyes at the small of Percy’s back. It was half the size of Draco’s clenched fist when curled up and about seven inches long when stretched out. It was growing with Percy, gaining about an inch every time they recharged it. The first had been in August of last year, eight months after first putting it on Percy. This was the second.

“Your host wants to find a mate. Will you know the difference between his mate and the man who hurt him?” Harry asked the blood snake. He stood in his open dress shirt, stockings, and shoes, but he didn’t feel self-conscious. For too many years Draco and he had gone with little to no clothes, so nudity didn’t bother them.

The snake titled its ruby head curiously.

“Do you know when your host is scared or upset?” Harry asked in a different way.

This time the snake nodded.

“A short time ago your host was feeling good and had some of his clothes off. Did you want to bite?”

The snake flexed his neck in pleasure and shook his head.

“That’s right. Do not bite unless your host is scared or hurt, okay? When people come against him and take his clothes off and your host feels good, do not hurt them.”

The snake nodded again and yawned before curling up and resting its head on its red coils to go to sleep.
Harry smiled as Percy turned around and sat normally on the seat. Harry told him what he’d discussed with the snake and Percy smiled in relief.

“Thank you,” Percy said, voice soft and sincere. He carefully kept his eyes away from Harry’s mostly naked body.

Draco smirked, smug satisfaction radiating from him, as he pulled Harry in close to his side.

Chapter end.
A/N: I just wanted to remind everyone that **Pixi56** on AO3 has created amazing multi-chaptered fanart for this series.

Also, it has come to my attention there is more incredible art on Instagram if you search **#sensiblytainted**.

Check it out and leave comments! It’s so cool!

**Getting Things Sorted**

Draco and Harry treasured their time alone on the ride to Hogwarts. They knew they would get very little of it while at school between classes and sharing a dorm room with others, so they cuddled and took naps on each other’s shoulders, talked in quiet murmurs about Hogwarts, played with Hedwig, and exchanged soft kisses. All too soon, the whistle blew and, with an almost regretful sigh, Draco got them both up and made sure their clothes and robes were put to rights. Ten minutes later, the train slowed to a rocking stop as it pulled into Hogsmeade Station.

Draco popped his head out of their compartment and asked a passing kid what they should do with their trunks. He was impatiently informed to leave them, that the Hogwarts’ elves would take care of it. Harry took hold of Hedwig’s cage and Draco firmly grabbed his other hand as they followed the press of loud and rowdy kids off the train.

The sun was setting; dusk enveloped the platform. They were faced with a brick wall with a red sign with white letters that read Hogsmeade. Green trees and gas lamps stood along the way. As they were pushed along with the crowd of students, Draco caught sight of Hagrid standing over three times as tall as the kids around him at the end of the platform.

“First years! First years, follow me!”

Hagrid didn’t look any different from when they had met him on Diagon Alley. The same patchwork coat and leather pants, the same bristly beard and happy grin. Draco guided Harry that way. The older kids continued on passed Hagrid onto a street that would presumably take them to Hogwarts. Draco bumped into Ron as the redhead also pulled away from the crowd.

“Oh, hey,” Ron said once he realized it was Draco. “I looked for you on the train.”

Draco shrugged, offering no explanation, and came to a stop in front of the Ground’s Keeper. Ron caught Harry’s eyes and stuck his tongue out at the blond’s back. Harry smiled nervously, ducking his head. A sharp tug on his hand brought Harry’s head up and his public mask of serenity in place. Pansy pushed in on Draco’s other side. She somehow managed to smile and scowl at the same time. Vince and Greg lurked behind her.

“I looked for you everywhere,” she hissed.

Draco gave her the same shrug he’d given Ron, which made the redhead smirk.

Pansy huffed, tossing her shoulder-length black hair dismissively before crossing her arms.

“Arry!” Hagrid boomed, spotting him. His grin grew impossibly wider.
“Hello, Hagrid,” Harry greeted the man politely, his head craned back to look him in the eye.

“You ready to go to school?” Hagrid asked with a playful tone. “Follow me! Yer gonna love this!”

The kids around them shuffled their feet as they realized The Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy were among them. Hagrid, oblivious to the sudden tension in the group, turned and took a side path that led behind the station. None of the kids moved, too busy staring at Draco and Harry. Draco sighed and tugged Harry after him, following the giant man down the hill. Ron, Pansy, Greg, and Vince came quickly after. They didn’t talk. Darkness was falling quickly now and they had to step carefully if they didn’t want to fall.

The path went through a thin line of tall trees when they suddenly stepped out onto a beach with a wooden dock that stretched out onto a choppy lake. Five small wooden boats were lined on one side of the dock, six on the other. Hagrid strode out onto the wooden planks, calling, “Four to’a boat! Come on now. Time ta go.”

The dock hadn’t looked all that sturdy, but seeing Hagrid walking easily down the length reassured Draco. He took the lead and stepped onto the wooden planks. Hagrid took the sixth boat at the far end. Draco, Harry, Ron, and Pansy climbed into the one next to the large man. Greg and Vince took the boat next to that one. A black boy and a dark-haired girl got in with them.

Each boat had a glowing yellow lamp on a short pole on the front and they flickered to life as soon as someone stepped inside. Soon enough all eleven lamps had flickered to life, creating a warm glow in the night. A cool wind blew up from the lake and Harry leaned against Draco’s side. Draco put his arm around Harry’s shoulders, confident neither Ron nor Pansy would think anything of it. They were somewhat used to them, after all.

The boats launched smoothly away from the dock on their own. They rocked gently side to side as they cut across the water further out onto the lake, following after Hagrid’s boat. The trees along the lake edge grew dense and thick the further they went. Rocky cliffs suddenly rose around them. They turned a corner and Hogwarts came into view for the first time. Harry sucked in a breath. Even Draco felt his mouth fall slightly open. The castle was huge! Tall towers and massive buildings, elegant bridges and hundreds of glowing windows; it was the most magical thing any of them had ever seen.

“Blimey,” Ron breathed.

“It’s beautiful,” Pansy agreed.

They eyed each other suspiciously.

Draco snorted, amused.

Harry’s manners kicked in and he introduced them, saying, “Pansy, this is Ron Weasley. He’s on the summer baseball team we’ve told you about. Ron, this is Pansy Parkinson. She visits us at the manor.”

“Be nice,” Draco added, smiling, but there was a subtle warning in his tone.

Pansy sniffed and turned her head away, putting her nose in the air.

Ron scowled at her before pointedly returned his attention to the castle. “Wonder which one is Gryffindor Tower,” he asked.

“I read in Hogwarts: A History that Gryffindor stands for the Fire element. That means the tower
should be to the South,” Harry answered.

Draco looked up at the sky, found an orientation point and pointed. “That’s north...” His finger swung in the opposite direction. ”So it’s probably that one.”

Ron looked at the tower Draco was pointing to and grinned. “It’s so awesome!”

Pansy made a rude noise. “What’s so awesome about a windy tower? I bet it rocks when it storms. No thanks!”

Ron scowled at her. “Let me guess. You’d prefer the slimy dungeons.”

Pansy opened her mouth to give him a scathing retort, but Draco interrupted. “Quiet. We’re almost there.”

They weren’t really. They were still about five minutes out, but Ron and Pansy both thankfully shut up. Draco mentally sighed. This was going to be a long year.

The little boats carried them through a curtain of ivy, which hid a wide opening in the cliff face. They were carried along a dark tunnel, the golden lamps from their boats seeming to dim in the utter blackness. Harry whispered that they were probably under the castle. The voices of the other children bounced eerily off the walls while the sound of water lapping at stone was magnified. They emerged inside a cave-like cavern in an underground harbor. Each boat drifted one at a time to a flat shelf along the shore.

Hagrid disembarked first. He stood there grinning cheerfully. “Welcome to Hogwarts, Firsties!” he boomed. “Line up over there now. Let everyone get ashore.”

Once the last kid climbed free of the boat, Hagrid led them over to narrow stairs cut into the stone wall. By the time they reached the top, their calves were burning. The stairs led to a door that opened onto grass. They stepped out of the side of the castle and followed Hagrid like ducklings around the corner and walked up to the massive front doors. They were huge with iron bands covering its surface. Hagrid pushed them open easily and they swung inward with a creaky groan.

Draco stared into the Entrance Hall. Candles were lit along the walls next to gorgeous paintings and tapestries. Four suits of armor stood at the ready. Two massive winding staircases went up on both sides of the hall while directly in front of them were two more tall doors. An elderly witch in a pointed hat and dark green robes stood waiting for them.

“I brought the First years,” Hagrid told her jovially.

“Thank you, Mr. Hagrid,” the witch answered him, tone stiff and formal.

Hagrid gave a salute and found Harry in the crowd. “I’ll be seein’ ya later, Arry. Good luck!” And then he shut the front doors behind him with a bang.

“Welcome to Hogwarts,” the witch said, drawing their attention. “I am Deputy Headmistress McGonagall, Transfiguration Professor here at Hogwarts.” Draco’s attention sharpened at that name. “Now, in a few moments, you’ll pass through these doors and join your classmates, but before you can be seated you must be Sorted into your Houses. They are Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin.” An unconscious chill touched her voice as she named the last House. Draco lifted an eyebrow at that. “Now, while you’re here, your House will be like your family. Your triumphs will earn you points. Any rule breaking and you will lose points. At the end of the year, the House with the most points will be awarded the House Cup…”
Her stern lecture was interrupted as a boy in the middle of the group cried out, “Trevor!” A croaking frog hopped up to McGonagall’s feet and the boy pushed out of the group to scoop it up. As McGonagall stared with an unimpressed gaze, Draco realized the boy was Neville Longbottom, the kid he’d met during Beltane.

“Sorry,” the boy muttered weakly, face red with shame.

“The Sorting will begin momentarily,” McGonagall continued. She turned with a sweep of her robes and went inside the double doors.

“A toad,” Pansy said in disgust. “Who gets a toad familiar in this day and age?”

Draco ignored her and edged past Greg and Vince to get a better look at the boy. As he’d thought, Neville was crying silently with not a hiccup of breath, tears rolling down his flushed cheeks. The Pleasant girl fostered by Neville’s family stood at his side, saying, “I told you he’d show up.” Draco took note of the looks of disdain on the other kids’ faces. Neville hadn’t made any new friends with his lost toad.

“I got a rat. My brother got an owl this year for being a Prefect, so he passed him on to me. He knows a lot of tricks,” Ron was saying behind him.

Draco turned at Pansy’s shriek and saw Ron holding a fat, graying rat in his hands. The redhead looked delighted by her reaction and shoved it forward in her direction.

Greg’s hand grabbed Ron’s arm warningly. “Don’t,” he said simply, making Ron scowl and jerk away.

McGonagall returned before anything more could occur, and Ron hastily shoved the rat back into his robe pocket. “We’re ready for you now,” she told them.

The Great Hall was massive. Longer than it was wide, it had hundreds of floating candles under a ceiling charmed to look like the sky. Four rows of tables stretched the length of the room. Hundreds of kids sat in long rows at those tables and watched with only vague interest as the First years marched inside after McGonagall. The group walked down the hall and stopped in front of a horizontal table that sat on a raised dais. The teachers were there, looking out at the students with varying expressions.

Draco caught Snape’s eye and gave a smirk. The Potion’s Master gave him a neutral stare in return.

“Now, before we begin, Headmaster Dumbledore would like to say a few words,” McGonagall told them solemnly.

Draco blanked his expression and held tight to Harry’s hand as the old wizard in billowing dark purple robes and a pointed purple hat pressed on the table to get to his feet. His chair was especially extravagant. The sides made of gold and with points along the top, looking like a modest throne.

Dumbledore looked as old and crafty as he had the last time Draco had seen him. Just as it had been then, Dumbledore’s beard and hair were snow-white and fell well past his waist. He gave a happy smile to the assembled children, his voice husky and soft with age. A frown shaded Draco’s features; he wasn’t buying the weak, old guy act for a second.

“I have a few start of term notices I wish to announce. The First years please note that the Dark Forest is strictly forbidden to all students. Also, our Caretaker Mr. Filch has asked me to remind you that the Third Floor corridor on the right hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not want to die a most painful death. Thank you.” Dumbledore gave a vague wave of his hand and returned to
his seat, smiling.

Draco flashed Harry a look. Harry blinked back at him - *patient watchful*. Frowning, Draco turned back to McGonagall as she began speaking.

“Now as I call your name, you shall come forth, I shall put the Sorting Hat on your head and you’ll be Sorted into your Houses.” She unrolled a parchment and called the first name. “Abbot, Hannah.”

The girl came forward timidly and was directed to the stool next to McGonagall. A ratty leather wizard’s hat was placed on her head.

“Hufflepuff!”

Draco wasn’t sure what the Third Floor corridor was about, but he was not happy that there was something so dangerous within reach of Harry. Percy had made a very detailed list about all the dangerous places in Hogwarts, including the Dark Forest and the more advanced greenhouses among other things, but none of them had actually been inside the castle walls.

Draco stared at Dumbledore and realized the old wizard was already looking at him. He wondered what the old man was up to and narrowed his eyes. Mouthing the words, ‘We need to talk’, he hoped Dumbledore got the message.

Vincent was Sorted Slytherin. A few names later Gregory followed him into the same House. Draco wondered distractedly why no one realized what that meant. Those two were not as slow as everyone assumed them to be. They had a verbal handicap, but they were cunning, observant, and had ambitions.

“Longbottom, Neville!”

McGonagall had been calling names, but Draco had been too distracted notice. He only noticed now because it was a name he recognized. They were already at the L’s; he’d be called soon.

“Gryffindor!”

Draco was pulled from his thoughts as Harry hissed next to him - *confusion pain*. Draco turned sharply to see Harry touching his lightning bolt scar. Draco’s razor sharp eyes shot around the room as he held tightly to Harry’s arm.

There were a few students whispering and looking Harry’s way, but none of them seemed particularly threatening. At the teacher’s table, Snape was the only one looking directly at them. The man frowned, dark eyes moving to Draco’s in question as he noticed Harry’s pain. Draco moved on, looking for the threat, but no one stood out. Practically growling, Draco crowded Harry protectively, running a soothing hand down the boy’s back.

“Malfoy, Draco!”

Draco didn’t want to leave Harry’s side. He shot Pansy and Ron pointed looks, tilting his chin subtly at Harry. He wished Vince and Greg were there, but they were sitting at their new House table.

Once Pansy and Ron moved into place on either side of Harry, Draco marched up to the stool. His mind raced, his eyes never once leaving Harry. The four tables and what seemed a sea of kids were just an unimportant blur in the background. He was hyperaware of their bond, ready to spring into action should another bolt of pain come through. His knuckles went white as he sat and gripped the edge of the stool. He didn’t like this at all. First a deadly Third Floor corridor and now Harry’s scar had reacted to something for the first time.
Harry watched nervously. He hadn’t meant to be distracting. He knew Draco was unhappy and then his scar had to go and hurt… This was so important and he was messing it up!

The hat had barely touched Draco’s head before it shouted, “Slytherin!”

Harry’s eyes went wide, knowing that wasn’t Draco’s plan. His heartbeat quickened as he watched McGongall take the hat from Draco’s head.

The blond stood from the stool and boldly said, “No.”

The Great Hall fell absolutely silent.

“I beg your pardon, young man?” McGonagall asked in a very offended tone, eyebrows nearly touching her hairline.

Draco looked up and gave her a polite smile, his eyes glinting with defiant amusement. “No, thank you, Professor. I am deeply honored. Slytherin is a great House, but I choose Gryffindor.”

“That is not how these things are done, Mr. Malfoy,” she stated sternly. “Please join your House.”

Draco gave her an elegant bow, and then, ignoring the green badge on his left breast, he walked calmly to the end of the Gryffindor table and sat next to a wide-eyed Neville Longbottom.

The older Gryffindor students were on their feet asking him what he thought he was doing. A few actually booed. Competing with the noise of outrage, Draco noticed the Weasley twins were standing on the benches cheering. He slanted them a lopsided grin.

Dumbledore stood once more. This time without the help of the table, Draco noted absently. The old wizard clapped his hands once and energy brushed over everyone in the room. Silence fell. “I ask for patience,” he directed to the room before looking directly at Draco. “We will have a discussion after the Sorting, Mr. Malfoy.” Blue eyes twinkling over his half-moon glasses, he waved his hand at McGonagall, sitting again and looking completely unconcerned.

McGonagall huffed and the Gryffindors grumbled, some of the older ones glaring dangerously, but the Sorting continued without further disruption.

Draco ignored it all. *Follow the plan,* he told his boy, voice calm and confident.

Harry looked into Draco’s fearless eyes and took a deep breath. His anxiety faded as trust bloomed in its place. Pansy’s hand slipped into his own. Harry held it tightly as he turned and faced the Sorting.

“Parkinson, Pansy.”

Pansy gave Harry’s hand a last squeeze and Ron a pointed look before making her way to the stool.

Ron went red, but as Harry’s wide, green eyes turned to him, fear clear in their depths, he reached out and took Harry’s other hand. Harry’s sweet, grateful smile gave him the strength to tilt his chin defiantly. There was nothing wrong with comforting a friend, and he’d punch anyone in the nose who said otherwise!

“Slytherin!”

Harry smiled, knowing Pansy had gotten the House she had wanted, but it trembled at the edges. Would he be next? His heart knocked painfully against his ribs.
* I’ll take care of everything, * Draco’s voice whispered in his mind. * Hush. *

“Patil, Padma.”

“Ravenclaw!”

Harry took a deep breath and slowly breathed out. Expanding his throat, he felt his collar press into his skin. It calmed him. *I belong to Draco,* he mentally chanted. All would be well as long as that was true.

“Patil, Parvati.”

“Gryffindor!”

Harry took notice at the repeat of the Patil name. The girls were identical. Taking in Parvati’s smile as she moved toward the Gryffindor table, Harry thought she seemed okay with being separated from her twin. He couldn’t imagine that.

“Longbottom-Pleasant, Hermione.”

The girl they’d met at Beltane pushed past him muttering encouraging words to herself. She was clearly wracked with worry, but you couldn’t tell by her body language. She moved with what seemed like confidence, her chin tilted up.

The hat sat on her head for about thirty seconds before calling, “Gryffindor!”

“Warrington-Pleasant, Kevin.”

“Ravenclaw!”

- Nervous worry - began to sneak into Harry’s heart. He knew Draco would get his way and be made a Gryffindor, there was no doubt of that, but what if the hat put Harry in the wrong House, too? That would be harder to fix.

“Potter, Harry.”

Harry clutched at Ron’s hand as his hard won calm shattered into - fear. He stared with wide-eyed horror at the stool. What if he messed this up so badly that Draco couldn’t fix it?

Ron’s blush deepened as it seemed like the whole school turned to look at them. Harry seemed frozen. Out of the corner of his eye, Ron saw Draco tense and knew that nothing good would come from the blond interfering. He’d already acted like a crazy bastard by refusing his Sorting. Ron had to try and stop him from doing anything crazier! He pulled his hand free, stepped behind Harry, and gripped his shoulders.

“You got this, Harry. You’re on the mound. Bases are loaded. Draco’s called the pitch. You just got to get it to him, yeah?” Ron said quietly but clearly and then pushed Harry forward.

Harry stumbled a bit, his heels clicking on the floor in the silence. The image Ron had given him settled his nerves. He’d been in tight spots before. He’d pitched in games where they were losing, the whole team’s hopes riding on his throw, but Draco was always there crouched behind home plate, calling the play. Harry turned to sit on the stool and his eyes connected with Draco’s stormy grey. The blond gave him the same cocky grin that he wore during a game, all cool confidence and
amusement. Harry’s nerves disappeared completely. Draco had him.

The Sorting Hat fell over Harry’s eyes. “Interesting,” a dusty voice said into his mind.

Harry went rigid. Snape’s voice had once resonated in his mind, a place meant only for Draco, by accidentally bleeding through Draco’s mind during an Occlumency lesson. It had been just as terrible, just as invading, but he wasn’t as weak as he once was. Instead of breaking down, Harry mentally growled, instinctively trying to protect what was Draco’s by blocking the voice out.

“A nice mind, generous heart, and deeply loyal…” the leathery voice continued, this time in a careful whisper.

* Hello. I don’t believe we’ve met,* Draco’s voice cut through the darkness behind Harry’s eyes like a brilliant flash of lightning. The blond’s fierce magic rumbled through the bond like thunder.

“You possess remarkable bravery. Your ability to trust in your Dominus with no fear for how terribly he could hurt you will make you feel right at home in….

Harry was off the stool and running to his new table. McGonagall was just barely able to snatch the hat back off his head. Draco had turned, straddling the bench. His arms were open, a pleased smirk on his face. Harry flung himself into those arms, shaking in reaction - joy relief love.

Draco smoothed a hand through Harry’s hair, gave him a squeeze, and gently pushed the boy toward the seat next to him. “I told you you’d get Gryffindor,” he said out loud while mentally prompting, *Mask.*

Harry blushed and realized the whole of Gryffindor table was cheering. Draco’s rebellion and questionable presence was forgotten completely as Gryffindor celebrated their acquiring The Harry Potter. Standing with the few remaining First years, Ron pumped his fist in the air, grinning. Harry kept his head up and gave them all a big smile, determined to win them over so that they’d let Draco stay.

A few minutes later, Ron was Sorted Gryffindor and he took the seat next to Harry. Harry gave him a hug while Draco slapped his hand in a high-five. The last few kids were Sorted and Dumbledore stood again, tapping his glass goblet with a fork, making it ring. The hall quieted. With twinkling eyes, Dumbledore exclaimed, “Let the feast begin!”

Food instantly appeared along the previously bare center of the table. Rolls, butter dishes, corn on the cob, roast potatoes, steamed carrots, and roast chicken. Ron immediately dug in. Draco barely kept himself from rolling his eyes. The redhead’s table manners were still deplorable.

“Wanted to be in the best House, eh, Malfoy?” an older student a few places down asked Draco with
mean eyes.

“Well, it certainly is now that I’m here,” Draco drawled with a smirk, amused by the pathetic attempt to bully him.

“Don’t think that you’re staying,” the boy spat angrily. “Slytherins aren’t welcome here.”

Draco arched an eyebrow and looked pointedly over at the Slytherin table. “Looks like they are since they have their own House and all,” he retorted, purposefully mistaking the ‘here’ to mean Hogwarts and not Gryffindor since that’s how everyone acted anyway. Like House Slytherin should be kicked out and destroyed. Such short-sighted ignorance.

The bully went red as the kids around him snickered.

“We come as a pair,” Harry cut in, voice as firm as his gaze. “We’re twin-bonded.”

A girl next to the angry teen got the boys attention and they held an intense whispered conversation. The First years were left alone.

Draco served himself a small portion of everything and gave Neville a charming smile. “Nice to see you again. How’s Trevor?”

Neville blushed a dark red, instinctively putting his hand in his pocket. “Fine, thank you,” he answered nervously, ducking his head.

Draco turned his smile to Hermione. “Congratulations on your Sorting. I’m sure you’re happy to be with your brother.”

Hermione’s guarded expression softened with surprise and then a real smile spread across her face. She looked at Neville and nodded her head firmly. “I am.”

“I’m Harry Potter,” Harry introduced himself to the First years around him. “I hope we can be friends.”

“I’m Seamus Finnigan!” the boy across from Harry said with a heavy Irish accent. He had short sandy-colored hair and blue eyes. “Can’t believe I’m here, really! I’m half-and-half. Me Dad’s a Muggle and me Mum’s a witch. Got a huge surprise he did when I got me letter! Mum had some explainin’ to do!” He laughed boisterously.

“Dean Thomas,” the boy next to Seamus offered. He was dark-skinned with short, dark hair. He was tall, too. Almost a head taller than Harry with them both sitting. His voice was subdued, but he seemed friendly enough.

“And I’m Lavender Brown,” a girl with long, ash-blonde pigtails pipped. She was on the other side of Neville. “I always knew I’d be coming to Hogwarts. Both my parents attended.”

“Parvati,” the Patil twin said with a sweet smile. She was Indian with large dark eyes and thick black hair that she wore in a single braid. “My family’s been magical for more than eighteen generations. Most of them were Ravenclaws.” Her sweet smile morphed into something more daring. “Guess I’m different.”

Next to Neville sat a girl with strawberry blonde hair that had been cut in a short bob. “My name’s Fay Dunbar.” She had small features and an upturned nose, which made her look a bit like a pixie. “I wanna play professional Quidditch one day. Are First years allowed to try out, do you think?”
“I’m Kellah Jordan.” Black with cornrow braids, she was very pretty with thick lips and large dark eyes. “You can call me Kell. My older brother’s in Gryffindor. His name’s Lee.” She pointed him out and an older teen sitting with Fred and George gave her an enthusiastic wave.

Ron rolled his eyes, unimpressed. His left cheek puffed out from food stored in it. “I got three older brothers here, all Gryffindor. Two more have graduated already. Don’t talk to me about older brothers. Oh, I’m Ron. Weasley if you couldn’t guess.”

“Draco Malfoy.” He gave them all the easy smile of a cat. “Nice to meet you. I’m sure we’ll get along just fine.”

They talked of simple things and ate until they felt like they were going to pop, the atmosphere friendly. Almost an hour later, the feast came to an end. Professor McGonagall stepped up to the First year section of the table and gave Draco as stern glance. “Mr. Malfoy, the headmaster would like to speak with you.” Turning her attention to Percy, she added, “Please take the First years to the tower and explain things, Mr. Weasley. I will be there momentarily.”

Percy nodded and stood.

* Stay close to Percy until I get back, * Draco instructed through the bond. He squeezed Harry’s hand tightly before letting go.

Harry gave Draco a smile - acceptance determination.

The other First years gave Draco curious looks as they stood and swung their legs over the bench. Percy gathered them up, unashamedly taking Harry’s hand. Draco gave them an unconcerned wave. Soon the Great Hall was empty. McGonagall lifted a single eyebrow before striding from the hall.

They went up a floor and walked down a long hallway with many gargoyles staring sightlessly back at each other. They were large and ferocious looking. At the end of the hallway, they came to an eagle-headed gargoyle with massive wings and a frighteningly large, sharp beak with the body of a lion. McGongall coolly stated, “Acid pops,” and the stone statue stepped off its pedestal, the head turning with a loud grating sound to look at them as they walked past to the spiraling staircase beyond.

Dumbledore’s office was a large and beautiful circular room, full of funny little noises. A number of curious silver instruments stood on spindle-legged tables, whirring and emitting little puffs of smoke. The walls were covered with portraits of old headmasters and headmistresses, all of whom were snoozing gently in their frames. A second floor could be seen past a railing and held hundreds of books that had no titles along the spines. There was also an enormous, claw-footed desk, and, sitting on a shelf behind it, the Sorting Hat. Dumbledore sat there. He waved them closer, indicating that McGongall should join them and sit. He offered them both a silver tin with yellow balls.

“Lemon drop?”

“No, thank you,” Draco denied. He reached up to tuck his hair back behind his ear.

McGonagall said nothing, narrowing her eyes impatiently.

“Very well.” Dumbledore chose one of the candies and placed it in his mouth. It made his cheek bulge slightly. “You are unhappy with the Sorting?”

“I am unhappy with a lot of things,” Draco answered mildly.

“It’s not for you to be ‘unhappy’ with things, Mr. Malfoy, you are a student and as such…”
McGonagall began.

“For example,” Draco cut her off and stared her down. “A fucking deadly corridor.” His eyes flashed to Dumbledore. “What the fuck are you thinking putting that in a school filled with kids?”

McGonagall opened her mouth to scold him for his language, but she couldn’t find the words to say because she agreed with him completely. She had been against it from the start.

“We are temporarily holding onto something that needs protection,” Dumbledore explained.

“Protect it somewhere else,” Draco demanded coldly, crossing his arms.

“Mr. Malfoy!” McGonagall exclaimed, shocked by his attitude, as if he were a king and they were his subjects to be commanded.

“Minerva, it’s alright. He is rightly concerned for his safety and the safety of the other children.” Dumbledore smiled, faded blue eyes twinkling madly above his glasses. “The item was placed in the most secure holding in the Wizarding world and I received notice that it wasn’t safe even there. This is the last place it can be kept. I assure you that every measure has been taken to keep the students safe from both the item as well as anyone after the item. The wards have been bolstered all summer. The teachers have been informed and will keep watch, and I assure you they are all highly qualified adults. I would prefer it otherwise, but this is necessary. Should the item fall into the Dark’s hands, I believe Voldemort’s return would follow directly after.”

“Albus!” This time she was shocked by the information the headmaster had revealed to an eleven-year-old. Such things were beyond the boy’s understanding, but more than that it was not for him to worry about. He was a child! He shouldn’t be burdened with such knowledge.

Draco considered that, a cold chill of fear coiling in his gut. He wasn’t ready. He hadn’t gained enough strong allies to be sure he could keep Harry safe when Voldemort returned. Not to mention they still hadn’t figured out a way to free Harry from the Black core attached to his own. He gave a sharp nod. “I understand. We must keep that from happening at all cost,” he agreed, voice resigned.

McGonagall felt her eyebrows lift. “Why, thank you for your permission, Mr. Malfoy,” she said archly.

Draco gave her a blank look. Her lack of understanding was annoying, but he knew it was to be expected. Winning her to his side would take time.

Dumbledore rubbed his hands together. “I’m glad we are all in agreement. Now, as to your Sorting…”

“I understand you do not wish to be separated from your twin,” McGonagall interrupted, “but it is not for the child to pick the House. We are none of us truly aware of who we really are. You belong with Slytherin, even if you do not think so at the moment. You will be more understood there. As for Mr. Potter, you will be able to see him between classes and meal times, but you simply must room with your House.”

Dumbledore sat back, stroking his white beard as he watched.

“Gryffindor is my House,” Draco stated with calm certainty. “The Sorting Hat is a magnificent object of power, but it is not perfect. Nothing is perfect. The hat took very little time Sorting me. Less than any other kid. There is more to me than can be measured in that time.”

“The Sorting Hat has never been wrong!” McGonagall insisted.
"How do you know that?" Draco demanded with a bit more force. "Have you been in the head of every child to ever walk these halls? There has never been a child who was consistently unhappy throughout their seven years here? A student who didn’t reach their full potential because of their House environment? Never? You can’t possibly know that."

McGonagall crossed her arms defensively as certain students in the past flashed through her mind. “And what makes you say you belong to Gryffindor besides being bonded to Harry Potter?”

“I won’t deny that I like to make plans. I’ve been told I’m smart in the cunning way, and I have the enormous ambition of keeping Harry alive.”

She opened her mouth, clearly feeling she had won.

“But!” Draco cut her off before she could speak. He met her eyes with fierce determination, and they weren’t the eyes of a child. “I’m brave, professor. Brave and chivalrous. I was kept captive for over a year by a very sick man. I faced his punishments and torture and never gave up hope of escape. I’d walk into that man’s chamber, knowing he was going to whip me half to death or shove plastic dicks up my ass. I knew he was going to make me bleed and bleed, but I faced him head on again and again. And I protected Harry from that. I knew it would be worse for me if I did, but I did it anyway. I take care of Harry before myself. No matter the cost. Always. I have honor, Professor McGonagall, not just pride, and I do know the difference.” Taking a deep breath, softening his voice to sound more vulnerable, Draco said, “I think I deserve the right to choose Gryffindor. I’ve proven my bravery more times than I can count and I never broke during all those hours of torture. My honor is still intact. If you force me to go to Slytherin… I feel like you’re telling me it’s not.”

McGonagall couldn’t speak. She was beyond horrified by Draco’s speech. Tears burned her eyes. The child stared up at her with a vulnerable expression, but his gaze was steady and he was facing her head on, just as he did his tormentors. He was so small now. How much smaller had he been then, helpless and utterly, truly alone? His undeniable bravery was heartbreaking because it shouldn’t have been necessary.

“Draco,” she whispered, voice wobbly and thick with unshed tears. “You may be Slytherin, but you are Gryffindor, too. I welcome you to your new House.”

Dumbledore cleared his throat. “May I ask why you do not wish to be in Slytherin? If your goal is to help Harry, then…”

McGonagall gave Dumbledore the fierce glare of a protective mother. How dare he suggest to an eleven-year-old to serve in the war!

“Simple.” Draco shrugged. “I could try and spy on the Slytherins, it might even help one day, but Harry’s been traumatized, too. It’s going to be hard for him to live at a boarding school where people don’t understand what we’ve been through. I’m his twin. He’s going to need me. Besides, I don’t have to be in Slytherin to spy on them. I’m going to maintain my contacts there.”

McGongall smiled, amused. “How very Slytherin of you.”

Draco gave her a tilted grin. “I’m sure there have been plenty of Gryffindors in the past who wished to spy on Slytherin.”

“But they did not succeed at it,” she countered. “I have a feeling you will.”

Draco chuckled. “Here’s hoping. Plus, with me in Gryffindor bridging the gap between the two
Houses, maybe we can help weaken the stigma against Slytherin and make them feel less persecuted. Then they’d feel less like they have no other choice than to follow the few who are hardcore Dark.”

McGonagall smiled proudly. Draco truly was Gryffindor if he was so set on saving so many people, people he didn’t even know.

Draco internally smirked. This was going exactly how he’d predicted. They were going to attribute his goal to infiltrate Slytherin and convert as many as he could to altruistic reasons. The truth was that every kid he pulled from the Dark Lord was another kid who wouldn’t hurt Harry. He wasn’t kidding when he’d said he would build an army to keep Harry safe. Draco was going to do whatever it took to make it happen, including “save” Slytherin House.

Deep in his mind he hid the rage and cold hatred aimed at these two people. They had left Harry at the Dursleys. McGonagall had sensed they were not good people, that Harry would not do well there. Dumbledore hadn’t listened. They had both failed epically. McGonagall for not checking up on Harry when she’d known. Dumbledore for continuing on with the arrogant confidence that he was right. There would come a time for vengeance, a time Draco would need a trump card, and he’d unleash his rage. He’d wait and watch for that moment with a Slytherin’s cold patience.

Chapter end.
Gryffindor

Gryffindor

Percy led the group of Firsties out of the Great Hall and up the main staircase. They passed stone corridors that led to classrooms, many vocal paintings of knights and languid ladies and, all the while, they stepped carefully as the stairs under them sometimes felt the need to move into another position, bringing them to a secondary landing on the next floor up. Percy explained that they should all try and get to class early because they tended to act up even more if you were running late.

Harry nodded firmly, making a mental note to tell Draco later. “Are there any maps?” he asked, looking up at Percy.

“I suppose I could find you one. Gryffindors usually like to do things by trial and error. I suspect that Hufflepuffs give their new members maps, though,” he answered.

“Because they’re babies,” Ron said with a big eye roll. “I’m not using a map. It’s more fun figuring it out yourself. We’ll be fine if we stick together, Harry.”

“I would like one, please,” Harry told Percy, undeterred. He didn’t care if his peers thought him a baby. If running late carried penalties like the staircases moving on purpose to make things worse, then he wanted to be prepared. He was determined not to be a burden to Draco.

“I want one, too,” Hermione spoke up, her chin lifted defiantly. “Only someone stupid thinks they won’t get lost in a castle this big. In Hogwarts: A History, it states several kids have gone missing never to be found again.”

Ron scowled, face red with embarrassment and anger, but before he could say anything to her, they stepped out onto the seventh floor landing. Percy led them to the huge painting that was almost set at ground level and was taller than Harry was by a half. A large woman in a white gauzy gown sat with her hair pinned up and dark green olive leaves around her head.

She gave them a big smile, saying, “Is this the new batch, then?”

“It is, Lady.” Percy turned to the group of kids. “This is our portrait. You have to tell her the correct password or you will not be allowed inside. Some students have had to camp out most of the night before someone else came along to let them in. This week the password is Caput Draconis.”

“Beheaded dragon?” Parvati asked curiously.

Ron and Seamus grinned, clearly approving. “Wicked,” they said almost at the same time.


Percy nodded at Harry as the portrait swung open.

A large round room filled with rugs overlapping with other rugs covered the grey stone floor. Heavy curtains and tapestries of animals, witches, and wizards covered the walls. Golden chandeliers casting warm yellow light hung from the ceiling, and a fireplace took up most of one wall with a roaring fire. A huge painting of a proud lion sitting with his head in profile was placed in a large golden frame above the mantle. It should have been gaudy and overwhelming, but it was so lived in and the atmosphere so casual that it felt homely instead. Dozens of stuffed red armchairs and a few couches placed around low mahogany tables in random clusters. Kids from twelve to seventeen were
lounging on chair arms, on window seats, leaning against the walls, sitting on the tables, playfully pushing and shoving, laughing. The volume of their voices was nearly overwhelming.

As the new First years crowded just inside the portrait of the Fat Lady, letting the door swing closed, the noise lowered. Percy opened his mouth, clearly about to say something when a boy, Fifth year or so, shouted, “Hey, Potter, what’s with Malfoy trying to get in here?”

Harry met the kid’s eyes squarely and said, “Draco’s the bravest person I know.”

“I’m sure Malfoy’s great, but you heard the Hat! It called Slytherin,” another boy argued.

“You want to kick out Draco, then you’re going to have to kick me out, too!” Harry said it with such fierce certainty that the boys had no quick comeback.

Trying to change the subject, Percy announced, “That’s the House billboard.” He pointed to the cork board in along the wall. It was already half filled with flyers and announcements. “Check it for news and notices.” Percy indicated two sets of gently spiraling mahogany stairs. They were decorated with crimson and gold as most of the room was. “The stairs lead to the dorms. Boys on the left, girls on the right. Boys can’t climb the stairs to the girls’ dorm. It turns into a slide.”

“And trust me…” Fred called laughingly.

“We’ve tried everything!” George finished with a mischievous grin.

The room laughed at that.

“The girls are able to climb the boys’ staircase,” a girl in the back called out with a grin.

Catcalls and comments about who she was looking to see up there were shouted across the room.

“That doesn’t sound fair,” Ron said with a frown, crossing his arms.

“Who cares if it’s fair,” Seamus argued, elbowing him with pink cheeks.

Lavender and Parvati giggled, Fay and Kell rolled their eyes, but Harry noticed that Hermione looked relieved.

“But if they’re caught in the dorm, they’ll get skinned by McGonagall,” another girl chimed in. She shuddered as if she had experience.

Hermione’s face dropped in disappointment.

Percy went on to say that curfew was at nine o’clock sharp on school nights and ten o’clock on weekends. If they were caught out of the tower after that time, the House would lose points and they’d likely earn a detention. A few shouted suggestions on how to avoid getting caught were bandied about, much to the amusement of the rowdy crowd. Percy did his best to ignore it, although most of the First years were doing the exact opposite and paying very close attention to the tips and tricks.

Other House rules were given: they were to keep their room and the common room tidy, beware Professor Snape as he had it out for all Gryffindors, never take anything from Fred and George as it was likely a prank of some kind, no recreation or mind altering potions or muggle drugs at anytime whatsoever, earn as many points as possible and don’t get caught breaking rules so that Gryffindor could win the House Cup…
“Been Slytherin last few years,” a boy grumbled unhappily.

“This year, we’re going to beat them at Quidditch,” a teen suddenly yelled out.

“Oliver,” a girl groaned.

“We will! I’m putting together a team better than when Charlie was here. The House Cup will be ours!”

A roared cheer of approval met this bold declaration, the sound making Harry wince and step closer to Percy’s side. Behind them, the portrait door swung open. McGonagall stepped inside with a beat up, bloody, bedraggled Draco. The room fell silent and the First years all backed up, deeper into the common room. Harry took a step forward, a look of worry on his face, but he stopped halfway, his expression going blank.

“Good evening, students,” McGonagall began, voice stern as ever. “I am here to announce that Draco has willingly undergone an additional test. The results are conclusive. He is a Gryffindor. In the Sorting Hat’s haste, it did not evaluate Draco comprehensively.”

Draco walked forward to stand beside Harry, taking the boy’s hand. He limped. His right eye was swollen and darkening into a terrible bruise. His hair fell around his face and stuck to the blood on his forehead and cheek. Blood smeared across his face from his nose and rolled down his neck from his ears. Soot smudged his skin, the smell of smoke rose around him. His robes, button-up, and jeans were torn in dozens of places, the skin underneath black and red with what looked like oozing burns.

“Can’t he go to Pomfrey?” Percy asked into the silence.

“I’m afraid not. Draco took this test knowing full well that it would be painful and his wounds would not be tended to afterward. Yet he faced it bravely and even now has not complained.” Her hazel eyes swept the room. “Draco has proven himself. Let all doubts regarding his House be extinguished!”

Harry pulled Draco’s arm over his shoulder and helped him walk toward the nearest armchair. The girl sitting on the arm leapt up immediately, but the boy didn’t move at first. Harry glared at him and the boy’s eyes went wide, finally standing. Draco sat carefully, making a face at the pain.

“Now!” McGonagall clapped her hands. “We need to see to dorms. Usually we have about twenty new students in Gryffindor each year, give or take. However, this year and last were on the smaller side due to events ten years ago. We haven’t had to split up the cohort in a while, but there are no more than five to a room. The girls will be fine in a single room. The boys number six…” She slanted Draco a stern glance as he raised his hand with seeming politeness. “No, Mr. Malfoy, you cannot share a room alone with Mr. Potter.”

Draco grinned and the expression was frightening with how bloody and battered he looked. “I was just going to say I’d like to room with Harry and Neville, professor.”

Neville looked shocked, Ron furious, and Hermione suspicious. Harry gave them a reassuring smile and mouthed ‘I’ll explain later’ to Ron.

“Very well.” McGonagall gave Draco a nod of acceptance. “Now that that’s out of the way.” She again gave her House a stern glance. “Mr. Malfoy has been spelled to be unable to discuss his challenge. Do not ask him about it if you do not want to waste your time. He will say nothing. Now you have classes bright and early in the morning. Your schedules will be handed out during
breakfast. I suggest you get some sleep.”

The room maintained its silence until the portrait swung closed behind her. Then bursts of whispered conversations erupted around the room. Slowly groups of students went up the dormitory stairs, staring at Draco the whole way.

“Congratulations!” Fred called, bounding over. He gave Draco a bow.

“Impressive,” George added, whistling as he took in Draco’s damage up close.

“Thanks,” Draco said wryly. He gingerly touched his split lower lip.

“What’s the deal?” Ron demanded, butting in.

Fred and George exchanged a glance and left the First years to their argument. They put their heads together and whispered back and forth.

“Harry and I like to go to bed early and like things quiet,” Draco explained meeting Ron’s angry gaze with his one good eye. “I thought you’d have more fun with Seamus and Dean.”

“You always think you know everything!” Ron spat and angrily stormed away. Seamus and Dean followed after shooting Draco curious looks.

Harry smiled gently at a still shocked Neville. “I hope you don’t mind.”

“N-no at all,” the shy boy stuttered, face red.

“I'll see you in the morning,” Hermione told Neville. She gave Harry and Draco a fierce look before following after the other girls.

“Help me up.”

Harry grabbed Draco’s hands and pulled the slightly bigger boy to his feet. Draco hissed in pain and looped his arm over Harry’s shoulder’s again. Neville stared in horror, but he said nothing. They made their way with agonizing slowness up the stairs. On the first level they found a door with a lightning bolt with their three initials on it. Harry opened the door and pushed it open.

The dorm room was like a circle cut in half. Small rectangular windows were placed regularly around the outside wall. Three fourposter beds were covered in thick scarlet blankets and embroidered with gold. Curtains an even darker red were tied off along each post and could be drawn around the beds for privacy. At the foot of each sat the their trunks and next to the head of the bed sat a nightstand. Three tall armoires were placed against the wall on the other side to hang their clothes. Several red rugs overlapped over the cold stone floor. Oil lamps sat on each nightstand, turned up so their warm flickering light filled the room.

Draco limped inside with the help of Harry and sat carefully on the far right bed. Neville went to the bed on the far left, leaving the middle for Harry.

“Are you okay, Draco?” Harry asked softly.

“Yeah. Fine.” Draco watched as Neville nervously twisted his hands in his lap. “Look, Neville, I didn’t mean to make you feel uncomfortable. I just thought you’d like a quiet dorm as much as Harry and me. The other boys can get pretty excited sometimes.”

“N-no, I mean, y-yes…” Neville stammered, red in the face.
“Good.” Draco gave him a smile and then focused on Harry. “Help me get these off.”

Harry obediently began tugging Draco’s clothes off one piece at a time, revealing even more bruised and oozing skin. The skin not damaged was covered in scars: thick ones, thin ones, long and short, lines and blotches, all a pale white, hundreds of them. His chest and legs were covered in them. His back looked even worse. The scars there were thicker and overlapped each other, clearly the marks of a whip. Neville gasped in horror, but he was ignored.

Harry carefully folded the ruined clothes before placing them in the hamper he’d found in one of the armoires. He set it next to the middle bed and told Neville he could use it, too. Then he fetched Draco’s dressing robe and hurried out of his own clothes, folding them and placing them in the hamper, too. “We’re going to take a shower. I saw a bathroom at the end of this hall,” Harry explained as he helped Draco get to his feet again.

Neville nodded numbly.

There was a door across from their own with a sword engraved on it and the initials of Ron, Seamus, and Dean. The door was shut. When they got into the bathroom, it was empty. Harry propped Draco up in the stall and began to help wash him off. The water ran pink and grey as it circled the drain, tainted with soot and blood. Harry lovingly washed Draco’s skin clean. He stared up at the blond from his knees, awe and devotion in them.

“You’re amazing,” Harry whispered, barely loud enough to be heard. “You got into Gryffindor just like you said and a room mostly to ourselves.” He could hardly contain his amazement at this incredible boy.

Draco felt warmth saturate him from head to toe as he was filled with Harry’s - unconditional love pride. Unexpected tears stung his eyes.

Harry was the first one to truly love him. To want to take care of him. Who saw something worthwhile in him and was proud of him. Harry’s love had saved him from a darkness so deep it had been colder and more empty than the black surrounding the stars. Even now Narcissa, Remus, Lucius, Andromeda…. Everyone who thought they loved him… They loved, but they didn’t love all of him, didn’t see or want to see all of him. They loved him, but frowned at this or that. They didn’t understand. Harry… Harry loved him. Every single inch, every aspect of his personality, loved in a way that broke through Draco’s barriers and had saved him from the darkness.

Draco ran his thumb over Harry’s bottom lip and then pressed two finger inside his warm mouth. Harry sucked and licked at Draco’s fingers hungrily. Draco’s nipples pebbled and he felt warm all the way through. Tilting his head back against the shower wall, he let all the tension from the day drain out of him. His gut coiled tighter with every hard suck of Harry’s mouth and he pulled his fingers free with a soft pop.

“Wash me,” he ordered, voice low.

Harry obeyed the command with - joy. He lathered every inch of Draco’s body, lifted one foot and then the other, washed between every toe and under the tiny nails. He washed between Draco’s legs, gently cupping the blond’s balls. The cloth slid smoothly up his scared stomach and chest, and he very carefully caressed Draco’s oozing, scrapped skin along his arms. He slid the cloth behind Draco’s ears and carefully over his battered face.

Saving the best for last, he tenderly washed Draco’s hair, scratching gently at Draco’s scalp as he massaged the shampoo into a lather. Draco practically melted. He pulled Harry in for a languid kiss, their tongues tangling and stroking. Draco broke the kiss and pushed Harry back with a sensual sigh.
Red cheeked, Harry cupped his hands to help Draco rinse. Once Draco was clean, Harry did a quick
scrub down and then helped Draco dry off. He put his robe on Draco, Draco’s had been dirtied with
soot and blood, and wrapped a towel around his waist. Neville was in his pajamas already and
reading against the headboard. He looked up nervously as Draco and Harry entered.

As they pulled on their own sleep clothes, which consisted of very large t-shirts (a compromise since
they both preferred to sleep naked), Draco told Neville, “We usually share a bed so that if we have
nightmares about the time we were kidnapped, we’re there for each other. I’m going to pull the
curtains closed, so hopefully we won’t wake you if that happens. Sorry in advance if we do.”

“Do you think you can keep this a secret? It’s embarrassing,” Harry added, flashing Neville his best
puppy dog eyes, which were all the more powerful because he hadn’t put his glasses back on after
the shower. It wasn’t embarrassing in the least, but he knew rumors of them sharing a bed would be
bad for Draco.

“Yes, of course!” Neville promised hastily. “It’s no one else’s business.”

Draco gave the other boy a smile. “Thanks, Neville.”

Neville went bright red.

The two climbed into bed and Draco pulled the curtains closed as he’d promised. It was dark inside
the makeshift cocoon. Draco, wand in hand, whispered the Silencing spell that Percy had taught
them. They weren’t skilled enough yet, so it wouldn’t last long.

“Are you really okay?” Harry whispered as he lay in the crook of Draco’s arm, head pillowed on his
chest.

“It doesn’t hurt much,” Draco answered with a grin. “Like I told you, McGonagall did all this with a
few spells. It’s mostly surface stuff. She didn’t want the students to think they could just pick their
House because then the Houses would get lopsided. Sorting keeps the Houses more evenly
balanced.” Voice turning teasing, Draco added, “No healing. I have to make a point tomorrow.”

Harry sighed in unhappy obedience. “Love you.”

Draco traced the wet leather of Harry’s collar. Slipping his fingers under it, it pulled tight enough to
threaten Harry’s breathing. Harry shivered and pressed closer, and Draco felt an overwhelming surge
of fierce possessiveness. “I love you, Harry,” he whispered back, meaning so much more: You’re
mine, Harry and You belong to me and I’ll take care of you and No one’s going to hurt you while
I’m around…

Harry pressed a smile into Draco’s skin - contentment submission love.

…

Harry and Draco were used to waking very early to start the long days of lessons under Narcissa.
The tower was absolutely silent, all the other kids still sound asleep, as they quickly used the
bathroom before returning to their room. It was still dark and they had to light the oil lamps to
see. Draco lounged in bed, using a book as a flat surface to write letters to the Malfoys, the Tonkses,
Dora, and Remus. While he wrote, Harry unpacked their trunks, hung their clothes in the armoire
(Harry used all of his and then half of Draco’s), and set their books out on the night tables. He then
packed up their school bags with paper, quills, and ink. He didn’t put any textbooks in them as he
didn’t know what classes they’d be going to. Draco didn’t think they’d need any on the first day. It’d
most likely be an overview of the class and rules.
“We’re going to need a desk,” Harry murmured quietly, aware of the sleeping Neville.

Draco nodded absently, still bent over his letter. Two completed ones already sat rolled up on the night table beside him.

Harry pulled on knee high silk socks and clipped them to his sock garters to keep them in place. He slipped into his black slacks and leather belt with the silver round silver buckle. Then he pulled on his black leather and lace boots with the two-inch heels. A button-up went on next and he tied on his red and gold neck tie. It took him two tries. He wasn’t used to this kind of knot, preferring different kinds of bows. Last, he pulled on his school robe. Pushing up his glasses he stood by the bedside and waited for Draco’s verdict.

Draco’s grey eyes went up Harry’s form and down before meeting Harry’s eyes. “You look perfect.”

Harry blushed happily and set out Draco’s clothes for the day.

“Wha’ time’s it?” Neville asked in a sleepy slur.

“Twenty minutes until breakfast,” Harry answered helpfully.

Neville sat bolt up right and then toppled out of bed, pulling his sheets and comforter with him. Harry rushed to his side to help.

Draco dressed in comfortable jeans, his Converse sneakers, and an untucked button-down. He tied the Gryffindor tie with practiced movements and pulled on his robes, leaving them open. Draco finger-combed his hair quickly before tucking his bangs behind his ears. Walking over to the other side of the room, he lazily prepared Neville’s school bag and handed it to the red-faced boy just as Harry finished buttoning the boy’s school robe closed.

“Th-thank you,” Neville stuttered in shame, clutching the bag to his chest.

Harry smoothed Neville’s bedhead into place and gave him a bright smile. “It’s no problem, Neville. It’s my fault. I just didn’t know what time you wanted to get up, but I should have known you’d want more than ten minutes to get ready.”

“We’re going to head to breakfast. You can join us when you’re ready,” Draco offered.

Neville smiled with nervous relief. “Yes. Okay. I’m just going to use the bathroom first.”

Other kids were up and milling around the common room, voices could be heard behind dorm room doors, a good many were making their way out of the portrait hole toward the Great Hall for food. Draco held Harry’s hand in his loosely and followed. His eye was no longer swollen, but it was still a dark black/purple. The bruise spilled over onto his other eye staining it a green/yellow underneath. His low lip was still split and fat, and a healing burn sat just above his collar. He garnered a lot of attention from those in the other Houses as he sat down at the Gryffindor table and he could hear the other Gryffindors spreading the story. There were whispered suggestions of having to fight a dragon to dueling with McGonagall herself. Draco smiled mysteriously and ate his breakfast.

Ron, Dean, and Seamus appeared with only ten minutes of breakfast left. They looked like they just woke up, but they were in great moods. The redhead looked Draco over and made a face at his wounds. “Sorry about last night, mate. You were right. We had a blast.”

“I’m glad.” Draco gave him a smile to indicate no hurt feelings and handed over the bacon.

“Cheers!” Ron said in delight and practically fell on the platter.
“Harry, I have the map you requested.”

Draco turned to see Percy standing there with a serious look, perfectly dressed, and with his horned glasses in place. Draco gave him a welcomed smile as Harry thanked him and took the parchment Percy offered.

“Just tap it with your wand and say the floor you’d like to see and it will appear.” Percy found Hermione talking intently to Neville a few seats down and went to give her a copy.

McGonagall arrived just a few second later. She handed each of them a rolled parchment from an apparently bottomless bag she wore over her shoulder. Draco and Harry unrolled theirs and just stared for a moment. The parchment had a weird spiraling square of days and classes that they had to keep turning the parchment in order to read. Draco chuckled. It was a schedule that only a magical school could think up.

The Great Hall would be open for breakfast 8-9 every morning, lunch 1-2 every afternoon, and dinner 6-7 every evening, but other than that every day was going to be different.


Wednesday: 9:03-12 Double Potions Practical with the Slytherins, 12:15-1:22 Charms Theory, 2-3:30 Free Period, 3:45-5:03 Magical Theory, and finally Midnight-1:30 Astronomy.


Saturday wasn’t a free day. 9:04-10:45 Potions, 11:00-12:45 Herbology, 1:30-2:45 Free Period, and finally 2:10-5:05 Double Transfiguration Practical with the Ravenclaws.

Sunday, thank the gods, was free.

Ron and Seamus were grumbling about the heavy work load. Kell and Lavender complained about the early hours, while Fay gloomily bet she’d be terrible at Xylomancy and Astronomy. Dean and Neville didn’t know what Xylomancy was, so they listened as Hermione gave them a brief lecture.

“That’s the oldest form of divination using specially prepared twigs,” she stated. “Hogwarts: A History states it’s been taught here for ages. We only take it as First years.”

Draco glanced at Harry. “Double Potions with Slytherins,” he said quietly. “What’re the odds?”

Harry took a deep breath and met Draco’s eyes - trust determination. “I’ll follow your lead.”

Draco gave a lopsided smile. “Let’s do this.”

…

The dungeons were dark. Torches shed enough light to see, but also threw a lot of shadows and the ceiling was shrouded with smoke. It was also colder by about ten degrees. The other Gryffindor First
years crowded around Hermione and Harry who carried maps. Fortunately it wasn’t far and they turned down a corridor to find the Slytherin First years waiting by a door.

“Pansy,” Draco said in greeting.

The girl crossed her arms, her expression cold. “How could you do it? How could you insult Slytherin like that?”

Draco sighed and addressed the eight glaring kids with the green and silver ties. “I didn’t mean to insult Slytherin. It really is a great House, but it had to be this way.” He purposefully took Harry’s hand. “Look, no matter what House I’m in, I’m still going to be myself. We’re friends Pansy. I hope that doesn’t change because of the ties we wear.”

Pansy sniffed, turning her head and putting her nose in the air.

Seamus muttered something like, “stuck up brat”, and Ron and Lavender snickered.

Pansy’s eyes flashed, but the classroom door swung open before she could get revenge.

The room was large with a very high arched ceiling. There was a blackboard at the front of the room and a teachers desk. A huge closet stood open at the front of the room, too. Along one wall were shelves of softly glowing jars filled with things like eyeballs and tentacles and frog legs. Long black desks were positioned in rows. Two students could use one at a time.

Draco instantly noticed how the other kids began to divid themselves: Slytherin on the left, Gryffindor on the right. A back boy partnered with Theodore Knott at the front of the room. Behind them was Pansy and Millicent Bulstrode. Then Daphne Greengrass and a blonde girl Draco didn’t recognize. Vince and Greg shuffled into place at the last Slytherin desk.

On the Gryffindor side, Hermione and Neville paired up at the front. Then Parvati and Lavender, and Fay and Kell. Dean, Seamus, and Ron were trying to figure out what to do, clearly assuming Draco and Harry would partner. Draco nudged Harry toward the Gryffindor boys and positioned himself at Greg and Vince’s table, knowing they’d need help.

Ron looked surprised as Harry appeared next to him and and flashed Draco a questioning glance, only to roll his eyes when he found Draco on the Slytherin side of the room. He and Harry took the last desk on the Gryffindor side so that Harry would only be separated from Draco by an aisle.

“I want you to draw what the ingredients look like into your textbook next to the ingredients list before class each day,” Draco murmured softly. “That’ll help. Vince, you can watch what the tables next to and in front of you are doing to help Greg follow the instructions.”

Greg and Vince both had trouble reading. The letters would dance and rearrange themselves if they read too long. Vince had it worst, however, because he had a hard time speaking words as well as reading them. He had to really concentrate, so he spoke slowly, which caused everyone to think he was dumb. He wasn’t, of course. He was actually very insightful and observant. Greg tended to speak for the both of them; he was also a pretty good artist, which would allow him to do as Draco instructed.

The classroom door blew open once more and a man in swirling black robes strode down the aisle and turned sharply at the front of the room to face the class. It was Snape. "As there is little foolish wand-waving here,” Snape began, black eyes glinting, expression forbidding, “many of you will hardly believe this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through the
human veins, bewitching the minds, ensnaring the senses…” His voice dropped to a whisper. The students practically held their breath to hear. “I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, and even stopper death.” His voice rose to a normal speaking voice as he hissed, “If you aren’t as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach.” His eyes narrowed malevolently on Draco. “Ah, our resident celebrities. You think you can be in two Houses? You made your choice, boy. Get to the other side of the room. Now.”

Draco shrugged and calmly crossed the aisle to stand next to Harry.

“I see you can’t count, either.” Snape hissed furiously. “Five points from Gryffindor.”

The Slytherins snickered while the Gryffindors muttered insults Snape’s way. Draco tilted his head thoughtfully, moving his hand in a cutting gesture to keep Ron and Harry in their places. There were no more open spots at student desks. The only thing he could think to do…

Draco picked up his bag, swung it over his shoulder, and walked to the front of the room directly up to Snape. The man didn’t move a muscle, simply glaring down at Draco. Draco turned right and plopped his bag onto the floor as he sat at the teacher’s desk.

Snape practically exploded. “Fifty points from Gryffindor! Detention, Malfoy! GET OUT OF MY CLASS!” he screamed, spittle flying from his lips as he flung his arm in the direction of the classroom door.

Draco wiped his face with a hand as he picked up his bag and stood. He gave a short, nearly sarcastic bow, saying, “Yes, sir,” before calmly walking back up the aisle.* Make a scene, Harry.*

Harry gave an unobtrusive nod of his head and then slammed his hands down on his desk. “You can’t do that!” he yelled furiously, making Ron jump and gasp with surprise. “There were no other places for him to go! You should have given clearer instructions if you were going to be so upset about it!”

“It’s okay, Harry,” Draco said, now drawing even with his boy.

“Ten points from Gryffindor for talking back, Potter,” Snape hissed, spitting Harry’s last name in disgust. A few of the Slytherins giggled.

“Harry! Shut up! You’re going to sink us!” Ron hissed, looking at Draco wide-eyed.

“No! I won’t let you bully Draco because he didn’t choose Slytherin House!” Harry yelled defiantly. “You’re a teacher! You should be ashamed!”

“DETENTION, POTTER!” Snape roared and stormed up the aisle. “GET OUT!”

Draco tensed, eyes narrowed dangerously. If Snape took this charade too far and put a hand on Harry…

Snape simply grabbed Harry’s bag, waved his wand at the classroom door, and flung it outside. Draco took Harry’s hand. He looked up at Snape with his fiercest glare, eyes gone sliver. He saw Vince, Greg, and Ron wince in his peripheral vision, and then he turned and strode from the class with Harry in tow. The classroom door slammed with a bang behind him.

Draco’s expression melted into a mischievous grin. “Sweet. We get free time and it’s a double period! Our next class doesn’t start until noon.”
“Did I do okay?” Harry asked anxiously, palms sweaty and his face pale.

Draco gave Harry a fierce grin. “You were perfect. Grab your bag.”

Harry did as he was told, completely rattled. He followed Draco almost blindly until he was suddenly pulled into a room with faint green light. Draco shut the door behind them. Harry stared with his mouth open.

There was a square window about three feet wide and five tall, but it didn’t look out onto the castle grounds. It showed under the lake! Purple/black lake weed waved in a sensual pattern. Little round things with tentacles swam by briefly in a pack. The light filtered through the lake shimmered and swayed, casting slowly dancing patterns along the ceiling and walls.

Harry shivered as Draco’s hands came up behind him and pulled off his school robe. Draco untied his tie from behind as well and then used it to bind Harry’s wrists tightly behind his back. Harry’s eyes went wide - anticipation desire need.

Draco came around in front of Harry and knelt. Eyes silver, he lifted Harry’s foot onto his knee and unbuttoned his boot. He slipped it off Harry’s small, socked foot and lifted the next one. Then he slowly unbuttoned Harry’s shirt, pushing it off Harry’s thin shoulders to bunch at his elbow. Last, he unbuttoned Harry’s pants and had him step out of them.

Harry was panting. His heart raced in his chest. His blood felt as if it were on fire. The stomach turning mix of fear and anxiety during that scene in Potions burned away as Draco took complete control, his eyes silver and his mouth softened into that small, sweet smile that only Harry saw. Draco held Harry’s gorgeous green eyes and walked him backward and around the furniture until Harry’s knees hit the back of the window seat. Draco gave a push and Harry sat with a gasp onto the cushion, naked except for his knee-high, black silk socks and the white shirt caught on his elbows above his tied wrists.

“Beautiful,” Draco whispered, admiring the way Harry was silhouetted by the light from the lake. His messy hair created a halo around his head, his collar a dark band around his pale throat, his thin chest rising and falling rapidly, and his legs submissively spread. * Mine. *

Harry practically melted. “Yours,” he whispered, eyes fluttering closed.

Draco put one knee on the seat and braced his hand on the cold window, folding over Harry’s body as he sucked the boy’s nipple into his mouth. Harry gave a yelp at the almost vicious pull, and Draco told him firmly, * Quiet. *

Harry’s throat obediently closed on any sound he might make. * Yours, Draco. Anything for you, * he wanted to babble as Draco continued to suck painfully hard on his chest. Sharp sparks of pleasure/pain sizzled and burned through him. He could feel his nipple swelling and thickening. Draco gave it sharp bites with his canine. Tears streaked Harry’s face, his breathing coming in nearly whimpered gasps.

Draco pulled off his chest with a wet pop and grinned down at the blood red, fat nipple he’d left in his wake. The circle around the nipple was beautiful red like that against Harry’s fair skin. About the size of a quarter and swollen, it was softly raised almost like a girl’s chest right before she grew her breasts. The nipple itself was fatter and raw looking, standing tall. Draco pinched it in his fingers, feeling Harry’s pain and pleasure spike through the bond, and descended on his other nipple to make them match.
He went back and forth for several minutes until they were both red as strawberries and painfully tender. He pulled and sucked until they were distended and swollen, raised like soft little bubbles topped with a pebbled point. Harry’s face was red, not as red as his abused chest, but red and damp with tears and sweat, but his member was stiff against his lower belly. The white dragon inked into his side arched its head and flapped its wings, the tail lashing, expressing what Harry could not since he’d been ordered mute.

Draco stood back and watched as Harry’s chest heaved. His sweat-damped hair splayed against the window that he was slumped against. He was a gorgeous sight. Draco couldn’t tear his eyes away as he slipped out of his robe and shirt. He stepped closer, tie in hand and made it into a gag, pushing it deep in Harry’s mouth, tying it tightly twice around Harry’s head.

It opened Harry’s jaw just enough. Draco shivered. He loved when Harry drooled all over himself, got wet with spit and sweat and tears… with blood… Draco loved it. Loved how messy he looked, how fucking blissed out and owned. He wanted Harry soaked.

Draco reached forward and pinched the boy’s fat nipples with his nails, twisting slightly. Harry’s body went tense, the cords of his neck stood out above the constricting collar as he arched into Draco’s painful touch, and then went limp as Draco released him. His breathing was harsh in the quiet of the dark room.

“Love you. Love this.”

Harry’s eyes practically glowed - _joy submission love painpleasure_. Harry’s magic throbbed hotly around them, stimulated and leaking.

“I’m feeling playful,” Draco said softly, almost a warning, and smiled softly as Harry merely spread his legs a little wider, offering himself completely. As the intensity of Draco’s desire spiked, his magic rose to meet Harry’s, locking into place and beginning to spiral.

He stroked his boy’s damp hair, pushing it out of Harry’s eyes and off his forehead. “God I love your body. How it responds to me,” he whispered without really thinking about it. He bent again to suck one last time at one nipple and then the other.

The searing heat of Draco’s mouth was almost more than Harry could take. It hurt so much, but it set him afire knowing Draco loved him, wanted him. Draco was happy, and that made him nearly come undone with a pleasure so sublime he could hardly breathe through it. He was Draco’s! Drool slicked his chin, dripped down his neck. Tears flowed unceasing. He could hardly breathe and it sent him soaring. Head spinning, throbbing intensely between his legs, his chest was a sweet, agonizing inferno.

Draco pulled his mouth away with a last sharp nip. The lost look in Harry’s eyes told him his boy was gone, completely consumed, a creature comprised solely of sensation. Draco took Harry’s nipples between his fingers again and descended on Harry’s cock.

Draco rode the wave of Harry’s hips and kept only the head of the boy’s penis in his mouth. Sucking with vicious force, he lashed the tip with his tongue again and again, scrapping his teeth along that sensitive tip in small little nips, determined to get it as red and swollen as Harry's chest. All the while, he twisted in sharp little pulls and tugs at Harry’s purpling chest.

Harry came undone with sudden force. He arched with a muffled cry, too far gone to remember to be quiet, to remember he had a voice or that there was a wold outside of his body. Tossing his head side-to-side blindly, eyes screwed shut, his hips push/pulled in an conflicted wave, wanting more and trying to flee the overwhelming sensation nearly simultaneously.
He came in Draco’s searing mouth, but Draco didn’t stop for a second. Harry screamed hoarsely, falling into stars and bursts of colored light, shaking and trembling, body completely limp. He whimpered and moaned, muffled by his gag, his body glistening in the green light of the lake with sweat. The musky, salty smell filled their nose.

Mouth still working, Draco released the swollen nubs and scooped Harry’s butt into his hands, pushing Harry deeper into his mouth. The heated and bruised head of Harry’s cock hit the back of his throat briefly before settling on his tongue as it shrank. Draco sucked hard again and again, twirled his tongue around it, forcing it against his teeth. Harry’s legs shook around him, vibrating as he made soft mewling sounds. Draco was nearly there, blind and flying as Harry’s orgasm flooded the bond, nearly overwhelming him… He was so close to being there with Harry…

He dug his nails in to Harry’s skin, felt hot blood coat his fingertips, and used it as lube to carefully slide his index finger inside Harry’s hole. Harry arched, his body twitching to life as he felt Draco enter him, the slight burn, the strange feeling of something down there moving inside him, and then Draco found that small bundle he’d been shown… Found it and pressed on it hard, again and again… sending Harry’s body into overstimulated ecstasy/agony.

Draco exploded, curling over Harry’s lap, finger thrusting on automatic to keep the feeling there. Stars exploded in his vision and molten lava rushed through his veins. Their magic exploded, sending powerful energy rushing outward to saturate the room. Harry dissolved into unconsciousness with a voiceless scream.

Dazed, Draco sat with his head pillowed on Harry’s bare thigh. It took several long minutes before coordination came back. There was a cooling damp spot in his pants, but he ignored it as he got to his knees. Harry was still out, slumped in the window seat. His nipples were purpling. The tip of his penis was slightly red, but not too bad. Sweat and spit and tears were drying on his skin.

Draco gently untied the gag and tapped his boy’s cheek. Harry slowly came to, moaning, and Draco gave him an affectionate smile. “You okay?”

“Yea…” Harry’s voice was hoarse, raspy. “That was…” Fresh tears graced his cheeks.

Draco gently cupped Harry's face and kissed him softly before licking away the new tears. He kissed Harry’s eyes and cheeks, kissed his lips again. As the static in the bond decreased, he was filled with Harry’s - *love contentment gratitude.*

Draco smiled against Harry’s mouth. He helped Harry lean to the side and united his hands. Draco then had Harry up on the window seat on his knees facing the lake. Harry arched his back to press his swollen, painful chest against the cold glass. Harry hissed in pain, but soon found relief in the cold.

Draco lovingly licked the blood from harry’s cheeks and hole, cleaning him. Harry practically melted, purring. *Love you. We’re going to get through this. Hogwarts will be ours, I promise. I’m going to take care of you, Harry. Not going to let anything happen to you…* he murmured into his boy’s mind, reassuring them both with the mantra.

*Chapter end.*
A/N: Pixi56 has added two new art to Chapter 3 of her Fanart for Freedom Found in Chains. It shows the boys in the Hold and they are very impactful. Please check them out and leave comments if you can. :D Thank you so much! It really is amazing art.

**Discussions**

Draco sat sideways in the window seat, the shimmering green light from the lake illuminating half of his face. One leg was planted on the ground, the other was bent in toward his lap. Harry sat with his back to the window, close to Draco, eyes closed and mentally floating. Draco lifted his hand and pressed a single finger into Harry’s mouth, and he realized his hand was trembling faintly.

“I want my touch to heal you,” he whispered, staring unblinking at the side of his boy’s relaxed face.

Harry hummed in response.

Without adrenaline coursing through his veins, Draco felt reaction set in. His very first class had been a disaster. So much was riding on things going right. Draco needed supporters, needed to gather an army that would surround and protect Harry. He needed to get stronger, smarter… He hadn’t anticipated such hostility from Snape. Was it because he’d refused Slytherin?

Draco blinked slowly and pulled his wet finger from Harry’s mouth. It tingled with the charge of his boy’s warm magic and he gently stroked one of Harry’s bruised nipples. Harry sighed softly, eyes still closed, completely limp and trusting.

Draco hadn’t realized how much stress they’d been under. Moving to a new place, the uncertainty of the Sorting, sharing a room and feeling Neville’s presence close by even while they were sleeping, and then the disaster of their first class… It had been a lot to handle. Almost too much. He’d been rougher with Harry than he liked, fueled by adrenaline and rattled by all the stress… Draco caressed Harry’s chest until red and purple faded into pale pink and the swelling disappeared.

“What would you have done?” he asked barely over a whisper.

Green eyes cracked open. Harry felt like a warm haze had wrapped him up in layers of fluff, but Draco was asking him something. It took him a long minute to understand what he wanted, but he finally answered, “Asked where I should go.”

Draco said nothing. He dropped his hand to rest on Harry’s bare stomach and leaned his head against the cold glass, tired and frustrated.

Snape had obviously known there were no more spots, that there were an odd number of students. What purpose would it have served to ask about a seat that wasn’t there? Of course, looking back with a clear head, Draco realized Snape’s purpose had been to make him submit by making Draco beg for a place. Any other student would have done the same as Harry, but Draco was broken. His instinctual reaction had been to push back harder than he was being pushed. And things had exploded.

Soft fingers stroked his cheek and he opened his eyes to see Harry staring at him - love contentment trust. Harry smiled and feathered his fingers over Draco’s lips in a caress. Draco, throat tight, pulled Harry more firmly into his lap. He held him close and let his mind drift.

They stayed in the lake-view room for nearly an hour, curled up together in the window seat like...
kittens, murmuring in soft voices love and comfort until it was time to rejoin the world. They made a quick trip to their dorm room to gather their Charms textbooks, splash water on their faces, and get fresh shirts and ties.

As they dressed, Harry brushed his fingers over the crescent scabs from Draco’s nails on the outer edge of his butt cheeks. Draco had tried to heal them, but he had sensed Harry’s sadness and had stopped. Harry hated going against what Draco wanted, but he couldn’t help how much he liked the marks. They made him feel strong, loved. They reminded him on a very real level what Draco was capable of.

It was a huge comfort to know that all of that force was being directed at keeping them safe and happy. With Draco taking the lead, things would work out. They’d be okay. Feeling the dull throb and sting of the marks that Draco had left on his body and the collar snug to his throat… They let him breathe easy, helped keep Harry’s constant anxiety at bay.

Freshly dressed and feeling stronger, Harry looked deep into Draco’s eyes. “Thank you,” he whispered with full-hearted sincerity.

Draco smiled that soft smile only Harry ever saw and gently kissed Harry’s lips. “Come on. We have Charms next.”

Using Harry’s map, they made it to the classroom in fifteen minutes and were the first to arrive.

“Good morning, boys,” a small, high voice said from the front of the room.

“Good morning, Professor,” Draco and Harry answered back simultaneously, surprised by their professor’s appearance.

The man was small. Barely over three feet, he was standing on what looked like a pile of thick, hardback books to see over his desk. A shock of white hair surrounded his head and face. He wore sky blue robes and a matching pointed hat with its tip folding over. His smile was kind.

“Welcome to my class. I’m Professor Flitwick. Please, sit anywhere you feel comfortable. I’m surprised you made it so quickly, considering you came from the dungeons.” He gave them a playfully stern look. “You don’t already know the whereabouts of secret passages, do you?”

Draco shook his head with a smile. “No, sir. We were dismissed early from Potions.”

“I see.” A worried look came over his face.

“We won’t cause any trouble,” Harry assured him, thinking the professor was afraid they were troublemakers.

“Unless you start it first,” Draco muttered almost too low to hear. He was still unhappy about Potions. He couldn’t understand why Snape had been so vicious, but Draco wouldn’t be pushed around by anyone, so he had pushed back. Of course, he still had the problem of pushing back harder than necessary, but Snape of all people knew that.

“Oh, dear,” Flitwick murmured. “I wouldn’t dream of thinking you were.” There was a moment of silence as the little professor considered them. “I suggest you talk to Headmaster Dumbledore if certain things are going to interfere with your education. I would also contact your parents. It is not productive to suffer in silence, my boys. Remember that.”

Harry smiled sweetly. “Thank you, sir. We will remember.”
Draco tilted his head thoughtfully. Maybe he should contact the Malfoys. Was that what Snape had hoped he’d do? If it was what a “normal” child would do, then he should adhere to that, shouldn’t he? As his mind raced, Draco very carefully kept this expression and body language calm. He didn’t want to put stress on Harry, not when his boy was still floating in a very relaxed mental space.

Hermione with her map led the way for the other Gryffindor First years. It made Draco smirk, knowing how dead set Ron had been against it and yet here he was following Hermione around. The group hesitated in the doorway, eyes wide when they caught sight of Draco and Harry. Then they all hurried forward.

“I think you’re dead, mate,” Ron exclaimed. “Snape is gonna kill you.”

“Why would you sit at his desk?” Hermione demanded, clearly scandalized. “What were you thinking?”

“I was thinking there were no other desks. What was I supposed to do?” Draco calmly asked.

“Ask for a new desk!” Lavender hissed at him.

“We’re down seventy-five points in the first day,” Seamus added hotly. “The upper years are going to be cheesed off!”

Draco actually hadn’t considered that angle and frowned. He was on thin ice with Gryffindor, this wasn’t going to help. “Snape was clearly out to get me no matter what I did. I couldn’t have prevented it,” he argued. “I’ll fix it, okay?”

“Good morning, students!” Flitwick said a little louder for the third time. “I see we have quiet the energetic group. However, it is time to learn Charms, children.”

Everyone settled into seats and took notes on Professor Flitwick’s opening lecture, but the group of kids continued to shoot Draco glances throughout the class. Draco sighed and took strength in the - calm trust - that flowed through the bond. Harry wasn’t worried in the least. He was completely confident in Draco’s ability to handle this. Draco steeled himself, determined to make that the reality.

After Charms, the class made their way to the Great Hall, but Draco and Harry stepped off the stairs one floor early.

Ron sighed loudly and asked, “Where are you going now?”

“To see the headmaster,” Draco answered with a cheeky smile, one hand hooking the bangs that had fallen around his face back behind his ear.

Ron called after them, “Try not to make things worse!”

“Acid pops,” Draco stated once they crossed the gargoyle corridor and stood in front of the Headmaster’s Guardian.

The gargoyle stepped aside and the two boys climbed the stairs to Dumbledore’s office. It was even more impressive than the last time Draco had seen it. Sunlight glinted off the items and figures twirling and whirling. Dust motes shimmered in sunbeams giving the area surrounding the old books a mystical feel. Harry’s - awe - made it seem so much more mysterious and majestic.

“Good afternoon, boys. To what do I owe the pleasure?” Dumbledore asked cheerfully, standing behind his desk. He swept his hand forward to indicate the two chairs placed before it. “Lemon drop?”
Harry accepted with a quiet, “Thank you, sir.”

Dumbledore practically beamed, handing over the treat. “You are welcome, Harry,” he said and took a seat in his throne-like chair. “Now what can I do for you?”

“Sir, we had a bit of an altercation with Professor Snape this morning. He made unreasonable demands and made it clear he was displeased with our very presence. He took seventy points off us, gave us detention, and kicked us out of class. I was advised by Professor Flitwick to inform you and our guardians because, if this continues, it will interfere with our education. Potions is a core class, is it not?”

Dumbledore steepled his fingers in front of his face, looking at them seriously over his half-moon glasses. “I see.” He paused a moment to consider them. “I cannot say I am surprised that Professor Snape showed you disfavor. There are many reasons for him to do so. That he went so far tells me that you escalated things, my boy, and forced his hand so to speak.”

“You are saying this is my fault?” Draco asked quietly, mind working furiously as he tried to understand any subtler meanings behind Dumbledore’s words.

“You, my boy, are very… assertive,” Dumbledore answered carefully. “That is an asset in its place, but there are times when you have to weather the storm to conserve energy instead of fighting it.”

“I don’t understand,” Draco admitted and met the headmaster’s stare directly. “Snape will continue to attack me and I’m not supposed to react? To what purpose?”

Dumbledore set his hands down on the desk. He leaned forward and spoke very seriously. “You will have to trust there is a reason, my boy. It is not something I can reveal at this time. However, I do believe Severus hopes to make you bear the brunt of his performance to spare Harry as much as he can.”

Draco considered that, but he saw only one choice and it was the same one as this morning. “I can’t not react to him attacking and humiliating me, Headmaster. Especially if he comes after Harry.”

Dumbledore hummed and then offered, “If Severus keeps his act within the realm of an exacting taskmaster, is occasionally unfair, and uses intonation to convey his disfavor, would you be able to handle it without retaliating in front of the other students? He is your professor, Mr. Malfoy, and students aren’t permitted to be defiant.”

Draco lifted an eyebrow. “I don’t understand. Why did you let me go to Gryffindor if you don’t want me to be defiant?”

Dumbledore chuckled, eyes sparkling. “Choosing your fate isn’t defiance, Mr. Malfoy. We are what our choices make of us. I am pleased you would choose the Light.”

Draco stared. What the fuck was that crap? Surely the headmaster wasn’t really that naive, was he? Just because Draco was in Gryffindor didn’t make him some champion of Goodness and Light. Nor did Slytherin mean evil. Draco knew from painful experience that someone who looked nice could be horribly evil, and someone who appeared dangerous could be kind. The worst, or best depending how you looked at it, Death Eaters would not be Slytherin. They were the ones who could hide who they truly were and so cause more damage to the unsuspecting.

“What about the point system?” Harry spoke up for the first time as Draco sat thinking. He kept his voice and demeanor as polite as possible. “Seventy points from Gryffindor in a single period is too much. Gryffindor won’t tolerate that.” Or tolerate Draco, he thought - worried.
“I believe you will be surprised.” Dumbledore smiled so wide they could see his teeth through his beard. “Gryffindor will stand by their own. Now, I believe it would be best to summon Andromeda. She can be seen eating with us tonight at dinner and it will lend credence as to why Severus has to be a little more discrete about his supposed dislike.”

Draco gave Harry’s hand a squeeze, silently telling him he would handle the point thing and was rewarded by the worry simmering through the bond dissolving. Standing, he politely asked, “May I use your floo?”

“Of course, my boy.” Dumbledore rose from his seat and came around his desk. He led Draco to the fireplace and offered him some floo powder from the mantle. His cheerful demeanor dimmed, however, when Draco called, “Malfoy Manor, Wiltshire.”

Draco calmly explained before he put his head in the fire, “Andromeda has been spared most of the ‘Lost Boys’ fervor. I want her in the public eye as little as possible. Besides, Lucius is the more intimidating presence and on the Hogwarts’ Board of Governors.”

Dumbledore gave Harry a look. The messy-haired boy stood a few paces back from the fireplace and seemed completely at ease. Dumbledore sighed and resigned himself to dealing with Lucius. He waited longer than he’d expected, Draco’s conversation with his father lasting about five minutes.

They couldn’t hear them from this end and Dumbledore wondered what exactly Draco had to say that would take so long, and then he realized the boy probably had to explain why he was in Gryffindor in the first place. That brought a cheerful smile back to Dumbledore’s face. It always felt so satisfying to purloin the children of Dark families to the side of the Light.

Draco finally pulled his head from the floo and out stepped Lucius Malfoy, regal and cold, cane in hand and his long hair tied back with a thin silk ribbon. Dumbledore twinkled at him, but was disappointed to see a non-flustered smile upon Lord Malfoy’s face.

Lucius’s grey eyes settled on Harry. “Congratulations on Gryffindor,” he said with a polite nod. “I am sure your birth parents would be pleased.”

“Thank you, Lucius,” Harry answered with a smile.

Dumbledore kept his expression pleasant, but inside he was deeply suspicious at the easiness between the two.

Lucius turned to his old enemy. “Headmaster, I believe we have to discuss the conduct of one of your teachers.”

Draco held out his hand. “Come on, Harry.”

Harry took it obediently and followed him out of the office.

“We missed lunch, but we have a free period before Magical Theory. Dora gave me the directions to the kitchens,” Draco explained. He didn’t like it when Harry missed meals. He’d taken the Healer’s warnings about the negative effects of malnutrition to heart.

Narcissa watched her husband floo away to deal with the situation at Hogwarts and her relaxed posture filled with tension. This was her chance. Lucius would be gone for several hours. She’d known as soon as he had shown her his bare arm that he was hiding something big from her. There was no other reason to keep her in the dark regarding the ritual and it was very telling that he was
careful not to name the exact ritual he’d used.

She went directly toward the dungeons. It was where they had a ready ritual room and altar. She had used it every year for the blood ritual to try and find their son. It was the most logical place to begin to look for clues. She didn’t, however, expect to turn around, just remembering the letter she had wanted to write to Mrs. Parkinson..

Narcissa stopped and narrowed her eyes dangerously. There was a subtle Forgetfulness Ward to repel those trying to enter the dungeon. She broke it easily and then had to face Lottie who tried to bar her entrance. Narcissa had Dobby restrain and gag her, much to Dobby’s distress. Her heart beat a mile a minute as she descended into the dark. A Lumos lit the way and she found herself standing tensely in front of a warded and sealed cell door. Lucius was keeping a prisoner. Taking a deep breath, she gathered her strength and readied her wand, determined to break open her husband’s secret.

Magical Theory went as well as could be supposed. The First years were still on edge, especially as Draco merely shrugged when they demanded to know what he’d done to “fix” things. Harry did his best to get conversation flowing and away from the topic of Snape, but despite his best efforts it was stilted and stiff. They were just about to enter the Great Hall for dinner when someone grabbed Draco by the robe collar and spun him around, slamming his back against the stone wall. The girls gasped, Lavender actually giving a short, sharp scream.

A heavy-set Gryffindor Sixth year put his face into Draco’s and growled, “I know what you are, Malfoy. A Slytherin spy sent to sink us.”

Draco, head throbbing from where it had impacted the wall, grit his teeth. He was just barely managing to keep his magic in check. *Don’t kill the kid, no maiming…* he reminded himself forcefully, but it was hard because his adrenaline had spiked with the pain and his heart was slamming against his ribs.

“Get off him!” Harry yelled, filled with *protective rage*, and charged forward, green eyes blazing behind his glasses. He drew up short when the teen leveled his wand right at his face with his free hand and four other Gryffindor upperclassmen appeared out of the shadows at the thug’s back.

Draco slammed his wrist into the bully’s, forcing him to let go. His white-blond hair had fallen to frame his face and his eyes seemed to glitter in the low light. He was practically half the older teen’s height, but his glare gave the boy pause. “Snape had it out for me. There wasn’t anything I could do.”

“You should have seen him sit at Snape’s desk,” Ron chimed in desperately. His shock of red hair seemed even brighter against his pale, anxious face, his freckles standing out boldly. Ron held tightly onto Harry’s arm to keep him from doing anything stupid. Heart thundering, he managed a squeaky, nervous laugh. “Snape looked like he was going to explode! It was great!”

They didn’t seem impressed and took a threatening step closer to their group, looks of hatred and fury on their face when a loud burst of laughter came behind the gang.

Fred and George pushed past the older teens, grinning ear to ear. “I’d’ve loved to see that, Forge!” “Can you believe the balls on this one, Gred?” Somehow they insinuated their way to Draco’s side and flung their arms over his shoulders.

“I’m getting those points back,” Draco promised darkly, still glaring up at the gang leader. “I already
talked to Dumbledore.”

“ Took on Snape and won!” George cheered, pulling Draco toward the Great Hall doors.

“He’s a right champion!” Fred exclaimed loudly. “A hero!”

The First years hurried after them, leaving the angry teens behind. George and Fred were singing some kind of hero’s song, putting Draco’s name in for the hero, but Draco was intensely aware that most of the Gryffindors sitting at the table were not amused. A few who had to be the twins’ friends were on board and clapping Draco’s back, but they were just a dozen out of a hundred and fifty.

The twins pulled Draco and Harry down onto the bench seat and sat one on either side of the two smaller boys. They weren’t big themselves, only Third years, but it was clear they were making a statement that Draco and Harry were under their protection.

Percy joined them, sitting across from Draco, and gave a subtle nod to his younger twin brothers. Draco had the intuition that Percy had asked the twins to keep an eye out for them, and he gave the older teen an approving smile. They were also joined by three girls and Kell’s older brother, Lee. The rest of the First years filled the seats around them. They had clearly decided to stick with Draco against common enemies: Snape and bullies.

“Who’s that eating next to Dumbledore?” one of the older girls asked, pointing to the Head Table. “He’s hot!”

Draco looked over and smirked. “That’s Lucius Malfoy.”

Fred and George whistled. “You’re not messing around!” they said together.

“Snape’s done for!” Ron crowed, potatoes half-filling his mouth.

“Who were those guys?” Harry demanded, heart still racing from the attack.


“Nothing wrong with House pride,” was Lee’s opinion, his dreads bouncing as he defended his plate from his little sister who was trying to steal his perfectly buttered roll.

“Nothing at all,” Fred said slyly, brown eyes bright with mischief.

“And we might help him show some,” George added with an evil grin.

The girls giggled nervously while the older boys looked a little pale.

Draco showed an equally fierce show of teeth. “I’m in!”

Fred ruffled Draco’s soft blond hair, much to the boy’s disgust. “Nah! It’ll look like you’re really against Gryffindor like they said if you helped.”

“Leave the pranking to us,” George agreed. “You keep doing what you’re doing.”

“And what’s that?” Draco asked, fixing his hair with a huff.

“Why rocking the boat of course!” the twins exclaimed together.

Word spread quickly that a very serious and attractive Lord Lucius Malfoy was eating at the Head Table with Headmaster Dumbledore. It was also noted that Professor Snape was not in attendance.
The Slytherin table was unusually quiet, their expressions studiously blank except for the younger years who looked worried and confused.

Toward the end of the meal, Professor McGonagall approached their table and told them that they were wanted in the Headmaster’s office. Draco and Harry rose, school bags on their shoulders, and made their way to the Headmaster’s Tower. Lucius was waiting for them at the fireplace. He gave the boys a cool smile and a nod of his head. “I look forward to your letters home. Make our family proud.” He took each boy by the shoulder and squeezed lightly before turning to the floo, his cane clicking on the floor.

“Thank you,” Draco said softly.

Lucius turned back and gave Draco a daring smile, and then he was gone.

Dumbledore cleared his throat, eyes twinkling like mad. “The point counters have been corrected. Any points taken from you during Potions today has been returned. The detentions stand, however. Hop to. You don’t want to be late. Professor Snape is expecting you seven-fifteen sharp.”

“Thank you, Headmaster,” Harry said politely as Draco led him from the room by his hand.

Lucius stepped out of the floo feeling buoyant. Making that Vow and removing the Dark Mark made him feel new, and the reward was great indeed: a clean start with his son. Draco had called on him for protection! His enthusiasm deflated instantly when he spotted Narcissa sitting in one of the receiving room’s chairs. Her dress was torn, her hair had half-fallen from its knot, soot smudged her skin, her hands bore burns, but it was her eyes, burning with blue fury, that drew him up short.

“I have to ask myself… Why would my husband so strongly ward a cell in the dungeon? Who could he possibly be warding against… except for me?” Narcissa spoke with quiet force, slowly getting to her feet. “Such dangerous and painful wards… with only me in mind.”

“Narcissa…” Lucius said weakly.

Injuring her had not at all been his intent when he’d constructed those wards, but he couldn’t argue with her reasoning. It was logical. There was no one else in the house to ward against but her. She would not believe him if he told her he’d been afraid of someone else breaking in to rescue his prisoner. How would they even know his prisoner was there? How would they get through the manor’s wards? He perhaps hadn’t thought it all the way through when he placed those wards on the cell door. He was honestly horrified that Narcissa was so wounded by spells he’d laid down.

“Such strange behavior… Keeping from your wife a potentially fatal ritual… A ritual you would not name… It made me wonder what the components of that ritual had been…” She continued in that soft, dangerous voice as she took one slow, small step toward him after another. She finally stood directly in front of him and looked coldly up into his eyes. “And what do I find… hidden away in the dark… but my sister! The sister I have mourned since I got news of her death in Azkaban!”

“Your sister stole Draco from you. From us,” Lucius told her ruthlessly. “She took your son away and left him vulnerable. To be enslaved and tortured by filthy Muggle men.”

Narcissa was unimpressed. “Get on your knees, Lucius. I want to look down at you.”

Lucius’s eyes flared wide. His head reared back in instinctual refusal… But then he calmed himself and sank to his knees. He owed her penance.
Narcissa stared down at him, expression as hard and unyielding as stone. “Her crimes were against my son as much as yours, Lucius, and you denied me knowledge. That is your first wrong against me. Denied me a chance at revenge. That is your second. You then held someone of my blood and inflicted torture without my consent. Your third wrong. How long, Lucius? She could not tell me for certain.”

“Eight months,” he answered quietly.

Narcissa let silence fill the room. Lucius knelt before her, his fine robes pooling on the floor, his cane discarded, but he remained unbowed. She’d see about that. “You let me believe she was dead…” Her voice was raw with pain. Tears streaked her face and it made her look all the more ferocious. “What was it?”

“A golem,” he answered softly, pale-faced as he looked up at her.

The pain was terrible, but then she masked it. Cold as ice, she said slowly and with precision, “You owe me obedience, Lucius. Do you remember?” She caressed her cheek where he had struck her all those years ago, bruising her skin.

Lucius tensed. “Are you calling in my debt?”

Narcissa smiled and it was a terrifying expression. “Yes, Lucius. I am. You will relinquish all rights of vengeance against Bellatrix Black. You will place her under my authority. Should you wish to have further dealings with her, you will have to go through me. Do you accept?”

Lucius grit his teeth. The storm of hate inside him howled at the thought of Bellatrix going free. He was about to refuse when he saw his wife through the red of his rage. Narcissa, fair and strong, beautiful and clever… and terribly hurt by him. She was the woman he would forever be devoted to. His beloved wife. He loved her, dearly, and she was asking him to honor the promises and debts between them. If he could not, he’d lose her completely.

It pained him, his neck practically creaked it was so tense, but he bent his head and said, “Yes.”

Draco stood outside the Potions classroom. He wasn’t sure what to expect. How much had been an act Snape had to put on and how much was real? Dumbledore couldn’t convince him that there hadn’t been some truth in Snape’s rage. He gave Harry a look. His boy stood beside him with only a little worry tainting his calm. Taking a deep breath, he steeled himself and knocked.

“Enter!” Snape’s voice called angrily.

Draco pushed open the door and the two boy stepped inside. It was even darker than during the day, but not so dark that they couldn’t see. Snape stood in front of his desk, his arms folded, skin a sallow white, with a fierce glare.

“Sit at the first desk. I have your task prepared for you,” Snape said with soft malevolence. With a pointed look at Harry, he added, “I hope that is explicit enough for you, Mr. Potter.”

Draco felt irritation crawl under his skin. He wanted to snap and growl, but he forced himself to remain silent. It had been so long since he’d had to endure a bad situation without actively fighting back. This was nowhere near as bad as the torture he’d faced at Raymond’s hands, but the parallel made him jumpy as hell.

“Yes, sir,” Harry answered easily.
Snape’s hostility did not bother him. Obeying simple tasks was comforting for him. He shot Draco a concerned glance, knowing it wasn’t the same for the blond. Draco gave him a tight smile and led him toward the front of the room. A pile of dead lizard-type creatures were placed on the desk. The creature was a dark, muddy green and extremely slimy. Sharp silver scalpels were placed beside the pile.

“You will be dissecting these for ingredients,” Snape told them with heavy impatience. He demonstrated how to remove the eyes, tongue, skin, and tail. The rest he diced, explaining as if to very stupid people what exactly “diced” meant. “There are two more baskets. I suggest you get started. You won’t be leaving until you’re done.”

“Yes, sir,” Harry said again and began.

Draco copied him and used his bangs to conceal his angry glare.

They had only been working for about ten minutes, the disgusting smell and texture of the lizard’s slime making both boys feel nauseous when Snape suddenly slammed his hand on the teacher’s desk. Harry jumped and Draco bunched his shoulders up defensively, trying to restrain a growl.

“Our listeners are gone,” Snape snapped furiously. “Children have the patience of a gnat!” He stood up and strode threateningly toward their desk. “I had hoped you had matured, Draco, but instead you’re the same arrogant little bastard you were two years ago! Flaunting the rules, choosing your own House, refusing to respect any sort of authority…!”

Draco tossed his head to part the curtain of his hair and met Snape glare for glare. “I have good reason to want to be in Gryffindor and you know it!”

“Good reason!” Snape scoffed, black eyes glittering with malice. “Your reasons and wants do not supersede society! You’re a child! Know your place!”

“My place is to ensure Harry’s survival and comfort! That’s the only thing that matters!”

“It’s not the only thing that matters, you imbecile!”

“Stop,” Harry begged. Tears fell down his cheeks, his voice a soft plea. “Please, Professor Snape.” Black eyes burned into him, but Harry met the cold stare with a gentle expression. “Draco is Draco. We’d be dead if he were anyone less, don’t you see?”

Draco slid his fingers into Harry’s wild hair and pulled the boy close, letting Harry rest his head on his shoulder as he wiped at his eyes.

Severus spun, keeping his back to the boys. His hands fisted at his sides. A few minutes passed before he was able to face the children again. “I apologize, Harry. I am… frustrated.” He met Draco’s guarded eyes. “Today did not have to become such a battle. A little taunting and you would have been able to continue class. Instead you challenged me and things escalated. One day you will challenge the wrong person and the backlash will be more than you can handle.”

Draco opened his mouth to say he’d always handle it, but Snape held up his hand to cut him off.

“You’re too arrogant, too arrogant by far. It’s dangerous. You have Harry to think of.”

“I always think of Harry,” Draco countered, voice low and rough.

Snape glared, frustration rushing back. “You’re in for a fall, Draco, and it will be Harry who suffers for it.” He strode past them, robes flaring around his ankles. “Finish your detention and go.”
classroom door slammed shut behind him.

Draco forced his shoulders and hands to relax, Harry’s concern - a constant itch under his skin. “Snape’ll understand in time,” he offered. Forcefully hooking his bangs behind his ears, he turned back to the task at hand. “Let’s get this done.”

“Yes, Draco,” Harry answered obediently.

As he worked side-by-side with Draco in the quiet, dimly lit classroom, Harry slowly felt a swell of hot determination begin to burn through his veins. His whole purpose in life was serving and caring for Draco. He couldn’t do much for Draco as he was, but Harry would get stronger, he’d study hard, and then everyone would know, even Snape, that if Draco ever did fall, Harry would be there to save him.

…

Ron lifted his head off the side of the couch arm where he’d kind of folded an hour ago as the portrait swung open. Most of the House was up in the dorm rooms, but the First year Gryffindor boys plus Hermione and Percy had stayed in the common room to wait. Draco and Harry walked in and with them came the most awful smell. “Whew! What did he have you doing?” Ron demanded, pinching his nose.

“Cutting up these lizard things,” Draco answered tiredly. His hair had fallen around his face and he hadn’t bothered trying to tuck it back behind his ears. “We washed our hands three times and they still smell.”

“How many of them were there?” Hermione asked curiously. “You were gone hours! It’s past curfew.”

“Hundreds,” Draco told her with a grimace. “We’re going to get a shower and go to bed. You didn’t have to wait up.”

Ron, Dean, and Seamus gave some encouraging and/or sympathizing words as they made their way up to their dorms. Draco and Harry binned their dirty clothes and pulled on their night robes before heading to the bathroom. Neville was nice enough not to complain about the smell coming off the dirty clothes. There wasn’t anything they could do about it.

Percy was waiting in the bathroom. “This ointment will clean all the remaining residue from your hands,” he told Draco softly, pushing his glasses up his nose much the way Harry did.

Draco felt a surge of affection for the teen as he accepted the jar. “Thank you, Percy. I really appreciate it.”

Percy nodded his head and slipped out of the bathroom, giving them privacy.

Chapter end.

A/N: Any ideas for pranks to pull on the Gryffindor bullies and/or Slytherins who are still pissed, I’d really appreciate hearing them. Also, I’d love some feedback on a Gryffindor Draco. What would you like most to see or have me take advantage of? What do you not want to see? I need a few kick-starting ideas because I’m hitting writer’s block. I give you my thanks in advance!

A/N: Pixi56 has added two new art to Chapter 3. It shows the boys in the Hold and they are very impactful. Please check them out and leave comments if you can. :D Thank you so much! It really is amazing art.
A/N: Fan Art!!

Just a reminder that Pixi56 on AO3 has created amazing art for Freedom Found in Chains. Two more drawings have been added to Chapter 3 of the boys in the Hold and they are very moving. It really is amazing. Check it out and leave comments if you can.

Also, there is some Instagram art by @princeoftheundead for the story. Look up #sensiblytainted. If you have a moment, check it out and leave comments and likes. :D

A/N2: Happy Birthday, Harry! Here is an extra update in your honor!

The Second Day

Draco sat up with a gasp. It was dark, the room lit by the oil lamps. Neville stood nervously by their bed, holding the curtains open. Draco instinctively held his arm over Harry protectively. “What?” he asked gruffly, head full of cotton.

“I-it’s almost m-midnight,” Neville stuttered quietly, eyes wide with fear.

Draco growled. Midnight? They’d been held until after curfew for Snape’s detention and had only gotten to bed after quick showers less than an hour ago. “The fuck?” Slowly it dawned on him that the chubby boy was wearing his school clothes. Draco distinctly remembered seeing the boy in pajamas before going to bed.

“We h-have A-astronomy,” Neville answered weakly.

Harry suddenly sat bolt upright - anxiety guilt. “I’m so sorry, Draco! I totally forgot.” He scrambled out of bed. “Thank you for waking us up, Neville,” he said in a rush, handing Draco clothes and practically flying into some of his own. He pulled on slacks without bothering with his socks and shoved his bare feet into his shoes.

“Shit,” Draco said grumpily, pulling on the jeans and t-shirt Harry had given him. He left his school robes hanging open and didn’t bother with a tie. He finished putting everything they’d need for class into their bags while Harry knotted his tie and buttoned up his school robe.

Neville waited nervously for his roommates, holding tightly to the old telescope his grandmother had given him. (He wasn’t trusted with anything new as he’d likely break it.)

Roughly three minutes later Draco swung his bag over his shoulder and took up one of the two very expensive telescopes Narcissa had purchased for them. “Thanks, Neville. You were really helpful.”

Neville blushed red with a happy smile and followed them down to where the rest of the First years were waiting, huge yawns held behind their hands.

Draco bumped Ron’s shoulder. “You didn’t have to wait up after our detention, especially as we have Astronomy.”

“Wan’ned to make sure Snape didn’t kill ya,” Ron muttered sleepily.

Hermione and Harry took the lead as they had the maps. Draco ended up carrying Harry’s telescope as well as his own while Neville carried Hermione’s. There was a brief argument about which turn to
take to get to the Astronomy Tower, but it was quickly settled. Ten minutes later, they climbed a tiny, narrow staircase built into the side of the tower and stepped out onto the roof where the other First years were already standing huddled against the cold wind.

The roof of this particular tower was flat and round, made from the same rough grey stone as the rest of the castle. Square half-walls surrounded them, reminding Draco and Harry of pumpkin teeth. The gap between each square “tooth” was wide enough to let a kid slip through to fall to their death. There were no torches, but there were a few oil lamps placed on the floor at each half-wall next to the gaps.

“Good evening, children,” the professor said, standing frighteningly close to one of the gaps. She was tall and willowy with a beautiful, deep voice. Her skin was a dark brown, which helped her blend into the night, but she wore silver robes that had stars and constellations embroidered on them making her easy to see. “Now that the Gryffindors have joined us, we can begin. Please pick a gap in the wall and set up your telescopes.”

There was some hesitation, but slowly the First years moved toward the wall and placed their telescopes down. Draco gave a nod to Pansy, Vince, and Greg. The two boys returned the gesture with smiles, but Pansy turned away, expression blank. Draco ignored her.

“Welcome to Astronomy. My name is Professor Sinistra. We will chart constellations, study planet rotations and compositions, and memorize the stars among other things.”

The adrenaline of being woken by Neville and almost arriving late to class wore off quickly. The sky was beautiful, but it was cold and they were tired. By the end of the ninety minute class, they were so tired they dragged their feet and telescopes back to Gryffindor Tower almost half-asleep.

It was close to three in the morning. Draco let his school robe fall to the floor, kicked off his shoes, and flopped onto his bed belly-first without undressing. Harry picked up the robe and hung it next to his own in the closet. Quickly pulling on one of the large t-shirts they had for sleeping, he crawled in next to Draco who was already sound asleep.

Five hours later, their alarm got them up at eight, several hours later than they were used to waking. They hurried through their morning routine to get to breakfast before it closed at nine. They weren’t the only ones groggy and grumpy. In fact, the only cheerful First years at the table were Seamus, because nothing seemed to get that boy down long, and Fay, who was practically bouncing in her seat with excitement for their flying class that afternoon.

“It’ll be my first time on a broom with all safety restrictions off,” she told Kell excitedly.

“Yeah, you told me,” the girl said with a grimace.

“Who schedules flying after a midnight class?” Hermione grumbled. Her brown hair was even frizzier today than normal, a sure sign of nerves. “When you’re tired, you’re more likely to make mistakes.”

“Maybe they want us a bit tired so we’re not so unmanageable,” Draco reasoned. “It’s the only thing I can think of.”

Hermione and Ron made a face at that; Hermione because she didn’t see how anyone could be excited for flying on a broom no matter the circumstances and Ron because he hated that the teachers were trying to put a damper on something he loved.

“We have Defense first,” Dean pointed out.
“Hope it goes better than Double Potions,” Seamus said with a grin and took a big bite of a breakfast biscuit.

Draco scowled down at his food. “Don’t remind me.”

...  

Unlike the four core classes of Charms, Potions, Transfiguration, and Herbology, which had a single class a week that was exclusive to each House for intensive study, all the rest of their classes were shared with one other House to make the average class size about twenty students. The exceptions were Astronomy and Flying, which consisted of all the First years together.

The Gryffindors shared Xylomancy and Herbology with Hufflepuff; Potions, Magical Theory, and Defense with Slytherin; Charms, Transfiguration, and History of Magic with Ravenclaw. That meant they were paired with Slytherin again for their first class of the day. Draco hoped that wasn’t a bad omen.

They arrived about at the same time as the Slytherin students, but there was no time for another conflict with Pansy as the classroom door was already open and a strong smell of garlic wafted out from it. Curious, they walked in to see a tall, wide room.

The left wall had three large, arched windows, but they were darkened with some kind of spell, casting the room in shadow. Torches were lit intermittently along the right wall. At the back of the room there were stairs that led up to a round balcony with a door that presumably led to the professor’s office. Bats and other strange, ominous creatures hung from the ceiling. Paintings of wizards dueling were placed along the walls. On the teacher’s desk in front of the blackboard sat a bright green iguana. Draco noticed right away that there was a spot for three at the front desk on the Gryffindor side of the room.

Ron shot Draco a grin. “Come on. Let’s see if I can keep you out of trouble, then,” he said and led the way to the three-person desk.

Bemused, Draco followed with Harry.

They were still settling into their desks when the door at the top of the stairs opened and a pale man with a faded purple turban appeared. “S-sorry I’m l-late. I w-was f-finishing some l-last m-minute pr-pr-preparations,” the man said with a strained smile.

Draco’s eyebrows lifted and he shared a look of disbelief with Ron. Harry clutched at his scar. A pervading ache resonated through the bond. Draco's heart rate picked up and he focused with hawk-like intensity on the seemingly pathetic man. The professor positioned himself at the front of the room, too close to Harry for Draco’s liking, way too close, and lifted the iguana to his shoulder.

Professor Quirrell stuttered his way through the syllabus for the year. Nothing strange happened. In fact, it was hard for most of the class to stay awake. They’d had a late night, the room was shadowed, and the professor was ridiculous and hard to understand. Quite a few of them would have fallen asleep, including Ron, except for the aggravating and constant smell of garlic. Draco wasn’t fooled. His heart pumped with clear purpose. Quirrell was linked to the Dark Lord somehow and that made him an enemy to destroy.

“Wha’s a matter?” Ron asked with a yawn as they filed out of the room.

Harry was quiet, his head still hurting, but the further they got from Defense, the better he felt. He had ignored the ache and had taken notes carefully on everything the professor had said, determined
to do well in all his classes. In fact, he was determined to stay as far from Professor Quirrell as he
could. The man made him feel like he should run and hide, and he knew Draco had picked up on it.
Harry felt terrible about messing up another class for Draco - guilt anxiety.

* Don’t worry about it, Harry. I’ll take care of everything, * Draco promised, putting the bite of
an order behind his words.

Harry ducked this head - submission trust regret.

Out loud Draco answered Ron, “Nothing.”

Ron eyed Draco suspiciously with a scowl. “What’re you planning?”

Draco didn’t answer, staring back at the redhead with a blank expression.

Harry looked between the two boys and put on a bright smile. “We have Xylomancy next. What do
you think it’s going to be like? It sounds so interesting. Do you think we’ll really be able to tell the
future?”

Draco softened as Harry’s honest - curiosity - filled him with what felt like gentle sunbeams. He
ruffled the boy’s hair, the tension in his shoulders and face relaxing. “I guess we’ll find out.”

…

Xylomancy was held in a courtyard on the west side. It was large with benches along the courtyard
walls. An older man with olive skin and thick black hair that fell to his shoulders sat on a bench
placed directly in the center of the courtyard.

“Wellcome students,” he greeted them. “I am Professor Mopsus. Please pair up and take a seat.”

There were an odd number of Hufflepuffs as well as Gryffindors, so that meant there would be one
Hufflepuff and Gryffindor paired. Ron made a bit of a face as he was the odd one out and had to
share a bench with Hufflepuff Justin Warrington-Pleasant.

Green vines and flowers grew along the walls. White stones were placed onto soft grass to form
paths to each bench from the castle door. The sun was warm as it filled the courtyard, sitting directly
above their heads. Mopsus had one dark brown eye and one blue. He watched them with a strangely
knowing expression. An aura of serenity emanated from his tall, thin frame. Even his robes were a
soothing, natural green and brown.

“Xylomancy, like most divinatory systems, is quiet ancient and has been practiced since time
immemorial. Derived from the Greek xylo, meaning wood, and manteia, meaning divination, it is the
art and practice of divining the past, the present, and the future by interpreting the omens from twigs,
pieces of wood, or fallen tree branches. Those who are most skilled can even divine the future from
the arrangement of logs in the fireplace.”

The deep, solemn voice drew them in and soon every single one of them were taking notes quite
seriously whether or not they were believers. At the end of class, Professor Mopsus gave them the
assignment to memorize the generic meanings of the common positions of fallen wood before their
next class on Monday.

The First years talked excitedly about the class and the ability to potentially see the future as they
went to lunch. There were a lot of laughs about what things they’d want to know and what things
they wouldn’t and a lot of jokes as they playfully made predictions about each other. Draco left early,
however, hardly touching his food when he noticed that Quirrell had failed to show up to the meal.
“I’ll meet you at Transfiguration,” he told Harry, getting up from the bench.

“Wait.” Harry pulled the school map from his bag and handed it to him. “We’ll use Hermione’s.”

Draco gave him a smile before ordering, “Clean your plate, Harry.”

“Yes, Draco,” he said quietly.

As Draco left them, Ron gave Harry a curious look. “Where do you think he’s going?”

“I don’t know.” Harry covered his worry - worry - with a smile. “I bet if we were good at Xylomancy we could find out.”

“Maybe he had to go number two,” Seamus said with a loud laugh, making Dean snort and the girls wrinkle their noses.

…

Draco made his way carefully back to Defense. The classroom was left unlocked and he slipped inside after carefully listening at the door to make sure there wasn’t a class running late or something. His heart beat hard against his ribs. Every sound seemed like a roar in his ears, the smell of garlic was overwhelming, and every little change in the air made the hair on his arms stand on end. He crept as silently as he could to the stairs, making use of the shadows created by the darkened windows.

At the top, he put his ear to the door. He could hear two muffled voices, but he could only catch a few words of Quirrell’s. Something about growing weaker and being patient. When the voices fell silent, Draco quickly hurried down the stairs and was almost spotted. He hid beneath them as Quirrell came down. The man was shaking, clearly upset. He left the classroom completely and slammed the door behind him.

Sweat rolling down his neck, Draco held perfectly still, but he couldn’t sense anyone else up in the office nor did anyone follow after Quirrell for several minutes. Draco was excruciatingly aware of the time. Lunch was drawing to a close or had finished already. Soon a class would arrive as well as the professor. He had to move. He couldn’t wait for whoever was still in the office, if they were there at all.

…

Harry waited anxiously for Draco to arrive. The blond was a few minutes late already, but fortunately the professor wasn’t there yet, either. The class was with the Gryffindor First years only for their intensive class. Seamus was grumbling about Draco losing them another hundred points.

“If he did, he’d get them back for us,” Harry assured the Irish boy, eyes still on the door.

Draco strode in as if he had no worries in the world. Harry’s whole body relaxed and he smiled happily as Draco took his place beside him. Ron and Seamus were about to question him when the cat who’d been lying on the floor jumped up on the desk and gave a loud yowl. They watched with wide eyes and gaping mouths as the cat leapt from the desk and transformed into a standing Professor McGonagall in midair. Now that they were looking for it, McGonagall’s thin, angular face and slightly slanted eyes did have a feline quality to them.

“You are late, Mr. Malfoy,” she said dryly into the absolute silence.

“Sorry, professor. I got lost on my way back from the loo,” Draco answered with cool calm.
“Told you,” Seams hissed and was elbowed by Dean.

“See that it doesn’t happen again,” McGonagall told him sternly and turned to the blackboard.
“Welcome to Transfiguration. I am Professor McGonagall. I suggest you pay attention in this class because Transfiguration is one of the most challenging fields of magic. If you fall behind, it will seem impossible as we move through the curriculum.”

There were distinctly mixed feelings as the bell rang. It was finally time for their first flying lesson. Fay practically ran out to the school’s side yard, pulling the rest of them after her. Flying was taken with all the First years together, so there was a large crowd gathered on the grass.

A woman with short, grey hair and golden brown eyes strode through the group to stand in front of them. Four bundles of ten school broomsticks floated after her and landed on the grass. “Well, now,” she said with a cocky grin. “Welcome, children. Professor Hooch, here, and I will be teaching you lot how to fly on adult broomsticks. If any of you set one toe out of line, you’ll be off your broom before you can cry foul, you hear me?”

A loud murmur of agreement met her words.

“Good.” Putting her hands behind her back, she marched up and down their rudimentary line. “During this class, you will be asked to perform basic maneuvers upon a broom. I will demonstrate and then I will ask you to follow. There will be times I will ask you to return to the ground as I instruct those who need extra attention. Again, if you do not follow my instructions directly, you will be removed. Is that clear?”

Another murmured agreement from the group of students.

“Line up. Give each other space.” Hooch flicked her wand and the bundles of broom unraveled. “Everyone take a broom.”

There was a mad rush as the kids who were excited about flying hurried forward. Harry gave a happy grin and pulled Draco by the hand, much to the blond’s amusement. Harry loved flying. He wasn’t as excited as Fay, but he’d never ridden a broom without safety spells before and he was really looking forward to it. They ended up between Neville and Ron. Hermione stood on Neville’s other side, and both she and Neville looked distinctly nervous verging into terrified.

“Stand with your broom next to your dominant side. Place your hand over the broom and say up with determination,” Hooch instructed, continuing to march up and down.

“Up!” Harry called and the broom firmly smacked into his palm. He grinned triumphantly at Draco. Draco smirked back, his broom also in his hand.

“Up. Up! UP!” Hermione was calling as the broom wobbled drunkenly upward.

Ron’s broom flew up with sudden force and smacked the redhead in the face. Seamus and Dean laughed, but Harry asked with concern, “Are you okay?”

“Fine, Harry,” Ron grumbled, blushing in embarrassment. “Oh, shut up, Seamus!”

The rest of the Houses had similar mixed successes, but once everyone had their broom in hand, Professor Hooch gave them the instruction to mount, kick off, hover, and then come back down. Unsurprisingly, Fay was in the air before the professor finished speaking.
“Miss Dunbar, come down this instant!” Professor Hooch called furiously. Fay did so with obvious reluctance. “What did I say about following my instructions, young lady? This is your very last warning before you turn in your broom and return to the castle for the day.”

“Yes, professor. I’m sorry,” the dark-haired girl answered, contrite.

“Now, on my whistle. Three, two…” but before she could blow the whistle, Neville floated off the ground.

“Neville!” Hermione cried and reached out to grab the boy’s robes, but he was already too high.

“Come down here this instant!” Hooch ordered.

“Shit,” Draco muttered. This wasn’t going to end well.

Neville quickly lost control of the broom and his screams filled the air as he was tossed this way and that, slamming twice into the castle wall. Hooch had mounted her own broom and was chasing after him, casting a spell that sounded like “immobilus”, but Neville’s broom zigzagged as if it were alive and her spell kept missing.

The girls screamed as Neville was suddenly yanked off his broom by a lance from a stone knight carved into the side of the castle near the roof. It pierced Neville’s school robe. Hooch was able to swoop in and slow his fall just as Neville plummeted about thirty feet to the ground. He hit hard, but not hard enough to kill him. Everyone rushed over, Hermione falling to her knees next to her foster brother. She gently held his head in her lap as he moaned in pain.

“Out of the way!” Hooch called. She strode through them and knelt down, tisking. “Broken wrist.”

“We have to take him to the hospital!” Hermione demanded, tears falling down her cheeks.

Alright, help me get him up.” Hooch grabbed one side, Hermione the other, and they got Neville to his feet. “I will return after taking Mr. Longbottom to the Infirmary. If any of you so much as touch your brooms while I’m gone, I’ll have you out of the castle by nightfall,” she threatened them menacingly.

As soon as she was out of hearing range, the Slytherins began to laugh. Theodore Nott bent down and picked up a round glass ball. Draco had seen Neville put it in his pocket every morning and knew it must be important to him.

“Give it here, Theodore,” he said calmly, stepping up to the thin boy.

Draco knew him from the yearly balls Narcissa hosted. Theodore was a child from a Sacred line, Pureblood for dozens upon dozens of generations. There were only thirteen or so bloodlines remaining who qualified, much to Narcissa and Lucius’s horror.

Theodore narrowed his eyes with surprising anger. “Don’t call me that, Malfoy. We’re not friends.”

Draco considered the other boy as the kids around them shouted this or that, eager to watch a fight. “No. We aren’t,” he said quietly. “But are we enemies, Nott?”

Theodore kicked off the ground, caring the glass ball with him. “I’m just going to leave this for that fat-ass to find. The roof, maybe.” He laughed meanly.

As the Slytherins laughed with Nott, Draco sighed and kicked off. Harry followed him up, much to Lavender and Parvati’s displeasure.
“You’re going to get kicked out!” one said.

“You’ll fall!” cried the other.

“What’s your problem, Malfoy?” Nott spat. “You’re not the boss of me!”

“I just want the ball,” Draco countered, trying to be reasonable. “Give it here.”

“You want it so bad, then go and get it!” the boy hissed furiously and threw it with all his might.

Harry shot off after it. He moved so fast that the wind from his passing nearly knocked Draco and Theodore off their brooms.

Draco’s mounting annoyance over people fighting him for no real purpose that he could see melt like ice under the hot sun as - exhilaration joy - speared through the bond, practically piercing his heart.

Harry had never flown so fast. He gave a joyful whoop as the wind roared in his ears and tugged at his clothes. Time seemed to slow and Harry kept his eyes pinned to the glint of sunshine off the glass edge of his target. Purpose gave him laser-like focus; Draco wants the ball.

The wall of the castle was rushing forward. Harry knew the ball would shatter if it hit. He put on a burst of speed and reached forward. Snatching it out of the air, he simultaneously leaned to the side and sat far back on the boom. The broom did a sharp fishtail and came to a stop, the bristles kissing one of the castle’s windows.

- triumph pride - Harry flew back to Draco, holding Neville’s ball over his head in victory. His hair was a windblown mess, his cheeks were red, and his eyes were bright with adrenaline.

The Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs practically mobbed him with cheers while the Ravenclaws clapped, acknowledging Harry’s skill on the broom. Ron and Seamus pounded on his back, exclaiming how bloody awesome he was, and Draco pressed in close to his boy’s side.

“Good job,” he praised quietly, whispering in Harry’s ear as he took the offered ball from the boy’s palm.

- joy love -

“Mr. Potter!” The shrill voice of Professor McGonagall silenced the group’s exuberance instantly. “Come with me!” She stood at the side door to the castle and looked as stern as ever.

Harry stared at her with wide eyes, face gone suddenly pale. The words of Professor Hooch resonated in his mind, I’ll have you out of the castle by nightfall!

Draco took Harry’s hand, pocketing the glass ball.

“Blimey,” Seamus muttered. “Got the worst luck!”

“Nah,” Ron countered with an eye roll. “Draco’s good at getting them outta trouble.”

“Professor McGonagall,” Draco began politely once they reached the witch.

“I don’t recall asking you to join us, Mr. Malfoy,” she interrupted with an arched eyebrow.

“I broke the same rules as Harry did,” Draco countered firmly. “If he’s going to suffer punishment, then I will, too.”
For a moment it seemed as if McGongall would deny him, but then she smiled warmly. “Truly a Gryffindor. Well, come on, then. I don’t suppose there’s any harm in you joining us.”

Draco gave Harry a reassuring smile and squeezed the boy’s trembling hand. Harry smiled back, his fear dissolving with relief. McGonagall wouldn’t have smiled if she was going to kick them out. Still, she set a fast past and they had to jog at times to keep up with her.

Draco grew more intent when he realized they were headed to the Defense classroom. McGonagall told them to wait outside, but he peeked his head around to see Quirrell stuttering his lecture with his iguana in his arms and half the class asleep. Draco nearly growled as he felt the faint ache of Harry’s scar beginning to burn.

McGonagall returned with a Fifth-year Gryffindor and shut the classroom doors behind her. The teen had short, light brown hair and dark brown eyes. He looked down at Harry and Draco curiously.

“This is Oliver Wood,” McGonagall introduced quickly. She gave Oliver a smile. “Wood, I found our new Seeker,” she said and clasped Harry’s shoulder.

Draco’s eyebrows lifted.

“Yeah?” Oliver gave Harry a more interested look. “Come to the Quidditch Pitch tomorrow morning at six-thirty. I’ll give you a try.”

McGonagall looked pleased as punch. “Thank you, Wood. Now return to your class. I’ll return Malfoy and Potter.”

“Quidditch is dangerous,” Draco pointed out as they walked at a more reasonable pace back to their flying class.

“It is, but it’s not life threatening.” McGonagall waved away his concern. “It teaches important life lessons, and we didn’t win a single game last year. Haven’t won a single game since Charlie Weasley graduated.” She gave Harry a happy look. “He played Seeker.” Her expression softened. “Your father was quite exceptional, as well, although as a Chaser.”

Harry nodded, but most of his attention was on Draco, his eyes wide - curious anticipation.

Draco sighed. * I’ll think about it, * he told him through the bond.

Harry was perfectly satisfied with that answer, content to wait for Draco’s decision, but word spread quickly. At dinner, Harry congratulated by nearly the entirety of the House. They even gave Draco happy smiles and included him in the pre-celebration of Gryffindor’s future victories. It solidified Harry’s desire to play. Keeping Gryffindor happy with them was his job and playing Quidditch looked like the best way to do that. Of course, that put even more pressure on him to win. Nerves settled in Harry’s gut, but he wasn’t deterred.

Once they reached the common room, Draco pulled away from the rowdy crowd still surrounding Harry. He found Percy and pulled him into a corner. “I need Professor Quirrell’s class schedule and background information.”

Percy nodded his head, but he looked puzzled. “Why Quirrell?”

Draco expression turned fierce. “I don’t know yet, but I will. When can you have it?”

“Tomorrow,” Percy answered quietly. Draco moved as if to join the others, but Percy grabbed his sleeve. “Let me know what’s going on as soon as you can, okay?”
Draco nodded, but he didn’t put much thought into it. He could handle this. He pushed his way through the crowd and took Harry by the hand. “It’s getting late. We still need to shower and we didn’t get much sleep last night. Don’t forget we have to meet Wood in the morning.”

- surprise happy -

Draco ignored the names shouted after him by the rest of the House for going to bed early and headed to their dorm room.

“You mean I can play?” Harry asked quietly once they were alone.

Draco turned and cupped Harry’s face in his hands, looking sternly into his eyes. “The minute I think it’s too dangerous…”

“Yes, Draco!” Harry agreed happily and flung his arms around Draco’s neck. “Thank you!”

Draco stroked his hair, smiling.

Harry pulled away to get their shower things ready and Draco’s mind returned to Quirrell. With Harry playing Quidditch, Draco would have time to figure out what was going on with their professor.

A dangerous smile curled his lips, but he let the expression go when Harry turned to look at him curiously. “It’s nothing,” he said, not wanting to worry Harry about it. “Come on. Let’s get a shower.”

Chapter end.

A/N: Thank you so much for all the ideas! I couldn’t keep writing without you guys.
Quidditch, Potions, Hagrid, and Blood

Quidditch, Potions, Hagrid, and Blood

Quidditch, it honestly baffled Draco. All this effort with Chasers trying to get the quaffle through these little hoops guarded by a Keeper while also dodging vicious Beaters hitting bludgers… and it didn’t matter a whit in the end. It all came down to a one hundred and fifty point snitch.

Draco had no idea why the other players tried as hard as they did since they were essentially irrelevant. In his view, they should eliminate goals and the other players completely. Quidditch was clearly all about the Seekers. And Harry was a Seeker. So much pressure on that one crucial player. Draco would have to keep a close watch. If it became too much, he would remove Harry from the game - Gryffindor be damned.

After explaining the rules, Wood asked Draco to fly against Harry, since he was there, so that he could get a sense of Harry’s skills. “Not that I’m doubting McGonagall!” It was a beautiful morning, perfect for flying, so Draco agreed. The air was cool and crisp, the sun rising slowly over the mountain ridge. The grass sparkled with dew.

“Ready, Harry?” Draco asked seriously. He looked into Harry’s eyes and ordered, “Do your best.”

Harry gave a firm nod.

When they had first started learning fencing from Narcissa, he’d been hesitant to strike at Draco. But Draco had gotten angry and grabbed Harry by the shirt and ordered him to try and beat him. Harry had obeyed. It had been two years since then. Two years of study under a very skilled teacher in Narcissa and they had grown quite good.

They kicked off the ground at the same time, their broom soaring into the air. The golden ball darted to the side and they shot after it like arrows, their shoulders colliding together. Harry pushed against Draco before rolling under him just as the snitch dove. Harry was in the lead now, rushing toward the grass, the wind streaking past his outstretched hand…

Draco swooped in at an angle, knocking Harry’s hand aside as he flew past. The snitch zipping back into the sky. Harry almost flew off his broom as he flipped tip to tail too quickly, just barely saving himself from a painful crash. He rocketed into the sky, chasing the end of Draco’s broom and their golden target. Their hands darted in quick jabs and snatches as they spiraled around each other. They moved instinctively with the broom underneath them, trusting it to keep up. Harry came up from under Draco and knocked him sideways only for Draco to come down on him from above like a swooping bird. Harry grunted with the impact and dropped several feet.

His heart thundered in his chest. His thighs trembled, his hands shook. Sweat blinded him and he blinked rapidly to clear his vision. Fatigue was setting in, but he knew Draco had to be nearing his breaking point, too. He dove and then arched back into the air like a shooting star, aiming for the snitch. Draco was coming at it from above. They were going to collide.

“I need to get better, Harry!” Draco’s young voice from memory cried, full of angry passion. “Come at me with everything you’ve got!”

Harry lay flat, milking the broom for every ounce of speed it possessed. He reached out past the handle. He could almost reach… Draco racing closer! They were about to crash… Harry’s closed around the ball a millisecond before Draco’s and they slammed painfully together. The blond had
opened his arms, catching Harry and cushioning the impact as much as he could. Their brooms locked together and they began to spiral down, dropping at terrifying speed.

Draco grabbed tight to Harry’s broomstick, held even tighter to Harry’s body, and leaned back. They decelerated too slowly, the ground rushed up. Draco yelled, “Jump!”

They tumbled across the grass, panting for breath. Harry turned his head to look at the blond, grinning. Draco gasped for air and slowly smiled, then he began to laugh, Harry joining in until they were nearly crying.

“Holy shit,” Draco panted. “That was crazy!”

Wood finally reached them, running across the pitch. Whooping, he jumped into the air, his fist high over head as he pumped it. “That was incredible flying!” he cried and helped the boys get back on their feet. He clapped Draco on the shoulder a few times before turning to Harry with a huge smile.

“Great catch, Potter! We’re not going to lose a game with you after the snitch!” Looking back at Draco with a greedy gleam in his eye, he asked enticingly, “Fancy being our reserve Seeker?”

Draco’s blond hair was a mess, almost as wild as Harry’s with grass tangled it in from the tumble they’d taken upon landing. His cheeks were red and his eyes shone with an inner light fueled by Harry’s - exhilaration. “I don’t want to get behind in my studies,” he lied, still panting. He really wanted time to stalk Quirrell.

“You won’t have to make every practice. Just one a week,” Wood negotiated. He put his hands together and actually begged. “Say you’ll do it. Please?”

“I’ll think about it,” Draco allowed and Harry gave him a happy grin. Battling over the snitch had been too fun.

…

Herbology was their first class of the day and was taken inside the greenhouses built on the east side of the castle. Two rows of tables were set end to end so that the students were in two lines. Their professor, a short, chubby witch with grey curly hair and a cheerful disposition told them excitedly about the things they would learn.

Draco paid her only half of his attention. He’d made sure to take the table next to Hermione and Neville. Last night, Neville and told them that the healer was able to heal his broken wrist, but from the way he moved Draco had been able to tell it still ached. Draco’s worry was misplaced, however, because Hermione made sure Neville didn’t do anything that would strain the injury. Hermione was abrupt and bossy, but she took care of Neville and it was clear the boy appreciated it. She gave Draco a confused look when he smiled at her after class.

History of Magic turned out to be a surprise. They were being taught by Professor Binns, an actual ghost. Draco was impressed. To have access to a first-hand account of history was really amazing. The only problem was that listening to the voice of a ghost for long periods was difficult and tended to put them to sleep. Draco made a note for Harry to find a spell or remedy that would help them stay focused.

Lunch arrived and again Quirrell didn’t show. Draco considered checking it out, but he didn’t want to be too obvious. He’d wait for Percy to get him some information first. It worked out anyway because halfway through the meal Hedwig swooped in on graceful, silent wings to deliver them a letter.
“Who’s it from?” Ron asked, mouth full of sandwich.

“Hagrid,” Harry told him with a smile. “It’s an invite to tea tomorrow. He heard we had a free period after lunch. Can we go?” he asked, turning to Draco.

“Sure.” Draco ruffled the boy’s hair. The soft-hearted man was always a good source of information and Draco was curious why Hagrid wanted to speak to them.

…

After lunch, they had Charms Theory and Magical Theory with the Ravenclaws. Already classes were challenging. In Charms, they had to memorize the seventeen fundamental wand movements and be able to perform them perfectly by next week. In Magical Theory, they had to take notes on the six main aspects of magic. They were to do further research for homework and write an informative essay.

Professor Sophos, a witch in her sixties with wildly curly, silver-streaked black hair and a greek accent, had oh so kindly given them an essay formula to follow. The formula itself was a challenge, let alone the essay topic! Introduction consisting of hook, background, and thesis. Body paragraphs consisting of transition, facts, sources, and analysis. Finally, a conclusion paragraph with transition, summary, and a restating of the now validated thesis.

Draco had to admit it was overwhelming. He looked at the loose parchment they had folded and tucked into their bags with their class notes and frowned.

“We need notebooks,” Harry said softly, guessing what Draco wanted. “It’ll be easier to stay organized.”

“We’ll need at least a dozen of them,” Draco agreed, hooking his bangs back behind his ears as he looked up at Harry. “We’ll add it to Remus’s letter. He can get us what we need.”

On their way back up to the tower from dinner, Percy snagged Draco’s sleeve.

At Draco’s signal, Harry turned to Ron with a distraction. “Did you bring your Wizarding Chess set?”

Ron perked up. “Yeah. Why?”

“I’d like to try again,” Harry told him, making a determined face.

Ron grinned excitedly. “I’ll go get it.”

“How’s Wizarding Chess different from the Muggle kind?” Hermione asked curiously.

“The rules aren’t different,” Neville assured her.

“But I bet Muggle Chess doesn’t bash each other in,” Seamus said excitedly.

Draco and Percy had slipped away from the group unnoticed a floor below the Gryffindor portrait. There was a room that was used mostly for the random couple who wanted to snog and sometimes studying away from the loud common room, but tonight it stood empty. Draco hopped up onto the desk positioned by a window. Percy pulled the desk chair out and sat in front of him. Draco propped his feet up on the side of the seat, caging Percy’s thighs in between his Converse. Percy handed him a parchment. Draco unfolded it and pressed it open on his lap.
“His class schedule as well as the location of his personal chambers,” Percy explained. “Apparently he had a run in with some vampires and barely survived before taking the position here. He’s paranoid and scared of his own shadow. I can’t really see him as a threat. Not to mention the curse on the Defense position. For decades Defense teachers have only lasted a year here. Something always makes them go. There’s already bets among the upper years that Quirrell won’t make it past Yule. That vampires will come and get him.”

Draco nodded absently, his attention on the map.

“What exactly do you think he’s up to?” Percy asked curiously.

“I don’t know.” Draco looked up and met the teen’s concerned brown eyes. “Keep your ears open for any rumors.”

Percy pushed his glasses up his nose, confused by the boy’s insistence. “He really does seem useless.”

Draco said nothing to that, his attention back on the schedule and map the redhead had given him.

Percy sighed, changing the subject. “Silvanus Rahl and his gang are still muttering about you being in Gryffindor. The twins have a prank lined up, but there’s no telling how they’ll take it. They hate all things Slytherin, Rahl especially. Lost his father, grandfather, and uncle to Death Eaters. His dorm mates follows his every word. Be careful. They can be dangerous.”

Draco nodded. “Thanks for the heads up. Who should I look out for?”

“Rahl’s the one who had you up against the wall. His second in command is Fergus Dougal, dark red hair, pale. They room with Abdul Virk, Archibald Mago, and Eric Greythorne and they are more like lackeys. They’re all Sixth years and want to be some big shot Aurors when they graduate. They’re the best duelers in the House.”

“I’ll be careful,” Draco promised.

“I’ll help as much as I can, but I have a feeling Rahl has something personal against the Malfoys. He’ll be a hard one to stop.” Percy ran a hand through his short curly hair. “Good news is next year is his last.”

Draco smiled wryly. A lot could happen in two years. “Good news,” he echoed.

Percy lifted Draco’s foot and slid out from under it before placing it back on the seat. “I’ll head back. Wait a few minutes and then come after me.”

“How’s your girl?” Draco asked curiously. “Your snake didn’t hurt her?”

The teen flushed red. “No. It was fine,” Percy answered shyly and slipped out of the room.

Draco grinned.

The next morning was Saturday. They got dressed quickly and went up to the Owlery. Harry pet and stroked Hedwig’s spotted white feathers for several minutes before tying the letters they had written to her leg. Hedwig took off silently into the dawn and the boys tucked themselves up on a window ledge to work some more on Pandora’s notes.
No one would bother them up here so early in the morning and the break was sorely needed. Draco especially was struggling with the constant and abrasive multitude always surrounding them, always watching, moving in ways that Draco couldn’t always predict or control. It put a lot more stress on him than he anticipated.

He’d gone from the Hold, which was an extremely controlled environment, to Liam - where Draco was given a lot of control and privacy - to the Malfoys, who were almost as controlled and rigid as the Hold. The Tonkses were a bit more flexible and chaotic, but even they were pretty self-contained. They didn’t socialize with others much (except for with the Weasleys and on holidays) and mostly let the boys do as they wished as long as they had supervision.

Harry was aware of the tension. He sat across from Draco in the same window, their legs brushing. He reached forward and gently touched Draco’s knee. “Please?”

Draco looked up from the notes, distracted and frowning. “What?”

Harry lowered his head submissively, hands folded in his lap. “Please?” he asked again, softly.

Draco smiled, his shoulders relaxing as - devotion compassion - pulsed warmly through the bond. “Yes,” he said and turned so that he was sitting in the middle of the window, his back to Harry. He crooked one leg to set Pandora’s notes on top and set his other foot on the ground for balance.

Harry slid his fingers into Draco’s hair and caressed the blond’s scalp. Closing his eyes on a sigh, Harry gently pressed his thumbs into Draco’s neck. The warmth from his core trickled up and soaked into Draco’s skin and muscle. Draco sighed in pleasure and began to read out loud so Harry could follow along. Soft groans escaped him every other sentence, making Harry smile, happy he was making Draco feel good. Draco took notes on what he thought a passage meant, adding Harry’s ideas. Harry’s hands continued to knead and press all the tension from Draco’s back and shoulders.

They walked into breakfast a little late, just as Rahl and his gang were storming out. Their hair had been turned into huge coarse balls of red and gold cotton and on the back of their robes in huge gold lettering it read, I’m a Gryffindor Bully. Rahl’s blue eyes were bright with fury when he spotted Draco and Harry. He was still within sight of the Great Hall doors, so he couldn’t do much, but he did bump Draco’s shoulder hard enough to make the boy stagger.

“Out of my way, you fucking snake,” he hissed in a low, threatening voice.

Draco stared after them, eyes cold.

Harry pulled him forward by the hand Draco held. “Breakfast is over soon,” he said softly - concerned.

Draco silently followed Harry to their table that had become a weird mesh of First and Third years. All the First year boys, plus Hermione, and then the Third year twins and their best friends Lee Jordan, Angelina Johnson, and Alicia Spinnet. The twins were beaming triumphantly and the rest of the group was snickering and laughing. Only Hermione seemed to disapprove while Neville looked nervous.

Draco and Harry took their spot between the twins and Hermione and Neville. Dean, Seamus, and Ron sat across from them with Lee and the girls across from the twins.

“Not sure that’s going to make him back off,” Draco admitted as he served himself some eggs.
“If they don’t learn their lesson,” George began.

Fred grinned evilly. “The pranks will only get worse.”

…


Draco decided to ignore him. Instead, he took notice of the single station that had been placed at the front of the classroom on the Gryffindor’s side of the room. Draco hefted his bag higher on his shoulder and pushed Harry toward Ron. Harry knew better than to argue, especially with the mood Draco was in. Draco made his way down the aisle and stopped at the single desk. Hermione and Neville sat behind him and Neville gave him a worried look. Draco left it to Hermione to reassure him.

Today was their scheduled potions practical and Draco began to set up his cauldron and equipment with the rest of the class. He’d just finished when Snape stormed in, slammed the classroom door behind him with a loud bang that made everyone jump, and took up a position by the blackboard. He looked furious.

“On the board you will see instructions for brewing the most basic of potions, the Boil Cure.” Snape’s dark eyes raked the class. “It can also be found in your textbooks on page thirty-three. Begin.”

Draco’s eyes widened fractionally. This was only their second Potions class. Was that really all the instruction they’d be given? He scowled and looked at the board as Harry’s - anxiety - scratched at him.

In almost indecipherable calligraphy, the board read: Add crushed snake fangs to your cauldron and stir. Slice your Pungous Onions finely and place in the cauldron, then heat the mixture. Add dried nettles. Add a dash of Flobberworm mucus and stir vigorously. Add a sprinkle of powdered ginger root and stir vigorously again. Add picked Shrake spines. Stir gently so as not to overexcite the Shrake spines. Add a glug of stewed horned slugs. Add porcupine quills. Finally, wave your wand over the cauldron to finish the potion.

Draco opened his textbook. The recipe on page thirty-three was slightly longer with more detail. His glare deepened. Which were they supposed to follow?

“Sir…” Hermione’s voice drew Draco’s attention and he looked up to see that the girl had her hand in the air.

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“If I wished to speak to you, Miss Pleasant, I would have called on you. Now begin. If I have to tell you again, I will be taking points.” Snape’s cold, disdainful voice was cutting.

“I noticed the recipe on the board…” Hermione continued hesitantly.

“Ten points from Gryffindor,” Snape drawled, staring her down.

Lavender and Parvati, sitting behind Hermione and Neville, hissed at her to be quiet.

Draco gave Snape a disgusted look. He pointedly chose to use the book recipe instead of Snape’s, not trusting that bastard for a second.

Snape stalked the Gryffindor side of the room, breathing down their necks, making them nervous. He bit out sarcastic comments like, “You call that a fine powder, Mr. Finnegan?” “So skilled are we,
Potter, that you don’t have to check the exact temperature of your flames?” “You do have a timer in your kit, Miss Brown, do you not?” “Silence, Miss Pleasant, no talking in my class if don’t want your mouth magical sewn shut!”

They were almost done, only ten minutes to go, when Hermione cried out, “Wait, Neville!”

Draco turned to face them, his eyes widening as his startled roommate dropped the porcupine quills into a cauldron that still sat on the flame.

The explosion knocked Hermione and Neville back into Lavender and Parvati’s table, making their cauldron clatter to the floor, splashing their ankles with boiling hot potion. Draco was flung back into his own cauldron and it tipped forward, spilling all down his back. Pain whited everything out. He locked his teeth, grunting, as he crawled blindly forward only to hold himself rigidly still, exerting all his self-control to clamp down on useless instinct. There would be no escaping the searing pain. There was no point in trying to flee. He had to be still and endure.

“You stupid boy!” Snape bellowed.

Kneeling next to Draco, he took in the smoking school robes of Draco’s hunched back and internally winced. He had no idea how the boy wasn’t screaming or unconscious. A quick swish of his wand vanished the robe, shirt, and tie. Red and angrily blistering skin covered Draco’s shoulders and down his spine, but it did nothing to conceal the most horrific scarring Snape had ever seen.

Hermione gasped, her hands covering her mouth in horror.

Draco trembled, on his hands and knees, his head hanging with his white-blond hair curtaining his face, but Snape could see the pain-tensed jaw of gritted teeth.

“Bottle your potions, clean up your stations, and GET OUT!” Snape screamed. Harry and Ron had appeared at Draco’s side. “You two! Get him out of here! Straight to the Infirmary! Brown, Patil, cease your caterwauling and go with them!”

Ron and Harry didn’t have to be told twice. They each got underneath one of Draco’s arms and helped him to his feet. Lavender and Parvati held hands, leaning on each other as they limped after the boys, crying in pain over their burnt ankles. Draco hissed as they started climbing the stairs, head hanging, clearly in agony. Ron looked pale as a ghost, the smell of potion and burnt skin mixing in his nose.

“Bloody hell,” he whispered.

…

Ron and Harry were forced to wait in the waiting room, but Lavender and Parvati were admitted into the Infirmary with Draco. Later that night the girls returned to the tower and told tales of gruesomely burnt skin that had been hardened and peeled from Draco’s back. Draco hadn’t screamed once and stayed conscious for the entire treatment. The story spread like fire.

…

Ron and Harry missed Herbology and lunch as they sat quietly outside the Infirmary. Healer Pomfrey finally let them come and see their friend, but she was visibly disapproving and told them that their visit would be short: “Sleep is essential for healing, but he insists on seeing you, Mr. Potter.” Harry barely heard her. He rushed forward, desperate to be back where he belonged. At Draco’s side.
Harry knelt on the floor by the bed so that Draco, who’d been placed on his stomach, could see him without straining his neck. Ron hung back, staring at the white bandages that covered Draco from shoulders to waist. At least that terrible scarring was covered.

“Draco…” Harry breathed - love concern - pouring down the bond.

Grey eyes blinked at him and he gave a smile. “Harry. I’m okay. Pomfrey said I’ll be outta here by breakfast tomorrow.”

Harry tearfully held his hand. “Please?”


Madam Pomfrey cleared her throat. “Alright, boys. Time to go. Mr. Malfoy needs his rest,” she insisted.

Harry looked up at her in confusion. “Go?”

The potion Draco had been fighting was going to win the battle and pull him under soon. It made him crazy to know Harry would be out of his sight for a whole afternoon and night, but the fucking nurse made it clear his boy wouldn’t be allowed to stay. Fuck. Doing his best to focus, he looked into Harry’s distressed eyes. “Meet Hagrid. Tell me what he has to say,” he ordered softly, eyes closing. “Stay away from Quirrell. You get a headache, you go the other way ’til it’s gone. Hard rule.” A sliver of grey could be seen between long blond lashes. “Harry, stay with the Weasleys. Never… be alone…” The grey disappeared, Draco’s eyes closing as he slipped into a potioned sleep.

“Yes, Draco,” Harry whispered, holding tight to Draco’s hand.

“The boy needs undisturbed rest,” Pomfrey scolded softly. “Off with you now. You’ll see your friend in the morning perfectly recovered. There’s no need for all this fuss.”

Ron felt a pang as Harry’s head hung and his shoulders hunched. He knew how upset Harry must be. Ron had rarely ever seen them separated for more than a few minutes at a time. It was a strange concept. They were like a packaged deal. Like Fred and George. In fact, he was having a hard time picturing Harry getting up and leaving Draco’s side, orders be damned, and he braced himself to pull his friend away, but Harry did. He got to his feet and gave Ron a smile that trembled a bit at the edges.

“Will you come with me to see Hagrid?” he asked quietly, clearly trying to be brave.

“Yeah,” Ron answered, chest tight. “Course I will.”

He offered his hand, blushing, but he knew he’d done the right thing when Harry gave him a truly grateful smile as he took it. Silently, Ron promised the unconscious blond that he wouldn’t let anything happen to Harry. For one, Harry was his friend. For two, he didn’t want to die.

Hagrid’s hut was down the side of the hill that Hogwarts sat atop. It was about a ten minute walk, so it wasn’t a short distance. The hut sat just outside the Dark Forest, the shadow of the tall, ominous trees falling over them, but it had an incredible view of the lake.

A dog began barking as soon as they knocked on the door. Deep bass barks that made Harry and Ron step way back from the door. Hagrid shouted something and then the door was opening and Hagrid was beaming joyfully at them. “Arry! Who’s that ya got with ya?” Hagrid stood in the
doorway beaming happily. “Down, Fang!” A big black mastiff with hanging cheeks and drool was wagging his tail and trying to push past Hagrid’s big legs to get at the boys. “Tha’s Fang. He wouldn’t hurt a fly,” Hagrid promised.

“This is Ron Weasley,” Harry introduced. “He’s in Gryffindor with Draco and me. Ron, this is Hagrid. I met him on Diagon when I got my school supplies. He’s the one who gave me Hedwig for my birthday.”

“Cool,” Ron said politely, but his attention was still on the huge dog.

“Well, nice ta meet ya,” Hagrid boomed. “Any friend of ‘Arry’s is a friend of mine. Come in, come in!” As the boys stepped in and fended off the overly friendly, slobbery Fang, Hagrid gestured to the table. “I made tea and cakes.”

The boys hopped up on two large stools while Hagrid plopped down across from them, still smiling happily. Ron and Harry shared a glance as Hagrid placed cakes down in front of them with loud thunks. He also gave them small cauldrons of tea. Ron giggled.

“I wan’ned to congratulate you on Gryffindor,” Hagrid boomed happily. “I was Gryffindor when I was in school. It’s the best House if ya don’t mind me sayin’.”

“You were?” Harry asked and tried to figure out how to eat the cake that was about the size of his head.

Ron leaned close. “Maybe we shouldn’t eat it.”

Harry elbowed him gently. “Hagrid, can you break this into smaller pieces for me?”

“Course, I can! ‘Ere, let me.” He got out a huge hunting knife and whacked the cake into fist size chunks.

Harry thanked him and dunked it in his cauldron of tea, hoping to soften it up.

“What’s this?” Ron grabbed a Daily Prophet from the floor, desperate for anything as a distraction so he wouldn’t have to eat the cake. It was dated a few days ago and had a theft from Gringotts on the front page. “Someone broke in to Gringotts? That’s impossible!”

Hagrid became nervous. “Tha’s nothing. Just kindlin’ for my fire.”

Harry looked over Ron’s shoulder to read the article as the redhead insisted, “No one’s ever broken into Gringotts before and gotten away, have they?”

“Why would they break into an empty vault?” Harry asked and suddenly remembered Hagrid saying Dumbledore had asked him to get something from Gringotts. Something important. He vividly recalled the round package that had effected Draco so much. “This happened the night of my birthday. The day we met,” he added, looking up.

Hagrid cleared his throat and took the paper from Ron. “How’re ya liking Hogwarts, ‘Arry?”

Ron looked startled as the paper disappeared from his hands.

Harry stared at their host curiously, but he answered, “I like it. Classes are really interesting.”

“Draco’s having some trouble,” Ron informed him. “Some Gryffindors don’t trust him because he’s a Malfoy.”
“Where is Draco?” Hagrid looked toward the door as if the boy would walk in any moment.

“He’s in the Infirmary,” Ron answered when he realized Harry wouldn’t. At Hagrid’s shocked look, he clarified, “He wasn’t attacked or nothing. Just a potions accident.”

“Well.” Hagrid reached forward to put his large hand gently on Harry’s head. “You tell Draco not to think on it. People are always hatin’ somethin’. Pay it no mind and hold yer heads high.”

“I’ll tell him,” Harry promised and fished his cake out of his tea. It was still hard, but he was able to bite off a piece. Ron watched him with fascinated horror. “Mmm. It’s good,” Harry complimented.

Hagrid smiled happily. “I’ll give ya some ta take back to Draco. It might make ‘em feel better.”

“That’d be great. Thanks, Hagird.”

Ron giggled again and whispered, “More like finish him off, you mean.”

Harry elbowed him again.

Hagrid showed them around his house and pumpkin patch. He even showed them a few feet into the Dark Forest. He talked cheerfully about all the creatures who lived there, most of them making Ron’s eyes big.

... McGonagall gave them a stern look as they arrived to her class out of breath, but she started her lesson without taking points. Harry paid extra attention and took very detailed notes to be sure Draco didn’t miss anything.

“Think you wrote enough down?” Ron asked him wryly. Harry had filled an entire parchment and the class had been their practical!

“I think so,” Harry answered unsurely, not sure if he had.

Ron laughed and flung an arm around his shoulders. “Let’s head to dinner. I’m starved.”

They talking about Hagrid and the forest when, one floor above the entrance hall, something shoved Harry from behind.

Harry flew forward with frightening force. His shoulder clipped Dean’s and flung him into Seamus, both boys hitting the wall hard. Ron grabbed for Harry’s robe, but he wasn’t quick enough. Harry hit the stairs with a terrible impact and then tumbled. It almost seemed to happen in slow motion and too quick to remember at the same time. Ron ran down to where Harry was sprawled, blood spilling in a growing pool around his head. Ron dropped to his knees. He was screaming. So were the girls.

Dean and Seamus were still getting their feet back under them. Ron looked up. Leaning over the second floor railing was a smirking Slytherin. Ron screamed, this time in rage. He jumped to his feet, but the boy disappeared as a crowd of students on the way to dinner rushed to look over the railing to see what was going on.

Suddenly, McGonagall was there, grabbing him by the shoulders. “What happened here, Mr. Weasley?” Other professors were trying to get everyone who’d rushed out of the Great Hall to move back. Dumbledore was levitating Harry, rushing him to the Infirmary.

Shaking, Ron looked into McGonagall’s eyes and said, “Draco’s gonna kill me,” before bursting into tears.
Draco felt - TERROR - scream along the bond, followed by bright flashes of pain, and then ominous silence. *Harry!* *his mind cried out, but there was no answer. Anxious, angry, Draco pushed through the layers of darkness swaddling him, trying to breach the surface. His arms and legs felt heavy and floating at the same time as he churned them uselessly, trying to move.

He hit the floor, but it almost felt like it was happening to someone else. He could barely feel it. The shock was enough to get his eyes to crack open at last, however. Bright light stabbed into his brain, rendering him just as blind as before. Snarling, he slapped his hands onto the floor in front of him and pulled himself across the cold tile.

*Harry!* *Spots dipped and swayed as some focus returned to him. Undulating walls, a gooey floor that waved gently up and down… He grit his teeth and pulled himself another foot forward.*

**Answer me, Harry!** Draco’s heart beat sluggishly, but it should have been racing. Terror clawed at his insides. **Harry, where are you? Harry!**

“Mr. Malfoy, please return…” Pomfrey was saying as she stepped into the Infirmary proper only to gasp upon seeing the boy dragging himself semi-conscious across he floor. “Mr. Malfoy!” she cried and rushed to his side. The boy was dripping with sweat and panting. She turned him onto his back and he shoved weakly at her, his face twisted with fear. “Mr. Malfoy… Draco… It’s just a dream, child. Come now. Back to bed.”

“Harry…” he moaned, tears welling in his eyes. “Harry…”

Pomfrey frowned. “Come now.” She sat him up. The boy trembled in her arms. “Everything is alright.”

Draco pushed at her with surprising strength. “Get away from me,” he hissed lowly.

Pomfrey watched shocked, her hands up over her mouth, as the boy pulled himself up on all fours and crawled his way to the nearest bed.

Draco couldn’t feel his hands, but that didn’t fucking matter. All that mattered was Harry. His boy needed him. **Harry, answer me right fucking now!** He pulled himself to his feet and swayed drunkenly only to collapse after two steps.

“You’re doing yourself injury!” she cried and gently putting a supportive arm around his shoulders. “I must insist you come to bed this instant. It was just a dream. Mr. Potter is fine, I assure you.”

The doors swung open and Dumbledore strode into the room. Pomfrey gasped, and Draco knew the form floating behind the old wizard was Harry. A little of his fear left him. Harry was here. Draco had him.

“Set him on the bed,” Pomfrey was saying as if from a long distance, voice urgent and distressed. “What happened?”

“He fell down the stairs I’m afraid,” Dumbledore answered.

“Pushed…” Draco said hoarsely. Something cold and dangerous coiled in his gut. He watched through unblinking blurry eyes as a red stain soaked into the white sheets under Harry’s head. The bed dipped, causing ripples of shadow to overtake his vision, but Draco refused to look away. Harry needed him.
Dumbledore spoke from right next to him. “How do you know, my boy?”

“Know…” Draco insisted, slurring, but he didn’t fucking care if Dumbledore believed him or not. Draco knew the truth. His hands curled into dangerous fists.

“What has he told you?” Dumbledore suddenly asked.

McGonagall’s voice answered, “He believes a Slytherin used a spell to push Harry. However, he didn’t actually see the boy cast a spell. It could be that the boy was smiling simply because he thought it amusing that Harry fell.”

“He didn’t just fall. He went flying forward, Professor!” Ron’s voice protested hotly. It was thick and sounded as if he had been crying.

Draco’s eyes narrowed and he held tightly to the knowledge that Ron knew who’d done this to Harry.

“Draco… I’m sorry…” This time Ron sounded small and afraid, but Draco had no time for that. All his attention was on Harry and the healer chanting over him.

“Draco also reports that Harry was pushed,” Dumbledore continued. “He must have felt something through their bond.”

“We must get to the bottom of this,” was McGonagall’s quiet response.

“Yes,” Dumbledore answered and the old man put a supportive hand on Draco’s shoulder.

“Don’t touch me,” Draco said coldly, not once moving his eyes from Harry’s pale face.

Dumbledore’s hand left him and there was silence in the room after that.

Chapter end.
Recovery

They waited an hour for Healer Pomfrey to finish treating Harry. In the end, he was placed under seven healing spells and was fed two potions: one for inflammation and another to heal broken bones. Pomfrey stepped back exhausted and Dumbledore gently guided her to a chair.

“He’ll likely have some memory loss that could span a couple hours up to a full day before the fall,” she reported. “Otherwise, he’ll have a full recovery.” Looking up at the headmaster, she said gravely, “It was a nasty fall, Albus. The poor boy suffered a skull fracture, brain swelling, blood loss, a dislocated shoulder, and severe contusions along his back and hips.”

“Rest a minute, Poppy,” Dumbledore encouraged and looked up at McGonagall. “Please move the beds together so that the boys can sleep in peace. Mr. Weasley, I’m going to have to ask you to come with me to identify the boy you saw on the stairs. Poppy, contact Draco and Harry’s guardians when you’ve recovered, if you would.”

Voices warped in and out of focus and things seemed to be vibrating strangely, but all Draco cared about was the gentle heat from Harry’s body and the feeling of his boy’s chest rising and falling. As McGonagall guided him to lie flat and joined his bed to Harry’s, he flung a protective arm over Harry’s chest. His eyes closed and he finally let go of the excruciating hold he’d maintained on consciousness, giving in to the power of the sleeping potion at last.

…

Ron was brought to the Slytherin common room where the students were forced to line up as Dumbledore and Snape watched. The cold glares of all those hateful eyes made Ron break out in a sweat, but he boldly lifted his chin and pointed to Third-year Adrian Pucey. “It was him!”

Snape coldly ordered the Slytherins to go to their dorm rooms and remain there until further notice before sweeping out of the room with Adrian Pucey’s arm in his grasp. Dumbledore guided Ron more gently and the four of them made their way to the Headmaster’s office.

Pucey scowled and looked offended, claiming innocence. His wand only showed those spells they were practicing in class and no one actually saw him cast a spell at Harry. Ron went red in the face as a slow smirk curled the Pucey’s lips, but there was nothing Dumbledore could do. Pucey was a student as much as Harry, and it was their job to act in his best interest. With no evidence, even circumstantial evidence, against him, Dumbledore’s hands were tied. All he could do was warn the boy quite seriously of the consequences of injuring another student while at Hogwarts and dismissed Pucey into Snape’s care.

Dumbledore gazed at the red-faced boy left standing angrily in front of his desk. “The truth will win out, young man. Until then we cannot act without proof.”

Ron stared mutinously back at the Headmaster in silence.

Dumbledore sighed sadly. “You will be held responsible for any retaliation you take,” he warned. “I can’t imagine how that would help your friends.”

“Yes, sir,” Ron answered stiffly. “May I go?”

Dumbledore inclined his head and the boy practically fled his office.
As soon as they were in the dungeons and out of sight, Snape spun on his heel. He grabbed a hold of Pucey’s robe and shoved him against the wall. Black eyes glittering with malice, voice dripping with disgust, he said in a low, compelling voice, “You did well to escape punishment this time, Mr. Pucey, but that is only due to the fact that Potter was not killed. Had the boy died, you would have been put under a more… vigorous… investigation. Shame would have been brought to your name, to my House, and you would have been placed in Azkaban, forever doomed to suffer unimaginable torment.”

Pucey looked up at his Head of House, face blanched with fear. His fingers ached as they clutched at the wall he was being held against. “I d-didn’t…” he stuttered weakly.

“Do not attempt to fool me,” Snape snarled, his face less than an inch from the teenager’s. “Let me give you some… advice.” He tightened his hand in the boy’s robe, nearly choking him. “Do not commit murder while at Hogwarts. Do not underestimate the power that destroyed one Dark Lord and precipitated the downfall of another. Dumbledore will act regretful, but he will destroy you all the same if anything were to befall his precious Boy Hero.”

Pucey whimpered, legs trembling.

Snape released the boy with a shove and Pucey cowered against the wall. With a louder voice, he spat with dark fury, “Fifty points from Slytherin, Mr. Pucey, for acting with Gryffindor shortsightedness.”

Pucey grew impossibly paler.

“Get out of my sight this instant,” Snape hissed, cold as ice.

The dark-haired teen fled.

…

Narcissa conjured a chair and placed it next to Draco and Harry’s hospital bed. She gently stroked her son’s soft hair off of his face. He was practically curled around Harry, and she frowned at how still and slack both of the boys’ faces were. They weren’t merely sleeping. They were unconscious. Four days into school and they were already in the Infirmary with critical injuries. She didn’t like it at all.

“I want to bring them home,” she said lowly. She looked over her shoulder and pierced her husband with coldly angry eyes.

Lucius placed a hand on her shoulder and gently squeezed. They had not repaired their relationship, but the anger and hurt between them had to wait. Their children were in trouble. “I’ll go speak to the headmaster.”

“I want assurances or they are coming home,” she said with finality.

Lucius gave her a little bow before turning on his heel and striding from the room. On the way out, he passed Andromeda and Ted as they arrived. Little Denebola was asleep on Andromeda’s shoulder. Lucius did not acknowledge them in any way and continued on. Harry’s guardian or not, the woman was still a blood traitor.

Ted conjured a chair for Andromeda and she sat across from her sister on Harry’s side of the bed. This was the first time Narcissa had met Denebola. The child lay curled in the nook of Andromeda’s
arm sound asleep and Narcissa felt an old pang of remorse. She didn’t dwell on it long, however, too concerned for Draco and Harry.

Dumbledore sat behind his desk and considered the furious man in front of him. Lucius was not satisfied in the least with the school’s dead-end investigation, and he was down right furious when Dumbledore refused to release the name of the student accused of the crime. The child had rights, and his parents would hold Hogwarts and Dumbledore responsible if those rights were violated.

“If you cannot assure me of my children’s safety while attending this school, Dumbledore, I will pull them out,” Lucius threatened. “And I will make it very clear that it was due to my concern for their safety within these walls. How will other parents react? How will the Ministry?”

Dumbledore understood the man’s anger. He truly did. “I will have the ghosts patrol the hallways between periods, more power will be allotted to the paintings so they can serve as witnesses, and I’ve been assured by the Heads of each House that they will take steps to better monitor their students. We will keep the boys safe, I assure you.”

Lucius was not pleased. He gave the old man a cold look down his aristocratic nose. “I will interview each House Head. If I am unsatisfied with the measures they plan to take to ensure the students’ safety…” He paused to snap up his cane into his fist. “We’ll talk again, Headmaster,” he coldly threatened.

Severus opened the door to his personal chambers as he heard a knock. “Lord Malfoy,” he greeted and carefully blanked his expression.

Grey eyes stared at him with predatory intent. “Professor Snape.” Lucius gave a sharp smile full of teeth. “I have need to speak with you once more.”

Severus opened his door wider, steeling himself. Lucius strode into the room and seated himself in an armchair placed at an angle to the fireplace as if he owned the room and it was Severus who was the guest. Severus very carefully chose to show just enough annoyance that Lucius would think he was trying to hide it. When Lucius gave him a knowing, superior smirk, Severus scowled as if further annoyed that Lucius could see through him. Severus crossed his arms, as if defensive, and hid behind a curtain of oily black hair.

“We both know why I am here.” Lucius’s voice was silky sweet and dripping with threat. He leaned forward, his long blond hair sliding over one shoulder to fall gracefully over his chest as he braced his hands on the cane planted firmly on the carpet in front of him. “I want to know, Snape, what steps you are going to take to ensure my ward never again comes to harm by one of your House. I also want a very detailed explanation on how my son could incur such a serious injury while attending your class.”

“Your son was injured when the student behind him made the most basic mistake of adding quills to the Boil Cure potion whilst still on the flame,” Severus recited with absolutely no inflection. “Potions accidents do occur, especially so early in their education. Mr. Malfoy’s clothes were banished within seconds of the potion spilling and he was taken directly to the Infirmary where he received excellent care. I have been informed that by breakfast tomorrow he will be completely recovered.”

Lucius gave a silky smooth, close-mouthed smile. Almost gently, he said, “I believe you mean ‘recovered with minimal scarring’.”
Inside, Severus winced, the comment purposefully bringing to mind the child’s horrific scars. On the outside, he maintained a stoic mask.

Lucius stared at him with the eyes of a patient leopard. “And your plan to control your House concerning my ward?”

“I have… spoken… with the boy suspected of the act and I assure you that…”

Lucius stood abruptly. Tired of playing with his prey. “I want the child’s name.” It was a demand, but when Severus simply stared mutely, Lucius added impatiently, “Do not concern yourself. The child is safe from me.” Grey eyes brightened, hinting at silver. “For now. I merely want to have a discussion of my own with his parents. I will be discrete, of course.”

“… Adrian Pucey.” There was no point in hiding it. Lucius would find out one way or another. If Severus resisted, he would incur Lucius’s sadistic revenge and no longer hold the man’s tentative trust.

With surprising speed, Lucius grabbed Severus’s left forearm with brutal force. “Be careful, Severus. If I think for a moment you’re moving against Harry, I will destroy you,” he hissed in a dangerous whisper.

Severus yanked free, heart beating hard and fast. With glittering, dark eyes, he spat, “And should that day ever come, you’d be standing right beside me wearing a mask, Lucius.”

Lucius grinned, all teeth. “I don’t think so. Malfoys are never slaves.” With deliberate slowness, he rolled up his sleeve.

Numb with honest shock, Severus could only stare at the scarred, pale arm that Lucius revealed. There was no hint or shadow of the Dark Mark like there was on Severus’s arm. He couldn’t even imagine what it had taken Lucius to accomplish that; it was thought to be impossible!

Lucius gave a shallow bow. “I wish you luck with your House, Professor Snape. I don’t have to describe what will happen if something of this nature should occur again, do I?”

“… No,” Severus answered lowly.

Lucius gave another little smile, eyes cold, before leaving the professor to think on his words.

…

Draco woke up feeling like shit. He felt dry as a bone and desperately thirsty, his head was pounding and he was pissed off.

“Draco…” A gentle hand touched his hair.

Draco snarled and slapped it aside. He turned dry eyes to see Narcissa sitting next to him. “What’re you doin’ here?”

Her eyes widened in surprise before softening in concern. “It’s school policy to send a report to the parents of students treated in the Infirmary.”

“But why are you here?” Draco demanded again. “We’re fine. Go home.” He wanted to check on Harry. He wanted to be alone.

“Draco…” Narcissa began.
“Get out!” Draco yelled only to wince and scowl as that made his head pound harder.

Narcissa sat frozen.

Madam Pomfrey bustled in, a ward telling her that Draco had regained consciousness. “How are you feeling, Mr. Malfoy?” she asked.

Draco thought his head would explode in fury. Why wouldn’t they leave him alone? Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath, blocking the two women out of his awareness. The bond was a trickle of ambient emotions as Harry slept. Draco realized he was clutching the shirt above Harry’s heart. He could feel every slow rise and fall of his boy’s chest. Harry was alive and warm and next to him. He took another breath. When he opened his eyes, his anger was buried and he looked at the women with forced calm. True privacy would not come while they were in the Infirmary anyway.

“… side effects of resisting the Sleeping Potion,” the healer was saying.

Draco didn’t care about what she had to say and didn’t bother asking her to repeat it. He looked to Narcissa, “We apologize for worrying you. We’ll be more careful. You don’t have to stay.”

Narcissa masked her expression due to Pomfrey’s presence, but Draco could see that she was upset by her eyes. “You can come home,” she offered quietly. “We can get tutors as skilled as any you’d find here.”

Draco’s expression softened. He reached over and touched her hand. “Thank you. Not yet. If you would like to help, I’d like to be alone with Harry for an hour or two. In a private room.”

Narcissa nodded and stood. She wore a thin black skirt and boots. A white blouse with a few ruffles falling from her neck and over her chest and a dark grey day-jacket. Diamonds hung from her ears and a diamond broach sat at the base of her throat. “Lucius is talking with the Headmaster now. Let me go find him.”

While she was gone, Pomfrey worked around them in a huff. She was clearly offended by Draco’s request. Andromeda returned with Dee and Ted. The little girl climbed up onto the bed and into Draco’s lap. Draco gave her a hug, but it was stiff. Ted gently scooped his daughter up, sensing that Draco was not in the mood to deal with the baby. Draco assured them he was fine and that they’d be more careful; the two gave him a string of good advice and returned home.

Shortly after, Narcissa returned with Dumbledore and Lucius as promised. Dumbledore’s eyes were twinkling as he dealt with a very unhappy Pomfrey, and between Narcissa and Lucius they transferred Harry over into a private room for contagious or especially critically patients. Draco followed them, never allowing Harry out of his sight and climbed into the new bed next to his boy.

“I’ll be in the waiting area,” Narcissa told him before stepping outside. “To make sure no one disturbs you.”

“Thank you,” he whispered, throat tight with gratitude.

She gave him a gentle smile and shut the door.

Draco immediately turned to Harry. The boy lay sleeping, his lips slightly parted, dark lashes resting on his cheeks. Draco ran trembling fingers through the boy’s hair. He found the slightly raised scar above Harry’s right ear and a little to the back. Closing his eyes, he tried to breathe through the knowledge that Harry would have died from that fall in the Muggle world.

Working with careful determination, he managed to strip Harry of his hospital top and pants. He
quickly stripped out of his own and settled between Harry’s legs. He leaned on his forearms so that his chest didn’t crush Harry’s, their stomachs and groins pressing against each other. Opening his thighs a bit, he spread Harry’s legs wider and felt their body heat meld into a soft warmth that soaked into Draco’s bones.

“Harry,” he called softly. Dropping his head forward, his hair brushed Harry’s cheeks a second before their lips gently touched. “Harry,” he said directly into the boy’s mouth. Draco licked a slow line over those petal soft lips. “Harry.” He laid a careful kiss on the boy’s bottom lip. Another on the corner of his mouth, then his cheek. Dipping to his ear, he called again, “Harry,” and traced the outside of that delicate ear with his tongue.

The boy shifted, his eyebrows tensing as dazed green eyes fluttered open. A dry groan escaped his throat.

“Harry,” Draco breathed. He leaned to the side so that he could free one hand to stroke the boy’s cheek and run his hands through his hair possessively.

Harry leaned into the touch, but he was confused. Where were they? What happened? Slowly the memory of Draco getting hurt in Potions returned. “Draco…” - concern fear - His voice rasped dryly. Something was wrong.

Draco helped him sit up and knelt between Harry’s legs. He gave the boy a tall glass of water and drank one himself. Harry obediently drank the whole cup, but his eyes were locked on Draco. Something was wrong, he thought again, the certainty settling on him like a physical weight. Draco didn’t look right. He almost seemed triggery as if he were on the verge of a flashback, but he was focused completely on Harry as if it were Harry who’d been hurt and not Draco…

“Hush,” Draco ordered as he took the empty glass from the boy and set them both on the bedside table.

Harry ducked his eyes, trying to obey - worry.

“Don’t worry, Harry. You’ll heal us both,” Draco whispered. He cupped Harry’s face in his hands and kissed his lips.

Harry opened his mouth, inviting Draco in, but the blond kept the kiss superficial, just a meeting of two lips. Harry’s hands clenched in the sheets.

Draco leaned back, caressing those soft cheeks with his thumbs. “You’ve lost some time. What’s the last thing you remember?”

“You getting hurt,” Harry answered, eyes downcast submissively. “Snape banished your robes and shirt. You were burnt. Ron was next to me. Snape was yelling. I don’t remember anything else.”

“That was yesterday morning,” Draco informed him, still gently brushing Harry’s cheeks with his fingertips. “You and Ron brought me to the Infirmary. Pomfrey wouldn’t let you stay. I told you to stay away from Quirrell and stay with Ron. You went to visit Hagrid and went to class. On the way to dinner, someone cast a spell that pushed you down the stairs. You got hurt pretty badly. I felt it all through the bond. We’ve been in the Infirmary all night. Narcissa, Lucius, Andromeda, Ted, and Dee all came. Andromeda, Ted, and Dee went home once I woke up and told them we were fine, that we’d be careful, but Narcissa and Lucius are still here. They helped talk Dumbledore into letting us be alone for a bit and got us this room.”

Harry was trembling at this point - guilt self-hate. Draco had been hurt and healing and Harry had
made him worry. He knew Draco would have been furious that Harry had been hurt while away from him. Draco had probably hurt himself trying to get to Harry. He’d hurt Draco! He’d worried everyone. He was a no-good freak! Why couldn’t he do anything right? He had to be more careful! He had to be aware! He knew the school wasn’t a safe place. How could he let this happen?

Draco simply watched as Harry absorbed everything that had happened. He continued to stroke the boy’s cheeks, now wet with a stream of tears as Harry punished himself with - anger, guilt, self-hate, regret, unworthiness.

“I’m sorry, Draco. Sorry for causing everyone trouble. Please? Please, Draco…” Harry lifted his eyes to beg. He needed to heal Draco, to make sure any damage he’d caused was fixed.

Draco gave him an almost cold smile. “You first, Harry. Always you first.”

Harry paled. He’d been hurt bad, then. He felt a spike of - anxiety. He’d have worried Draco bad in that case. Draco was mad at him.

“You fell down the stairs, Harry. Bruised you up pretty good. Dislocated your shoulder. Cracked your head open. You lost so much blood. It was red everywhere. You even lost your memories. They were yours and now they’re gone forever. You can’t even tell me who did this to you. Who almost killed you.”

Harry broke into sobs. His gut churned with so much anxiety and guilt that he was on the verge of being sick. He hated himself. He was always hurting the people around him, always hurting Draco. Causing him trouble and scaring him. He wasn’t worthy of Draco’s love. The darkness under his skin oozed to the surface, making him feel filthy and like clawing his skin right off his body just to escape it. Wails of grief built up in his chest and throat and choked him. He felt as if he were going to shatter apart when a hand fisted his hair with painful force. The pain ground him and brought Draco and the room swimming into focus. Silver eyes pierced him straight through.

“I’m going to give you your punishment, Harry. That’s my job, not yours. Now roll over. Lay on your belly.”

Harry obediently lay back and rolled over as Draco got off the bed out out from between his legs. He trembled with anticipation. Needing so very much. Needing to be made clean, to atone. He needed to apologize and earn forgiveness. “I’m sorry, Draco! I wasn’t careful enough! I got hurt when you needed to focus on healing! I am so, so sorry, I’m sorry…” he babbled into the pillow, crying helplessly.

Draco lifted the hairbrush that he’d noticed on the bedside table. There was also a lamp and a thin glass vase with three white flowers, but all his focus was on the brush. It was wooden and heavy, the bristles made of soft hair. He turned it so that he could feel the solid back. He whacked it into his palm and felt a satisfying sting. He turned to Harry and tugged on his leg.

“I want you bent over the edge, Harry. Legs on the ground.”

Harry shifted so that he was sideways and his lower half fell over the edge of the bed as ordered. The bond boomed with his - GUILT, hate, NEED.

Draco smoothed his hand over Harry’s soft skin. “It’s going to hurt, Harry.”

Harry went limp, pliant and needy.

“Ready?”
“Please, Draco, please, sorry, so sorry…”

“Hush,” Draco commanded and Harry instantly became quiet, swallowing his pleas and sobs.

Draco placed a hand on the small of Harry’s back for balance and brought the brush down with a smack on Harry’s ass. Harry’s hands clenched in the sheets as the burn registered. Another smack. Tears fell down his red face, soaking the bed underneath his head. Smack! He had to press his face into the sheets to muffle a pained cry.

"I trusted you."

Harry whimpered as he was stuck hard. The pain was intense - regret sorrow pain.

"I could have hurt myself trying to get to you when I was potioned and hurt."

Harry felt sick. He squeezed his eyes shut and practically lifted his butt into the next blow, making it hurt as much as possible. His back glistened with sweat and he practically choked on the sheets to keep his cries muffled.

Draco slowly realized that he was crying, tears wetting his face, making his blond hair clinging to his cheeks. Realized the tangle of sharp emotions choking him were his own. He could have lost Harry! He should have been there! His hand turned into a fist around the brush, but he refused to bring it down. Not when he was the one upset. He had to have a clear focus on Harry's emotions, his body language, or he could go past Harry's limit and truly hurt him. So he stood there and forced himself to calm, to breathe deeply.

“I want you to think about something,” Draco spoke calmly. “If you’re unconscious or too hurt to heal us when we’re attacked, we might not be able to walk away next time.”

Harry bit down hard into the blanket to smother a scream of - REGRET desperation pain.

"But after this. You'll remember to be careful. You'll remember what's at stake. And I'll forgive you."

Harry couldn't hold back a gasp at that promise and broke down into loud sobs, wanting that forgiveness more than anything. "Won't forget, Draco. Promise!" he cried out.

"Hush.” Draco said again, almost gently, and Harry did his best to strangle his sobs. "I'll make it better.” He ran his hand over Harry's heated skin, took a deep breath, and lifted the brush once more and brought it down with a brutal smack! Harry tossed his head back with a gasp, consumed by the burning pain, blind to everything else. He arched into each blow, tears soaking his face.

Draco spanked Harry again and again, until he was breathing hard and his arm burned. He didn't stop swinging until the boy went limp, his sobs quieting to weak gasps, his emotions sliding into a quiet static. Harry’s ass was a blazing red that was certain to bruise. The heat that radiated from the boy’s skin increased with each blow until Draco could feel it an inch away.

Draco threw the brush aside and pulled Harry fully onto the bed. He turned the boy onto his side and faced him. Dazed, green eyes stared past him blindly. Huge tears rolling almost peacefully down his cheeks. “… it’s over… it’s done… so good, Harry… love you…” the blond murmured in a soft whisper, echoing the same words into Harry's mind. * You did good, Harry. Good boy. I love you. All is forgiven. Good boy. *

It took Harry several minutes to realize that the punishment had stopped. He blinked, feeling floaty
and free. He was aware of his ass burning as if were on fire, the deep ache down to his bones, but it was distant. He felt warm and forgiven and loved. Draco was smiling at him, stroking his hair, kissing his tears away. Harry melted into his soft touch. Filled to bursting with love, he carefully touched Draco’s cheek, traced the tear-tracks that were there. “Love you… thank you, Draco… yours, I’m yours… let me... Draco, let me take care of you... please…”

Draco gave a long sigh and let Harry roll him onto his stomach. Harry knelt on his side, careful to put no pressure on his bruised butt. There was a new blotchy scar between Draco’s shoulder blades, erasing the white lines and ropes embedded on his skin from his time in the Hold. Harry braced himself on his hands before leaning down to trace the new scar with his tongue. LOVE - beat like something alive in his chest, in his soul.

Draco gasped as he felt Harry hovering over him, felt the heat of Harry’s love and magic soak deep into his body as the boy began to trace every single scar with his hot tongue. Halfway down his back, Draco began moaning, his hips began to rock against the bed as pleasure coiled and tightened in his gut. Harry’s sweat dripped onto Draco’s skin as he worked his way down Draco’s beautiful body. He could hardly contain his - joy pleasure desire - as Draco began thrusting against the bed. Draco, Draco, Draco… he chanted in his mind, completely lost to their spiraling pleasure. Gently kissing the small of Draco’s back, he whispered a desperate, “Please…”

Draco groaned deep in his chest and lifted up on his knees. He turned his head sideways on his forearms and growled, “Yes, Harry. Lick me open. Do it. Make me cum.”

Harry almost exploded right there. Draco had never let him touch him there since that time in the Hold. Their first time. That Draco would allow him this once more when he didn’t deserve it … - GRATITUDE LOVE - Harry slithered his way down the bed and situated himself between Draco's spread thighs. He gently pressed the blond’s cheeks apart and licked at Draco’s hole, getting it wet and soft. The sounds of Draco’s moans and gasps made Harry feel like he was on fire. Eyes fluttering closed, he pressed his tongue forward into that tight opening, and licked inside the rim. The taste was bitter and musky and Draco… Harry groaned hungrily and pressed ever closer, clinging to Draco’s hips.

Draco was grunting now, his hips rocking back onto Harry’s face, setting the pace for Harry’s tongue to follow. Draco’s fists tore at the sheets. Pleasure spiked up his spine. So fucking good! He was so close. He freed one hand to reach between his legs. “Yes... Harry, mine… you’re mine…” he growled. Sharp stabs of pleasure, Harry’s hot mouth and his stabbing, wiggling tongue, the hungry little noises Harry made, god! Thrusting back, pressing Harry’s tongue as deep as it could go, the pleasure rolled through him like thunder. Blinded by stars, Draco spurt clear fluid over his fingers. Head thrown back with a guttural cry, he collapsed onto the bed.

Dazed, thrumming with the orgasm, Draco rolled onto his side to see Harry kneeling on the bed, cheeks red, lips flushed and swollen, hair a mess, and his green eyes blazing. The bond practically screamed with - need desire LOVE. Their magic was still locked, filling the room with a thumping, incomplete power. Draco shivered and gave a slow smile. He shifted so he was lying on his back, his legs on either side of the gorgeous boy.

“Touch yourself, Harry,” he whispered low. “Show me. Show me how good I make you feel.”

Harry whimpered, his eyes falling closed as he touched his stiff member with tentative fingers.

“Open your eyes.”

Harry obeyed and blushed as Draco stared back at him, eyes silver and lazy and happy. Harry practically melted into that look. The taste of Draco on his tongue, the sounds of Draco’s pleasure
still ringing in his ears, the pain throbbing hotly, add to that the soft brush of his own fingers on his
dick and it was nearly enough to send him over the edge. He gave a whole body shudder, flushed
and heated and almost there. Draco watched his every move, his every expression. He was open and
vulnerable and all Draco’s.

Draco’s smiled that small, sweet smile that only Harry saw, and Harry sobbed, overwhelmed with
how much he loved him - would do anything for him… “Not yet,” Draco purred. Harry whimpered
and made his fingers even lighter to keep from cumming, just a feather’s touch, and it was still almost
enough… “Please please please please…” he begged. Magic and pain and desire and love twisted
the air into knots oh god he couldn’t hold back it was coming…

Draco sat up, all languid grace, and gripped Harry’s hips. The tips of his fingers pressed into the
blazing heat of Harry’s ass. The boy tossed his head back with a soft cry, hand frozen as he barely
hung on to Draco’s command to hold it, to wait. Their magic swirled and throbbed, filling the room
with power on the verge of crashing down… Draco licked up Harry’s exposed throat and whispered
into his skin, “Cum, Harry.”

Harry screamed, flinging his arms around Draco’s shoulders and tucking his face against Draco’s
throat as his whole body curled forward. Howling magic broke over them in a wave, making Draco
moan as he clung to his boy. Magic filled them to overflowing, healing their hurts, washing them
clean, and they collapsed in a sweaty, panting heap wrapped in each other’s arms.

“Good boy,” Draco whispered on the edge of unconsciousness. “Good boy, Harry.”

Harry curled in closer to Draco’s sheltering warmth and let sleep pull him under.

**Chapter end.**
Making Plans

Draco led Harry out of the room by his hand. Harry blushed prettily and gave a shy smile to the waiting Narcissa.

Narcissa smiled gently back and stood from the chair that had been placed in the hall. She shrunk the parchment she’d been writing on and tucked it into a pocket in her skirt. “How are you feeling?”

“Much better,” Draco answered. He gave her an easy smile, his blond hair tucked behind his ears and his eyes a warm grey.

“Good.” She ached to reach out and touch her child’s cheek, but she knew better. “You are still not officially cleared to leave the Infirmary, so you’ll have to check in with Healer Pomfrey.”

Draco sighed. “Fine.” As he followed Narcissa down the hall, he asked, “What time is it?”

“It is Sunday, five fifteen in the evening.”

“Dinner will be served soon,” Draco said and glanced at Harry, hearing the boy’s stomach rumble. Harry’s blush deepened, making Draco laugh softly under his breath.

Pomfrey, her grey hair pulled back into a messy bun, looked cross as she straightened her pristine white apron. Her forbidding frown grew even darker when she scanned them and found them in perfect health. Well, except for the superficial bruising on Harry’s buttocks. She gave Narcissa a very disapproving look, but Narcissa returned it with icy composure, completely unruffled. Unfortunately, it was not within Pomfrey’s authority to criticize her parenting. Both boys bore new scars - Draco’s back where he’d been burned and Harry’s scalp where it had impacted stairs. Harry’s memory loss also remained, but otherwise they were in perfect health. There wasn’t even a trace of the healing spells and potions that had been in their systems not three hours ago.

“Ah, my boys, it’s good to see you up and about!” Dumbledore said with cheer, arriving at the end of their examination. His robes were a soft gold with green vines along the bottom hem and sleeves. Draco snorted as he noticed the small white flowers tucked into the old man’s waist-long beard. “Your bond is an amazing thing.” He chuckled. “It is a good thing your magic was accepted by Hogwarts and absorbed into the walls or I dare say the whole castle would have felt it. As it is, only myself and Minerva were able to feel the boost to the wards.”

Pomfrey humphed. “Channeling powerful magic while recovering from injury is dangerous,” she informed them with deep disapproval.

Everyone in the room ignored her.

“Can we go?” Draco asked, bored. Harry was hungry.

“Yes, of course, of course,” Dumbledore answered jovially, but then his face took on a serious cast. “Be careful, my boy. Don’t do anything that would land you in trouble.”

“I won’t,” Draco promised. He’d be very sure his revenge wouldn’t be traced back to him. Looking up at Narcissa, he gave her a grateful smile. “Thank you for coming and looking out for us. Tell Lucius I’ll take care of it.”
Narcissa inclined her head. “Write often.”

“We will.”

“Bye, Narcissa,” Harry called softly as Draco tugged him to the door. His beautiful green eyes were soft and filled with contentment behind his round black glasses. “Love you.”

Narcissa teared up and gave him a wave as the boys disappeared back into the school.

...  

They were the first to arrive in the Great Hall. Harry sat next to Draco at their usual table and winced as his butt came in contact with the hard wood of the bench. Draco watched through half-lidded eyes as the boy squirmed before finally resigning himself to the painful ache and sitting still. Harry ducked his head, feeling Draco’s eyes on him - regret determination. Draco slid his fingers down Harry’s jaw and hooked his chin, gently lifting it up. “Good boy,” he said softly.

Harry stared at him with wide eyes - disbelief longing.

Smiling softly, Draco whispered it again, “Good boy. You took your punishment and made me feel so good. It’s over, Harry. You did good. You’re forgiven. I love you.”

Harry felt happy tears fill his eyes and he leaned into Draco’s touch, accepting Draco's kiss on his lips - love acceptance peace.

Kids began entering the hall. Voices dropped to whispers as soon as they saw Harry and Draco sitting alone at the Gryffindor table. Draco idly wondered what rumors were being spread about them. Percy would be paying attention to the gossip and would report back to him later. It wasn’t long before their group started arriving. They walked in gloomily, their steps slow, their heads downcast. Hermione noticed them first. She said something and then came running over. Draco smiled and accepted the excited clasps on his shoulders from Dean, Seamus, and the Weasley twins. Harry received a more thorough welcome. The girls touched his shoulders and arms while the boys pounded on his back. Hermione even touched Harry’s hair. Harry blushed at the attention, but his mask was in place and he smiled up at them, hiding the pain of being jostled on his bruised bottom.

Draco cleared his throat. “We’re fine, guys. Sit down so we can eat.”

As the group began to sit down at the table, giving them some space, Draco noticed that Ron had held back and that Neville was missing. He frowned at Hermione. “Where’s Neville?”

Her happy expression shifted to something more sad. She shook her head, her frizzy hair hitting Harry in the face. “He won’t come down. He thinks it’s his fault.” Her eyes shifted to Ron before looking back at Draco adding, “Harry probably wouldn’t have been hurt if you were there.”

Ron winced and sunk even lower on his seat.

Draco inclined his head slightly to let her know he understood that he had to deal with Ron. He also had to deal with Neville, but Hermione probably didn’t understand that or she’d have worded her answer differently. They ate dinner, listening as the twins and the others filled them in on what they’d missed. Apparently Ron and Harry had heard from Hagrid about the first ever break-in at Gringotts. Weird thing was, the thief had broken in to an empty vault. What were the odds? Raul, the Sixth-year Gryffindor bully, had congratulated Neville on a job well done earlier that afternoon, which was why Neville was hiding now. They had gotten their homework mostly done and offered to let Harry and Draco copy for tomorrow’s classes.
After dinner, they went back up to the common room. Draco maneuvered through their group to grab Ron’s wrist. He held it loosely, but the redhead still winced. “Can I talk to you for a minute?”

Ron didn’t answer one way or another, but he followed Draco up the stairs. Harry trailed after them, saying goodnight to the others. In their dorm, Neville was sitting on his bed. His fat toad sat next to him, croaking sadly. Neville looked pale and exhausted. He stared dully as Harry carefully shut the door behind them and moved to the side, his head submissively bowed. Draco spun and faced Ron.

“So who did it?” he demanded lowly.

Ron fidgeted. “I don’t know… not for sure.”

Draco shoved him hard in the chest, making Ron stagger and his back hit the door with jarring force. He stared at Draco with wide, frightened eyes. “Don’t give me that shit,” Draco hissed. He stalked up to the slightly taller boy, eyes glittering. “You were right there and Harry almost died. I want a name.”

“I thought it was this Slytherin kid, a Third-year named Pucey,” Ron yelled, tears filling his eyes. “He was standing there smug as hell, staring down at us before everyone else rushed over, but he was one floor above where Harry fell, so it had to be by magic if it was him, and they checked his wand and everything and there was no proof! So I don’t know okay!”

Draco waited a moment to let the redhead’s tears slowly dry on his cheeks. “Okay,” he answered softly and backed off.

Ron stared at him in shock. “That’s it?”

Draco lifted an eyebrow, half his hair falling to frame his face. “You’ll be more careful next time,” he stated darkly. It almost sounded like a threat.

Ron swallowed and nodded. He looked over at Harry. “I’m really sorry, mate. I’m… I’m glad you didn’t die.”

Harry lifted his head and gave him a beautiful smile. “Thanks, Ron.”

Ron blushed, his freckles disappearing under the wave of red, and shifted awkwardly again. “So… can I go?”

Draco nodded, his attention was already on Neville. He hardly noticed as Harry and Ron shared a few more words before Ron slipped out of the room. Neville wore an expression very similar to Harry’s - wide-eyes full of pain and need, pale with flushed cheeks, trembling lips. It tugged at his insides. Draco walked slowly up to the boy, leaving only a few inches between them. Neville had ducked his head as soon as Draco had started moving toward him, his pale hands clutched at the sheets. Draco slowly slid his school robe off his shoulders to pool at his feet. Then he began to unbutton his shirt. Neville’s breath hitched, but his head remained down. Draco turned, displaying his back.

“Look.” It was a command and he felt Neville’s eyes slowly lift. He glanced over his shoulder to see the boy looked close to passing out. Horror was written across his face. *Harry, show him.*

Harry came away from where he stood by the door and went to them. He sat next to Neville and gave him a sweet smile. “These are from the Hold where Draco was before we met.” He gently traced one of the whip scars. “This was from your potion.” He traced the outline of the splotch of scar between Draco’s shoulder blades.
Neville whimpered. Tears streaked his face. “I-I’m s-s-sorry…” he rasped.

You didn’t do it on purpose… He’d probably heard that a hundred times from Hermione already. It was an accident… equally useless. It wouldn’t even touch the guilt Neville felt. He didn’t want it explained away, but maybe not even Neville understood what he did want… what he needed. But Draco did. Neville needed atonement so that he could feel forgiven.

Draco turned and faced the chubby boy with the round cheeks and guilty brown eyes. He bent forward, putting their faces close together as he fisted the other boy’s thick hair. “You were careless. You were afraid and made a mistake. It got me hurt. Added to my scars.”

Neville winced. He didn’t even try to escape the blond’s hold. He stared up at him almost desperately. “Yes,” he sobbed.

“You’re gonna make it up to me.” Draco smiled, slow and dangerous. His fist tightened, making the boy whimper in pain. “You’re going to do our homework for tomorrow and then you’re going to start studying potions. You’re going to study it until you make the perfect potion. To apologize.”

“Yes, sir…” Neville’s eyes widened at the words that spilled from his lips. Draco was the same age as him. He was smaller than him even, but for some reason it felt right on a deep level to call him that.

Draco’s eyes softened. “Good.” He released Neville and gently brushed his fingers over the boy’s damp cheek in reward. “Get to work.”

Neville scrambled off the bed, past Harry, to his school bag discarded in the corner.

Harry began to pick up Draco’s clothes.

“I’m going out of a bit. Stay here.” Draco’s eyes flashed over his shoulder as he pulled on a sweater to wear over his jeans.

“Yes, Draco,” Harry answered easily.

Neville nodded with a hot blush.

“Good,” Draco repeated, almost purring.

Both of the boys flushed with pleasure at the blond’s praise.

Leaving his dorm mates, Draco searched for Percy. He wasn’t in the common room, so he went down to the study Percy had shown him before. Sure enough, the older teen was waiting for him. He was writing an essay at the desk and smiled as Draco approached.

“How are you feeling?” Percy asked quietly.

“Good as new,” Draco answered. He stood next to Percy’s chair, facing the teen, with his back to the corner of the desk. He leaned back against it. They were about eye level with Percy sitting and Draco standing. “What’s the word?”

Percy pushed his glasses higher up his nose. “Some people think it was just an accident. The rest think it was the Slytherins although no one knows who. Nott’s name has been bandied about. The rumor is he was jealous that Harry made the Quidditch team because of the stunt during flying class. Some people are saying the potions accident was rigged somehow to get you out of the way. All part of a Slytherin plan. I kept my eye on Quirrell, but he didn’t do anything out of the ordinary.”
Draco hummed. He glanced down at Percy’s essay. “Can I borrow parchment? I need to write a letter.”

Percy got some out of his bag and relinquished his seat so the blond could sit. Percy leaned his hip against the desk as he watched Draco pen a quick note. He didn’t try reading it. He’d learned over the years that sometimes it was for the best not to know everything. Still, a question burned on his tongue and slipped past his lips no matter how much he tried to hold it in.

“So was it Pucey?” Ron was his little brother. He knew who he’d fingered. He had practically screamed the accusation in front of dozens of witnesses when Harry had fallen.

Grey eyes looked up at him curiously. “You know it was.”

Percy bit his lip for a split second before continuing. “There were a lot of people on the landing, Draco. He wasn’t the only one smirking. His wand turned up clean. Are you sure?”

Draco frowned. He put the quill down and sat back in the chair. “Slytherins have a lot of ways of covering things up. He’s a Third-year. I’m sure he could manage it. He also made a threatening statement about Malfoys hooking up with Potters at the robe shop. We also know he’s very firmly on the Dark side. He saw an opportunity and took it. It was violent and impulsive. Not many other people are capable of that. On top of that, Ron was there and his instincts told him it was Pucey. People always forget we’re animals on a basic level. Instincts are often correct.” He stood and pushed at Percy’s chest with the palm of his hand, warningly. His eyes glittered dangerously as he stared up at the older teen. “I won’t let bastards like Pucey get away with shit because they know how to work the system. Society may need proof, but I don’t.”

Draco’s words were full of double meaning. Percy had been a helpless Third-year when he’d been molested and eventually raped. It was always at night while everyone else slept and he’d always passed out afterward. When he woke in the morning, drenched in sweat and terrified, there had been no marks, no evidence. It was _impossible_ for a man to break into the dorms. Without proof, no one would have believed him, but Draco had believed. More than that he had done something about it. It made no rational sense. It shouldn’t have been possible that a kid four years younger than him could protect him from dozens of miles away, but Draco had. Percy hadn’t been touched since. Just as Draco had promised. So as unrealistic as it may seem for Draco to know who did this to Harry, Percy had to believe he did.

“Okay,” he allowed, ducking his head. His posture relaxed as he submitted. “What do you need me to do?”

Draco eyed him for a long minute before nodding. He sat and finished his letter. He rolled it up and held it between his fingers, staring up at Percy through his lashes. “Mail this for me.”

Percy nodded his head. “Okay,” he said again as he accepted the parchment. “Be careful. If you get caught, you’ll end up dealing with the Aurors.”

Draco snorted. He thought very little of the magical government and its law enforcement. “Yeah. I’ll be careful.”

Percy packed up his essay, ink, and quill and put his bag over his shoulder. “I’ll go to the Owlery now.”

Draco said nothing as he watched Percy leave. He didn’t like all this doubt about his ability to protect Harry. He’d have to make sure his revenge was executed perfectly, so that everyone thought twice about attacking Harry again and so that Percy and those he intended to protect never doubted him.
Remus got up from the small dining nook in the cottage in Hogsmeade he’d purchased almost two years ago to open a window. A barn owl swooped in, a rolled up parchment in its beak. “Hello, there,” he cooed softly, stroking its feathers.

The cottage was small: two bedrooms and a full bath upstairs, a sitting room, kitchen with attached dinning nook, and a laundry downstairs. It was set far back from High Street on the edge of the town and backed into the mountains where Hogsmeade had been placed. It was an all-magical village set above and to the south of Hogwarts. The main road led to the school on one end and ended at the train station at the other.

He made the walk to Hogwarts and the Whomping Willow every month. He could have walked to the Shrieking Shack from his cottage in minutes, but he didn’t want any of the villagers to see him go in and get suspicious, so he used the tunnel from the school. Plus, he liked to patrol the school’s boarder. It was useless. He couldn’t do much in the great scheme of things to protect anything or anyone, but his instincts still drove him to try.

It made him feel both satisfied and restless to know the boys were now so close. He unrolled the letter, wondering what Muggle things they needed now, and his smile fell. His gut clenched and he had the urge to growl. Someone had hurt Harry and Draco needed help punishing the guilty person.

He strode to the fire in the sitting room and threw the letter in. He’d leave nothing to incriminate Draco. He grabbed his jacket and house keys and strode out into the night. He had a few errands to run.

Harry, sweetie, I’m sorry we had to leave you so soon, but Denebola was not comfortable in Hogwarts. The longer we were there the more restless she became. Perhaps she is sensitive to the magic of the school. I can only hope she’ll either grow out of it or more in control as she gets older. It would be a shame if she could not attend.

The healer assured me you would be well and Draco promised the same. More importantly, Narcissa refused to leave your side. I knew she would make sure you are safe there. It was the only thing that made me feel comfortable enough to go. The next time I have need to come to Hogwarts, I’ll leave little Denebola with Remus in Hogsmeade.

Ted sends his love. Denebola tried to eat the edge of this parchment, so I take that to mean she also misses you. Be careful, Harry. The world is filled with troubled people. Be on your guard, but do not let it get in the way of your happiness. Draco, I know you are reading this, too. This advice goes for you as well. Don’t let this ruin your experience at Hogwarts or let it land you in trouble.

Congratulations on your Sorting to Gryffindor, both of you! And on making Seeker, Harry. The youngest in a century! And Draco as reserve! I know you two will accomplish so many great things. I’m very proud of you.

All my love,

Andromeda Tonks

Harry handed the letter to Draco and returned to his breakfast. Draco read it quickly and tucked it into his bag. Neville had written the homework due for today’s classes three times and given them...
each one so that they’d be ready. They had Xylomancy, Potions theory, lunch, DADA theory, and their Charms practical. It was definitely going to be a busy day.

They spent the first half of Xylomancy opening themselves to the universe and magic. Hermione and most of the boys were very suspicious and embarrassed by this process, but the other girls took it seriously. Even tomboys Fay and Kell. Harry, of course, approached all of their classes with earnest concentration while Neville was always nervous. Draco tried his best to block out his roommate’s low level anxiety, Ron and Seamus elbowing each other, Dean’s snickering, and Hermione scoffing. He let Professor Mopsus’s deep voice roll over him.

Their professor chanted in a foreign language before transitioning to English. He asked for enlightenment and wisdom, asked that his pupils be given signs and messages that they could understand. As the minutes dragged on, the class grew more calm and slowly became still. There was a hypnotic quality to the man’s voice and it even seemed that his one blue eye seemed to glow while the brown one seemed to grow darker.

They were told to partner up and wander the grounds to look for twigs, fallen branches, or driftwood to examine. Slowly the class grew more animated as they left Professor Moss’s vicinity. They began to laugh and play. In contrast, Draco remained quiet and wandered away from the group toward the forest edge with Harry in tow. Draco felt almost meditative. He walked with no direction, no thought. Just let impulse guide him. He felt at peace like when he got Occlunding just right, but without the sense of effort or strain that it took to maintain. It was effortless.

The morning was crisp, an autumn chill in the air. Clouds hung toward the north, threatening rain. They walked in silence for several minutes, just taking everything in. They found a fallen tree limb just out of sight of the lake and Hagrid’s hut. It had fallen on a rock and the base had cracked before tumbling to the side. The leaves were dry and dying, but one side of the branch had more, the other was barren.

As Draco stared at it, he could feel something. Like the branch had fallen according to a pattern in the universe and not randomly. It felt significant in a weird way. As if from a distance he could hear Harry drawing what they had found as best he could in the Muggle notebook Remus had mailed them that morning. Minutes passed and Draco continued to stare enraptured. Eventually Harry began to quietly flip through their textbook, trying to look up meanings that matched the branch they had found.

“The rock represents conflict,” Draco whispered lowly, almost as if he were half-asleep. “There are two paths from that conflict. One that leads to…” He groped for the word, but it wouldn’t come. Instead he gestured at the thin, naked twigs on the leafless half of the branch. “The other is more… full of possibility.” He gestured at the side of the branch that still had leaves, dying as they were.

“Very good, young Malfoy,” Professor Mopsus walked up the hill and stopped at their side. He also stared at the branch. “It is clear one path is more favorable than the other,” he agreed, voice low and soothing.

Draco nodded thoughtfully. “Thank you, Professor.” He gave a respectful bow of his head and took Harry’s hand.

The bell had sounded. Class was over.
Hermione was very surprised when Neville quietly asked to use the individual desk in Potions. It wasn’t a practical, it was only theory, but Neville wanted to make it clear that he was studying hard as Draco had told him. The image of Draco’s scar haunted him. He was desperate to get that weight off his chest, to breathe freely again. He didn’t deserve it and he was bound to mess it all up, but he couldn’t help striving for forgiveness anyway.

Ron was equally surprised when a huffy Hermione came to be his partner. He stared at her like she had three heads or something until she gave him a glare that could have melted a glass cauldron. He quickly turned his attention to the lecture and his notes after that. As the class wore on, he grew increasingly uncomfortable and aggravated. The girl kept making soft tsking noises and would reach over to actually draw an X over some of his words because he got the note wrong. It was aggravating as hell. He could fix his notes later himself, thanks! She made him feel like an idiot, so he of course hated her by the end of class. He shoved everything messily into his bag, glared at her when she opened her mouth to lecture him, and stormed out of the class.

Draco stared as the flushed and embarrassed Hermione snapped at Neville to, “Hurry up!” He frowned. The girl was clearly upset and he didn’t like how that threw Neville off balance. The boy began to stutter and actually tripped over his own shoe lace in the hall, spilling his things everywhere. Draco tensed to intervene, but instead of screaming at the flustered boy, Hermione dropped to her knees and helped him clean up with tears on her cheeks. Draco hurried Harry past them, preventing him from helping. He knew that would only make Hermione more embarrassed and likely piss her off again.

Draco sent Harry on to the table with the order to cool Ron down if he could and waited for the twins. He didn’t have to wait long. He gave the teens a friendly smile and asked, “Can I talk to you a moment before lunch?”

“Of course,” George answered ecstatically.

“You’re our favorite trouble-maker, after all,” Fred agreed with a huge grin.

They pulled him into a broom closet a few doors down from the Great Hall. Draco brushed his hair out of his eyes, sandwiched between the two Third-years. His chest was pressed up against George’s chest while Fred pressed up close to his back.

“What can we do for you?” Fred asked, giggling.

“Isn’t so tight in here when it’s just us,” George admitted ruefully.

“He looked smaller before we crammed him in here with us,” Fred agreed and rested his chin on the top of Draco’s head.

Draco shrugged him off as best he could. “I have a revenge plan in play, but I had to make a little adjustment. Instead of having it go off in the Great Hall, it needs to happen in the Slytherin Common room. I got a few friends who can help me with opening the portrait, but do you have any advice on how to get there from Gryffindor Tower and not get caught? The portraits are all more alert than normal. I never see them sleeping now.”

“Dumbledore’s not messing around,” George said wryly.

“He was pretty furious that Harry was hurt,” Fred sighed and leaned as far back as he could, trying to give the blond space.

“You should have heard his lecture Saturday night at dinner…” George trailed off and met Fred’s
eyes. Silent communication passed between them.

Draco waited impatiently. It was getting hot crammed in here with these two.

“Should we, Forge?” George finally asked out loud.

“I think we should, Gred,” Fred agreed.

“We haven’t even let our dorm mates see what we’re going to show you,” George whispered, staring intently down into Draco’s eyes.

“You gotta swear to keep it secret,” Fred added and gripped Draco’s shoulders tightly.

The flashback came hard and fast, nearly making him throw up, but before it could come clear, the spell Snape had taught him snapped into place, distancing him from the memory and giving him back control. Draco forced himself to stay still. It felt like all the air had been knocked out of his lungs. Sweat beaded his face, his hands shook, and he felt nauseous as all hell, but he could hide it.

“Of course. I swear I’ll never reveal what you show me,” he promised after a few seconds, voice even.

“That room you go to with Percy sometimes. Go there tonight. Midnight,” George whispered and burst out of the closet with dramatic force.

Fred tumbled after his twin, laughing and carrying on.

Draco stepped over the brooms and mops calmly, but his face was pale.

Harry knew something wasn’t right without Draco saying a word. He hovered at Draco’s side and became loud and friendly, drawing everyone’s attention away from Draco’s withdrawn, disconnected behavior. Draco made it through lunch, DADA, and Charms. He even made it through dinner, but he could feel his control slipping. The spell wouldn’t last much longer. Harry made a big deal about his stomach hurting, giving Draco the perfect chance to disappear with Harry up in their room. Harry had managed to whisper in Neville’s ear, asking him to give them an hour or so before he came up to bed. The boy had agreed.

Draco collapsed to his knees just inside their dorm room. He hugged his torso, his control slipping as a violent and painful memory trembled deep in his mind, ready to consume him. Harry didn’t try to touch him. He knelt at Draco’s side and spoke lowly, softly. “You’re okay, Draco. No one’s going to hurt you. You’re safe now. I’m here…”

Draco gave a full body shudder and curled over his knees, forehead pressing hard into the floor. He bit his lip hard enough to make it bleed, trying to keep in his screams… He was there. In the Hold. In the dark, damp swaying. Men came barreling down the stairs. They never came down. Not since Draco had taken over. They were fast but strangely quiet. They pried up boards that made up the floor, revealing dark squares. Like tiny coffins. The men gagged the crying children. Tied their hands behind their backs. Tied their ankles. Then they started shoving the tussled-up kids into the holes before putting the boards back into place. Shutting them in.

Draco was yanked forward. He stared with empty eyes as his hands were quickly and efficiently bound. He knew what was coming. His heart hammered in his chest. The bruises and welts felt icy cold against his skin. His ankles were tied. The gag came toward his face. No. Not that. He already couldn’t breathe. His chest was tight with terror. The smell of piss filled the air. A few kids had wet themselves in fear. He shook his head as the gag pressed at his mouth. The man grabbed a fistful of his hair and brought their faces together.
“You make a sound. The smallest sound. I’ll take you apart piece by bloody, screaming piece,” he growled, his breath hot and heavy against Draco’s face.

Then he was grabbed by his shoulders from behind. The grip tight and heavy. He was shoved in the box with three other kids. Skin against his, warm, wet, wiggling. Pressed in tight. An elbow in his gut, hands scratching at his hip, a knee pressed against his balls, his cheek against a boy’s shoulder, the rub of a girl’s gag rough against his back. They were all naked and terrified. The boards came down and it went pitch black.

He could hear the muffled gasps of the kids pressed against him, on him, beneath him. Feel it as if they were his own. Every breath was a struggle, their lungs labored around him. Piss dripped on his skin, stung his marks. Draco didn’t make a sound. His hands worked, dug into skin, drew blood, as if trying to claw his way out, but they were useless, bound at the small of his back, pressed into another kid’s body. The girl behind him strained against him. He could taste her panic, her terror. She thrashed as much as she could with being pressed in so tight. Then she went rigid and then still.

Draco shuddered. He knew. Knew she was dead. He gulped in the tainted air. It felt thinner. He couldn’t breathe. Oh god get me out of here I can’t breathe I’m going to die get them off oh god please get them off me…

“… please come back. I’m right here, Draco. With you. You’re okay. You’re safe…”

Harry’s voice. Draco slowly cracked open his eyes. He realized he was digging his forehead into the rug, his arms wrapped tight around him as he curled into a painful ball on the floor. His face was soaked with tears and sweat. His clothes clung to his body. Muscles stiff, he carefully uncurled and gasped in air, desperate to breathe again. He was shaking.

Harry lovingly helped him to his feet and stripped him of his clothes. He wrapped Draco in a robe and towed him to the bathroom. There, Harry washed him in cool water before bundling him back up and taking him back to their room. Neville was there. He watched them worredly, but he didn’t say anything. Only Harry’s soft sweet voice filled the room. Talking about nothing, just a soft voice in the darkness.

Draco was pulled into bed. When he tensed at Harry’s touch, the boy carefully gave him enough space so they wouldn’t touch during the night. Numb, Draco fell into a deep, dreamless sleep. He never made a sound.

Chapter end
Revenge

Harry woke Draco with soft kisses. He’d cracked open their bed hangings and let in the lamp light to dance and flutter over them. Draco sighed, tension leaving his frame as he pulled Harry against his chest. Their lips slid sensually and slowly against each other, Draco’s tongue taking languid swipes at the inside of Harry’s mouth. His hands tangled in Harry’s thick, messy hair as they kissed, scratching gently at the boy’s scalp and making him shiver. It felt amazing to have Harry’s warm, pliant body pressed against his. It felt like home and comfort.

Sighing again, Draco broke their kiss, trailing his wet lips along Harry’s jaw. His hands tightened in his boy’s hair, lifting Harry’s head so that he could get to his throat. Harry gave a soft whine as Draco bit down on his leather collar. *Love you,* he whispered into his boy’s mind.

- joy LOVE - poured through the bond like warm syrup.

“What time is it?” Draco whispered, hands exploring Harry’s naked back and sides.

Harry pulled away to reach for his glasses and Draco’s watch. It had been a gift from Ted for Draco’s eleventh birthday. It had a thin black leather band and a round silver face. The background was a light emerald green in color, nearly the exact shade of Harry’s crystalline eyes. The numbers were roman numerals and the hands were thin and delicate with a spade-like shape at each tip. Draco didn’t prefer to have things around his wrists or fingers, but he’d taken to wearing the watch once they’d started Hogwarts. Harry read it carefully and answered, “Quarter to six.”

Draco sat up and ran his hands through his hair with a frustrated frown. He’d missed his midnight meeting with the twins! He wondered how upset they’d be if he went and woke them up now. Mentally shrugging, he decided to find out. “You have Quidditch practice in thirty minutes. Get ready,” he ordered. Quidditch season hadn’t officially started yet, but Wood was running practice for last year’s members twice a week - on Tuesday and Thursday. Once try-outs were held and the season officially kicked off, practice would be five days a week - Monday through Friday morning, six-fifteen to eight. “I’m going to go talk to Fred and George. I’ll meet you at the pitch to walk you to breakfast.” Draco felt safe enough letting Harry go alone. Very few people were awake at this hour and the dust had yet to settle after the last attack. Harry should be safe.

“Yes, Draco.” Harry smiled and happily accepted the last gentle kiss that Draco placed on his lips. He climbed out of bed, but looked back curiously as Draco grabbed his wrist.

Draco crawled to the edge of the bed and sat, lifting Harry’s nightshirt. He ran a hand over the deep purple bruises on each soft butt cheek. It would be a good two weeks before they healed fully. Riding a broom must be painful. Draco looked up at Harry and considered healing it, but the calmness of the green eyes that stared back at him over a soft, round shoulder decided him against it. The bruises hurt, but Harry wasn’t upset about it, and it really was a lesson that Draco wanted Harry to take to heart.

With that in mind, he took a handful of each round cheek and squeezed a bit, making Harry hiss softly under his breath. “Remember to be careful.” Draco whispered against Harry’s neck, the boy’s head bowed submissively forward. “You need to make sure you’re always well enough to heal us if necessary.” He stood and hugged the boy from behind before giving him a gentle shove forward. “Now get ready,” he repeated.
Harry obeyed with another soft, “Yes, Draco,” filled with determination gratitude.

“Good boy,” he murmured and accepted the school uniform Harry handed him.

…

Draco found the twins’ room by stalking silently through the dark dorms one by one. He shook his head in wonder. Not one of the doors had been locked. He wondered briefly what the others would think when they realized they locked their door at night. Draco shook his head. They’d cross that bridge when they came to it. He found the twins in the fourth room that he searched. He smiled when he saw that they shared a bed. They didn’t cuddle, however. One twin was almost diagonal across the mattress, his arms and legs flung wide. The other lay on their side with their arms and legs pulled close. If he had to guess, he bet it was Fred sprawled out and George curled up.

Draco climbed onto the bed with them, kneeling by the teen curled up on his side, and pulled the hangings closed to muffle his voice. He left it cracked toward the top so that some of the lamp light would spill inside. “George, Fred,” he whispered softly in the dark. “Wake up.” The twin closest to him gave a sleepy mumble and pressed his face deeper into the pillow. The one sprawled out curled up, mirroring his brother as he rolled onto his side. “George.” Draco poked the redhead’s shoulder. He was more sure than ever that was who lay next to him. “Wake up, George.”

A brown eye cracked open, the exact same color as their older brother Percy. “Wha?” he slurred.

“Sorry I didn’t meet you. I was… busy. Can we meet now?” he asked gently, grey eyes warm and earnest.

George snaked his arm out and pulled Draco down with an arm hooked around his waist. “It’s okay. Just a dream…” the redhead soothed sweetly. He tucked Draco against his chest, his cheek rubbing sleepily against Draco’s soft, white-blond hair.

Draco laughed quietly. “I didn’t have a bad dream, George, but thank you. Come on, wake up…” He wiggled around so that he faced George and ran his hand over the redhead’s face in gentle swipes from his forehead, over his nose, and back up. “What were you guys going to show me?”

“Show?” George’s eyes blinked slowly open once more only to close again. “Tha’s nice.”

Draco sighed and stopped. He couldn’t imagine going back to sleep when someone was touching him. The twins were weird. He shook the teen’s shoulder a bit more firmly. “Yeah, what were you going to show me?”

George’s eyes opened up and squinted at him. “What time s’it?”

Draco slithered his arm up between their chests and checked his watch. He had to squint in the low light. “Almost six-fifteen.”

“Six…” Fred groaned from behind his brother. “Really. And you’re in our bed, why?”

“I wanted to know what you were going to show me,” Draco explained patiently. “To help me get past the portraits.”

“At six,” Fred repeated grumpily.

“Yes,” Draco said, amused. He still lay in George’s loose embrace, looking into the teen’s sleepy eyes from only a few inches away. “What time do you usually get up?”
“Depends,” George answered in a sleepy whisper. “Is it for a prank?”

“Trust me. It’ll be epic,” Draco promised, voice dark and low.

Fred’s head appeared above George’s shoulder, propped up by his hand. “Fine.” He sat up and stretched, whacking his brother across the back. “Up, George.”

George grumbled, hugged Draco one last time, and sat up. “Fine. I’m up.”

Draco flashed them a winning smile, sitting up with them. “Great!”

Fred climbed out of bed and grabbed something from their trunk. Draco took note that the trunk at least had been locked with at least three spells as far as Draco could tell. It made him relax a little, knowing he wasn’t be seen as strange by the others for locking their dorm door. Not that he cared what anyone thought about him, but he’d come to realize that it sometimes caused more problems than it was worth when they got too much negative attention.

Fred climbed back onto the bed, maneuvering so that Draco sat between him and George. They put their heads close to Draco’s and slowly unveiled their treasure. It was a map. A very, very special map. It was… beyond anything Draco could have conceived. It had every secret passage and everyone in the castle marked out in real time. With wide yes, Draco touched the soft parchment with reverent fingers. He wanted it badly, but he knew they’d never give it up, which made him insanely frustrated for a brief moment before he took a deep breath. At least the map existed at all and the twins would let him use it occasionally. He should be grateful.

The mental pep-talk only did so much. Draco still wanted it, but he was able to relax his shoulders and smile at the twins. “This is brilliant.”

They nodded in unison and echoed with solemn agreement, “Brilliant.”

“How did you figure out the code words to turn it on and off?” Draco asked curiously, eyes bright with excitement, a lock of blond hair falling across his face.

“Well, when it’s off and you speak to it while tapping it with your wand, words appear and talk back,” George explained.

Fred grinned. “After enough experiments, we were able to piece together clues by the end of First-year and voila!”

“We opened the Marauder’s Map,” they said together, clearly proud of themselves.

“Amazing.” Draco forced his hand to drop from the pages. “So what’s your advice?”

They put their heads together and figured out a way to bypass the portraits and get Draco to the Slytherin common room without being seen. In return, Draco described his plan. Fred and George stared at him for a moment before breaking into identical grins. “Epic,” the said together, their voices one.

Just over an hour later, Draco left the twins and trotted happily out to the pitch. Today was going to be a great day. Not only would he get his revenge, it was also Tuesday. Tuesday was one of only two class days where they didn’t have a class with Slytherin. The only other day that happened was Friday. Today they had their Potions intensive with just the Gryffindor First-years, History of Magic and Herbology with Hufflepuff, and their Transfiguration practical with Ravenclaw.

Neville had been studying Potions hard every night, so when they were given a quiz, he answered
two out of three questions right. It still wasn’t an O, but it was passing. When Draco gave him a nod of recognition, it made Neville so happy that he became even more determined to get an O and earn his forgiveness. Hermione, of course, was the only one who answered all three questions correctly. Harry felt terrible, answering only two out of the three correctly. Draco had gotten the same score, but it was because they hadn’t been studying as much as they could be. The rest of the class only answered one right, which was a failing grade.

Professor Binns began his lecture almost as soon as they walked in and concluded over an hour later with, “Another very notable moment in history during this time, children, was the wildcat Gargoyle Strike of 1911. Now, a wildcat strike action is a strike action undertaken by unionized workers without union leadership’s authorization, support, or approval. This is sometimes termed an unofficial industrial action. Wildcat strikes were the key pressure tactic union workers would use against the unjust workforce as well as a complacent union. The wildcats were winning during the Gargoyle Strike of 1911 when something noteworthy happened. I want you to write three inches inferring from what I’ve told you today what that action may have been and include an explanation supporting your hypothesis.”

They staggered out of his class groggy from listening to his ghostly voice and in desperate need of a dictionary. Lunch was just the thing they needed to perk themselves back up and fortunately the following two classes were more hands on. They practiced the Fire-Making Spell in Herbology so that they would be able to handle the Spiky Bush that they would be dealing with in their classes next week.

As a demonstration and to motivate the students, Professor Sprout had brought a potted one into the class. The terrifying bush was small since it was in a pot, and she promised the ones in the greenhouse would be twice as big. The potted plant stood about half their height, but it was three times as wide and almost perfectly round. It had pale yellow spikes growing out of the thick green leaves. Professor Sprout demonstrated its danger by approaching with a fast, violent hand gesture. The yellow spikes were launched through the air with horrifying speed. A quick Incendio and the spikes turned to ash before they impaled the short, chubby woman.

In Transfiguration, they reviewed the transformation formula, which was that the intended transformation was directly influenced by bodyweight, viciousness, wand power, concentration, and a fifth unknown variable. Then they began to try to transform matches into needles. It was surprisingly difficult, but Hermione was again able to master the new spell in a single class period, much to the rest of the class’s frustration and Harry’s shame.

Harry wasn’t proud of his academic progress so far. He needed to do better. He had to find time to study and practice more. He refused to be a burden to Draco. After class, they had almost an hour before dinner, so he asked politely if anyone wanted to join him in the library. Hermione instantly agreed. So did Neville. Draco frowned thoughtfully. “Go straight there and wait for me to get you before going down to dinner,” he decided. “I have something to do.”

Harry agreed, but Hermione bristled at Harry being ordered around.

“He can do what he wants. If you’re so worried, come with us,” she snapped and crossed her arms firmly over her chest.

Draco stared her down, making her blush and scowl. “Harry’s not your concern,” he said lowly. “You have your own problems to worry about, Hermione,” he finished with brutal honesty. They were just into their second week of school and already the rest of the Gryffindor First-years were beginning to avoid her like the plague. Her reputation for being a stuck-up know-it-all was spreading. Hardly anyone except for Neville would willingly partner with her in classes.
Harry and Neville shifted nervously, looking back and forth between their faces.

Hermione glared, but she said nothing.

Draco finally moved his eyes back to Harry. “See you soon.”

Harry’s eyes dropped submissively as he answered, “Yes, Draco.”

* Good boy, * Draco praised in a whisper directly into Harry’s mind.

Harry’s head came back up, a happy flush brightening his cheeks.

Hermione complained about Draco all the way to the library until Harry was able to distract her with their assignments. Their Magical Theory essay was due tomorrow. Harry and Neville had only written half of it, much to Hermione’s horror.

Draco made his way quickly to the owlery. He took out the treats he’d put in his pocket and fed Hedwig some before launching her out the window with the order to go to Remus. He’d given the man enough time to get what he needed ready. Draco perched in the window as he waited for her to return and quickly scratched out the outlines of an essay that was due tomorrow. He didn’t have to wait long. About half an hour later, Hedwig winged back in over his head, dropping a fist-sized box into his lap.

With a dangerous grin, Draco carelessly shoved his essay into his bag and immediately headed back into the castle along the route he’d memorized with the twins early that morning. His heart thundered in his chest. Soon he’d have his revenge. He’d make it clear there would be a heavy cost for attacking who was his. His vision almost tunneled in, he was so focused on his task. Every sound, smell, and shifting shadow registered as he moved silently through the secret corridors and rarely-used back hallways. No portrait saw him. No ghost sensed his presence. Draco was hunting, and he wouldn’t be stopped until he had the blood of his prey filling his mouth.

Heart beating strong in his chest, Draco slipped out of the shadows at the door to the Slytherin common room. A whispered password later, provided by the devious twins of course, he was able to crack the door. Luck was with him, no one was inside, thanks to the Felix Felicis that Remus had bought. Remus had also provided the shrunk crate.

Draco slipped in quickly and went to the nearest dark corner. He pulled the nearly fist-sized wooden box out of his pocket and tapped it three times with his wand. It expanded to almost four times its size. The soft sounds of something moving inside of it could be heard, making Draco grin fiercely. This next part would be tricky. It would require all of his concentration and willpower. Draco summoned the memory of Harry floating limp, blood spilling, face pale as death and found all the determination he needed.

Harry shifted subtly on his chair. The library chairs were harder than the ones in the classrooms or even the Great Hall. Probably to keep students who were studying late into the night awake, but it made his butt ache fiercely. The sharp ache reminded him of the bed digging into his stomach and the repeated blows that struck his burning skin, sending pain shooting up his spine. It made him remember Draco’s tearful eyes and the worry and exhaustion there. Made him remember his failure, but it also reminded him of Draco’s forgiveness and his pride. He’d been proud of Harry.

“Harry,” Hermione hissed, annoyed. She tapped the table in front of him. “You’re clearly tired. Let’s
Harry shook his head, keeping his face averted. He felt unexpectedly raw, his mask slipping from his features. He pulled his transfiguration textbook closer, lifting the muggle pencil more firmly in his hand to take more notes in his composition notebook. He had to study. He had to get better. He had to be strong enough to help Draco.

“Five more minutes,” Neville asked softly, trying to keep the peace.

This was the third time he’d asked for more time and Hermione wasn’t having it, her face painted red with frustration. She had opened her mouth to insist more strongly that Harry put away his books and come eat when Draco strode into the library, distracting her. The blond had his hair tucked tightly behind his ears. It was darker than normal and oily from sweat. He had dust and grime on one cheek and across his forehead, his school robe looked as if it had been hastily brushed off, and the tips of his short nails were dark with dirt underneath.

“What were you doing?” she demanded. It annoyed her to no end that Harry, who just as second ago had refused to go to dinner, had immediately closed his books.

Draco gave her a cool look, his expression hard. He deliberately didn’t answer, instead looking to Harry and grabbing his hand. Hermione glared at the blond’s back the whole way to dinner, ignoring Neville’s every attempt to distract her with conversation.

Percy had been busy carrying out Draco’s request. Throughout the last few days, he’d casually spread the information that Harry had needed seven healing spells and two potions to the right people. He emphasized that, had Harry not been minutes from the Infirmary, he’d likely have died from the fall. That meant by the end of dinner Tuesday night everyone knew about it. He gave Draco a subtle nod as he ate. The blond didn’t acknowledge him in any way and yet Percy knew with certainty that Draco had seen and understood his signal. He smiled down into his soup, content to wait to see what the boy had planned.

Draco positioned himself so that he was standing at the Great Hall doors, supposedly waiting for Harry who had gone back to the Weasley twins to tell them something, when the group of Slytherin Third-years began to leave the Hall after dinner. Draco watched them with hard, predatory eyes. The teens shifted with unease and unconsciously grouped even tighter together as they walked up to the blond, their voices dropping to nervous whispers. When it was clear that Draco was staring at Pucey, the group parted, none of the other teens wanting to stand close to the target of that intimidating stare as they walked past.

Pucey felt almost compelled to meet Draco’s silver-eyed stare. His face went pale and then flushed red with defensive anger. His hands fist ed at his sides and he glared hatefully back at the younger, smaller boy. “What are you looking at?” he spat furiously.

Draco gave a closed-mouth smile that had not an ounce of humor in it. “You know, I heard an interesting legend earlier and it made me think of you.”

Sweat slicked Pucey’s palms, making his clenched fists feel damp. “Yeah?” he blustered. “I don’t fucking care.” He began to stomp past.

“Hogwarts will take revenge on those who make her chosen bleed,” Draco said in a soft, dangerous
voice.

Pucey continued past, pretending he hadn’t heard.

Of course, the few students who still sat near the doors definitely had and excited whispers began to spread across the Hall.

“Sorry, Draco,” Harry said sweetly, smiling as he returned to the blond’s side. “I’m finished.”

“It’s okay,” Draco answered, expression relaxed, the dangerous edge to his features completely gone. He took the slightly smaller boy’s hand in his own. “Come on.”

Deep in the dungeons, the door to the Slytherin common room opened as the first group of kids returned from dinner and triggered a timing spell Draco had painstakingly laid according to Remus’s explicit and detailed instruction. Unwary and oblivious, Slytherins of all ages gathered in the nooks and crannies of the common room. They talked about school, plots, and gossip, relaxing after a long day. Quite a few were talking about Draco’s parting words after dinner.

Exactly an hour after the first Slytherin had stepped into the room, shadows began to shift in one corner of the room as an invisible box began to dissolve. The snakes that had been trapped inside were released, spelled by Remus to target the owner of a particular sock he’d been given. Percy’s informants included the Hogwarts elves and it had been easy enough to get one to give him a sock of Pucey’s with the promise it would be returned.

A scream rent the air as a girl caught the zip of a snake across a green and black rug. Her alarm alerted the others and more cries went up. Pucey, sitting in an armchair in the corner with a few like-minded friends and bitching about Draco-sodding-Malfoy, looked up to see snakes zig-zagging fast across the floor, moving directly toward him.

The boy was able to jerk back in his chair, mouth falling open with a cry, before they were on him. It was that fast. They wound up his legs or launched with surprising force and speed from the ground, latching onto his torso, arms, thighs, and stomach before anyone could lift a wand. A blood curdling scream of pain and fear tore through Pucey’s throat. The bites burned like lava, searing down to his bones, boiling his blood. He screamed again, collapsing and thrashing with desperate terror, completely hysterical. Other screams joined his. Students ran terrified, saving themselves.

Only a few spells were cast at Pucey, his friends trying to help him, but their spells did nothing. Pucey flung himself at the floor, at the coffee table, the armchair, anything, trying to get them off, but the pain was so great he could hardly think, could only draw breath enough to scream and wail helplessly.

McGonagall walked Draco and Ron silently to the Headmaster’s Tower, looking grimmer than ever. Neither Ron nor Draco said a word. Snape was waiting with Dumbledore. Without explanation and without asking a single question, they took the boys’ wands and tested them. Ron stood red-faced, furious he was being suspected of something he had no clue about. Draco merely looked bored. When nothing came up besides the spells they were learning in class, they’d been dismissed just as Pucey had been. Snape gave Draco an intense look as he left the office. It had not been a happy expression, almost thunderous. It made Ron sweat and feel scared, and it hadn’t even been directed at him, but Draco had turned away easily. He didn’t give a fuck about Snape.
Ron gave Draco side-eyed, curious looks all the way back to the Tower, saying only, “Sooo… Pucey’s been attacked,” when they’d reached the portrait.

Draco said nothing, staring at him through almost animalistic grey eyes.

Ron backed off immediately. “Not that the punk didn’t deserve it or that you had anything to do with it,” he muttered. “Just saying.” He sighed in relief when Draco’s gaze left him.

Hermione was waiting for them in the common room. So was most of the House. They had known something serious was up when McGonagall had appeared like the personification of Death and asked for Ron and Draco to follow her immediately. Ron rubbed the back of his head and gave a nervous grin.

“Dumbledore wanted to check our wands. Seems Pucey’s been attacked and since I accused him of hurting Harry…”

Of course everyone clamored to know what had happened, but Ron didn’t know any more than that. The professors hadn’t said, but he could guess it had been bad from their serious expressions.

Hermione slunk close to the blond’s side while everyone was peppering Ron with questions. It wasn’t hard to do. Draco had melded into the background as Ron took the spot light. Harry stood at his side, expression calm, although that didn’t reassure Hermione any. Draco could do no wrong in Harry’s eyes, and it pissed her off that even Neville seemed to think Draco was something special. “You had something to do with it, didn’t you?” she whispered in a tense hiss.

Draco’s eyes flashed as he went from calm to angry in a second. “What’s your problem with me, Hermione?”

She flushed, her chin jutting up as her voice rose to match his. “You came back all dirty before dinner.”

Draco began to yell, gaining the attention of others around them. “So that makes me guilty? My wand came up clean! That should be good enough for you.” He took as step closer and glared dangerously as she held her ground. “I don’t have to explain myself to you or bullies like Raul! You shame the Longbottom name by accusing me without any proof!”

It was a deliberately low blow. She flinched.

Draco held tightly to Harry’s hand and stormed away. He wasn’t really mad, of course. He’d just needed to put her in her place. He admired her mind, but she was pushing against the wrong person. Besides, rumors of their fight would spread and hopefully that would make other people hesitate to accuse him.

- love adoration pride -

Draco smiled as he shut the door safely behind him. A quick spell made sure no one else could get in for as long as the spell lasted. He pulled his boy against his chest as he leaned back against the door and kissed Harry’s lips with nearly brutal force, making them red and swollen. Harry’s whole body throbbed with heat. His butt ached with every hard beat of his heart and it made his heart want to fly out of his chest. He stared up at Draco with complete adoration.

“You’re amazing, Draco.”

Draco preened under the praise, heart thundering as he finally let his triumph free. He walked Harry backward, hands tight in the boy’s black, messy hair. His mouth bit and sucked at Harry’s neck and
collar, knowing what it would do to Harry. *Desire need pleasure* - boomed through their bond, making Draco bare his teeth in a fierce grin. Harry let out the most delicious gasps and moans. He moved backward, obedient and responsive, collapsing back on the bed with Draco on top. Draco immediately began driving his hips into Harry’s with slow, bruising force.

Harry cried out softly as his ass was driven hard into the bed. Pain and pleasure exploded from his center as Draco pressed hard against his cock and rubbed his hips up and down in a slow, maddening rhythm. Whimpering, Harry opened his thighs, welcoming more of the pleasure-pain. *I belong to Draco*, resonated through his whole being as he stared unblinking up at the dominating blond.

Draco growled and bent down, pressing Harry even harder against the bed. Something that had been coiled in his chest finally began to unwind. Harry had been threatened and Draco had finally been able to act to make him safe. Pucey would think hard before ever attacking Harry again. Harry was safe and cared for and *his*. Triumph and a hungry desire rose up from deep in his gut, nearly choking him with the urge to howl in glee. His hands slipped between them and open their belts.

His hips never stopped rocking. He unsnapped their buttons and unzipped them so that their stiff cocks could rub together. The bite of their metal zippers stung their skin with each firm rock forward, making Draco's grin wider and Harry’s gases sweeter. Harry’s whole body began to rock with Draco’s thrusts. His hair splayed messily about his head as he clung to Draco’s shoulders. Draco stared hungrily down into his eyes as Harry panted and moaned, limp under Draco’s possessive, glowing gaze.

“You’re mine,” Draco growled, hoarse and breathless and almost there already. Heat burned through him, his blood thundering through his veins. Harry was *his*!

Draco’s hands reached forward and wrapped around Harry’s throat, the collar pressing into his palms. Harry’s eyes went impossibly wide - *DESIRE need trustlove* - and his mouth fell open, wet and red. A gasped wheeze escaped his constricted throat as Harry’s arms fell limp, hands curled peacefully by his head, submitting to Draco’s force. Draco put his mouth over Harry’s, their lips barely touching. He sucked in Harry’s last exhale, taking it into his lungs, and then clenched his hands harder until Harry couldn’t breathe at all.

Harry’s face instantly went red - *euphoria painpleasure LUST*. Draco continued to stare unblinking into his eyes with that look he got of absolute, silver-eyed focus and Harry couldn’t breathe, was under Draco’s complete control, was going to cum, his vision tunneling, *oh god yours Draco forever please yes yours*. His dick and butt throbbed as Draco continued to rock hard and slow against him, a painful-pleasurable push-pull of strong, thin hips.

The room was practically swirling with their magic, the air damp and heavy like a swamp. Draco’s hips rubbed hard against Harry’s, their skin warm and wet with sweat. He thrilled in the way that Harry made no move to escape or breathe, just lay under his power, trusting and safe and *god Draco was gonna cum so hard all over his boy…*

Harry held his body open and didn’t even twitch to fight Draco’s hold until his body arched involuntarily, green eyes rolling back. Draco watched, hands around a slender throat, enraptured as Harry’s beautiful eyes went unfocused, the boy beginning to lose consciousness. It was all too good. Harry felt like he was coming apart at the seams. Completely under Draco’s control, his lungs screaming for air, his eyes blind, intensifying the sensation of Draco rubbing against his dick *oh god it felt so good*; the sharp sting of their zippers even better, Harry felt the sparks build under his skin, at the tip of his dick, in his nipples, deep in his gut… His mind fuzzing, going dark, body spasming as a wave of pure ecstasy crashed over him, *Draco god YES!*; sending him soaring into lightening-
streaked darkness…

Harry’s eyes fluttered mostly closed, only a sliver of white remaining, as he blacked out and went limp. Draco gasped, excited and so fucking close to cumming, as he felt Harry’s hot cum squirt against his skin. Their magic throbbed and trembled, needing Draco’s orgasm to be complete. Grunting, growling, he released Harry’s throat, snaked his arms under Harry’s back, and hooked his hands on Harry's shoulders, holding Harry's body in place, Draco thrust with sudden brutal speed against Harry’s unconscious body.

Harry’s head rolled limply, Draco’s dick sliding in the warm, slick wetness Harry had produced. Draco choked out a low cry as a wave of pure pleasure crashed down on top him, soaking him from head to toe. His back arched away from Harry’s body, only their hips touching… *MINE!* he howled triumphantly before cumming all over Harry’s stomach. Magic punched outward in an intangible wave, absorbing into the walls.

Dazed, he slid down Harry’s body to his knees, his head pillowed on Harry’s splayed thigh, eyes half-lidded and hardly coherent as he panted and shuddered, mini-explosions continuing to fire through his core. His pants hung open, his skin wet and cooling with their mixed cum, otherwise he was fully dressed. Draco gently stroked Harry’s calf, listening as the boy wheezed in soft, shallow breaths. He shuddered knowing without seeing it that Harry’s throat would bruise if he didn’t heal it. It would ache and burn like hell. It made Draco’s hips jerk reflexively, one last thrust against Harry’s leg at the knowledge that Harry would want the bruises to stay… would want it to swell so that it would hurt every time he swallowed… as a reminder of Draco’s power and lust… In fact, he would be sad when he forced him to heal it.

“Mine,” he whispered once more, content and purring, nuzzling against the inside of the boy’s thigh.

Eventually, he rose to his knees, folding himself over Harry’s damp crotch and pat gently at Harry’s cheeks. The boy began to take deeper breaths and his eyes fluttered open. Harry's thighs flexed and Draco climbed to his feet, leaning over and bracing his hands on either side of Harry’s head. Harry smiled sweetly up at him, foggy with pleasure and warmth, as Draco bent to pepper his face with butterfly kisses, nuzzling and purring and praising him.

- contentment adoration - “Yours,” Harry whispered unprompted, voice wrecked and hoarse.

Draco hummed happily and licked and nibbled at Harry’s jaw.

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Adrian opened his eyes to see the white of the Infirmary. A touch on his hand made him flinch and turn his head to see his mother. She sat beside him, dark eyes solemn. He looked up past her to see his father standing at her side, staring down at him, dressed in his dark robes with his hair slicked back. He was not happy. “Father…” he croaked.

“I’d ask you what you’ve done, but it’s obvious,” Mr. Pucey said softly and Adrian shivered in dread. “You’ve challenged someone before you were ready and now you reap the consequences.”

“Lord Malfoy has turned his attention to our affairs,” Ms. Pucey explained. “We’ve already lost several good clients.”

Adrian bowed his head in shame. “I’m sorry, Father, Mother. I acted rashly. I… I just… Malfoy acts so fucking smug, like he doesn’t know what a disgrace he is to the Cause… and, and Potter was such an easy target, weak and…”
“And guarded by a dragon,” Mr. Pucey hissed, interrupting his son’s babble. He leaned down, putting his face close. “You will stay away from Malfoy and Potter. You will not act on your own again. Or I will bring you home. Permanently.”

Adrian shuddered. He wanted to cry, but he couldn’t. He’d be Crucio-ed for sure if he did. “Y-yes, F-Father…” he managed to stutter and closed his eyes to escape the pain of the bites that still burned as well as his parents’ painful attention.

…

Pucey was missing from class the next day and Slytherin House as a whole was subdued and withdrawn. They stayed well clear of Draco and Harry. Even the First-years who took classes with them kept their head down and mouths shut, even Nott. Of course, the other Houses were confused and suspicious, but Draco merely shrugged when questions came his way.

“Must’ve got what was coming to him. Everyone knows Harry’s special. Hogwarts must think so, too.”

Of course, when no one else was looking, Draco would give the Slytherins the most chilling smile.

It took three days for Pucey to return to class. With his return, information began to leak out of Slytherin House into the rest of the school. Pucey had been attacked by snakes! Nine of them. (Harry needed seven spells and two potions to be healed.) Professor Snape had been alerted to a student of his House in mortal danger and had arrived quickly enough to rush the teen to the Infirmary. Without immediate care, he would have died from snake venom. (If Harry hadn’t been minutes from the Infirmary, he’d have died.)

Rumors spread fast and furious. The upperclassmen from the other three Houses were able to look up several instances where spells embedded in Hogwarts’ wards and foundation spells had attacked intruders without direct manipulation. However, in none of those instances had a student been targeted. It was concluded that it was possible Hogwarts had been behind the brutal attack, but it was also possible it had been someone else.

All eyes turned to Draco as the most viable suspect. Draco had clearly warned, or perhaps even threatened, Pucey that night and he was obviously crazy protective about Harry. Plus, Draco came from a rumored Dark family (not so rumored for those who knew without a doubt the Malfoys were Dark). On the other hand, Draco was a First-year. Dark family or not, could he really do that? He wasn’t showing extraordinary skill in classes, not like that Pleasant girl; he seemed to be an average student overall.

Draco didn’t act guilty of anything, either. He wasn’t strutting or acting suspicious. He’d been interested when the topic had been brought up initially and then dismissive after a few days. He was clearly busy with other things. Like studying and practicing as a reserve Seeker for Gryffindor. He’d also been cleared by the Headmaster, although that didn’t necessarily mean anything. It was clear by the Headmaster’s speech after Harry’s fall that Dumbledore cared about Harry a great deal and had been very upset by the ‘accident’. Dumbledore had also favored Gryffindor from the moment he’d become Headmaster. Maybe he’d let revenge against a Slytherin slide.

… And so the rumors continued.

Chapter end.

Sorry I’ve been off line. I haven't lost interest. I'm just dealing with serious health problems and natural disasters. I promise I will continue to work on this story in my spare time.
Hopefully I'll be able to update more regularly again soon. I'd love your feedback and any well wishes you can spare. I miss you all.
The End of September

Severus stepped near silently into the Headmaster’s darkened office.

“Severus, my boy, any new leads?” Dumbledore asked quietly.

It was late, the Headmaster’s office cloaked in shadows and stillness. Dumbledore stood out the most in the room with his glowing white hair and beard. He sounded tired and yet alert. Severus stepped silently up to the massive desk and placed his hands at the small of his back.

“The snakes were all non-poisonous species. They’d been cursed to create an intense burning sensation and illness with every bite. They had also been spelled to attack a single target, likely from something of Pucey’s - an item of clothing or even blood or hair. The curse would have degraded over time. Pucey was in no real danger of death, only acute suffering. Malfoy has neither the skill nor the means to collect the snakes and then curse them. However, the spell I found on the door is well within Malfoy’s ability. It is my belief that someone provided the boy with the supplies and instructions to set the trap. How he managed to get around the portraits and the password to the common room is still unclear.”

Dumbledore said nothing for a long minute. His face was in shadow so Severus couldn’t get a clear look at his expression. However, his tone was grave when he spoke. “Did you look into his mind, Severus? Do you know for certain he is guilty?”

Severus tilted his head slightly as he considered his answer. “If you are speaking of Pucey, yes. He was guilty. He did not intend to murder Potter, but he did intend great bodily harm. As for the Malfoy brat… Lucius must have trained him. There were the beginnings of Occlumency shields in his mind. I dared not try and surpass them for fear of alerting the brat to my ability. Weasley was genuinely oblivious.”

Dumbledore sighed tiredly once more, settling deeper into the dark as he leaned back in his chair. “Thank you, Severus.”

Severus waited for further comment or instruction. When none was forthcoming, he turned on his heel and left the old wizard to his thoughts. Personally, he was of two minds regarding the whole incident. On one hand, he had to admire Draco’s cunning. His ability to formulate the plan, contact the people he needed to make it happen, and then execute it successfully had been flawless. There was no legal way for the Headmaster to prove it had been him. Just as there had been no legal means to prove it had been Pucey. He also admired the fact that Draco would do whatever it took to protect Harry.

On the other hand… Severus felt cold. He knew without a doubt that this boy of eleven years was capable of murder. Whoever had helped them had made sure the snakes would harm but not kill. Had that person not taken that step, Pucey could well be dead right now. Beyond that, the attack had been designed to leave severe psychological damage in its wake. *Children* had witnessed the brutal attack and had been traumatized. Some would still not enter the common room and were being housed in guest quarters temporarily until their fear could be calmed.

It was clear to Severus: Draco was not a child in the way people thought of children. He was a killer. It was dangerous housing him with other children. It was dangerous leaving Harry in his care. However, war was brewing on the horizon. Realistically speaking, a killer was exactly what they
needed to end the Dark Lord for good and keep Harry alive. Severus would just have to remain watchful and protect the children as much as he could.

Draco was very careful to maintain an aloof demeanor the week following Pucey’s brutal attack. He made sure to craft the perfect amount of ambivalence so that there was never enough certainty to get him in trouble and equally not enough doubt to erase their fear of him. Between the scars seen on his back, the stories of his gruesome treatment for the potion burn (and his lack of screaming), and Pucey’s attack, Draco was quite pleased with the respect and fear he had garnered. It put a small spring in his step that he couldn’t hide completely.

Besides his victorious re-claiming of Harry, he’d only indulged in two small celebrations. For the first, he had softly bumped Percy’s shoulder the day the details of the attack had finally begun spreading to the rest of the school. Draco had given the redhead a meaningful look, lips curled in a subtle smirk. Percy had shaken his head, but Draco could tell his shoulders sat straighter. Victorious, Draco had hummed happily the rest of that night, knowing he’d put the teen’s mind at ease and had proven his ability to protect who was his.

For the second, he had written a letter to Remus.

Remus,

Thank you. You’re amazing at explaining stuff. Your tips on that spell were really useful. I’m definitely going to pass the test now. Harry’s feeling much better, too. Actually, the kid who our friend thinks did it was attacked a few days ago in the Slytherin common room. There’s rumors Hogwarts did it to punish him for nearly killing Harry. Do you think that’s possible? Whoever did it, I don’t think the kid will be hurting anyone anytime soon. The whole school will think twice about hurting Harry now. Some people even think I did it. Can you believe it? How could an eleven-year-old manage something like that? Well, at least its made people back off Harry and me. Even the bullies in Gryffindor I was telling you about. So you don’t have to worry about us anymore. We’re safe now. Thanks again, Remus. You were really helpful. We’ll write again soon,

Draco

Remus had been in a state of constant anxiety until Draco’s letter had come winging to him on Hedwig’s silent wings. He smiled down at the unusually long note. Harry was known to write a lot; Draco usually kept things short and concise. He could practically feel the boy’s victorious exhilaration in the rambling words. He could also sense the boy’s gratitude and care. Remus almost felt like preening. The tension from the last few days fell from his shoulders. The bully had been put in his place, Harry was now safer than ever, and no one had gotten killed. They had won.

Remus leaned back in his chair, tipping it onto its back legs as he laughed. He wished James, Sirius, and Peter were here to… The thought brought his joy crashing to a halt. His chair fell with a loud thud back to all fours. He heeled his heart as pain rushed in. The urge to tip his head back and howl was strong and he shook his head hard to clear it. He lifted the letter and brought it to his nose, inhaling deeply. He had a new pack now. Draco was pleased with him and Harry was safe. That’s all that mattered.

As the pain bled away, Remus stood with purpose and walked to the kitchen stove. He pulled his wand from his pocket and lit the burners. With gold-flecked amber eyes, he set the letter on the flame and watched it burn.
Just as he’d told Remus, the other students began to give Draco a lot more space, which gave him plenty of room to spy on Quirrell. He hadn’t forgotten for a moment the threat the professor posed. Every DADA class, every time he and Harry came too close in the halls, Harry’s head would spike with a dull pain originating from his scar that wouldn’t fade until distance was put between them.

Draco slipped away from the group to spy on him as much as possible and borrowed the map as much as the twins would let him. He watched Quirrell’s footsteps, made note of the places he visited most frequently, the people he talked to most often. He seemed as innocent as Percy claimed, but Draco wasn’t fooled. Then he asked to borrow the map overnight.

The twins had resisted at first, but Draco had managed to convince them, swearing he only wanted to see something and didn’t want to bother them in the middle of the night to check the map. Fred handed the precious parchment over with an unusually stern look. “Don’t you dare go sneaking off with it. Stay in your room like you promised.”

“Or we’ll be out for blood,” George finished the threat. “We can’t afford to have it confiscated.”

“I swear,” Draco promised, meeting their eyes. He would never endanger such an important asset. He just wanted to see what Quirrell did throughout the night.

Just as promised, he curled up against the headboard of his and Harry’s bed, curtains cracked to let in the lamp light. Harry’s head sat heavy with sleep in his lap. He stroked the soft hair under his hand and settled in to watch. Sleep tugged at him as the first few hours rolled by, but Draco pushed through that easily. He was obsessed with discovering the man’s secret, with understanding the exact nature of the threat he posed. Nearing two in the morning, Draco perked up, registering that something was happening.

Quirrell’s name… It began to blur at the edges. Excess ink began to darken around the letters in the man’s name, as if it were bleeding. Draco stared, unblinking, as Quirrell’s name became such a mess of ink that it became illegible for nearly an hour. During that hour, his dot remained smack in the middle of the forbidden third-floor corridor. The ink bled away a little after three, Quirrell’s name became clear again, as the man returned to his quarters at last.

“He’s after whatever Dumbledore’s protecting,” Draco whispered, fingers clenched in Harry’s hair.

Should he tell Dumbledore Quirrell was snooping around? Dumbledore had to know someone kept going to the third-floor corridor, right? Maybe he even knew it was Quirrell already. But what the hell had happened with his name? In the short time that Draco had known about the map, he’d never seen anything like that. As for Dumbledore, there was no benefit yet to tipping his hand and admitting he knew more than he should. It would only force Draco into explaining how he knew stuff. He didn’t want to lose such powerful advantages so early in the game.

Besides, Dumbledore was actively protecting whatever it was, so Draco had to trust that those defenses would hold. In the meantime, he still had to figure out Quirrell’s connection to Voldemort because there was one there beyond a shadow of a doubt. If Draco played his hand just right, he could maybe get some information about Voldemort’s location, current condition, or maybe even some of Voldemort’s weaknesses.

Draco kept watch the rest of the night, but Quirrell stayed in his rooms unmoving. Harry began stirring just before six and Draco smiled warmly as the boy pushed himself to his knees to face him. Draco reached forward, cupping Harry’s sweet face, and left butterfly kisses across his cheeks, the bridge of his nose, and eyelids. “Good morning, Harry,” he murmured.
Draco deactivated the map and tucked it away. Harry knew about it and what it did, and he knew of course that Quirrell was bad due to the headaches and that Draco was keeping an eye on things, but he didn’t need to know about Quirrell trying to get whatever Dumbledore was hiding or about the way his name bled into a glob like it had. There was nothing Harry could do about either and Draco wasn’t going to worry him unnecessarily.

Harry chose their clothes for the day and they got dressed quietly so as not to disturb Neville. They were just about to head to the common room to get some studying done when Neville sat up with a yawn and blinked sleepy brown eyes. “Good morning…” he said softly.

“Good morning, Neville,” Harry greeted. He gave him a worried look. “I’m sorry. Did we wake you?”

“No, I, uh, wanted to ask you something. Before you, um, left.” A slight blush dusted the other boy’s cheeks. His hands tangled together in a show of nerves. “Um, I was, um, wondering if you would come to d-dinner with me tonight, here in the, um, common room to celebrate H-Hermione’s b- birthday…” he trailed off into a whisper, eyes pleading.

Draco considered the request. For the last week, since their fight in the common room, Draco and Hermione had taken to pretending the other wasn’t there, even if they were walking next to each other or sitting across from each other at meals.

“I-I haven’t r-really…” Neville stuttered quickly, clearly taking Draco’s thoughtful silence as reluctance or refusal, “tried to, um, do a birthday for someone else before. H-Hermione wasn’t a- adopted until last, uh, December, so this is the first b-birthday I’ve been able to, um, celebrate with her and I w-want it to be special because she, um, really made me feel s-special on my b-birthday in July…”

Harry gave an excited smile. “My birthday is in July, too. July 31st.” He glanced at Draco for confirmation. He’d had six birthdays so far and it still felt unreal that he’d even have one like everyone else.

Neville’s eyes widened and he smiled, some of his nerves falling away. “Mine’s July 30th.”

Draco shook his head fondly at the two smiling boys. He put his hand on top of Harry’s head and ruffled his hair, saying, “We’d love to join you, Neville. Hermione and I may not always get along, but we’re friends.”

Neville’s eyes went wide once more. “T-Thank you, Draco!”

Draco inclined his head and tugged Harry to the door. “I’ll leave the details to you, then.”

“O-Of course! I’ll make sure everything is ready!” Neville called as Harry pulled the door shut behind them.

Draco asked Harry to keep him awake throughout the day and the boy dutifully poked and prodded the blond when it looked like Draco’s eyes were getting too heavy. It wasn’t really the ideal time to try and make-up with Hermione, but when was life ever ideal anyway? Grumpy and grumbling, Draco nonetheless arrived in the common room dressed in what Harry had picked out: a silk, white shirt and blue blazer with red cuffs that was tailored to fit him perfectly.

Harry had also dressed up. He’d chosen his black lace, high-heeled shoes, thigh-high silk socks with slender semi-elastic bands encircling his thighs to hold them up, black pleated shorts, dark blue shirt,
black vest, and thin bow tie with the loops hanging nearly halfway down his chest. Draco reached out to thumb the line on Harry’s soft thigh where skin ended and silk began.

“You look amazing,” he whispered, voice husky, eyes heavy.

Harry blushed prettily. “Thank you, Draco.” He looked up through his long lashes. “You look amazing, too.”

Draco gave a soft laugh and took his boy by the hand, leading him to the common room.

Neville and Hermione were already there. Neville had pulled a table in front of the fire and covered it with white tablecloth. He pushed four chairs up to it. They didn’t match of course, some were higher than others, but it was cozy. Hermione looked up at them in surprise when she saw them come down. She’d thought they had already gone to dinner and it would just be her and Neville. Her eyes grew even wider when she saw that they were dressed up.

“Harry! You look… Wow!” she exclaimed, cheeks red.

Draco smirked as Harry smiled happily.

“Thank you. You look nice, too, Hermione. Happy birthday,” he said politely, giving the girl a graceful bow.

Neville blushed in shame, wishing he’d thought to dress up. He’d been so focused on dinner, he hadn’t even thought to put on his dress robes. He glanced at Hermione out of the corner of his eye and thought maybe it was okay that he hadn’t dressed up because Hermione hadn’t either and he knew she was sensitive about being different or the odd-one out. They both wore comfortable sweaters; Neville in his school slacks, Hermione in a knee-length skirt. Hermione had also pulled her hair back into a low ponytail, revealing more of her face than she normally did.

“Happy birthday, Hermione,” Draco echoed and gave a half-bow that was just as graceful as Harry’s if not as deep.

Hermione was too surprised to answer.

Neville beamed happily at them. “Thank you for coming. Have a seat.”

Hermione and Neville were already sitting across from each other, so Draco and Harry separated and sat in the remaining chairs. As soon as they were sitting, four soups and sets of silverware appeared before them.

“I spoke to the House Elves,” Neville confessed.

“It’s my favorite,” Hermione murmured, carefully lifting the spoon.

“I think that’s going to be a theme tonight,” Draco told her dryly, a smirk curling the corners of his mouth.

Hermione ducked her head, smiling. “True.”

They ate mostly quietly. They shared a few murmured comments about school work, but that was about it. Halfway through the main course, Draco rolled his eyes. There was a huge elephant in the room and Draco was sick of avoiding it. “So, Hermione, what did you usually do for your birthday before coming to Hogwarts?” He met her surprised eyes with a serious stare.
A heavy silence fell around them before Hermione straightened her shoulders. “I didn’t have many friends, so my parents would usually take me on a vacation for a few days. I had such good grades I could always make up any work from school later. We’d go to France or Spain. Somewhere in Europe anyway.” She spoke in a strong voice, but her lips trembled and her eyes grew wet. “They were really busy, you know. Because they were both doctors, so traveling for my birthday was always pretty special. They’d be in such good moods and tease me and stuff. They… they thought me pretty odd, I guess, but… I think they loved me.”

“Of course they loved you,” Neville spoke fiercely, all nervousness gone. “They were your parents.”

Hermione gave him a wobbly smile. “We… We were all pretty surprised when the Ministry came and said I was a Muggleborn. They evaluated us for a month and decided my parents wouldn’t be able to provide an environment that would nurture my magical development. They… They were made to forget me and I… I was spelled to forget their names and address… so I wouldn’t be tempted to try and go back. They couldn’t erase them completely from my mind, though, because that would be too damaging, so… I still remember them a bit. Things like traveling for my birthday, anyway…”

“How’d you end up with the Longbottoms?” Harry asked quietly. He could tell she needed to talk about it, but he didn’t want to make her feel like he was pushing. “If you don’t mind my asking?”

Hermione shook her head to tell him it was okay. “I was kept at the Ministry. In an apartment there. People came and gave me tests for a week or two. Health, magic, intelligence, personality… I guess to make a report that potential families could review. I was interviewed a few times. Madam Longbottom was one of the ones to come interview me. She must have liked something about me and put in a bid for my adoption. So did another family, but I…” She cast Neville an affectionate look. “I liked Neville. He was so shy and concerned about me, so I agreed to the Longbottom’s bid. They… They cast a spell on me and Madam Longbottom… So I’d feel at home with them. It’s like… Nothing was familiar to me, but it felt like home… They felt like family.”

Neville gave her a big happy smile. “I’m so glad you picked us,” he said earnestly. “I-It was hard before you came, but you… You made everything better. I-I really love you, Hermione.”

Hermione sniffed and came around the table to hug Neville tightly. “I really love you, too, Neville.”

Harry smiled at them, - happiness - sparkling through the bond.

Hermione pulled away from Neville and wiped at her eyes. She looked over to Draco. “Thanks for coming, Draco. I know… we don’t always get along…”

Draco shook his head, cutting her off. “We get along fine. You’re a brilliant witch, Hermione. Sometimes you don’t understand what’s between Harry and me. We’ve been through some pretty tough times, too, and that’s made us different, but I don’t expect you or anyone else to understand that. I just wish sometimes you’d trust me a little more. I’m your friend.”

Tearing up again, she gave him a big smile. Besides Neville, Harry and Draco were her first ever friends. “I’ll try and remember that.”

Draco tilted his head, mouth crocked in a half-smile. “Good. Now let’s have some birthday dessert. It’s my favorite part.”

Neville and Harry giggled while Hermione laughed.
Draco slept like a rock, making up for the lack of sleep the day before. Harry woke him up thirty minutes before class and he still felt groggy. They didn’t bother with breakfast, instead getting dressed and heading to their first class. Low-level anxiety thrummed through the bond throughout the day. Gryffindor’s official Quidditch Try-outs were at seven that night. Draco stuck closer to Harry’s side than normal, reassuring him that he’d do fine.

It was Oliver’s first year as captain and he decided to open up each position on the team. At first, the others were pretty upset, feeling like their hard-earned place was in jeopardy, but Oliver told them that if they worked hard then they had nothing to worry about since they had more experience. As it stood, they had last year’s Beaters, Fred and George, Oliver as Keeper and Captain, and one Chaser from last year, Angelina Johnson. Alicia Spinnet was trying out for Chaser and had played as a reserve Chaser the year before. Then there was Harry and Draco, of course, who had been recommended as Seeker and reserve Seeker by Oliver and Professor McGonagall. That left them with the third Chaser spot that had to be filled, while all the other positions need to be safeguarded from someone winning it out from under them.

Just over fifty kids showed up to try-out. Oliver had everyone run a mile, complete fifteen sprints, and perform various difficult maneuvers on a broom. Those that handled quaffles or bludgers also had to prove their arm strength and accuracy. Either no one else thought they had the skill to be Seeker or they were afraid to challenge Harry and Draco because no one else applied for the position. Draco and Harry were set loose against each other.

Try-outs came to a halt as the Gryffindors stared in awe. Draco and Harry were clearly not holding back at all. Dangerous dives, rolls, and feints - the two boys battled each other for the Snitch, almost catching it several times, only to be knocked off course by the other. Eventually Harry’s hand once again closed over the golden ball. It was Draco who crashed into him this time. Their watchers tensed, expecting a fight to break out in the heat of the moment, but soon realized that Draco was ruffling Harry’s hair, congratulating him.

In the end, everyone kept their positions and Alicia was made an official Chaser along with Second-year Katie Bell. Reserve players were named and told to make it to at least three morning practices and one evening practice or be in danger of losing their spot. As for the starters, they would have practice five mornings and three evenings a week.

Sweaty, dirty, and drunk on endorphins, the group of fourteen Quidditch players chanted battle songs and cheers, arms wrapped around each other’s shoulders as they celebrated becoming an official team. They spilled into the common room and the twins snuck off to grab butterbeers and snacks from the kitchen. An impromptu party started, someone producing a radio and playing the Wizarding Wireless.

Draco, slouched on the couch, one arm across the back as he smiled at the silliness. He had to send mental reassurances as Harry was pulled into dancing with their new, rowdy teammates. *You’re doing good, Harry. You’re making everyone happy, * he whispered into Harry’s mind as worried green eyes locked onto his.

The - guilt uncertainty - that began to bubble up through the bond slowly fizzled out to be replaced by - happy embarrassment. 

... 

Three days later the twenty-third of September arrived. The Autumn equinox, Mabon, when day and night, light and dark, were in perfect balance for a brief moment before darkness began to rise in supremacy. It was the first of three harvest festivals. Andromeda and Ted performed the celebrations
and respected the Cycle, but not with the depth of true belief the way the Malfoys did. Narcissa and Lucius, of course, tried to pass on that belief to Draco and Harry.

Draco could acknowledge the power invoked by their rituals on the Holy Days, but he still wasn’t particularly religious. He believed in his own power above all else, so he fell more along the lines of Andromeda and Ted. Harry, on the other hand, had no trouble believing in a power greater than himself and had embraced the Pagan religion more earnestly. Therefore, Draco inquired of Percy how celebrations were handled at Hogwarts.

Percy glanced around the busy hallway at Draco’s innocent question. None of the students around them seemed to have heard, too busy making their way to the Great Hall for lunch. Percy gently grabbed Draco’s arm, pulling him toward an empty classroom. Draco let himself be guided, mentally giving Harry the instructions to stay close to the others and save him a seat. Percy pushed up his glasses and gave Draco a curious look.

“Since you weren’t raised in the Wizarding world, I didn’t think you’d be Pagan.”

Draco shrugged. “I’m not really, but Harry practices.”

Percy leaned against a desk. Draco mirrored him, placing one foot outside Percy’s right foot and the other on the floor between the teen’s long legs. Percy had that thoughtful look that he sometimes got when he was trying to understand something complicated. “We have two weeks off for Yule and a week off for Ostara, the Spring Solstice, to return to our families, but there are no official celebrations at Hogwarts besides feasts days on both Samhain and the Winter Solstice, which most still call Christmas. Many witches and wizards have adapted a weird blend of the Pagan and Christian faiths. Most families that I know of don’t attend church regularly, but they don’t identify themselves as Pagan, either. True Paganism isn’t socially acceptable. It’s believed to lead to the Dark as it was the Dark families who resisted the conversion to Christianity. They continued to practice the Old Ways and often lashed out at Christians, which triggered the Witch Burnings that turned the Church against magic-users in general.”

Draco didn’t really understand all of what Percy was saying, but he did have a question. “Your family holds small festivals on the Holy Days.”

“Yes, most witches and wizards still have Pagan traditions and rituals. It’s a part of our magical history, but they still mostly identify as Christian. It depends on each individual family where they fall on the Pagan to Christian scale, some are more Pagan and some more Christian in terms of their practices. It’s rare to find either true Pagans or true Christians anymore really.”

Draco thought of being tied to a bed with Latin being chanted over him as he was burned and tortured for being demonic. He definitely didn’t believe in the Christian god. He’d seen nothing to validate that belief. On the other hand, he had experienced the power invoked in the deep woods, so if he had to choose, he’d definitely say he was Pagan.

On the whole, completing the rituals didn’t matter to him one way or the other. It wouldn’t change anything. Harry, however, had grown very devoted. He’d found peace and solace in the rituals. It comforted him to know that they were a part of something bigger, connected and interdependent to all life. Comforted him to know that he was a part of that web just as all living things were.

It infuriated Draco. Would the world that Harry took such joy in ever stop forcing Draco to have to prove to Harry that he wasn’t a freak, wasn’t bad? Harry was submissive and gay and Pagan. Things that the world would reject and scorn him for. It made Draco’s hatred for society burn deeper and brighter. It made him want to clear the board and create a society that would welcome all that Harry was. But Draco wasn’t stupid. He didn’t have that power, and clearing the board would only
devastate Harry. Harry was forever attached to people and things. Instead, Draco would have to see about changing the board he did have to play with.

“What are you thinking?” Percy asked quietly, fascinated by the look of intense concentration on Draco’s face.

Draco lifted his eyes, looking up through a thin lock of blond hair that had fallen from behind his ears. “Weighing Harry’s social favor against how much it would cost to make it public that he’s Pagan…”

Percy’s eyes widened and offered. “I don’t think Harry being Pagan will change peoples minds about it. Not while he's still so young. They’ll think he’s being influenced, probably by the Malfoys.”

Draco nodded, clearly unhappy. “The Malfoy name is in good standing right now with the public, but Lucius garnered a lot of heat during the war. If it comes out he’s raising us as Pagans, people will remember their suspicions. So…” He pressed off the desk and stood in front of Percy. Now that his decision had been made, he looked confident again. The regret that had shaded his eyes was gone. “So we’ll have to keep it mostly secret for now. I’ll have to convince Harry he’s not bad. Again. But he’ll be okay. At least until I can figure out a way to change what people think about it.”

Percy bowed his head, in awe over this boy’s determination and utter confidence that he could change the world. “I’ll do whatever I can to help.”

Draco reached forward and gently stroked Percy’s arm from shoulder to elbow before turning and slipping out of the room. He didn’t head toward the Great Hall, however. Instead he hurried to the owlery to pen a quick note before rushing back down to rejoin Harry.

Hermione rolled her eyes as Harry’s face lit up with delight at Draco’s return. Draco was always disappearing. It drove her crazy that she couldn’t figure it out, but it also made her less suspicious about Draco’s involvement with the attack on Pucey. Clearly Draco was involved in some other project. She still thought he had something to do with it, though, but she’d learned to keep her questions to herself.

There was only ten minutes left of lunch, but Harry had made Draco a sandwich, ready for whenever Draco returned. Draco scooped it up and ate it with slow but determined focus. Talk picked up again around them. They had all learned by now that asking him what he’d been doing was a waste of time. In fact, Draco’s strange comings and goings were so normal, most of them didn’t even bat and eye. Only Hermione seemed bothered by it and she glared at Draco until the bell rang and they had to make their way to their next class.

That night, at the end of dinner, Hedwig swooped through the windows of the Great Hall and delivered a letter to Harry. Harry stared at her in surprise. He cooed and stroked her feathers, handing her choice pieces of meat, while Draco untied the parchment attacked to her leg.

“Who’s it from?” Hermione asked, trying to see the label.

Draco stared her down, making her flush and glare in frustration, before relenting. “Hagrid. Wants Harry to visit. Has something to show him. We’ll be back by curfew.” He ignored everyone’s questioning stares and offers to join them, took Harry firmly by the hand, and led him away.

The air had a cool bite to it and Draco was glad he’d told Harry to pack sweaters int their bags. They stopped a moment to pull them on, putting their school robes back on after. The mountains stood majestically around them, the forest a living thing that cast its shadow over the green hills. Hagrid’s hut sat next to a massive pumpkin patch, the pumpkins already round and fat, promising to grow
even fatter. Hagrid opened his door at their nock and beamed down at them joyfully.

“Arry! Draco!” he boomed. “Come in!”

Draco hustled Harry inside and saw that everything he’d asked for in his note was there: candles, apples, a sharp knife, a goblet and a bottle of wine. “Thank you for celebrating with us, Hagrid.”

The giant man reached out and patted Draco’s head with delicate force. “It’s no problem, boys. Glad I could help.”

- love devotion gratitude - Harry couldn’t believe Draco had set this up. He knew it was for him.

In that moment, Harry felt such love for the blond that he didn’t really know what to do with the feeling. It spilled over his cheeks in the form of tears. Draco gave Harry a silver-eyed look, focused purely on him, and it made Harry warm to his toes, a shiver tickling his spine.

Harry accepted the apples that were set in his arms and watched as Draco took the knife and goblet. Hagrid took up the eight candles and wine. Together they made their way into the forest where no one from the castle could easily see them. Draco had explained that these rituals were private, done with family only. Harry wondered how many other kids were out here, making their own offerings in the privacy of the night.

Hagrid led them to a small clearing where a tree had fallen and left a break in the canopy. It let them see the sky, which had turned a beautiful pale orange as the sun began to set. Draco and Harry got busy setting the candles in a circle around them. One to each of the four corners - north, east, south, west - and the cross-corners - northeast, southeast, southwest, northwest.

“Take the lead, Harry,” Draco commanded softly.

Harry opened his mouth to protest - I’m not worthy!

“I need it to be you,” Draco whispered, silver eyes glinting in the dying light.

Harry straightened his spine. Anything for Draco!

He looked to see Hagrid waiting with a still patience that so few people had. He watched them with gentle, accepting eyes.

Harry took a deep breath and set the apples in front of the west candle, toward setting sun. He accepted the goblet and wine and set them to either side. He then handed Draco and Hagrid each an apple.

“Please stand behind me,” Harry asked softly, head ducked humbly.

Hagrid and Draco obediently took positions behind Harry as the boy faced west. Harry took the long match Draco struck and turned to his right, beginning to light the candles in a clockwise direction, opening their circle and making it come to life.

“Today is Mabon, a spiritual day that marks the Autumn equinox. A day when Light and Dark, Day and Night, are in perfect balance,” he began, voice low and rhythmic. The forest seemed to still around them, a gentle, listening presence. “It is a day to renew wards, to be thankful for all the blessings in our lives, and to prepare for the darkness of the winter months.” Harry lit the last candle, the west candle, the flame of the match singeing the tips of his fingers. “While we celebrate the gifts of the earth, we also accept that the soil is dying. We have food to eat, but the crops are going dormant. Warmth is behind us, cold lies ahead.”
A breeze whispered through the trees. The shadows grew darker. A barely there electric hum settled in their bones and blood. Harry closed his eyes and tried to find that place Narcissa summoned with her words, her belief. When he spoke again, his voice had taken on the cadence of ritual, almost like a song.

“The apple is sacred, a symbol of the gods, and holds the knowledge of the ancients inside.” He bent and took an apple into his hands, lifting it on two cupped palms, presenting it to the west. “Tonight, I ask the gods to bless me with their wisdom.”

The wind blew, cold and stinging as Harry gracefully sank into a kneel. Draco passed him the knife and Harry brought it up, the edge glinting silver, reminding him of Draco. He brought the knife down in a smooth arc, neatly cutting the apple in half. The smell of apples filled the clearing, more than could be explained by simply cutting one apple.

“Five points in a star, hidden inside. One for earth, one for air, one for fire, one for water, and the last for spirit.” Lifting his hands, Harry offered each half, flesh facing upward, revealing the black seeds set in that powerful star-shaped pattern. “I call upon the Wise Ones, the ancient gods to hear my devout prayer. As the sun moves away and fire fades to be replaced with the chill of night, I will reflect on the guidance of the gods and let the cool autumn rains that come wash over me, cleansing my heart and soul.”

“We call upon the Wise Ones,” Draco echoed. He took a bite of his apple and then set it in front of Harry and the wildly flickering candle. Hagrid mimicked him, eyes bright and attentive.

A deep thrumming could just barely be felt under their feet. Something ancient and powerful stirring to life. They could almost hear the forest breathe like something alive.

Harry tilted this head back, eyes closed as he took in the energies around him, basked in the feeling of the universe acknowledging their offerings and prayers. In that moment, tenuous and precious, they were connected to something greater and Harry’s heart filled with soul-deep gratitude for all he’d been given. Slowly, eyes opening, he picked up the wooden goblet. His other hand poured the wine, filling it, letting it overflow and soak into earth beneath his knees.

“The Wild God returns this night to the belly of the Mother. The mother goddess tonight becomes the Crone. As the Wheel of the Year turns, the earth dies a bit each day. I willingly follow the old gods into the darkness, where they will watch over me, protect me, and keep me safe.”

True dark slid over their clearing. Hagrid looked around in amazement as he felt something soft and yet implacable settle around his shoulders. Draco bore the weight easily, eyes fastened on Harry’s thin back, watching as his boy brought the cup to his lips and drank, watched as that slender throat swallowed.

Green eyes, glowing faintly in the dimness of oncoming night, turned and met his own. Draco grinned, fierce and powerful, and accept the goblet. He stared unblinking into those unearthly green eyes as he drank from the cup. A woody, rich flavor rolled over his tongue. It felt warm and unexpectedly thick, like honey. The aftertaste became metallic, like blood. It only made Draco grin wider as he passed the drink to Hagrid. The large man drank, handing the goblet back to Harry when he was done. Harry, still on his knees, had to look away from Draco to accept it, but he could still feel the blond’s eyes on him. It set every nerve in his body alight.

“Wise Ones, old gods, I thank you for Draco, his protection and care,” Harry said with such raw honesty it made Draco harden in his pants.

“I’m thankful that I have Harry,” Draco echoed, holding his boy’s eyes, promising him the bite of
teeth and the heat of passion. Harry whimpered in response.

“I’m thankful that I got a place to belong and friends to share it with,” Hagrid boomed, grin white and force in his wild, dark beard, his beetle-black eyes glittering.

Tears rolled down Harry’s face, overcome with a joy so powerful, he almost wanted to scream. Instead, he lifted his hands and yelled joyously into the night, “The Wild God has gone to rest in the Underworld. I look to the darkness for renewal and rebirth!” He dug his fingers into the wine-damp earth and lifted them up high. “Earth, symbol of security and stability, bring peace and harmony into my home this season of thanksgiving. May the earth, the soil, the land, ground me and protect me and those whom I love and to whom I belong. As I will, so it shall be!”

Harry poured the rest of the wine over the west candle, extinguishing it. Simultaneously, the remaining seven candles went out with a hiss. Harry arched his back as an electric current ran up his spine from the ground. His magic sparked and crackled deep in his core in response. Hagrid’s gasp and Draco’s soft exhale told him they were feeling it, too. Their offering had been accepted. They were being blessed!

The smell of apples, wine, and blood rose again, saturating the air. Energy danced along their nerves, tugged at their hair. The trees swayed in a sudden gust, almost echoing Harry’s wild cry. Panting, Harry lowered his arms, expression exuberant, cheeks red and damp, eyes unnaturally bright.

“Thank you for celebrating with me,” he told them.

Draco, grinning, swooped Harry up into his arms, bringing the smaller boy back to his feet. He almost kissed him right there, but Hagrid’s presence stopped him. “You did amazing,” he said instead, voice rough with desire. *Love you, Harry. Want you.*

Harry flushed, his face turning red - *desire need joy.*

“That was incredible,” Hagrid agreed. He bounced on the tips of his toes, energized.

It took them only a few minutes to clean up. They said goodbye to Hagrid, Draco and Harry again thanking him for helping with the ritual. Hagrid waved them off and they walked back to the castle with Harry wrapped in Draco’s arms.

Draco made sure they were out of sight before pushing Harry up against a courtyard wall and ravaging his mouth. Harry was sweet and pliant, opening to Draco readily, a needy whine rising softly in the back of his throat. Draco mentally ordered the boy silent as he sank to his knees and opened Harry’s pants, taking the thin, stiff member into his blazing hot mouth.

It didn’t take long… Harry’s head was flung back against the wall, his mouth gaping open silently as he sucked in one breath and another, his nails clawing at stone… He came, eyes squeezing shut as stars erupted behind his eyes. Slowly he sank, his robes hissing as they dragged against the wall. He dropped to his knees, trembling and dizzy.

Draco sat back on his butt, legs spread wide, and practically tore his pants open, gripping himself with almost bruising force.

“Please?” Harry begged prettily, long lashes fluttering over still-dazed eyes.

Draco shivered, hand falling away, eyes staring at Harry with almost primal hunger. “Yes, Harry,” he groaned. “Come here.”

Harry crawled across the few inches that separated them and licked up Draco’s stiff shaft. The feel and flavor of Draco’s warm, soft/hard skin made him whimper-moan. He closed his lips around the
tip and slid sensually down Draco’s cock. Harry whimpered again as Draco grabbed him roughly by the hair and began lifting his head up and pushing it down at a quick pace - satisfaction pleasure need. He closed his eyes and sucked hard, loving the feel of Draco’s dick sliding along the inside of his cheeks and the roof of his mouth. Loved the way it tapped at the back of his throat.

Draco gave a short, barked cry as pleasure rolled over him, crashing like a wave, setting his body on fire. Harry moaned long and deep, eyes fluttering closed - pleasure joy - singing through his soul as Draco gave a growl and Harry felt the splash of the blond’s pleasure across the back of his throat and tongue. Their magic rolled out into the night, a rippling wave that made the energies of the night sparkle and come to life. Golden flecks of light, like dancing fireflies, exploded in a shower of sparkles across Hogwarts grounds.

Draco stared up at the little sparkling lights with a soft smile. “Well, shit…” He muttered, but he couldn’t bring himself to care, too much. He pulled Harry up so that he was sitting next to him and not sprawled face-first across his lap. “Look, Harry.”

Harry blinked, eyes wide as he leaned against Draco’s side. “It’s so pretty…” he murmured sweetly, reaching forward and touching a sparkle with the tip of his finger. It rested there for a long second before flickering away into nothing.

“Yeah,” Draco agreed, looking at the side of his boy’s soft face. Harry’s lips were shiny and wet, swollen and red. His cheeks flushed warm and his green eyes glittered in the twinkling golden light. “Pretty…”

The magical little fireflies lasted long after the boys finally climbed to their feet and made their way to bed. They danced and shimmered, twinkling like little stars, only to slowly dim and fade away as morning drew closer.

Chapter end.

Thank you for all the well wishes. They really mean a lot to me. I have the best readers in the whole community. :)
Shut up in his office, hair pulled back into a ponytail that rested on the back of his head, Lucius stood over his desk, his shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows. Candlelight flickered over the papers scattered around his desk. Heart thudding hard in his chest, Lucius stared down at Pandora’s notes on souls and cores and sudden inspiration struck.

Excitement and cold apprehension combined into a queasy whole as he strode with anxious purpose to his library. There, in the back, was a cupboard warded and hidden to all except the Malfoy Head. Inside were books - dark and forbidden. He pulled out a thick tome, *Secrets of the Darkest Art*, and carefully opened it. Absentmindedly walking closer to the magical light burning on the wall, he found the entry he’d half-remembered.

“Tamper with the deepest mysteries - the source of life, the essence of self - only if prepared for the consequences of the most extreme and dangerous kind.” - Herpo the Foul

Lucius read those words with deep respect. Herpo was one of the most revered and powerful Dark Wizards of all time. Living over three hundred years, creator of a multitude of Dark spells and rituals, first breeder of basilisks, he’d been placed on a chocolate frog card and remembered to this day.

Unknown to nearly all, he’d also created a ritual that would ensure immortality… theoretically. The Horrible Cross, the Horcrux… It might have explained Herpo’s ancient age until passing, but it did not elude Lucius that Herpo did eventually die. Due to age degrading his insanity or some unknown weakness of the Horcrux, Lucius didn’t know. All he knew was the ritual described and the dire warnings Herpo had given had led even the most staunch Dark Wizards and Witches to be wary.

Lucius read through the seven page long ritual and shivered. Intricate and dangerous, the ritual took strength and stamina and a nearly obsessive focus on immortality. Herpo concluded by describing in detail the effects of a successful casting.

>Cleaving a piece of your immortal soul causes one’s being to become other. Humanity becomes a thing just out of reach, as if trapped beneath the clear surface of a lake. One can almost remember the deeper emotions, but it is lost to them eternally. It is also in part due to the dehumanization of oneself that there is some physical change that marks the loss of one’s humanity. The distance will only grow more vast with time. Is there true purpose in separating oneself from the organic universe one feared to leave? I know not. I only know once the ritual is cast and successfully takes hold, there is no return. A third side effect of Horcrux creation is that the master soul itself becomes unstable. I have a growing fear that once death inevitably comes, I fear an inability to truly cross over. Can a mere fragment possess the ability to make a final transition? I fear eternal limbo awaits my eternity.

After that cheerful warning and the very explicit statement that it was all in vain, that true immortality did not result, the spell eventually faded from the world. Nearly three thousand years later and this darkest of spells had been nearly lost to time, but it did not surprise him in the least that the Lord Voldemort had come across it. It explained so much!

It explained Lord Voldemort’s decent into madness and instability. It also explained how he’d managed to survive and how he planned to come back. All these years, a wraith - a spirit - waiting to gain the strength to perform the rituals that would return him a physical body and strength. It wouldn’t be long now, Lucius suspected, before Voldemort made a full return.
To create a Horcrux, a wizard first had to begin the ritual and prepare the mind and soul for the severing. Then they had to deliberately commit murder. This act would result in the murderer metaphysically damaging their own soul. A wizard who wished to create a Horcrux would then use that damage to their advantage by casting a spell, which would rip the damaged portion of the soul and encase it in an object. If the maker was later killed, he or she would continue to exist in a non-corporeal form, although there are methods of regaining a physical body.

Where a person’s container, their body, could be destroyed without any damage to the soul, the fragment of soul contained inside a Horcrux was dependent on the container for its existence. If the container was destroyed, so to would be the fragment of soul within it. However, Horcruxes by their nature appeared to be extraordinarily durable, as only very destructive magics and processes could truly destroy them.

Destroying a Horcrux required that the object containing the soul fragment be damaged to a point beyond any and all physical or magical repair. Horcruxes possess some last line of defense against destruction. It can sense impending threats and can act to defend itself. However, as a safety measure to protect one’s immortality, the creator would usually place powerful enchantments onto the artifact to prevent damage.

Also, the fragment of a person’s soul within a Horcrux was capable of thinking for itself and had certain magical abilities, including the ability to influence those in their vicinity. A person with an affinity for the Dark Arts would be strengthened by the influence. If a person is more emotionally vulnerable, it is possible for the soul inside the Horcrux to take control.

A memory arose: “Lucius…” the hissing voice of his Lord, the words a caress of ownership. “My most honored. Take this and guard it well. Your life and the existence of your bloodline depends on your ability to safeguard it.”

Lucius carefully returned the tome to the warded cupboard and with trembling fingers pulled out a small, black diary. He turned it over. Embedded in golden ink on the bottom right was the name: Tom Marvolo Riddle.

The Dark Lord had given an ignorant Lucius his Horcrux!

Striding to a desk, Lucius picked up a quill and opened the book. He knew writing in it would be dangerous, but Lucius was confident in his ability to withstand the effects of the Horcrux. This diary contained too much knowledge to pass up. Lucius would destroy it, but first…

*My name is Lucius Malfoy. Do you know who you are?*

The ink disappeared and he waited with baited breath until words began to spell themselves in beautiful calligraphy across the page. *Yes. My name is Tom Marvolo Riddle. I have been waiting a long time for you to write to me. There is much I’d like to ask.*

Lucius felt a grin stretch across his face. Let the games begin!

…

Draco had said he wanted to check something and had given Ron a pointed look before striding off in the opposite direction. Ron was one of the tallest boys in the class and Harry was just short enough that it was easy for Ron to rest his arm across the back of his friend’s shoulders. If Harry were to happen to fall again, Ron would be able to catch him for sure.

“Let’s play a game of chess,” he said cheerfully. Harry had been so busy with Quidditch practice and
studying that they never got to hang out anymore.

“Yeah!” Harry answered happily. He felt bad for not spending time with his friend.

They were just reaching the portrait hole, Ron chattering away telling Harry jokes that Dean and Seamus had taught him, when they heard a voice call out Harry’s name. Ron instantly began to scowl, turning to see the Pleasant girl right behind them, Neville trailing in her wake as always. She had four books held close to her chest. Her hair was frizzed out around her head and she looked almost frantic.

“I heard the upper years saying Professor Flitwick gave them a surprise quiz today. That means he might give us one, too, tomorrow! We should brush up on our Charms notes before bed.”

Harry’s eyes went wide. “Yeah, okay.” He gave Ron an apologetic smile. “Sorry, Ron. Did you want to study with us?”

Ron gave the menace a glare, voice stiff as he answered. “No, thanks. I’d rather study on my own.”

She brushed past him as if she didn’t care about his bad attitude. Neville ducked his head and wouldn’t meet his eyes while Harry gave him another smile and wave before hurrying after her. Ron watched his friend go, a worried frown on his face. Harry was always studying, couldn’t she see he needed a break? He looked stressed out and it was only their second month of school!

…

Lucius discarded the letter from the Puceys basically begging him for mercy. He didn’t need the distraction, honestly. He picked some clean parchment and wrote a quick letter to his assistant, giving him the order to desist in the financial attack on the Puceys. They had learned their lesson, and if Lucius continued his attack, he’d make them so desperate they’d lash out, which would require him to deal with the situation. He was too caught up in his project to care at this point. He was certain Draco had taken steps to punish their son, and, knowing Draco’s ruthless ferocity, Lucius was certain Adrian Pucey would not be making any moves against them any time soon. It was finished. He was more concerned about the diary and Voldemort’s broken soul.

Voldemort was only sixteen in the diary. He did not have as much knowledge as Lucius had hoped. However, he still had his quick intelligence and determination to shape the world into a more acceptable shape. Insanity had yet to touch him as it had his older counterpart. That led Lucius to believe the Dark Lord had created more than the diary and Harry as Horcruxes. In fact, he guessed the genius had wanted to craft six in total with the master soul making seven, the most powerful magical number. The question was, was Harry the sixth and final one? Or some number in between? There was no way to know for certain, but Lucius was determined to research Voldemort’s life now that he had a name to follow: Tom Riddle.

…

“Quiz me,” Draco ordered. He had a piece of toast in his hand as they walked quickly to their first class.

Harry was also eating toast. Draco had gotten in late the night before, so Harry had let him sleep while he got some more studying in. They’d only had time to grab a few pieces of bread, butter it, and spread on strawberry jam before rushing out to class.

“Emeric the Evil,” Harry said.

Draco thought about it and shook his head. “Killed a bunch of people, but I can’t remember how.”
Harry told him the important highlights of the warlock’s history and then said, “Uric the Oddball.”

Behind them, Hermione frowned with disapproval. She didn’t approve of cramming. Sure Draco may get a few of those questions right now, but he didn’t really know the material or understand the deeper concepts. It was basically cheating. Neville, however, listened attentively.

…

Narcissa stepped into the guest room on the east side of the manor. Golden light spilled through the window, softening the pastels and soft colors of the room. It was one of Narcissa’s favorite guest rooms, designed to comfortably house unattached visiting females. However, none of this really registered because the eye was immediately drawn to the back spot that seemed to darken the room with its very presence.

Bella sat demurely in the window seat. Thin and gaunt, she was still strangely alluring with her dark curls cut short, her big blue eyes, and sharp, angular features. In shocking contrast to the room, she wore all black. Her thick skirt pooled around her legs to the floor, the bodice tight, the sleeves long to cover the bone-white skin of her arms. The short hair still made Narcissa uneasy. It was shocking to see. Their mother had forbade them from ever cutting their hair, implying the act would somehow diminish them or make them less.

“Cissa,” Bella cooed and stood to embrace her.

Narcissa stood frozen as the darkness in the room came closer and filled her vision before thin arms pulled her against a warm body in a hug. Narcissa pulled away, placing her hands on Bella’s shoulders. She’d only managed to visit her sister after installing her in the guest room a handful of times a week. Partly due to the fact that Bella always greeted her with overwhelming affection. Narcissa had no idea how to reconcile her hurt and broken sister’s love with the fact that Bella was the one who had destroyed her and had inflicted incredible damage to her beloved son. She’d had enough time to come to terms with finding her sister, however. She wanted answers.

“Bella,” she said softly and guided her younger sister back over to the window seat. “We need to talk. Really talk this time.”

Bella let herself be guided, but she refused to relinquish her hold on Narcissa’s hand. She sat and looked up at her with trusting blue eyes framed by a messy fall of black curls. “What is it, Cissa?”

“Bella…” Narcissa took a deep breath and sat on the window seat so they’d be on a more even level. “You stole Draco from me. You stole him away and abandoned him. I need to understand this.”

Bella’s smile morphed into something more intense. Her hand tightened around Narcissa’s and a fanatical light entered her eyes. “I saved him for you, Cissa. I saved him.”

Narcissa swallowed a hot lump of rage and grief and asked coldly, “How did you save him?”

“I saw it. When I took the mark of my Lord. I saw the future of my darling nephew,” she said intently, staring straight into Narcissa’s eyes. “He was a sweet creature, Cissa. Sweet and loving with a core of strength the world not seen in ages. Such a soul, a true Black no matter the Malfoy wrapping.” Here she laughed, giddy as a young girl. Her head bowed, her features hidden by her hair. She lifted Narcissa’s hand to her lips and placed a cool kiss on her knuckles before peering up at her. “But he was to be shackled and maimed by your husband.”

Narcissa sucked in a breath and Bella practically leaped forward to frame her face in cold hands. A demented smile stretched her face as she insisted almost frantically, “But I don’t blame you, sweet
sister! You would be hampered by tradition and the place of a wife beside her husband. Draco would be too afraid to tell you what he suffered as he was molded to Lucius’s expectation. Draco, the poor boy, would have willingly carved the pieces that didn’t fit from his soul, and you, sister, would not have realize what had happened until too late. You would not even know to guess that the Malfoy mold was too small for his destiny.”

“What destiny?” Narcissa croaked, caught in her sister’s gaze. It felt like Bella loomed before her, that Narcissa shrank with every passing minute.

Bella laughed, low and sultry. “I saw him, wrapped in the arms of another man. The pleasure and completion found there became the foundation of a strength nearly overwhelming. I saw them come together, male and male, and it was not abhorrent, Cissa! It was beautiful! Draco changed the world, Cissa! He broke the chains of Light that hobble the world. He will set the world free on wings of Darkness! With our Lord guiding us all, we will be reborn! Draco will become a grand Duke with a male on his arm and in his bed without censure or rejection by the less worthy. The Old Ways will return and true power will be breathed into this dying world! Our Lord will not allow those like Draco - those who are broken by this rigid society - to wither! He will embrace the Truth of each soul and fan it to its potential and use it for His great purpose!”

Narcissa was panting. Shocked and shaking, she reached up to grab Bella’s hands and pull them away from her face. “Bella,” she whispered, tears blurring her eyes. Her sister was insane. “Bella, he’s found his boy.”

She giggled again, red staining her cheeks. “So soon? Has time passed so quickly? What year is it? How old is sweet Draco? And our Lord, where is our precious Lord? He has yet to come see me.”

“Bella,” Narcissa said again, imploring her sister to listen. “Bella, Draco found his boy, but he is Harry Potter, Boy-Who-Lived, the boy who caused the Dark Lord’s downfall.”

Bella began pulling on her hands, trying to remove them from Narcissa’s grip. Her head shook back and forth in denial, an almost-growl rising from her throat.

Narcissa held tighter, voice rising. “The Dark Lord is gone, Bella!”

“He will return! He is the most powerful… the most…” she gasped, face made ugly with fury.

“He is gone!” Narcissa yelled in her face with equal fury. “And if he were to return, as you seem to hope, he’d destroy Harry Potter. Destroy him and along with him my son who would never forgive him. Draco would put everything he had against the Dark Lord in an attempt to destroy him!”

Bella finally jerked away. “How could you let this happen?” she bellowed. “I did everything! I sacrificed everything! How could you do this?” She flew at Narcissa, hands up in claws, aiming for Narcissa’s eyes.

Narcissa’s wand snapped up and she cast, “Petrificus Totalus!”

Bellatrix slammed to the floor, arms forced to her side.

Tears scorching pale cheeks, Narcissa knelt by her damaged sister. “I didn’t let this happen, Bella. You did. They formed a magical twin bond overseas before Draco returned to us. There is no separating the two now. You were right. Draco’s destiny is bigger than the Malfoy mold. He is now a Dominus. On the order of King Arthur, I believe. And sweet Harry is his delicatus. There is no going back, Bella. Draco is going to change the world with Harry at his side. The Dark Lord’s time has passed. I’m sorry.”
Standing, she turned and left her sister, locking the door tightly behind her.

Hermione stared at Harry across the library table. He looked pale and tired. It was nearing curfew and Draco was late picking them up. Draco always insisted on walking them back to the Tower whenever they studied in the library, the memory of Harry’s fall clearly still haunting him, so Harry and Hermione tried to do most of their studying near the dorms. Tonight, however, they needed some extra books for reference to write good essays. Neville was wandering the shelves, looking for books on Herbology and Potions. He’d needed a break and was perfectly satisfied with an E unlike his O obsessed friends, so Harry and Hermione were alone.

“Harry…” she said softly, gaining his attention. “You’ve been doing really well in classes lately. You get O’s more often than not. I was just wondering…” She cleared her throat, not really sure how to ask what she wanted to know. “I just mean, you’re not pushing yourself to match me, are you?”

Harry shook his head hard, eyes wide. “No way. You’re way smarter than me, Hermione. Thank you for always helping me. I’m only doing so well because we study together.”

She flushed in embarrassment. “You’re welcome. I just didn’t want you to try so hard if that was the case. I’ve never met anyone better than me at studying before. I didn’t want you to hurt yourself trying to beat me or something.” Knowing she sounded stuck-up, she quickly added, “But that doesn’t mean I’m better overall! I mean, you’re way better at flying!”

“I’m okay at it,” Harry denied with an embarrassed blush, ducking his head. “There are people way better than me. Like Draco, Fred, George, and Oliver.”

Hermione tilted her head curiously. “If you’re not trying to catch up to me, why are you working so hard?” She frowned. “You’re not working so hard for Draco, are you?”

Green eyes looked up at her again and this time they were less open. There were always secrets in his eyes when it came to Draco. It bothered her to no end. Mostly because she’d never understood something before. “I want Draco to be proud of me, but I also just want to be the best I can be,” he finally answered.

Hermione scrunched her face in thought. “Does it bother you that he doesn’t feel the same way?”

Harry looked genuinely confused. “What do you mean?”

“Why? He makes you work so hard for his approval and you just give it to him for nothing,” she hissed. “It’s not fair.”

“Draco’s amazing,” Harry told her firmly. “He works really hard on stuff. Just because he can’t tell you what he’s doing, doesn’t mean he’s not working hard or that it’s not important. I’m really, really lucky to have Draco, Hermione. You don’t understand, so don’t talk about Draco, okay?”

Hermione flushed hotly. Harry was normally so sweet and kind. He cared about everyone and was really attentive. He and Neville were the nicest people she knew, so it always made her feel like
she’d done something wrong when he got mad at her. Well, mad for him anyway. It wasn’t like he was mean or yelled, but she felt put in her place just the same. Frowning, she turned her attention back to her essay.

... 

Remus looked up from the book he was reading when there was a knock on the door. He saved his place and made his way slowly to the front of the cottage. Opening the door, he kept his face neutral as he saw Albus Dumbledore standing on his doorstep. “Headmaster;” he said softly. “Come in.”

Dumbledore smiled, the sun glinting off his glasses. “Thank you, Remus, my boy.” As he ducked his head to step inside and the front door was shut behind him, he turned to his former student. “I feel remiss in welcoming you to Hogsmeade. It has been a busy three years, but that is no excuse. How have you been?” he asked jovially.

Remus was thinner. He moved stiffly and there were healing cuts along his hands and face, but he looked incredibly well considering it was the day after his transformation. Usually he would be on the floor unable to move for a good twelve hours after the moon had set and hardly able to do more than crawl into a bed for another twenty four after that. There usually was more physical damage to his body to be seen as well.

Remus gave him a polite smile and gestured him to the small couch in front of a fireplace. Fall had come and even during midday there was a chill in the air. “I am well. Would you care for some tea?”

“That would be lovely,” Dumbledore agreed and took his place on the couch. He looked around as Remus made himself busy in the kitchen. The cottage was cozy and well-kept. The only place that was unorganized was the large desk by the window with books and papers scattered about.

Dumbledore scanned a few of the titles on the spines and noted they were all American in origin and revolved around Shamanism. Smile in place with eyes twinkling, he accepted the hot cup of tea Remus brought to him before sitting in the armchair adjacent to the couch. “Interesting field of study.”

Remus tilted his head curiously. “I’m aware it is considered an uncultured field and would not be looked on well here. It’s more for my personal knowledge than for any academic acclaim from my peers. I was able to witness several acts of shamanic magic while overseas and have grown quite fascinated.”

“I see,” Dumbledore said amiably, sipping his tea. “I for one would love to read any papers you write on the topic.”

Remus smiled at that. “Thank you, sir.”

“How are you settling in?” Dumbledore asked.

“Well enough. I’m on speaking terms with most of the villagers, but I do not go out of my way to invite a closer acquaintance,” he said easily with a shrug. “I’m so used to moving from one place to the next. I guess old habits are hard to break. Honestly, I’m quite content left on my own to study. I’ve never owned a home. It’s been peaceful.”

“Good, good.” Dumbledore took another sip of his tea before easing into the subject that brought him. “The boys are equally settling in to Hogwarts. There have been a few instances, but I feel they are behind them now.”

Remus eyed the old wizard for a long moment before saying, “That’s good to hear.”
“In fact, just recently there was an act against those who may have hurt Harry.” Dumbledore gave the younger wizard a frank stare. “I was wondering if you knew anything about that?”

“No, Headmaster,” Remus lied easily. Protective instincts surged through his veins. “Was it in the papers? I don’t read the Prophet much.”

“No,” Dumbledore said softly, his eyes shaded with disappointment. “I had a feeling you may know more about it, perhaps due to your correspondence with Draco…”

Remus gave a frown before nodding. “I had forgotten. Draco had mentioned that. He said people think he did it? But it sounded far-fetched so I put it out of my mind. Should I be worried?”

Dumbledore set his tea down, his whole posture changing. “Yes. I believe you must. If Draco did have a hand in the attack, it was shocking and brutal. Especially from the mind of a such a young boy. I fear what could occur if he should be allowed to develop unchecked. Remus, these boys are crucial to the survival of our world. We must be sure they grow appropriately.”

Remus sat back, a look of sympathy on his face. “I understand, Headmaster. I do. Draco can be cruel. However, I thought we were making progress in softening his outlook. I will do my best to reach him. You said the attack wasn’t in the news? I hope that means the boy was not seriously hurt?”

Dumbledore sighed. “He was scared out of his mind. Physically he is well, but it will be a while before he is fully recovered.”

“I can’t help but wonder why you are so concerned for his wellbeing,” Remus said softly, an almost unnoticed glow about his amber eyes. “The boy tried to murder a fellow student. That is as brutal as anything Draco has done.”

“He does not have the fate of the world on his shoulders,” Dumbledore said firmly, looking at his former student over his glasses. “His poor decisions do not effect the world as Draco’s does.”

Remus disagreed strongly. Had Adrian Pucey killed Harry - the mere thought made Remus want to vomit and his heart begin to race - the fate of the world would have sat very much on his shoulders. Pucey would have started a chain of events that would have ended in destruction. By attacking Pucey in turn and making it clear such attacks on Harry were unacceptable, that destruction was hopefully prevented. Could the Headmaster not see that? It was baffling to Remus who could see it so clearly.

He spent the rest of the visit making polite small talk, even brushing on a few of his topics of study. Inside, he was watching and waiting, much as a wolf would who was stalking prey. Dumbledore was beginning to have doubts regarding Draco. He could become troublesome.

…

Draco had missed Quidditch practice for the last four days and Oliver made it clear, great flyer or not, if Draco didn’t make it to at least a few practices a week, he’d be removed as reserve Seeker. Harry was really excited that Draco had decided to join him that morning. He was determined to show him how hard he’d been practicing. They always started practice by running a mile. Harry ran as hard and as fast as he could. He felt almost like puking when it was over and bent over his knees, heaving in air.

Oliver clapped him on the shoulder. “Good job, Harry! Took another twenty-seven seconds off your time!”
Harry grinned, pale and red-faced at the same time, and looked up at Draco.

Draco lifted a single eyebrow, his lips curled up in a smile. He’d come in a good forty-seconds after Harry. He was panting as well, sweat dripping down his face. “Good… job… Harry!”

Harry beamed proudly.

Next they did sprints. Harry was ahead of Draco during most of them, but soon Draco was directly at his side, and then on the last two Draco passed him. Flinging themselves down onto the grass of the pitch, chests heaving, they tried not to die.

“Still… beat you…” Draco eventually panted.

Harry nodded. Draco was so amazing! He only came to about a third of the practices that Harry did and he was still able to mostly keep up and even beat Harry.

Draco wasn’t as impressed with himself. He knew Harry’s endurance would always be fundamentally weaker because of the long-term starvation he’d experienced with the fucking Dursleys. It infuriated him every time he saw the evidence of Harry’s mistreatment, and he reminded himself again to make sure Harry was eating well during meals.

Oliver blew his whistle and they mounted their brooms for flying practice and maneuvers. Draco and Harry shared fierce grins as they shot up into the air together. It always surprised everyone else on the team how hard Draco and Harry went against each other. They were so close, nigh inseparable, and yet they almost looked like they were trying to kill each other over the snitch.

…

Lucius tapped the quill tip to the diary’s surface. In the week or so since he’d started his quest to find information on the life of one Tom Riddle, he’d learned absolutely nothing. It was as if all record of him was gone. Ink dripped onto the page and disappeared.

*You've been gone a long time. Has something happened?* words appeared onto the page.

Lucius figured he had nothing to lose. *I could find no records of Tom Riddle anywhere.*

*You doubt my validity? You think I'm a false personality?* There was a pause. *Let me show you who I am, or should I say who I was?*

*How?* Lucius wrote suspiciously. Suddenly the pages seemed to glow. Lucius pulled back but not quickly enough. He was sucked into the pages and was brought face-to-face with a sixteen-year-old version of his former Lord.

The teen was handsome. His eyes were bright with intelligence and mirth. “Hello, Lucius,” he drawled. “I’d be most interested to learn of Lord Voldemort. I have the distinct impression that you know of him.” A persuasive smile softened his mouth as he linked his arm through Lucius’s. They were nearly the same height. Tom only an inch or so shorter. “Would you like to see the Chamber where I thought up the name?”

“Slytherin’s Chamber?” Lucius whispered in awe. They were standing in a hallway at Hogwarts. It looked remarkably real. He reached out to touch the wall, but Tom had begun walking forward, pulling him along.

“The very same,” the teen drawled.
Ron cornered Harry before he disappeared in some nook somewhere with Longbottom-Pleasant. “You want to play a quick game of Exploding Snap with Dean, Seamus, and me?”

Ron had thought about inviting Draco, too, but the blond was currently sitting on a window seat across the room with the twins. Ron scowled. The last time he’d tried to interrupt the three of them, Fred had called him stupid baby names and George had basically told him to butt out. It had left Ron angry for days! They were *his* brothers! Why were they so nice to Draco and never nice to him? Not that Ron wanted their stupid attention! Fred and George were mean and annoying; Draco could have them!

“Sure,” Harry agreed, but he looked distracted. His hair was messier than normal as he ran his hands through it restlessly.

Ron put on a smile to cover his worry. “Great! Come on!” He grabbed Harry’s wrist and pulled him over to the fire.

Dean playfully shoved Seamus in the shoulder. “You lose on purpose just because you like the explosions.”

“Well, yeah, but I don’t lose on purpose. I’m just that bad at this game,” Seamus countered with an exaggerated face of disappointment.

Ron laughed at them and took his turn. Harry was next and he looked over, but the boy was staring into the fire. “Harry…” Ron snapped his fingers in front of the boy’s face. “Are you tired? You’ve been studying an awful lot.”

Harry blinked and turned a smile Ron’s way. “I’m fine! Sorry, Ron. I was just thinking.”

“About Draco? Where’d he run off to?” Dean asked curiously.

Ron looked over and sure enough Draco and the twins had disappeared.

“He likes to explore the castle,” Harry lied easily. “Hogwarts is pretty amazing, isn’t it?”

Harry didn’t feel bad about lying. Draco was busy and the others would only slow him down, even if their intentions were good. Harry just wished he was stronger so that he could help Draco more. All he could do at this point was bring food back to the dorm if Draco missed a meal, keep their room clean, get better at Quidditch, and help Draco relax whenever he had a spare minute, but none of that really mattered. What really mattered was the battle between Draco and Quirrell. Harry wondered how strong he’d have to get before he would be able to stand at Draco’s side.

“Yeah, it really is!” Seamus exclaimed, his accent still unfamiliar to Harry’s ear. “We’ve been looking for secret passages and we found one near the Astronomy Tower. Maybe we could show Draco some time.”

“Yeah, maybe.” Harry pulled a card and flung it down. It didn’t explode. “I bet Draco’s already found it though. He’s pretty good at exploring.” He also had access to a magical map, but Harry knew better than to share that secret.

“Then maybe he could show us a few secret places,” Dean suggested. He flung a card down and it exploded, making all four boys jump and laugh.

“Harry!”
Ron looked over with a dark glare, but Longbottom-Pleasant seemed immune.

“I looked over your essay like you asked. I found some punctuation and spelling errors, and you need better transitions. You’ll have to rewrite it.”

Harry got up and accepted the parchment. He ran his other hand through his messy hair, clearly upset with himself. “Thanks, Hermione. I’ll go fix it right now.”

Ron got to his knees and grabbed the girl’s wrist before she could wander off. He waited for Harry to get out of earshot and said hotly, “He could’a just scratched out the mistakes. Why can’t you leave him alone? He needs a break.”

She yanked her wrist out of his grasp. “He wants to do well, unlike some I could name. I’m being a friend and helping him with his goals. What’re you doing besides wasting time playing a stupid game?” Her tone was thick with accusation and disapproval and Ron’s face went red with fury, but before he could scream at her, Dean and Seamus grabbed him by each arm and pulled him back down.

Chapter end.

A/N: Kind of a filler chapter, I know, but the stage has been set. The following chapter will be more action-packed, promise.
Samhain Battles

Samhain Battles

Samhain, or Halloween, dawned cold and dreary, but that did nothing to douse everyone’s excitement for the feast. Upperclassmen told stories of piles and piles of sweets, floating pumpkins and candles, and staying up late telling stories of the dead.

“It’s Wingardium Levi-O-sa,” Hermione said impatiently as Ron again struggled to lift his feather in Charms, the last class of the day.

Ron glared hotly at her. Hermione merely sniffed and put her nose in the air as if he were the one being unreasonable! The gong of the bell in the bell tower rang throughout the school, signaling freedom. Ron grabbed his bag, flung it violently over his shoulder, and rounded on the bushy-haired girl. Voice dark and vicious, he spat, “I didn’t ask for your help! And don’t think I don’t know what you’re doing with Harry!”

Her eyes had grown wide. Everyone had gone silent around them, but Ron couldn't stop. He’d kept it in for far too long. Being assigned as her partner today had been the last straw!

“You’re scared he’ll realize how terrible you are if he spends time with anyone normal, so you’re doing your bloody best to keep him from his other friends! Well, I’m not going anywhere, you ugly hag! Everyone hates you! You’re a bloody menace! Why don’t you just shove off?”

Professor Flitwick was too shocked to interfere and Ron stormed away before he could assign a detention. “Oh dear,” he muttered as Hermione fled the room in tears.

Neville ran after her, but Draco took Harry’s hand and went after Ron instead. He didn’t like the way the rest of the First-years were silent with implied agreement. Even Hermione’s roommates looked reluctant to interfere.

The Great Hall was decked out for Samhain. Floating pumpkins and candles hovered above the tables just as promised and treats were piled almost two feet high. The energy in the room was almost electric. They found Ron sitting at the end of Gryffindor table, away from their usual spot. He was poking at a cupcake with a scowl on his face.

“Ron,” Draco called.

The redhead looked up, his expression mulish.

Draco sighed. Harry took the seat to the right and Draco sat on the redhead’s left, boxing him in. “Look. You have every right to be mad if she’s being rude, but you can’t just go off on her like that.”

“Like a know-it-all like her would ever listen to me any other way!” Ron mashed a perfectly fine cupcake flat with his fork.

Draco had to concede the girl was stubborn. “If she really bothers you that much, try and avoid her.”

“Hard to do when you two are always hanging out with her,” Ron muttered stubbornly. “She’s always getting in my face when I’m trying to hang out with Harry.”

Draco frowned at Ron’s resistance. “We have to live together for seven years. You really want to fight that whole time? Besides, it upsets Harry.” The last was said in warning.
Ron glanced to the side and saw that Harry did look worried. Harry had been working so hard, everyone could see it. Ron was being a jerk, putting more on him. He mashed his cupcake even harder. Hermione Longbottom-Pleasant was just so impossible! Draco saw the Fourth-years hovering nearby. Ron had taken their usual seats. Sighing, Draco grabbed Ron’s arm, pulling firmly.

“I doubt she’s coming to dinner. Let’s go sit at our usual spot, okay?”

Ron caved as Harry stared at him with big hopeful eyes. Together, they walked to their accustomed table with the twins, the twins’ friends, and most of the First-years. Draco was right. Neither Neville nor Hermione showed up for the feast. Harry fretted through most of the meal, only calming down when Draco told him to pick out the best treats so they could bring it up to Hermione and Neville later.

Draco gave Ron a look, making the redhead squirm. He gave in, saying, “Yeah, okay. I’ll help you bring them up.” The relief on Harry’s face made Ron feel twice as guilty. “Sorry for ruining our first Samhain at Hogwarts,” he muttered.

“It’s okay. Friends fight.” Harry said, forgiving him instantly.

A warning kick from Draco to his ankle kept the, ‘I’ll never be her friend’, behind Ron’s teeth.

A wave of silence followed the abrupt arrival of Professor Quirrell. He was clearly in a panic, running and stumbling. His face was pale, his blue eyes wide with terror. By the time he hit the halfway mark into the Great Hall, you could hear a pin drop. “T-T-Troll. I-In the d-d dung-geon,” he stuttered, looking toward the head table where Dumbledore and the other teachers sat. “Just t-t thought y-you’d like to k-know.” Then he fainted dead away.

There was instant pandemonium.

Dumbledore rose to his feet, his voice magically amplified so all the students could hear him. “Seventh-years, guide your classmates back to the common rooms. Stay inside until you hear from your Head of House! Teachers, escort the children. Minerva, with me.”

Draco grabbed both Ron and Harry by the hands. “Go. Be safe. I’ll catch up in a minute.” He wasn’t about to leave Quirrell. He pulled the two boys’ hands together, placing Harry’s hand in Ron’s.

- anxiety trust - Harry didn’t want to go, but he trusted Draco to make the right decision. If Draco thought he’d get in the way, then Harry needed to leave.

Ron gave a serious nod before getting up and following the stream of their housemates. Percy appeared at his side and Ron shamelessly took his hand, too. They followed the raised voices of the Seventh-years, calling, “Keep together now! Let’s be quick!”

They were in a crush of students from all the houses moving toward the Great Hall doors. Frightened and excited murmurs filled the air. Suddenly the kids next to Harry and Ron parted and a Gryffindor Fourth-year appeared at Harry’s shoulder, eyes wide and voice breathless from their struggle to reach the two First-years.

“Um, I thought you should know that I saw that friend of yours run into a bathroom on the second floor. She was crying.”

Harry’s eyes went wide as he looked to Ron - distress. “They won’t know about the troll!”

“Bloody hell,” Ron cursed, hand unconsciously tightening around Percy’s. Trolls were dangerous. Neville and Hermione were in serious trouble. “Perce…”
“You go on ahead,” Percy decided, letting Ron’s hand go and pushing the boy toward the stairs. “I’ll go get the other two.”

“No way!” Ron decided instantly. “It’s my fault they’re in trouble! I’m going! Arguing with me will only waste time. We need to get them quick.”

Percy gave his brother an angry glare, but Ron was right. They didn’t have time. Turning, he practically ran toward the second floor bathrooms with Ron and Harry chasing after him. It should be okay. The troll was in the dungeons. They’d get the other two and hurry up to the Tower. It’d be fine…

…

Draco hid under a table. It took ten minutes for everyone to leave and then a few minutes after that before Quirrell got to his feet, no longer looking terrified. Draco felt cold. In the weeks that Draco had been spying, Quirrell had acted suspicious as hell, but he’d never dropped his act so completely. It was like he was a different person altogether and it made goosebumps rise along Draco’s arms.

Quirrell strode with purpose down past the head table and out a side door obscured by banners. Draco followed as quickly and quietly as he could without giving himself away. What he wouldn’t give for the map right about now! Not that he really needed it. He had a feeling he knew exactly where Quirrell was headed: the third floor corridor. Quirrell was making his move.

…

A strong stench filled the second floor corridor. Percy knew something wasn’t right even before they turned the corner and saw the bathroom entrance smashed in, debris and dust falling across the floor. A girl’s scream pierced the air.

This isn’t happening! Percy mentally screamed. It couldn’t have gotten up here this fast!

His heart pounded with terror. He’d never been so scared in all his life. Trolls were out of stories and textbooks. The smell, the sheer size, the fear of being hurt, of the younger kids being hurt… MerlinMerlinMerlin…

“Get help!” he yelled as he ran forward to try and save the Longbottoms.

Ron shoved Harry, echoing, “Go! Get help!”, before running after his brother.

Eyes wide, heart pounding with adrenaline, Harry hesitated for a brief second before turning and sprinting back toward the main cross-section.

…

Draco pressed his back flat to the wall and slowly peeked his head around the corner. Quirrell muttered something, his wand moving in intricate patterns. His other hand was splayed palm out toward a door.

- fear determination - filled the bond with the flavor of metal. Draco pulled his head back, breathing hard. What was happening with Harry?

Sound hit the air, deep and powerful, with repetitive booms. Draco covered his ears and staggered away from the wall. Slowly he realized it was barking. Eyes wide, he tried to estimate how big the dogs had to be to make a sound like that. What the hell? Was that even possible?
He took another look around the corner to see a massive grey paw fill the entire doorway with claws black and deadly. Quirrell staggered back, casting a fire spell that made the paw yank back, but the barking continued even after Quirrell slammed the door shut.

... 

Harry almost ran into Professor Snape. The man had been running up the stairs toward the third floor after seeing his Slytherins to the dorm, but he stopped at hearing Harry’s desperate cry.

“Please! Help! The troll! It has students pinned in a bathroom!”

Severus looked furious, more furious than he ever did in class, and practically flew back down the stairs.

Harry turned and ran after him - desperation fear.

... 

The troll was as dumb as a bag of rocks, but it was huge! Three times the size of Hagrid, it barely fit in the bathroom. It had a massive club and a loincloth, hugely muscled arms and legs, skin a moss green color, and sharp yellowing teeth like a shark’s.

Percy attacked it from outside the bathroom, drawing its hungry attention from Hermione and Neville who were huddled terrified under a sink. Their hands were over their ears and they were screaming, torsos curled close over their knees.

Annoyed, the monster bellowed and took another swing at the wall. Stone shattered with a deafening, terrifying crash, making the floor vibrate and the whole world seem precarious. Percy was clipped by a piece of debris and went down to his knees, his shoulder bleeding. Neville and Hermione began sobbing, now clinging to each other desperately.

“Wingardium Leviosa!” Ron bellowed and the club was lifted out of the troll’s hand. With a scream of rage and fear, Ron swung his wand as he would a baseball bat with all the strength in his arm. The club swung around, mimicking Ron’s movement and hit the troll square in the face.

Blackish blood burst from the monster’s face, splattering the walls and floor as the troll staggered and fell against the bathroom wall. Again the floor shook. The bathroom stalls fell toward Hermione and Neville with a bang.

“Run!” Ron cried desperately. He reached his hand forward uselessly, too far away and too slow to stop it. His heart practically leapt into his throat, certain he was about to watch classmates die right in front of him…

Neville grabbed Hermione’s hand, yanking her toward Ron, but the stalls fell with a crash right on top of her. She gave an agonized cry as she slammed face-first to the ground, the stalls pinning her legs brutally to the floor.

“HERMIONE!” Neville screamed.

The troll gave a roar and pushed off the wall, reaching for Neville.

... 

* Harry! * Draco called through the bond, an instinctive reaction as his boy’s fear screamed through him.
Draco pushed his head around the corner one last time only to see Quirrell standing inches away staring directly down at him. A demented smile twisted the man’s face. The smell of garlic wrapped around him, hitting Draco’s senses like a punch. How the hell had the man gotten so close without Draco smelling him sooner?!

Draco’s eyes went wide in horror, his heart thundered in his chest as adrenaline soaked his system.

“Well, well, well…” Low and menacing, Quirrell spoke without a single stutter. A faint red glow seemed to come from his eyes. “Finally caught the rat that’s always scurrying around, following me, watching me. Thought you were clever, did you, boy? You’re going to wish you had left well enough alone…”

Draco bared his teeth, backing up and giving himself some room. His magic coiled tightly, waking up from deep in his core with the realization that: Harry needed him; this bastard is a threat to Harry!

“What are you going to do, Professor?” he drawled, heart pounding as his vision went crystal clear, his body and mind primed for battle. He hadn’t been looking for a confrontation, not so soon, but like hell he’d back down now.

Eyes glinting silver, his voice dripped with mocking disdain, “Kill or hurt a student? I’m Draco Malfoy! The whole world knows my name. Something happens to me, your cover’s blown.” He snapped his fingers. “Just like that.”

Quirrell laughed, high and insane. The sound was so foreign, so inhuman, it literally made Draco feel cold. His heart beat so hard it seemed to pound at the inside of his throat. Draco clinched his fists, trying to steady his screaming nerves.

“Tell me something!” Draco demanded, stalling. He dug his nails into his palm, cutting deeply, getting his blood flowing. “Who’re you talking to when you’re all alone? I’m betting Voldemort. Do you do it through a mirror? Something else? Well, I’ll just bet Dumbledore will love going through your things to find out, traitor. And he’ll just love to hear about how you’re always creeping around this corridor. Finally found a way to get the door open, huh? Fat lot of good it did you,” he finished with a sneer.

As Quirrell snarled and lunged forward, Draco flung up his hand, splattering the asshole with his potent, magic-imbued blood.

As Snape and Harry sprinted onto the scene, they saw dust rolling out of the shattered bathroom doorway and could smell the gut churning stench of troll. Chunks of stone were flung across the hallway. Percy Weasley was on his knees, blood spilling from his shoulder. The sound of children screaming made every hair stand on end. Snape practically flew into the bathroom, wand stabbing forward as he bellowed, “Bombarda!”

The seven foot monster standing inside the demolished bathroom flew with great force right through the wall away from Hermione and Neville. As more debris fell from the roof and more dust filled the air, choking them, it screamed in rage.

Harry ran right past Snape, ignoring the man’s angry call of his name - determination fury. His friends needed him! They were going to die! Troll blood made the floor slick. His leather shoes slid slightly, the heel made him slightly unsteady, but then he was there. Neville looked up at him with such painful hope that Harry almost collapsed underneath it. He was useless! He was going to FAIL!
- but still his body moved, still he tried.

“Get to your brother!” Snape yelled, grabbing the younger Weasley by the back of his robes when the redheaded boy tried to go after Harry. He flung him back through the broken doorway.

Huge green hands grasped the edges of the hole that its body had made and began to pull itself through with another wall-shaking scream.

At the crunch of stone under the beast’s hands, Harry looked over his shoulder, green eyes wide and wild, gasping in fast terrified breaths of the stench-filled air. Whipping his head back around toward his terrified friends, he raised his wand, trusting Snape to protect him.

Quirrell instinctively flinched backward and flung his arm up to catch most of the blood with his robe sleeve. The cloth immediately began to smoke as if acid had splattered it and Quirrell shrugged his robe off in a smooth gesture, letting it pool on the floor. A few drops had landed on his wrist and the back of his hand. It burned fiercely, disintegrating the skin and searing down through muscle to bone.

Quirrell screamed! His voice distorted the air, layered with a higher pitch, eerily doubled.

Draco wound up to fling more at the bastard, but he felt his arms get yanked viciously backward before he could finish the swing. His arms were magically bound from elbow to wrist, hands falling just below his ass, in a position he had once been terribly familiar with. Ice speared his insides and, with terrible understanding, Draco realized he should have run as soon as he saw Quirrell so close. His stupid instincts had led him to hold his ground instead. Terror opened up a pit in his stomach. He was helpless.

Shit, god no, not again...“Fuck,” Draco gasped, staring in horror as Quirrell’s face seemed to blur for a second. A monstrous mouth, wide and gaping, blazing red eyes... Draco bit back a whimper and flinched back, his arms hitting the wall hard. With desperate terror, he bit his cheek, the pain hardly registering as poisoned blood slowly filled his mouth.

“Wingardium Leviosa!” Harry screamed fearfully, desperate to save his friends.

Harry’s desperation-filled spell slowly lifted the heavy stalls off Hermione. Neville was already pulling on his sister’s arm, screaming mindlessly with fear. As soon as they lifted enough, he dragged her out from underneath. Harry let the stalls drop with a bang and began to help Neville pull her toward the bathroom door. Harry tried not to see how her legs seemed crushed and bowed in weird places or the swath of blood that trailed in her wake...

Tears spilled over Harry’s cheeks while Neville babbled hysterically promising everything would be okay. Hermione sobbed in pain, unable to walk. Her cheek was scraped and raw, blood trickled down her chin from her split lip. She looked battered and small and so unlike herself.

Snape cast spell after spell, giving them the chance to drag Hermione clear of the rubble and the shattered doorway. The troll bellowed. Its skin smoked and steamed as it staggered back, but it was determined. Eyes red and frothing at the mouth, it flung itself forward again and again, trying to smash-break-eat them!

...
Quirrell stood over Draco, his expression cold, eyes burning red, and cast another pain spell. He’d dodged the mouthful of blood the boy had spat at him like a wild thing and reflexively brought the child down with a spell that caused many grown men to weep like a baby. The child had hardly shown a reaction.

“You’re powerful, boy,” Quirrell whispered softly, caressing the words almost seductively. “Murderous. Dark. You’ll be a great weapon in my hand.”

Quirrell watched fascinated as the boy went rigid, muscles tensed into corded lines, but still he didn’t scream. That only delighted Quirrell more. He released the spell and the boy went limp, crumpled on his side with his arms bound behind him and blood trickling out of his mouth. His blond hair had long since fallen from behind his ears, fanning across his cheek, darkened and damp with sweat.

“I’m tempted to see if Cruico would win a scream from you, but that would leave evidence behind.” He crouched and gently stroked the boy’s hair, moving it away from his face so he could see it better. “You won’t be telling anyone about this or me, I’m afraid.” He smiled darkly. “But do not fear, I will not forget our time together, Draco Malfoy. I have great plans in store for you and your inborn power.”

As Quirrell’s burnt and damaged hand grabbed Draco face, a spike of pure agony split Draco’s head open as if it had been brutally cleaved in two. Draco bared his bloody teeth in a vicious grin. He fought the invasion with everything he had, his body going into a full-blown seizure, but he lost.

Lost, broken… underneath a man once again, he had everything he was twisted cruelly. Draco’s psyche screamed in utter agony that thrilled the man ripping him to pieces… The terrifying howls of three massive dogs filled the corridor.

…

Dumbledore and McGonagall arrived just as Harry and Neville managed to drag a sobbing, whimpering Hermione out of the bathroom. Dumbledore’s blue eyes blazed with power he usually kept hidden. His white hair and beard seemed to lift slightly as if on a breeze. His movements were strong and fast. McGonagall wasn’t nearly as flashy, but she was efficient and confident. With Snape joining them, fury lacing every spell, it was over within a few minutes. The troll was left bleeding, unconscious, and bound.

“I will take care of the troll,” Dumbledore said gravely. “Minerva, see to the school. Severus, take the children to the infirmary.”

“There is something I need to check on,” Snape insisted.

“Very well,” Dumbledore allowed after a brief hesitation. He turned sharp eyes to McGonagall. “See to the children. I should only be gone a few hours.”

She bowed her head. “Yes, Headmaster.”

…

The pain was indescribable as Draco’s mind was brutally torn open. His defenses only slowed the monster down, did nothing to stop it. He was helpless. Chucks of memory, of who he was, was shoved this way and that, his mind being forcefully remade.

Helpless, torn apart, Draco’s consciousness sank into a place that he once knew so well. He knew no amount of begging for it to be over would stop the mind-shredding pain. The only thing he could do was hunker down and endure. *It hurt, hurt, HURT!* He sobbed and whimpered brokenly as it went
In his mind, the image of Quirrell fractured, shattered painfully as his memories and consciousness were pulled apart like taffy. Quirrell was made harmless, Draco’s paranoia and deadly intent shifted to Snape, Harry’s headaches an allergy to garlic, nothing to worry about. It was all Snape, the traitor, the one who was a danger to them all…

Quirrell grinned as he stared down at the small boy. He was crouched before the child, looming over him, hovering too close. The boy sat against the wall, breathing hard, eyes glazed with acute suffering. Tears streamed down his face as he made these soft sobbing sounds. Eleven years old, so young, but his mind had been so tangled and full of blades. In time, he’d become something fierce and formidable. Quirrell caressed the child’s face, nails thick and yellow against the soft, pale skin of the boy’s damp cheek, before hearing footsteps approaching. He reluctantly pulled away.

“Until next time, Draco,” he whispered softly.

Severus strode down the third floor corridor, breaking into a run as he passed the sound ward and heard the howling, barking madness of the cerberus. He unlocked the door to the chamber with the first trap and was immediately set on by the monster. He dove away from the doorway, but a claw still managed to nick his leg. His slammed the door, heart thundering in his chest. A quick bandage spell stopped the bleeding, but something wasn’t right. Something must have agitated the beast to be so ready for violence. The beast’s barking was deafening.

Concerned, he hurried down the hallway, trying to see if anyone were fleeing the scene and ran smack into Draco Malfoy. The boy tumbled backward, falling hard on his butt. His eyes were wide and wild, a snarl twisting his features. Severus narrowed his eyes as blood slowly trickled from the boy’s nose and out the corner of his mouth. Tears streamed down the boy’s pale cheeks.

“Draco, what happened? Are you well?”

Draco got back on his feet, swaying slightly. Sweat dampened his face and darkened his hair. “Could ask you the same thing,” he said lowly, voice thick, hoarse. “Something you need over here? I’m sure you have other things you should be doing than lurking around this corridor.”

Severus had no time to argue with the boy. Something had clearly happened. He had to find the traitor; they had to know which of the staff was contaminated. “Harry was taken to the infirmary. I suggest you go there as well.”

“And leave you here to steal whatever it is Dumbledore’s protecting?” Draco took an aggressive step closer, eyes glittering with malice. “How long have you been in Voldemort’s service, traitor?”

Severus reeled back as if struck. “I don’t know to what you’re referring,” he said numbly, his mask slamming into place from long years of practice. “Why don’t I escort you to the infirmary. You’re obviously unwell.”

Draco said nothing to that, letting a sneer of disgust speak for him, but he followed the man when he turned and made his way back down the corridor. At least it got Snape away from the third floor corridor for now. Draco stared grimly at the professor’s back. He’d make sure Snape didn’t get his way and that Dumbledore’s item stayed safe from Voldemort. Once Draco figured out how Snape was keeping in touch with the Dark Lord, he’d reveal him for the bastard traitor he was. The taste of salt and blood filled his mouth, making him grimace and his stomach roll, but his silver eyes stayed focused on Snape’s black-robed shoulders.
Harry looked up as Snape strode into the infirmary with Draco in tow. He took one look at Draco’s pale, blood-streaked face and ran to his side - worry love. Draco opened his arms, holding Harry safe and close, but his eyes remained narrowed on Snape’s form.

“You’re bleeding,” Harry murmured, reaching up to gently wipe some of the blood away.


Harry dutifully told the story of his adventure - pride worry.

Draco’s grip tightened in Harry’s hair, distressed that the boy had come so close to danger and he hadn’t been there, but Harry was proud of himself. Draco could feel the tentative belief that he’d done good a flicker through the bond. If Draco got mad or scolded him, Harry’s fragile self-worth would be crushed to dust and three times as hard to bring back to life.

“Good boy, getting help,” he murmured. “You saved their lives.”

- happy pride - Harry smiled, hiding his face against Draco’s shoulder. “But Hermione’s still really hurt…” - worry guilt.

“She’ll be fine. Pomfrey is a good healer, remember?” Draco closed his eyes and just held his boy close.

He had to do better. He had to protect Harry! The fact that Harry had run into Snape of all people, alone for that brief moment, made chills run down his spine. He opened his eyes and stared malevolently over Harry’s head at Snape. Snape was fucking lucky Harry hadn’t been hurt or Draco would have killed him, consequences be damned. Dark eyes stared back at him, expression blank, and Draco bared his teeth in a dangerous, blood-coated grin.

“I’m sorry, Severus,” Poppy said softly. The room was dark, the children spelled into a deep sleep as they lay in her hospital beds - for observation, she’d told them. “I scanned Mr. Malfoy twice. There’s nothing wrong with him that I can see beyond exhaustion. He had a bitten cheek and punctured palm, all easily healed.”

Severus stared at the eleven-year-old boy tucked into the narrow bed. Harry lay in the bed next to him, their hands reaching across the space between them, fingers linked even in sleep. Draco looked so small, so young. Severus was deeply disturbed by their earlier confrontation. Something had happened and Severus feared for the boy. What did you get yourself into? he thought, feeling grim.

“Thank you, Poppy,” he said, voice equally soft, and spun on his heel, making his robes flare. “I must report to the Headmaster.”

Harry woke shortly after dawn. He was exhausted, but the night before had left him feeling like he was rattling inside his own skin, too anxious to sleep. The blurry outline of Draco in the next bed soothed him and he held tight to the blond’s hand. He almost made it back to sleep when he heard Neville’s soft crying. Harry frowned. Sitting up, he grabbed his glasses off the nightstand with his free hand and slid them on his face. He blinked a few times to clear his vision and saw that Neville was in hospital pajamas and stood next to the bed across from him. It was Hermione’s bed. Looking
to his other side, he saw Percy sound asleep.

Harry carefully climbed out of bed, noticing that he wore hospital pajamas, too. Gently placing Draco’s hand on his chest, he tiptoed across the room. Neville looked up at him, eyes red-rimmed and tormented. Harry’s heart clenched. He wanted to help, but he had no idea what to do. His eyes unconsciously darted back to Draco’s sleeping form. He would know. Draco always knew.

“I couldn’t help her,” Neville rasped hoarsely. “She’s really hurt, Harry.”

Harry looked to where his roommate gestured and saw that there was something on Hermione’s legs underneath the blankets. Some kind of cast or brace. Harry bit his lip, his heart suddenly pounding harder in his chest - uncertainty guilt. He could heal her!... But if the wound was very bad, it would make Harry weak and dizzy and possibly pass out. He could even hurt himself because he always lost a dangerous amount of weight when he healed big things without Draco’s magic bolstering his own. His throat tightened and he became aware of the collar at his throat. Unconsciously, Harry relaxed; his nerves settled.

“Madam Pomfrey’s a really good healer,” he repeated Draco’s words to himself as well as to Neville.

Percy sat up, woken by the boys’ voices. He rubbed tiredly at his eyes. “You two should still be sleeping. What’s going on?” He was topless, a big white bandage wrapping his shoulder.

Harry looked to Neville, but the other boy had no intention of speaking. “Hermione’s hurt,” Harry finally said and glanced back at Draco worriedly. “And Draco won’t wake up.”

“Hermione’s going to be fine,” Percy told them, voice and eyes gentle as he slipped on his glasses. “I heard Madam Pomfrey talking about it. She’s going to need treatment for a few weeks, but she’ll make a full recovery. As for Draco, Madam Pomfrey said he was exhausted. She probably gave him something to help him sleep.”

Neville ducked his head. “I just wish I could have helped her before she got hurt in the first place. I… I was so scared. I didn’t know what to do and she got hurt.” Large tears rolling down his raw cheeks, Neville looked up at them and confessed, “I wish I were stronger.”

Sympathetic tears filled Harry’s eyes as he reached forward and took Neville’s hand. He knew exactly how Neville felt. “Me, too.”

Percy tried to get them back into bed, but they stood by Hermione for almost half an hour before Pomfrey came to check on them. She ordered them breakfast trays and told them to get back in bed and take it easy.

All five of them had been excused from classes for the day. Ron had been as well, but he had insisted on going back to the Tower last night. (He hadn’t trusted Pomfrey to release him in the morning and judged it better to avoid her clutches if possible.) He knew both Harry and Hermione would worry about missing class and had promised to take notes for them. Harry and Neville shared a grin at that. Maybe those two would finally stop fighting now.

Chapter end.
Harry sat cross-legged on Draco’s hospital bed with Draco’s head resting on the pillow next to his hip. It was nearing dinner and still Draco hadn’t woken. Percy had left at lunch. Hermione had woken shortly after. She’d been withdrawn, but her eyes had been alert as Pomfrey had explained her condition and healing regiment. She’d have to stay in the hospital for two days and then use a cane to walk for a few weeks after that. If she had merely broken bones, Pomfrey could have healed her completely in twenty-four hours. However, Hermione’s right knee had been shattered. The combination of ligaments, cartilage, and bone took longer to fix.

Harry had retreated to Draco’s bed after that. He felt tense, pulled thin. Something was wrong. Pomfrey assured him Draco was just tired, but Harry felt it. Something was wrong. He would have tried to heal him, but he couldn’t with so many people around. Draco’s hard rule was to keep their healing/kissing private. Harry couldn’t disobey… At least not yet. Soon though. If Draco didn’t wake up soon, Harry would prioritize Draco’s condition over the rules.

On top of a chilling feeling of impending disobedience, he felt stressed about Hermione’s leg. He could heal her, save her pain and recovery time, but Draco had said no. Pomfrey was able to heal her. It would just take time. He still felt guilty. Caught between his worry over Draco and stress regarding Hermione, Harry felt wound tighter than a spring. Like he was barely holding on.

Hermione sat up in bed and stared across the room at her friends. She’d already sent Neville off. He needed a break and to get out of the infirmary for a bit, but Harry refused to budge without Draco. He sat with his back to the headboard on the same bed as the blond. Draco was sleeping, mouth slightly parted, hair splayed slightly on the pillow. He was on his back, his breathing even and deep. Harry, on the other hand, looked like a blank-faced doll. His dull green eyes stared unblinking behind his glasses. His jet-black hair fell around his face and stuck up in places around his head. He sat with an almost unnatural stillness. His hand rested on Draco’s chest, fingers curled slightly as if he wanted to grasp Draco’s hospital shirt and hold on.

Hermione had already called his name a few times, but the boy was deaf to it, trapped somewhere in his thoughts. She didn’t like how dependent Harry was on Draco, especially since it didn’t go both ways. Sure, Draco cared where Harry was and what Harry did, but he left Harry behind plenty of times to do whatever it was he did in secret. He did what he wanted and told Harry what to do. There was no room for what Harry wanted.

Not to mention, where was he when Harry, and even Ron, had come and risked their lives to save her and Neville? He was doing his own thing like usual! She had needed him… Harry and Neville had needed him… but he hadn’t been there. Now she was hurt and Harry looked broken and Draco just got to sleep peacefully as if nothing was wrong!

Why the hell was he even in a hospital bed to begin with? He was tired? She snorted in disgust. Please! Harry worked so much harder than him! Between Quidditch and their school work, Harry barely had any time for eating and sleeping. He’d even fought a battle with a troll, and he was holding up better than Draco was! Crossing her arms, leg throbbing with painful heat with every beat of her heart, Hermione scowled at the blond sleeping peacefully across from her.
Draco woke slowly. It was like climbing up out of blankets of cloying fog. He became aware of his breath, of the feel of a bed at his back with his weight pressing down. Then the psychic bond registered with the cold sting of - stress anxiety. Draco’s fingers twitched, his breath hitched and he pried his heavy eyes open. He had no memory of where he was or what had happened, only a sense of Harry needing him.

The blurry image of Harry sitting next to him, staring straight ahead slowly came into focus. A slow blink; he noticed Harry’s hand resting tensely on his chest. Draco lifted his arm and placed his hand on Harry’s. Harry took a deeper breath and turned his head down and to the side so he could look at Draco. It took a few seconds, but his jewel-bright eyes focused and actually saw him.

- RELIEF worry gratitude -

Tears filled Harry’s eyes as a smile spread across his face. He slid down to lay on his side next to Draco so they were still facing each other. Draco turned onto his shoulder, their heads rested on the same pillow, their noses brushing. He lifted his hand to card it slowly through Harry’s wild hair. “What’s the matter?” he asked in a sleep-rough whisper.

Harry took another deep breath, letting the weight fall from his shoulders. Draco was here; Draco had him. “Hermione’s knee was shattered. Pomfrey couldn’t fix it right away. She’ll need a cane to walk for a few weeks. I want to heal her. And you wouldn’t wake up, Draco. It’s almost dinner. You slept so long. Something… Something feels wrong.”

Draco listened patiently, hand rhythmically stroking Harry’s hair. Trusting green eyes stared back at him. It made his heart kick harder in his chest: Harry needed him, Harry relied on him. A quick self-check revealed he did feel heavy and kinda foggy. He understood they were in the hospital wing, but he was blurry on why. There was a troll, but he didn’t remember a troll… “What happened?” he finally asked, having a sense this would worry Harry because he should already know.

Harry related the events with the troll once again, but he couldn’t tell Draco what had happened to him. He hadn’t been there. “You stayed behind to follow Quirrell. After the troll, Snape found you in the third floor corridor.”

Draco began to remember seeing Snape, the booming barks… That traitor had gone after whatever it was that Dumbledore was safeguarding from Voldemort! His whole body tensed, but when Harry frowned and gently cupped his cheek, Draco breathed out slowly and forced himself to relax. “Okay,” Draco whispered. He swallowed hard. His whole mouth felt suddenly dry. The sharp memory of the taste of blood hit him hard. “I feel a bit foggy, but I think I’m fine. You can heal me tonight.”

Harry nodded - relief love. “Yes, Draco.”

“As for Hermione… Let me check her out.”

Draco pushed himself up into a sitting position, basking in the warm - trust faith - that shimmered through the bond. Harry sat at his side, close enough that his wild hair brushed Draco’s pale cheek. The infirmary was wide and twice as long with dozens of rows of beds along each side. It was empty save for Hermione who was pale-faced and glaring. Draco frowned. He swung his legs over the bed and crossed the distance between them.

“How are you feeling?” he asked softly, eyes running down her body and taking note of the brace that was strapped to her right leg. The knee was swollen and red/blue. Reaching forward, he hovered his hand a few inches above it and felt the heat from there.
“Fine, no thanks to you,” she answered coldly, arms pulling even tighter across her chest.

Draco glanced up at her face, surprised. Her eyes were bright with unshed tears. There was anger there and hurt. Draco felt a pang. She had expected him to come help and he hadn’t. Draco lowered his head. “I’m sorry, Hermione,” he told her sincerely. “I promise I left for a good reason.” He glanced over at his boy who was watching attentively from the bed across the aisle. “Be on look out.”

“Yes, Draco,” Harry answered before tuning his attention to the room around them instead of Draco and Hermione.

Hermione frowned and opened her mouth to tell him off, but Draco raised a hand to stop her from speaking. He turned and sat half on the bed, twisting slightly sideways so he could still face her. He lifted his hand, blocking his lips from the rest of the room and began to whisper into her ear. “I know I’ve been keeping this secret, but it’s for good reason. Harry’s in danger, Hermione. Dumbledore is keeping some magical artifact in the school and Voldemort is trying to get at it through a traitor so that he can be brought back to full strength. You didn’t think a baby could really destroy a powerful Dark Lord, did you? Something weird happened with their magic, but Voldemort isn’t gone for good. Not yet. I’ve been keeping my eye on the third floor corridor, trying to figure out who our enemy is and I caught him red handed! It was Snape, Hermione! If Snape gets this thing, Harry’s the first one Voldemort will go after.”

Hermione’s arms fell as she stared at him in horror. “My god…” she breathed.

Draco dropped his hand and grabbed hers tightly. “I have to protect him, Hermione. I’m sorry I’ve been gone a lot, but I was trying to figure this out. I didn’t tell you earlier because I wasn't sure you could handle it to be honest, but it’s different now. I could really use a brilliant mind like yours working on this with me.”

Hermione’s lips paled as they pressed tightly together as her mind raced. After a moment, she managed to get out, “What makes you think I can handle it now?”

“Because,” Draco answered gently, looking intently into her eyes. “You’ve been hurt. You’ve seen how dangerous things can get. You know now how serious this is and what it could cost. You won’t treat this as some game.”

Breath shallow and fast, Hermione’s fists clenched in the bed sheet, her right hand flexing under Draco’s firm grip. The thought of facing something like the troll again terrified the hell out of her. Tears slipped down her cheeks as she glanced at Harry who was still dutifully watching the room from the other bed. If Voldemort was going to come back… Taking a deep breath, she squared her shoulders. Harry had risked his life to save her. She wouldn’t do any less for him. She turned back to Draco and lifted her chin. “I’ll help you.”

Draco gave her a fierce smile and reached out to stroke her hair once.

Hermione blushed and wiped at her cheeks. “Now start at the beginning.”

Draco complied, going all the way back to Diagon Alley and their first meeting with Hagrid.

…

Ron’s face lit up when they came down for dinner. “How’re you feeling? I took really good notes today.”

“Thanks, Ron,” Harry said sincerely as he took his seat. “I really appreciate it.”
Ron blushed red. “Don’t worry about it. How’s Hermione?”

Draco used both hands to tuck his hair tightly behind his ears before answering. He gave Ron a tired smile. “Hurt, but she’s strong. She’ll be okay.”

Movement at the corner of Draco’s eye drew his attention. It felt like the world became made of sharp-edged glass. His universe oriented on Snape walking out from a side door and settling at his place at the Head Table. His sallow features set in a glare, the large hooked nose, the lanky hair framing his face… Draco could see him as if he suddenly had the ability to zoom in with his eyes.

* It was Snape, Harry. It was him all along. *

Harry shivered as the dark intensity of Draco’s mental voice filled his mind. He instinctively ducked his head and glanced at the head table through his thick bangs. Snape was looking their way. Harry resisted his first impulse to look away. Snape looked as firm and unforgiving as ever, sometimes he was even cruel, but he was also the man who had helped Draco with his flashbacks and protected them from the troll. Harry leaned over and placed his lips close to Draco’s ear. “Is he working with Quirrell?” he whispered, trying to wrap his mind around Snape being the enemy.

* Quirrell’s nothing but a pathetic loser, * Draco dismissed, eyes glued to Snape.

Harry sat back in confusion. He checked the head table, but Quirrell was not in attendance. That wasn’t very unusual, though. Quirrell wasn’t a threat? Harry looked at Draco in concern, but Draco didn’t seem to notice.

“What’s up with Snape?” Ron asked, butting in. One cheek budged with a bite of bread.

Draco tore his eyes away. “Nothing. Why?”

Ron frowned. “You were glaring at him. I thought he must’ve said something to you?”

“No.” Draco shot the evil bastard one last glare before turning his attention to the meal. He brutally stabbed a piece of broccoli. “He’s just an annoying, old bat.”

Ron laughed, but then his expression sobered. “Yeah, but he was really something with that troll. We’d’ve been toast without him, you know?”

Draco looked up into Ron’s blue eyes, suddenly sincere. “I’m sorry I wasn’t there. Thanks for protecting Harry.”

Ron blushed again, his freckles disappearing under a wave of red. He ruffled his hair at the back of his head bashfully. “It’s no big thing.”

Draco refused to drop Ron’s eyes. “It is to me. Thank you. You were really brave.”

Grinning at the praise, Ron bumped Draco’s shoulder with his own. “It’s cool, man. Don’t worry about it.”

Draco let the subject drop, but he wouldn’t forget. Under the table, he took Harry’s hand and entwined their fingers. Soft green eyes looked over at him and Draco squeezed Harry’s hand. It was small and warm and soft. An intense burning need to protect suddenly choked Draco. His throat grew tight and his eyes burned. He would keep Harry safe no matter what it took.

…
Draco told their housemates they needed to get some air; they'd been cooped up in the infirmary for too long. Harry thanked Ron again for taking notes and asked him to leave them with Neville; he'd look at them later that night. It was cold, but not too cold. Sweaters under their robes were enough to keep them warm. The exposed skin of their hands and face grew cold to the touch. The sun had already begun to set. Pink and orange began to bleed out of the sky, turning a soft grey that was deepening into night.

The boys didn’t talk as they walked down the grassy hill. Stone steps were placed erratically along the way down. The castle began to shrink as they walked away and cut toward the forest where trees and lake met. Hagrid's hut was higher up the hill. They could see that the windows were dark. Hagrid wasn’t home; he was probably deep in the forest.

Harry took a deep breath of the cold air. The further they got from the castle, the more steady he felt. It was just Draco and him here, and the prospect of soon healing Draco, of being useful, warmed him from the inside out. Already his nerves tingled in expectation of Draco’s mouth and teeth, of the pleasure-pain that he craved and utter peace that followed.

Draco hummed, creating a low purring sound deep in his throat. Harry’s emotions pulsed warmly through the bond, making him hard. The skin of his cock head grew sensitive as his pants rubbed against him with every step. Excitement and anticipation made his heart pump hard in his chest. He looked around almost desperately for a good spot. He had to have Harry under him, coming undone. There! A flat, dark grey rock jutting out past the forest and a few feet over the dark lake water. Orange and red leaves that were cast in shadow littered the surface, crunching as Draco guided Harry onto the narrow stone shelf.

“Kneel,” he commanded, voice low and intense.

Harry immediately sank to his knees, his head bowed forward, his hands naturally hooking at the small of his back.

Draco looked around carefully. The trees screened them from the castle and Hagrid’s hut. All he could see was the lake and mountains before them and the dark, looming forest behind. True dark was falling, further protecting them from view. Draco shifted his attention to his boy. “Take your robe off.”

Harry reached up and undid the clasps holding the robe closed and pulled it off his shoulders, letting it pool behind him. His messy hair blended in with the encroaching night, but the fair skin of his face, slender neck, and hands could easily be seen. He looked beautiful and Draco’s eyes lovingly traced the black collar at Harry’s throat. Draco slowly mimicked Harry, undoing his robe and letting it fall around his feet.

“Now your sweater,” he ordered just above a whisper.

Harry pulled the dark red, thick sweater over his head revealing a white button up with a red and gold school tie falling down his chest. The boy was breathing faster, his cheeks had darkened with warm blood. - desire need anticipation - filled the bond with prickling heat.

“Glasses,” Draco rasped. He was almost trembling with the desire to touch, own, mark.

Harry set his glasses aside.

Draco crouched on the balls of his feet, worn Converse bending easily. Jeans encased his legs, nearly skin-tight. The white collar of a white button-up without the school tie could be seen above the low v-neck of his sweater. The black, soft wool made Draco’s skin seem even paler, a milky white in the
darkness. Eyes gone sliver, glinting as he stared at Harry with absolute focus, he watched his boy kneel with perfect submission.

Slowly, one pale hand reached out and unknotted Harry’s tie. Harry sat still as Draco worked, a faint tremble of need shivering through his muscles. The cold stone under his knees seemed to seep in through his legs. The contrast between that and the heat of his desire made goosebumps rise along his arms. Draco slid the tie free of Harry’s neck and rose gracefully. He walked around the boy and crouched again. His hands were warm as he maneuvered Harry’s arms so that the boy’s forearms were overlapping halfway down the boy’s back. He tied them in this position using the school tie. It pulled Harry’s shoulders back and his biceps tight to his sides, but it wasn’t a tight enough pull to put strain on the shoulder joints. It was a soft hold. One Harry still couldn’t pull free from until Draco released him.

Harry began to pant, his pupils dilating - *relief last love*. He was under Draco’s complete control, unable to move, unable to make a mistake or get things wrong. He was safe and wanted and made Draco happy. He was good. A moan slipped past his lips. Draco walked around to stand in front of the trembling boy. He let Harry revel in the feeling of being bound for a long minute as he watched with hungry eyes and listened to every soft sound that fell from soft, pink lips.

As their desire grew, their magic rose invisibly from their bodies to touch and slide together in the air around them. Draco lifted his hands and felt Harry’s attention as an almost physical sensation against his skin as those beautiful green eyes watched as he slowly unbuttoned and unzipped his pants. He took a measured step forward and brought his stiff member even with Harry’s mouth. Harry opened with a sigh, eyes fluttering. Draco reached forward and hooked his thumbs at the corners of Harry’s mouth. Holding the boy’s jaw open and preventing any forward movement, Draco kept him from getting too close.


Harry’s mouth and breath were hot while the air was almost painfully cold against the wet skin Harry left in his tongue’s wake. Every hot swipe and lap made him hiss and gasp. Harry was salivating, spit soaking Draco’s thumbs, dripping down his throat, and soaking Harry’s shirt collar. It made Draco’s heart beat even faster as drool glistened obscenely on Harry’s chin. The boy made a gorgeous picture: mouth wide open with Draco’s thumbs hooking it open wide, glistening tongue wriggling and lapping at the soft skin of Draco’s dick, cheeks flushed and eyes bright.

“Sit still.”

Draco took his slick thumbs from Harry’s mouth and steadied the base of his cock with one hand, the other fisting Harry’s hair to keep the boy’s head steady. A flex of his hips and his dick slid into the wide open mouth along the boy’s tongue. He rubbed it there, shivering as Harry’s hot, panting breaths hit the sensitive tip. Draco groaned, shifted his hips, and deliberately began to tap at the back of Harry’s throat. Harry made gagging sounds at each tap but held perfectly still. Draco bounced faster - tap, tap, tapping - stopping only when he thought Harry might actually throw up.

“Keep it open,” Draco ordered hoarsely.

He crouched down, not releasing his hard grip on Harry’s hair. With his free hand, he quickly buttoned his pants to protect his wet dick from the cold. Then he grabbed Harry’s tongue and gently rubbed it between thumb and forefinger. Draco’s head was higher than Harry’s in this position and he leaned forward so his mouth was above the boy’s.

Harry stared up at Draco with - *need adoration lust*. His head was tilted back, his mouth still wide
open with spit drizzling out of the corners. His pupils were huge, his chest rising and falling rapidly with every panting breath. Electricity shot straight to his nipples as Draco continued to stroke and tug at his tongue. His eyes widened. An excited gasp escaped as Draco opened his mouth and a thick string of saliva dripped down, hitting Harry’s tongue and sliding to the back of his throat. Harry swallowed instinctively - *DracoDracoDraco* - filling his senses.

A hungry smile curled Draco’s lips as the string of saliva continued to connect his mouth to Harry’s. Harry’s tongue writhed against Draco’s pinching fingers and Draco let go curiously. Harry lapped at Draco’s spit, reaching for more. They moaned together this time. Draco bent closer, slightly curling over the other boy, and began to lick at Harry’s mouth, the inside of his cheeks, the roof, along his teeth. Finally, Draco rubbed his tongue firmly against Harry’s.

Harry held his mouth open the way he had been commanded. His heart beat so hard it felt like it was going to leap out of his chest. His dick throbbed painfully hot between his legs. Tears gathered at the corners of his eyes as more and more spit spilled past the corners of his lips and soaked his neck and shirt collar. A whimper slipped up his throat as Draco’s teeth caught his tongue and tugged playfully.


He stood and deliberately placed the ball of his foot against the small bulge in Harry’s dark slacks. Harry groaned, curling over Draco’s leg and pillowing his cheek on the blond’s thigh. The posture revealed Harry’s bound arms and the vulnerable back of Harry’s neck. Eyes slitted with a predatory glint, Draco rubbed his foot in small circles with an occasional soft thrust. Lust spiked through his system, making him feel like he was burning alive as his thigh quickly grew wet with Harry’s drool. Harry was moaning near constantly now. The air seemed to shimmer as their magic began to merge and spiral.

Draco tossed his head back, his blond hair bright under the light of the moon as Harry’s magic played at the edges of his senses and slowly entered his body, erasing every ache and filling him with energy. “Yes, Harry, good boy,” he murmured blindly up at the star-studded sky.

- *pleasure need euphoria*

Head dropping down to stare at his boy once more, Draco pulled at Harry’s hair, forcing him off his thigh and to sit up. Harry’s mouth was still obediently open and Draco grinned fiercely. “Good boy.”

Harry’s back arched at the praise, head tilting submissively to the side and revealing more of his collared throat.

Draco bent and grabbed the bottom of Harry’s shirt and lifted it, exposing Harry’s slender torso and gorgeous, dark pink nipples. He bunched it up, making it tight under Harry’s arms and stuffed the wadded up shirt into Harry’s gaping mouth.

“Bite.”

Harry flexed his jaw, holding the bunched up shirt in his mouth.

Draco stood over him. He rubbed his foot against Harry’s crotch, enjoying the sight of Harry’s exposed skin. He loved the way Harry’s jaw strained to hold the shirt, the way his wild, black hair stuck to his damp cheeks. Loved the soft lines of Harry’s chest and ribs, the dip of his stomach and perfect low belly button. Draco especially adored his small nipples, the way they were already pebbled.
“Rock against me,” Draco whispered seductively.

Harry groaned and flexed his hips, rocking up against the sole of Draco’s Converse. It made the muscles of his stomach tense and ripple. Sweat began to dew on his skin. Draco watched with unblinking eyes as Harry groaned and panted and worked his body closer and closer to the edge. Draco reached down and pressed his palm firmly against his throbbing dick. Not yet.

“Don’t cum until I say, Harry,” he growled. Reaching forward, he touched Harry’s cheek just under his eye with gentle fingertips. “Can you do that for me?”

Harry whimpered, his muscles tensing to obey - **PLEASURE need**. He was so close. The feel of Draco’s eyes on him, the sensation of rubbing against Draco’s foot, the ache of his jaw as he held onto his rolled up shirt, the cold biting his sweat-damp skin, his arms bound tight behind him - it all sent him into a haze of pleasure, the end rushing toward him.

Draco watched as the struggle became more and more difficult. Harry was dripping sweat. His eyes were wide and pleading as he involuntarily began to thrust harder against Draco. Tears were streaming down his face, further soaking his shirt. Fear began to trickle into the bond; Harry was about to fail and disobey. Scream building in his throat, Harry began to tremble. His hips jerked haphazardly. Draco stepped back right before Harry lost it completely. Harry curled slightly forward, his damp bangs falling down and over his eyes. He was panting hard and fast, on the edge of sobbing.


Magic curled and tangled in tight, tense knots around them as Harry fought to catch his breath and keep from cumming. Draco groaned and crouched. He twisted both of Harry’s nipples brutally. Harry screamed, head flinging up and arching his back, offering more of his chest for Draco to play with.

“Such a good boy,” Draco purred, eyes half-lidded as he looked on Harry’s flushed face and dazed eyes. “Keep holding it, Harry. Until I say.”

His hands trailed down to unbutton and unzip Harry’s slacks. Harry didn’t wear underwear either and Draco easily exposed his hard member to the cold air. It was swollen and red, throbbing in Draco’s palm. Draco touched it softly, not giving Harry enough to get off.

“I want your mouth,” he murmured.

Harry immediately released his shirt and Draco pressed his mouth to Harry’s in a searing kiss. Meanwhile the blond’s quick fingers had Harry’s shirt unbuttoned and spread in moments so that he could still access Harry’s chest. Draco pulled back, a string of saliva spiderweb thin between them. “That’s better.” He smirked. One hand went up and three fingers slid into Harry’s mouth. It was dry now from the shirt, only slightly damp. Draco planned on fixing that. The other went down and pinched the head of Harry’s cock between thumb and middle finger, closing the tiny hole at top. Draco watched Harry’s expressions intently as he finally released the sensitive tip from the brutal pinch. He switched hands, stroking Harry’s throbbing erection with his freshly damp fingers. His other hand pressed again at Harry’s mouth. Three fingers slid in and out in a slow rhythm that matched Draco’s stroking hand.

Tears streamed down Harry’s face from blind eyes. His dick throbbed with painful heat that was
soothed by the mind-numbing pleasure of Draco’s hand rubbing deliciously. Trapped between the two fires of pain and pleasure, Harry felt wrapped in layers of trust and lust. Draco hummed and pressed Harry’s cock flat to his belly. He pinched just under the head. Harry screamed, the vibrations shooting up Draco’s fingers and straight to his cock. Harry’s body arched beautifully. Draco leaned forward, curling over him, and thrust his fingers in and out of Harry’s mouth faster.

Harry began to unravel under the agonizing pinches to the head of his cock and balls intermixed with a damp fist jerking him off and fingers fucking his mouth. He lost all sense of his body. Only of the pounding waves of heat, pleasure, pain, and Draco. He existed only in a single moment of exquisite sensation. He was the universe, and it was exploding.

Draco felt the bond swell. It slowly took over his mind and vision. Until all there was were throbbing stars of white and red. Harry was gagging and screaming, his body tensed and arched backward. Right before Draco lost control completely, he screamed, “Cum!”, and thunder boomed as they both spurt wetly. Their magic burst outward in a concussive force. The forest shook and the lake’s surface shattered with hundreds of ripples.

Draco rapidly blinked his eyes. His whole body tingled and throbbed, little zaps of pleasure still firing through his neves. It made him shiver and grin. He pushed himself up, realizing he was on his side facing Harry. His fingers slid out of the boy’s mouth. A quick check downward showed him that Harry’s penis was soft, still swollen and red around the tip.

Harry was on his side, eyes mostly closed only revealing a sliver of white between his lashes. The bond was hazy with static. Draco smiled soppily and gently untied the boy, rolling him on his back and slowly buttoning his shirt and pants. He caressed Harry’s face with gentle fingertips and butterfly kisses, filled with so much love and contentment that he felt completely melted.

Slowly Harry’s panting and racing heart slowed. His eyelashes fluttered and a groan slid past swollen lips. Draco cuddled the boy, knowing Harry would be sensitive and vulnerable until he recovered fully. Harry leaned against Draco’s side, head resting limply on the blond’s shoulder - peace contentment love. His body throbbed, especially his penis, but he thrilled in it. The soft kisses to his hair and cheeks, the gentle way Draco wiped at his eyes - it made Harry feel loved and so damn grateful.

“Thank you. Love you,” Harry whispered, voice still weak and raspy.

“I love you,” Draco whispered back, tears in his eyes that mirrored Harry’s. “So much.”

A sudden howl pierced the night. Draco’s head shot up, his whole body tensing as he went on alert. Suddenly he realized that he’d been able to see Harry quite clearly for a while now. With dread, he looked up to see the moon hanging bright over the mountain ridge. It was full.

“Shit,” he hissed. Draco grabbed their clothes and pulled Harry to his feet. He tossed Harry his glasses. “We got to go back. Now.”

Harry still felt foggy, but adrenaline began to wash his mind clear. Draco shoved his sweater and robe at him. Harry fumbled with his glasses and awkwardly pulled his sweater over his head. Draco pulled him forward and he almost lost his balance. He clutched his school robe in his free hand as he tried to keep up as the blond began to run.

The leaf-strewn ground made each step slippery. Breaking through the trees, they skid slightly, holding on to each other to stay upright. They didn’t make it. A lanky shadow broke free of the tree line a mere hundred feet from them. Golden eyes seemed to glow as they stared directly at them. Inhuman and malevolent, the creature was hunched over and bulky in the shoulders with long limbs.
Its hands were more like paws with enormous claws. Its back legs were bent at a dramatic angle, the feet long and strangely jointed. The beast had a snout that fell open to reveal impossibly sharp teeth strung with thick saliva. It was lightly furred with long ears pressed back along its skull.

Draco stood tense, his breath clouding in front of his face as the monster slowly approached. Harry clutched fearfully to one of Draco’s arms, his eyes huge. The werewolf snarled, the lips curling, revealing even more of the long, deadly fangs filling its mouth. It walked on all fours until it was within twenty feet of them. Then it rose up on its hind legs. The boys tipped their heads back as the monster towered over them.

- FEAR -

Draco mentally shook himself. What the hell was wrong with him? He bared his teeth in a ferocious grin, his magic kicking in and swirling out of the depths of his soul. He shook Harry’s grip off his arm and took a menacing step toward the creature. Harry was his! He wouldn’t let anything hurt Harry!

Harry stared at Draco’s back. His heart pounded furiously in his chest. His fists clenched and he lifted his head. He wouldn’t let it hurt Draco! Determined, he felt deep inside himself for his power. It stirred to life and he sent it toward the blond. Protect him, he ordered it. Protect Draco!

The werewolf snarled. Draco yelled with all his might, felt Harry’s magic merge with his own, and a concussive force hit the werewolf in the chest like a truck. The beast was flung through the air. It hit the ground hard, yelped, and tumbled before it rose up onto all fours. Panting, Draco watched as the beast growled and dropped low to the ground. Draco braced himself for the creature to leap at them, but it didn’t move. Draco’s heart began to slow. He stared the werewolf down and blinked when those golden eyes looked away. Still growling, the beast slunk closer, but at an angle so it wasn’t straight on.

Draco kept his sharp eyes on it, power thrummed in the air around him. The werewolf again stopped twenty feet away, but this time it stayed low. Draco approached the monster. Harry tried to grab at the back of his sweater, but Draco pulled free. The monster snarled and snapped its teeth at the air, but they were nowhere near Draco’s body. Draco smiled grimly and placed his foot on the beast’s throat.

“Hello, Lupin.”

Harry sucked in a startled breath. “Remus?”

The werewolf bit at the ground, growling. It could easily escape, but it didn’t.

Draco lifted his foot and let the beast go. Lupin scrambled to all fours and trotted a few feet away before settling down on its haunches. Draco suddenly laughed, the tension of the last few minutes bleeding out of him. He spun and grabbed Harry by his shoulders, hugging him close. “Come on. It’s late.”

Keeping a close eye on the werewolf, they walked carefully toward the castle. Predatory golden eyes followed them. When it was clear that it was being left behind, the werewolf tipped its head back and howled. Draco gave Harry a grin and howled back, long and loud. Harry giggled and added his voice to theirs, the three of them howling madly at the moon.

Chapter end.
Curses

Remus woke to the smell of rich earth and the chirping of birds. Leaves whispered and rustled above his head and he shivered hard as he registered the damp cold against his naked skin. With a gasp, he sat up quickly, his head spinning with the sudden change of position. His joints screamed in agony, but he had long ago learned to ignore it.

He was outside. Last night was the full moon! Why was he outside? He’d never escaped the Shrieking Shack once he’d locked himself up inside it before. It had never failed him! Until now.

Heart hammering with terror, he examined his hands for dried blood and ran his tongue desperately over his teeth. The faint taste of metal came to him and he shuddered, heaving and gasping. Blood! Dear Merlin, there was blood! As he turned to wretch pathetically to the side, he saw the corpse of a labrador-sized spider next to him. It was half eaten.

Gasping on a sob, Remus began to weep in utter gratitude. He hadn’t hurt anyone! His heart slowed as did his sobs. Sunlight began to filter through the canopy of tree leaves above him and he realized that he was still shivering.

Sore, aching, and exhausted, Remus managed to get to his cabin without anyone seeing him naked in the woods. The last thing he needed was for people to think he was a pervert and start watching him more closely. He collapsed into bed, but before he passed out he swore he’d figure out why the Shrieking Shack had failed him. He’d figure it out and make sure it never happened again.

…

Coming back to the castle, the boys had almost been caught by Filch and Mrs. Norris. Draco had ducked behind a knight, pulling Harry into his arms. Ms. Norris had peered around the armored legs, eyes glowing in the dim light, but Draco had opened his mouth in a simulation of a hiss, filling his mind with all the ways he could make her die. She’d laid her ears back before bolting down the hallway as startled cats do. Draco and Harry had to muffle their giggles as Filch had hurried after her.

They’d only gotten about five hours of sleep, but it had been well worth it. Neville hadn’t asked where they’d been last night. Draco kept an eye on him, but he was in too good a mood to worry about the other boy’s suspicions, if he even had any. Instead, he watched fondly as Harry dressed for the day.

Harry pulled on a pair of black underwear that looked like tiny, skin-tight black shorts, calf-high black silk socks, and a crisp white button-down. Harry’s slender legs were then encased in black slacks and his shirt was tucked in properly. Then Harry sat on the edge of the bed and pulled on a pair of grey two-inch, high-heeled boots. Last, he deftly tied his red and gold necktie with agile fingers before pulling on a grey, cashmere cardigan that had a low-cut v neckline and his school robes.

“You look lovely,” Draco murmured, smoothing Harry’s hair and causing a faint blush to rise where the rims of Harry’s glasses touched his cheeks.

Their happy contentment shattered as Draco took a bite of his breakfast and the rancid taste of filth filled his mouth, maggots wiggling against his cheeks and tongue. Eyes wide with shock, he spat out his food onto the table. Hermione and the other girls around them all made horrified sounds. Draco
stared down at the partially chewed food. Nothing looked wrong with it. He thought for a moment, mind racing, before he scooped up some eggs. He turned and caught Ron’s wide-eyed stare.

“Taste this.”

“Wha - ” Ron didn’t get out the rest of his question before Draco snapped, “Do it.”

Ron narrowed his eyes in a glare, cheeks flaming red. Dean and Seamus egged the redhead on. The girls were squealing, “What’s wrong with you!” “Ew! Don’t!” Draco maintained his hard stare, utterly serious.

Scowling, Ron leaned forward and took the bite from Draco’s fork. He immediately gagged and spat it out. “What the bloody hell?” he demanded, horrified.

Draco’s eyes narrowed. “So it’s not me that was cursed. It’s most likely my plate.”

Everyone looked around suspiciously. They eyed their food. Fred and George shared a glance before taking quick bites. They shrugged and gave Draco the thumbs up. It was fine. The rest followed suit. Only the food on Draco’s plate tasted rancid. Draco scowled and scooped a bite from Harry’s plate. Harry had already pushed it his way in an offer to share. Immediately, he spat it out again as once more the feeling of maggots and the taste of filth overwhelmed him.

“Fuck!” he growled once he’d gagged and spit out the food. He quickly reached for a glass of milk only to spit that out, too.

Harry felt horrible for giving Draco bad food and lifted his fork to test it before Draco could stop him. His eyes watered as he spat it out. It wasn’t just Draco. The food from his plate tasted bad now, too. “Sorry, Draco…” he whispered sadly.

Draco was furious. It was one thing to keep him from eating. It was a whole different story to prevent Harry from eating. “Ron, give Harry your plate.”

“But!” Ron looked more horrified than he had when he’d eaten the bad food.

“Now!” Draco barked, fist hitting the table with a surprisingly loud bang.

Silence fell around them, the First-years staring wide-eyed at the blond.

Ron sullenly passed Harry his plate. “Here, mate.”

Harry opened his mouth to protest, but the feeling of a hot laser boring into the side of his head made him glance to the side. Furious silver eyes stared at him, waiting for him to disobey. Harry swallowed hard, his heart kicking in his chest, and took Ron’s plate. He ate with his head ducked - ashamed submissive trust.

Hermione gave Draco a worried glance. Her frizzy hair was pulled back in a low, tight ponytail and still a few flyaways had escaped to fall around her face. “What do you think happened?”

Ron forced Fred to share his breakfast plate with him. “It’s probably just a prank.”

“Focused on me and anyone who helps me.” Draco shoved his plate away and braced his elbow on the table, leaning his cheek against it. His other hand rested where his wand pocket was located. “I suspect our friendly Gryffindor bullies.”

“Or the Slytherins,” Dean muttered. He was sitting on the other side of the table and was glaring
behind them at the table of green and silver.

“They would have targeted Harry, too,” Seamus disagreed. “Harry’s food was fine until Draco tried to eat off his plate.”

Dean shook his head hard. “You saw what happened to Pucey for attacking Harry. They won’t go after Harry directly again.”

“We don’t know anything for sure,” Hermione interjected firmly. “It’s useless to speculate. We need to investigate and get hard evidence.”

“How’s your leg?” Draco asked suddenly. He studied her face, looking for evidence of pain.

Hermione met his eyes easily. “It’s fine.” She looked down at the cane leaning beside her on the other side of the bench. “I’ll have to use this for a week or two, but I’ll make a full recovery.” She looked up at Ron and Harry across from her. She gave them a small smile. “I could’ve been hurt way worse. Thank you for coming when you did.”

Harry and Ron both blushed. Ron muttering, “It was nothing.”

“Neville and I have a pass to be tardy to classes because of my leg,” she continued. “But McGonagall warned me that no one else is excused, so don’t wait for us.”

Draco nodded. He took Harry’s hand as he stood. “Come on, guys.” He gave Neville a meaningful glance. “Be careful.”

Neville nodded, face pale but set. He wasn’t going to let anything happen to Hermione.

It was Saturday, November 2nd, so their first class of the day was their Potions Practical with the Slytherins. Draco was already in a bad mood, but it darkened further the closer they got to Snape’s classroom. Aggression pumped through his veins. His fingers turned white as he gripped the strap of the school bag that he wore across his chest.

“Here, Draco,” Harry said softly - worry concern.

Draco’s neck felt stiff as he turned it to see his boy. Harry had a red apple offered on his palm. Draco felt his shoulders relax as he looked past the fruit into Harry’s gentle green eyes. A rush of warmth softened his expression. “Thank you.” It tasted delicious and he ate it happily, filled with Harry’s - love.

…

Draco could hardly focus on his potion; he was too busy watching Snape through the curtain of his bangs. He chopped and prepped what Harry told him to, but he mostly left the brewing up to his boy. He couldn’t seem to take his eyes off Snape. Every time he looked down to help brew, he’d get a crawling sensation along the back of his neck and an overwhelming sense of paranoia would make him snap his eyes back up to see where Snape was in the room and see what he was doing.

There were all these dangerous ingredients around. Anything could happen and Snape could easily make it look like an accident. The burn scar on his back itched at the thought, making Draco want to lower his head and growl warningly at the man. He didn’t of course. It would give too much away. He settled for watching Snape like a hawk. By the time class was over, they’d produced a mediocre potion and Draco’s neck cracked from tension as he rolled his shoulders.

“Sorry, Draco. I’ll do better next time,” Harry murmured - disappointment self-hate.
Draco cut his eyes toward his boy.

Ron looped his arm over Harry’s shoulders. “Don’t worry about it, mate,” he said cheerfully. “Seamus’s cauldron puffed black smoke! Did you see?” He laughed. “An A from Snape is as good as an O! Especially when he grades Gryffindors.”

Ron’s kind words only made Harry more miserable. Now he felt - guilty - on top of inadequate. He didn’t deserve kindness right now.

Draco pinched the back of Harry’s arm sharp enough to bruise. Harry sucked in a quiet breath at the painful sting but otherwise showed no other reaction. “You need to study with Neville tonight.”

Hermione didn’t see the pinch, but she heard the comment and scowled, unconsciously picking up her pace to try and keep up with the infuriating blond. “Ron’s right. Harry’s potion and Neville’s were the second and third best potions! And I do mean Harry’s potion. He might as well have been working alone with as much help as you offered! So you have no room to complain about the grade!” She tried to come off sharp, but she was breathless by this point and her leg was beginning to hurt.

Draco slowed down to meet her pace. He tucked half his bangs behind an ear, the rest still falling softly around his face as he walked. A single eyebrow lifted as he regarded her with a cool look. “That potion didn’t really require two brewers. Snape only pairs us because there aren’t enough stations. I notice you didn’t accept much help from Ron either and yet you got an E.”

She opened her mouth to argue back, but Draco slashed his hand out in a cutting gesture. The look on his face hardened into something more intimidating that made her hesitate.

“I don’t like you thinking Harry isn’t as capable as you are. You’re brilliant, Hermione. Your memory is better than anyone else’s I know, but Harry is brilliant, too. He’s perfectly able to get E’s and O’s.”

- doubt happiness - Harry blushed a pretty pink. “Draco, I…”

Draco’s intense eyes settled on Harry. He stopped walking, forcing the others to stop with him. They stood in a main corridor, so other students muttered in annoyance as they had to walk around their group. Draco didn’t care. He only had eyes for Harry. “You’re perfectly capable of getting E’s and O’s,” he repeated. “I want you to write down what you could have done better today in Potions and copy the recipe three times before going to bed.”

- gratitude unworthiness - Harry teared up and hugged Draco. “Yes, Draco.”

Draco held him, one hand cradling the back of Harry’s head, as his eyes shifted to Hermione. The girl was watching them with a slightly cocked head, a frown of confusion on her face. Taking Harry’s hand, Draco resumed walking. They were going to be late at this point, so they might as well keep their pace to Hermione’s. If Ron cared about the slow pace, he didn’t mention it. They had just reached the first floor when Draco suddenly went sprawling. It felt like wire had hooked his ankle. He fell hard, jamming his wrists as the heel of his hands absorbed most of the impact. His jaw also hit the floor, snapping his teeth painfully closed. It was sheer luck he hadn’t bitten off the tip of his tongue.

“Draco!” Harry cried, crouching beside him.

Neville grabbed Hermione as the girl teetered, almost tripping over Draco’s sprawled form.

“Who the bloody hell did that?” Ron bellowed at the milling students around them.
“Ron,” Hermione murmured warningly.

Several dozen students were near them, all in different Houses and years. Some looked at them curiously, some were laughing, but it wasn’t the kind of laugh that made them seem guilty just immature.

Heart pounding with adrenaline, Draco pushed himself up so that he was kneeling, pain throbbing through his senses. “Rahl?” he demanded.

“Don’t see ‘em,” Ron answered, glowering at the crowd.

Draco climbed to his feet with some help from Harry. His jaw and hands throbbed hotly, but he wasn’t bleeding. “Come on,” he said quietly and walked stiffly out the doors to the greenhouses.

They were all on alert as they walked to lunch after Herbology, but Draco was left alone. They all breathed a sigh of relief only to tense up again when Draco still couldn’t eat. Harry tried to keep things light and the conversation flowing, knowing Draco wouldn’t want attention right now, but it was hard. Draco was the only one sitting at the table not eating. It made Harry’s stomach clinch. The memory of the Dursleys and cowering on the floor hovered behind his eyes. He ate half of what he normally would and only ate that much because Draco glared at him when he stopped. If anyone was underserving of food, it was Harry not Draco!

“Let’s go study by the lake,” Hermione suggested as lunch came to a close. It would be nice to get out of the castle and away from whoever was cursing Draco. Maybe they could relax.

Harry, Neville, and Ron all agreed solemnly. They had all snuck food into their bag, so once they were settled on the grassy bank of the lake, they pulled out their offerings for the blond. Draco gave them a closed-mouth smile, eyes soft. “Thank you.” He ate the bread, cheese, and fruit as he worked with Ron on the Transfiguration essays due next period. Neville, Harry, and Hermione worked on Potions, having already finished their essays.

It was a beautiful day. The breeze was cool, but the sun was warm. The smell of fall was in the air, the lake sparkling before them. Soon all the stress from the day disappeared and they lounged, relaxed and happy as they studied, but they hadn’t forgotten. As they made their way back inside the castle, they surrounded Draco, hoping to protect him from further attacks. It didn’t work. They were just climbing the staircase toward the second floor when Draco’s bag ripped open and all of his notebooks, pens, and textbooks went flying.

Harry, Neville, and Ron scrambled for Draco’s things while the blond stood rooted in place. The stairs were filled with students. They were laughing at him. Some were even annoyed for him being in the way, purposefully kicking or stepping on his things. Cruelty shone in their eyes and rejection. Hermione wrapped her fingers around his wrist and held on tight, her chin tilted up defiantly.

The boys finished gathering his things, Ron having angrily cussed out several people who got in his way or laughed at him. Hermione repaired the tear in Draco’s bag, warning him it would only hold temporarily. They were putting everything back inside it when a Stinging Hex hit Draco’s hand, clipping Hermione’s. She gasped at the pain and flinched back, dropping Draco’s textbook. Her eyes stung from the sharp sting and she stared wide-eyed at Draco who merely looked annoyed. The blond picked up the book she had dropped and shoved it into his bag, glaring at the students who pushed past them.

“Hurry it up! You’re in the way,” snapped an older Ravenclaw.

Draco grit his teeth, took Harry’s hand, and continued up the stairs with the rest of them following.
Harry didn’t duck his head as he normally would. His head was up, his eyes attentive as he watched their surroundings. They were late to Transfiguration. McGonagall assigned Draco, Harry, and Ron detentions, scolding Hermione sharply for not taking their warnings seriously.

“All you and your brother have tardy passes, Miss Pleasant. Do remind your friends of that next time.”

Hermione tried to protest, but Draco squeezed her hand warningly.

“I don’t understand why you didn’t say anything,” Hermione snapped, frustrated. Her cane hit the floor more loudly than it did normally, a sharp click with every step as they made their way to dinner after class. Ron had asked Dean and Seamus to walk at their slower pace while the rest of their class went on ahead. The more help they had guarding Draco the better at this point.

“What can they do about it? We were looking out for something like that and even we didn’t see who did it,” Draco answered lowly, eyes scanning the kids around them. “There’s no point in telling them.”

As if to prove his point, Draco went sprawling in the Entrance Hall. Harry had grabbed the back of his robes as Draco fell, but he wasn’t strong enough to catch him. Instead, he was pulled down on top of the blond. Draco grunted at Harry’s added weight.

Scrambling off of him, Harry knelt by his side - anger self-hate. “Sorry, Draco,” he said, voice thick. It was his job to take care of Draco and he was failing!

“I’m fine,” Draco bit out. He climbed to his feet for the second time that day. His wrist and knees throbbed. His jaw still ached from the first time. He was getting seriously pissed off.

“What the hell is their problem?” Ron demanded loudly.

“Hush,” Hermione tried to quiet him, but the redhead wouldn’t simmer down.

“Draco’s done nothing wrong!”

“I heard a few people talking,” Dean offered. He shared a glance with Seamus. “Some of the upper Years. They were talking about Draco being behind the troll getting in. Said it was some Malfoy plot to get rid of Muggleborns. That Draco’s only pretending to be a Gryffindor so he’s not suspected.”

“I knew it was Rahl,” Draco growled, eyes glinting. “Only he’d come up with something that stupid.”

“Even if that’s where it started, it’s gone beyond him now,” Seamus cautioned, Irish accent softening his words. “There’s a lot of people who feel that way.”

“That’s bullying!” Hermione protested hotly. “We have to tell the professors!”

“If there’s so many people, it’s hard to tell who’s doing it,” Dean said unsurely. “What are they going to do?”

“There has to be something!” Hermione exclaimed. “We have to try!”

They took their seats at their table. Draco didn’t even bother trying to reach for the food. It didn’t matter though. Ron spat out his food with gagging sounds, followed closely by Dean. Draco scowled furiously, grabbed his bag and stood. Apparently, he wasn’t allowed to sit with them.
“Where are you going?” Hermione asked softly, worried.

Draco noticed the twins and Percy had similar expressions. “I’m going to study. It would be a better use of my time. Come on, Harry.”

Harry immediately stood, - grateful - Draco was taking him along with him.

The others didn’t know what to say and let the pair walk off. As soon as Draco was out of the room, their food became edible again. The message was clear: being friends with Draco came with a cost.

Draco took Harry straight to the kitchens. He was not going to let Harry miss meals, so they would just have to eat by themselves until Draco put a stop to this. He followed the directions he’d memorized from Dora and soon found himself in front of a painting with a bowl of fruit. Tickling the pear, it swung open to a vast room with large islands, tons of counter space, fireplaces, and working elves.

Harry took over, speaking kindly to the two elves who turned to see what they needed. In less than five minutes, they were sat at a small wooden table off to the side by one of the fires with two stools and a large spread of food. It tasted delicious, confirming Draco’s suspicion that it was the plates and/or utensils in the Great Hall that were cursed not the food itself.

Harry ate the food placed in front of him with no hope that they’d be able to actually eat it all. The elves worked quietly, but there was still a nice background hum of conversation and activity. The fire warmed him nicely, too, and he shed his robe and sweater. He looked over at Draco with a smile, feeling relaxed for the first time since the lake.

Draco felt as if things were just slightly tilted. He could see Harry, feel the peaceful feelings softly whispering through the bond, see his boy’s sweet smile, but it felt at a distance. Behind glass. Loudest in his ears was the slow, hard beats of his heart. His knees and skinned palms began to burn, the echo of everyone’s laughter began to rise in his ears, distorted and wavering as if he were standing on a stage with a whole stadium filled with people laughing, laughing, laughing while he slowly bled.

Harry froze - anxiety worry - spiking through his system. Draco stared right through him. His face was utterly expressionless. Like he were a doll. No, worse, as if he were dead. Was he breathing? “Draco!” - terror - Harry reached for his arm.

Draco blinked. The strange sensation fell away. He blinked again and actually focused on his boy’s frightened face. “What?”

Harry sat there, heart pounding in fear. “You… Are you okay?” he asked in an unsteady whisper.

Draco gave him an easy smile. “Got a few bruises, but I’m fine. You can heal me when we take a shower later, okay?” He saw that Harry’s hand was almost touching his arm, hesitating. He smiled again and caught Harry’s fingers in his own, linking them and letting them rest together on the table. “Don’t worry, Harry. I’ll make sure these attacks stop soon,” he promised.

Harry stared intently at Draco’s face. He took in the soft expression, the light in Draco’s grey eyes, the gentle smile. He was Draco again. “You… You looked… bad,” he said in frustration. He didn’t have the words to describe the utterly dead expression on Draco’s face. “Like you couldn’t see me…”

Draco frowned. His first impulse was to blow Harry off and that made him pause. He would never blow Harry off! Had he felt weird a minute ago? He couldn’t remember, but Harry’s alarm still

Harry gave an unsure nod. Slowly his anxiety bled away and his heart rate returned to normal, but he was still worried. Something had happened to Draco and it had been utterly terrifying.

…

That night at detention McGonagall had Ron, Draco, and Harry write an essay regarding the importance of punctuality. She gave them an essay frame for them to use, briefly discussing with them the parts of an essay and the purpose of each. It was good practice even if the topic was shit and the detention unjust. Draco was exhausted by the time they made it back to the Tower. He pulled Harry into a shower stall and sat on a low seat while Harry knelt and sucked at his knees and palms, the warmth of sunshine and wholeness filling Draco with light. Harry had then stood and bent forward to lick and suck at Draco’s bruising jaw, the colors bleaching away under his touch. They washed quickly, Draco nearly falling asleep in the shower.

Sitting against the headboard, Harry stared down at the blond - worried. Draco was sound asleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow. He looked fine, even peaceful, his mouth slightly parted as he breathed in and out, his damp hair fanned out along the pillow, his long pale lashes resting on his cheeks, but the feeling of something wrong nagged at him.

“It’s been a long day,” Neville’s voice said softly. Harry hadn’t shut the curtains around their bed yet, the lamps still burning. “It makes sense he’s tired.”

“You’re right. Good night, Neville,” he offered with a forced smile, accepting the boy’s softly whispered, “Night,” in return.

He blew out his lamp and pulled the curtains closed. He slid down, curling around Draco and resting his hand on the blond’s chest, feeling for each breath and heartbeat. It had been stressful, he wouldn’t deny that, but when they had bad days, Draco became alert and watchful not sleepy like this. Harry stayed awake for an hour or more, just watching over the blond, but Draco never moved or shifted, practically dead to the world. When sleep came, Harry rested fitfully, waking up several times in the night just to check that Draco was still there.

…

Lucius waited for Narcissa to fall deeply asleep before creeping out of bed and entering his study. He unspelled the warded drawer on the right and lifted the diary free. Quill in hand, he wrote his warning: *Things are happening at Hogwarts. I will be taking steps to safeguard my children soon.*

They had received the owl earlier that day informing them of the troll incident at school. It came with Dumbledore’s reassurances that it had been handled swiftly and that the children were safe, but Lucius was still displeased. Too many times his son and ward had been put in danger already that year, he didn’t like the trend he was seeing.

There was a longer pause than normal before Tom’s beautiful script bloomed across the page. *I see. You feel I’d be an added liability should my older incarnation successfully complete a ritual of rebirth.*

Lucius held his breath, but he wrote nothing. He felt poised over a precipice. It was unexpected and alarming. Why had he written at all? He should destroy the diary immediately and weaken the Dark Lord’s path back from the dead… Except it would be useless as long as Harry existed, anchoring the Dark Lord’s soul to earth.
Perhaps you should think about it from another angle. I could be an advantage, Lucius. I must admit I am not happy with the reports you bring of my future self’s actions. I had not taken Herpo’s warnings seriously. I merely thought he lacked mental fortitude, but your testimony has made me reconsider. If you help me, Lucius, I can help you destroy this failed incarnation of myself and together we can rise in power and make our dreams a reality. We can change the world, Lucius. Make it what it once was again. Now that we know what to protect against, we can insure my sanity does not wane. Harry is safe from me. After all, why would I destroy my own Horcrux? And if I am no longer a threat to Harry, Draco should no longer be a threat to me. We can make it work, Lucius. Together, nothing would be impossible.

Lucius slammed the diary shut, breathing hard. With a shove, he pushed away from his desk and paced to the other side of the room. Tom was very persuasive and a large part of Lucius liked what the brilliant teen had to say. Lucius deliberately turned his back and left the room, leaving the diary to sit alone in the dark. He had a lot to think on.

…

Draco was tripped in the halls several times a day. His school bag continued to rip open, spilling his things everywhere. While he was going to the bathroom in between classes, the toilet had exploded up at him, splashing him with filthy water. He’d missed his next class because of that to go get cleaned up, but fortunately it was History of Magic and Binns didn’t really care or notice.

Draco was frustrated beyond belief! Dean and Seamus were right. It was more than just Rahl and his group. A lot of the time, they were never around when something happened to Draco. Their vicious rumors had done their job and now a good portion of Gryffindor and upper-Years from other Houses were targeting Draco because he was supposedly some traitorous snake. If Draco retaliated or attacked Rahl, it would only justify their abuse and make them attack him more.

The First-year boys and Hermione did their best to shield Draco, and Draco and Harry did their best to make Draco less of a target - using side passages, avoiding crowds as much as possible, eating in the kitchens - but they couldn’t prevent all of the attacks. It made Harry feel so useless. It was his job to take care of Draco! Draco was important and always working on important things. Harry’s job was to support him, and he was failing miserably!

…

Harry opened his eyes. It was almost pitch black inside the curtains of their bed. Low-level anxiety that never left him and a sense that something wasn’t right made him immediately reach out for Draco, but this time his fears were justified. Draco wasn’t next to him. Heart thundering in his throat, Harry shakily pulled the curtain open and turned the knob on the bedside lamp. A flame jumped to life, casting light over the bed. Draco was sitting on the far edge, his back to Harry. Harry’s heart plummeted as the blond remained perfectly still, unaffected by his - fear - and the light.

“Draco?” he whispered.

He crawled slowly over, craning his head to get a look at Draco’s face. As if in slow motion, Draco’s profile came into view, the curve his cheek and jaw. Already something didn’t look right, but it was as if Harry wasn’t registering what he was seeing right away. He continued forward, stomach clenched and hands trembling, seeing now that Draco’s mouth was hanging open. His lips stretched tight in the shape of an oval; it looked like he was screaming. Draco’s eyes were open and unblinking, the pupils small.

“Draco!” Harry rasped, - terrified. He flung himself at the blond, hands on his shoulders, shaking him lightly, but he was so stiff. He hardly moved under his hands. Red appeared at Draco’s nose,
horrifically bright against Draco’s white skin. It rolled slowly down over his lip.

Magic swirled out from Harry, hitting Draco with more force than normal, fueled by his - desperate terror. Draco’s back arched, his whole body going rigid as if he was being electrocuted. Harry cried out, stopping his magic, afraid he was somehow hurting Draco more, but Draco merely fell limp on the bed, eyes blinking as he moaned softly.

“Harry, wha time’s it?” he slurred.

Heart hammering in his chest, tears soaking his cheeks, Harry gently stroked Draco’s hair from his face. His hand shook. “Draco...” He swallowed past a painful lump in his throat. “Draco, are you okay?”

Draco captured his trembling hand and sat up. His nose had stopped bleeding, but red was still smeared across his upper lip. “What’s the matter?” he asked, eyes growing more alert as he frowned at Harry. Through his tears, Harry dutifully described what had happened. Draco pulled him against his side and stroked his hair soothingly, rocking Harry softly. “Shhh, it’s okay. You woke me up. You did so good, Harry.”

Slowly Harry’s shaking stopped. Draco kissed his head, his temple, his cheek. He pulled Harry back up the bed and they laid down next to each other. Draco peppered his face with kisses, licking the salt from his tears off his skin. Harry melted under his gentle care, but his - anxiety - didn’t fade completely.

“I’m fine,” Draco murmured reassuringly. “I’ll go see Pomfrey before the game, promise. Rest, Harry. Whatever happened, I’m fine now. I’m sure it’s just another stupid curse. I’m sorry it scared you.”

Harry let Draco’s voice wash around him as his eyes fluttered closed in exhaustion.

…”

They were in the Gryffindor locker room. The team was pulling on their uniforms: red and gold half-robeks, black riding pants and matching knee-high, black boots. They were charmed with protective and cushioning spells to offers some protection against injury. Harry wore the number seven on his back; Draco wore the number fourteen since he was reserve Seeker.

Draco held Harry’s face in his hands, his grin nearly as bright as his eyes. “Do your best out there, Harry.”

Harry leaned into Draco’s touch, his mind was still on last night. The image of Draco’s mouth shaped in a soundless scream, the color red rolling down from his nose, eyes wide and empty…

“Harry.”

Harry blinked green eyes behind round, black glasses and stared into Draco’s commanding gaze.

“You’re about to play your first match. Lucius and Narcissa, Andy and Ted... They’re all out there. I want you to show them how strong you’ve become. That means you gotta focus. Pomfrey said I’m fine. It was probably just stress. You gotta trust me.”

“Yes, Draco. Sorry,” Harry murmured and brought his whole attention back to the moment. “I’ll catch the snitch for you,” he promised.

Harry nodded.

“Alright, team! Huddle up!” Oliver called, breaking the moment between the two First-year boys.

Harry felt a small pang of loss as Draco released his face and took a step back, but the slow, sweet smile that Draco sent his way in response made Harry’s heart melt and his fears shrink.

Oliver was clearly excited and nervous as hell; this was the first game as Captain. He gave a long speech about winning and then they were running out of the tunnel and into the bright November day. It was cold, and Harry smiled in thanks when Fred and George cast warming charms on him. He looked through the stands, searching for his family, but it was Draco who found them first and pointed them out. Harry gave a wave, cheeks red with embarrassment.

Ted and Andromeda waved back happily; Lucius and Narcissa regally bowed their heads. Other parents and a few fans from Hogsmeade also filled the spectating stands along with most of the school’s teachers. Remus wasn’t there; he was likely babysitting Dee. The rest of the stands were filled with what seemed like the entire school. Draco and the two other reserve players moved to sit on the bench, clapping and cheering.

The whistle blew and Harry shot up into the sky, higher than the other players. The Slytherin Seeker copied him. Harry kept him in sight, but he turned most of his attention toward the pitch, searching for a glint of gold in the sunlight. Within ten minutes, Angelina scored the first goal, causing the crowds to cheer madly. Slytherin scored, Gryffindor again… Harry saw the Snitch! He angled his broom - a brand-new Nimbus 2000, a gift from Narcissa and Lucius that had arrived that morning - toward the ground and shot forward. Higgs was several feet behind him.

The cold wind rushed past his face, whipping his hair about, but before Harry could get too close, a Slytherin player blocked his path, nearly making Harry crash into him. Harry barely had time to veer away and lost sight of the snitch in the process. Madam Hooch called foul and awarded a penalty, which Alicia scored much to the crowd’s delight. Harry zoomed back up to a higher perch and scanned the arena again for the snitch.

Draco basked in the - excitement determination - that beat like a second heart through the bond. Harry was having fun. He had to admit the game was fun to watch, even though the point system still made no sense to him. He rubbed his hands together and blew into them, his nose red from the cold. The game was about forty minutes in. Suddenly - surprise fear - spiked through the bond and Draco whipped his eyes up to see the boy barely holding on to a broom that was jerking one way and then the other. Jinx, line of sight, the knowledge rose through his adrenaline-soaked mind.

“Grab the banner!” he barked at the reserve player next to him. He grabbed one end himself, took his broom in hand, and practically growled when the other boy was being slow about it. He looked like he wanted to ask questions, but Draco ordered in a cold, dangerous voice. “Move it.”

Following Draco’s lead and confused as hell, they rocketed up toward the spectator’s box. Draco’s eyes immediately zoomed in on Snape as if pulled by a magnetic force. The man had his eyes on the pitch, his mouth moving. Draco flew as close as he was allowed and barked at the other boy to pull the banner tight. Snape’s line of sight was broken by the bright red material with Gryffindor written in huge gold letters. He gave Draco a furious look, eyes dark as pitch. Draco glared back, baring his teeth. He turned his head to see Harry’s broom had stabilized, the jinx had been broken.

A wild cheer went up as Harry spat out the snitch into his hand. Draco whipped his head around and gave Snape a triumphant grin, victory making him feel high. He gave a whoop and released the banner, letting it flutter toward the ground, as he flew over to his boy.
* Good job, Harry! Good boy! *

- pride shock - flooded the bond and Draco kissed Harry’s cheek.

The whole of the Gryffindor team was only a second behind him, crashing into them and forming a massive crush in the air. Oliver was crying, he was so happy. The twins thought it was hysterical that Harry had accidentally caught the snitch in his mouth. They were laughing historically as they slapped Harry’s back.

They had won 170-60. Flint threw a fit, calling foul, but Madam Hooch judged the incident fair play - Draco had never entered the pitch after all and whatever had happened to Harry’s broom had righted itself in less than a minute. Everyone attributed the weird moment with Harry’s broom to him losing control of the powerful instrument; he was only a First-year after all. Harry and Draco knew better, but they were too excited about the win to worry about it right then.

Severus eyed the people sitting nearest him in the stands suspiciously. Whoever had been jinxing the broom had stopped when Draco had flown up to block his view, so they had to be close. For a moment, he’d felt heart stopping fury, terrified that without his counter-jinx Harry would be flung from the broom and gravely injured, but Draco’s obnoxious move had miraculously still saved the boy.

Severus caught Dumbledore’s eye and gave him a subtle gesture before standing in a swirl of black robes. Face perfectly blank, Severus turned and practically flew from the stands.

“The boys will be celebrating with their friends. Let’s not disturb them,” Lucius said softly, but it was clear he wasn’t happy. Narcissa was practically clawing into his arm, but even she had to admit this wasn’t the time.

So rarely did they see Draco and Harry so carefree and overjoyed as they were, caught in the middle of their cheering team. Besides, Draco had successfully put a stop to whatever had effected Harry’s broom. Maybe it wasn’t anything ominous; perhaps it had been a tasteless prank or some Slytherin sabotage. The boys had things in hand. For now.

“Why don’t we speak to the Headmaster before we leave,” he suggested.

Narcissa nodded, worry evident in her eyes. Andromeda and Ted agreed immediately. Andromeda looked dangerous, reminding Lucius she was a black, and even Ted looked determined. Lucius gave them a sharp, approving smile before he led them through the crowd to the Headmaster’s side.

“Headmaster Dumbledore,” he said with mock gentleness. “May we have a word?”

Severus paced across the Headmaster’s office, waiting for Dumbledore to appear. He knew the Headmaster had to bid farewell to the guests who had come to watch the match, but he was anxious and worried. It took nearly an hour before Dumbledore finally arrived. “Things are getting too dangerous,” he said lowly once the Headmaster sat tiredly in the seat behind his desk. “Something is affecting Draco. I suspect a mind spell from the symptoms the boys described to Pomfrey this morning. He needs to be seen by a Mind-Healer.”

Dumbledore stared across at Severus unhappily. “I’m still working on getting Nicholas to agree to
destroy the stone, but he still isn’t ready yet. It wasn’t safe even in Gringotts. There is no other place for it. We certainly cannot allow Voldemort to gain possession of it or the Dark Lord will be resurrected in less than a year. The boys aren’t ready to face that battle yet.” He sat back and took his glasses off, rubbing at his eyes tiredly. “As for young Draco, we cannot seek a Master Healer. Not just yet. Not until the issue regarding the stone is resolved. The boys’ guardians are already threatening to remove the boys completely. We have to think of the bigger picture.”

Severus practically snarled. “That may not be the worst idea! The children are in danger, Headmaster! All of them! Draco has been attacked! Harry was attacked just now on the pitch! The traitor grows bold!”

“There is no evidence to suggest that Harry was attacked by our traitor, Severus. Perhaps it was a prank. Draco is unfortunately being targeted by the students and that has spilled over onto Harry. We need to devise a plan to turn popular opinion back into Draco’s favor.”

“Draco has been injured!” Severus protested furiously. “He needs treatment!”

Dumbledore closed his eyes for a moment before opening them. “Poppy assures me the boys are perfectly healthy. We only have your suspicions that he’s been attacked.”

Severus was too angry to be polite or humor the old man’s willfully blind outlook. “There are many mind-spells that do not show up on a healing scan. That’s why the excuse of the Imperius was so successful in getting people out of trouble during the war. It is undetectable.”

“Then a Mind Healer’s treatment would likewise be uncertain,” Dumbledore pointed out. “If your suspicions are correct, then we are too late to help young Draco. We must protect the stone until I can settle things with Nicholas. That takes precedence before all else. Likewise, the boys need to be here, Severus. If they isolate themselves, they will have fewer allies in the war to come. The future depends on them succeeding here.”

Severus refused to accept this was the only way. He gave the Headmaster a disappointed look before slamming the door behind him.

Dumbledore seemed to wilt, a tired sigh rising from his lips. Fawkes flew over to his desk and began to sing, but even the phoenix’s song couldn’t soothe him completely.

Chapter end.
A/N: Happy belated Halloween and sorry for the very late chapter. The chapter was giving me a lot of trouble. I really wanted the atmosphere to be right. Please let me know what you think of it!

Minerva couldn’t sleep. The castle was dark and cold, winter fast approaching. Moonlight illuminated her tired face in intermittent bursts as she passed windows filled with crystal clear panes of glass. Her slippers shushed along the stone floors. A single source of warmth was caught in her hand, a small flickering candle held chest high.

Her slow, meandering journey brought her to a stone guardian. Shadows thrown by her candle made the avian face appear harsh and impassive. “Cockroach clusters,” she whispered, half-certain she was speaking nonsense and the gargoyle would refuse to move.

Instead, the eagle head seemed to nod as it took a step back, revealing the stone steps it guarded. Minerva climbed. There was nothin else to be done, really. She climbed seeking answers and reassurance, seeking peace so that she could sleep.

Albus stepped out onto the balcony that led to his personal quarters wearing a plain white dressing robe. His hair was loose as it fell down his back, his beard braided so as not to tangle in his sleep. Without a word of greeting or question, he stepped down to meet her in his office. His hands were warm as they gently took hers. She looked down at them. They were knotted and slender, but they still possessed a steady strength. This man had seen terrible things, but he still clung to beliefs as bright and glorious as the sun.

“What is bothering you, dear friend?” he finally asked.

Already most of her worries seemed to fade. “The boys, of course.”

“The bullying?” he asked softly.

“It is hard to catch the culprits in the act no matter how closely we watch. The attacks are subtle and unrelenting. It is certainly not the work of only a few students.” She looked up at him in entreaty. “Are you certain turning a blind eye is the right decision? I hate that I had to give him detention for tardiness.”

“We are teachers, Minerva.” Albus drew her over to the fireplace and conjured soft chairs. “It is crucial for Draco learn to ask for help. Once he does, we can cast wards on his person that will repel the simple jinxes and hexes that plague him in the hallways. However, you know that wouldn’t be a true solution. It would only drive the other students to more creative lengths to make him miserable. The problem is the students’ perception of him. We must somehow change their rejection into acceptance.”

“How?” she demanded desperately. She hated to see any child suffer but maybe especially those two. Her soul ached with the knowledge of how much they had already been hurt and the difficult trials that awaited him.

Albus gave her a bright smile. “I’ve been thinking on just that thing, Minerva. I’ll give the boys a little more time, to either reach out for help or solve their problem themselves, but if that doesn’t work, what we need is to create an environment where Draco’s more virtuous and admirable
qualities shine. In short, he needs to be seen as the hero.”

Minerva couldn’t help smiling back even as her stomach fluttered with nerves. What exactly was Albus planning?

…

Cold fog shrouded the ground, glowing faintly with moonlight. Twinning and snaking around the ominous shapes of trees, it smothered all sound. Barely a faint hissing of leaves could be heard. Chillingly empty, dangerous…

Out of the darkness something white coming closer… At first Harry thought it was a ghost and he gasped, scared… A horse made of pure light, standing on its back legs, nose reaching skyward, front feet kicking… Beautiful until he realized it was frothing at the mouth in terror, square blunt teeth bared, eyes rolling… A shrill scream of pain shattered the eerie silence… Sending his heart rocketing against his ribs. His whole body shook at the sound. He wanted to run far, far away…

Blood spilled and splashed, drenching the white of its coat… that was horrifically fading to a dirty, corpse grey. The dying, terrified creature fell, heavy. The thump was felt in Harry’s bones. It seemed to look right into him as the light faded from its beautiful grey eyes…

Harry screamed! He fought the blankets, trying to sit up, to stand, to move. He screamed again, tears drenching his face. Light spilled over him as his curtains were pulled aside. Neville, wide-eyed and hair mussed, grabbed his shoulder.

“Harry…” he called, voice shaking. “Harry?”

Harry turned and grabbed onto his arm desperately. His heart felt like it would pound straight out of his chest. He could almost still feel the blood, slick and terribly hot against his lips and cheeks, coating his chin.

Neville pulled Harry against his side, calm now that he realized it was just a nightmare. He stroked the trembling boy’s back, speaking softly, promising that it was just a dream, everything was fine.

Slowly, Harry’s heart stopped trying to break out of his ribs and he could breathe again. Wiping the tears from his face, he turned to the side, confused. “Draco?”

The other side of the bed was empty.

Harry’s stomach seemed to leap into his throat. The nightmare vanished from his mind as terrified urgency took its place. “Where’s Draco?” he demanded, staring up at Neville with wide-eyes.

Neville frowned. “I don’t know. He wasn’t here when you woke me up.”

Harry scrambled from the bed. He didn’t bother with a robe or slippers. Wearing only the long white t-shirt he slept in, he ran from the room. He checked the bathroom first. The lights slowly flickered to life, triggered by his presence. He checked every stall, but the room was empty. Harry ran back past Neville standing frightened in their dorm room doorway. He ignored Neville’s call of his name and practically flew down the stairs into the common room.

The room was a mess of shadows. The fire burning low, casting a dull orange-red light. Harry froze, breath caught in his throat. Standing almost dead center in the room, back toward Harry, was Draco’s silhouette.

Bile rose in the back of Harry’s throat. The white blond hair, the pale skin and bright white shirt - the
figure of the white horse in his dreams - splashed with blood and dying - Gasping, struggling to breathe through a constricted throat, Harry took careful steps forward. His fingers trembled as his arm lifted, reaching.

“Draco?” he whispered.

Draco stood perfectly still. In the low light, it almost made Harry second-guess himself. “Draco?” he called a little louder, frightened. His fingertips brushed Draco’s shoulder.

Draco’s head too-slowly turned, only his head. As if in slow motion, Harry saw his mouth gaping open impossibly wide, eyes blank and unblinking, blood oozing from his nose.

Harry’s hand clenched around Draco’s shoulder in reaction, yanking the boy off balance. “Draco!”

Draco stumbled and fell to his knees. His mouth shut as life animated his face, his eyes blinking rapidly. Voice dry and hoarse, he looked up at Harry and said almost in a daze, “What time’s it?”

Harry fell to his knees and flung his arms around Draco’s neck. He shuddered as hot blood dripped onto his shoulder.

“Hey,” Draco rasped. He held Harry to him, frowning at the way the smaller boy shook in his arms. “What’s wrong? Why are we in the common room?”

Harry haltingly told him about the dream, about Draco being missing, about finding him standing down here. Draco listened, stroking his hair and rubbing his back. His frown deepened. It was getting worse - these nighttime attacks of his. It wasn’t every night, but it was often enough that Draco was beginning to grow concerned.

“I’m going to figure this out, Harry,” he promised in a warm whisper. His hand gently fisted the boy’s hair, lifted his head. He looked into Harry’s eyes. - Fear anxiety - flowed thick and heavy as syrup through the bond. “I’m going to fix this.”

Harry’s shoulders relaxed. The tears that had yet to fall finally spilled down pale cheeks - trust worry love - “Yes, Draco.”

…

Draco made a trip to the Infirmary before breakfast. Harry stood anxiously at Draco side as Madam Pomfrey delivered the results of her exam. She could find nothing out of the ordinary besides elevated stress levels and fatigue. Harry opened his mouth to argue, to insist something was wrong, but Draco squeezed his hand.

“Either she’s not telling the truth and someone is making her lie or she really can’t find anything wrong with me,” Draco explained as they made their way to the kitchen. “Either way, there’s no point arguing. We’re going to have to figure this out on our own.”

Harry’s jaw tightened as he gave a short nod - determination. “I’ll do my best, Draco.”

Draco turned to smile at him, bringing Harry’s hand to his lips to gently kiss his knuckles. “I know you will.”

Harry blushed a pretty pink, his head ducking.

…
Draco, Harry, Hermione, and Neville spent as much time as they possibly could in the library. It served two purposes. One, they had a lot to figure out if they were ever going to get on top of what was happening at Hogwarts. Two, Draco was safe from bullying under Madam Pince’s watchful eyes.

Their routine was to first finish their classwork as quickly as possible and then return to their research projects. Harry was looking up spells that could help protect Draco in the halls and keep their room safer at night while Hermione and Neville were researching magical objects that might help Voldemort come back. If they could figure out what it was that Dumbledore was protecting, they could figure out a way to destroy it. Draco had told them that Dumbledore was waiting for permission from the true owner to destroy the item, but Draco wasn’t so inclined. If it would help Voldemort, then it had to be destroyed, permission or no.

Draco’s project was a bit more secretive. Only Harry knew that he was searching for curses that would cause him to sleepwalk and have nosebleeds. So far he hadn’t found anything that matched Harry’s disturbing descriptions.

…

Draco was just stepping through the portrait hole into the Tower when his feet jerked underneath him. The books in his arms went flying as he flailed in order to keep his balance. His body jerked about in an awkward tumble of arms and knees. His feet jumped and kicked madly, as if dancing some demented jig. The common room was full of people. They all turned at the commotion, saw Draco flailing, and burst into laughter.

“Finite incantatem,” Hermione cast firmly, brows lowered in concentration. Draco staggered as he regained control of his feet and practically fell against the wall for balance. His hair hung limp, his face glistened with sweat. He hid his expression, trying to swallow down the helpless fury that choked him. Hands balled into fists, he just barely held onto the icy-cold magic that wanted to spill free.

Harry rushed past him and shoved Rahl, who was laughing so hard he was crying, off the couch arm he sat on. “Draco’s done nothing wrong!” he screamed. His eyes blazed behind his glasses, his face red with fury. “You think he’s some traitor because he’s a Malfoy, but it’s like you’ve forgotten that he wasn’t raised here! He was kidnapped and kept overseas until only two years ago! If anyone’s a traitor, it’s you! For bullying one of your own! Draco’s more of a Gryffindor than you cowardly assholes who attack behind his back and laugh! You got a problem with him, say it to our faces!” The room fell silent as Rahl slowly stood up. Broad-shouldered, a few inches shy of six-feet, Rahl stared down at Harry.

Harry didn’t back down. He stared up at the older teen with defiant rage in every line of his body. “Better watch it, Harry,” Rahl warned, his pale blue eyes narrowed dangerously. “Being the Boy-Who-Lived will only get you so far.”

Draco came off the wall and stood at Harry’s side. “No, you better watch it,” he said softly. There was something about the way he spoke, the knowledge in his eyes, that made Rahl bare his teeth and the kids around them lean away. Then to Draco’s complete surprise, another voice spoke up.

“Leave Draco alone!” Hermione added her voice to theirs as she stepped forward to stand with her friends. “We’re just First-years! What do you hope to accomplish besides looking cruel and childish?”
“You're just being bullies!” Neville cried defiantly. He was pale with fear, but his voice was steady.

“There’s no way a First-year, no matter who he is got a troll into the castle,” Ron stated. He crossed his arms and glared at everyone around them.

“I don’t appreciate my own House sabotaging my players,” Oliver said darkly from his position by the fire. “Draco’s my reserve Seeker. I’m going to need him fit to play if we’re going to win the Cup. Some of us are trying to get noticed by the Professional Quidditch League, you know.”

There were voices of assent to this statement from the other Quidditch players, most notably the Weasley twins.

Suddenly the air was thick with tension as the room began to divide, groups turning on each other with accusatory eyes.

Draco felt his heart pound in his chest. He hadn’t expected such support. He felt the atmosphere shift in his favor and grabbed it. He spoke low and compelling, voice growing in volume as he continued.

“I know my name comes with baggage, but I am not my name. Maybe Malfoys are meant to be Slytherin, but I turned that down! I chose to be here. You can trip me, break my things, poison my food, but I’m not scared of you and I’m not going anywhere! My name is Draco not Malfoy, and I am a Gryffindor! Twin to Harry Potter! That’s who I am.”

Fred and George shared a glance, identical grins spreading across their faces. Slowly they began to clasp. Ron joined in and soon the whole of the Gryffindor team was clapping loudly, but there were still plenty of faces that looked uncertain or suspicious.

Draco gave them all a wry smile. “Come on, Harry. We still have some homework to finish before bed.”

Harry glared fiercely up at Rahl. “You’re going to have to go through me to get to Draco,” he promised. “What are you going to do? Push me down the stairs like a Slytherin?”

There were unhappy murmurs at this, but Rahl looked unfazed, eyes cold as he continued to meet the younger boy’s eyes.

Harry gave the room a dark look before turning and chasing after the blond.

…

Concerned, Professor Flitwick asked Harry to stay behind after class. Draco, of course, waited at the door for the other boy. Flitwick watched with a frown as Harry fidgeted before his desk, eyes lowered. When he spoke, it was with a hint of nervousness.

“Yes, Professor?”

“I noticed your essays have declined lately,” he told the child gently.

Green eyes looked up at him through a curtain of wavy bangs. They were ringed underneath with dark circles.

Flitwick made his voice even softer. “Are you getting enough sleep? Are you well?”

“Yes, sir,” Harry answered. The boy offered a smile. “I promise to work harder.”

It wasn’t that he wanted the child to work harder per say, he was just concerned about the boy’s
health. Earnestly, he offered, “If you need help, child, my door is always open.”

At that the boy lifted his head fully for the first time during their conversation and looked Flitwick dead in the eye. “I’ve been researching defensive spells, Professor. I’ve found Protego, but it only shields you against a single spell. Is there some other spell that could protect you? Something more long-lasting?”

Flitwick ached for the boy, so young and haunted, so desperate to protect himself from others. He’d thought the bullying had stopped, but the intensity of Harry’s eyes told him that it hadn’t. Not completely. Glancing behind the boy, he noticed Draco’s cheek did look slightly red and swollen. He must have fallen again.

“There isn’t a spell that will have the effect you seek,” Flitwick explained, returning his attention to Harry. “I would recommend warding an item of clothing or a piece of jewelry to repel hostile magic.”

Harry’s face lit up with simple joy. “Thank you, Professor! I’ll research it right away!”

Flitwick didn’t have the heart to tell him that most wards were years beyond his ability.

…

Bellatrix crept from the warded room. It was three in the morning. The witching hour where dark and secretive things were at their strongest. Blood coated her fingertips. Silent as a ghost, she slipped through the elegant marble halls. She had no intention of escaping, so the wards remained quiescent. Pale, sickly thin, black curls short and messy around her head, her dark eyes stared unblinking as she followed the faint seductive tendril that flushed her skin and made her back arch.

The soft creek of a door as it swung inward. A dark office - books lined the walls, plush rugs, a wide window only slightly silvered with the tiny crescent moon looming above. She was pulled forward, soft gasps escaping her lips as the feeling of sweet, rich darkness tantalized her senses. Almost on its own, a drawer opened. A black, velvet covered book sat inside.

She moaned as her fingers caressed the leather surface and lifted it up high. “My Lord,” she breathed reverently. Opening the book, she set it on the desk and lifted the quill that sat ready at the edge.

…

Draco yawned as he made his way up to the library with Harry. He didn’t know how much longer he would be able to read old, musty books. It was so damn frustrating having symptoms but no real clue what exactly he was looking for. It was a wild goose chase that had no end.

“I’m going to use the bathroom,” he said. Maybe splashing water on his face would help wake him up. “Go on without me.”

Harry gave him a smile and a nod, hurrying ahead.

Draco smiled fondly as he watched Harry enter their sanctuary. Harry had been studying wards for the last few days, ever since Flitwick pointed him in that direction, and he felt like he was on the verge of figuring it out. Draco entered the bathroom and headed directly for the sinks. He turned the nob so only cold water came out and cupped his hands. The lights went out. All at once, with no sound or warning, just instant and total darkness.

Draco’s eyes stared wide and blind. His heart beat hard and fast in his chest as he gripped the cold porcelain edge of the sink. It was possible the room wasn’t dark, but that he’d been hexed blind.
With that in mind, he made sure to control his expression. He would not show fear. Smoothly, he released the sink and straightened. He turned to face the room. Black… perfect black… He couldn’t see. Swallowing hard, he took a step forward. Ping! Draco froze, stilling as the sound echoed. What was that?

Shit.

Forcing his shoulders to relax, he took another step. Nothing. Third step… Ping! Draco froze again. This time the sound was much closer. He was breathing faster now. Who was here with him? He wanted to snarl and growl. The constant attacks had let up a bit since his speech in the common room. There were days where nothing happened to him at all and he had a feeling his bullies were about to make up for it now.

Draco braced himself and stood his ground. “What the fuck do you want?” he demanded, voice low and controlled.

Nothing. No response. Just blackblackblack…

Draco took a step toward where he thought the door was and another. Clang! Draco jumped, the noise was much louder now. It sounded like metal on metal. “If you’re not going to do anything, I’ve got other places to be!” he yelled defiantly.

Clang! Determined to stop for nothing, he walked carefully forward. Clang! Clang! He ignored the noise and kept moving forward. Silence. He bumped into a tiled wall. Sweating, he slid his hands along the cold, tiled surface, looking for the doorway.

A few steps forward and the wall became sticky and slowly grew warm under his touch. “What the fuck?” he hissed, but he refused to take his hands off the wall. Without it, he had no idea where to go. “I’m going to kill you when I get my hands on you,” he muttered darkly.

His hair stuck uncomfortably to his cheeks and forehead. God, why was it getting so damn hot in here? And what the fuck was all over the fucking wall? Bang! With a snarl, he tried to yank his hands back, but they were stuck fast. It felt like the wall was melting, swallowing his fingers and creeping up his wrists. Bang! Disgusting squelching sounds filled his ears.

“Get it the fuck off me!” Draco yelled, pulling with all his might.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

He screamed…

…

Harry frowned at the library door. It had been ten minutes. Draco should have been back by now. “I’m going to check on him.” He pushed up from the table and Neville grabbed his wrist. He looked over to see the other boy staring back at him pale and worried.

“I’ll go with you.”

Hermione didn’t even notice as they left. She was deeply buried in her book. Together, they hurried from the library. The hallway outside was empty. Harry frowned. A faint thud! could be heard from inside the bathroom.

“Draco?” he called.
Harry walked deeper in only to gasp and rush forward.

Draco stood to the left of the sinks and was slamming his forehead against the wall again and again. Red painted the tile, splattering wider with every *thud!* of Draco’s head against the hard surface. Screaming Draco’s name, they pulled him away from the wall, the three of them falling back, Draco in their laps. The blond went suddenly limp. His eyes fluttering closed. Blood gushed from a cut at Draco’s hairline, coating his forehead and dripping down his cheeks like tears.

Terrified, furious, Harry looked up at Neville and screamed, “Go get help!”, as he tried to staunch the bleeding with his robe sleeve. Neville scrambled back, his eyes staring in horror at the blood dripping down the wall. Then he turned, feet scrambling on the slick floor, and ran.

As soon as he was gone, Harry bent close, folding over Draco’s head in his lap. He placed his lips over the cut and searched deep inside. Draco was his everything… Draco was hurt… The ache in his heart became a soul-deep need to fix, to heal. Warm blood filled his mouth, coated his tongue, Harry swallowed, shivering at the feeling of Draco’s blood filling him from the inside, and let his magic pour down.

Severus crept silently through the darkened Infirmary. Draco lay in a nearby bed unconscious. He’d had no wounds when he’d been admitted, but the blood in the bathroom by the library told a different story. Harry sat in a chair pulled up to the blond's bedside. He was folded in half with his upper body laying over Draco’s chest and waist, as if trying to hold him there. He was sound asleep, face pale with dark circles casting shadows under his eyes.

Satisfied that the children were safe for now, Severus stalked back the way he had come. He wasn’t surprised to find Dumbledore waiting for him just outside the doors. “You cannot keep this from the Malfoys,” Severus stated, not bothering to hide the satisfaction in his tone.

Dumbledore’s blue eyes were cold and calculating behind his half-moon glasses. “Yes. The Malfoys will be informed of the bullying. Hopefully the boys will convince them to stay as I believe they were close to fixing the problem.”

“Bullying?” Severus could not believe his ears. “This was not done by bullies, Albus! Draco’s mind was attacked and he’s growing unstable. You read Longbottom and Harry’s statements! Draco was brainwashing himself!”

“And yet he arrived with no physical injury. The blood in the bathroom must have been part of the prank to startle Draco’s friends.”

Severus stared at his old mentor, shock written on his face for a brief second before his eyes narrowed, a look of fury boiling across his features. “Prank?”

Dumbledore reached out and gripped Severus’s shoulder with surprising strength. “Listen to me, Severus. Draco’s mind is stronger than the average child’s. In fact, these lapses may indeed be him breaking free of whatever was cast on him.” He drew even closer, his expression suddenly threatening. “Do you really believe a Mind Healer, no matter how skilled, would be able to help him? We both know Draco would reject any foreign presence immediately. Especially in these circumstances. They would in fact only hinder Draco further. I will hear no more of your suspicions regarding Draco’s mind. Understood?”
As Dumbledore released him, Severus realized he was breathing hard. He glared at the Headmaster and shrugged his shoulders to get the ghostly feeling of the Headmaster’s hand from his shoulder.

Dumbledore gave him a gentle smile, suddenly old and wise once more. “This is a battle Draco must wage on his own, Severus. Should the Malfoys hear your suspicions, they would not be able to help him regardless and would pull him out of Hogwarts. We both know why that is unacceptable.”

Severus sneered and spun on his heel, his robes flaring around his feet. “I understand perfectly, Headmaster,” he answered, cold and stiff, before disappearing down the hall, the shadows embracing his rigid form.

Dumbledore watched him go, suddenly aged beyond his years. “I doubt that, Severus. I truly doubt that.”

Chapter end.

A/N: Question about pacing!!

So I’m really, really torn between narrating this story on a mostly day-to-day basis to show the build up of their everyday life and stress like I did with the majority of Freedom Found in Chains versus a narration more like this chapter where time passes more quickly with only significant moments being expressed in detail… I would REALLY love the feedback on this.
Draco watched Harry as they slowly ate their breakfast trays. Pomfrey would release them after they finished eating as again she could find no residue of magic or anything physically wrong with him. Honestly, Draco was more concerned about his boy. - Construction worry - filled their bond with static. Harry’s shoulders were slumped forward. Exhaustion hung around his too skinny frame. Any glimpse of Harry’s eyes, behind a shield of wavy bangs and glasses, revealed a dull green ringed in dark circles. Draco couldn’t really remember the attacks, but Harry wasn’t so lucky.

Draco tried imagining their roles being switched - of finding Harry banging his head against the wall hard enough to splatter the tile with blood - and his gut curled with helpless fury. In fact, as bad as his boy looked, Draco was actually surprised Harry wasn’t worse. He wasn’t clinging to Draco or panicking. Something else was going on…

“Harry,” he said, low and demanding.

Harry looked up attentively before looking around the infirmary. They were alone, but Harry still frowned and shook his head. Draco mirrored his frown. Whatever Harry had to say couldn’t be said where they might be overheard.

“Draco! Harry!” Hermione appeared at the doorway and hurried over, a thick book clutched to her chest. She’d been free of her cane for a few days and liked to rush wherever she went now that she was able to. Neville trailed behind her, red in the face and panting. “I’ve found it! I know I’ve found it.”

Draco reached eagerly for the book. “Let me see.”

She shook her head, stepping back. “I want to confirm it with Hagrid first. Let’s go during lunch.”

Draco frowned. He didn’t want Harry missing lunch. Healing him in the bathroom had taken a lot of energy without Draco’s magic bolstering him, but this was equally important. Draco was convinced everything would get better once they destroyed whatever it was that Dumbledore was protecting.

“Fine,” he said, giving in. Maybe Hagrid would have something for Harry to eat. Hopefully something besides rock cakes.

Harry tried to focus. He really did, but their first class was their DADA practical with the Slytherins. As usual, his scar burned as soon as he stepped inside the classroom. A low throbbing headache beat behind his eyes. The overwhelming smell of garlic didn’t help. Professor Quirrell had them line up, one House facing the other, in the center with about five feet separating them. All the tables and benches had been stacked precariously in the corner of a room with magic.

Harry squinted past his headache and saw that he was opposite Vince. He gave a small, aborted wave as he met the other boy’s blank expression. Next to him, Draco faced Pansy. She didn’t look coldly detached like Vince; she looked venomous. A quick glance at Draco’s face revealed the blond was calm and unbothered. Harry wondered if that meant Pansy wasn’t really mad or if it meant Draco didn’t care about her anymore.

At the professor’s signal, they began firing the Kickback Jinx at each other. It was the one spell that
doxies were vulnerable to, a common Wizarding pest. Harry felt Vince’s spell as a gentle shove against his shoulders and he took one step backward. Returning to position, he fired the same jinx back. Vince barely moved. Vince’s next jinx had him failing his arms a bit to keep his footing.

Harry couldn’t protect Draco like this. He was useless trash, a burden. Tears burning his eyes, he took a firm step forward, remembered his determination to be of use to Draco, and fired off the jinx. Vince was shoved right off his feet. He slid backward, coming up against the opposite wall with a soft thud. The room instantly became quiet, all eyes turning to Harry. He tucked his chin, heart pounding. He wanted to duck his head, to cower and grovel… I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to hurt you! … but his Mask was firmly in place. They were in class, in public. Draco’s rules closed around him, a guiding light in the chaotic darkness. They held him upright even as his heart pounded. Harry stared across at his friend, watching with paralyzed fear as the bigger boy pushed up into a sitting position.

Vince’s blue eyes were wide as they stared back at him. Harry looked desperately into Draco’s warm, grey eyes. He felt the anxiety clawing up his throat slowly subside as Draco held his gaze, unwavering. Harry was peripherally aware of Quirrell walking toward him.

“P-P-Potter. Try a-a-and m-modul-late your p-power.”

Harry instinctively gripped his robes over his side. The pounding behind his eyes suddenly felt like something stabbing him straight through his brain. The professor walked past him without further comment, telling the class to continue. Harry’s shoulders relaxed. Draco tilted his head toward the other side of the room. Harry obediently turned his attention back to his partner to see Vince standing at the ready, back in position. He looked none the worse for wear.

“Ready... Potter?”

The words and tone of voice were cool and detached, but Vince’s eyes were full of concern. Harry’s lips twitched up into a shaky smile before he lifted his chin, holding onto his Mask with all his might… I will be useful to Draco! … Sweat dampened his forehead and the back of his neck, but he managed to answer with a mostly even, “Ready.”

…

Draco took Harry by the hand as the bell signaled the end of class. Slipping into a shadowed corridor, Draco looked both ways before pulling Harry into a secret passage. Weeks of unrelenting attacks in the halls had made them both adept at fading into the background. They knew all the unused hallways and secret passages by heart. Harry’s headache slowly disappeared, smoothed away by each sweep of Draco’s thumb across the back of his hand.

“Don’t worry, Harry. They’re just playing their part,” Draco said softly as they walked. The passage grew narrow and they both had to turn sideways for several meters to slip through.

Harry said nothing. Ever since the troll attack Draco seemed incapable of understanding that it was Quirrell and not the class or the smell of garlic that gave him the headaches. He stared down at their clasped hands and held Draco’s a little tighter. More than ever Harry was certain that Quirrell had done something to Draco. Harry was determined to make sure Quirrell never touched Draco again.

They came out onto the first floor, which was mind boggling as they didn’t go down any stairs and the Defense classroom was on the third floor. A nearby door let them out of the castle in a courtyard. Overhead, the sky was a cloudy grey; sunlight falling weakly down on them. The breath of winter bit at their skin.
“What couldn’t you tell me in the infirmary?” Draco asked, attention sharp on Harry as they reached into their bags and pulled out black mittens and tugged them on.

Harry instinctively looked around, but they were alone. They stood in the shadow of the castle still a good bit away from where they met for Xylomancy. He reached out and pulled Draco by the hand even closer to the castle wall before undoing his robe. His soft gloves slid against his skin as he untucked his shirt and pushed it and his sweater up to reveal his side. Harry shivered as the cold air touched his warm stomach.

Draco’s eyes narrowed. The silver dragon embedded under Harry’s skin looked… dangerous. It’s head was lowered, sharp teeth glistening and bared. Green eyes slitted, a look of deadly fury was etched on its face. Its scales seemed more spiky than normal; it’s claws flexed. Its muscles were etched and taunt. The tip of its outstretched tail flicked in agitation. As Draco watched, it arched its head back before snapping it forward with terrifying speed. Instinctively, Draco cupped his hand over the mark he’d placed on Harry’s skin and flicked his eyes up to meet Harry’s.

“Whatever is happening to you,” Harry said softly, - faith love - filling the bond with sparkling light, “your magic’s fighting it. You’re fighting it.” He looked into Draco’s surprised eyes and gave a fierce smile of his own. “That means you’re going to beat it.”

Suddenly breathless, throat tight with too much emotion, Draco pressed Harry against the stone wall and kissed him deeply. His mittened hands sank into Harry’s hair. His tongue lapped forward, penetrating Harry’s mouth with slow, deep strokes. Harry opened to him easily - lovelovelove. Draco may be kissing Harry breathless, but it was Draco who was overwhelmed. No one had ever believed in him or loved him the way Harry did. That absolute faith in Draco’s ability and choices healed unseen fractures in Draco’s broken soul, made him want to clutch Harry to him and melt them into one.

Wet, slick lips parted, connected by a string of saliva. Draco panted against his boy’s mouth. He wanted to mark and bend and consume, but class would start soon and he didn’t want another detention for being tardy. Instead he grinned, fierce and strong, as he took in Harry’s flushed cheeks and slightly askew glasses. With gentle fingers, he set the black frames right and ruffled Harry’s hair.

“We’ll finish this later,” he promised, voice low.

Harry shivered, dazed, and obediently answered, “Yes, Draco.”

By the class time finished and they made their way to Hagrid’s hut, the sky was an even darker grey as clouds beginning to gather. It wasn’t quite cold enough to snow, but it was cold enough that if it rained it would feel like ice. December was only a week away. They wore their warmest robes, thickest socks, pants, shirts, and sweaters. Knitted red hats sat on Hermione and Neville’s heads, Hermione’s hair puffing out around her neck as the hat forced it downward. Draco carefully wrapped a red and gold scarf around Harry’s neck.

“Hagrid!” Draco called, his breath a cloud on the air. He could see the light of a bright fire through the window.

Loud, excited barking startled them into stepping back as Fang went nuts on the other side of the door. They waited several long seconds, but the door didn’t look to be opening any time soon. They couldn’t hear anything over Fang. The four of them exchanged curious looks.

“Maybe he’s working?” Neville suggested.
“Without Fang?” Draco countered, eyebrows lowered ominously. He wanted to know what Hermione had found out. His patience was wearing thin.

“With such a big fire going?” Hermione frowned at the offending door. “Magic or no, you shouldn’t leave such a thing unattended.”

“Hagrid!” Harry called and waved his hand above his head. He was looking in the direction of the forest and the others turned to see the huge man stepping from the trees.

“Aarry! Draco!” their friend boomed as soon as he was close enough. He was smiling happily through his beard. “What are you doin’ ‘ere?”

Draco gave a charming smile and elbowed Hermione before she could launch right into her suspicions. “We came for a visit. It’s kind of cold. Mind if we come in?”

Hagrid actually hesitated, which made Draco grin triumphantly. He knew something was up! He shifted his feet, subtly bumping Harry’s shoulder. On cue, Harry shivered dramatically and blew on his mittened hands, eyes wide and innocent as he looked up at the big man. Hagrid instantly caved and they were ushered inside the blazingly hot cabin.

Hermione and Neville were introduced to the gentle giant of a man and were directed to the rickety table. There weren’t enough seats, so Neville sat on a crate while Hermione got a stool. Harry shared Draco’s chair, half in the blond’s lap. Almost immediately they shed their gloves, hats, and robes. By the time Hagrid got them tea and cake (thankfully from Hogwarts’ kitchen and not made by Hagrid), they had shed their sweaters, too.

Hagrid wasn’t known for being subtle. He had a simple, earnest mind, so he was painfully obvious as he tried to hide something he had placed dangerously close to the roaring flame in the fireplace. Predictably Hermione warned Hagrid about fire-safety and asked what the lump was. It turned out to be a dragon egg wrapped in flame repellant rags so it could be as close to the fire as possible without actually burning.

“Hagrid!” Hermione cried, scandalized. “Dragons are triple-X marked creatures. It’s illegal to bred or hatch them!”

“The Ministry just don’ understand, is all,” Hagrid argued, posture sheepish. “Dragons are seriously misunderstood creatures. Sweet things, they are.”

Hermione took a visibly deep breath and tried to apply some reason to the situation. “Where will it grow up? It needs to be with its kind, Hagrid. You don’t want it to be unhappy and alone, do you?”

Hagrid fussed with his egg, expression stubborn.

“We actually came because Hermione had something to ask you,” Draco intervened. He knew the man wouldn’t budge on the dragon issue. At least, not yet.

Hermione gave Draco an unimpressed look. She flipped her bushy hair over her shoulder. “What can you tell me about the Sorcerer’s Stone?”

Hagrid’s head whipped around, his eyes wide. “How’d ya hear about tha’?”

Draco gave a slow, predatory smile that surprisingly didn’t look out of place on his young face. “It’s just an innocent question. We’re learning about all sorts of things at school.”

Hagrid shifted nervously as he stood, the forbidden egg forgotten momentarily. “That’s between
Nicolas Flamel and Headmaster Dumbledore. You shouldn’t go lookin’ into things above your keen.”

Hermione opened her book and pointed to a place on the page. “It says that it grants immortality as well as turning any metal to pure gold.”

Draco looked at the girl intently before shifting his laser gaze to Hagrid. Immortality? His heart thundered in his chest and he instinctively held Harry tighter. The Dark Lord was after something that could grant him immortality?


“How so?” Hermione demanded as if personally offended on her book’s behalf. “Flamel is nearing seven hundred years old! He’s still alive, so it must be true!”

Hagrid shook his head. “There’s no such thing as immortal life, ‘Ermione. Headmaster Dumbledore explained it t’me. Said Flamel’s just slowin’ things down, drawin’ things out.”

“Still…” Hermione’s expression was a picture of doubt.

“Now, don’ worry about anythin’. Headmaster Dumbledore’s a great wizard. He’ll keep the stone safe. Even gave him Fluffy to help guard it. No one’s gettin’ by my Fluffy.”

“Fluffy?” Draco vividly remembered terrifying barks filling the closed off third-floor corridor. “What is Fluffy exactly?”

Hagrid blinked at him. “I shouldn’a said that.”

“Come on, Hagrid,” Harry wheedled. He leaned forward and offered the big man a sweet smile, his green eyes bright behind his glasses. “If we know something strong is protecting the stone, we won’t worry about it as much.”

Hagrid considered that and eventually tipped his head in a nod. “Fluffy is a cerberus. Raised ‘em myself, I did. He’s a good, loyal pup. He’ll take a piece outta anyone tryin’ to break in. So you don’ gotta worry about nothin’.”

Neville and Harry stared wide-eyed at this while Hermione and Draco shared a shocked look behind their backs. A cerberus!? In the school? It sounded crazy, but Draco had to admit it was a good protection. Well, at first glance anyway.

“Is a cerberus resistant against magic? What’s to stop someone from just killing it?” Draco asked with a frown.

Hagrid sat straighter from his kneeling position next to the egg and fire. “The kind’a magic it takes to kill Fluffy would send up all sorts of alarms.”

“And there’s no way around Fluffy without killing him?” Draco persisted.

“Well…” Hagrid twirled a lock of his beard almost nervously. “I might’a put ‘em to sleep as a pup with a lullaby, so now whenever he ‘ears some music, he goes right to sleep. But no one could possibly know that!” Seeing the troubled looks on the kids’ faces, Hagrid hurried to continue. “An’ even if they figured it out, Fluffy’s not the only protection! Headmaster Dumbledore asked each Head of House to come up with a defense, plus Headmaster Dumbledore put some kind’a protection up himself! So I don’ want ya thinkin’ on this one more minute! The stone’s safe. No one’s gonna
Of course this just opened up a hundred more questions, but the big bell in the tower rang a low note, signaling the end of lunch. If they were going to make it to Transfiguration, they were going to have to hurry. Hagrid seemed relieved to see them go, to be honest, as they donned their winter clothes and said hasty goodbyes. As they jogged across the grounds, Draco’s mind raced, trying to guess the protections Sprout, Flitwick, and McGonagall would have created. It made him feel deeply sick to think Snape had created a barrier. Did that mean Snape knew about the other protections already?

Before Draco could panic, he had to remind himself that if Snape could get to the stone that easily, he would have already. Fluffy had seemed to have stopped Snape cold on Halloween night. That meant that while Dumbledore had asked each Head of House plus Hagrid for a defense, he likely hadn’t shared what those defenses were. In any case, Flitwick was a crafty genius and there was no love lost between Snape and McGonagall; Draco would just have to hope that at least those two would be able to at least slow Snape down.

Distracted by his thoughts, Draco hadn’t been paying as close attention to the hallway. They were just turning onto the Transfiguration corridor and passed a group of six Gryffindor students. Draco flinched, seeing the pointing wand from the corner of his eye. Harry moved as if to shield him with his body, but Draco’s hand clamped down, keeping Harry out of the line of fire. His skin burst into a deep, pervading ache, growing tight. Draco staggered as he felt something wet slide down his cheek, forehead, and chin. The group of kids weren’t much older than them and they burst into laughter. Draco glared, flushing in angry embarrassment.

“Flipendo!”

The call of the Knockback Jinx was said with such fury, it shoved four of the center kids hard enough for their heads to whip forward and then slam back when their bodies collided with the wall. The laughter disappeared to be replaced by cries of shock and pain. Draco stared at Harry, who stood with his wand out and extended, expression fierce, and felt a wave of smug satisfaction.

“What is going on here?”

They all turned to see that McGonagall had arrived. Her pinched features, tight bun, and silver glasses seemed more severe than normal as she stood tall, arms crossed over her small chest.

“Potter attacked us!” one of the boys cried, pointing a shaking finger at Harry.

McGonagall’s eyes narrowed dangerously. “It is quite clear, Mr. McLaggen, that you were dueling in this hallway and Mr. Potter got the best of you. Do not imply you were attacked without reason in a cowardly attempt to escape punishment. You are a Gryffindor. I expect some show of bravery… Even if it must be faked.”

The boy looked close to tears; McGonagall’s voice and words cut sharply.

“You may have forgotten, but dueling in the corridors is forbidden, Mr. McLaggen. You and your friends will serve a week of detentions for forgetting this simple rule. Now get out of my sight immediately.”

The four boys who hit the wall got shakily to their feet, likely suffering massive headaches. Their two friends helped them and soon they were gone and the corridor was empty. The bell in the tower rang, but McGonagall didn’t seem to be concerned by being tardy.

“I’m afraid that jinx can’t be removed by a spell, Mr. Malfoy,” she said in a matter-of-fact way, the
anger lifting from her voice. “You will have to go to Madam Pomfrey for a potion.”

Draco tentatively touched his face and felt extremely sore bumps covering the surface of his skin. Just touching them made more liquid seep out. It had a gritty, oily feeling. It was disgusting and his whole face hurt, but it wasn’t anything he couldn’t handle. “I’ll go after class,” he decided. They had Flying next and it wasn’t like he needed to learn about that. He got enough instruction when he attended Quidditch practice.

McGonagall inclined her head and turned on her heel.

“Looks like they used the Pimple Jinx,” Hermione informed him, wincing at the red, swollen, and weeping sores all over Draco’s face. One had made his eye swell half-shut.

Draco didn’t much care what spell they had used, only that in a few hours the effects would be gone. They took their seats in class, Draco earning whispers and a few snickers at his disfigured face, which he ignored.

“You did good, Harry,” he whispered as they took out their textbooks and notebooks.

- guilt protective - “I should have been faster,” he confessed, staring into Draco’s eyes sadly.

Draco gave him a smile, making more things on his face pop and ooze painfully. “This is nothing,” he assured the boy. “It looks worse than it is. You did great, Harry. They won’t mess with me again for a while.”

Harry nodded, but Draco could tell he still wasn’t happy with the way it had played out. “I think I found a ward that is simple enough that I can cast it and it will still protect you. I found it yesterday before…” Harry trailed off. Finding Draco in the bathroom still haunted him.

Draco felt cold, knowing exactly what Harry couldn’t say. He couldn’t remember what happened in that bathroom, so he had no idea who had cursed him. It hadn’t been a simple Pimple Jinx, that was for sure. “Show me later tonight,” he whispered and turned his attention to McGonagall as she started class.

Harry went with Draco to see Madam Pomfrey. Hermione offered to join them, but Draco insisted she go to Flying class. The girl hated to fly, but it was a basic skill that could come in handy later. Harry fretted over the stains the boils and pimples had made on Draco’s clothes. He really hoped the elves could get it out. That sweater was Draco’s favorite!

The potion Madam Pomfrey gave Draco worked. Within twenty minutes the swelling went down, the ooze dried up, and Draco was looking normal. They had the dorms to themselves and a few hours before dinner, so Harry started right away on warding Draco’s clothes as Draco went to take a shower. Harry decided to start on Draco’s school robes first since he wore those most often. Laying the black robes out on the floor, Harry sat cross-legged and pointed his wand sharply down. Latin and Greek spilled from his lips. The book he had found described the spell phonically, so he was pretty confident he would get it right. Especially with the tutoring he had been provided by Narcissa.

His fingers grew warm, as if he dipped them in warm honey. As he chanted, golden threads appeared in the shape of the warding: squiggles and loops, blocks and runes. Protect Draco… Some corner of Harry’s mind remembered images of Draco falling, skin scrapped and bleeding, feet jerking and kicking, hitting his head against the floor or door frames, bruises blooming on soft pale skin, food turned rotten in his mouth, exploding toilets and Draco covered in filth, mean laughter,
rejection… His goal burned bright at the center of his mind… Protect Draco… and slowly the burning sensation rose higher, covering his hand, then wrist, then forearm. The golden threads covered the inside of the robe from shoulders to mid-back.

The hot honey sensation had reached his biceps when Draco touched him on the top of his head. Harry gasped, his arm falling slack. His hair hung heavy and damp. Sweat soaked his face and shirt. He looked up at Draco, a plea on his lips… Let me finish! … but Draco shook his head firmly.

“It’s time for dinner. You need a break, Harry,” he said and there was no room for argument in that tone.

Harry looked down at his work. The golden threads seemed to shimmer with magic. It looked the way the book described, so he must be doing it right. Sighing regretfully, he stood. The room dipped and swayed, and he would have fallen except for Draco grabbing his arm.

“You will eat everything I put on your plate,” Draco told him.

Harry nodded obediently and followed Draco down to the kitchen, resigned to feeling overstuffed. They still couldn’t eat in the Great Hall without their food being cursed to taste disgusting. His mind was far away, still back on the warding. Draco had three school robes, plus half-a-dozen sweaters, double that in t-shirts and button-downs, three slacks, and five jeans. And that wasn’t even counting his dress clothes. It would take Harry weeks to ward them all, but he was determined.

Draco eyed his boy carefully. He noticed the color back in Harry’s face, the brightness of his eyes. The food had done wonders, but he knew Harry and could see how close he was to exhaustion. He also knew Harry wouldn’t rest unless he felt he had accomplished something. “You may finish the robe, but you won’t ward anything else tonight,” he ordered as they returned to the dorms.

Harry nodded - determined love protective. He understood Draco was just taking care of him, but one day he’d be strong enough that he wouldn’t have to stop after one robe.

Hermione and Neville had beat them back to the dorm room. Fortunately girls were able to come up to the boys’ side without problems, but only until curfew. After that, Hermione would get itchy and it would only get worse until she left.

“Harry, this is amazing!” she praised. She was standing over the half-warded robe admiring the golden ward.

Harry blushed and ducked his head. He didn’t deserve it. It had taken him hours to do so little, but he knew what he was supposed to say. “Thank you.”

“What do you think about the defenses around the stone? Any ideas on how we can discover what they are?” Draco asked, purposefully drawing Hermione’s attention away from Harry. He knew the boy would be itching to start warding right away.

Draco sat at the desk they had brought up to their room with schoolwork laid out around him. He’d already finished their Transfiguration essay before dinner while Harry had worked on warding the robe. His boy was already cross-legged, his head bowed as he lifted his wand over the robe. His other hand raised over the material as if he were a conductor of a symphony.

“A few,” Hermione answered, pushing her bushy hair out of her face. She came to sit on the unused middle bed and faced Draco at the desk. Neville joined her. “They can’t be too deadly. They all have to have an out because the Headmaster will need to be able to check on the stone sometimes and such. He’ll need to be able to get to it, to remove it when Mr. Flamel agrees to it it being destroyed.”
Draco grinned, fierce. “So we’ll be able to get around the protections, too.”

“If we can, so can Snape,” Hermione cautioned.

Draco scowled. He glanced at Harry, checking on him. It’d only been a few minutes, but already his skin glistened with sweat. “True,” he muttered darkly.

“So there’s a way around the defenses, but only if you know the weakness, like Fluffy’s reaction to music,” Hermione continued. “Otherwise they will seem impossible to beat.”

“We’ll need the weaknesses,” Neville concluded. “But how are we going to get them?”

“We’ll split up,” Draco decided. “Neville, you’ll need to somehow get info from Sprout. Make sure she doesn’t suspect you or anything.”

Neville looked horrified to be given such a big job.

“Hermione, do you want to tackle trying to McGonagall or Flitwick?”

“Flitwick,” Hermione answered confidently. “Sometimes being a girl can help get information from males.”

Draco nodded. “Harry and I will try to get something out of McGonagall and Snape, then.”

Plans in place, Hermione insisted they get homework done. They had essays and research and quizzes to study for. Not to mention in less than a month they’d have their first semester exams. Harry sweated and chanted for over an hour, his arm slowly going warm again, this time to the shoulder, before he gasped, the ward completing with a snap of magic. Hermione and Neville crowded around him, touching the robe he held up with curious fingers.

“You can’t feel it,” Neville said in surprise.

“You can feel a bit of a tingle,” Hermione corrected. It didn’t feel like raised thread against her fingers, but there was a small spark of energy at her fingertips. She gave Harry a smile. “Good job, Harry.”

Draco wrapped an arm around Harry’s waist and gave him a hug. “Let me try it.”

Harry watched, holding his breath, as Draco slid the robe on and asked Hermione to cast a simple curse at him. The Jelly-Leg Jinx bounced off harmlessly. Neville cheered while Draco caught Harry up in a proper hug, kissing his cheek.

- proud happy love -

Chapter end.

A/N: Sorry for the long gaps between updates. I’m still struggling with pacing as well as just getting it written. I’m still not happy with it and the chapter is shorter than usual, but I have to keep pushing on. I don’t want to lose the story completely or drop it.

Thank you SO SO SO much for the helpful feedback and tips. You have no idea how much it helps! I know some of you have felt the lack of the recent chapters as much as I do. Bear with me. I feel like the end of this writer’s block is around the corner. I can feel the inspiration just beneath the surface!
A/N: WARNING : Dark chapter ahead and a BDSM scene.

Huge shoutout to Babyvfan who’s encouragement/reassurance made this chapter possible.

The night was dark and cold. Silent… not a rustle of a leaf or crunch of soil. Yet he was gliding forward. The edges of the trees high above his head and the uneven forest ground glowed briefly silver as the half-moon peeked out from the clouds. He felt calm, relaxed… peaceful until a soft flicker of something white and pure cut through the darkness. A sudden feeling of absolute certainty stole over him. Something bad was going to happen. His breath hitched, soft little gasps that he couldn’t hear but could feel. Anxious tears burned his eyes. He didn’t want to go forward. He strained with everything he had, but it didn’t matter.

Please… no…

There and gone again, quick little teasing darts. Until he was close enough to recognize silk soft hair, slender legs, a long sloping back… Chilled to the bone and terrified, he tried to scream out a warning.

Run! Get away!

The chase was about to reach its terrible end. His heart pounded in his chest. He was gasping, screaming, but there was still no sound! Why couldn’t he stop?! He was close enough now to see the unicorn fully… to see beautiful silver eyes wide in fear and anger… and suddenly sound ripped across the silence. A scream but not his own. The stallion bellowed its challenge, head whipped back, hooves lashing at his face. The pearl horn stabbed forward… Harry tried to fling himself onto the deadly tip just to stop what was coming.

Please! Please don’t make me!

His hands brutally caught the creature by the throat, twisting and flinging it to the ground as if it weighed nothing. Its cry of pain was terrible, making him cringe and shudder, even as he dove forward. His teeth closed on that soft skin… Could feel the warm, soft fur against his lips and tongue, felt the resistance of skin and muscle giving way against his teeth. His stomach heaved in horror and disgust as he chewed through the creature’s flesh.

Oh god! Nooooo!

Ripping muscle, thick blood filled his mouth with a delicious, syrupy warmth that nonetheless made him scream. He swallowed mouthful after mouthful; it slid down his throat and hit his stomach, filling it to overflowing… He wanted to crawl out of skin to get away! It was inside his body… The creature’s shrieks of agony pierced his ears, made him shrivel up even as he pressed closer, ripping off raw meat and eating…

Harry sat up with a choked scream - HORROR grief terror GUILT. Arms held him close, Draco’s voice in his ear soothing him. Harry twisted away and flung himself at the edge of the bed. His whole body arched forward as he violently threw up. He was sobbing, snot and tears joining the mess on the floor. He was on his knees, hanging onto the edge of the mattress with a death grip. Draco held his hair off his forehead, the other hand gripping his shoulder to make sure he didn’t
topple into the puddle of sick. Bile and vomit hung from his lips.

“I ate him!” It would have been a shriek of horror, but his voice was hoarse and small. “Drank his b-blood and ate him!”

Draco pulled Harry up and back so that he sat on the bed between his legs. He kept one hand on his boy’s clammy forehead, holding the thick black hair back and away from his face. The other arm he wrapped tight around Harry’s chest to keep him in place against his chest and make him feel secure. Ignoring the fluids that dripped from Harry’s mouth and chin onto his arm, he used his other hand pull Harry’s head back to see his scar. Tension fell from Draco’s shoulders as soon as he saw that the lightning scar was no longer blood red and threatening to burst. It was fading slowly to an innocent white once more.

Harry broke down into wordless sobs. Draco held him tightly, humming. It took several minutes before Harry was calm enough for Draco to turn Harry in his arms, so the boy was sideways in his lap, cradled to his chest as if he were a baby. “Killed him…” Harry whispered brokenly, exhaustion and despair thick in his voice. “In the woods… killed him and drank his b-blood…”

Draco stared over Harry’s head, expression grim, but his voice was soft and gentle when he spoke. “It wasn’t you, Harry. You didn’t do anything wrong.”

Harry whimpered - denial GUILT shame. He knew better than to pull away, but he wanted to. Draco’s forgiveness felt like acid against his raw nerves. He didn’t deserve it. He was a filthy, disgusting demon…

Draco took a deep breath and looked across the room at a wide-eyed Neville. The boy’s hair was mussed from sleep, but he was wide-awake. He was usually a hard sleeper, but Harry’s distressed whimpers and terrified cries could have pulled the dead from sleep.

“Neville,” Draco said calmly, voice low. His hair had fallen from behind his ears, the white-blond strands framing his face and falling just past his jaw. “I want you to bunk with Ron for the rest of the night. He won’t mind if you tell him Harry had a night terror and we needed some space.”

Neville balked. He leaned back, his hands twisting the comforter. “B-but…”

“Neville,” Draco said again, a little more firmly. He stared dead into the other boy’s eyes. “Harry really needs me right now and you need your rest. Go sleep with Ron, okay?”

Neville flushed red. He looked really nervous about it, but he obediently crawled out of bed. He kept his head ducked as he pulled on a dressing robe and pushed his feet into his slippers.

“Thank you,” Draco whispered, grey eyes bright with sincerity.

Neville’s shoulders straightened and he gave Draco a nod before slipping out of the room.

Harry lay limp in Draco’s arms, eyes staring blindly ahead. He probably didn’t even notice Draco’s conversation with Neville; the bond was a churning storm of dark emotions. Harry’s frame trembled, tears dripping down his messy face. Draco closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He found the core of his being, his love for Harry and the absolute certainty that Harry belonged to him, and knew what he had to do. He gently pushed Harry up into a sitting position. Dull green eyes blinked as awareness slowly bled into them. Draco gave Harry a soft smile, but he knew his eyes had gone silver by the way Harry shivered.

“On your knees.”
The command was given in a low, hard voice that sent a bolt of electricity right down Harry’s spine. He ducked his head and dropped his eyes submissively as he shifted to kneel on the bed, butt resting on his heels - *HATE guilt despair* -

Draco slipped off the edge of the bed and slowly pulled all the curtains wide open. He wanted as much light as possible. He wanted to see every inch of that skin. “Shirt off.”

Harry pulled his sleep shirt over his head and was left naked. With the curtains open, the chill from the stone walls and floor made goosebumps rise along his skin. He shivered, his arms hanging limp at his sides, his chin lowered. - *GUILT grief loathing* - clawed at his sanity.

Draco left him there as he went to their armoire and dug out a box at the bottom. In it, he kept the rope that he’d had Dobby get for him nearly a year ago. Being bound and tied, made helpless and at Draco’s complete control, sometimes that was the only thing that would let Harry find his center again and Draco had been sick of using scarves and belts.

- *Trust need* - flashed like lightning through the dark muck of Harry’s emotions as soon as he caught sight of the rope. It was made out of a dark green nylon. Harry had chosen the color for Draco’s magic, the color of the deep wood and, for Harry, safety. It matched the eyes of the dragon inked into his skin and was several shades darker than his own lighter green eyes. The rope wasn’t soft, but it wouldn’t tear Harry’s skin to shreds either.

“Up.” Draco smacked Harry’s thigh and the boy rose up on his knees and off his butt. Draco climbed onto the bed so that he was standing behind Harry and ordered in a cold voice. “Arms up.”

Harry obeyed, lifting his arms above his head. Draco caught those thin wrists in his hands and began to wrap the rope around them. He moved with deliberate slowness, making sure Harry felt every coil around his skin, the tightness, the inescapability of it, and then he firmly bent Harry’s elbows and pulled the wrists down so that they rested behind his neck.

Draco tugged the end of the rope, making sure the stretch could be felt but wasn’t painful. “Ankles together;” he growled in Harry’s ear.

Weeping, Harry carefully shifted his ankles together, rocking side to side to move his knees inward to make it happen. The ghostly echo of the unicorn’s blood still burned in his belly, the feeling of *chewing* the raw meat wouldn’t leave his mouth! He was disgusting! Filthy! Draco must see it, too. The thought sent a mother spike of - *anguish* - and - *despair* - through him, but it also meant relief. Draco saw. He would make it right. Even if it meant destroying Harry completely, he would make it right.

Draco ignored Harry’s whimpering sobs as he made several tight loops around the boy’s ankles, pulling the rope tight. Darkness thrashed and flailed through the bond, but Draco didn’t let it affect him. He remained cold and detached inside of himself as he checked the pull of the rope. His teeth flashed in a fierce grin. He would win Harry back from the darkness.

With slow, deliberate steps, he walked on the bed around the bound, kneeling boy to stand in front of Harry. Harry struggled to stay upright and not pitch over onto his side as the bed dipped next to him with every step Draco took. Draco reached forward and gently ran his fingertips of his left hand down the boy’s chest and over his firm stomach, lightly muscled from hours of Quidditch practice. His nails stopped just above the boy’s dick. Harry shivered, goosebumps appearing on his bare, cold skin. What Draco had planned would hurt like a bitch. Maybe the cold would buffer that a bit.

The dark green cord connected Harry’s wrists tightly to his ankles. It made the boy’s back have a slight curve backward, his chest slightly thrust out. His slender arms were pulled up, the elbows bent,
exposing his torso and stomach in offering. Harry’s thighs had only a small gap between them with his legs position this way, framing his small, soft cock. Face glistening with tears, head bowed slightly forward, black hair hanging down over his eyes and the bridge of his nose, Harry was a gorgeous picture of vulnerability, like an offering to the gods.

Harry couldn’t see Draco’s face, his bound wrists pushing his head slightly forward. Could only see Draco’s perfect feet, slender yet strong legs, and the white sleep-shirt that fell to mid-thigh. Suddenly Draco crouched on the balls of his feet on the bed in front of him, arms propped up on his thighs, his shirt falling between his legs, keeping him covered. His eyes were blazing silver as his lips crooked in a cocky smile that screamed dominance.

Draco ran his hand through Harry’s hair, firmly fistig the black locks at the back of the boy’s head to make Harry lift his face up against the press of his wrists. Harry’s cheeks were wet with tears and smears of snot. His eyes were red-rimmed and slightly puffy, unhidden by the glasses that rested on the nightstand. His chin was splattered with puke. His thin body exposed and shivering, wearing only the green rope binding his limbs and the black collar. The silver-white dragon tattooed on his side crouched above Harry’s right hipbone. It was perfectly still in a predator’s crouch; its dark green eyes unblinking and watchful.

Expression intent, watching Harry with a nearly obsessive glint, Draco ran his fingertips over Harry’s slightly parted lips and down his throat. He tucked his fingers into the top of the collar. Harry’s weeping grew raspy as Draco’s fingers pressed against his throat.

“This won’t be quick, Harry,” he said softly. “It’s going to hurt. A lot. But that’s what you need, isn’t it?”

- relief GUILT need self-hate - “… yes, Draco…” Harry wheezed, fat tears rolling down raw cheeks. “…please… I’m evil…”

Draco leaned forward to press his forehead to his boy’s. He stared into Harry’s eyes, blond hair falling to curtain their faces, a white cocoon. “Do you trust me, Harry?” he asked almost gently.

Crying, Harry answered immediately with a choked, “Yes.”

“Then trust me.” Draco straightened. He reached over and picked up Harry’s discarded shirt next to them and began to wipe the boy’s face and chest. “I’m going to make you clean again.”

Harry shuddered, his eyes falling closed, torn between trusting absolutely in Draco and the complete inability to believe he could ever be clean.

Draco pulled the dirtied shirt away, its job done, and dropped it over the small puddle of vomit next to the bed. “Dobby!”

A long second passed before there was a soft pop. “Yes, Master Draco?”

“Clean this mess. Lock the door and put up a sound ward, too, please, and go,” Draco ordered without looking. His attention was fully on his boy. Caressing Harry’s damp cheeks, he said, “Tell me, Harry. Let me hear it. What did you do wrong?”

With a whimper, Harry’s pretty lips began to move. “I killed it!” he sobbed. “Drank its blood and ate it… Feel it in me! …” The rope creaked as he unconsciously pulled against it. “And I left you… Left you alone and you… There was so much blood…” A keen of pure despair rose from Harry’s tight throat. “My fault! All my fault!… And I’m getting bad grades… It’s not good enough! I’m not good enough! … I’m weak! Can’t ward all of your things right away! You’ll be hurt again ‘cause of
me…” His eyes went unfocused as he fell into the darkness of his soul and the truth that lived there. “… bad, disgusting, EVIL, demon FREAK…”

The words were said with utter hatred and a black outline darkened around Harry’s form. Draco had heard enough. He reached forward, still crouched on the balls of his feet, and wrapped his hands around Harry’s throat. Harry’s lips soundlessly shaped the slurs that he called himself deep inside his heart, even as his voice was stolen by suffocation. His shoulders tensed as he instinctively pulled on his arms and was unable to move them. The feeling of being tied made the blackness seep out of his vision.

He blinked back into awareness, felt Draco’s strong, slender fingers almost brutally tight around his throat. He looked up into silver eyes that cut into him with crystal clarity. Slowly, he relaxed into Draco’s hold, even as his lungs painfully spasmed and his face went tight and hot. Draco released him. Harry gasped and heaved, trembling and dizzy. Dark spots danced in his vision, but he held his position on his knees, spine straight with a slight bend backward, wrists bound tightly to his ankles behind him. He didn’t fall. Chin dropped low, wild hair curtaining his face, he fought to catch his breath and waited. Draco was here; Draco had him.

Draco stood and jumped off the bed. It was cold. Even he was shivering now. He went to the armoire and pulled out his thickest sweater, a pair of jeans and some warm socks. By the time he was done dressing, Harry was breathing mostly evenly again, but he was still trapped in an endless loop of - guilt shame self-hate fear. Draco climbed back onto the bed and crawled to Harry on all fours. His movements were smooth and predatory. Harry watched him with wide eyes that were full of a desperate need to be saved. Draco lifted up onto his knees only inches away from his boy and ran his fingers down Harry’s chest. The boy’s skin was cold to the touch, but Harry’s teeth hadn’t begun to chatter yet. Perfect.

“Where did you eat the unicorn?” he asked curiously. Harry’s nipples were pebbled nubs from the cold and Draco pinched them, smirking as Harry’s stomach muscles jumped.

Harry’s face twisted in mental anguish as he remembered. “The neck…” he sobbed. “I tore out its neck…”

Draco hummed in response. He caught Harry’s chin and forced it up so that Harry was looking into his eyes. “Ready?” he asked solemnly.

Harry’s breath escaped him on a shaky sob. “Yes, Draco.”

Draco slid closer, fist ed Harry’s hair, and titled his boy’s head to the side. His sweater brushed Harry’s skin as he put his mouth against his throat. The boy was gasping… - NEED guilt submission self-hate - … heart thundering in his chest. Draco opened his mouth, lips ghosting over Harry’s chilled skin. He pressed his teeth to the boy’s flesh and, without warning, bit down brutally.

Harry choked back a scream as pain tore through his senses. He jerked away instinctively, but Draco held him in place.

The bite had left deep indentations, two perfect crescents that were already bruising. Two drops of blood welled up where Draco’s canines had cut through. Draco didn’t stop there. He dropped his mouth to the slope of Harry’s neck and shoulder. He bit down, holding Harry’s flesh in his teeth for a long minute before releasing him. Harry was truly shaking now, gasping in short breaths as the hot pain streaked across his body from his neck and shoulder and slammed into his mind.

Smiling a predator’s smile, eyes silver with intent, Draco slid his lips up the soft underside of Harry’s arm. It was on perfect display with his arms up and his wrists tied behind his head. Draco gripped
that soft flesh with his back teeth. A sharp, pained cry escaped Harry as Draco worried at it in a chewing motion. Draco moved only a few inches over to bite down again. Harry began to sob loudly.

“Sorry… Sorry, Draco! … Sorry!” Harry pleaded, head rocking back and forth, sweat dampening his brow, his black bangs sticking to his skin.

Draco turned his mouth to the curve of Harry’s jaw and cheek and bit him.

Harry whimpered, tears and snot drenching his face once more. Draco took the boy’s lower lip in his molars and clamped down, worrying it, chewing. The thin skin tore. The small cut bled ruby red down Harry’s pale, cold skin. It dripped off his chin and slid down his chest. Draco followed that trail, leaving bruising bites and the occasional cut from his canines.

He used this hand to grab a handful of Harry’s chest to have more to bite on. The pebbled nipple was caught safe in his mouth, and the searing hot heat of the side of Draco’s tongue rubbed the hard nub even as his teeth pinched and bruised the muscle around it. Harry screamed! Draco held the bite, pain eating up all the hate and guilt and shame through the bond.

He gripped Harry’s other breast, raising the muscle and skin, and clamped his teeth down. Again his tongue rubbing almost brutally against the cold nipple. Harry shrieked as the pain of the new bite crashed into the pain of the old.

Draco continued downward, biting each rib, marking every patch of skin. He gripped and pinched and chewed at Harry’s soft stomach. Harry could no longer talk through his tears. He lost track of where he was. He was being consumed, just as the unicorn had been consumed… Draco was eating him whole! The idea of that made Harry’s eyes fly open wide - JOY! - and he moaned, the sound coming from deep inside his soul.

Yes! Eat me! Yours, Draco, oh god, yours! He had no sense of where Draco was biting anymore. Waves of agony struck through him in waves. The unicorn disappeared… Draco bleeding alone in the bathroom… the hate and guilt of all his failures… it all faded under waves of white and red and pain, consumed by Draco.

Draco lifted his mouth from Harry’s skin, hands gripping the boy’s slender waist for balance, and looked up at Harry’s face. He was so fucking beautiful. Green eyes bright and half-lidded, body shuddering as he wept softly, perfectly limp and no longer resisting, letting Draco take everything away. Harry’s chest, the back of his arms, and stomach were littered with dozens of swelling bruises. Harry looked spotted like a Dalmatian. Harry was his and so fucking beautiful!

Heart filled with overwhelming love, Draco stroked and squeezed Harry’s thighs, letting the boy come down a bit. Harry’s soft cries slowed and those dazed green eyes slowly came back into focus. Harry whimpered and shivered, covered in a sheen of sweat even as his teeth began to chatter, lips tinged blue.

“With me, Harry?” Draco asked in a soft rasp, eyes burning with possessive hunger.

“… yes, Draco…” came Harry’s dazed, hoarse whisper; he was floating on a wave of bliss and pain. He was Draco’s; Draco was eating him!

Draco made sure Harry was watching him with those gorgeous green eyes. He leaned over and kissed the boy’s tender inner thigh before biting cruelly down. Harry arched against the rope, a high-pitched whine escaping him. Draco turned his head to give a matching bite to the opposite thigh. Harry shrieked! “I’ve got you… So beautiful, Harry… so goddamn beautiful…” Draco rose up on
his knees. Their positions put Draco a little taller than his boy as he looked down with heated eyes into Harry’s slack, pain-filled face. Panting, he reached behind Harry to grip his bound wrists for balance. Harry moaned as that put more strain on his shoulders. The sound made Draco ache deep inside his gut.

He stared down at Harry’s cold, bruised body, drinking in the bruises and bites, every tremble and shudder of Harry’s slender, lightly muscled body. Harry was covered in Draco’s marks, blissed out and flying, tears falling down his face… It made Draco burn with lust. Blindly, his left hand fumbled open his pants. He’d never been so hard before. He could feel his dick throbbing. Almost desperately he gripped his cock. The shocking pleasure made Draco groan, his eyes fluttering closed for a brief second.

Harry’s vision slowly swam clear. Everything hurt, throbbing and hot, cold and aching, but it was quiet again inside. He was cocooned and insulated, completely and utterly Draco’s. Nothing else could touch him. Whimpering, he blinked and saw that Draco’s face was close to his own. The blond was on his knees only a few inches away from him. He was flushed, his mouth parted as he panted. He wore a dark blue sweater that hugged his thin frame, the V of the neckline revealing sharp collarbones and emphasizing the milky white color of his perfect skin. The long sleeves fell just past the wrist that was working up and down, steadily going faster.

Harry stared, eyes wide. Draco’s hand was fisted tightly around his cock. He had never seen Draco’s cock so red, glistening, and swollen, rising tall from the open jeans. Glancing up into the blond’s face, Harry saw that Draco was staring down at his naked body, eyes bright with an obvious hunger. Harry groaned, shocked and pleased that Draco wanted him.

Draco’s hold on his bound wrists grew tighter and Harry tensed every muscle to keep them both upright. Draco was panting hard now, almost growling. His breath and skin took on a faintly musky scent that went straight to Harry’s cock. His fist began to pump wildly now.

“Draco…” Harry whimpered, pupils blown. His body throbbed in agony, the painful cold only slightly numbing his battered skin and Draco was so bright and beautiful and good… “Hurts… so good… Draco…” he sobbed.

Panting, magic throbbing and twisting in the air, his senses vibrating, Draco pumped his cock faster, his eyes riveted to the dozens of bite marks covering Harry’s soft skin. The - love adoration submission - that filled the bond pushed him even closer to the edge.

“Fuck, yes, good, so fucking good…” * MINE! * he bellowed deep in Harry’s mind as he came with a long, drawn out groan.

Harry gasped and arched his body as much as he could, offering more of himself to Draco as hot cum splattered his stomach. The inked dragon on his side flapped its wings madly as Draco groaned and leaned against him. They were both panting, nearly breathless. It was agony where Draco pressed up against him, but Harry thrilled in it. Draco’s… He was Draco’s! … Draco wanted him, loved him, saved him; he had made Harry clean!

Shivering, teeth chattering, Harry rubbed his cheek against the side of Draco’s head and whispered in a dazed, blissed out voice, “Love you… thank you, Draco… Yours…”

Draco gave a soft, breathy laugh. “We’re not done yet, Harry.” Magic snapped and crackled around them, not yet complete. Harry shivered and whimpered as Draco pulled away from him. Draco dragged his hand through the mess on Harry’s stomach, making the boy flinch and gasp as he rubbed across the broken and bruised skin.
Fingers slick, Draco teasingly squeezed the head of Harry’s cock with his fingertips. It was pink and stiff, rising up against Harry’s lower belly above soft, hairless balls. Draco’s index finger pressed and rubbed at the little hole. Harry whimpered, head thrown back as much as his arms would allow. Draco gave a lazy smile and tapped at the tip, slowly at first and then faster and faster, hitting harder and harder.

Panting, sobbing, Harry trembled and shook, arms bound above and behind him, completely at Draco’s mercy. He never pulled away, even as the shocks of pleasure began to burn painfully. The heat of their magic coiled and twisted. Harry was so close! His vision swam in and out of focus, his mouth hang slack, drool slicking the corners of his battered lips.

Draco leaned forward to lick some of Harry’s spit from his chin. He chuckled, pressing his forehead to Harry’s, staring into those blazing green eyes as he began to tug up and down, thumb rubbing hard at the reddened, swollen head on every up-swing. His fist made a squelching sound, dirty and wet. It made Draco tingle and twitch; god he loved it when Harry got wet! He put their mouths together so that with every gasp Harry only got Draco’s air, owned from inside and out.

“Want it, Harry… Give it to me… Want to see you cum with my marks and cum all over you,” he growled, silver eyes glowing.

“Draco, Draco, Draco, Draco…” Harry chanted near breathlessly, lost in a sea of pained pleasure.

Their tangled magic throbbed and pulsed. Harry was cold and hot and hurt everywhere, his attention riveted on the pulsing heat and shocks of pleasure where Draco pumped his hand up and down, rubbing brutally at his over sensitized tip. Muscles spasming and toes curling, his hips pushed forward for more. Loud wails shook though him as Draco’s tempo grew faster.

Draco’s free hand clenched in Harry’s hair, keeping the boy’s gaping mouth right against his, their breath cycling as Draco hungrily ate every moan and whimper. Soft little sobbing cries spilled from Harry’s lips, “ahh, ahh, ahh,” as he gave small thrusts into Draco’s tight, slick fist. So close… He was so close to the edge… He sobbed, mouth slack, eyes glassy.

“Mine,” Draco growled possessively right into the boy’s mouth.

Harry gave a loud, wrecked cry, the sound making Draco gasp and shiver. Cum shot out of the boy, splattering Harry’s naked stomach and Draco’s hand. Their magic crashed and rolled outwards, deep like thunder. Blacking out, Harry began to collapse sideways.

Draco guided his fall so that Harry lay on his side on the bed, wrists and ankles still connected and bound behind him. Draco lay facing his boy as echoes of fading pleasure burst under his skin. Unable to keep his hands off, he spread their mixed cum over as many bites as he could. It made him tingle and throb to think of it there, invisibly marking Harry further.

After a few minutes, Harry softly groaned, eyes fluttering open. His pupils were wide, still high from the orgasm.

Draco smiled into that dazed expression. “I love you, Harry.”

Harry smiled sweetly back. “Love you… so much…” he whispered, voice wrecked.

Draco leaned forward to softly kiss Harry’s lips. Long and languid, their lips moved slowly, Draco swallowing down his boy’s soft sighs.

Eventually Harry began shivering too hard to ignore. Draco sat up and moved to kneel behind his boy. He untied the rope from around Harry’s ankles. Bruises were left behind from when Harry had
unconsciously pulled and strained against the rope’s hold. Draco reverently traced over them and then glanced up at the hands still bound behind Harry’s head.

“I’m leaving your wrists bound.”

Harry nodded and straightened his legs, rolling onto his back. His bound wrists came to rest on his thoroughly marked chest. It hurt at first, but then the pain subsided into a dull throbbing and he was comfortable.

“You’re not to heal any of these without my permission,” Draco commanded and lazily slid two fingers into Harry’s battered mouth. “Get them wet for me.”

Harry was filled to bursting with safety and warmth. He closed his eyes on a sigh and lapped lovingly at Draco’s fingers. As soon as the blond pulled them free of his mouth, he whispered, “Yes, Draco…” - love submission.

Draco smiled and leaned over to kiss Harry’s fat lip one more time. “Such a good boy for me,” he praised.

- joy surprise gratitude - Tears spilled from Harry’s closed eyes. “Draco…”

Draco smiled and gently traced Harry’s lips before sliding over to his jaw and cheek. He hated erasing the marks, but he knew he couldn’t leave any that would be visible over Harry’s clothes. Reverently he stroked the bites and strangulation bruises on Harry’s neck, watching as they slowly faded away under his touch. Harry was sweet and pliant, slow tears soaking his cheeks and the pillow under his head, but they weren’t tears of pain or self disgust any more. They were tears of relief and peace, a washing clean of all the darkness that had come before.

Humming, Draco cupped Harry’s face and kissed him softly, lapping at the inside of the boy’s mouth and drinking the tears from his healed lips. Pulling away after a long minute, Draco sat up to close the bed curtains and pull their thick, warm blankets over them. He held Harry, whispering words of love and praise until Harry fell into a deep, restful sleep, held safe in Draco’s keeping.

Staring at the red canopy above his head, Draco thought hard. They were a week into December. Two weeks had gone by since their conversation with Hagrid and Harry was running himself into the ground with Quidditch practice most mornings, classes all day, essays and studying, and then trying to ward all of Draco’s clothes for three hours every night. Spread so thin, it wasn’t any wonder Harry was burning out and performing poorly.

His grades had dropped from E’s with the occasional O to mostly A’s. Some nights Harry could only get through warding one sleeve instead of half a robe as he’d done the first time. Harry explained he had to be utterly focused on the feeling of wanting to protect Draco, but exhaustion and worry made his mind cloudy. Worse yet was that the warding only lasted a few days before Harry had to re-ward it. As it stood, Harry was only able to keep one robe fully warded at any given time. Draco thought this was fine. He was able to switch between them, giving Harry the robe with the failing ward to fix while he wore the one that was freshly warded, but of course Harry didn’t agree. He still felt as if he’d failed Draco by not providing more shielding.

Technically, Draco’s feet and ankles were still exposed and vulnerable, so were his head and hands, and anything else that wasn’t covered by his robe. If the bullies figured that out, then Draco would be an easy target once more. However, Draco’s bullies weren’t exactly geniuses and the warding had been extremely successful. Draco no longer tripped or danced or grew sick in the halls. Several people around him had been hit instead as the jinxes and curses bounced off, so now the attacks had stopped completely. Of course, Draco knew that meant they were biding their time and working up
to an even bigger attack, but he was careful and watchful.

More importantly, they weren’t making very much progress regarding the stone. While Harry warded at night, Draco and Hermione researched ways of destroying something as powerful as the Sorcerer’s Stone. So far they had come up with nothing. Hermione had also asked Professor Flitwick for tutoring, but she hadn’t yet found an opening to ask about the stone. In fact, the only one who had made any progress in that area was Neville. Neville had asked Professor Sprout for a tour of the upper year greenhouses and had noticed an empty spot in one of them. Turned out a big Devil’s Snare plant was missing. Sprout tried to convince Neville it had gotten damaged and she’d sent it off to be repaired, but they knew better.

So it wasn’t any wonder that Harry had this breakdown. Draco stroked the boy’s thick, messy hair and hummed some more. Something had to give, but Draco wasn’t sure what. If he forced Harry to give up warding, Harry would take that as proof of his failure, that Draco didn’t believe in him. Quidditch practice was time consuming and physically exhausting, but it was the only time in the day Harry felt relaxed and somewhat happy. Harry was really proud of his last win. And of course their classes and the amount of assignments wouldn’t disappear.

Draco was well and truly stuck. He had no idea how to help his boy or make things more bearable. They had to destroy the stone! Once they did, Snape’s plans would be crushed and the Dark Lord’s presence would leave this place. So would these dreams of Harry’s. They’d be free to relax and focus purely on school again. Sighing, Draco rested his cheek on Harry’s head briefly before carefully pulling away. Maybe it was time to ask for outside help. Determined, he crept quietly to their desk and opened a notebook. He had two letters to write.

**Chapter end.**

**A/N:** I hope the two week time jump from last chapter to this and Draco’s inner monologue and summary at the end wasn’t too abrupt. I tried to make it as smooth as possible. :D

The scene with Draco and Harry at the beginning gave me huge fits. I had to ask for help to make sure the feelings between Draco and Harry and the psychological needs of both were expressed clearly - **THANK YOU, BABYVFAN.**

I’d love any feedback you guys can give.

Sorry I’ve been relying on you all so much lately!! I hope everyone is enjoying the story and will continue to be patient as I work through my writing issues as of late.
A/N: Happy Yule! Sorry for the delay. I really appreciate all the great feedback. :)  

Things are slowly but surely moving forward. This is the start of very big things.  

Ron had been surprised when Neville had come sneaking into his room, the other boy blushing and stuttering about Draco and Harry needing space. Ron had grumbled in confusion, but he’d moved over and fallen right back to sleep. In the light of morning, however, he was worried about his friends. He told Dean and Seamus to go on without him and held Neville back, a frown on his face.  

“What do you mean he had a bad nightmare? How bad? And about what?” His hair had gotten longer, falling over the tops of his ears and across his forehead. He brushed it impatiently back as he gave the other boy a hard stare.  

“I d-don’t k-know,” Neville answered nervously, his eyes darting to the side.  

Ron could have growled. It was clear Neville was trying to protect Harry’s secret, but from Ron? It was true that his friends had been distant lately, always shut away or buried in books, but he’d been so sure if something serious was going on, they’d include him. He dressed quickly, pulling on his warmest clothes. A sharp chill was coming off the stones; the winter solstice may be days away, but no one had told the weather that. The school was hours north of his home and was proving to be much colder than he was used to. Brows lowered in a scowl, he followed Neville back to his room to see what was going on with his friends.  

Draco was already up and dressed, sitting at the desk with his legs crossed as he watched Harry. He wore jeans, his black Converse shoes, and a heavy, dark blue sweater. Draco’s school robe and a thick cloak with black fur around the collar were draped over the bed, waiting. Harry stood by the armoire. He had on wool slacks that were a dark grey in color, black leather ankle-boots, a blue, long-sleeved dress shirt tucked into his pants, and was just pulling on a black wool sweater. His head popped out of the hole, his hair messier than normal and with his black-framed glasses already on his face.  

Harry gave them a shy smile. “Good morning,” he said softly.  

“Morning, Harry,” Ron answered absently. He crossed the distance to stand next to the desk, eyes on the inscrutable blond. “What happened last night?” he demanded quietly.  

Neville busied himself getting dressed and ready for the day. Fortunately, they had no classes as it was Sunday. They all would have probably slept in a bit, but in a few hours, directly after breakfast, the Hufflepuff/Ravenclaw Quidditch match would start. Harry helped him get ready, apologizing about the night before.  

“Harry had a nightmare,” Draco answered simply. His grey eyes cut upward to hold Ron’s gaze. “It was a bad one, but I handled it. He got a few more hours of sleep afterward.”  

“What’s been going on with you two?” He shot Draco a warning glare. “And don’t tell me it’s nothing. We’re friends, aren’t we? If somethings going on, let me help.”  

Draco sighed. He propped his elbow on the edge of the desk and rested his cheek against his fist. “It’s complicated and dangerous. Honestly, I don’t know if there is anything you can do to help or I
would have asked.”

Ron flushed red. “But Pleasant and Longbottom can?” he hissed.

Draco’s eyes narrowed. He stood in a smooth movement. Ron was taller, but at least it was only a few inches instead of the redhead standing over him while he was still sitting. “Neville’s been an enormous help and Hermione is amazing at research. What exactly do you expect to accomplish by being a jerk? Don’t let your temper lead, Ron. We’ve talked about this before.”

At first Ron looked about to explode. His fists clenched; his jaw tensed. Neville froze, watching with wide eyes, but Harry continued pulling out his friend’s outerwear for the day, unconcerned. Draco remained calm, steadily staring into Ron’s eyes, and a miracle happened. Ron let out a huge breath. His shoulders loosened, his fists uncurled. He took a slow breath in and let it out softly.

“I’m worried. I’d like to know what’s happening. I wanna help,” the redhead eventually said. His voice was calm. His eyes were steady.

Draco gave a nod to acknowledge Ron’s efforts. “Thank you.” He reached out to gently squeeze his shoulder in praise. “Like I said, it’s dangerous and complicated. We can’t get into it now. If you want to know what’s happening, we’re going to meet up after the match. You could join us.”

Ron gave a determined nod. “Well, let’s go then.” He broke out into a irrepressible grin. “I’m hungry! Breakfast is on!”

Draco smiled indulgently. He held his hand out to Harry and his boy immediately came to his side, accepting it. Draco couldn’t help but think of the dozens of tender bites that even now must be throbbing on Harry’s skin, hidden away under his sweater and shirt. Draco slid his hand up Harry’s arm until he reached the back above the elbow. He squeezed gently and thrilled in the way Harry sucked in a soft breath.

- love pain gratitude -

Practically purring, Draco turned his attention back to the room. Neville was just pulling on his school robe. They were ready. Draco released Harry to quickly slip into his warded school robe and pull on his cloak. Harry did the same, grabbing two sets of Gryffindor hats, gloves, and scarves.

Breakfast was a loud, rowdy affair, everyone excited for the second Quidditch match of the year. It didn’t help that the illusion of snow was falling from the enchanted ceiling, indicating the first snowfall had occurred. As soon as they stepped outside, sloppy snowballs were flying through the air between shrieking kids. Fred and George threw one at Draco, but it missed and hit Harry. It exploded with a *whump*. Harry staggered with a wince, his hand coming up to shield his chest from further attacks. Draco shot them a vicious glare. The twins bolted, laughing loudly.

Draco made sure to walk directly in front of Harry the rest of the way to the pitch. *I can heal them...* he offered quietly, mind-to-mind.

Harry shook his head hard in refusal, a hot blush rising on his cheeks - *desire embarrassment.*

Draco grinned.

It was cold. Everyone was bundled up in hats, scarves, and mittens. Noses red, they cheered as the game started, yellow and blue players soaring into the sky. Goals were scored, bludgers were smacked straight at players, but inevitably the snitch was spotted and a winner would soon be decided. The Seekers were neck-in-neck, their shoulders bumping into each other as they tried to
knock the other player off the trail. With Harry’s excitement burning through him, Draco cheered so loudly he was in danger of losing his voice.

Hufflepuff caught the snitch, the Seeker performing a crazy summersault as he leapt off his broom to win the golden ball before the Ravenclaw Seeker could grab it. The spectators went wild, except for those in Ravenclaw blue. Draco shook his head as Harry jumped up and down next to him. Ron and Draco were still talking about it as they made their way to the library where Hermione was waiting for them. (She did not approve of violent sports or standing stupidly out in the cold to watch them.)

“But how do you think they feel now?” Draco was insisting. “Ravenclaw was clearly the better team. They outmaneuvered Hufflepuff in every way. Their Seekers were evenly matched. Hufflepuff just happened to be more daring, so they won the game, but is it really a win when you know your team wasn’t the better one?”

“But how do you think they feel now?” Draco was insisting. “Ravenclaw was clearly the better team. They outmaneuvered Hufflepuff in every way. Their Seekers were evenly matched. Hufflepuff just happened to be more daring, so they won the game, but is it really a win when you know your team wasn’t the better one?”

“Daring is a valid quality in the game! They had more, so they won fair and square. Of course it’s a real win!” Ron protested.

“Fine, but as for the rest of the team, they were clearly not as good.”

Ron had nothing to say to that except a petulant, “You can’t take the snitch out of Quidditch, Draco!”

“They should be less points. Say, fifty. Or make the goals scored with the quaffle worth more. Instead of ten, they should be worth thirty.”

Ron hated the idea, but he had no way to battle Draco’s logic. Instead he changed the subject. They were in the library at this point and he could see Longbottom-Pleasant sitting at a table toward the back. “Look, there she is. Now can you tell me what’s going on?”

Her thick, frizzy hair was pulled back away from her face in a low ponytail. Several books were spread out around her, a few open, a few shut and waiting to be used. As the four boys took seats, filling out the table, she lifted her eyebrows at Ron’s inclusion.

Draco gave her a reassuring smile. “At the very least, a new perspective might help.”

Hermione looked doubtful, but she didn’t interrupt as Draco began to explain the bare bones of the situation. He left out mention of Snape and the Dark Lord, but he did explain it was very important for them to destroy the stone since Dumbledore’s hands were tied. If the stone fell into the possession of someone evil, it would be very bad for everyone.

Ron frowned as he listened, his mind spinning with possibilities and strategies. “The Devil’s Snare will likely be the next defense after the cerberus.”

“You can’t possibly know that,” Hermione snapped.

Ron shot her a heated glare. “I can’t know it, but it’s likely.”

“How in the world is it likely?” she demanded.

“Because Devil’s Snare is only dangerous if you come into contact with it. Most people know what it is and would destroy it from a distance. The only way it would be worthwhile as a defense is if you arranged it so someone was forced to come into contact with it. I’m thinking the cerberus is guarding a trap door and you’ll have to drop down into the next room right into the middle of the Devil’s Snare. It’s just too perfect a chance to fully utilize the Snare’s defensive capability.”
Hermione had a look of surprise on her face while Draco looked smug. “That’s… brilliant,” she admitted.

Ron turned bright red to the tips of his ears. “Not really. Just logical is all.”

“Exactly,” she responded.

He shot her a nasty glare, blush disappearing. “I’m not stupid!” he growled.

She said nothing; the implication being that it was debatable.

Draco intervened before Ron could explode. “That leaves us with four more defenses and we have no idea how to find out what they are.”

“Potions, Tranfiguration, Charms, and whatever Dumbledore cooked up,” Ron summarized.

“We’ll never figure out Dumbledore’s,” Neville said in defeat, slumping in his chair.

“Probably not,” Ron agreed. “Or Potions. Snape wouldn’t tell us if his life depended on it and especially not if our lives depended on it.”

“McGonagall is sharp. She’s not going to let us trick it out of her,” Draco added. He hooked his bangs behind his ears sharply, a gesture of frustration.

Hermione scowled down at the book she had open. “I’m having no luck with Flitwick.”

“Well, we could follow the person stealing it,” Ron offered. They all stared at him. “What?” he demanded, crossing his arms defensively. “They would have to get through the defenses, right? To get to the stone to steal it. We could go in behind them. It shouldn’t be so hard then. We would at least see how they got through them if they didn’t take them down completely.”

“And then what?” Hermione hissed furiously. “We’ll be too late.”

“Not necessarily.” Draco gave Harry a thoughtful look. Trusting green eyes stared back. “If we go in right on the thief’s heels, we could destroy it before they escaped with it.”

“That sounds really, really dangerous,” Hermione protested softly, dark brown eyes filled with worry.

Draco ignored that. “So we need to make finding out how to destroy the stone our top priority, and we’ll set an alarm so we’ll know right away if someone tries to get past Fluffy.” He reached over to squeeze Ron’s shoulder. “Thanks, Ron. You were a huge help.”

Ron shot Hermione a dazzling smile.

She scowled and looked away.

xXx

Harry was exhausted. From the stress of the last few weeks, from the night terror the night before and Draco’s claiming, from the constant low level pain of the bites left on his body… That meant he didn’t realize at first what was pulling him from a deep sleep. It was dark, cold, but warm under the blankets. He wasn’t dreaming. Just sleeping deeply, body heavy. Soft, almost not there scratch-scritch-scratching reached his ears. Scritch-scratch, scritch-scratch. Harry’s brow tensed and then his eyes squinted open. Was it a mouse eating at the walls?
Too dark to see, his hand slid over soft, warm sheets to feel empty space. Adrenaline dumped into his blood and hit his brain like a truck. Draco was missing! He sat up quickly and scrambled to the edge with the nightstand. He flung the curtain open and tapped the lamp. It fluttered to life. *Scritch-scratch, scritch-scratch.* Harry’s eyes darted around what he could see of the room, but he couldn’t see… “Draco?” he called in an urgent voice.

*Scratch-Scratch-Scratch*… Harry crawled to the other side of the bed and flung aside the curtain. He gasped, eyes wide. Draco was crouched in the shadows between the bed and the wall wearing nothing but a white t-shirt. His hands slowly clawed at the stone floor… *Scritch-scratch, scritch-scratch*… Harry couldn’t see his face, but Draco’s body was tensed, rigid.

“Draco…” Harry called - *worry fear love.* He got no reaction. Some of Draco’s nails had broken and were bloody… *Scratch-scratch-scratch*…

Climbing out of bed, Harry crossed the small space between them. His heart pounded in his throat as he reached out a trembling hand. “Draco…” Harry’s fingertips gently touched the blond’s tensed shoulder.

Draco whipped around, face contorted with a snarl, eyes wild and wide. He made a screeching sound that had Harry screaming and scrambling back. Draco scuttled with shocking speed underneath the bed and the *scritch-scratch, scritch-scratch* started again.

“Harry…” Neville’s sleepy voice made him jump. “What’s going on?”

Harry’s voice shook. From the cold and fear. “Get Percy please?” He only wore his own sleep shirt. His feet were bare and already he was shivering. How long had Draco been out of bed? He must be frozen solid! Slowly, Harry crouched to see under the bed. Draco lunged at him. Harry yelled, falling back on his butt. Draco landed on top of him, shrieking. Sharp broken nails scratched at Harry’s neck, caught at his collar. Harry wrapped his arms around the blond, ignoring the pain, and let his magic flood free. Draco shrieked like a wounded animal and dove back under the bed.

Dazed, Harry lay bleeding from the scratches at his throat and shoulders. He could hear Neville hyperventilating. He rolled onto his hands and knees, then stood. “Neville, get Percy. I’ll stay and watch him.”

“We need Madam Pomfrey! Or Dumbledore!” Neville protested, terrified.

“She doesn’t help! No one helps,” Harry snapped, eyes narrowed. “Get Percy! Hurry!”

Neville scrambled out of bed and bolted past him. He didn’t bother with a sleeping robe or slippers.

Draco darted for the door, face contorted into something crazy. Harry leapt in front of him, arms open and magic radiating from his body. Draco veered away with an animalistic hiss. He climbed onto the middle bed and pressed himself against the headboard. A crazy croaking escaped his wide-open mouth, clicking occasionally. The sound made goosebumps rise along Harry’s arms and the back of his neck. Harry’s heart beat a crazy rhythm. Oh god what was wrong with Draco?

“It’s okay,” he said breathlessly. “It’s going to be okay. I’m going to take care of you.”

*Scratch-scratch-scratch …* Draco clawed at the wood of the headboard behind him. His head tilted, the creepy sound coming from his throat growing louder. Harry bit his lip, terrified, as Draco’s head seemed to turn almost upside down, eyes bulging and unblinking.

“What’s happening to you?” Harry whispered, tears of horror welling in his eyes. “Draco…”
Neville beat almost blindly on Percy’s door. He was too panicked to think clearly, so when Oliver Wood opened it with a sleepy look of wrath, Neville latched onto his arm to keep from falling forward and practically screamed in his face. “Percy! I need Percy! Draco’s acting crazy! Something’s wrong with him. Something's really wrong!”

Oliver looked shocked and then really worried. “Longbottom, what…?”

Percy appeared behind the Quidditch captain. He placed a hand on Neville’s shoulder as he passed, pushing him gently into the room. “Stay here. You can have my bed.”

“Percy…” Oliver stared at the other boy in surprise. The redhead could be bossy, but he was mostly quiet and a loner. Oliver had never heard him sound so intense or serious before.

Percy didn’t answer, slipping silently down the hall and disappearing into the shadows.

Oliver shook his head and shut the door behind the clearly freaked First-year. “Alright, kid. Guess you’re bunking with us.”

Neville swallowed hard and wrapped his arms around his chest. Three other boys were sitting up and staring with either curiosity or annoyance.

Oliver waved them off. “Show’s over. Go back to sleep,” he ordered as he guided Neville to Percy’s bed.

Neville didn’t resist. He didn’t want to go back to his room. Draco had been terrifying, like something possessed. He shivered hard and crawled under the still warm comforter. He pulled it over his head to muffle his heavy breathing.

“Hey. It’s going to be fine. Percy’s a know-it-all. I’m sure he’ll fix it,” Oliver reassured the boy. He was already falling back to sleep.

Neville really hoped he was right because Draco was not okay.

Percy didn’t know what to expect, but he knew it had to be bad to scare the Longbottom boy and have Harry sending for him. He took a deep breath, his wand held tightly in his right hand, and quietly opened the door, slipping inside and shutting it quickly behind him. Almost immediately he tensed as the most terrifying sound reached his ears. Draco was croaking, crouched on all fours on a bed. He looked to be trying to throw something up, his back arching violently every few seconds. His face was twisted in the most hateful expression, eyes bulging and locked on Harry.

Harry stood frozen, eyes wide as he watched the blond. He stood in nothing but a t-shirt. His neck was bleeding from several scratches, staining the collar of his shirt a vivid red. There were round bruises on the back of his arms and circling his wrists, but otherwise he seemed fine. Percy’s eyes snapped back to Draco. He had never seen anything like it. He shuddered in horror and carefully lifted his wand. Before he could cast a single spell, Draco flung himself up on his knees and began to scream bloody murder. Percy and Harry both slammed their hands over their ears in shock.

Draco clawed at his head, ripping white strands free from his scalp. Harry ran forward and flung himself on the blond. Draco immediately began to thrash and struggle, still screaming like a banshee, head and arms whipping back and forth. Harry held on for dear life, tucking his head in against Draco’s neck. Percy darted forward and cast the strongest sleeping spell he knew, lashing the blond
across the shin with his wand.

Draco should have been out like a light, but instead he slowly weakened. His scream tampered off into broken whimpers as his arms stilled. After thirty seconds, he was finally silent and unconscious. Harry lifted his head and kissed the blond’s pale lips, pushing as much of his love and healing magic as he could through the connection. Percy backed off, breathing hard as he tried to understand everything he’d seen.

xXx

Draco was somewhere dark. His chest felt heavy and his stomach churned, a distorted, sick feeling of butterflies. Tears welled in his eyes. He felt hopeless. There was no point. No point to fighting or caring. It didn’t matter in the end. Anxiety churned harder and he clenched his fist over his stomach. What about Harry? Fuck, what was he going to do?

He could almost taste it, the feeling of Harry’s warm magic, but it was as if a thick sheet of glass separated him from the bond, from the world. He was in a dark place. Alone. He hadn’t been alone since he was six. He’d felt this crushing hopelessness back then, too, but he’d learned to survive. Learned to hunker down, conserve his resources, and wait. Draco wasn’t sure he had it in him this time. He was so fucking tired. The world was closing in around him and he felt sick.

xXx

Percy didn’t have long to think about what was going on or the fact that Harry’s bruises were from bites. Draco’s eyes opened and he weakly pushed at Harry, which shouldn’t be possible. Percy’s spell should have knocked him out until he cast the counter. He tensed, ready for another crazed attack. Harry, on the other hand, pulled back with a soft breath of surprise and a burning look of hope.

Percy expected Draco to immediately comfort the smaller boy, but instead Draco turned his face away. Percy frowned. As Harry sat back on his heels, he shot Percy a pleading look. Percy straightened his back and took charge. He had four younger siblings. The instincts drilled into him by his mother on how to deal with sick kids kicked in. “I’m going to wash him up. Clean up the room. We’ll be back.”

Harry nodded, eyes wide as he watched Percy scoop Draco into his arms bridal style and carried him to the door.

Draco lay complacently in the older teenager’s arms. What was the fucking point of fighting it? At least it got him away from Harry. Tears burned his cheeks. He began to gasp, unable to catch his breath.

Percy shut the bathroom door behind him, placed Draco on his feet, and quickly spelled the door locked and soundproof. He turned back to see Draco standing as if lost, arms wrapped around his chest, shaking in the midst of a panic attack. Percy moved Draco to the side of the tub and sat him on the edge. He rubbed the boy’s back, putting enough pressure to lean the boy forward. “That’s it. You’re alright.” He reached behind Draco to turn on the hot water and stopper the tub.

Draco exploded into sudden movement. Heart banging in his chest, lightheaded, he threw himself across the room. With his back to Percy, he pressed his forehead against the cold tile, grit his teeth, and choked back the sobs. He was coming apart; his control was shattered. He wanted to burrow into a dark hole and never come out. “Leave me the fuck alone,” he gasped when he had enough breath.
“I can’t, Draco,” Percy said softly. “I don’t know what’s going on with you. I can’t risk you hurting yourself again.”

Draco snarled and hit the wall with a shaking fist. It hurt, but the pain and anger began to ease the claws that were sunk deep in his chest. He gulped back tears and slowly his trembling stopped. He opened his fist and pressed his hand flat to the wall. It was red where he’d hit it, but he also noticed his nails were broken and short. There was no damage or blood - he vaguely remembered the warm wash of Harry’s unique magic - but Draco knew he’d had to have clawed at something hard to get them to look like that. It wouldn’t have been pretty.

“Fuck!” he screamed and punched the wall again. Heavy anxiety and depression consumed everything. Closed off his mind, blinded and smothered. He was still shaking; his knees felt weak. “Harry?” he rasped. He pressed his forehead hard against the cold tile of the wall.

“Safe,” Percy answered honestly. “Shaken up but unhurt…” There was a pause and then the redhead said, “Except for the bites and bruising.”

Draco felt some of the tension leave his shaking frame. He could feel it again, the current of Harry’s emotions - worry trust protective. “What happened?” he rasped hoarsely, eyes closed.

Percy stared at the boy’s back. The feeling of the boy’s surprisingly light weight in his arms wouldn’t leave him. Draco was so strong and indomitable. It had been shocking to see him so vulnerable and pliant. He wouldn’t forget Harry’s bruises or his suspicions about them, but now wasn’t the time to push. “I don’t know how it started, but Longbottom came for me. I told him to stay in my room and when I got here, you were crazed. Standing on the bed, making these sounds… You didn’t recognize us at all. When you began to hurt yourself - you were clawing at the headboard - Harry flung himself on you. While he held you down, I was able to spell you to sleep. You should have stayed that way, but after only a few minutes, you woke up.”

Draco turned around, arms back around his chest in a protective hold. His grey eyes were dark with exhaustion, but he was alert, anger clear in the tight cast of his face. “What the fuck’s happening to me?”

Percy held his gaze. “I don’t know for sure, but I don’t think it’s a spell. I’ve heard stories that described something like what I saw. I think…” Percy took a deep breath. “I think someone messed with your head.”

Draco felt a sick feeling of dread.

“Something like that is way beyond school-age magic,” Percy continued. He felt sick as he remembered Third-year. He’d gone almost out of his mind with fear as he suffered those nightly visits - held down against his will, used as a heavy weight sweated and rutted against him. He always blacked out and there was never any evidence left behind in the morning. Magic had to be involved and he was plagued with nearly debilitating questions.

Was more being done and he was made not to remember? Were the terrifying moments fake memories implanted by someone else? If he couldn’t even trust his mind, how would he ever be able to stop it? What if it never stopped? - Percy almost hadn’t made it home. He had contemplated death so many times, and he was furious and sick over the fact that Draco was experiencing something similar. Draco was just a child!

“There are some…” he continued, throat tight with emotion. “They don’t react well to mind altering spells. They fight it unconsciously, experiencing demented and crazed episodes.”
Draco could hardly breathe. His vision was going black around the edges and he had to lean against the wall for support. His mind? Someone had fucked with his mind? He couldn’t remember anything like that… but he wouldn’t, would he?

“There’s a chance you can break the spell.” Percy looked up, hope in his eyes. “There’s a chance.”

“And if I don’t?” Draco whispered. He now understood Harry’s desire to claw out of his body. He felt disgusting and trapped inside his own skin.

“You’ll go insane,” Percy confessed. He ran a hand through his frizzy red curls, brown eyes dark with worry. He sat at the edge of the tub in his blue and white-stripped pajamas. “The episodes will get closer and closer until that’s all that’s left. They’d lock you up in Saint Mungo’s. Potion you until you’re calm and leave you there.”

Draco understood; he’d be placed in an asylum. Harry wouldn’t leave him. He’d either be arrested or locked up too as the darkness was left unchecked. They’d maybe share cells next to each other. Draco clenched his fists and grit his teeth, fury washing his vision red. “That’s not going to fucking happen,” he vowed, dark and murderous.

Percy shivered at the tone. “No. I don’t think it will.”

The rage washed out as fast as it had come and nearly took him to his knees as terror washed in. What the fuck was he going to do to stop it? His mind had been fucked with. With painful clarity, he suddenly remembered Harry’s sweet voice saying, “You’re fighting it. And that means you’re going to beat it.” He saw the faith and trust in Percy’s eyes. They believed in him. And it hurt, that belief. Draco felt his breath quicken. Panic sat heavy on his chest. He turned his back, biting his lip to keep broken sounds behind his teeth.

Percy turned the hot water off as it neared the edge of the tub. He didn’t know what to do, what to say. Draco stood silently shaking, clinging to the cold bathroom wall to keep his feet. He looked about to shatter. Standing, Percy said, “I’ll be in your room since I gave my bed to Longbottom.”

He didn’t know how to help, but he knew that him being there was only making it harder for the blond. Maybe he needed a minute to cry and gather his strength? Heart beating hard, he left Draco to his privacy and hoped to Merlin he was making the right choice. Slipping into the First-year dorm, he saw that Harry had put on his sleeping robe and had cleaned the room. There was no more blood on the walls, the furniture was put back in place, the middle bed was made neatly as if no one had touched it. Harry sat at the edge of the far right bed, but he got to his feet as Percy quietly entered.

“He’s taking a bath,” Percy reassured him, trying to smile.

Harry smiled in relief, tension leaving his shoulders, and slowly sat back down. “Thank you, Percy. For taking care of him.” He felt a stab of jealousy, but it quickly faded. What was important was Draco. Whatever helped Draco was good and he was thankful.

Percy moved across the room and sat on the edge of the middle bed, facing Harry. He couldn’t see the bruises because Harry’s robe was covering them, but he knew they were there. He unconsciously moved his hand to push his glasses higher up his nose. His fingers met air; he hadn’t had time to put them on when Longbottom came banging on his door.

“Harry…” He cleared his throat. The boy stared at him attentively with bright green eyes behind round glasses. His hair was a mess, but it always was. A soft smile sat on his lips, ignorant to Percy’s worries. “Do they hurt?” He gestured weakly at Harry’s arms.
Harry frowned in confusion and then lit up with recognition. His hand cupped the back of his arm. Doing so had his sleeve falling down, revealing the bruises encircling his wrist. Now that Percy could see them more clearly and up close, they looked put there by a rope. The bruises were only on one side of the wrist, but they had distinctly round edges. If Harry’s wrists were tied together, the rope would only have gone around the outside as his inner wrists would have been pressed together.

“Not much,” Harry answered easily.

He didn’t look afraid or ashamed or embarrassed. Percy was quite confused. “Did Draco do that to you?”

Harry nodded, his hand dropping casually into his lap. “Yes.” He looked up into Percy’s eyes, love filling his gaze. “Draco takes care of me.”

Now Percy was even more baffled. “But why would he hurt you?”

Harry’s smile fell, his eyes dropping to his lap where his fingers now tangled and twisted slowly together. “I need it,” he admitted. He looked back up at Percy. He’d always wondered why others didn’t understand. Dobby did, but no one else. Maybe Percy could understand. He wore Draco’s snake. Draco had marked him as one of his. “I need to belong to him. Without Draco…” Harry shuddered. “I… I was ugly… disgusting…” He shook his head, trying to find the right words. “You couldn’t touch me without getting filthy… I wasn’t human… I was a thing, evil and vile. Sometimes other people can still see it… Like the ones who took us… They saw… Tried to clean me… It hurt so bad…”

His eyes flashed up to Percy, surprisingly bright and clear. “But not like Draco! Draco doesn’t hurt me like they did… No he… He gets inside me, makes me his… makes me new. I’m not dirty or broken or evil. I’m Draco’s! I’m good! I take care of him and I can be a real person… Because nothing of Draco’s can be bad. Draco’s amazing! He… He makes all the bad feel good…” Harry blushed, remembering just how good Draco could make him feel. “You understand, don’t you?” he asked hopefully. “Draco marked you, too. It hurt, but it made you better. Being Draco’s makes everything better.”

Percy shared Harry’s blush. He couldn’t hold those earnest green eyes and looked toward the door. He kind of did understand actually, but at the same time it went against everything society taught him about, well, everything. Pain was bad. Hurting others was bad. Kids shouldn’t do those kinds of things… But at the same time pain could sometimes be okay. When a doctor was treating you, sometimes they had to hurt you more to make you well. Medicine was like that, too. And Draco was sort of like medicine, really. As for the sex…

Well, what do you expect? Kids are innocent. They had found something that felt good, why would they stop? It’s like eating candy or cake. Kids didn’t understand how it could be bad for them, right? Draco and Harry made each other feel good, so why wouldn’t they? Percy had witnessed a few moments of them getting off. Draco had been rough, but Harry had always seemed to really like everything Draco did.

Now bright red, Percy left the bed to put some distance between him and Harry and all these confusing, conflicting thoughts. He understood, but he didn’t. Bruised wrists and bites were way more violent than anything he’d seen the boys do together that was for sure, but Harry was comfortable and happy. He wasn’t embarrassed to talk about it at all. There was no shame in his voice or expression. And the way he had talked about himself… It sent shivers of horror up and down Percy’s spine. To hear such horrible things said in a child’s voice… It made him feel sick. Whatever had made Harry feel that way seemed way more horrific than the bites and bruises that Harry seemed perfectly happy to wear.
They sat in silence after that. Percy began to get nervous as an hour passed. Should he check on the blond? Harry was staring at him expectantly now, silently asking where Draco was. Percy bit his lip. He should go check. He stood just as Draco stepped into the room, hair damp from his bath, his cheeks red from the heat of the water. The blond looked better, if a little tired. Harry immediately went to his side. Draco pulled him into a hug, rubbing his cheek against the side of Harry’s head.

“I’m okay,” he promised. He pushed Harry gently away to look into his eyes. “You okay?”

Harry nodded quickly, but Draco had seen the scratches at his throat.

Eyes narrowed, he pressed three fingers at Harry’s mouth. Harry opened his lips immediately to accept them inside. Draco was soft and gentle. His other hand came to rest at Harry’s throat, his thumb stroking over the leather collar. When his fingers were wet enough, he slipped them out of Harry’s soft, warm mouth and spread the boy’s healing magic over the scratches and cuts. He pulled aside the robe to make sure to heal the ones on the boy’s slender shoulders.

Percy watched all this from several feet away. His shoulders loosened and he could feel the tension easing out of his body. Draco was so gentle and conscientious. It was clear how much he adored Harry. He really did take care of him. Percy would keep an eye on Harry, but for now he didn’t know what to say about the bruises.

xXx

Draco never did go back to sleep. He sat watching over Harry sleeping next to him and Percy asleep in the next bed. They both had been exhausted. Truth be told, Draco was too, but he couldn’t sleep, not with the thought of his mind being fucked with. If that was true, there was no cure. They’d just have to wait to see if he beat it or went crazy, clearly his mind wouldn’t give up fighting whatever it was.

It was only a few hours later when Neville stepped nervously into the room. Draco was already dressed and writing at the desk. He stood and went to the other boy. Neville squeaked in surprise as he was pulled into a tight hug.

“Thank you, Neville. You really helped me out. I swear I’m going to do everything I can to make sure that doesn’t happen again.”

“What did happen?” Neville asked. He’d been scared Draco would be just as he was last night and he was painfully relieved to see that Percy had been able to fix it.

“Someone cast a spell on my mind and it didn’t take. Not all the way,” Draco told him honestly. He wrapped his arm around the boy’s shoulders and walked him toward Neville’s bed. He sat his friend down and crouched so he could look up at the other boy. Neville’s eyes were wide in a very pale face. He gently took the boy’s limp hands. “I know it’s scary and I can’t really expect you to believe me, but I’m fighting whatever they did to me. I might have more of those episodes, but I promise I’m going to do everything I can to beat this, okay?”

“We need to tell someone!” Neville exclaimed. Images of his parents burned bright in his mind. He clamped his hands down around Draco’s, suddenly desperate and terrified. “You need help!”

Harry and Percy had been woken by their talking and were watching from their beds. They said nothing, letting Draco handle it.

Draco soothed him, making a hushing noise, as he stood and wrapped Neville into a hug again. He was surprised at the strength of the boy’s reaction, but now wasn’t the time to question it. “I would,
Neville, but there’s nothing anyone can do to help. It’s something I gotta do on my own. There’s even a chance they’d want to lock me up until I broke through it.” He pulled away to look into the boy’s wide brown eyes. “Neville, that would only make me worse. You understand, don’t you?”

Neville nodded. He totally got that. He loved his parents, mourned their loss every day, but visiting them in that place was very difficult. It was a horrible place to be. He held tight to Draco’s hands. Draco had been hurt - Someone had attacked his mind! - and Neville had run away. “Is there anything I can do?”

Draco’s blond hair fell from behind his left ear as he tilted his head with a cocky smile. “Keep being a good friend. That’s all I need.”

Neville smiled, lips wobbling, as tears filled his eyes. He flung his arms around Draco’s neck and gave him a hug.

Draco hugged him back, briefly stroking his hair before pulling away. “Get dressed. We all need a good breakfast.”

Neville wiped his face and went to get his clothes.

They went downstairs together. Oliver, Hermione, and Ron were waiting for them. Hermione and Ron became really suspicious as Oliver asked Draco if everything was okay. Draco assured him he was fine, but there were faint circles around his eyes. Neville and Hermione fell back to whisper heatedly together and Harry promised to explain things to Ron later. They ran into the twins halfway down. They were cackling, so they most likely had been pranking someone.

At breakfast there was an announcement. Each Head of House would be compiling a list to see which students would be staying over the Yule break. There would be a list posted on the common room bulletin board in each House and those staying should place their name on it.

“We’ll be staying,” Draco announced, voice quiet but firm.

“We’ll ask,” Hermione offered, referring to her and Neville, but her tone of voice made it clear it might not be possible.

Ron frowned. Yule would be a perfect time for the thief to go after the stone. Draco and Harry couldn’t defend it by themselves! “I’ll tell Mum I’m staying, too.”

Percy paused, fork halfway to his mouth.

Fred and George shared looks. “Yule at Hogwarts,” Fred exclaimed as if it were some novel idea. “What a wonderful idea!” George concluded. He flung his arm around Ron’s shoulders with an enormous grin. “Why don’t we all stay?” the twins said together.

Percy nodded his agreement.

“Sounds fun,” Harry said casually, mask in place, and gave them all a thankful smile. He leaned supportively against Draco’s shoulder. The more help he could gather around the blond, the happier he’d be.

- love determination protective -

Chapter end.
A/N: Warning! Child Abuse, child molestation, slavery, sexual slavery, human trafficking, drug use (mild?), non-con, shota, a lot of profanity

Seeking Help

Draco staggered over to the tub of hot water that Percy had prepared for him. He felt numb, but at the same time like he would shatter if he moved too fast. He couldn’t stop thinking about it. Someone had gotten inside him, changed him, and he would never have known. The only consolation he had was that he was somehow rejecting what had been done to him, but no matter how he fought, it was too late. He couldn’t undo the violation.

Draco’s legs collapsed and he sank to his knees. His head tilted back, his face twisted in agony, and he screamed so loudly his veins corded on his neck. Gasping, he bent forward, slamming his fists on the cold tile, pressing his forehead hard against the ground.

The surge of rage and fear passed and left him once more feeling numb and vulnerable. He was exhausted. The simple act of bathing seemed beyond him. He trembled as Harry’s love and worry emotions hummed through the bond… Harry’s scar bleeding a thin trail of ruby… Harry’s small body heaving and shaking… the way the darkness seemed be waiting to pull him under… Harry needed him. Draco couldn’t fall apart. Not now. Voldemort would win the battle over Harry’s soul if he broke now.

Draco felt the panic well up again. The sick idea of someone getting inside his head mixed with images of being raped and he hovered on the brink of a flashback. His Occlumency kicked in, locking it away for later. “Fuck!” Draco screamed hoarsely. He stared blindly ahead, panting and furious. “Get up, you bastard. Get up!” Beating his hands against the floor one last time, Draco forced himself to his feet. His vision greyed. He wouldn’t make it. Not like this. It would take him days to find his center again. He didn’t have that kind of time.

Staggering, forcing one foot ahead of the other, Draco abandoned the bathroom. Arms wrapped around his thin torso, he forced himself down the cold, stone hallway and up two flights of stairs. Like last time, the door wasn’t locked. He stumbled across the dark room, snores and soft breathing filling the small space. He pulled open the bed hangings of a specific bed and practically fell onto two pairs of legs. He was shaking again, his teeth chattering loudly. His feet were painful blocks of ice.

“Who’s it?” a sleepy voice called in the darkness before the soft glow of a wand tip illuminated the space around them.

Draco was crying, tears streaking his pale face, eyes puffy and bloodshot, tormented as he looked up at George. “Please…” he whispered. “I need… something… please, I know you have potions… I just… I need to think straight… just for a minute…”

George stared in horror at the little boy. He swished his bed curtains closed, activating the silencing and privacy wards, and sat up. He immediately flung the comforter around the boy’s shaking shoulders. “Shit, Draco, what happened?” he demanded, short red hair mussed from sleep and wide brown eyes filled with worry.

“George?” Fred sat up, woken by the movement and cold as the comforter was removed. His expression creased with worry identical to his brother’s when he registered Draco’s trembling frame.
at the foot of their bed.

“Please…” Draco begged, curling in on himself.

“Get Pomfrey,” George ordered his brother as he wrapped Draco in his arms.

“No!” With surprising force, Draco shoved George away from him. “No! No adults. No fucking adults.” His grey eyes flashed up and pierced first Fred and then George. “I just need something to settle my nerves. I have flashbacks. Of when I was a fucking sex slave, okay? Just please help me. I’ll be fine. I’ll be fine,” he repeated, crumpling into tears again. “Fuck…” he rasped, squeezing his torso in an effort to hold himself together. He was falling apart, couldn’t they fucking see that? Someone had fucked with his fucking mind and he couldn’t remember any of it! He had no idea what had been done to him! Harry needed him to get it together, goddamn it! Couldn’t they see he was fucking begging them for help?


Fred watched his brother leave and turned a concerned frown on the blond who looked one minute away from a complete meltdown. Sex slave? That hadn’t been in the papers, he thought, horrified. Bloody hell…

Draco took deep breaths. He thought about Harry and his promises, but it was like trying to catch the end of a writhing snake. He wasn’t weak, damn it! He was strong! He just had to goddamn breathe! He’d been through this before… held down, beaten, raped, bled and tortured… He’d won; Raymond had fucking died like the animal he was! But this time thinking about the past made him feel weak instead of strong. He’d been small and scared and it had hurt so fucking much. It had destroyed him in ways he still didn’t comprehend. He didn’t honestly think he could survive that again. He really didn’t.

George returned to see Draco rocking back and forth at the foot of the bed, eyes staring blankly at nothing. Fred’s hands hovered in the air, hesitating on touching the boy, clearly terrified of making things worse. He shot his twin a desperate look.

“Draco…” George called unsurely. Dead grey eyes slowly shifted over to him. George shivered. “I have something. It’s a lot more powerful than a Calming Draught. It will make you feel floaty. Clear your mind. Lots of kids strung out before the big exams take it.” He lifted a test tube full of a thick, pale blue substance. “How much do you weigh, do you know?”

“Seventy-seven pounds,” Draco answered in a monotone with hollow edges.

George looked to Fred to double check his math.

Fred answered, echoing the number he’d come up with, “Thirty-five kilos, so…”

George nodded. “About seven milliliters, then.” He cast a spell at the tube and a good third of it vanished. He hadn’t expected the kid to be so light, but come to think of it, Ron was tall for his age. That’s why he probably weighed more. He handed the vial to Draco.

The boy stared at it blankly for a long second before he unwound his arm stiffly from his torso and reached for it with a numb hand. The blue goop had an iridescent shine to it. Draco didn’t think it would help. The feelings inside him were too strong, howling and tearing him to shreds. He’d been stupid to come. Stupid to think there was any hope. There was no such thing in this ugly fucking world.
He tipped the vial back. The thick potion slid out almost the consistency of jello. It had no flavor, but it made his tongue and throat tingle. It settled in his belly and expanded, warming up gradually until he blinked and realized he was breathing easily. Most of his shaking slowly stopped except what was caused by the cold. He blinked and two identical faces stared back at him worriedly. He gave a tentative smile, testing to see if he still could. His lips curled upward obediently, but the expression fell as he sighed and took stock. He didn’t feel great or suddenly invincible, but the screaming inside had been silenced. He’d been cut free.

“How long will it last?” he asked quietly, cold sweat slowly drying on his skin.

“Twenty-four hours give or take.” Fred waffled his hand back and forth.

“It depends on each person’s receptibility and the size of the dose,” George continued.

“We think we got it right, though,” Fred added. “So it should last you until tonight.”

Draco nodded. He reached forward and caught George’s hand. “Thanks,” he said quietly, sincerity shining in his eyes.

George nodded, but he wasn’t happy. “You need to talk to someone.”

Fred agreed and asked carefully, “How often does this happen?”

“Not often,” Draco answered honestly. He looked away, unable to meet their gaze. “I saw a Mind Healer. He taught me a spell that helps me manage it, but…” He hesitated and then decided to trust the two. He met their eyes. “Someone recently cast a spell on my mind and it messed me up a bit. Scrambled my control.”

The twins gave him solemn looks as they said together, “You need to tell Dumbledore.”

Draco nodded, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. He climbed from the bed. “I got to get back. Harry will be worried.” Fred and George shared a look, but Draco already knew what they were worried about and added, “Percy’s staying with us tonight.”

The twins relaxed a little at that.

Draco thanked them again and slipped from the room on silent feet. It was fucking freezing and he hurried back to the warm bath he had left behind. He had a lot to think about while the artificial peace gave him room to breathe.

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He made it through the next school day, but after their last class Draco felt as if there was an hourglass in his head and the last of the sand was quickly trickling through his fingers. He stood and took Harry by the hand. His friends called after them, but Draco ignored them, pulling Harry into a shadowed hallway. He made sure no one had followed him and slipped into an unused classroom. At the back, there was a tapestry that hid a secret passage.

“I’m going to talk to Dumbledore,” Draco said calmly, still towing Harry by his hand. Suddenly he stopped, took a deep breath, and faced the other boy. “I took something from the twins that’s kept me calm, but that’s going to wear off soon. I’m going to need you.”

Harry looked solemnly into Draco’s eyes - love determination protective. “I’ll be strong, Draco,” he promised. He thrilled at the chance to take care of the blond. He loved him so much.
Draco released Harry’s hand in order to cup his boy’s face in his palms. He stepped forward and gently pressed their lips together. Sliding his tongue into Harry’s mouth, he deepened the kiss. Harry kissed him back, coiling his arms around Draco’s neck and filling Draco’s chest with a powerful surge of - love devotion. Draco pulled away, smiling a soft smile that only Harry ever saw. He carded his hand through Harry’s dark, tangled hair. “Love you,” he whispered.

“Love you, Draco,” Harry echoed back, catching Draco’s hand in his.

Draco smiled for a moment longer, staring into Harry’s eyes, before turning and continuing to the Headmaster’s Tower. They didn’t speak, they didn’t need to. They ascended the moving stairs up to Dumbledore’s office door in perfect sync.

“My boys! What can I do for you?” Dumbledore asked cheerfully. “I was just preparing to go down to dinner.”

He was standing by the stairs that lead to his personal apartment in brilliant white and red heavy winter robes. Fawkes sat perched next to him, red and gold feathers a blaze of glory. The bird trilled, the sound sweet and pure. Draco found the song clearing his mind, slowing the sand trickling away in his head, and he gave a polite smile of gratitude to the bird.

“We need to talk,” he said calmly. “Sit with me. This might take a few minutes.”

Dumbledore looked genuinely curious. He led the boys across the room to his desk and took the seat behind it, gesturing to the two chairs placed in front of it with a benevolent hand. “What can I do for you? I hope there hasn’t been any more trouble?” he asked in concern.

Draco took one of the seats, but Harry decided to stand at his side to be closer. Harry’s eyes dropped to where their fingers were linked together on the armrest. Draco’s hands were a tiny bit bigger, his fingers pale and slender but strong. They were warm, too. He shivered in pleasure as Draco’s thumb unconsciously swiped across his palm.

Draco eyed the old man before him. He was powerful and vastly more knowledgeable, but Draco couldn’t fathom what the crazy bastard was thinking. He was screwing everything up, making so many mistakes. At least, from Draco’s perspective.

Dumbledore stared back at the two children, his smile falling as the silence stretched. The Malfoy heir stared at him as if he were a bug to be dissected while Harry looked downward, standing stoically at the blond’s side, their hands entwined.

“I’ve been attacked,” Draco finally voiced. “My mind has been violated and altered.”

Dumbledore tensed, staring across the desk. “My dear boy, that is a serious accusation…”

Draco cut him off. “Cut the crap, old man.” The words were disrespectful, but his tone remained level and calm. “We both know that there is an agent in this very school working for Voldemort, trying to get the Philosopher’s Stone. A stone that could possibly bring Voldemort back to full power. A stone that you could destroy but have not yet done so because you lack permission. And that person attacked me, Dumbledore. Did something to my mind.”

Dumbledore leaned back, expression grave. “Permission is not to be so carelessly disregarded, Mr. Malfoy. As it is, I am bound to protect the stone and will do so until I am able to convince Nicholas to change his mind. It was one of the costs of convincing my old friend to let me protect it. Had I not made that promise, Voldemort would already have the stone as you well know by the break-in that happened the very night I was able to transport it to safety.”
Draco considered that. The problem was that Dumbledore had too much ranking. None of Dumbledore’s people would go against his order and destroy it. Even though they probably understood that Dumbledore had been forced to make that promise and it wasn’t actually the best strategic choice. That meant Draco and the others would have to move forward as planned and Draco would have to do it himself. “And the attack on me? How is it that you were unaware of such a thing?” he asked lowly. He thought about Percy, about Lily Potter. “How many students have had their minds broken and you sat here with no clue?”

“Contrary to popular belief. I am not all powerful, my boy. No witch or wizard is,” Dumbledore said sadly. “As it stands, most of the Mind Arts are of surpassing difficulty and the punishment for committing such an act is quite severe. Attacks of that nature are exceedingly rare.”

Dumbledore sat there calmly, back straight, hands folded before him on the desk, lecturing as if they were talking about some classroom theory. Draco’s temper slowly grew. His hand tightened around Harry’s. Harry stood alert. Ready to jump in at any moment, his attention riveted to the blond at his side.

Dumbledore continued, oblivious. “This is a very good thing as wards, unfortunately, cannot detect Mind Magic as it is not inherently Dark. The Obliviate is the exception, of course, as it is a spell with the sole purpose of destroying or erasing memories, but Legilimacy attacks, as well as the Imperius Curse, their purpose is to change or alter not destroy.”

Draco stared unblinking at the supposedly powerful and wise wizard across from him. Voice as cold as the arctic, he said, “You’re wrong. They do destroy.”

Dumbledore’s eyes widened before they softened. A compassionate expression softened his features. “I’m sorry, my boy. That was callous of me. I do not mean to say it is not a horrific act to alter another person’s mind.” He stared kindly over his glasses. “It pains me more than you can know to learn that you have suffered so here at this school. I will do all in my power to discover who is behind this horrible attack.”

Why did that sound like an empty promise? Draco took a deep breath, trying to remain calm. After a moment, he was able to say, words clipped and sharp, “What about me?”

Dumbledore steepled his fingers. “I believe you are aware of Occlumency.”

Draco nodded his head once.

“That is the only way to heal and reorganize your mind, I’m afraid. Of course, there are potions that can help make you more receptive or induce a trance-like state to help, but that’s all anyone can really do to help you.” Blue eyes sparkled as Dumbledore gave Draco a confident smile. “I have faith in your ability to recover, my boy. You have a very unique mind, after all.”

Coldly, Draco growled. “Faith?” His eyes glittered with rage.

Dumbledore’s smile fell as he began to sense not all was well with the boy. He tried to reassure the child. “The fact that you are rejecting whatever alteration may have been made proves that your mind is not easily manipulated. Most people do not realize they have been altered unless someone else points it out to them. The trouble then becomes that that person is now who they are. To alter them in an attempt to return them to their former self is in essence committing the same crime, so not much progress or experimentation has been done in that area.”

“That’s a load of crap,” Draco declared, eyes narrowed on the older wizard.
“Is it?” Dumbledore looked at the boy curiously. “If Harry could be altered, say to be a regular child with no trauma, to be the boy he was meant to be before he was subjected to abuse, would you allow it even knowing it would change who he is at a fundamental level?”

Draco bared his teeth. “I’m not talking about rewriting a whole past. I’m taking about correcting the damage created by someone attacking another person’s mind!”

“So you are,” Dumbledore agreed calmly. “But you do understand my point as well?”

Draco understood in the sense that he could comprehend the words coming out of Dumbledore’s mouth, but it was still a load of bullshit. “In essence you are saying that the person after being mind raped is a new person and so can’t be mind raped a second time to fix the first mind rape.”

Dumbledore’s expression was completely shocked at the boy’s crude choice of words. “Mr. Malfoy…"

“Well, to hell with that thinking, sir,” Draco drawled the title with heavy sarcasm, grey eyes flashing silver. “I’m talking about healing something real. You’re talking about philosophical crap that doesn’t fucking matter! If you think for one moment someone doesn’t bare marks, damaging marks, after being mentally attacked, you are very much mistaken. And to leave a person in that state because of some theoretical shit about protecting their current personality is cruel.”

Fire burned through Draco’s veins. The potion the twins had given him was running out. Vicious anger and helplessness and fear were churning beneath the surface. Terrors held at bay by Occlumency flickered in the shadows of his mind, ready to pounce. It made Draco dangerous. It took him back to the time when he’d been savage and bloodthirsty. Dumbledore literally leaned back as the boy’s expression became feral and wild, his voice thick with threat.

“I say put your theory to the test,” Draco hissed, leaning forward. “Why don’t you hike those robes up and bend over this fucking desk. We could call up…” His mouth twisted into a cruel smile. “…Snape. Harry and I will watch as he knocks all your magic aside like it’s nothing and rapes your ass and mouth and degrades you in the most brutal way. He’ll hurt you, truly hurt you, and you won’t be able to stop it or talk your way out of it because you won’t fucking matter beyond the fact that you can give Snape pleasure. He’ll make you scream in agony and you’ll actually believe him when he calls you a slut and a filthy whore because he’ll make you cum. You’ll cum even as he’s making you bleed. Even that will be his. I dare you, Dumbledore. I dare you to know what it feels like to have your body stolen from you and made into a thing, just a fucking tool for another man’s pleasure.” Draco was panting now, eyes wild and dark and cruel. “I’d like to see you stop yourself from laughing in the asshole’s face who says that because what the fuck do they know about being destroyed?”

Draco came to his feet, leaning in closer to the older wizard. He thrilled in the horror in Dumbledore’s eyes, the tears streaking his face and wetting his beard. “Are you picturing it, Dumbledore? Well, let me tell you it’s a thousand times worse than what you can possibly imagine. Increase that thousand to a million times worse when it’s your fucking mind that’s invaded, the very core of who you are attacked!” Draco slammed his palms flat to the desk. The noise making Dumbledore flinch. “Now tell me that coming up with a cure is complicated and shouldn’t be done,” his fingers stabbed at the desk with every word. “I’d like to see you stop yourself from laughing in the asshole’s face who says that because what the fuck do they know about being destroyed?”

Draco gave a cold little smile and re-took his seat. Voice and face suddenly masked into something resembling calm, he continued, “I have to say, Dumbledore. I’m not really impressed. Harry and I
are fucking essential if you don’t want your pathetic little world to go up in flames and yet you’re doing a really piss poor job of protecting us. We need time, Dumbledore. Time to grow up. If you can’t get us that, then what fucking good are you?” He flicked a gyrating metal circular thing that sat on Dumbledore’s desk and it toppled to the floor with a clatter.

As Dumbledore’s continued to stare mutely, his attention shifted to Harry as the boy lifted his head for the first time and entered the decidedly disturbing conversation. His hair no longer shielding his face, Harry looked surprisingly fierce. His green eyes were hard with stone cold determination. He looked Dumbledore dead in the eye and said coldly, “You better be able to help Draco.” He didn’t bother with an ‘or else’, but it hung heavy in the air between them anyway.

“My boys… I never said I wouldn’t help you,” Dumbledore protested softly. He stood shakily, his red and white robes swishing softly as he moved. He leaned heavily on the desk, as if he would fall without that support, and sat in the chair next to the boys. “What happened to you both is beyond anything any human being should ever have to endure.”

Tearfully, he reached for them. Harry shifted his body between the old man and Draco so that Dumbledore grabbed his arm instead of Draco’s hand. The blond was tensed as a drawn bow. Harry knew the signs of an impending flashback and was in full-blown protector mode. Unaware of how on edge the children were, Dumbledore looked at the boys with soulful eyes filled with empathy and compassion. Lips trembled in his white beard, and when he spoke, his voice was thick with emotion.

“I am so proud of you both for coming and asking for help. I had no idea that you had been attacked, Draco. Of course I will help you.” Dumbledore released Harry’s arm and straightened in his chair. “I have books of incredible value that will guide you on how to strengthen your Occlumency. I will also contact a Mind Healer if you should think that would help, although I caution you that anyone, even an ally, entering your mind right now could further damage it.”

“If you summoned a healer, could you keep it from my parents?” Draco asked. He leaned back in the chair, his posture relaxing now that they were talking about concrete solutions.

Dumbledore lifted his eyebrows in surprise.

Draco sneered. “Don’t pretend you don’t understand. If Narcissa and Lucius find out my mind was attacked, they’ll take me out of Hogwarts. It won’t matter what I have to say about it. And I’m not leaving until I know the stone is out of Voldemort’s reach for good. It’s too important. Harry’s at stake.” Draco’s eyes hardened once more. “But don’t think that doesn’t mean I won’t walk right out of here with Harry if I think the danger has become too much. We’re awfully close to that point now, Dumbledore.”

Dumbledore smiled, the twinkle coming back into his eyes. It was faint as he was still reeling over Draco’s little speech, but it was there. “I understand, my boy. I will support any decision you make.” He stood, hands grasping his robes to free his feet to walk. He moved to the bookcase partially hidden by the stairs that lead up to the Headmaster’s apartment. “I would indeed have to inform your parents if I called a healer to the school, but I am certain the books will help you more than a healer could. In the meantime, I will work harder on Nicholas. He will be appalled that you have suffered such an attack and I’ll double my efforts to discover the Dark agent at the school.”

Dumbledore returned with three books. One was the size of a textbook, bound in battered and torn black leather. The other two were smaller and thinner, the size of journals. One looked almost new, the leather cover a deep blood red. The last was brown and as worn as the larger one. Harry released Draco’s hand to accept the books with a soft thank you. Draco stood and met Dumbledore’s eyes.

“I’ll let you know if they help.”
“Thank you, my boy. If you need me for anything at all, you are always welcome here,” Dumbledore said gently, staring sadly over the rims of his half-moon glasses.

Draco gave a final nod and led the way to the door, Harry trailing after him.

Back in the school, Draco wrapped his arms around his torso. They had been talking to Dumbledore long enough that dinner had started, so fortunately the halls were empty and so was the common room. He blinked as he realized he was already standing in the center of their dorm room. He was only vaguely aware of Harry shutting the door behind him and then he was somewhere else…

Draco glared resentfully at his Master’s back as he was made to crawl to the showroom with a fucking cinderblock balanced on his back. It was heavy as shit and seemed to get heavier with every passing second. Draco was cursing under his breath and sweating profusely by the time he made it to the showroom. Master walked beside him, crop in hand. He cracked Draco hard across his already welt-laden ass. The cinderblock trembled, almost falling off, as Draco tensed and hissed at the agonizing sting. There were three men there. They looked up from the kids they had chosen and hissed at the agonizing sting. There were three men there. They looked up from the kids they had chosen and laughed at Draco’s humiliation.

One of the men, fat and bald with brown eyes and greying beard, called out, “If looks could kill, Raymond, I think you’d be dead!” The girl he’d chosen was lying across his thighs on her back, her legs spread as he thrust thick fingers into her folds. A particularly harsh jab made her whimper and burst into helpless sobs. She was ignored.

“Don’t know if I’d appreciate my slave lookin’ at me like that,” the one in the middle said darkly. He was practically drooling over the boy shivering on his lap, barely sparing Draco or Raymond a glance.

The fucking block was really starting to hurt his back now, felt like it’d snap his spine in two. Draco glared murderously up at his Master. The fuck did he want from him?!

Master stared back, a sick smirk gracing his features. “Take it to the table.”

Draco crawled across the room, panting and sweating, until he reached the low, table-like stage that sat in the middle of the room. Raymond kicked the block off of Draco’s bare back. Draco hissed as it took a fair bit of skin with it.

“Bring yours here, Mr. Wilson,” Raymond told one of the clients.

The bald one got up. He sat her on the table. His right hand glistened from when he’d had it pressed inside her. She was still crying. Draco was trying to catch his breath, sitting on his butt, his knees bent beside him in a frog-like position. His back throbbed; his arms burned. Raymond grabbed him by his oily, blond hair and hefted him to his feet.

“Aim for the ankle and shin,” Raymond said softly, bending down to speak directly into Draco’s
In his mind’s eye, Draco saw that heavy block rushing at his face, could imagine the crunch of bone, the way his face would break, the horrific pain and death that would follow. Fuck! With that terrifying promise ringing in his ears, Draco bent and hefted the heavy weapon. He wished he could reach the Master. He’d gladly burst his head open! He’d beat him with it until his skull was pulp!

As if from a distance, Draco felt himself lift the cinderblock over his head. His legs and arms shook with effort. The girl was screaming in terror now. Mr. Wilson was watching with wide, excited eyes as he held her down. Draco focused on the thin limb held out for him and brought the cinderblock down with all his strength. He could feel the brutal crunch all the way up his arms. The girl flung her head back and shrieked in agony.

“Good. Now the other one!” Mr. Wilson ordered. He straightened her other leg. The girl was thrashing, hysterical, but he easily held her flat.

Draco could hardly breathe. Shit, he was tired and this was a lot of fucking work. He looked to Raymond, wiping sweat from his face.

“Do it,” his master ordered, eyes cold.

Draco grimaced and struggled to get the heavy cinderblock over his head again. He gave a little yell as he brought it down. It took him off his feet this time and he clung to the block to keep himself from falling. The girl made a sound like a wounded animal before passing out. Both ankles were twisted in unnatural positions, her shins looked slightly misshapen. Already some swelling began to appear. Draco knew he should be horrified, but he felt kind of floaty.

Raymond wrapped the girls feet, ankles, and shins in tight bandages. He gave a brief lecture on the best way to make them heal pretty but still hinder her mobility.

“Cuddle her a lot. Be sweet and she’ll love you for breaking her legs,” Raymond advised, laughing.

Draco shuddered, desperately glad he was never cuddled by his Master.

Finally the men left with their new property. Raymond stared down at him and Draco felt the numbness fade. Could feel his heart begin to beat harder. Terror brought tears to his eyes. He knew that look. Master was about to hurt him, hurt him bad.

“Put your arm on the table.”

Draco stared up at the bastard and set his jaw. He didn’t move. He wasn’t going to help Raymond hurt him. He wasn’t one of those fucking brainwashed kids.

Raymond bent down slowly, never breaking eye contact. He lifted Draco’s arm and placed it on the table. Draco was shaking at this point. “You’re nothing but my fucking toy, slut,” Master said with brutal honesty. “I can do whatever the fuck I want. Now if you move your fucking arm even an inch, I swear to god…” He bent close. Close enough that Draco could feel his hot breath against his face. “I’ll fucking rip it off completely.” He grabbed Draco’s wrist and pulled hard. Draco’s chest came up hard against the side of the table and his socket almost gave. He gave a choked cry of pain, free hand scrabbling helplessly at the table.

“I won’t! Fuck! I won’t fucking move!” Draco screamed, sobbing in both anger and fear.

Raymond laughed and let go of Draco’s wrist. Draco kept his arm still. Even as Raymond picked up the cinderblock. The echo of that girl’s legs breaking, the feel of it, the sound of her screams… Draco began to hyperventilate between his sobs. He was terrified, but if he moved he knew...
Raymond would do as he promised and cripple him. He had to stay strong. He had to stay strong so he could kill this fucker once and for all! His left hand came up to hold his right arm still at the bicep. He was shaking like a leaf.

Raymond didn’t slam the cinderblock down with all his strength like Draco had. Instead he brought it as high as he could and simply dropped it. It fell like a hammer. Draco’s vision went black; pain shot up his arm as the two bones in his forearm fractured. He went limp, wheezing and crying, pinned in place by the heavy concrete cinderblock. He hardly even felt it when the Master grabbed him by the hair with one hand to keep his head steady and began to jack off with the other, aiming his dick at his agony-contorted face. He felt the bastard cum, though. Felt it hit his tear-soaked face. Could taste it on his lips. Draco hated him so fucking much!

“I’ll kill you,” he promised hoarsely, tears and cum dripping down his flushed cheeks.

Raymond laughed and kicked the block off his arm. Draco screamed. He kept screaming as Raymond wrapped tight bandages around his arm to hold the bones mostly in place.

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Neville opened the door to their dorm and immediately froze. Draco stood close to the center of the room facing the center bed that wasn’t usually used. Harry was standing next to him, talking softly but not touching the other boy. Green eyes glanced Neville’s way but then went back to looking at Draco. Hesitantly, Neville shut the door and stepped over to his bed. It gave him a better view of Draco’s face. His heart sank into his stomach. Draco was staring blindly forward. He was crying and the expression on his face was a mask of pain and anger. Looking down, Neville noticed Draco was clutching his right forearm with his left hand. He wondered if Draco had hurt it.

Harry’s soft, gentle words could just barely be heard over the blond’s harsh breathing. “You’re safe, Draco. You’re at Hogwarts. I’m here. I’m not going to let anyone hurt you. It’s okay. Come back. You’re not there anymore. We’re safe now…”

Neville tore his eyes away from the two and stared helplessly down at his bed. He didn’t know what to do to help. This wasn’t anything like what had happened last night. Draco wasn’t scary or violent. He looked devastated, and the way Harry was speaking, so soft and full of love, brought tears to his eyes. Draco was hurting! He was hurting bad! Neville’s fists clenched in helplessness.

“Neville,” Harry called. His voice still soft, his tone soothing. “Can you get Draco and my pajamas and robe out for me. Lay them on the bed. Draco’s going to be really tired when he comes out of this.”

Neville nodded quickly, surprised he was being allowed to help. “Yes, of course,” he said softly, trying to match Harry’s tone.

He hurried to the armoire his friends shared. Harry talked him through where their night clothes were kept and Neville set them out on the bed. He drew the curtains closed on their bed except for on the right side where they could climb in and pulled down the sheets. He went around the room, turning off the lamps until only the one by his bed was lit. The whole time Harry kept talking to Draco softly, encouraging him, but he never once touched him.

Neville watched from the corner of his eyes as he changed and got ready for bed. He didn’t know what to do. This wasn’t anything like what had happened last night. Draco wasn’t scary or violent. He looked devastated, and the way Harry was speaking, so soft and full of love, brought tears to his eyes. Draco was hurting! He was hurting bad! Neville’s fists clenched in helplessness.

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Neville watched from the corner of his eyes as he changed and got ready for bed. He was just crawling under the covers when Draco seemed to shudder with a loud gasp and blink his eyes. Harry immediately enfolded him in a hug. At first Draco allowed it, a confused sound rising up his throat, but then he pushed Harry away, arms wrapped tightly around his torso.
“I’m fine,” he rasped, even as he shook violently.

Neville wisely lay still, pretending to be asleep as the blond glanced in his direction.

He peeked open his eyes to see Harry hovering by the blond’s side as they changed for bed. Neville thought he saw dark spots on Harry’s chest and stomach, but it must have been weird shadows. Then the boys were crawling into their curtained bed. Neville could hear them softly murmuring to each other for a few minutes and then there was silence.

Neville finally reached over to put out his light. He lay on his back and stared at the ceiling. He had no idea what his friends had been through, but he was beginning to understand that it was something truly horrible. He felt determination well up in his chest. He was going to help them. He didn’t care what he had to do; he was going to help them!

Chapter end.
Calm Before the Storm

A/N: Opening scene is M for Mature.

Calm Before the Storm

There was something warm and wet sucking gently at his neck. Harry groaned, his nipples hard and tingling with every soft suck. His eyes fluttered open. Soft golden lamplight spilled in between the crack in the bed curtains, softly illuminating the bed. Harry groaned again as Draco’s warm hands slid up the back of his arms, lifting them and pressing them up beside his head. His hands gently pinned his wrists. The soft open-mouthed kisses continued until Harry practically melted into a puddle, his member growing stiff and hot, the tip tingling.

“Draco…” he moaned, eyes fluttering. The blond hummed against his throat, making Harry squirm. Pulling away, Draco looked deep into Harry’s eyes. With a soft voice, he whispered, “I’m sorry.”

Harry didn’t need to know what for. He already knew. Harry lifted his head enough to kiss Draco’s sweet lips. “It’s okay, Draco. You didn’t hurt me bad.”

Draco’s lips quirked, his eyebrow cocked. “Because you fought me off, didn’t you? You made sure I didn’t hurt you.”

Harry blushed red at the pride shining in Draco’s eyes. “I knew you wouldn’t like it if you’d hurt me.”

Draco’s eyes went molten. He leaned down so that his mouth was just above Harry’s. “You’re such a good boy,” he practically purred and kissed him hard, his tongue diving in deep before backing off to lap at the inside of Harry’s mouth.

Joy caught in Harry’s chest, bringing tears to his eyes. His whole body burned with embarrassment at the praise even as he thrilled in it. He’d been good! Harry moaned into Draco’s dominating kiss, sucking hungrily on the blond’s tongue. A deep ache settled between his legs and Harry squirmed, rubbing his thighs together. Draco kissed him until his head spun and his lungs burned. When Draco finally pulled away, Harry was panting for air, helplessly pinned by the hands holding his wrists firmly above his head.

“Draco…” he begged softly, tears catching on his long, dark lashes.

Draco grinned, all teeth and pleasure. His cheeks were flushed with desire. “I think you deserve a reward, Harry. For being such a good boy.”

Harry panted, his hips jerking slightly, his cock throbbing. “Please…”

“Keep your hands up there. No touching,” Draco purred.

“Yes, Draco…” Harry groaned obediently even though all he wanted was to touch Draco’s skin, to taste him and bring him pleasure.

Draco released the slender wrists and sat up. He drew back the covers, flinging them off the boy. His silky, blond hair, mussed from sleep, fell around his flushed face adorably, but his eyes were hungry and predatory. Harry was breathing hard, his little dick flushed a deep pink and standing up cutely against his lower stomach.
Draco took the palm of his hand and pressed down on the stiff member. Harry sucked in a breath, his hips pushing up for more. Licking his lips, Draco slowly slid his hand up the small rod until it glided over the weeping tip and landed on Harry’s soft, twitching stomach. Draco thrilled in the soft whimpers Harry made as he slid his palm upward along that soft skin, catching Harry’s shirt on his wrist and drawing it up.

Bruise-spotted skin was slowly revealed. All the bites Draco had made only a few nights prior still marking the boy’s torso. Deep-seated satisfaction made him warm to the tips of his ears down to his toes. Draco pulled the shirt off completely, letting it fall beside them on the bed. Harry was completely naked now. The blush on his cheeks had traveled down his neck and flared out along the top of his chest, turning it a gorgeous deep pink to match his cock.

“Pull your legs up,” Draco whispered softly.

Harry stared into Draco’s eyes as he dropped his hands and gripped the back of his thighs, drawing his knees up toward his chest and down until they almost touched the bed underneath each armpit. Draco could just see the little hole twitching and he grinned again before kissing Harry’s lips once. Then he leaned over and licked a warm path up Harry’s thin, hard shaft.

Harry’s whole body twitched, a soft cry falling from his swollen lips. For long minutes of torturous pleasure, Draco lapped and sucked messily until Harry was dripping wet between his legs with Draco’s spit. Tears streaked Harry’s face as he hovered at the edge, almost falling over into that place of pure pleasure.

After nearly fifteen minutes, Draco pulled away. Harry cried out a soft denial, but Draco ignored him. Shifting closer so that he was pressed up against Harry’s side, he rubbed his dick helplessly against the outside of Harry’s hip, painfully hot and near his own climax. Sweating, heart thundering, Draco put his face close to his boy’s and shushed Harry gently as he pressed two fingers into Harry’s open, panting mouth. Harry gasped softly, tears glittering on his lashes. Was Draco going to…?

Draco’s fingers pulled free of Harry’s sucking mouth with a wet pop and Draco groaned at the sensation. Harry’s thighs quivered in anticipation. His heart thundered in his aching chest, every bruise throbbing, on the edge of bursting. Draco drank in Harry’s gorgeous expression as he firmly pressed his first two fingers inside the boy’s body.

Gasping, Harry tossed his head back, exposing his throat. The pressure sent pleasure shooting up his spine in a way that was nearly incomprehensible. His whole existence was wrapped up in the sensation of Draco’s fingers inside him. Back arching, mouth gaping wide, he shuddered as Draco pressed in as deep as he could before sliding his fingers back out and pressing in again. Harry moaned from deep in his chest, his swollen cock glistening with clear fluid at the tip.

Draco wiggled his fingers in that tight, gripping heat, searching for that place he knew was in there. He was entranced at the heat of Harry’s insides and wished he could see where he touched. It felt soft, silken, but tight. Harry’s body gripped and sucked at him. The feeling was indescribable! Draco shivered, the wet sounds Harry made down there combined with the way Harry’s hips were undulating made Draco thrust harder and faster against the firm, warm skin of Harry’s hip.

Draco couldn’t take it, the look of Harry’s tear and sweat-damped face almost tipped him over the edge… He tucked his face against Harry’s neck with a deep groan, so fucking close to losing his mind, and this was supposed to have been for Harry… He bit and sucked at the leather collar, pulling it tight against Harry’s throat. He pulled his fingers mostly out and added his ring finger to the first two. Pressing forward, it was tighter. He had to push a little harder to get the all the way in. Harry gave a long, low cry that went straight to Draco’s cock.
“Shit, Harry, god…” he gasped and spurt against Harry’s hip, biting down hard on the collar around Harry’s throat.

Trembling, throbbing in euphoric contentment, Draco sat up. He lazily watched as Harry cried and rocked on the three fingers still lazily thrusting inside his body. Harry’s face was flushed red, his eyes blown wide. He whined and begged softly, nearly breathless. Even so, Draco shushed him, eyes heavy-lidded. Lazy and content, he bent forward to gently kiss the dark bite-mark on Harry’s inner thigh and rested his sweat-damp forehead there, his hair tickling the boy’s thigh. Draco opened his mouth and let spit dribble down on his fingers and hand. He used it to help him press more easily into Harry’s tight heat. He began to thrust his hand in earnest, rocking the Harry’s body back and forth. Harry gave a breathy moan, whole body trembling.

“I know it’s in there,” Draco murmured, spit still drizzling from his mouth. He shivered in pleasure, thrilling in the way Harry’s hole began to glisten and squelch softly, darkening as it turned red. Fuck, he loved it when Harry was wet and messy.

He watched, entranced, as the boy’s hole slowly grew less tight, gripped him more softly. Draco pulled his fingers out until just the tips of his longest were inside his boy. Harry begged incoherently, calling his name. Draco pushed in, bringing his pinky in toward the others. Harry was spread wider than before, the hole blanching white. Harry went limp, whimpering, but Draco’s hand slipped in until his thumb caught the rim… and Draco found it. Harry’s back arched off the bed as he gave a shocked cry, taking Draco’s fingers halfway out of his body. He lost his grip on his legs and they fell limply to the bed, his right leg propped up as it rested over Draco’s shoulders.

Panting, eyes wide, Draco pressed his hand back in, easily finding that place now that he knew where it was. Harry’s torso twisted, he was sobbing now, but his little cock spurt clear fluid and he was pressing his hips down on Draco’s fingers even harder. “Fuck,” Draco breathed in awe. He leaned up and over his boy, pressing Harry’s leg up by his chest again. Grinning, Draco put his mouth just over Harry’s and stared into the boy’s wild eyes. He forced his fingers against the little gland again and again until Harry’s was gasping and crying, left leg splayed wide, his whole body shuddering in blissed out overload.

Draco slowed his hand and spread his fingers just to feel the tight stretch inside. Harry was barely conscious, eyes half-lidded, glassy, and dazed. His thighs and chest muscles spasmed as he breathed heavily, drool dripping down his chin from his half-opened mouth. Draco pulled him close, his wet fingers sliding against Harry’s bare back. He kissed Harry’s face again and again, whispering how much he loved him, how good he was.

After a few minutes, Harry was able to clumsily move his arms around Draco, returning the embrace. He was shaking now, little bursts of pleasure still erupting under his skin. He tucked his face against Draco’s throat and whimpered softly. Draco stroked his hair and rubbed his back, kissing his ear and cheek and the corner of his damp lips.

Harry slowly stilled in his arms. He pulled his head back to look up at the blond. Voice thick and raspy, he breathed his name in awe, “Draco…” He didn’t know how to tell him how good it felt, how good it still felt. He was flying, floating, his body throbbing hotly between his legs and behind.

“Draco…”

Draco laughed softly at the wide-eyed wonder that filled Harry’s face. “Shhh, Harry. I know.” He grinned and kissed him again and again, little butterfly kisses. Soon Harry was giggling as Draco tickled under his arms.

“Draco? Harry?” Neville’s sleepy voice called out of the dim darkness beyond their curtains. “What time’s it?”
The sound canceling charms must have fallen. The kid didn’t sound shocked or anything, so he must have been woken by their giggling. Draco laughed, imagining Neville’s face if he’d woken up to hear the other, more interesting sounds Harry had been making.

“Sorry we woke you,” Harry called, his eyes soft with - love adoration - as he watched Draco laugh.

“It’s time to get up anyway,” Draco called once his laughter was under control. It didn’t feel too early, though. They probably would have needed to get up for practice by now if Quidditch hadn’t been canceled for the break. He slipped out of bed and went to the armoire, hissing as his feet touched the cold stone floor. “We’ve been slacking on our coursework and I have something I need to look up.”

Harry climbed out of bed, his legs feeling a little like jelly, and accepted the warm dressing robe Draco handed him. Once it was on, he went to fetch his school books. Neville rolled over with a sigh. The sky outside the window only held a hint of brightness, still mostly black. He grabbed his watch off the nightstand and saw that it was only just after six. It wasn’t that early really and Draco was right about his homework. With a sleepy, regretful yawn, he pushed his covers back just as Harry plopped down next to him. The wild-haired brunet gave Neville a grin. Neville, surprised, couldn’t help but smile back. Harry looked so happy. It made the worry sitting heavy in his chest loosen a bit.

xXx

The next few days were spent in intense study and focus. They had to get caught up on the classwork they had gotten behind on and they also had to prepare for the mock exams that were going to be given on the last day of term. Draco wasn’t too worried about it. Their professors had informed them that the exams would be scored as if they were real tests so they could see how the final exams at the end of the year would work, but they would actually only be worth the same points as an essay assignment. Practice or not, Harry, Neville, and, of course, Hermione still wanted to do well on them. Additionally, Harry continued to work on warding Draco’s school robe before bed. He didn’t seem to be getting any better at it, taking a few days to ward a single robe.

While Harry worked on that, Neville returned to mastering Potions. He was still determined to get an O and earn Draco’s forgiveness for hurting him so horribly. However, his pursuit of the grade was now a little different since he’d gotten to know Draco better. For the first time in his life, Neville actually believed he could get an O. He’d realized that Draco wouldn’t have set him that task if he hadn’t already been certain Neville could accomplish it. It gave Neville a strange confidence. A confidence that Harry and Hermione bolstered at every opportunity.

Like the boys, Hermione and Draco spent the week getting caught up on their schoolwork, but their true focus was on their main projects. Hermione was working on a way to know instantly if anyone ever entered the room with Fluffy. She had a very short deadline and she was determined to meet it. Lady Longbottom had denied their request to stay over the holiday, so Hermione wanted the alarm set before she left. She knew Draco would do something crazy, like trying twenty-four hour stakeouts or something, if she didn’t.

Draco was also caught up in a project. Only Harry and Neville knew what it was, although both the twins and Percy could guess. Draco was on a mission to fix his mind. He poured obsessively over the books Dumbledore had given him on Occlumency, his attention completely focused on mastering the techniques found there. His notebook became a mess of notes as he studied.

Draco was having a lot of trouble actually. It was weird because he had a feeling that this would have been easy for him before the attack. He could remember being able to enter a trance while with Raymond. It was a skill honed under torture out of fear and defiance, but it was still a skill he
possessed.

The books told him there were levels:

*Hypnodial Trance (levels 1 through 10)*

*Light Trance (levels 11 through 20)*

*Medium Trance (levels 21 through 30)*

*Deep Trance (levels 31 through 40)*

From their description, Draco could have been able to go into a Light Trance on his own before, and in Faerie he had managed a Deep Trance, so he didn’t know why it wasn’t working. He just couldn’t shut all of his consciousness down, couldn’t sink deep inside himself. The books reassured him that this was normal, that it took fucking years to master this shit, but knowing that didn’t help him in the slightest.

Trouble entering trance = learning opportunity for improving ability to go under. The unconscious is an aspect of awareness that records every experience, even those you’re not consciously aware of. Unconscious has an intelligence of its own; one of its major functions is to keep ‘self’ safe.

Safe!? How the hell was his unconscious keeping him safe by locking him out? Draco was trying to fucking fix whatever had been done to him, goddamn it! But he tried not to let it get to him. He knew it wouldn’t help to get upset; in fact, it would only make it even more difficult, so he held onto his patience as best as he could and worked tirelessly on breaking through whatever block had been set in place. He tried exercise after exercise, often forgoing sleep to practice all night.

1. Start by rubbing your hands together to develop heat.
2. After you feel the heat, pull your hands apart until they’re about 4 inches from one another.
3. Now move the hands very slightly in and out, so you can feel the natural magnetic pull. It will feel like a magnet. Focus on those sensations until they get stronger and stronger.
4. Play around with the energy until you feel that your hands want to come together. At this point, just close your eyes, and deepen the trance from there.
5. It doesn’t matter if your hands touch or if they’re 10 inches apart, what you’re looking for here is a strong magnetic pull. If your hands aren’t touching, focus on the space between them to intensify the experience.

Another method of entering the subconscious and manipulating his mindscape, he learned, was through a Transformative Technique. For example, visualizing becoming an animal.

Imagine how it feels and what its thoughts are. Allow yourself to merge with the animal. After experiencing yourself as the animal, return to yourself and then visualize a different image, and then repeat this exercise. Allow yourself to go from image to image as you merge with each one. At some
Time passed quickly. Soon enough the First-years were sitting down to their mock exams. Fortunately they would only be taking an exam for the four main courses: Potions, Transfiguration, Herbology, and Charms. Harry had thought he was reasonably prepared, but his eyes widened when he saw the questions. He had to read them several times before he really understood what they were asking. Sweat dripped down the back of his neck and he chewed his lip nervously. Several times his anxiety reached a dangerous peak and Draco had to mentally order him to take a deep breath.

They were given a break after two exams for a quick lunch. The First-years from all the Houses were sat together so they couldn’t cheat by talking to the upper-Years. They ate slowly, subdued and silent with gloom on their faces. Neville looked pale as death and even Hermione looked frazzled. Ron simply looked defeated. Draco tried to calm them as much as he could, but with two more tests looming ahead of them, it was a lost cause.

After their final test, they trudged their way to the Great Hall for dinner. Fred and George teased and poked at their younger brother, trying to cheer everyone up, but the First-years remained quiet throughout the night, their brains fried, and they all went to bed early. The next morning Harry and Draco spent time with Hermione and Neville as their friends packed for their return trip to London. Straight after breakfast, most of the school made the walk down to Hogsmeade to catch the train.

Hermione gave both Draco and Harry a tearful hug, ordering them to write her every day and to be careful. The last was said with a pointed pat against the metal coin Draco wore around his neck. She had conned Flitwick into making it for her and then secretly attuned it to Fluffy’s door. It would heat up and alert Draco every time someone entered the room.

Neville and Harry hugged each other with happy smiles, but the chubby boy blushed brightly when Draco pulled him into a hug, gently running his hand over his hair in the process. Ron and his brothers stood beside them, waving at their own friends, but Draco only had eyes for the two Longbottoms as they opened their compartment window to wave goodbye. An arm suddenly draped itself over his shoulders and pulled him against a hard chest. Draco looked up with an annoyed glare, but it only made Fred laugh.

“It’s Yule break! Let’s have some fun!” he declared.

George had an arm around Harry, grinning merrily. “Snowball fight!” he cried in agreement and pulled Harry along with him back up to the school. “The east courtyard has the perfect terrain!”

Draco allowed it. Harry’s bruises were faint shadows now, smears of pale green and blue. A snowball wasn’t likely to hurt if it struck Harry on the chest this time. Maybe playing for a couple hours would even help. He’d made no progress in Occlumency and was beginning to get frustrated. A fight may just be what he needed. “You ready to show these two who they’re messing with?” Draco asked with a taunting grin as he pulled Harry away from George.

“Yes!” Harry agreed readily, green eyes sparkling behind his glasses.

“Then let’s do it!”

Surprising everyone, Harry and Draco cut into two different directions, trying to pin the twins between them. Fred and George put their backs together. They alternated between casting the spell that made perfect snowballs and the one that shot the snowy missile with perfect accuracy, so that snowballs were both always being made and thrown.
Draco dove for cover, taking a snowball to the shoulder. Harry fell flat on his belly and wormed his way under a courtyard bench when a ball suddenly flew with great force and knocked George clean off his feet. Percy gave a smug smirk as the twins gaped at him in surprise. Fred turned to shield, freeing Harry to quickly make a small pile of snowballs that he mercilessly aimed at the back of George’s head. George turned to shield and Draco was up and gone in a flash only to come face to face with a grinning Ron…

The courtyard was filled with the sound of challenges, the whump of snow making contact with bodies, and childish laughter for two solid hours. They were all soaked, snow in their hair, but Percy cast drying and warming charms on all of them as they headed back inside the castle for a well-deserved lunch. Draco took Harry by the hand, feeling lighter than he had in weeks. The Weasley twins walked with Ron and Percy ahead of them, still laughing and carrying on. Draco cast the brunet beside him a warm smile, Harry practically purring with happiness. His green eyes sparkled behind his glasses and his cheeks had a beautiful rosy glow. Draco was about to suggest hot chocolate when a crack sounded beneath his sneaker.

Draco stopped and lifted his foot. There was a dried branch, snapped from Draco stepping on it. It was small, hardly bigger than his wand, and it looked as if other feet had stepped on it before him. Unconsciously Draco’s hand tightened around Harry’s. There was something ominous about the dark of the wood against the white snow… the way the branch seemed shattered and broken beyond repair…

“I’m going to meditate.” Draco’s voice was flat and distant. “Go to lunch with the others. Stay with one of them at all times.”

“Yes, Draco,” Harry answered softly as Draco released his hand.

The blond’s face was remote and cold once again, his attention caught up in the battle inside his mind. It drove Harry crazy that he couldn’t help him. All he could do was obey and let Draco focus on his task without distraction. Still, he couldn’t help looking over his shoulder as he jogged to catch up with the Weasleys. Draco remained standing on the path alone, staring down at the ground.

Harry was subdued and quiet throughout lunch. The twins rolled their eyes and disappeared to work on some mischief of their own. Percy and Ron shared a look and sighed. “Why don’t we go find him?” Ron suggested. “I’ll bring my board and we can play chess while he’s zoning out.”

“I have some personal reading I’d like to get caught up on,” Percy agreed easily.

Harry smiled, deeply touched. “Thank you.”

They found Draco back in the courtyard. He was sitting on a cold stone bench with his legs crossed, his back straight, and his hands resting palm up on his knees. His eyes were closed and his breathing was slow and even as if he were sleeping. He had on his hat, scarf, and gloves, as well as his fur-lined winter cloak, but Percy cast a warming charm on him just to be sure. In fact, he cast Warming Charms on all of them. He took a seat against the castle wall, taking shelter against the wind. Ron and Harry straddled the bench opposite Draco’s, a chess board between them.

They stayed there for nearly three hours, Draco slowly beginning to show signs of strain. His face paled and refused to flush pink no matter how many Warming Charms Percy cast. His hands began to tremble, his back began to bow out of the rigidly straight posture. Worse yet, bright red blood slowly spilled from his nose. At the first sight of red, Harry crossed the distance and knelt on the ground in front of the bench. He rested his forehead against Draco’s knee and let his magic well up into the blond. It was draining and still the blood dripped down Draco’s face, but Harry had to try.
Draco came out of his meditation just before dinner. He gave a soft gasp and sort of went limp, falling sideways. Percy was there to catch him, eyes dark with worry. Draco looked exhausted, completely defeated as he yet again failed to break through the mental block. Harry only looked slightly better. He was stiff and clumsy as Ron helped him to his feet. Gasping, wiping sweat from his eyes, Draco leaned against Percy’s side as he stiffly uncrossed his legs and slid heavy feet to the ground. The image of the broken twig resurfaced in his mind and he bit back tears.

They didn’t speak as they made their way inside. Percy and Harry, of course, knew what was at stake. Ron didn’t know what Draco was trying to do exactly, but he could see that Draco was struggling with whatever it was and he respected that. However, it was hard to remain stoic in the face of the Great Hall’s glory. Without hundreds of rowdy, loud kids, the beauty of it all was nearly overwhelming and broke through even Draco’s dark thoughts.

The ceiling had darkened to night, the tall, frost-covered windows equally dark. Ever since the first snowfall, there was a constant illusion of soft, beautiful snowflakes slowly falling regardless of the weather outside. Hundreds of floating candles filled the large space with warm, soft light. Huge wreathes with dark green pine needles and fat pinecones hung every few feet along the boarder of the ceiling. Red and white flowers were woven among the branches of each with soft bells jingling and tinkling, hanging from ribbons that were tied in big bows at their bottoms or tops.

Earlier that week, Hagrid had dragged in enormous sixteen foot trees that he’d set in the four corners of the Great Hall. Each House had taken one as their own and the students had added fairy lights and decorations a little everyday until each one sparkled and shone. The trees seemed much bigger and more glorious in the quiet of the room.

The Hufflepuff tree had ornaments on nearly every branch: snowmen, animals of every kind, figures holding hands, bells, tiny wrapped gifts, and other things. The fairy lights had been charmed every shade of yellow from citrine to the palest ivory. A bright star sat on top and it literally made the air around it glitter. Overall, the tree was warm and colorful and playful.

Gryffindor’s tree was nearly as bright. The red, orange, and yellow fairy lights were charmed to flicker while in the branches small golden lions and cats prowled. A few other figures and animals decorated the tips here and there, but they were painted exclusively red to offset all the golden felines. At the very top, a shining golden head of a lion had been placed and occasionally it would let out a roar.

Ravenclaw’s tree was simple and tasteful with an even spread of lights and decorations. Unlike the Gryffindor tree, it had no movement or flickering lights. Done in rich blues and pure whites, the tree had an elegant yet cold feel to it. Regardless, it was beautiful. A white star sat on top shining steadily and scattered throughout the dark green branches, icicles and snowflakes reflected crystal light into the air.

Slytherin’s tree was much more rustic. Candles sat amid the branches, charmed to ever-burn while the tree itself had been made flame-repellant. Soft, green fairy lights nestled in the branches here and there. A few ornaments done in silver were placed on a few branch tips. At the top, a glowing orb that shifted through the phases of the moon in the night sky cast soft moonlight down around it. Draco’s eyes lingered there and he knew Harry’s had as well. The tree reminded them both strongly of their home with the Malfoys and of the two Yules they had spent together there.

In fact, this was only their third Yule celebration in their lives. Draco silently ran his hand through the smaller boy’s messy hair and gently nudged Harry with his hip to keep him moving. He wished it could be different for them, that they could have gone home. The coin around his neck hung heavy, but staying at Hogwarts wasn’t bad. It was only the four Weasley brothers, Harry, and Draco left at
the Gryffindor table and they had chosen to sit at the end of the table near the tree. Warm, delicious food appeared on the serving plates in front of them and Draco gave Harry a reassuring smile to get the smaller boy to eat.

“You okay, mate?” Ron asked carefully. Draco had dark circles under his eyes and he looked worn thin and still too pale.

Draco gave a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. “Yeah. Just tired. Been studying a lot.”

Ron snorted as he scooped a large helping of mashed potatoes onto his plate. “I didn’t see you study at all. It’ll be a miracle if you pass the mock exams. You’ve been too busy with whatever it is you’re trying to do.”

Draco ignored him and conversation moved away from the blond and his obvious poor health. It wasn’t until they were all getting up to leave that Draco spoke again. He reached out and caught Fred’s wrist. “Can I borrow some spare bit of parchment later?” he asked, looking up into the redhead’s eyes.

Fred tapped his lip in thought. He glanced at George who shrugged. Fred turned back with a grin. “Sure but same rules as last time.”

That meant Draco wasn’t allowed to take it out of the dorm or tell anyone about it. He nodded and let Fred’s wrist go.

“I was thinking I’d bunk with you guys,” Ron said as they stepped past the portrait of the Fat Lady.

Draco gave a shrug. “I don’t mind as long as it doesn’t bother you if we go to bed early.”

Ron looked a little disappointed, but he was determined to have his way. He had a blast rooming with Dean and Seamus, but he was still a little disappointed he hadn’t been chosen to stay with Draco and Harry. He was excited to finally get to share a dorm with them.

Seeing this hope in Ron’s expression, Draco sighed. “You can take the middle bed. It’s hardly been used since Harry sleeps with me most nights anyway.”

“Brilliant.” Ron gave a happy grin and ran up the stairs to gather the things he’d need.

Draco went up with the twins to grab the map. He was interested in knowing exactly who had stayed over the break and he opened it as soon as George handed it to him. His eyes immediately caught on Severus Snape standing in a lab in the dungeons. Damn! Draco’s expression went cold. He had no doubt at all that Snape was the agent working for the Dark Lord within the school. He didn’t know what had driven the man to side with the Dark, but like hell was he going to let that greasy bastard win! Draco’s fingers wrapped tightly around the golden coin hanging from his neck, determination sitting heavy in his stomach.

“I’m going to beat this,” he promised in a whisper, eyes glued to that hated name. “I’m gonna beat this and destroy you.”

xXx

It was early afternoon and Lucius was deep in his study on Horcruxes when movement caught his eye. “Narcissa?” Lucius stepped out of his office curiously. He’d seen Narcissa walk past, dressed in a semi-formal gown and midnight blue cloak. He held a book in his hand and impatiently pushed back his long hair over his shoulder. Narcissa had turned to face him. Her eyes remote, distant, making Lucius frown.
“I’m going to Hogwarts,” she informed him.

Draco and Harry should have returned the night before on the Hogwarts Express. He still remembered the letter they had received two weeks prior announcing their intention to remain at the school. It had been short on details, but the overall message had been clear.

“The boys said they needed to work on a project,” he reminded, cocking an eyebrow. “It is clear Draco wants no interference.”

Narcissa seemed unmoved. “I am going to Hogwarts and spending the Solstice with my sons.”

Lucius sighed. The book in his hand shut with a snap. “You mean to make it public, then? That we practice the Old Ways? That we and the boys are Pagan?”

Her hands clenched. She knew it was unwise; there was still a strong prejudice against Paganism. However, four months of not seeing the boys weighed heavily on her heart. So much time lost because Draco had been stolen from her, she couldn’t bear to let time she could spend with her child slip away. The truth was she was Pagan, and she couldn’t celebrate without her children. Was she being irrational? Weak?

Lucius took her silence as determination to go, not the uncertainty that it was. He gave a small nod. “Very well. Let me change. I will accompany you.”

Narcissa felt herself relax. If Lucius was willing to go, then he must not think it too damaging. Excitement curled in her core. She would see her boys soon!

They flooed into the Headmaster’s office with the pass Lucius had due to being a Member of the Board. It only took a few minutes before Headmaster Dumbledore arrived, no doubt alerted by a ward to their arrival. Lucius had braced himself to push past any argument or refusal from the old wizard, but Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled brightly at seeing them.

“Lucius, Narcissa,” he said with jovial cheer and offered his aged hands to Narcissa. Narcissa took them and allowed Dumbledore to place a kiss on her knuckles. “Welcome to Hogwarts. I take it you would like to spend some time with the boys?”

Lucius was deeply suspicious, but he chose not to ask questions. At least not until after they got what they wanted and saw the children. “We would.”

Dumbledore nodded. He folded Narcissa’s hand into the crook of his elbow to give her escort. “Very well,” he said with a smile. “They have just sat down to supper. Would you like to join them? Have you eaten?”

Narcissa gave a cool smile. “That would be lovely. Thank you.”

Lucius trailed slightly behind Narcissa on her other side. The castle was just as he remembered it at this time of year. Cool and quiet with a the feeling of magic thick in the air. It always seemed like the castle resonated more deeply on Holy Days. The hallways were quiet, most of the children having gone home. The Great Hall doors were already opened, warm light spilling through and into the foyer. The huge House trees stood in the four corners. A handful of children sat in front of each. The staff table was missing half it’s number as well, although he saw that all four Heads of House were in attendance.

They were guided toward the end of the Gryffindor table. Harry spotted them first, his face lighting up with a delighted smile that set Lucius’s heart at ease. The child stood, accepting Narcissa’s hands. Narcissa bent to kiss his cheeks and accept his kiss in return. Draco stood more slowly. Lucius was
hyper-aware of Dumbledore’s presence and that of the four Weasley children. The sight made his lip curl. He’d thought he’d resigned himself to his son occupying Gryffindor, but seeing the company he kept made him feel disgusted. His son could do so much better. In fact, he was so displeased that he didn’t even care that Draco was shooting him a very dark look.

“I hope we aren’t intruding,” Narcissa was saying to both boys, although she only held Harry’s attention at the moment. “Since you’ve decided to stay over the break, we thought one visit wouldn’t be amiss.”

“Please, sit and enjoy yourselves. It is the season to spend with family,” Dumbledore encouraged.

Lucius and Draco shot him identical looks of suspicion, which made the old wizard’s smile widen.

Lucius sat carefully. The detested Weasley children gave him cold looks and glares. Lucius returned their glares for a brief moment before he decided to ignore their existence completely, instead shifting his attention back to the only children who mattered. His own. Harry was telling Narcissa about their experiences at the school. Most of it they knew from the fairly frequent letters, but it was nice to hear the recounting from the child’s own lips. Draco remained mostly silent. Lucius studied him carefully.

His son looked paler than he should. Dark circles sat under his eyes. He also picked at his food, not really eating as he normally would. Lucius began to worry. Draco was his Heir. The curse placed on their family made it crucial that Draco do well and thrive. Lucius was not impressed with his condition and was determined to get to the bottom of it before they departed.

“What would you like to see the common room?” Harry asked politely, smiling up at Narcissa.

Narcissa returned his warm smile. “I’d love to.”

Draco and Lucius walked side-by-side, tension between them. The Weasleys trailed after sporting mutinous looks, except for the one in glasses. Lucius noted that his face was carefully blank. Fortunately, the hoard of redheads disappeared up the stairs to the dorms, leaving the common room to them. Lucius stared around at the garish and worn common room. The fat, plush red couches, the awkward placement of tables scattered around the edges, the single book case, the busy tapestries all sporting knights or warriors, the enormous lion portrait above the fireplace… Lucius could even hear the cold wind howl outside the tower windows… and was the room swaying slightly? It was loud and overwhelming, but the boys seemed quite used to it.

Harry led Narcissa over to the fireplace. It was large enough that Lucius could easily walk inside it should he wish, which made him think it could be a flooing fireplace. He stored that information away for later. “Happy Solstice,” Harry said and looked concerned. “We don’t have a log.”

Narcissa knelt gracefully on the worn, red rug in front of the fire, her midnight blue skirt pooling around her. She opened the pouch at her side and removed a wooden box about five inches long and three inches tall and much too big and heavy to have fit in the pouch. Lucius waved his wand, dousing the fire and banishing the firewood burning there. A cleaning charm removed all the ashes and embers. Narcissa opened the wooden box. Draco and Harry leaned closer to look inside and saw the charred remains of last year’s Yule log were inside.

“A year has come and gone. We have overcome challenges and received blessings in equal measure. As we stand watch on this Longest Night, we remember the past and give it its due.”

Narcissa’s voice, soft and resonant, was filled with sincerity and faith as she tossed the ashes and embers inside the fireplace. Then she reached again into her pouch. A shrunken log from this year’s
ever-green tree sat on her palm. Lucius used his wand, casting a simple spell that returned it to its true size and then another that gently levitated it into place on the hearth.

“We take with us into this Night the knowledge of how to overcome hardship and the strength we have discovered inside ourselves,” Narcissa finished. She met her son’s eyes. “I believe by this point in your education you should be able to produce a fire spell.”

Draco met her stare evenly and took his wand from the holster on his right forearm into his left hand. “Incendio,” he cast, flicking the wand forward, the tip moving in a curved triangle shape, almost like that of a flame. A jet of warm, yellow-orange flame shot from the wand and ignited the log. Narcissa graced Draco with a proud smile. Lucius stepped closer to the boys, placing a sturdy hand on each of their shoulders. Harry looked up, expression relaxed and easy, but Draco remained stiff and unmoved.

“Tell us what has you staying in the castle,” Lucius coaxed, voice low and quiet. A voice made for secrets.

Harry looked to Draco, waiting for his decision.

“We have all night,” Narcissa pointed out. Pagans celebrated the Winter Solstice in many ways, but the one thing they all had in common was that they sat watch until the sun rose. It was considered bad luck to sleep during the longest night.

Draco stared into the fire. The firelight softening his face and making his eyes glisten. His hair took on a soft yellow quality instead of pure white and fell around his face, down past his angular chin. He looked so young, the dark circles and tension erased in the forgiving light. Harry stood just slightly shorter than Draco. His hair thick and messy, jet black even in the firelight. It was hard to make out his eyes behind his glasses, but his full lips were naturally a dark pink and his cheeks were slightly round with a soft blush from the heat.

They were beautiful children. It made Lucius simultaneously proud and protective. From the powerful love shining on Narcissa’s face, she felt the same. Lucius’s hands tightened on the boys’ shoulders and he once again made a silent vow that he would do whatever was necessary to ensure that these boys would survive… Whatever was necessary.

“I’m studying Occlumency under Dumbledore,” Draco finally voiced, eyes still staring into the flames. “I can’t leave until I make more progress.” Suddenly he looked up, piercing Lucius with his gaze. “I think I’m about to make a breakthrough, though.”

Lucius felt a chill of worry, but he knew it would only push Draco away if he were to voice it. Fortunately Narcissa wasn’t as hindered.

“Occlumency…” Narcissa spoke softly, capturing the boys’ attention. “That is a very ambitious goal. It is a Dark and complex art, taking years if not decades to master.” She reached forward to gently trace a fingertip over the curve of Harry’s cheek. “I know you will not do anything too risky and lose yourself. You have something very important to do.”

Draco’s eyes narrowed into a glare and he slapped Narcissa’s hand away from Harry's face. “I know what’s at stake.”

Harry leaned into Draco’s side, shifting Lucius’s hand off of Draco’s shoulder. “I’ll help Draco,” he offered. “But Draco can do this. He’s strong.”

Narcissa nodded, showing no reaction to Draco’s strike on her hand. “Then I will not worry.” She
offered a small smile to their defiant son. “However, should you need assistance, your father and I
know something of this art. I trust you will not let your pride stop you from being successful when
you have Harry to think of.”

“Pride?” Draco’s voice dropped, became dangerous and hissing. “You think I’m in danger of letting
pride be my downfall? I think I’ve proven pride will never be my problem.” He lowered his chin, his
bangs falling in front of his face, eyes glittering dangerously as he stared his mother down. “Do you
see me lashing out when stupid kids are calling me maggot and Death Eater in the halls? Or tripping
me until my knees and palms bleed. Or ruining my supplies. Or sabotaging my work. Or making my
legs dance under me until I collapse as dozens of kids laugh in my face. No… I walk away, take
secret paths, let Harry work on warding me from their petty pranks. Because I know that’s what they
are. Petty.”

Harry ducked his head as the list was told. Failure burned in his throat. It was his job to protect and
help Draco, and it had taken him way too long to stop what was happening. Draco pushed on,
ignoring Harry’s - guilt. He’d deal with it later.

“They’re just sadistic assholes following a racist leader and I know that if I lash out, I’ll actually
make them believe what they’re saying. That I’m evil filth. And in a few years when I need wands to
protect us, maybe even die for us, there will be no one there. So I walk away and do nothing because
pride would only get in my way.” He reached forward and drew a line down Narcissa’s cheek with
his finger, the same way she had touched Harry, but instead of the pad of his fingertip, he used his
nail to gently caress her skin, the threat subtle. “You still don’t truly trust in my decisions. You still
think you know better. And because of my age, you have the power to make me do things against
my will. Like leaving the school because it’s dangerous. So until you really decide to respect me and
accept that I will make the final decisions, you are just another thing that’s in my way. Because I will
do whatever it takes to win. Sacrificing my pride is the least of it.” Draco’s hand dropped and he
turned away from her shocked expression.

Narcissa’s blue eyes had gone wide, her pale lips slightly parted. Lucius moved to her side. He
reached down and grabbed her arm, pulling her up to her feet. She leaned heavily against his chest
and suddenly Lucius was reminded of all the years she had spent draining herself dry, dropping to
under a hundred pounds, in her determined pursuit of their son.

“You have continuously pushed at us as if we were the enemy when we are your greatest allies,” he
said coldly, eyes gone silver as he stared down at his son. “We can do no more than we’ve done to
prove ourselves and yet you insist we are some threat. It is the height of stupidity to not make use of
our knowledge and power. You speak of needing wands in the future and yet you disdain the two
strongest at your disposal. Why? Because you don’t like us? Because you can’t trust us? You sound
like a spoiled child! If you continue to behave as such, you will make your childish fear of authority
a reality and we will come to doubt that you can make good decisions!”

“Lucius…” Narcissa breathed, horrified.

“I don’t fear authority, Lucius,” Draco hissed. His expression was etched with rage, hands clenched
at his sides. Harry had taken a step back to give him room. He refused to look at Narcissa or Lucius,
eyes instead loyally pinned to the blond. “I refuse it! I will answer to no one!”

As they watched Draco storm from the common room, Narcissa gave Lucius a disdainful glare.
“What was the point of that?”

“It had to be said,” Lucius defended, angry. “He’s acting irrational.”

“It could have been said a different way,” she countered, arms crossing over her chest. “We are
standing in the Gryffindor common room, but you do not have to act like one. Tact and subtlety was in order. Our son is delving into the Dark Arts. There is no telling how it has effected him. It has likely made him paranoid and irrational as you so bluntly pointed out.”

“Where are you going?” he demanded as she moved toward the common room door.

She stopped and looked over her shoulder, expression cold. “I’m going to speak to Dumbledore and see what he knows about our son’s studies and his condition. Why don’t you speak to Snape. I find it interesting that Draco said he was studying under Dumbledore when Snape is the Master Occlumens.”

Lucius waited for her to leave before making his own way back into the castle. Did she not see that sometimes the direct approach was the only one worth taking with Draco? The boy was determined and clever and strong, but he could be so damn blind and stubborn. Perhaps Gryffindor was the correct House for his son after all. Scowling at that despicable thought, Lucius made his way deeper into the dungeons. And as they separated, pursuing different goals, the Longest Night had only just begun and their strength had been reduced by half.

Chapter end.

A/N: Sorry for the updating delay. A lot is going on right now. As for the story, things are going to happen at a pretty fast pace in the next few chapters.
The Longest Night

A/N: Sorry this is so late. Partly it’s because the chapter grew so long. I hope you guys like it. Can’t wait to hear what you think!

The Longest Night

Bellatrix stepped out of her warded apartment and made her way toward Lucius’s office. A sweet giggle escaped her, her bare feet creating a soft pattering sound as she danced her way through the silent house. Her beloved sister had still not figured out that Bellatrix could move about the manor as she pleased. She had a talent for wards. She could talk to them in a way others were unable to. It was a simple matter to convince them that she was an ally and not an enemy. The wards only activated if she had the intention of escaping anyway and she wouldn’t leave the manor for the world.

It took but a whisper to spell the elves to sleep and once more she owned the halls of Malfoy Manor just as she had that night ten years ago. At last she arrived at her destination, her eyes sparkling with soul deep joy. She slid graceful, slender fingers along the grain of Lord Malfoy’s office door. Pressing her cheek to the wood, she crooned, whispering to the wards.

It wasn’t every night that she was able to enter here. Lucius haunted the office more often than not, but she had known that tonight the way would be clear. Her Lord was favored by Fate, and Bellatrix had known the universe would create opportunities for His glorious return. Slowly, the door swung open with a soft creak just as the last colors of sunset bled from the sky. A deep grey twilight settled over the manor, fading to night as she stepped across the plush rugs toward Lucius’s desk. It took the work of only a few minutes to open the side drawer and retrieve her Beloved’s diary.

Her lips and hands trembled with excitement as she opened the book to the middle. Pressing a quill tip to the page, she sensually wrote out the message: I am yours, my Lord.

The pages pulsed with power and words written in an elegant script answered her with: Come to me.

Blinding light engulfed her and she fell willingly into the book’s depths…

Draco ran as fast as he could through the hallways. He ducked into secret passages and sprinted past portraits, taking the shortest route. He ran until his legs and lungs burned, until he was panting so hard he could hardly breathe. He burst outside into an overgrown courtyard, rage and frustration pounding like a second heart in his chest. His feet crunched and slid on the snow as he spun around wildly. Harry skidded through the open door, panting, eyes wide. Draco practically leapt forward and grabbed the smaller boy by the collar of his robe. Harry stumbled, but he didn’t resist as Draco shoved him roughly against the castle wall.

“What… do you… think?” he demanded, gasping from his sprint. “Am I … being childish?”

Harry met Draco’s eyes, - trust worry - a subtle hum between them. “They might help… if you told them everything… but they might also… get in the way,” he answered softly, panting from the run. “You understand… the situation best.”

Draco gave a scream of rage and lifted a balled up fist. Harry didn’t even flinch as Draco swung with all his might. A meaty thud sounded as the blond’s knuckles brutally impacted against the stone wall
inches from Harry’s head. Draco swung again and again, screaming with each desperate blow until warm blood splattered Harry’s cheek.

Heart pounding, Harry sank to his knees, slipping from Draco’s loosened grasp. He lifted his hands, tears glittering in his eyes. “Please…” he begged, pain in his voice. “Please, Draco… Don’t… Let me help you… Please…”

Draco stood there, staring blindly down at the boy who practically sung with - love - for him. Blood dripped from his split knuckles, staining the snow red in small, delicate drops. Pain, hot and sharp, spiked up his arm. He’d broken bones.

“Sheesh… I am not going to let you help me…” Draco growled, purposefully clenched his broken hand. A gasp escaped his lips at the intense pain, tears filling his eyes. He stared up at the dark sky, the stars cold and remote above him.

Behind him, Harry pulled his beseeching hands back and wrapped his arms loosely around his chest. His butt rested on his heels as his head lowered slightly in submission. “Yes, Draco.”

At the sound of Harry’s calm acceptance, Draco turned back around to face him. It had been exactly what he’d needed to finally quench the last of his anger. Harry didn’t push what he wanted. He didn’t demand or argue or judge. He accepted Draco, trusted him wholeheartedly. Draco’s expression softened and his lips parted to speak when magic, Dark and deep, spiraled up around him.

What neither of them realized was that Draco’s blood had made a circle around him. Blood spilt on a Solstice night was extremely powerful, especially the blood of a Hemopath like Draco. It created a temporary gateway where things could cross over. The celtic knot appeared on the hollow of Draco’s throat, the mark acting as a key to other realms. It began to glow with the cold, blue-white of moonlight and Hogwarts disappeared…

Draco stood in a forest with wide, black-barked trees. The stars between the tangled branches were fat, the size of a baby’s fist. The moon was a silver scythe hanging above his head. Deep snow sat heavy on the ground. Before Draco could really understand what had happened, arms - thin and unnaturally cold - wrapped around him. Sharp talons pierced through the skin on his back, drawing more hot liquid to the surface. Snarling, Draco tried to break free, but he was held fast.

“Greetings, Little Hunter,” a voice said, deep and vast and all around him. “Looks like you’ve become prey.”

The last word was spoken with a bottomless hunger that could be felt deep inside Draco’s bones, triggering instincts primal and powerful. Teeth bared in defiance, he swung his head back as hard as he could…

Harry stared up at the Creature before him. It was human-shaped but wasn’t male or female. Long white hair, a vast expanse of stars in Its black eyes, pale white skin, and naked, It gracefully crouched before the kneeling Harry. Advanced age had touched Its features, but yet the Being didn’t seem weak in the slightest. A slow grin revealed pointed, blood-stained teeth.

“The Cold Dark has come,” It said, a whisper as loud as a scream. “Do you still Dance?”
Harry was caught in the Being’s eternal eyes. He didn’t understand, but deep down he knew the answer and spoke true. “For Draco.”

“Then Dance for him.”

Harry’s hands were clasped with surprising gentleness and he was lifted to his feet. The God’s nails were long and sharp even as Its hands were gnarled with age.

“Know that should you fall, so to he shall fall. For he walks the Dark and will need a path Home. Winter has come. Endure… or die…”

It wasn’t a threat. It was simple Truth. Winter was ruthless and brutal, but if you had the strength to endure, It could also be beautiful. Harry’s hands were released. The Being stepped back. It was there but not there. It couldn’t be seen, but It could be felt in everything… In the cold and quiet of the snow, the distant glitter of the stars, the deep darkness between them…

Endure or die…

There was another option beyond endurance or death. Tilting his head back, Harry slowly lifted his hands to the infinite night-sky. A deep breath in and he opened himself to all that he was, all that was Draco, and all that they were together. He could feel it, the deep three-fold bond between them. It was magic in the purest sense, humming and powerful and alive. And it was Draco’s way home; he was Draco’s way home. Harry closed his eyes, hardly able to contain the feeling of love and wonder and magic that existed even in the Dark of Winter, and began to dance a dance of worship. He was Pagan and he felt honored to be able to dance both for Draco and for an Old God…

...Narcissa stepped into the Headmaster’s office, expression cold and remote. Her hands were folded in front of her demurely. Her dress with midnight blue skirt and long-sleeved bodice with a wide, black velvet band tight around her waist was half covered by the black cloak she still wore. The hood was down, revealing the single braid that wrapped around the top of her head, leaving her long neck bare and exposed. Her eyes were a blue only a few shades lighter than her dress.

She wore no make-up. Her lips were as pale as her cheeks. Her eyelashes and thin, sharp eyebrows only a little darker than her golden-blonde hair. She stood with regal bearing, shoulders back and pointed chin slightly tilted up. She was a medium-tall woman, eight inches taller than five feet, and very thin. The years of working powerful rituals to search for her son had taken a toll, giving her face and expression a harder edge than most. She was beautiful, but more than that she was a force to be reckoned with.

Dumbledore stood from behind his desk and bowed his head in acknowledgment of her strength and power. He had consciously donned a white robe with purple and silver highlights. Pale blue eyes twinkling with happiness, beard as white as snow, they seemed complete opposites and yet there was a strong similarity between them, as if they were two sides to the same coin.

Narcissa stepped gracefully forward until she stood in the center of the room facing the ancient wizard. She did not continue on to the desk or the seats sitting across from it. She was not a supplicant in search of his counsel. “You know why I am here, Albus,” she said softly and waited.

Dumbledore smiled and stepped around his desk to face her on even ground. “You have concerns regarding your son.”

“Sons,” she corrected. She felt her magic deepen and wrap around her. It was the Solstice. The
calendar had entered the darker half on Mabon, but it was Yule when those who resonated to the Dark were at their peak. Her magic felt that change and stretched. “Why have you chosen to keep my sons in a hostile environment when they are here simply for an education?”

Dumbledore tilted his head before he answered. “It is for the purpose of education that I have chosen to allow the children to solve their own problems. They have not sought my aid or the aid of any teacher in this matter.”

Narcissa let a long second pass to think about his answer. “The Art of Occlumency… It is classified as a Dark Art. I admit my surprise upon hearing you are my son’s tutor, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot.”

“It is considered so but not illegal,” Dumbledore answered easily. “I have mastered many Arts in my time as a wizard.”

Narcissa held his gaze, her tone growing sharp. “Draco shows signs of strain and ill health. I would not say he has been well cared for. Would you?”

Dumbledore sighed softly, his hand lifting to stroke his beard. “I speak the truth, Narcissa Malfoy nee Black. My sole wish is for young Draco and young Harry to grow strong and capable. I would not endanger their lives for anything in this world.” His eyes grew solemn as he tilted his chin down to look over his glasses at the angry mother. “However, I believe you know your two boys are destined for great things. There is only so much I can do to buffer the weight of that destiny. Fate has set about to prepare them for their future.”

“Let me make something clear.” Narcissa lifted a single finger and pointed it upward. “You are incapable of truly understanding my sons. Any manipulation on your part is destined to go very wrong. My advice to you, Albus, is that you forget this notion that you understand their destiny. The best thing you can do is let things play out as they will without your interference.” Her finger slashed down to point directly at his heart. “That means treating them as you would any other student under your supervision. For you are simply a player with a part to play and not one of the Weavers of Fate.”

Dumbledore felt her words deeply. A blush stained his cheeks, denials built up on his tongue, but she slashed her hand downward and out, stalling his words.

“You have been trying to manipulate things, Albus. I see the signs of it and my sons suffer.” Narcissa’s eyes glittered. The room seemed to darken and grow colder. “This is the last warning I will bestow upon you. Your place is to act as Headmaster to my boys. Nothing more and definitely nothing less. Fulfill your duty, sir, or my sons will be removed from this school.”

Dumbledore stood silent as she stared him down. He felt the chill in the air as she turned, her skirt swirling about her feet as she strode gracefully from his office. As soon as she was gone, Dumbledore let his expression fall into something more grave and serious. Fawkes gave a quiet yet beautiful trill and he stepped closer to his familiar, stroking the warm, soft feathers.

“All is well, Fawkes,” he murmured. “She is just a mother trying to protect her children.” He sighed sadly and looked into the dark, liquid eyes of the phoenix. “Unfortunately, they are not simply her children but belong to the World.”

Dumbledore had experienced wars and losses that Narcissa, young as she was, could not begin to comprehend. There may be some truth in her words, but she was wrong on one thing. He was not a simple Player. His role was greater than that, especially for those boys. Fate had placed him in position to guide and prepare them. That was his destiny, and he would see to it that they had the
skills and tools they needed to successfully carry out theirs.

Frowning, Dumbledore was pulled from his musings as something stirred at the edge of his senses. Curious, he crossed the room to the tower window. The glass slowly began to frost right before his eyes and the gentle snow began to fall harder. He turned and strode quickly toward his door.

Narcissa frowned. She lifted her bare hands up to her face. They trembled slightly, the tips almost numb with cold. Narcissa took a deep breath and blew out. Her breath fogged in front of her face for a brief moment before disappearing. Listening, she felt something resonate deep inside her core. “Draco, Harry,” she whispered, eyes wide. She took a step forward, but stopped when she heard the stairs begin to move behind her. She chose to wait for the Headmaster to join her.

Dumbledore stepped off the stairs, his expression grim. “A storm has come upon us, Lady Malfoy. Soon it will be a blizzard.”

“My sons?” she demanded.

Dumbledore shook his head. “I will summon the staff. We will search for them.”

Narcissa’s hands clenched, her eyes promising terrible things should they not be found…

There was no answer when Lucius knocked upon Severus’s door. Frustrated, Lucius summoned a House Elf and demanded the Potions Master’s location. The elf squeaked out an answer before popping away. Lucius turned, sharply rapping his cane on the stone floor. It didn’t take him long, up a staircase and down a corridor, before he stepped out into a small courtyard.

Severus stood in the center at a small table manipulating ingredients next to a cauldron hanging from a wooden beam set over a rough fire. He wore a black winter cloak and robes, his hands protected in thin leather gloves from both the cold and his ingredients. His hood was pulled up, leaving only his chin, lips, and a part of his nose revealed. He moved with practiced grace, a true artist at his craft.

“What is it you want, Lucius?” Severus spoke, low and calm, never once pausing in his work.

Lucius hesitated, his temper gone in the face of this mystery. He had known, of course, that Severus was a Master, but he’d never seen him in action. It changed his perception of the wizard, made him realize there were hidden depths to his personality. “You know why I’ve come,” he answered finally, his tone a reflection of the other man’s: serene.

“You son has fallen into deep waters,” Severus replied. He turned and scattered something with a precise flick of his wrist into the cauldron that sizzled, creating a violet glow that illuminated the surface for a brief moment. “I do not know if he will sink or swim.”

Lucius attention snapped away from the potion. His glove creaked softly as it tightened around his cane, his eyes flashed and his tone sharpened. “Are you a mere observer? Do you deny your responsibility to assist your student?”

Severus stirred the potion in perfect circles with one hand, his other folded and refolded a substance like dough except it was grey and streaked with black. “I do what I can, Lucius. I will always do what I can. At this moment, I am unable to directly assist the boys. Draco will not let me close.”

The temperature took a sudden drop. Lucius frowned, looking upward. The soft snow that had been falling, collecting on his hair and shoulders, grew thicker. Goosebumps lifted along his arms and the back of the neck, an almost electric hum resonating through his core. Lucius’s eyes dropped back to
Severus as the wind picked up. Already the snow was falling hard enough that it was harder to see.

Severus’s hood was blown off, his straight black hair whipping around his face. “I cannot stop once begun,” he called, dark eyes locking on Lucius. “Cast a ward against the wind. Draco will need this potion.”

Lucius stepped forward, crossing the distance between the Potions Master and himself. He took up position on the other side of the small worktable, his wand sliding from the cane with a fluid movement. The tip of the pure black wand dipped and swayed, making sharp points and precise turns. Slowly, a pale glow appeared in the snow around them. The shape of runes and magic symbols could just be seen through the glow. The wind was reduced to a soft breeze, the snow falling slowly, while outside the circle the wind and snow continued to increase until it began to howl and gust, a blizzard born.

“This storm has been Called,” Severus murmured, still working over the potion.

“The boys are likely involved,” Lucius agreed, voice grim. A quirk of an eyebrow only partially seen through a concealing curtain of Severus’s lanky hair. Lucius gave a sharp smile. “My wife will attend to them.” Grey eyes taking on a silver glitter, he inclined his head to the bubbling cauldron. “Do not fear, Severus. I will guard the circle. As long as you understand that half of this potion will be mine.”

Severus’s expression gave way to a frown, but he wasn’t in any position to argue…

Bellatrix found herself in a massive chamber made with dark quartz and deep green stone that was lit with high, white-burning torches. Huge columns carved with snakes and sinuous figures supported an arched ceiling high above her head. On either side were canals filled with a dark, mysterious water that whispered and burbled as it flowed past, echoing softly in the massive space. Before her was a thirty-foot statue of one of the world’s most powerful wizards in history. Between the feet of the magnificent robed figure, a teenager sat in a golden throne with a deep green cushion. The back of the throne rose high above the teen’s head, a sculpted disc of dozens of snakes.

Dressed in the school robes of Hogwarts, the Slytherin crest on his breast, the teenager nonetheless possessed an aura that spoke of power far surpassing his age. His dark gaze was piercing and mysterious, the curl of his full lips amused as she slowly sank to her knees in wonder. Thick dark brown hair, smooth with a soft wave, fell elegantly over his forehead. His cheekbones and chin were sharp and angular, his completion smooth perfection. He was extremely handsome. The teen stood gracefully, his eyes never once leaving her kneeling form. As he approached, each step seemed to ring throughout the chamber. Bellatrix held her breath, staring up into his beautiful face from where she knelt.

“Hello, Bellatrix.” The teen’s voice caressed her name, making her gasp softly. A strong hand lifted her chin as he crouched. “We meet at last.”

“My Lord,” she breathed, deeply humbled. Her whole body trembled at his touch.

“Are you mine, Miss Bellatrix Black?” he asked gently, staring into her eyes.

“Yes, my Lord!” she cried eagerly. She offered her arm, the Dark Mark tattooed onto her skin jet black and pulsing.

Tom Riddle stroked the short, dark curls that adorned her head, his expression sweet and concerned.
“I will ask you to give me your life and magic,” he told her. “Are you still mine?”

“Oh, yes, my Lord!” she answered again, devotion shining from her eyes even as she panted with excitement.

Tom kissed her softly on the lips, a promise of what was to come. “Then I intend to grant you the honor of being my vessel, sweet Bella.”

He reached forward and brushed his hands along her shoulders. Under his touch, her robe and dress disintegrated, leaving her naked to his eyes. Her breasts were small and yet perfectly shaped and full, her small nipples pink and already pebbled. She shivered as he trailed his fingertips down the center of her chest and over her thin stomach. His hand stopped directly between her hips underneath her bellybutton. She gasped helplessly, soft whimpers escaping her.

Tom’s eyes traveled to her sex. She was hairless as were her legs and arms. Tom knew that the procedure had been painful and carried out before she reached puberty by her Pureblooded mother. Bella had been shaped to be the perfect wife, her sole purpose to please her husband and tend to the children while they were young. Better yet, just above the lips of her sex was a single rune, the color of a birthmark. His pupils dilated as he saw it. It named her a virgin, a Pureblood virgin from a Sacred Line. It would fade once she was penetrated.

“Do I please you, my Lord?” Bella asked, voice trembling with nerves. Tears graced her cheeks, afraid he would reject her and yet she never once looked away from his face.

“You are a perfect vessel,” Tom praised her in a soft whisper. He stood, offering his hand.

She took it with a cry of relief and came to her feet, joy radiating from her soul. Tom graced her with another smile as he led her forward. Bella followed him, feeling light as a feather. Obediently she sat on the throne when he pressed her forward and down. Tom’s strong hands skimmed her thighs before hooking under her knees. Looking into her eyes, he lifted her slender legs and pulled them open, draping them over the throne’s arms. It opened her to his sight, her folds delicate and pink and beginning to glisten. He reached down to spread her vaginal lips that still bore the mark of the virgin. Tom felt his heart beat increase, heat rising from his body. She was his to despoil.

Silent and intent, dark hair falling across his forehead, he caressed her breasts and stroked her thighs. He spoke to her, slow and sensual of his pleasure in her offering, of his plans to rule the Wizarding world, to restore the Old Ways. Bella stared enraptured, caught up in his voice and promises. She was dripping by this point, slick and hot, her skin flushed with desire. Tom stood before her, powerful, calm. He cut into his thumb and whispered a spell to ensure it did not clot. Then he leaned over her, his mouth taking in her needy gasps as he drew pattens onto her lower stomach in his blood.

“My Lord!” Bella arched with a cry, overcome with idea that her Lord’s blood was coating her skin.

Tom moved easily with her body. A controlled burst of wandless magic and the throne’s arms lifted and curled over the woman’s legs right above the knee, holding them still. “Arms up, sweet Bella.”

Bella obeyed immediately with no hesitation. Two snakes from the headpiece of the throne came to liquid life and captured her wrists, securing them above her. Tom straightened. He stared down at her body, marked with blood, held open and captive, a willing sacrifice. He was panting now, too, and slowly he undid his robe. Bella whimpered, her dark lashes settling on her cheeks as if she couldn’t stand the glorious sight of him. Tom unbuttoned his shirt and unclasped his pants, where his thickening member lifted and became hard against his lower stomach. Fluttering her lashes as she cracked her eyes open, she could see the finely etched muscles of his chest and abs. It was clear he
had not ignored his body as he pursued magic. He was strong.

“I was once born on this day, the Solstice of Winter,” he intoned, voice deep and resonate as he took in the woman’s shuddering body underneath him. Her dark blue eyes were open again. Her mouth parted in awe as she gazed up at him. “This was the day of my birth and it will be the start of my rebirth. I call the Destroyer to be present in this ritual of Death and Rebirth. Winter, I call upon you to empower this circle. The Ruler of Death, Cold, and Darkness, I call upon you.”

Tom’s magic curled about him. Bella hissed as stinging pleasure washed over her in waves. Her breasts rose and fell with every gasping breath she took. Her hips unconsciously angled upward, offering herself to his shockingly large and thick cock. Tom’s dark eyes were like daggers, piercing her straight through.

“Witness Bellatrix Solana Black offer her life! She will be unmade so that I, Tom Marvolo Riddle, may be remade. Just as Winter gives way to Spring, from Death comes Life. I call upon the Destroyer, Ruler of Death, Cold, and Darkness! Bear witness to this act! I call upon Winter to Bless and Accept her sacrifice!”

Cold, burning cold, filled the chamber. Frost coated the pillars and the smooth quartz floor at Tom’s feet. The blood runes painted on Bella’s skin turned to ice. She shivered and shook, her skin taking on a grayish quality, but instead of crying out in fear she laughed.

“My Lord, Winter has come!”

Untouched by the cold, Tom gripped the base of his cock and stepped closer so that his spongy head caressed her soft, bare folds. The power in the room resonated like the unending ring of a bell. Tom braced himself with a hand flat next to her head. She stared up at him, eyes bright with need and fear.

“This will hurt,” he told her, a gentle promise.

Bella swallowed. “Yes, my Lord.”

He kissed her lips, soft and chaste, then slammed forward with a single violent thrust that held the power of his entire body. She screamed as she was slammed backward and up, the hold on her legs and wrists was painful, but she hardly noticed, her whole body feeling torn in two.

Tom gave a low groan. She was tight, very tight, and her expression as it twisted in pain was exquisite. It made his cock throb and thicken even more. He tore free from the hot grip of her body and slammed inside again just to see tears gather in her eyes and spill down her pale cheeks. Again and again, he slammed into her. The more he thrust, the wetter she became as blood slicked her passage.

Bella sobbed as searing hot pain stabbed deep inside her body. Her wrists and thighs were already deeply bruised, but even as her Lord tore and thrust, tearing her apart from the inside out, she moaned, the sound deep and primal. She canted her hips, welcoming the pain and the sensation of something massive moving inside of her. Through her tears, she saw his expression, open-mouthed with pleasure, eyes burning with lust, and she was happy.

Tom began to thrust faster, shallower, punching deep again and again. He was sweating now, panting as he practically beat his hips against hers. This life was his, given to him freely, and he would take it. He gripped her short curls in one hand and crushed his mouth to hers. Thrusting his tongue inside, he drank in her sobs and cries for long minutes before biting down on her lips. The cold became brutal, the touch of Winter pervading the chamber. Bella’s lips were lined in blue, her
eyelashes crystallizing with ice. Her breasts bounced as he thrust harder. She moaned and dripped blood, staring with perfect love and devotion up at his face, even as she cried from the agony of being taken so violently.

Tom was close, close to something he had never felt before. His blood pounded in his veins, a burning hot river racing with the force of a typhoon. It filled his head with a curtain of red lust. *Fuck* was it amazing. He wanted to crawl inside her body and bathe in her boiling hot blood. She gripped him so fucking tight; it was so bloody hot and slick. He dove again and again into that place of toe-curling pleasure. He’d never felt so good! Pleasure drowned out thought, frying his brain, and Tom wrapped his hands around her throat and squeezed until Bella could make no sound whatsoever. Her expression looked tortured, her eyes big, mouth gaping helplessly as she was strangled.

They came together, Tom releasing a cry of triumph, Bella going rigid. Magic speared through them both, an ice javelin the size of a fist impaling them straight through their core. The agony was nearly unbearable. Everything erupted into a scrambled mess of searing electricity, black and red and white...

Draco lay panting in the snow. His sides and back were bleeding where the creature’s talons had cut into him; his arms were still pinned to his sides. Whatever, *whoever*, had him, Draco could feel their cold breath, slow and even.

He’d struggled madly, fury blinding him, but as the minutes passed without the creature holding him budging an inch. He would have fought forever if he hadn’t heard the faint beat of a drum and the chime of bells. It distracted him. Panting, nearing exhaustion, Draco had collapsed to his knees and fell onto his side before going still. The music seemed to cut through the blind panic and rage, calmed his racing heart until its beat matched that of the drum. The cold patience of the Hold fell over him; he’d wait and watch for the moment something changed.

At first, nothing was in front of him except the silence of a dark forest and then a naked Being was crouched there, head tilted as it stared down at Draco. White hair tangled, face cragged with age, It was nonetheless inhuman with black pools for eyes and sharp piranha teeth. Draco met the Creature’s dark, endless eyes fearlessly. He tested the hold on his arms and realized it was different. Draco pushed as hard as he could and the rough skin of tree bark bit into his arms. With a grunt, Draco used as much force as he could and the branches holding him cracked. He was free.

Draco sat up, scraped and bleeding from the shallow punctures on his sides and back and from breaking free of the wooden branches holding him. He didn’t turn to check his wounds, however. Instead, he kept his eyes pinned to the Being who still crouched in front of him with a wicked smile. “Ah, little Hunter,” It said, voice somehow filling every available space without shouting. “There you are.”

Draco tilted his own head. He was thinking again. Clarity descended on his mind for the first time in what felt like ages. There was no panic, no emotional havoc, no obsession. He took a deep breath, pulling in the frigid air. The snow was cold and wet under him, the forest empty and still. From a far distance, he could still hear the steadily beating drum and the jingle of bells.


Draco slowly pushed up and got to his feet. He was so much smaller than the God, but that didn’t
bother him. “What test?”

The Being grinned and this time blood stained Its sharp teeth. “A Test of Self. Are you truly a Hunter or are you Prey? Are you worthy of the Dancer or are you destined to die so that others can live?”

Blond hair falling around his face, Draco’s eyes glinted silver. “The Dancer is mine,” he answered, voice hard and unyielding, a predator’s warning growl.

The Being made no response. It turned and began to walk away. Its steps were as graceful and soft as falling snowflakes as It glided into the forest, disappearing between the darkness of two trees.

Draco took another deep breath and listened to the faint drums and bells for a moment longer. He couldn't feel Harry at all, the bond likely silenced by the God, but the music reassured him that Harry was close and well. Stealing himself, he stepped forward to face his challenge...

... Professor Sprout had discovered the disturbance in the courtyard and sent a Patronus messenger to inform them. Now, Dumbledore and Narcissa stood in the open doorway, and even with Dumbledore’s magical shield, they had to hold tight to the doorway or risk being thrown back into the castle.

The wind was a howling, vicious thing, a stationary tornado of snow and ice. Dumbledore’s beard and long hair were flung this way and that while the skin of their hands and faces went numb. Dumbledore’s robes also whipped around his legs while Narcissa’s skirt did the same. They hardly noticed, their attention riveted on the center of the tornado. Illuminated by what looked like moonlight only every ten seconds or so was a small figure. Bending, turning, leg lifting up and out, hands weaving a graceful pattern, the figure danced to some music that could not be heard over the scream of the wind.

“That’s Harry!” Narcissa yelled, one hand holding tight to the doorway, the other keeping her hair in place.

Dumbledore barely heard her voice even though she stood directly next to him. He gave her his full attention and yelled back, “What?”

Narcissa yelled again, “Harry! That’s Harry!”

Dumbledore frowned and looked into the blizzard. He cast some diagnostic magic, but his spells were rebuffed no matter how delicate or powerful. He took Narcissa by the arm and stepped back inside. The door was left open, so the wind was still incredible, but the walls buffered it just enough they could understand each other at a shout.

“This is powerful magic at work,” Dumbledore told her loudly.

Narcissa closed her eyes. She could sense the cold, the Dark, but there was something else there. Something that wasn’t quite human. “It’s the fae! They still have a connection to the boys.”

“I fear interfering will do more harm than good at this point,” Dumbledore concluded, holding tight to his hair and beard so it didn’t lash Narcissa in the face.

“I will stand watch,” Narcissa answered, agreeing.

Dumbledore nodded. “I will join you.”
He conjured armchairs for them to sit in and put up a strong barrier that softened the scream and fury of the wind just enough that it wasn’t torturous to sit just inside the doorway. He also ordered lap throws to help keep them warm from the cold. The freezing bite of winter would not be denied no matter what spell or ward Dumbledore applied.

“Minerva,” Dumbledore called cheerfully, eyes sparkling once more. His deputy had been hanging back to keep out of the worst of the wind. “Will you return to the tower and inform their friends that the boys have been found and the adults will handle things from here?”

Minerva gave Narcissa a hard look, but she nodded. “Let me know the minute anything changes.”

“Of course, of course,” Dumbledore agreed. He gave Narcissa a warm smile. “Cocoa, my dear?”

Narcissa ignored him, her eyes pinned to the doorway and the blizzard beyond it that was holding her children hostage. She had to trust they would come out of whatever trial they faced. All she could do was pray to the Old Ones that her faith would not be in vain…

The forest gave way to a jungle. As soon as the humidity pressed against Draco’s skin, he felt himself relax only for a frown to crease his expression a moment later. It was quiet and still. As if some great predator had passed by, silencing the jungle around it. A sense of violation swept through Draco’s core and he wrapped his arms around his chest protectively.

He could see it now. There were cuts scored into the trees and snapped branches. The brush had been trampled. Vines and the elephant ears had been severed completely in places, leaving them hanging limp and withered. The plants and leaves seemed battered as if by a great storm. A now familiar sense of paranoia washed over Draco, his blood pressure increased and his thoughts began to cloud as anger and agitation began to take hold. Now that he’d felt the difference between this and the cool logic he usually thought with, he realized just how deeply affected he’d become by the Dark Lord’s attack.

The cold breath of winter shivered down his back. It gave him a split second to think clearly again. Draco reached for the cold, determined to keep his thoughts clear. In a way, it was as familiar and comforting as the warm humidity found in his own mind. For Harry’s mind had originally been a place of bleak, cold emptiness. A place with hurricane force winds and a flat arctic plane that had been utterly empty had been created by a brutal reality where Harry had hated himself as much as everyone had hated him. Fortunately, the bond to Draco had softened that arctic tundra. Harry’s submission and Draco’s possessive love had transformed the landscape. Now if one were to look into Harry’s mind, they’d find rolling, snowy hills, softly falling snowflakes, blue skies and gentle breezes. It was still cold but not bitterly so. It was a place of simplicity and breathtaking beauty.

With his thoughts focused solely on Harry, Draco managed to push away the trauma and paranoia that lay thick and heavy in his own mind, and slowly he felt himself transform. When Draco blinked his eyes clear, he was lower to the ground, his vision was in black and white. He realized he had taken the animal-form he’d found with the fairies.

Four-footed with claws on each paw, he was vaguely feline except he had pitch-black scales instead of fur and a more canine-shaped head with a mussel filled with sharp teeth to match. He also had a tail much like a greyhound - thin and whip-like. His eyes, however, were slitted like a snake’s. Also like a snake, he had two front fangs that were hollow and connected to a sac that produced a very deadly venom. When he was in kill-mode, the venom would pool in his cheeks and drip from his mouth, a cloudy yellow that smoked when it came in contact with anything organic.
He was a conglomeration of predators, making him sleek, beautiful, and extremely deadly. More importantly, Draco was able to keep his thoughts clear, immune in this form to the paranoia and anger that pervaded his mind like an invisible, poisonous fog. It chilled him to the bone to realize how corrupt his mind had become, his every decision and reaction for the last two months had become flawed.

He’d attacked Harry, pushed away the Malfoys, and had revealed too much to Dumbledore. He’d secluded himself and Harry, not making enough use of the resources around him and definitely making no progress in his goal of building connections with the other students. He’d become obsessed with Occlumency with no real results. His grades had suffered; *Harry* had suffered. All because he had put himself in reach of a wizard he had *known* to be connected to Voldemort, because he had thought he could handle it.

Growling, Draco acknowledged that the difference in their powers had been made perfectly clear. The damage he had taken had been more massive than he had even realized. Without clear vision, his perspective had become as egocentric as most people’s. Draco wasn’t most people. His almost inhuman practicality and awareness made his mind different from the average person’s and gave him the ability to master nearly any person or situation. With his unique perspective warped, Draco had made so many stupid mistakes and he refused to let it continue. Whatever it took, he would free himself from this curse.

Stalking past the battered jungle, he pushed past his jungle defense and into his true mind. The truth was his mind wasn’t a tangled, near-impassable jungle full of predators and death anymore. The bond had changed him as much as it had changed Harry. His true mind was a rainforest with narrow but walkable paths and beautiful vegetation. Sunlight filtered down through the thick canopy above, creating an eternal twilight underneath. There were purple and white orchids hanging in the trees. Passion fruit flowers and yellow jasmine were in bloom giving the air a sweet smell. Vivid red and orange bromeliads grew along the forest floor. Red monkey bush vines hung from tree branches. There were still predators stalking the deep shadows - large snakes, black panthers, and spiders a little bigger than a man’s fist. They moved in the shadows and up in the tree branches. It was dangerous here in Draco’s mind. Death, violence, and pain would never be foreign to him, but it wasn’t the bloodbath the jungle had presented. Draco walked through the paths as familiar to him as if he’d been there a thousand times. It was too still, too silent. Something was very wrong…

Harry felt cold arms wrap around him as he spun and he was pulled against the Winter God’s chest. He looked up into that ancient, aged face trustingly. The God smiled and led him a few steps in a waltz. Harry moved easily with the Being, offering no resistance. The bells that had appeared on his ankles chimed softly as they moved, and Harry slowly realized his clothes had changed.

He now wore a white lace skirt lined in white silk that fell to the snow. A white, leather corset was synched tight around his middle, making his waist smaller than his hips, and bound his ribs tight. It came to stop an inch below his nipples. You could see them - pale and pink - below the lace that covered his chest. It went all the way up his neck and gently framed his jaw. It also encased his arms in tight sleeves that fell gracefully over his hands. When Harry lifted his arms, the lace folded backward over his wrists and forearms like the opening of a flower.

On a spin, Harry realized his skirt parted in the front, revealing short, white shorts underneath. The shorts revealed far more than Harry had ever dared reveal before, falling only a few inches over his thighs. Thin, white leather garters were clipped to the front and back of the shorts to hold up the soft, white silk stockings that rose just above his knees. His feet were encased in white leather ankle boots.
with a high heel, making his legs look longer and gave his thighs and calves a more pleasing sinuous shape. A string of silver bells were tied around each ankle just above the boots and chimed every time he stepped. Snow had fallen and caught on his soft, black hair, creating an illusion of a short veil over his head. He was the image of a bride with dark pink lips, eyes full of love. Both provocative and yet innocent, the garment and the Dancer both pleased the God.

“The one to whom you belong has woken to his true self, calmed by your Dance,” the God told him gently, spinning the boy in Its arms. “You did well. He now undertakes his Test.”

Harry bowed his head, a blush staining his cheeks.

“Come.”

Harry was led through the forest, his steps chiming softly through the silent night. Draco appeared between two massive trees around a turn in the path. He looked dirty and exhausted. He was naked, blood stained his sides and scrapes lined his upper arms, but his grey eyes lit up with gentle warmth as soon as he saw Harry. They came together and Draco leaned forward to press their foreheads together.

“I’m going to come back to you,” he promised, voice rough and determined. “I’m going to end this once and for all.” He rubbed his cheek against Harry’s lovingly.

Harry opened his mouth to say something, but Draco was already looking off into the shadows, his attention laser sharp and focused. Heart in his throat, aching to follow in Draco’s footsteps, Harry watched the battered blond walk off into the darkness alone. The Old One bent, filling Harry’s vision with the galaxies spinning in Its eyes.

“Wait for him. He will return to you stronger.”

Harry gasped, a protest on his lips - He didn’t want to leave Draco! - but then he was being spun out of a wall of wind and ice and snow. Cold hands caught him and he looked up to plead that he be allowed to stay, but it was Narcissa staring down at him, expression creased in concern. She wrapped him in her arms, saying something, but Harry couldn’t hear her. All his attention was on the center of the courtyard. Narcissa had seen it too, for she let him go to rush forward and kneel in the snow. Draco lay naked and unconscious, the tattooed celtic knot glowing faintly at the hollow of his throat…

A young buck stepped out of the shadows of the forest, unafraid and unmolested, for it lived here always. It was the part of Harry that would be forever connected to Draco through their bond. It was now taller than Draco’s animal-form; his legs were long and slender. He had two large, fuzzy knots sitting in front of his cupped ears, his antlers growing in. The buck looked thinner than he should and tired, but he was still alert and responsive. Along his back lay a coating of pure white snow, the smell crisp and clean.

The young deer lowered his head and Draco gently butted his scaled forehead against that of the deer. “I’m going to come back to you,” he promised silently. Their bond was still closed, so he couldn’t speak into Harry’s mind, but he hoped Harry heard him somehow. “I’m going to end this once and for all.” Draco rubbed against his cheek against the deer’s one more time, comforting himself as much as Harry, before setting off on his hunt.

It didn’t take him long. There was a pungent smell on the air that didn’t belong. He stalked the scent, keeping his body low to the ground. It took him a minute, the smell too pervasive to follow easily,
but he found it. In the hollow of a dying tree, Draco found a sinister looking pale green and brown cactus with vicious spines. Even as he watched, the cactus shuddered and launched its spines through the air, spreading the cactus’s influence and poisoning the vegetation around it. The cactus had grown large, but Draco wasn’t leaving until it was destroyed. He’d hunt for every spine it had thrown and remove it. He didn’t care how long it took. He would have his mind back.

Draco lowered his head and growled. His heart beat steadily in his chest as venom began to fill his mouth. He spat and hissed, venom splattering the cactus, and it began to smoke as the acidic fluid touched its fleshy body. His poison also splashed some of the vegetation around it. Pain lanced through Draco’s mind, knocking him off his feet. Growling, Draco stood. There was no way to prevent some of his own mind from being damaged as he attacked the foreign object. Heart pounding, his mouth filled again with venom. Without hesitation, he spat, ignoring the brutal pain that followed. He was determined to be free …

The storm had ended. Severus would be brewing the poison for a few hours more, until the sun broke the sky. Lucius would have remained with him to see it through, but an elf had appeared and summoned him to the Infirmary. Lucius had no choice but to reminded Severus of his promise that half of the potion belonged to him before making his way quickly to the Hospital Wing.

He braced himself for the worst, but the first thing he saw when he pushed through the double doors was Harry dressed in a provocative and yet breathtakingly beautiful wedding gown. It drew attention to the fact that Harry had grown taller and more willowy in the four months they’d spent at Hogwarts. His hair seemed a little longer, too, the ends curling slightly underneath a thin layer of snow that still somehow graced the top of the child’s head. In addition to this, the beautifully stitched corset made Harry’s waist seem smaller and his shoulders and hips wider. Jewel green eyes blinked at him from across Draco’s hospital bed. Harry was holding tightly to the blond’s hand, the gorgeous lace from Harry’s long sleeves falling over both their hands.

“What is his condition?” Lucius asked, finding it hard to tear his eyes away from Harry, dressed as he was.

“There is nothing wrong with him that I can tell,” Madam Pomfrey answered. Her eyes kept darting to Harry as well; it was clear she was shocked by his attire.

It was interesting to note that Professor McGonagall, who stood at the head of the bed, did not seem shocked at all. In fact, when her eyes rested on Harry, she almost seemed awed. Lucius stepped closer to his son’s bedside and cast Narcissa a curious glance. She stood at the foot of Draco’s bed, looking down at their boy with a thoughtful expression. She didn’t acknowledge his presence. Deep thoughts moved through her eyes. Dumbledore stood next to her, stroking his beard. He gave Lucius a cheerful smile.

“Harry had a type of vision. He claims Draco is being tested and the boy will wake as soon as the trial has been completed.”

“By whom?” Lucius demanded.

Harry looked up and met Lucius’s eyes. “The God of Winter. She said Draco will come back stronger.”

A thrill passed through Lucius, his breath catching. The God of Winter had chosen to test his son and had gone so far as to promise his Blessing.
“Likely it is a fairy playing some trick,” Madam Pomfrey huffed and crossed her arms. She was Christian and did not believe the Old Gods remained. “That symbol on Mr. Malfoy’s throat has been activated. It is my understanding that it was placed on the boy during his time in Faerie.”

Lucius saw the Celtic knot was indeed glowing, but the knowledge in Harry’s eyes, the unmelting snow, his gown, made him believe Harry was telling the truth. It wasn’t a fairy who had Draco but a God.

“We will leave him in your care, Madam Pomfrey, until the end of winter break,” Narcissa spoke, slow and determined. “If he has not awoken by that point, we will come and fetch both boys.”

Lucius agreed. The God may consider it interference if they were to remove Draco from the place of his Test. However, once the students returned from break, Draco would be too vulnerable to be left unguarded. Dumbledore had long ago proven his incompetence. Lucius reached over and gently clasped Narcissa’s arm, silently giving her support and comfort. Draco was an incredible soul. Lucius was confident that their son would come through this triumphant and win the God’s blessing. His eyes fell on Harry once more. The boy practically exuded the aura of Winter, which was likely why none of them had considered offering the boy a robe to help cover him up. Harry clearly wore the God’s favor. A thrill passed through him once more, awed in the presence of something so much Greater than he…

…

Ron and his brothers remained in the Tower as promised, but none of them had gone to bed. They stood watch in the common room, quiet as the howl of the storm had raged. It was almost dawn when the portrait finally opened. Four heads snapped over only for their eyes to go wide as Harry stepped through. He wore a corset and dress! Harry’s glasses were gone, his eyes a bright grass green. His hair looked less wild somehow, more feminine with a slight curl. A thin layer of snow made the top white. Heels made him a few inches taller, his waist looked so tiny, his arms and neck so slender.

“Blimey! How’d you get turned into a girl?” Ron blurted, a blush staining his cheeks.

“I assure you, Mr. Weasley,” McGonagall said, voice chilly. “That Mr. Potter is still very much a boy. He is tired. Please do not keep him up. Allow him to go to bed in peace.”

The redheads all nodded quickly. She gave them a stern glance and swept out of the room. Fred and George practically leapt over a couch to stand in front of Harry. Harry looked up at them, lips a dark pink, eyes bright and framed by long black lashes.

“Bloody hell. You’re so pretty,” the twins said in unison. They reached forward to touch a softly curling lock of hair but hesitated to actually make contact.

Harry immediately blushed, bowing his head and clasping his hands in front of him shyly.

“Where’s Draco?” Percy asked, worried. He’d come to stand beside the twins. He frowned at them in warning. They all knew if any of them touched Harry without permission, Draco would have their skins. And that wasn’t an exaggeration. They’d known the boys for two years. They knew just how possessive and vicious Draco could get.

“He’s in the Infirmary,” Harry told them. The Malfoys had made it clear to keep the Dark God a secret. “Madam Pomfrey said he’ll wake in a few days.”

“Why’re you dressed like that?” Ron demanded. He was blinking slowly, still mesmerized and
shocked by Harry’s appearance. “Don’t you care you’re wearing a dress?”

Harry looked down at himself and smoothed his hand over the corset and the silk-lined lace at his hips. His blush darkened, but a smile curled the corner of his lips. Looking up shyly through his lashes, he admitted, “I think it’s beautiful.” He swayed side to side, letting the material slide over his legs.

Fred and George both swallowed hard, their pants growing a bit tight. Ron continued to stare, baffled.


Ron took Harry’s hand and led him toward the stairs. “I think I’d die of embarrassment if someone put me in a dress.” He looked over at his friend and Harry looked back at him trustingly. “But… I guess it does look kinda okay on you.”

Fred and George stood rooted to the spot as they watched Harry climb the stairs. The slit in the dress opened with every step up. It revealed a slit down the middle of the skirt. They could see bare thighs and silk stockings and small shorts. The kid was a total knockout!

Percy firmly shut the dorm door behind them and locked it. He was glad Ron was still young enough to be unaffected by Harry’s look. It wasn’t just that the dress was beautiful and provocative, especially to a wizard’s way of thinking, but Harry’s sweet temperament and trusting nature made it all the more arousing. “Get his pajamas, please,” he ordered.

He knelt behind Harry and began to work on untying the corset. He’d never done it before, so it took him quite a few minutes. Harry stood patient and uncomplaining. Ron had perched himself at the end of the bed, his rat in his lap. Percy finally got the damn thing off, his fingers throbbing from having to untie the many rows. Ron’s gasp drew his attention and he looked to see that Harry had unbuttoned the skirt and it now pooled on the floor at his feet.

The lace shirt was tucked into the white shorts, which sat low on Harry’s hips. High-heels gave his legs subtle definition and silver bells graced his ankles. Skin-tight stockings encased those slender legs. The strip of bare thigh between stockings and lace seemed shockingly provocative. Even Percy felt himself reacting, the memories of watching the boys get off during the two times his tattoo had been renewed came back to him full force.

“Bloody hell,” Ron breathed. He was deeply shocked, his face dark red. He’d never seen lingerie before, and this definitely fell into that category.

Harry was oblivious to the other two boys in the room. He bent, giving the redheads a spectacular view of his ass, and carefully lifted the skirt. He knew how precious this gift was and he was determined to take good care of it. He also took the corset from Percy’s limp hands. Walking over to his armoire, the bells around his ankles chiming softly, he busied himself with hanging and storing the skirt and corset. Looking over his shoulder, he asked sweetly, “Can you help me out of the shirt. I don’t want it to tear.”

Percy swallowed hard, his fingers trembling, but he went over. He smoothed his hand down Harry’s back and arms, looking for buttons. He bit back a groan at the feel of how warm and soft Harry’s skin was. The buttons were tiny and ran down the boy’s spine. There were dozens of them. Percy slowly worked the buttons open, the lace parting to reveal pale, golden skin.

“You got a tattoo?” Ron demanded. The shock of his friend wearing strange clothes that revealed far
Percy looked to see the silver-white dragon staring up at him from Harry’s side. Percy quickly swallowed and desperately told his dick to calm down. He didn’t want to die on the floor in the First-year boys’ dorm because of a boner.

“Yeah.” Harry smiled, joy radiating from his face. “Draco gave it to me.”

“Draco can do tattoos?” Ron’s eyes lit up. “I want one!”

“Mum would kill you,” Percy told him, rolling his eyes behind his glasses. He sighed in relief as the last button came undone. “You can get it off yourself, right?”

“Yes. Thank you, Percy.” Harry gave him a sweet smile.

Ron pouted on the bed. “But I want one! Maybe a lion. That’d be so wicked!”

“If Draco gives you a tattoo, you don’t get to pick what it is,” Percy told him, amused by his little brother.

“Oh.” Ron considered that. “Maybe if I asked nicely?”

“Mum would still kill you,” Percy repeated.

Ron’s jaw set stubbornly and Percy sighed. At least he could count on Draco not giving Ron a tattoo based on his little brother’s whim. Draco would only give one if he meant it heart and soul, and Percy doubted a tattoo was in Ron’s future. Fortunately their little argument distracted Percy from the rest of Harry’s undressing. The boy came over bare-footed in a t-shirt and a night robe. Harry yawned, the snow in his hair melting as the light of dawn broke through the window. Water dripped off the ends of his hair and darkened the robe he wore.

“Come on. Time for bed.” Percy smiled and pulled Harry over to his bed. Ron crawled unprompted under the covers of the middle bed. Percy tucked Harry in and cast a drying charm at his head. It made the boy’s hair fluff up and become messy once more. He grinned. “Good night. Try and sleep in if you can.”

“Good night. Sleep well,” Harry answered sleepily. He turned on his side facing the bed Ron was in, green eyes blinking slowly.


Percy came over and smoothed the covers over his brother on his way out the door. “Sleep well.”

Bella woke on the floor of Lucius’s office. The diary lay open before her. All sense of magic was gone from it. Pain lanced up her spine and instinctively she closed her legs. Something hot and wet coated her thighs. It only took a second to realize it was blood. Crying, she sat up. Her arms and wrists were bruised. Her throat was swollen. She could breathe, but talking was out of the question. It felt like she had swallowed lava. Her thighs ached, but all of that paled in comparison to the scream of pain inside her.

She managed to get to her hands and knees. She had no magic to speak of, but that was okay because her spells must have run out. An elf appeared, looking absolutely shocked. Without being told, it summoned towels for her to hold between her legs and, not knowing what else to do, began
to clean the blood from the floor. It wouldn’t keep Lucius from knowing she had been in there or hide the fact the diary was dead, but at least he wouldn’t have her blood to play with.

Bellatrix sat still for a long minute just trying to breathe through the pain. She had to leave. Before her sister or Lucius returned. Her hands cupped protectively over the small roundness of her stomach. She had to protect her Lord and Master. Gritting her teeth, Bellatrix forced herself to stand and limped over to the fireplace. She unraveled the wards with a careful tug in just the right place. There was no more need for subtle. The elves tried to stop her, but they were bound not to harm her. She was of their Master’s Blood. Harming her would mean their death. With a grimace of absolute agony, tears streaking her face, Bellatrix lifted a handful of floo powder. Throwing it down, she whispered her destination and disappeared in a flash of green.

Chapter end.

A/N: A long chapter. There’s a lot happening here. Let me know what you think please. :D
Interlude

Lucius and Narcissa arrived home shortly after dawn. They were both emotionally exhausted and deep in thought about everything that had occurred, so it took a second longer than it normally would to notice that both Lottie and Dobby were standing against the wall in the receiving room with heads lowered, trembling.

“What is it?” Lucius demanded as he spelled Narcissa clean of floo-ash.

“Master…” Dobby whispered. Both elves sank to their knees. “Masters, Lady Black has escaped…”

Narcissa sucked in a soft breath as Lucius went perfectly still. His face went cold and hard, his eyes glinting silver. “How is that possible?” he demanded, his tone even and yet vibrating with threat.

Lottie was practically a puddle on the floor, quivering and sobbing, leaving poor Dobby to speak for them both. Brutally twisting his ears, Dobby squeaked and whimpered, the story coming out in stuttered bits. ‘I’s… I’s don’t… don’t know, Masters! D-Dobby and L-Lottie were cleaning M-Masters! Then we’r- we’s falls asleep r-right on the floors! W-when we’s w-wake up, Masters, w-we sensed L-Lady B-Black be h-hurt! D-Dobby and Lottie went right away! L-Lady B-Black be on the f-floor! S-She be bleeding! Lottie fetched her a towel and Dobby offered to get L-Lady B-Black anything for her, but she didn’t speak, M-Masters! Then- Then she s-stood and went to the f-floo. Masters! Dobby and Lottie could not stop her Masters! She be hurt bad! Dobby and Lottie were afraid to h-hurt her more! S-She be bleeding! Lottie fetched her a towel and Dobby offered to get L-Lady B-Black anything for her, but she didn’t speak, M-Masters! Then- Then she s-stood and went to the f-floo. Masters! Dobby and Lottie could not stop her Masters! She be hurt bad! Dobby and Lottie were afraid to h-hurt her more! She used the f-floo and went away, Masters! Dobby tried to follow her, but she went to a place Dobby can not find her! Masters, we are so sorry!”

Lucius’s wand snapped out of his cane in a flash. “Crucio,” he intoned with cold clarity.

As the two elves screamed and shrieked, thrashing on the floor in acute agony, Lucius’s thoughts raced. The manor’s wards had been penetrated once, when Draco had been stolen as an infant. It had seemed impossible then. The manor had stood impenetrable for over five hundred years. The house and wards had been added to and remodeled by Malfoys since it’s construction, but that should have only increased the wards’ power over the years. If it had been impossible then, it was inconceivable now. Since Draco’s abduction, Lucius had become obsessive about powering and checking the wards. He’d added a whole new layer and extended the ward boundary by a quarter of a mile. They should have been unassailable!

Coldly furious, Lucius turned to his wife. His spell snapped off, leaving the helpless elves whimpering. “Did you help arrange this, Wife?”

Narcissa looked pale as a ghost. Her hand rested at the base of her throat, her expression clearly shocked. “No, Lucius. You know I didn’t.” But her voice was faint, scared.

Lucius took a step closer to her. “There is no other way around my wards, Narcissa.”

Narcissa’s hand dropped, temper sparking in her sky blue eyes. “I would not help my sister escape, Lucius! She’s clearly taken by the Black madness and a threat to my son! I may not want her caged and tormented, but I do not want her free to act as she pleases!”

“You’ve forever underestimated your sister, Narcissa,” Lucius said coldly, taking another step closer so that he stood directly in front of her, her head tilted back so that she could meet his eyes. “That
witch is vicious and dangerous. She rightfully belonged in my dungeon.”

“You have no understanding of a sibling bond, Lucius,” Narcissa spat, eyes narrowed. “I know her better than anyone. I know exactly what she is capable of! I secured those rooms. I cannot imagine how she managed to escape them.”

“You do not understand her at all, Narcissa. You only see the lost little sister you left behind when we married.” Lucius grabbed his wife carefully by the hair, cradling the back of her head. “You will allow me entrance into your mind, Wife;” he commanded. “I will see just how compromised your weakness has made us.”

Narcissa had no right to refuse. She could manipulate and influence him as was her right, but in the end Lucius was her husband and she had to obey. Refusing to flinch, she stared defiantly into his cold, silver eyes.

“Legilimens,” Lucius incanted, voice sharp as a knife. He wasn't a master in the Mind Arts, but he was proficient. It also helped that there was a strong marriage bond between Narcissa and him. He’d had Bellatrix at his mercy for months before Narcissa discovered her. He knew her magic and he hunted for it ruthlessly, completely uncaring of the pain it caused Narcissa.

It was late June. Narcissa had just finished her Sixth-year of Hogwarts, Bellatrix her Fifth. They sat together silently in a compartment alone. Their friends knew to leave them alone, the two Black sisters descending into a dark mood. Almost two years ago to the day their older sister Andromeda had graduated and eloped with a Muggleborn. She’d been disowned, naturally; her name forbidden in their house. Ever since that day, their home had become oppressive and forbidding. Their mother watched everything they did and punished any small error. This summer in particular promised to be especially unhappy.

Narcissa looked at her younger sister. They were born only a year apart and should have been really close, but Narcissa had always gotten along better with the more calm and reasonable Andromeda. Bellatrix was so unpredictable and prone to strange moods, but she was Narcissa’s sister. Narcissa worried about her, especially now.

“Are you scared he’ll pick me?” Bellatrix asked suddenly.

Lord Lucius Malfoy, the impressive boy who had taken over his family name and businesses at the young age of thirteen at his father’s death, had a betrothal contract made with the Black family at his birth. Andromeda, four years older than Lucius, had been the intended bride, but she had obviously disqualified herself. That left Narcissa or Bellatrix. The daughter that Lucius chose would become his betrothed and finish her years at Hogwarts as the contract bid. Directly after graduation, they would be wed. As for the remaining daughter, their mother had already promised during Yule that she would be removed from Hogwarts permanently, to distance her from any more dangerous influences. Lucius had just graduated. He’d make his offer to one of them soon. One of them would not be returning to Hogwarts next year.

Narcissa’s fists clenched on her thighs. Hatred for her older sister made her tremble. This was all Andromeda’s fault! If she hadn’t been so perverse and selfish, they wouldn’t be in this position. The truth was, Narcissa was terrified Lucius would pick Bellatrix and leave her behind with their mother alone. She desperately wanted to be chosen, even knowing that it would condemn her little sister instead.

“Don’t be scared, Cissa,” Bellatrix said softly. She had the same blue eyes as Narcissa, the same pale
skin, but that is where their similarities ended. Bellatrix had wild, curly black hair; Narcissa straight blonde. Bellatrix was curvy and vivacious; Narcissa slender and reserved.

“I only have one more year of Hogwarts anyway,” Narcissa voiced. “It’d be better if he’d pick you. You’d get two more years before…”

Bellatrix reached over and took her hand. “I’ve seen the way he looks at you. He’ll pick you,” she said softly. Turning, she impulsively wrapped her arms around her sister in a tight hug. “Promise me. Promise you’ll come visit after you marry. Don’t forget me, Cissa. Please don’t forget me.”

Tears burning her eyes, Narcissa hugged her sister back. “I’ll never forget you, Bella. You’re my little sister. I’ll do what I can. Promise.”

…

Narcissa jerked awake. The room was nearly pitch dark. Her ward was still in place, she could feel it, but impossibly she knew she was no longer alone. Her whole body went tense as she felt her mattress dip.

“Shhh. It’s just me,” came a soft voice.

“Bella…” Narcissa didn’t relax.

Bellatrix had changed. Her eyes glinted more wildly than ever. Her moods had become more extreme. Narcissa had learned to be afraid of her little sister. During her last visit home at Yule, Bellatrix had been quiet and perfect, but on the third day she had gone into a fit of rage. She’d physically attacked Narcissa, busting Narcissa’s lip and leaving painful scratches and bruises on her body. The hatred in Bellatrix’s eyes then had chilled Narcissa to the core. After that, Bella had been punished with Crucio intermittently for an hour. Shaken, horrified, Narcissa had listened as Bellatrix howled with laughter for the first fifteen minutes before finally breaking down into screams. Narcissa had never been so grateful in her life to go back to Hogwarts. Now she was back home, but only for one more night. She had graduated and would be married to Lucius the next day, leaving her family for good.

“How’d you get past my ward?” she asked in a frightened whisper.

“Cissa… Cissa, I’m sorry… for before…” Bellatrix’s voice was sweet and soft, the way it had been when they were younger, the way it had been on that last train ride together from Hogwarts.

Narcissa immediately melted. “Bella…”

Bellatrix wrapped her body around Narcissa’s in a soft embrace. “I didn’t know it was you… I think I’m going mad, Cissa… I’m so scared… I don’t even know who I am anymore…”

Narcissa stroked her sister’s curls. She wanted to promise to help her, to take her away from this house, but she knew it was impossible. Their mother owned Bellatrix. There was nothing she or Lucius could do. “You need to get married, Bella. I know Mother has gone over the List with you. Pick one! Any one! I’ll do what I can to make them see how advantageous it would be accept you. Lucius has great influence…”

Bella chuckled wetly. She’d started crying, her tears warming Narcissa’s shoulder. “Mother favors Rudolphus.”

Narcissa bit her lip. Rudolphus Lestrange was cold and frightening. At school, it was no secret that familiars and pets were not to be left alone with him. He had killed more than one animal during their time at Hogwarts. “What about a Greengrass?” Narcissa suggested. “Together we could convince
Bellatrix laughed wildly, making Narcissa tense in fear, but her sister didn’t lash out. “Mother will not accept anyone Neutral. She distrusts everyone, Narcissa. Only the most staunchly Dark will be acceptable to her.” Bellatrix’s voice dropped to a whisper, all humor bleeding out of it. “Only if they will hurt me will she accept them. All bad girls need to be punished, you know.”

“Bella…” Narcissa’s heart ached for her sister, only sixteen and already so broken.

“Nevermind, Cissa…” Bellatrix whispered. “Just don’t forget your promise.”

“I’ll never forget you, Bella,” Narcissa said again.

Narcissa had been married nearly half a year now. She had fallen more in love with Lucius than she had expected to. She was happy, but guilt still weighed on her heart. She’d gotten a letter from her little sister practically begging her to visit. Lucius had forbidden Narcissa’s family from visiting her, but she was free to go as she pleased. Gathering her courage, she had flooed home.

“Sweet, sweet Cissa!” Bellatrix grabbed hold of her almost before she had stepped out of the floo. “How I’ve missed my beloved sister!”

Narcissa winced. Bella’s hold was too tight, her nails digging into her skin. She carefully pulled away, offering a pained smile. “Bella dear. How are you? How’s Mother? Father?”

Bella grabbed her hand and pulled her out of the receiving room and down the hallway toward the sitting room. The hall was dark. No candles were lit. The whole house seemed cast in even more gloom than before. “Mother is resting. She’s come down with something.” A mischievous grin flashed across Bella’s face. “Father is attending to her, of course.” Bellatrix released her hand and did a twirl before sitting gracefully on the couch. “Kretcher!”

The elf looked battered and crazed, but he appeared and served them as a proper elf should.

“Did you hear, Cissa dear. I’m engaged to Rudolphus. Mother decided at last,” Bellatrix told Narcissa happily, holding her teacup carefully in her hand. She took a sip. “There’s a rumor that the bitch is with child, you know. Of course, the bitch won’t likely survive long enough to birth the filthy thing. Not if Mother finds her.”

Narcissa was so shocked by the profanity falling so easily from her sister’s mouth that she sat frozen and wide-eyed.

Bellatrix pushed her curls away from her face. It revealed dark circles and skin too pale to be healthy, but her sister’s face was stretched in a seemingly happy grin. “When Mother’s feeling better, she’ll likely call you home soon to suggest you get with child. We have to redeem our bloodline. It’s just the two of us now.”

Narcissa blushed. Lucius had told her of the Malfoy Curse before they wed. She’d accepted his hand regardless. What else could she do? She’d love to get with child, but there was war on the horizon. Lucius was keeping his eye on it in great interest. It wasn’t exactly a good time to be having a child. On the other hand, if Lucius got involved and something happened to him, he would need an Heir or risk ending the Malfoy line permanently. Perhaps she could convince him?

Bellatrix laughed. “I see I’ve caught your interest. Lucius must be as skilled in bed as he is with his wand.”
“Bella!” Narcissa gasped.

It was as if all the joy in Bellatrix’s eyes and face melted away to reveal something deeply sad and disturbing in its place. “Cissa… Sorry… I… I have no idea what to do… who to turn to…”

Narcissa felt her heart soften. She left her chair and sat beside her sister on the couch. She wrapped Bellatrix in her arms and her sister folded into her as if she were much younger than her age. Narcissa’s eyes widened when she realized her little sister was shaking.

“I… I can take it… whatever Rudolphus dishes out, but… if I have a baby… Narcissa… do you remember your promise?”

Narcissa’s arms tightened. “You can come to me. If you ever need a safe place, you or your child, you can come to me.”

Bella was silent a long minute. “But Lucius… He won’t allow it… The wards keep me out as much as Mother…”

Narcissa had to admit that was true. “I’ll talk to him…”

“If my husband were about to kill me in a fit of passion… or kill my baby… I want to know I have somewhere I can retreat to…” Beseeching baby blue eyes looked up at her. “You’re the only safe place I know, Cissa…”

Narcissa bit her lip. Years of guilt reared up. She knew she shouldn’t. She knew her new husband would be angry, but looking into her sister’s eyes, she knew she had no other choice. Andromeda had left them both, abandoned them to deal with the aftermath of her horrible choice. Narcissa had also left, but she refused to abandon Bellatrix completely. She took Bella by the hand and led her down to the ritual room. Bellatrix watched her wide-eyed as a lamb, gratitude shining on her cheeks in the form of tears. Together, they worked a spell that would make their blood indistinguishable from each other. Wherever Narcissa could pass, so to could Bella if she called upon their shared blood. In an emergency, Bella would be able to come to her even in Malfoy Manor. Lucius would understand.

After the ritual, Bella fell on her, kissing her face over and over. Narcissa smiled and held her close. “You kept your promise…” Bella cried, half in shock, half in delight. “I love you, Cissa… Thank you!” She pulled back, cupping her older sister’s face in her hands. Her expression turning serious and protective. “But if he finds out… Narcissa, he’ll hurt you…”

“No,” Narcissa tried to tell her. “Lucius wouldn’t…”

“You don’t know what he’s capable of, Cissa…” Bella insisted, eyes burning compellingly. “He will be furious and hurt you, sweet sister. We have to keep it secret. We have to keep you safe.”

“But…”

“Look into my eyes… I’ll lock this away. He’ll never find it. He’ll never know…” Bella kissed her sister’s cheek. “Let me protect you, Cissa. Please…”

Narcissa sighed, hugging her sister once more. “Fine. But he wouldn’t hurt me, Bella. Lucius isn’t like that. Isn’t like them. He’d understand.”

Bella smiled with such sorrow then. “It’s okay, Cissa. It’s better if you believe that. I’ll protect you, sweet sister… Obliviate…”
…

Narcissa collapsed bonelessly. Her head pounded so fiercely that her vision swam in and out. The room seemed at once too bright and going dim. Tears streaked her face. A moan slipped past her lips.

“You opened the door. You let her in. Allowed her to manipulate you,” Lucius accused coldly, looking down at his wife pitilessly. “Our son was taken because you trusted an insane and dangerous witch. And now she is gone again, a threat to my only son once more.”

“Lucius,” she whimpered. Narcissa couldn’t move. Simply turning her head made her feel like she was going to be sick. Arguments and justifications sat on her tongue, but he did not allow her to explain.

Power built in the room. Lucius raised his hand high, using his wand to cut his palm. His blood fell, but it seemed to be absorbed into the floor. A thrum of power surrounded them. The Malfoy signet ring on Lucius’s finger burned a cold blue. He reached forward and grabbed her hand, cutting it. Her blood splattered the rug beneath them.

“Lucius,” she gasped. “Don’t…”

“As Lord Malfoy, rightful Heir to the Malfoy line, I hereby revoke your access to the wards. You will henceforth no longer be recognized as a Malfoy-bride by this mine house and servants,” he intoned, eyes staring down at her coldly. A gentle, pulsing web shimmered into existence around her. It connected her to the manor and to her husband. The energy swelled and then shattered, falling to be absorbed by the walls and Lucius himself. He was not done. He knelt before her, ignoring her pained sobs. Placing his bleeding hand on her throat, he continued, “By this blood, I, Lucius Abraxas Malfoy, bind Narcissa Black Malfoy as a ward of the Manor.”

Narcissa hissed through her tears as a bolt of cold blue light lashed up from the floor to encircle her neck before fading from view. She’d been cut off, made a guest of the house. Now, worse, he was marking her a ward to be monitored like a child, only able to enter or leave with his express permission. She was no different from Harry with as much power as he had over the house and wards, which is to say, none. Narcissa curled into a miserable ball and wept.

Standing, Lucius strode from the room, leaving her on the floor, her hand still bleeding onto the rug, her throat smeared with his quickly drying blood. He lashed out, punching the wall of the hallway with a closed and trembling fist. He could hardly catch his breath. He was so angry and hurt. How dare Narcissa betray him so terribly! Practically vibrating with regret and rage, he strode quickly to his office, and a sense of doom closed in on him the closer he got. The miserable elf said Bellatrix had been bleeding, badly injured. What would have caused such an injury except for his most dangerous wards.

His office door was open. He stood frozen in the doorway. His long hair hung loose around his shoulders. His wand remained clenched in his hand. There on the floor by his desk, he could see it. The black diary. Horrified, he walked carefully across the rug. He knelt, but he already knew. The diary was empty. It was simply an old book. The magic and soul it had contained within its pages were gone. Lucius stood and flung the book at the wall with a roar of rage. He should have destroyed it when he had the chance! Now the Dark Lord’s soul was loose with that wretched bitch! Both of whom were dangers to his son.

…”

Draco lay shivering and panting on the ground. His mouth stung from all the venom he’d produced and spat at the invasive plant growing in his mind. Blood dripped down from the corner of his
mussel from the bleeding sores that had spread on his gums. He was exhausted and nauseous, but where the cactus had sat there was now a smoking circle at the base of a rather battered tree.

Draco knew he could give up. He could let his consciousness rise from the depths of his mind. He was exhausted and hurt. No one would blame him if he left things as they were, but he just couldn’t. There were still cactus thorns embedded in the surrounding plants. He was determined to take back the whole of his mind. He couldn’t stand to leave a single poisonous splinter to infect his personality, and he refused to leave even the smallest foothold for Voldemort to gain power over him again.

Get up! he growled to himself, but his body wouldn’t obey. He lay helpless, whimpering on the forest floor, refusing to let go.

Harry woke abruptly and immediately reached for Draco, but his hand met with empty space. Harry blinked his eyes clear to see that the sun had been up for hours. Sitting up, the blankets fell down his body to pool in his lap. He frowned and shivered against the winter chill, wrapping his arms around his chest. He’d gone to bed in a t-shirt and a warm robe because of the cold. He still wore the robe, but it had fallen open, the ties undone. He wore nothing underneath. His t-shirt was missing.

Frowning, he slid his legs over the side of the bed.

“Ron?” he called in confusion, reaching for his glasses. The redhead’s bed was empty. Shivering, he quickly hurried to his armoire and got dressed. He needed to see Draco. His absence was as loud as a scream that grated along his nerves. Hurrying down the dorm stairs, he found Ron sitting with his brothers in the common room.

Ron smiled as his friend appeared. “Harry! Bout time you got up! It’s well past lunch.”

“I’m going to go visit Draco,” he informed them, barely stopping on his way to the portrait.


“We all will,” Percy corrected dryly, seeing the interested looks on his twin brothers’ faces.

It didn’t take them long to make it to the Hospital Wing. The hallways were empty, even the portraits were quieter than normal. They found Madam Pomfrey hovering by Draco’s bedside. Harry’s eyes widened as he watched two trails of blood fall from Draco’s nose. The older witch had her hair pulled back in her customary bun. Her dress had a full skirt and she wore the traditional nurse’s apron over it. She was a small woman, but she was strong.

“I’m going to have to ask you to leave,” Pomfrey said firmly. “Mr. Malfoy needs rest.”

Harry ducked past her. She tisked but allowed it. Dumbledore had warned her not to interfere between the two, that their bond was powerful and inexplicable. The Weasleys, however, were firmly pushed out the door to wait for their friend.

Harry crawled up onto the bed and pressed his forehead gently to Draco’s. With his right hand, he gently cupped the sleeping boy’s face. Draco’s skin felt cool to the touch. There was no reaction. The blond lay perfectly still, his chest barely rising as he breathed. Harry closed his eyes and let his love rise and fill him. It was his job to heal Draco, to help him in whatever way he could. Draco was his everything. He owned Harry body and soul.

Pomfrey came back to her patient. She’d seen strange and wonderful things in her time serving as a healer, nothing usually surprised her anymore, but the sight of little Harry Potter laying next to the Malfoy Heir, their foreheads pressed together, gave her pause. There was a feeling in the air, the
stirring of wild magic. She stood frozen, entranced as Harry’s eyes opened, the boy staring down at Draco. The green of his irises glowed faintly, visible even past the barrier of his black-framed glasses.

- LOVE - Harry lowered his mouth to Draco’s and breathed out just as the blond breathed in. The very magic of his being, everything that made him him, raw and untamed, spilled from his body into Draco’s underneath him. Harry pressed their lips together in a one-sided kiss. The taste of Draco’s blood filled his mouth along with the hint of crisp, cold snow. As if from a great distance, Harry could just barely hear the tinkling of a small silver bell.

Growling and whimpering, refusing to let go, Draco lay on his side on the forest floor. Every few minutes he’d try to stand, only to collapse once more. A sound caught his attention. At first it sounded like a small bell, but then he made out the sound of steps. The leaves and underbrush rustled as it drew closer. Draco watched through unblinking snake-like eyes and waited.

He saw the glow first. It illuminated the shadows as it came forward. Draco relaxed, immediately recognizing that soft, golden light. As he expected, a young stag stepped clear of the trees and ferns, its small delicate hooves falling lightly on the ground. It came to Draco unhesitatingly. It knelt, bending its legs gracefully, before lying next to him. Draco gave a purr-like noise of acceptance and in response the stag reached its soft, velveteen nose forward, touching his cheek.

Warmth washed through Draco, making him arch and purr. His claws dug into the soft soil beneath them. Pleasure assaulted his senses, as if he’d stepped into a hot bath after a cold, long day. For a brief moment, he was a small human boy again with Harry’s warm body in his arms, their bodies pressing together in a way that sent pleasure sizzling along his nerves. Then he was the scaled, cat-creature once more with a beautiful stag staring into his eyes.

Strength returned quickly now, the sores in his mouth healed. Climbing easily to his feet, Draco looked down at the deer. With another soft purr, he licked along the stag’s cheek and over the curved ear. The deer closed its eyes in pleasure. Thank you, Harry, Draco thought, hoping it would reach him. Such a good boy. Love you so much. He took a step away. The deer watched, ever accepting and obedient. I’ll be back soon, he promised and disappeared into the shadows of the forest.

Harry pulled away from Draco. He somehow knew that he’d done all he could, that Draco would be okay for now. As he sat up, a wave of dizziness passed over him. Madam Pomfrey forced herself into motion. She was shocked, of course. She hadn’t expected Harry to press his lips to the other boy’s. It wasn’t a chaste kiss, either. The way Harry’s lips moved over the blond’s had been sensual and familiar. The delicate curve of Harry’s back as he melted into the kiss, the unconscious surrender in his body language, Harry’s desire had been clear.

“Sit for a moment, young man,” she ordered, trying to get back to business, her cheeks still burning hot. She ran her wand over him and frowned at the results. “You’ve magically drained yourself, child. Lay still for a moment. I’ll fetch you a potion. Then I want you to go get something to eat and get back into bed.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Harry replied demurely.

He leaned back against the headboard, Draco asleep next to him. His fingers tugged and twisted the shirt by Draco’s shoulder. He felt content and at peace from just sitting next to the blond. Harry stared down at him lovingly until Pomfrey returned with the potion. It tasted citrusy and strongly
astringent. Somehow Harry managed to swallow it all in one go. Pomfrey let him rest for a moment longer to let it settle and then firmly shooed him out the door and into the company of his friends.

“Make sure he eats a good meal and put him back to bed, Mr. Weasley,” she ordered.
Percy nodded, pushing his glasses further up his nose. “Yes, ma’am. I will.”
Satisfied, Pomfrey shut the door in their faces.

“How is he?” Ron wanted to know. He gave Harry a serious look, demanding the truth.

“I healed him a little,” Harry admitted. “I think he’s okay for now.”
The Weasley brothers exchanged glances, wondering if Harry knew how strange he was.

“Are we going to the kitchen?” Ron wanted to know, excitement in his eyes.
Percy shook his head at his little brother. “Yes, Ron. We’re going to the kitchen.”

Fred and George shared big grins and led the way. They talked excitedly about places to explore and tricks to pull tomorrow when Harry was rested. Ron was even more excited by this. He hadn’t been allowed to help his brothers play pranks before. It sounded exciting! Ron flung his arm around Harry’s shoulder and smiled happily.

“You hear that, Harry? The Slytherins won’t know what hit ‘em when they get back!”

Harry leaned into him tiredly, returning his smile. “But it won’t splash the First-years, will it?” He was thinking of Pansy, Vince, and Greg. He wished they could be friends again.

“We can make sure it doesn’t,” Fred offered reluctantly.

“Although maybe they’d like to have rainbow hair, too,” George said with mock-seriousness.

“Wouldn’t want them to feel left out, do we?” Fred agreed.

“I don’t see you sporting the look,” Percy pointed out with an arched eyebrow.
The twins laughed and promised to turn their hair rainbow for tomorrow.

Once they arrived at the kitchen, the elves were only too happy to serve them an early dinner. Percy watched Harry carefully. The younger boy was quiet and subdued. He looked exhausted. By the time he’d finished eating all that he could, his eyes were only half-open. “Come on. Let’s get you to bed,” Percy said, pulling Harry gently to his feet.

The others weren’t ready to call it a night, so Percy walked Harry up to the Tower alone. He got the younger boy changed and into bed. Harry was asleep before his head hit the pillow. Percy tucked him in, making sure he’d stay warm throughout the night. Checking that everything was in its place, he spelled the lights off and shut the door behind him.

…

Bellatrix opened her eyes. At first the room was blurry. She blinked a few times. The room looked familiar, but at the same time like she had never seen it before. It had dark pink paisley wallpaper. A dark brown dresser sat across from the foot of the bed. The bed itself was a four-poster with deep burgundy curtains.
“Bellatrix.”

She turned her head to see an older man sitting at her bedside. He had a large, leather-bound tome open on his lap. He was slender with not an ounce of extra fat on his frame. His hair was slicked back, grey streaking the dark brown. His eyes were crystalline blue. She gave him a sweet smile. “Father. Welcome back,” she said happily. She was at Grimmauld Place as she’d intended. She hadn’t immediately recognized the room because it was the master bedroom. She hadn’t been in here often and never in the bed.

Cygnus Black shut his book and placed it on the bedside table. He stood and leaned over her. “Bellatrix. What have you done, Daughter?”

Bella giggled and cupped her swollen belly. Even now she could still feel the warm drip of blood from between her legs. At least it seemed to be slowing. “We have much to talk about, Father.” Her expression turned serious. “Do not let Malfoy come here.” She reached out and caught his sleeve, her eyes burning feverishly. “He would destroy me.”

Cygnus looked down at his youngest child. The world had thought she’d died a year ago in Azkaban, but he was her father. He had known instinctively that she still lived. It infuriated him that she was injured and on the run from Malfoy. Vengeful hate burned brightly in his chest. His one refuge, his sanctuary of twenty years, had been stolen from him by that pompous, pretty-boy Malfoy and his despicable agent Huld. Cygnus would do whatever he could to stand in that arrogant sod’s way. Reaching forward to stroke his daughter’s wild curls, he gave her a reassuring smile.

“Do not worry, Bellatrix. Malfoy will never be welcome here. Now tell me what you have been up to. You reek of a Dark ritual.”

Bellatrix pulled back the blankets to see her belly. She stroked its unfamiliar roundness and smiled up at her father. “The Dark Lord shall be reborn.”

Cygnus’s eyes widened in shock, his hand unconsciously tightening in his daughter’s hair, before his expression became thoughtful. “Is that so?” he said slowly.

“Yes. I have much to get ready,” she told him almost sweetly. A strange glow entered her eyes. The cold breath of winter filled the room. “You will help me, won’t you, Father?”

He’d been holed up for over two years now in Grimmauld Place, no one the wiser. At first, he’d tried to stay completely secluded, but loneliness had driven him out amongst his peers, shrouded of course, his identity hidden, but he’d been disgusted by the decline of the Wizarding population. They’d become complacent and lazy, barely holding onto their power and culture. It was so stagnant here, hardly anything wild or powerful left in their world. Looking into his daughter’s eyes he saw a bit of the wild, raw power of true magic once more. It called to him. He understood instinctively that she was already lost, sacrificed to whatever ritual she had begun, but she had summoned and wielded true power and pride burned bright in his chest. He touched her cheek gently and promised his support for what little time she had left.

“I will help you, Daughter. You will have whatever you need.”

Bellatrix gave him a wild grin. “Thank you, Father!”

Chapter end.

A/N: So a bit of a shorter chapter. I got some explanation in there regarding Bellatrix’s escape. I still have to flush out and explain what’s happening to Bellatrix and the version of the Dark Lord she
“carries”. I also want to explore Draco on his mental quest more in the next chapter and explore a Harry without Draco. Not to mention the possessed Quirrell still running about. And Snape’s potion. Lol! I got a lot of work to do.
Violation

A/N: Just a reminder that this is M for Mature. There are scenes of child abuse / slavery / human trafficking / and rape in this chapter.

Violation

The rich aroma of the forest filled his senses. The smell of fresh rain, the soft perfume of flowers, the musk of animals, the green of plants, and just underneath it all... the sickly sweet smell of poison. Nostrils flaring, he crept silently through the underbrush and came upon a wide tree. The bark was darker, more sinister than the surrounding trees. The shade it cast felt threatening; the shadows almost seemed hungry.

Draco stalked around the base of the tree, searching... There! A thorn about teen feet above his head was halfway embedded in the trunk. Black sap oozed out from around it, as small as a drop of blood, but it stank of rot. Bunching his muscular back legs, Draco leapt at the tree, claws digging into the bark. He whipped his head forward, biting the thorn with his small, sharp front teeth, and yanked it out. The most foul taste flooded his mouth, his whole body clenched, wanting to vomit and expel the vile taste, but he refused to let go...

He was small with flesh hands and bare feet. He wore underwear and a shirt. It was hot, even at night. He was in a room with several beds and a single light above their heads. Other kids were there in similar clothes. One was crying in the bed closest to the door. Two others were laughing and hitting each other with pillows. A lady in a dark dress was shushing them, telling them to sleep. There was a dark gloom around the edges of the room and he frowned at it. Had that always been there? A boy with dark skin, deep dark eyes, and short dreads flopped down at the end of his bed.

"Are you sick?" he asked.

"No," he answered. He tilted his head and blond hair fell into his eyes. "Why?"

"You never laugh." The boy put his head down his folded arms. "You smile and stuff. You're not like Tyson. He cries all the time 'cause he misses his mommy. You never had a mommy, right?"

He shook his head. "No."

"Then why don’t you laugh ever?"

"Roger, get into bed."

The lady was beside them now. She smacked the black boy’s bottom. Roger - with a look of fear and pain on his face - scampered into the bed not even a foot away from Draco’s and crawled under the thin cover. Draco stared up at the lady. She - glared at him coldly.

"Am I sick?" he asked her curiously.

She frowned and felt his forehead. “You don’t have a fever,” she dismissed his worry and moved on - leaving him feeling alone. No one would ever understand him because he was different from all of them. “If I don’t hear silence in the next minute, you’re all going to get a smack!”

Draco frowned as he realized the shadows in the corners were whispering. He took a deep breath in. With his eyes pinned to that darkness, he blew as hard as he could. A powerful gust of ice-cold air
whipped around the room. It became brighter, more in focus. The image of Roger’s pain-filled face after the lady smacked his bottom changed into that of a giggling boy. She had barely tapped his butt. Her glare when Draco had asked his childish question melted into one of simple tiredness. She had touched his head gently when he had laid down, stroking his hair back from his face, tucking him in… but that gentle part of the memory faded almost as soon as he remembered it. The cold wind erasing it as it had the Dark Lord’s influence…

The black-scaled creature fell from the tree and landed on his paws. He was growling, anger pulsing through his blood. The poisonous thorns were altering his memories! The Dark Lord had wanted him to feel isolated, wanted him to pull away from others. He had been different from the other kids, more serious and watchful, but he hadn't been wasn’t alone. That had been implanted, false, but there would be a cost to cleaning his mind of the Dark Lord’s manipulation. He had to sacrifice something in exchange. It sucked, but he had no other choice. It didn’t matter what it cost him; he had to be free!

A deep growl of fury erupted from deep in his gut. His claws dug deep furrows into the rich soil beneath him. An almost eerie glow appeared in his eyes. Taking a deep breath, he took in the scent of the forest around him. Again he smelled it, the faint hint of sickness on the air. Draco sprinted forward, every inch a predator. This time the putrid scent wafted from deep within a bunch of ferns. The soft green, feather-like leaves parted under his nose. There, in the middle, a thorn was embedded in a withered, oily fern lying limp and flat along the ground. The soil around it reeked of poison. Gagging, body tensed, he nonetheless snapped his jaws around the fern, his stomach clenching, threatening to rebel, as he swallowed the leaf whole, dirt and all…

Draco sat huddled in the corner of a small square space. Pitch darkness smothered him. Even though he knew there was a single lightbulb above his head, he’d been bad so he’d been denied light. It didn’t matter. He could see the room around him even though he was blind; he’d been stuck here for what felt like years, unable to leave.

A bare room so small he could almost reach out and touch both walls with his arms extended. One door that was always locked. A small metal grate in the floor. It smelled of piss and shit. It would until the bucket filled with soapy water was given to him to wash himself and the room, rinsing the drain clean. It wasn’t cold or hot, but he shivered. It was quiet, always quiet. He used to scream or talk or sing, just to hear a voice, any voice, even his own. He’d even bounce himself off the walls like a ball just to be able to move, - but he’d stopped doing any of that. He couldn’t do it anymore. What was the point?

Suddenly the light turned on. Draco flung his arms over his face, his eyes watering painfully. The door opened. Fresh air spilled into his space, but Draco felt like choking because the monster was there. Standing in the doorway, filling it with his wide body. He was tall, but the monster knelt so that he wasn’t towering over him. Draco would rather he stay standing. As much distance that he could get from the monster the better.

“I missed you, baby,” the monster said, revealing himself to be a man, voice sickly sweet. “Did you miss me?”

Draco said nothing. - He stared straight ahead through the man’s chest, pretending he was still blind. - The smell of soap invaded his room as a bucket full of water was placed inside. The man easily reached him, his long arm stretching across the small space and grabbing hold of his leg. Draco was pulled forward and set on his feet. He didn’t fight, didn’t move, as the man began to wash him off.

“Such a pretty boy, you are. A good boy…” the man cooed.

He said more of the same. Words spilling from his lips in a never-ceasing rain as Draco’s body was
touched and scrubbed. The man loved to wash between his legs and his butt most of all. He’d rub and stroke with the sponge as well as his bare hand. He’d tug on Draco’s balls and tap at his hole. The man’s whole face would get red when he did it. His mouth would part and he’d breathe heavy. - During this, Draco stood silent. It used to make him cry, but now he was just tired. What was the point in fighting? All he could do was endure and wait for it to be over… Draco shook his head. Why was it so dark in here? The light was finally on. He looked up and saw a gloom too deep to see through. Draco threw his head back and screamed…

The shadows burst apart as cold air exploded around him. The false emotions were scraped clean, but the man’s face also blurred. Draco could no longer remember it with the crystal clarity that he’d had before. All he knew was that he hadn’t stood there passive as the man groped and fondled him. He’d glared tearfully, his mind racing as he eyed the space between the man and the door frame. He had always watched! He’d always been ready! …

Thrashing his way free from the ferns, Draco staggered a few feet away. He crouched, panting. Fuck Voldemort! Clearly he hadn’t wanted Draco to resist. He wanted Draco passive and less likely to fight back. Well, fuck that! He would NEVER stop fighting! Back then, during those three months he’d been trapped in that sicko’s closet, he’d not once given in. It had felt more like years than months, but he had never stopped testing the door, he’d never stopped hitting the walls, and he’d definitely never stopped watching for a chance to escape.

Howling like a wild thing, Draco leapt into a sprint and took off after the next hint of poison. The smell was up high. Taking a running leap, claws digging into the bark of a tree, he climbed with blinding speed. In seconds, he was in the canopy, crouching on a thick branch. There, hanging in a web, sat a fat spider. It glistened unnaturally; its body swollen grotesquely. Extra legs grew from its head. It was dead and deformed, half rotten.

Draco’s eyes narrowed dangerously. He could barely force his jaws open. Bile burned the back of his throat. His whip-cord tail lashed side-to-side. Snarling, he snapped his jaws at the air. Spittle went flying. Then, before he could chicken out, he lashed his head forward and swallowed the putrid thing whole…

The master was drunk, but not so drunk that Draco would be able to bite and kill the bastard. The man held his favorite whip. The one that cut Draco to the bone with very little effort. If Draco got too close or made any sudden movements, he’d bleed for it. The master was sitting on the wide bed, his back to the headboard, his eyes half-lidded and glittering malevolently. His shirt was open down the front, revealing his hairy chest. His pants were also open.

Draco tried not to look, but it was hard to miss the thick rod that stood up against the man’s flabby belly. Draco wished the bastard would just fuck him already so that he could kill him dead, but the master had bought Draco already knowing about his strange “poison”. He never entered Draco with his own flesh. Toys, on the other hand, were fair game.

“You’re going to do it, slut. Or I will, and I certainly won’t be gentle about it,” the master taunted, his mouth curling into a mean grin. “Either way, I’m going to have so much fun.”

Draco was on his hands and knees at the end of the bed, his body longways across it so that the master faced his side. Pink silicone lay next to his left hand. The dildo wasn’t the biggest thing the bastard had shoved into him, but Draco had never been asked to do it himself before. He glared murderously. He was already covered in bruises and his shoulders burned like fire from the last time the master had played with him. Cold hatred saturated his brain, the room filled his eyes with almost painful clarity. Sounds seemed muffled, but he could count each bead of sweat on the bastard’s face. Shifting up on his knees, Draco wrapped his hands around the dick. His fingers couldn’t quite meet
around it.

The motherfucker lashed his whip forward. Draco grit his teeth on a scream as the bite of the leather seared a line of burning fire across his hip. Blood spilled hot down his thigh and splattered onto the bed. The pain screamed unending down his nerve-endings, forcing tears to flow down his pale cheeks.

“Use that as lube.”

Draco snarled, but he obediently wet the toy with his blood. He lined the tip up against his body and began to push. The feeling of being spread open wasn’t foreign to him, but he was by no means used to it. He groaned. The pressure in his guts as it speared him to the core always made him cry…

Draco tossed his head hard to the side. No. That wasn’t right! He blew out a shaky breath and a cold wind as cutting as a knife burst through the room. He knew that as soon as that bastard had whipped him, as soon as Draco had seen that sick light enter that fucker’s eyes, he’d known he wasn’t going to get any mercy. He had bared his teeth and flung the toy right at the bastard’s face, but the image of the dildo slapping the fucker on the cheek was torn from his memory as payment.

What didn’t disappear was the remembered agony of his punishment as the furious man whipped Draco with brutal precision, leaving ten bleeding lashes placed from shoulder to hips that had split the skin of Draco’s back and wrapped halfway around his chest so that he looked like a candy cane. Draco had been left just on the edge of death, but he most definitely hadn’t performed for the bastard and raped himself!

Falling from the tree as a black-scaled predator once more, he landed hard. His legs collapsed under him as his body hit the ground with a heavy thud. He hardly noticed. He was still caught up in the memory of being in the Hold, of being a slave to human traffickers. For those fifteen hellish months, his existence had been focused on a single purpose, survival, but he wouldn’t have just obediently followed along for some false promise of mercy. He’d never been that naive!

The smell of Voldemort’s taint still drifted ominously on the air. For the first time Draco really understood what his freedom would cost him. Long ago he’d been pared down into something barely human. It wasn’t until Harry was thrown into the Hold that he had remembered what it was to feel warm. Going back again and again to the time before Harry would bring that mindset back. It would turn some of his mental forest back into the blood-thirsty jungle once more…

But he had no choice…

Not if he was going to be free.

Not if he was going to save Harry.

He would do anything for Harry.

…

It was dark in the room. The only light came from a single candle that flickered gently on the currents in the air. The redheaded boy was sound asleep, his bed curtains wide open and his blankets pulled down to the foot of the bed despite the cold. He was curled on his side, knees drawn halfway up to his chest, one arm folded close, the other out flung. He wore thick sleep pants and a thin sweater. One foot was bare, the other wore a thick wool sock. He was deeply asleep, soft breathing barely detectable.
The boy’s body was sweet and pliant as he was stripped of his clothes. Thick fingers reverently traced all the freckles that spread down the boy’s chest and thighs. Greedy hands retreated only to return glistening with oil. The man massaged it into the boy’s pale flesh, making the redhead’s inner thighs glisten. Pushing the limp boy onto his side, the man climbed into bed behind the boy and pressed up against his slender, naked back.

Rock hard, the man’s dick rubbed against the boy’s ass and back, but he knew he couldn’t fuck him. Not the way he wanted to. He’d learned his lesson, learned to leave no evidence behind. He’d have to settle for the boy’s thighs. A warm, damp rag would wash the evidence away later. The boy would never know. As much as he missed the whimpers, the gasps, the way his first boy had squirmed and cried, he knew he couldn’t afford to be caught.

It didn’t matter. The boy’s thighs were soft and warm. They made the perfect passage when he braced his leg on top, forcing the boy’s thighs to squeeze together. Tight and wet, it felt so damn good as he rutted into that forbidden space. The boy’s body rocked limply as the man’s languid thrusts became harder, more violent. The slap of skin on skin was loud in the room. His balls swung heavy, filling as heat coiled tight in his core.

Hoarse grunts escaped the man’s tight throat as his eyes drifted across the room. He locked onto the other boy he’d prepared. The dark-haired child was naked, robe flung wide open, sprawled in the center of the bed with his legs spread as wide as a whore’s. His arms were placed above his head, leaving his torso stretched. The image of those legs incased in thigh-high stockings, his perfect round barely covered by tiny shorts, sent him over the edge in a flash.

He gripped the sleeping boy in his arms hard as came, spurting between the redhead’s thighs and wetting the sheet. Shocks of pleasure sizzled under the skin, but it wasn’t enough. The redhead only took the edge off and let him think more clearly. He was still hard, even with cum dripping from his dick. His true desire lay in the other bed, helpless and asleep, vulnerable. He climbed out of the bed, leaving the redhead sprawled half on his stomach, half on his side, soaked between his legs with oil and cum.

The man padded silently across the room. He stood at the side of the bed and looked down at his true desire. He almost didn’t care what price he had to pay. He wanted the boy with a burning passion. Last night, he’d jacked himself off above the dark-haired boy, spelled his shirt gone and spread him out like the whore he was. He’d never cum so hard in his life, splattering the boy’s perfect skin.

He knew the cost of touching the boy was high. He’d been claimed and collared, after all, and even though he was young, the little blond who owned him was a force to be reckoned with. Of course, that only made the dark-haired boy even more desirable, which seemed impossible since the boy was such a gorgeous little whore all on his own. Wild black hair, full pink lips, and slender with the delicious tendency to wear thigh-highs, heels, and panties… He also had a white dragon lying curled in a sleepy ball, embedded in the skin of the boy’s waist.

The man glared furiously even as his hands clenched. His first boy had been taken from him. A blood-red snake filled with a Dark and deadly magic had been tattooed at the base of his boy’s spine just above the curve of his ass. He’d known immediately he’d never be able to touch the boy again. That same dangerous magic was contained in this dragon, but it was also different. The snake had been a simple construct with the express purpose of killing anyone who touched the boy with lustful hands. The dragon was clearly far more complex, which left room for loophole. Perhaps there was a way to get around it and take what he so desperately needed. It would only be fair! The snake had taken the only joy he had in his life. He deserved this after all he’d suffered!

Sweating, eyes glittering feverishly, he carefully reached out and touched the dark-haired boy’s
slender wrist. He was careful not to touch skin yet. He kept his hand on the velvety material of the boy’s robe, the boy’s arms still inside the sleeves. He watched the dragon like a hawk. Heart pounding, dick throbbing as it stood rigid against his belly, the man slid his fingers down the boy’s arm and over the curve of his shoulder.

He was panting, almost cumming from this alone. He was so close to the boy’s face that he could count every eyelash that rested against the boy’s cheeks. The scent of the boy filled his nose. Lust burning deep in the pit of his stomach and between his legs, he gasped as his fingers ran out of material. Trembling, he let his fingertips drop onto the leather of the collar that ringed the boy’s slender throat. His eyes darted down to the dragon and he froze. It still lay peacefully still, but its dark green eyes were now open.

His heart thundered in his chest with the pounding beat of a war drum. His eyes darted up to the boy’s face, but the child still slept deeply, the man’s spell holding true. Boldly, he ran his finger over the collar’s edge and onto the warm skin of the boy’s throat. His breath caught and he stared down at the dragon, but it didn’t move. It continued to lay curled up, eyes unblinking and open.

Letting out a harsh breath, the man gave a feral grin. Less carefully now, he reached for the boy’s robe-clad arm and pulled until the boy was just on the edge of the bed. The movement made the boy’s legs close, but that was fine. He was after something else tonight. He repositioned the boy’s arms down by his sides this time. The arm nearest the edge fell limply, hanging toward the floor as he pulled the boy’s head even closer to the edge by a firm grip on the boy’s thick hair. The dragon’s head weaved softly side to side as if hunting for something, but it couldn’t find him, couldn’t see him. It was not primed to recognize sexual energy and attack as the red snake had been. It had nothing to go off of with the boy unconscious and unaware. Without the child’s fear or anger to guide it, the dragon was harmless.

He released the child’s hair and gripped the base of his cock. His other hand came up to pull the boy’s jaw down revealing little white teeth and a small pink tongue. He pulled it open wider to see the dark red of the back of the boy’s throat. Moaning at the sight, skin feeling on fire, he slid the tip of his dick into the boy’s mouth. The soft scrape of the child’s teeth sent electricity down his nerves. He carefully pressed forward. Only half of his cock fit inside before hitting the back of the boy’s throat. The man gasped as the boy swallowed reflexively, lips briefly closing around him before falling slack once more. Drool began to pool in the bottom corner of the boy’s mouth.

“Merlin,” the man moaned shamelessly.

He grabbed the boy’s hair again to keep the kid’s head steady as he softly glided along the boy’s tongue, pressing at the inside of his cheek and tapping at his soft palate. The room began to haze. He was sweating buckets. His thighs began to shake. He couldn’t believe he was here, using the boy’s slack mouth. He was so bloody close to exploding all over the little whore’s face…

Why was he holding back? He didn’t have to be careful. The boy bloody deserved it! He helped take away his first boy! He still remembered the feeling of stretching his boy out around his fingers, the tightness and heat, the way the boy got dripping wet with the slick he’d used before he pressed inside. The feeling of that tightness wrapped around his dick had felt like being struck by lightning! He’d only gone halfway into the boy, afraid of hurting him, but it had still been ecstasy! He could still feel the way his boy had gripped him so tightly as he’d bounced his hips gently, gripping the base of his dick to make sure he didn’t go too far in. He’d pressed inside the boy’s helpless body over and over until he’d cum, fireworks exploding behind his eyes…

And that bliss had been stolen from him! He hadn’t been able to fuck anything since, afraid to leave evidence, settling for slack hand jobs and the slicked up thighs from the other boys he’d chosen. But
tonight he’d get his revenge! He’d finally take what he so desperately needed, what he rightfully deserved! And it wasn’t like this little whore would even care! Dressing up like a girl, getting fucked by the blond on the regular! He’d probably love taking him in, probably beg for it if he were awake…

Panting, almost mad with lust as he visualized the boy begging, tears in his eyes, the man snapped his hips forward and this time didn’t stop at the soft resistance at the back of the boy’s mouth. He pushed down the boy’s small throat and it closed around him, wet and constricting, tightening as the boy swallowed. It felt better than anything he’d ever felt since taking his first boy’s ass, and he let out a wild yell, his eyes rolling up in the back of his head. He pulled out, the boy making a small gasping sound before the man snapped his hips forward, pushing down the boy’s throat again.

Something in the man snapped completely. He growled, wild and vicious, as his hands clenched harder in the boy’s hair. He fucked the boy’s throat with abandon, battering the boy’s lips with his hips. The whore’s face turned pink as he was denied oxygen, his eyelids flickering as his hands helplessly twitched. He stopped pulling out of the tight heat constricting around his dick before slamming forward again. Shallow and fast, he thrust again and again, fascinated with the outline of his dick stretching the boy’s throat. He could even feel the bloody collar! Holding that throat even tighter around him just at the tip of his cock!

In only a few minutes, the end was rushing up, roaring over him like a steam train. He looked down to see where he was impaling the boy’s throat and saw the dragon rushing up the skin of the boy’s neck, its jaws open in a silent roar, eyes glittering with the promise of death. With a scream, he stumbled back, falling on his ass. As he fell, he spurt a fountain of cum into the air, splattering the boy’s face, the bed, the floor. Heart tearing through his chest in a mixture of ecstasy and terror, he watched in horror as the dragon’s head lifted off the skin of the boy’s jaw, transforming from ink into real-life white-metal scales and glittering teeth.

The dragon snarled with the sound of a hissing rattlesnake, wings stiff and half raised along its back, covering the boy’s cheek and the top part of the boy’s neck. The man looked into the miniature dragon’s eyes and saw his own death. It looked right into him before sinking down, becoming an inked tattoo once again. Trembling in relief, he felt his cock spurt a few more times on his trembling thighs before slowly softening. He laughed nervously, still catching his breath. Now that the threat of death had disappeared, he stared enraptured at the boy’s wrecked face.

There were a few strands of cum in the whore’s dark hair, across the bridge of his nose, and dripping from his chin. His lips were swollen twice their size and already darkening with bruises, a deep plum red. The boy was still sound asleep, panting softly and offering a weak cough every few minutes. Tears had slipped free of his closed eyes, beading on his lashes and rolling sideways to wet the sheet that was already soaked with drool.

Getting to his feet, feeling like a god, he strutted to the bedside table and grabbed the camera he’d left there. He took a picture of the dark-haired boy’s face, making sure to get nice and close. He also took a picture of the redhead’s glistening thighs. He already had quite a few of the redhead in his stash, but this would be a nice addition.

Satisfied and humming, he cast a spell to wet a rag with warm water. Almost reverently he cleaned the boys, the beds, and the floor. Once he was satisfied that all the evidence was gone, he dressed the redhead and carelessly covered him with his blankets. He didn’t bother putting a shirt back on the dark-haired boy. Like he’d said, the boy was a whore; that morning he hadn’t even questioned waking up naked, so he needed no special attention.

The man almost didn’t bother healing his mouth, either, the boy looking like a gorgeous doll, lips red
with lipstick, but he knew his first boy would become suspicious, so he traced his wand over those succulent lips, casting a basic healing charm. Once that was done, he pulled the blankets back over the boy. The two boys slept on oblivious, all traces of his victory erased.

…

Narcissa opened fevered eyes to a darkened room. She’d been in and out of consciousness for a whole day, but she was beginning to feel a little more coherent. She was in the guest room she favored in the east wing. The idea of going back to the master bedroom that she shared with Lucius made her stomach roll uneasily. “Lottie,” she called, voice hoarse and weak.

The elf appeared as promptly as ever, but it didn’t call her master. “Yes, Lady Narcissa?”

“Warm broth and some water.”

The elf disappeared with a small bow.

While Narcissa waited, she propped herself up on her pillows so that she was sitting more than reclining. Her hair hung in a thick braid over her shoulder and into her lap. She wore a loose cotton nightgown and had the blankets folded over her lap. A gentle fire burned in the fireplace, helping to keep the room at a warm temperature. She was as comfortable as she could make herself.

Her head ached, but it was no longer pounding as if a gnome with a hammer were banging away in there, and her magical core still felt raw and flared every so often, unstable, but the dizzy spells had past and she no longer shook. As for her status in the House of Malfoy, she was still Lucius’s wife. Magically, however, she was no longer recognized by Lucius’s magic or by the manor as his wife. The marital bond between them had been blocked, but it hadn’t been severed completely. Not yet. It would take a full divorce to sever their marriage completely, and divorce was deeply shameful in Pureblood circles, so she was fairly confident Lucius wouldn’t want to go that far.

Part of her understood his actions. He’d had to do it. To protect the manor and their son from Bellatrix, he had to block her access to the wards. She understood why Lucius had to do it, but it was how he had done it that had shocked her. He hadn’t given her any time to recover from his clumsy mental assault and a broken Obliviate barrier. He hadn’t given her a potion to soften the blow of having the Malfoy wards and magic stripped from her. He’d been as brutal as he could be. Then to add insult to injury, he’d marked her as a ward under his care. That made the wards protect her, sure, but it also made them monitor her movements. It would also keep her from leaving without his permission.

On one hand, that told Narcissa that Lucius feared she’d run from him for the way he’d so disgracefully treated her and he did not want her to leave. On the other hand, it showed his utter contempt, that he thought of her as a child to manage. It hurt her terribly. Lucius and she had gone beyond the traditional Pureblood marriage where there was no stepping outside of the roles placed on them by society. They had honestly loved each other, had suffered the same heartbreak at the loss of their son, and had taken care of each other. He’d trusted her judgement in many areas. He’d treated her as an equal.

Lottie returned with the warm broth and glass of water. The little elf summoned a lap tray so that she could remain in bed and Narcissa ate with shaking hands. She hardly finished half of the bowl before she grew too tired to continue. Tears burned her eyes. She had never expected for Lucius to actually treat her with such cruelty. He had every right to be furious and hurt, but Draco was her son, too! She felt just as betrayed! She’d extended Bellatrix a promise of protection out of love, and in return her sister had hurt her more terribly than anyone else ever could. Lucius had to know that she would give anything, sacrifice anything, for Draco!
“Take it away and leave me,” she ordered the patiently waiting elf.

Lottie obeyed with another bow, taking the dishes and disappearing with a pop.

Narcissa weakly removed the pillows from behind her and lay down. She considered her options. First, there was something about Bellatrix’s escape that still bothered her. Why did Bella wait until now to leave? For what had she needed the Solstice? The thought of seeing her husband filled her with fear, but she would not let fear rule her! She would see Lucius and she would get her answers.

Second, she’d have to find her sister. Bellatrix was her mistake. She wouldn’t be able to live with herself if Bella was able to inflict any more hurt on her son. Narcissa would have to find Bellatrix, and she’d have to kill her. She no longer entertained a hope of redemption and healing. The promises between them were void. There was too much damage now to be forgiven. Narcissa stared up at the ceiling and sighed, frustrated and hurt. Her fist hit the bed next to her and she impatiently wiped at her tears with her other hand. Tomorrow, recovered or not, she’d confront Lucius and get permission to leave the estate. She had things to do and a son to protect. She was done playing nice.

Chapter end

A/N: A very intense chapter. Very tragic. I am open to anyone’s thoughts on the contents of this chapter. It is desperately sad how many people have experienced rape and domestic violence.
Harry woke all at once with a gasp of air. Immediately tears sprung to his eyes and he grabbed at his throat. It felt like he’d swallowed fire. Ron snored softly in the other bed. Harry considered shaking his foot to wake him, but he decided against it. He had no idea what time the redhead had come to bed and it was technically vacation, so with a grimace he crawled out of bed and quickly dressed. The sun was just rising, brightening the room with gentle light as he slipped out of the room and quietly shut the door behind him. No one was in the common room, so he made his way to the infirmary alone.

Draco lay alone in the room lined with small white beds. Harry’s boot heels clicked quietly on the floor as he made his way to the blond’s side. Draco’s expression was peaceful. There was no blood dripping from his nose, no sense of distress or need and Harry’s shoulders relaxed. He gently stroked his fingertips over Draco’s forehead and let his magic trickle down through his touch.

Madam Pomfrey arrived at that point and she gave him a stern look. “You’re here rather early, Mr. Potter. I give you my word I will alert you to any change in his condition, so I’d rather you made sure you got enough rest.”

“Yes, Madam,” he replied, ducking his head submissively. His voice sounded wrecked, hardly above a whisper and extremely hoarse.

Madam Pomfrey’s eyes went wide. “Are you ill, Mr. Potter?” She didn’t wait for a response, gesturing him over to the bed next to Draco’s. “Hop up now. Let me get a reading.”

Harry obeyed, sitting still as she took her wand out and waved it over him. She was just finishing when the infirmary doors opened and Dumbledore entered with Andromeda and Ted in tow.

“Harry!” Andromeda rushed to his side. “What has happened? Why didn’t Narcissa contact me?” She looked both worried and furious as she stroked his hair once before crossing the distance to Draco’s bed. She bent over him, resting her hand over his brow. “What is his condition?” she demanded of the nurse.

Ted came to stand beside her. He placed a gentle hand on her shoulder and gave Harry a reassuring smile, his blue eyes as warm as ever.

“He’s in a magically induced coma,” Madam Pomfrey explained, folding her hands in front of her over her white apron. “He and Harry were outside on the Solstice and were caught up in some fae magic.” Disapproval shaded her tone, her eyes cutting to Dumbledore. “At this point, I am only able to monitor Mr. Malfoy’s condition. He will have to awaken on his own.”

Andromeda frowned fiercely at the witch. The nurse was clearly more on the Christian side of the spectrum and did not approve of anything relating to the Wild ways. She looked to Harry for a more accurate accounting. “Harry?”

“Winter came to us,” he croaked painfully.

“His throat is inflamed,” Madam Pomfrey explained. “He drained his magic dangerously low yesterday afternoon and that can weaken the immune system. Let me get him an anti-inflammatory potion and an immune booster. It is likely a precursor to a cold.”
“It’s not Dragon Pox?” Ted asked in concern. He stepped away from Andromeda to place himself protectively at his ward’s side. The magical community had lost too many people to the Pox.

“No, there were no contagions in his blood,” Madam Pomfrey reassured him with a smile. She turned to Dumbledore. “Help me with the potions, Headmaster.”

Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled. “We will be but a moment. Feel free to stay with the boys for as long as you’d like,” he invited before following the nurse from the room.

Madam Pomfrey shut the door to the potions room firmly behind Dumbledore. She glared up at him. “I don’t approve of this at all, Headmaster. They need to know what I witnessed. The Malfoys should also be informed.”

“It was an innocent kiss,” Dumbledore said gently, trying to soothe her.

“There was more to it than that!” Madam Pomfrey’s face was flushed red and she nervously smoothed the hair that was already pulled back into a bun. She took a deep breath. “I understand they are bonded, Albus, but it can’t be allowed to go too far. You know that. To even remotely promote feelings of a sexual nature between them is reprehensible! Something should be done!”

Dumbledore’s cheerful expression took a more stern cast. “Mr. Malfoy was suffering a decline that you were unable to prevent. It is even possible the boy would have died under your care had it been left to continue. Miraculously, Mr. Potter was able to heal him. Is that not correct?”

Madam Pomfrey’s eyes went wide with horror at the thought of an innocent child dying in her ward. “Yes, but…”

“The boys are too young to accuse them of inappropriate behaviors,” he scolded her. “In any case, we have no knowledge of how their guardians would react to such an accusation. Are you willing to bear full responsibility for any action they may take?”

She looked away with a sense of guilt. There had been times in the past where they’d had to report to parents that their teenagers had been caught being promiscuous. The children had not fared well, punished to an excessive degree that made Madam Pomfrey deeply unhappy and had forever altered the child. She understood that their society lived by very strict rules, especially the higher class. Sexual purity in both boys and girls was to be maintained until marriage. Bastard children were completely unacceptable to a people who prized blood-line purity above all else, but she did not agree with the more heavy-handed actions of some of the more traditional Pureblood parents. It was only natural for teenagers to be curious, after all. As bad as promiscuity was seen in the eyes of the traditional Purebloods, it couldn’t even compare to the abhorrence of same-sex dalliances. She shivered to think of what Lord Malfoy would do to the children if he suspected their love for each other was sexual in nature.

“I have heard talk of same-sex pairs becoming more accepted in the Muggle world,” Dumbledore said softly, drawing her attention once more. He was staring at the potions lined neatly in her cabinet. “There are some even in the magical world who believe that it is only natural for a select few to be of that nature. They say magic wills as it wills.”

“So it was believed hundreds of years ago, back when we participated in human and animal sacrifices and kept slaves,” Madam Pomfrey snapped. She opened the cabinet and took two potions from the shelves. She gave him a stern look. “The morals of the Church have ensured magic stays pure and good and not corrupted by Evil. It states clearly that such a union is born from Evil and will beget more Evil.”
Dumbledore lifted an eyebrow as he met her eyes evenly. “I know my catechism, Poppy.”

She flushed. “Yes, of course. I did not meant to imply otherwise. I certainly don’t begin to understand the Muggles and their ideas.” She straightened her shoulders. “I will refrain from informing their guardians of Mr. Potter’s actions, but if another such instance occurs, I will have to say something, Albus. For the children’s sake.”

Dumbledore bowed his head. “I leave that to your good sense, Madam.”

She nodded back distractedly and left the room to return to her patients.

Ted and Andromeda were talking softly with Harry, the boy whispering so as not to hurt his throat too much. Ted was a big man with a rounding gut. His yellow-blond hair fell over his forehead, thick and healthy. His blue eyes were bright with both kindness and intelligence. He looked almost Muggle in the casual sweater and jacket he wore, paired with common slacks and boots. Andromeda on the other hand had dark brown hair that she left to fall untraditionally freely around her shoulders and down her back. She wore a long-sleeved dress with a full skirt that was completely acceptable by wizarding standards.

They were an odd pair, but they clearly cared for both children under their care. Surely they would steer the boys from the evil temptations. She certainly couldn’t count on the Malfoys to do the same; they had clearly come to celebrate the Darkest night of the year with the children instead of teaching them to ward against it by preparing for the celebration of the birth of the Lord of the Light.

Madam Pomfrey gave the two parents a warm smile before she gave both potions to Mr. Potter. He swallowed them obediently without complaint even though they most assuredly tasted foul and then continued his story. Pomfrey listened again to the end of Harry’s tale of dancing with a Winter fairy and being told that Draco was undergoing a trial.

“We should pray for his soul,” Madam Pomfrey said gently, casting a worried glance at the boy in the bed. “It is in the nature of Light to forever cut through Darkness and make it flee. Our prayers should do the same.”

Andromeda’s expression bore a shadow of a frown as she looked over at the nurse, and Dumbledore stepped in before words could be said.

“As Lady Malfoy was on the scene during the emergency, she legally had the right to make decisions regarding Draco and Harry’s care. She decided that the boys will stay here as it is quiet and secure until winter break is over,” Dumbledore informed them, eyes twinkling once again. “Is that acceptable to you?”

“Narcissa thinks taking him away from the ritual site might hurt Draco,” Harry added solemnly. His voice already sounded better, only a little raspy.

“Very well,” Andromeda very reluctantly agreed. “I would not want to worsen his condition by taking him away.” She slanted a pointed look at the nurse. “And I trust Harry’s accounting. If Winter promised to return Draco, then I will put my faith in that.”

Pomfrey’s eyes widened, surprised by the remark.

“I do not want any more occurrences, Headmaster,” Andromeda added, hazel eyes flashing as she met the old wizard’s twinkling blue eyes over Harry’s head.

“I’ll take care of Draco,” Harry promised earnestly, looking up at her.
Andromeda melted and wrapped him in a brief hug. “I know you will, sweetie. I’m glad you are alright. I was really worried when I received Dumbledore’s notification.” She smoothed his hair down, trying to tame it, and smiled into his eyes. “Why do such things always happen to you two?”

“Please be more prompt and thorough with your letters home,” Ted added, scolding the boy lightly. “You promised to keep us updated with your situation here.”

“Sorry, Ted.” Harry reached out and Ted easily took his hand in his larger one.

“I understand you’ve been preoccupied, son,” Ted reassured him, giving the small hand in his own a gentle squeeze. “Please do make the effort, though.”

“I will,” Harry promised.

As Dumbledore invited them to have breakfast with Harry in the Great Hall, Harry’s attention had returned to Draco. He reached under the blond’s collar and pulled out the necklace with the charmed coin. Very gently, he lifted it over Draco’s head and put it around his own neck. He was ashamed it had taken him so long to think of it, but Draco had a mission and Harry was determined to see it through in Draco’s stead. The adults didn’t understand the significance of the necklace, so no comments or questions were asked. With a sweet smile, Harry took Ted’s hand again and led the way to the Great Hall.

…

The Tonkses left shortly after breakfast. The Weasley brothers had arrived just as they were preparing to leave and Andromeda visibly relaxed, knowing that Harry was not alone or friendless in the castle. She kissed Harry’s cheek and left feeling more at ease. Harry waited for the Weasleys to finish eating and decide what they were doing for the day. Percy had some correspondence to take care of and the twins were already whispering together, so Ron suggested they visit Hagrid.

Together they went back up to the Tower to grab their warmest robes. The sun was bright in the sky, but there was at least a foot of snow on the ground, put there by the winter storm on the Solstice. They smiled as their feet crunched through the perfect white fluff as they made the trek down to the Grounds Keeper’s cabin. They weren’t even halfway to Hagrid’s when they spotted the half-giant heading toward the forest. He had a lantern in his hand and wore an enormous satchel across his chest that was filled with something lumpy. Fang trotted at his heels.

Ron called out, waving his arm.

Hagrid stopped and turned, and they saw that he wore a dark expression.

“What’s wrong? What’s happened?” Ron asked, worried.

“Nothin’ to concern yerselves with,” Hagrid answered, unusually brusk. “Now’s not a good day to visit. Go on back to the castle now. Off w’ya.”

“Hagrid.” Harry met the man’s dark eyes boldly. “We can help you.”

Hagrid sighed, his hard expression melting into one of sorrow. Tears glittered in his eyes. “I suppose’n you could at tha’. Alright. Stay with me now.”

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Ron was suddenly reluctant. He refused to let anything happen to the smaller boy. He’d failed spectacularly already this year, but Draco was absolutely correct. It wasn’t going to happen again. He gave Harry a worried glance, but Harry’s shoulders were set, his eyes full of determination. Sighing, Ron got his wand out and held it down by his thigh. He trailed after the two, alert to
anything that could be dangerous and recited in his mind the most effective defensive spells he knew.

Oblivious to Ron’s concern, Hagrid led them deep into the forest. It was mid-morning, going on noon, but it was dark and shadowed under the forest’s canopy. Hagrid’s lantern cast light over the ground in front of them, allowing them to walk safely. Instead of bounding off and investigating, Fang stayed close to them, ears perked and head lowered.

It took them almost an hour before they came upon it. Ron gasped softly, his hand tightening around his wand. Harry stood frozen, horror filling his eyes with guilty tears that rolled down his pale cheeks. Hagrid knelt down slowly, head bowed, while Fang gave a low mournful howl.

The corpse was mangled. Chunks of white flesh and dark muscles had been torn from its neck, side, and abdomen. Silver blood had soaked into the ground, and the snow melted as soon as it touched it. The blood left a wide circle of uncovered decaying soil, killing the plants in the vicinity. Horrifically, the unicorn’s hair still shimmered in the light of the dappled sunlight. Still breathtakingly beautiful, the golden horn still had a soft sparkle, but the unicorn’s eyes were wide open and dark, devoid of life. A stillness hung over the body, chilling the boys to the core.

“It’s the third one,” Hagrid said, voice low and rough. “Don’t know wha’ could be doin’ it. Not many things will attack a unicorn. An’ I don’ know of anythin’ with a mouth that small. Was a vicious thing though, almost bit her to th’ bone.”

Harry felt sick, the phantom memory of blood and flesh in his mouth, the screams of a horse, competed with the ghostly remembrance of Draco biting him all over this body, claiming and punishing. The duel sensations made Harry break out into a sweat and he wrapped his arms tightly around his chest.

Hagrid reached into his satchel and brought out fistfuls of dried sage. Tearfully, he explained, “To try an’ purify this place.”

After a moment, Ron moved to help, covering the body and the ground with Hagrid’s dried herbs. The smell of something like mint but with a more earthy aroma began to slowly surround them. It was clean and pure, and some of the darkness of this place lost its hold.

Harry forced his arms to uncross and took his wand from his pocket. His voice lifted, soft with sorrow as he began to cast, “Mai fod y ddaear dda yn feddal o danoch chi…” His voice rang reverent and clear. “May the good earth be soft under you when you rest upon it…”

Ron looked up at Harry from his knees, sage in his hands. The spell and prayer reached deep inside his heart and tears spilled freely down his cheeks.

Ótan stirízetai se aftó boreí na eínai éfkolo na sas xekourásei… May it rest easy over you…”

Hagrid wept huge tears. His hands scattered the sage until the unicorn was completely covered.

Harry’s wand dipped and swayed, graceful and light. He poured his heart into the funeral prayer. “Ar an gcéad uair a leagann tú faoi… At the last you lay out under it…”

Ron had never been to a funeral, at least not when he was old enough to remember, thank Merlin, but something in him yearned to join Harry. He lifted his wand, pointing just above the sage-covered body. He felt his core respond, felt magic leave him on a sigh.

“E pode descansar tan suavemente sobre ti que a tua alma pode quedar fora de debaixo dela rapidamente…” Harry’s wand tip spiraled, gentle circles stirring the air around them. A cold, cleansing wind gently tugged at their robes and hair, and yet, the sage stayed as if glued to the
ground and body where it had been placed. “And may it rest so lightly over you that your soul may be out from under it quickly…”

Ron and Hagrid felt the forest respond, felt their magic join Harry’s. Green sprouts began to push through the tainted dirt where innocent blood had spilled. They grew with slow grace. Bright green leaves and dark green, they created a bed for the unicorn to lay on.

“Agus suas agus as… And up and off…” Harry finished in a whisper, casting his wand forward and up as if to point the spirit of the unicorn to the sky.

Ron’s breath caught while Hagrid made a soft sound of awe. Purple bell-like flowers with white and yellow at their heart began to bloom with the soft opening of sleepy eyes among the green leaves around the base of the unicorn’s body. Thick stalks grew tall and thick at least three feet into the air. Little flowers with white skirts bloomed in a thick bunch along the top of each, blocking the body from view behind their sheltering screen.

Ron wrapped his arms around his friend as Harry’s wand dropped limply to his side. Harry leaned heavily into his side, clearly exhausted, but the feeling of evil had dispersed. The body of the murdered unicorn was gone and in its place was a garden of surpassing beauty that miraculously existed in spite of the snow and cold of winter.

“Morning glories and acanthus,” Hagrid murmured. He gave Harry a beautiful smile. “Thank ya, Harry. That was beautiful.”

Harry couldn’t bring himself to smile, but he nodded his head. “It was only possible because you brought the sage, Hagrid.” He looked up at his friend. His throat felt tight with grief and regret. “Thank you for coming to put her to rest.” He gestured at the flowers. “They wouldn’t have bloomed if she was still hurting. She can stop crying now.”

Hagrid put his large heavy hands gently on the two boys’ shoulders. They stood there for a few minutes more before Hagrid cleared his throat and lifted his lamp. His satchel now hung empty at his hip. “We best be off. It’s too cold to be standin’ around.”

Ron and Harry walked silently in Hagrid’s wake, following him out of the forest and back into the sunshine. Ron knew he would never speak of this with his brothers. Not because he wanted to keep it secret, but because there were no words to describe how equally horrific and beautiful the experience had been. Looking over at his friend, Ron took Harry’s hand in his own. He had always known Harry was special, but it wasn’t because of a scar on his forehead or a Dark Wizard. Harry was special because he was magic in the way of Solstice festivals and dark woods, and Ron felt a more powerful urge to protect him than ever before.

They stayed with Hagrid for the rest of the afternoon. It was spent pleasurably as they listened to the giant man coo at his egg that was still bundled up next to the roaring fire. Hagrid told them, excitement and love in his eyes, that he’d seen it move and rock a few times.

“Might not be long now,” he boomed joyfully, running a fingertip over the hot shell. “Dependin’ on the breed, it could be born in as soon as a week. The Northern breeds take longer, the harsh winters would kill a hatchlin’ right quick, but the Southern breeds have been known to hatch sooner. Gives ‘em more time to get strong enough to hunt fer food on their own durin’ summer and autumn. They got to be big an’ strong ‘nough to survive their first winter, ya know. Dragon mama’s aren’t much for coddlin’ their young. Believe in tough love, they do.”

Ron and Harry shared a smile and took turns making guesses about what the baby would look like and how soon it would take for it to catch Hagrid’s beard on fire. Of course, it wasn’t even certain it
was a fire-breather, but the thought made them all laugh.

“Did you have fun with Hagrid?” Percy asked as they all met up for dinner.

Ron and Harry shared a look, answering in unison, “Yes.”

Fred and George gave them a suspicious look, but neither of the boys would elaborate. Fortunately, Hedwig chose that moment to fly in and land in front of Harry. She had a letter tied to her leg. Harry cooed at her and made a big fuss. He stroked her feathers and fed her some meat, apologizing for not visiting her more often and thanking her for her hard work. Hedwig preened under his attention, feathers ruffled in pleasure, eyes heavy-lidded, making Percy chuckle.

“Who’s it from?” Ron asked, mouth full of mashed potatoes.

Harry was tempted to tell him that it wasn’t polite to speak with your mouth full, Narcissa and Andromeda’s voices echoing in his head, but he let it go. Ron seemed immune to all attempts to teach him manners, so Harry said nothing and looked at the handwriting on the envelope. “Remus,” he recognized happily, but then he remembered the last letter Draco had sent their oldest friend.

It had been two weeks ago and had been about the Stone. Harry shoved the letter into his pocket unopened. Percy and the twins didn’t know about the Stone or their mission to stop it from being stolen. He smiled and finished dinner as if the letter wasn’t burning a hole in his pocket, but he stood when desert appeared on the table. “I’m going to check on Draco and call it a night early,” he told them. Truth be told, he was pretty tired from the ritual in the forest.

Ron looked mournfully at the cakes and pies, but he stood to go with his friend. “I’ll go with you.”

Percy and the twins thought nothing of it and let the two boys go off on their own. Draco was still sleeping with they got to the Infirmary. Harry again brushed his fingertips over Draco’s forehead and bathed him with his magic. Ron guided him away before Pomfrey could scold them.

“So what’s the letter about?” he asked as they changed into their sleep clothes and got ready for bed.

Harry gave Ron a smile, amused that his friend hadn’t been fooled by his casual act. “Let’s find out.” He sat on the edge of his bed, Ron sitting next to him, and opened the letter.

Dear Draco,

I deeply regret not writing to you sooner. I have been buried in a few research projects as of late. One of which was why I left my sickbed while I was indisposed after Samhain. I do not have clear memories of the night, but I was greatly distressed that I wandered around during my fever. I did some research into the topic, even contacted a few friends overseas. They had some interesting theories regarding my sleepwalking.

Now, regarding the information you requested, I found out what you wanted to know. It’s too complicated to review in a letter, but since it’s Yule break why don’t you ask the Headmaster if you could stop by my cottage for tea. We can catch up and you can tell me about school.

Looking forward to your visit,

Remus

Harry looked over at Ron with a grin. “He knows how to destroy the Stone.”

Ron’s face lit up with excitement. “That’s great! Wanna go tomorrow?”
Harry nodded, folding the letter up. He went to the desk and tucked the letter inside to share with Draco later before turning back to Ron. The idea of sleeping alone made him feel unsettled somehow, Draco’s absence a void, so he asked, “Want to sleep with me?”

Ron shrugged. “Sure.” He grew up in a house with seven siblings. Sharing a bed was not unusual or uncommon. He was about to get under the covers with his friend when a squeak sounded through the door. Ron got up to open it. A fat, greying rat looked up at him, whiskers twitching. “Scabbers!” Ron smiled as he picked up his pet. “Where’ve you been all day? You’re usually back by now.”

The rat chittered and squeaked in answer, rubbing his soft cheek against Ron’s fingers, making the redhead smile. Petting him gently, Ron carried Scabbers to the box filled with rags that he’d made into a soft bed. He set the rat gently inside and retrieved a few pieces of cheese that he kept in a bag just for his pet. “There you go.” He stroked the rat’s back one last time before he hurried over the cold stone floor and jumped back into bed with Harry.

Harry giggled as he bounced with the force of Ron’s landing, and Ron shoved him playfully on the shoulder. “Go to sleep, Harry. I know you’re tired.”

Harry nodded, a yawn stretching his face briefly. “Night, Ron.” He turned on his side so that he was facing his friend and closed his eyes.

“Night, Harry,” Ron answered, turning off the lamp that sat on the bedside table.

...
on, he began to yank with brutal force, cinching the child’s waist as small as it could go, and it was fucking tiny! The boy’s breathing became soft little, breathless gasps that had the man leaking. Eyes wide, pupils huge, he rolled the boy over onto his back and pulled so that the edge of the bed caught the boy under his knees. With trembling fingers, he pressed those silk clad knees open as far as the bed allowed them, stocking toes just barely brushing the ground. The whore was a bloody masterpiece!

Two spots of color had appeared on the boy’s cheeks. His pink lips had parted to get in more air, his breathing shallow and light, faster than normal, mimicking arousal. The corset sat just under the kid’s chest and bound the ribs. Two pink nipples sat above the material and the man flicked them hard, making them pebble. He pulled on those small nubs, tugging restlessly, as his eyes remained fixated with that tiny waist. The corset made the kid’s hips look wider, like a girl’s. Breathless, he left off twisting the whore’s hips and wrapped his hands around that tiny waist. He moaned, low and hungry, his thumbs only an inch and a half away from touching. The tight lace panties that held the kid’s small junk so tightly only enhanced the illusion that he was looking at a little girl, not a boy.

“Merlin,” he groaned, grateful tears in his eyes.

He wasn’t a pervert. He didn’t prefer boys and definitely would never fuck a man, but he was desperate, forced to sate his needs on the boys he had access to. Really there wasn’t much difference between a girl and a boy if the kid was young enough anyway, he’d told himself, and eventually it had stopped mattering as he chased after that moment of perfect pleasure again and again. But now… seeing the image of a dark-haired boy… no, girl… laid out on the bed… he felt a red curtain of lust fall over him like never before.

His heart boomed in his ears, his pulse pounding in his throat. He fell on the girl’s swollen nipples, ravenous, and sucked as if his life depended on it. Sucked until his spit slicked the girl’s chest, soaked into the top of the corset, and slid down her sides to dampen the bed beneath her. He sucked until the girl’s nipples were round and fat, her breasts swollen into the soft mounds of a girl on the cusp of becoming a teen. He scrambled to get his camera and took several pictures, thrilling in the red and blue bruises that were beginning to form along the girl’s small chest. Tears of awe streaking his face, the man carelessly dropped the camera onto the bed and brushed his hand over his cock. It was so rigid and slick with pre-cum that it almost hurt to touch.

“I’m gonna fuck you good, sweetie,” he promised his sweet girl, delirious with lust.

Roughly, he pulled the redheaded boy so that he was lying with his head falling over the edge of the mattress, his slack mouth open, his face upside down. More carefully his scooped his little girl up into his arms bridal style, her head resting limply against the crook of his neck and shoulder. He laid her down on top of the other boy, face up. He wasn’t done with those sweet, tiny breasts.

As she settled on the boy underneath her, her head tipped back, falling between the redhead’s legs, her long throat extended and vulnerable and obscuring her face slightly. The man imagined her tossing her head back in passion, offering more of herself to be devoured. She was still making those quick gasping noises, hardly able to breathe around the constriction of the corset. The man gripped the small mounds of her breasts and squeezed.

“That’s it, sweetheart. Gonna make you feel so good,” he rasped.

One hand still groping her chest, he used the other to hold his cock down and away from his body, aimed between the girl’s tender thighs. “That’s it, take me in good, that’s my good little whore,” he rasped, hoarse and hardly able to talk around the thunder roaring in his blood. He slid past the redhead’s gaping lips. At this angle, only the first few inches were able to penetrate the boy’s throat, but the slick, constricting heat around his inflamed head was ecstasy. Grabbing the girl’s tiny waist
tight, he slid her down as far as she could go so that it looked like his fat cock was disappearing into her tiny body. Then he slid his arms under her knees so her legs draped over his arms.

At first, he rocked softly backward and forward, eyes riveted on the girl’s lace panties and staring at his hands gripping her round hips. The man's body felt electric. He needed more, needed to be deeper in her perfect heat. Before he knew it, he was slamming forward at a brutal speed, yelling mindlessly. The girl’s head rocked up and down limply, yanked down over the redhead’s crotch and then shoved up to fall down between the boy’s legs over and over. The man watched the motion through a fevered haze until it looked like she was moving with him, mouth slack and gasping in pleasure, cheeks red with arousal, fucking him as hard as he was fucking her, and holy shit he was cumming!

He slammed his hips forward, his body spasming, his vision black as his whole existence became electric static. It felt like it went on forever, pleasure spiking into agony before he blinked blurry eyes and found himself collapsed over the limp bodies of two boys. Small teeth were pressing painfully into the base of his softening cock and he pulled his hips back with a hiss before rolling over. Shivers wracked his frame. His heart still beat an exhilarated beat against his ribs. Euphoria gave the candle-lit room a soft haze. He sat up, panting and soaked with sweat. He felt invincible, incredible! Colors seemed brighter, the world more full of magic.

Time seemed to stop. In a moment of perfect clarity, horror washed over him. He found himself on his knees, the brunet tossed carelessly aside. He hovered over the redheaded boy he’d laid out on the floor with desperate speed. The boy’s face was swollen and blotchy, eyes open and bugged out. His jaw was dislocated, hanging unhinged like a snake’s. He wasn’t breathing. There was no life in his eyes. His heavy body lay terrifyingly still.

The man could hear nothing but ringing in his ears as he realized he’d hurt a child, murdered a child. He understood with powerful self-loathing that the acts he’d been performing on these children were heinous. Hysterical, he swore in an endless mental loop that he’d stop, that he’d repent, as he cast the Revival Spell over and over. If Ronald would just breathe, the man would fix it, he’d fix everything!

The boy suddenly gasped, his heart giving a sudden kick before settling into a steady rhythm. The man hugged the child to his chest, sobbing. He smoothed Ronald’s hair and whispered that it would be okay over and over. The boy’s face still hung unattached and drool slicked his chin. Pain filled the boy’s eyes and he cried like a child much younger, frightened and confused. The man couldn’t risk putting him to sleep, not when he’d been technically dead for who knew how many minutes.

“Shhh, it’s okay. I’m going to fix it,” he promised desperately. With clumsy hands, he shifted the boy’s jaw, trying to put it back into place.

Ron arched with a high-pitched shriek of pain, his arms lashing weakly in panic.

“Hush!” the man ordered just as he felt the soft snap as the joint locked together.

Scrambling to his hidden stash, the man watched as Ron curled into a ball whimpering and sobbing, hands clutching his face. He quickly grabbed a healing potion and returned to the boy’s side. Ron fought him, scratching and arching his body away, but he forced the potion down the kid’s throat. Almost immediately, Ron’s strength left him and he went limp, eyes heavy-lidded as he continued to cry softly. The man cradled the boy close, heart still pounding with adrenaline and terror.

“It’s okay. You’re okay. You’re safe now,” he whispered.

They rocked together until the boy fell into an exhausted natural sleep. The man held him a moment
longer before gently laying him on the floor. His legs had gone numb from sitting so long and he grimaced as he got to a knee before pushing clumsily up into a standing position. His eyes immediately fell on the dark-haired child.

Harry lay on his side, one arm trapped underneath him, the other limp over his corseted waist and resting on the bed. His legs hung over the edge, awkwardly twisted. The soft, helpless gasps for air no longer seemed sexy but desperate and terrifying. The man practically threw himself at the child and tore at the laces to get the corset off. When Harry took his first full breath of air, the man burst into sobs. Tenderly, he stripped the child of the underwear and stockings and washed Harry’s skin clean. He apologized again and again as applied a healing cream to the boy’s brutalized chest.

Once Harry’s bruises were seen to, he dressed the boy in one of his night shirts and a sleep robe before tucking him safely under the covers of his bed. He gave Ron the same treatment, the boy moaning in his sleep, fitful and still afraid. The man soothed him as best he could. “I’m so sorry,” he said again and again, tears in his eyes as he brushed short red hair off a pale, freckled face. Chastely kissing the boy’s forehead, he lifted his wand and cast, “Obliviate.”

Chapter end.
Family

Narcissa stood in her favorite garden. It faced west, so even though the sun was beginning to rise, she and it were still cast in twilight shadows. She’d forgone a winter robe and stood in a heavy maroon, long-sleeved dress. The air froze the exposed skin of her face and hands and slush covered the flowers around her, but it would melt under the sun once it rose high enough to do so. She shivered, arms wrapped tight around her, her hair a long, braid down her back, but the cold was clearing her mind. She’d confronted Lucius yesterday as she’d planned. She’d learned things she hadn’t expected, and she was so damn angry.

Narcissa folded her hands at the small of her back to hide their shaking and strode into Lucius’s office with her head held high. It was a few hours after noon. It had taken her that long to bathe, dress, eat, and bolster herself for this confrontation. She looked impeccable. She wore an expensive maroon dress with exquisite black embroidery around the bottom of the skirt and on the sleeves. A fat ruby hung around her neck and small rubies graced her ears. She’d left her long, thick hair braided down her back, not having the strength to pin it up in her usual coils. Small touches of make-up emphasized her eyes and lips. She was ready.

She hadn’t expected his office door to be open or for her husband to be at his desk with his head in his hands and a half empty glass of firewhisky, a commoner’s drink, next to his elbow. The bottle lay empty on the floor. The room smelled of sour sweat and strong alcohol and she felt a powerful stab of guilt that she’d caused him so much grief.

“Lucius,” she called, voice firm yet soft, knowing his head must pound.

Blood-shot grey eyes lifted to see her. His hair was tangled and wild around his face and shoulders. He was unshaven. There was an air of utter defeat about him. She crossed the distance between them in quick strides, but she hesitated to reach out to him as she normally would have done. Her core was still raw and throbbing from being stripped of her rightful connection to the Malfoy home and wards. The pain she’d felt at his hands was not easy to forget.

“Lucius, I will find her,” she promised, soft and reassuring. “She will not live to hurt our son again.”

He laughed. It wasn’t a sound of joy. It was mean. At first Narcissa tensed, a blush of shame on her cheeks, thinking he laughed at her, but then she realized he was laughing at himself. Lucius put his hand on an old, leather-bound book and shoved it across the desk. He used too much force and it fell at her feet.

“I would keep it secret and deal with it myself, but I made an Unbreakable Vow. It will demand that I inform Draco as soon as he wakes or I can choose to die, so there’s no point keeping it from you.” He grabbed his glass and downed the last of the whisky. “I will make sure what was inside is utterly destroyed, but I will lose my son’s trust forever because I let it escape, however temporarily.”

Narcissa picked up the book. It was a diary, a nice one but old. There were no words written inside. Confused, she turned it over and read the gold-emblazoned name: Tom Marvolo Riddle. Time seemed to slow. She felt outside of her body somehow. Her voice, when she spoke, held no inflection. “What did you do?”
“I discovered the secret to Harry’s black core,” Lucius answered, an ugly smile stretching his features. “I had no idea what that book was when the Dark Lord gave it to me to safeguard. All I knew was that it was worth my life should I fail in my duty to protect it, but Lovegood’s research made it all so clear.”

“Lucius…” Narcissa’s eyes narrowed. “Tell me.”

“The ancient and Dark Art of the Horcrux,” he told her, eyes fevered. “The Great and Terrible Dark Lord created a Horcrux when he was merely sixteen years of age and stored it in this diary. On purpose or not, he did the same with Harry on Samhain ten years ago. Harry’s mysterious Dark core is none other than a piece of the Dark Lord’s very soul.”

Narcissa saw red. “You’ve had this diary all these years. You knew what it was since September. You’ve been talking with it.” Her hand clenched around the leather binding making it creak. “You’ve been talking with the soul of the man destined to try to destroy our son and his bonded. Because you thought you were clever. Because you wanted an advantage.” Furious blue eyes, bright and clear as crystals flashed up. “Foolish Lucius. Always making the same mistakes over and over in your bid for power.”

Lucius laughed again, drunk and miserable.

“Crucio,” she rasped almost before she knew she was going to, before she even realized her wand was in her hand and pointed at her husband.

He’d torn her to shreds. He’d humiliated her. He’d left her broken and sick. Well, now it was her turn. Her magic fluctuated wildly. She wasn’t well enough to cast such a powerful spell, but it was Winter, it was the Dark of the year, and she needed revenge more than she needed air.

Lucius screamed in perfect agony as every nerve in his body was lashed with a Dark and terrible purpose. It was the burn of fire over every inch of skin, it was stomach acid melting your insides, the breaking of bones as they snapped again and again. Lucius had fallen out of his chair. His body seizing as he screamed and screamed. She could only hold it for fifteen seconds, but those fifteen seconds felt like a lifetime.

She was on her knees, panting. She could just see Lucius’s head and shoulders from where he’d fallen on the floor behind his desk. His hair covered his face, but she could hear the broken whimpers that escaped his raw throat. She could smell urine. He’d pissed himself. Books flew from the shelves. Items on the desk were flung at the wall. Her magic flared wildly, painfully, around her. Nausea made her stomach turn over uneasily as the room took on a swaying quality, but she didn’t regret casting that spell. Clumsily, she pushed to her feet. She made sure to pocket both the now-empty diary and her wand. She left her husband to recover on the floor, a broken thing.

She blacked out in the hallway at some point. When she came to, she got back on her feet and staggered to her room. She had potions there and took a few to help stabilize her core. Then she’d found her way out to her garden to sit in the dark and the cold.

…

Narcissa took out the book, the sun streaking the sky with gold and pink. It was empty, only the name marking it as extraordinary. She knew now why Bella had waited until the Solstice to escape. Her sister was hopelessly obsessed and in love with the Dark Lord. Bella must have been over the moon to feel a piece of his soul so close. Bella now knew that Draco was bonded to Harry. That meant the Dark Lord knew.
It didn’t matter in the end. Draco wouldn’t want it any other way. He had barely agreed to keep his claim to Harry a secret and had only complied because society would never except such a claim while they were so young, but that same restraint did not apply to enemies. Draco wanted anyone coming for Harry to know they would deal with him first. She regretted how much information Bella, and through her the Dark Lord, had on her sons, but that wasn’t her main concern.

Her mind raced, cold and precise, as her hands mindlessly turned the diary over again and again. The Dark Lord’s soul was still out there, otherwise the diary would have been influencing them long before now to resurrect it. Also, Harry would be more affected by the soul he bore if the Dark Lord were truly dead. It would have sought to possess him.

That meant there was a soul still out there, conscious and actively working at resurrection, which allowed the diary and Harry’s Black core to remain dormant. Lucius had fucked with the diary, though, instead of destroying it, and now Bella had the soul that was inside. There was even a chance that with all this interference that soul had taken advantage of the attention and was also attempting rebirth. That meant there were possibly two Voldemorts in their future. Lucius had precipitated the very thing he feared. The Dark Lord was coming back, sooner rather than later, and her children were not yet twelve years old. They weren’t ready.

Narcissa’s hands clenched around the leather book. She knew what she had to do. She had to find Bella and somehow delay the resurrection. Delay it and somehow discover or create any weaknesses that she could. She would not allow her sons to be destroyed. If she had to fight Dark Lords and mad sisters, she would. She turned to look back at the manor, a cold smile brushing her lips. And Lucius was going to help her do it.

Ron knew he was dreaming. It was a nightmare; it had to be! He was drowning. The giant squid had him around the throat. It was choking him. He was trying to fight it off, but it wouldn’t let him go. The tentacles were everywhere, wrapped all around him. He was scared, so scared, but no matter what he did he couldn’t breathe. And with sick realization he knew he couldn’t get free because he was already dead. Dead and never coming back from the cold, dark waters of the lake…

With a choked scream, Ron sat bolt upright in bed. He was panting so hard that his head spun. Someone was holding him, saying something, and he scrambled over the edge of the bed until he fell hard on the cold floor. “Get off me!” he shrieked, terrified. His throat hurt. Had he been screaming? Harry sat back on his heels, eyes wide as he watched Ron have a panic attack on the floor. He took a deep breath and moved to the edge of the bed, speaking softly the way he would for Draco.

“It’s okay, Ron. You’re safe. It’s not real. It was just a dream. You’re at Hogwarts. You’re alright. No one’s here who will hurt you.”

Ron curled up into a tight ball. The fear wouldn’t let go. The image of the unicorn hit him with the force of a truck. He hadn’t understood. Not really. It’d been sad and horrible, but he hadn’t understood.

“Ron…” Harry stared worriedly down at his friend. “Let me help you. Please.”

Ron shook his head hard, but he was beginning to wake up. His sobs were slowing. Eyes bloodshot and red-rimmed, he pushed up off the cold floor so that he was sitting. His arms shook and his face hurt. He must have hit it when he fell. He wiped his robe sleeve across his nose and eyes, sniffing.

“It’s okay. That’s it. You’re safe now.” Harry climbed down to sit next to him and this time when he
put his arms around Ron’s shaking shoulders his friend didn’t shove him away. Harry closed his eyes and leaned his forehead against Ron’s neck, searching for the warmth that lived down deep inside him.

Ron felt it, something warm sinking into his skin. The ache in his face and throat began to fade, his muscles unlocked, even his shivering calmed. “Harry,” he rasped tearfully. “Sorry.” He sniffed again and wrapped his arms around Harry, returning his hug. “Never had a dream like that before.” He shivered and laughed nervously, but the truth was he was still scared.

“It’s okay,” Harry said again and pulled away. His hair was messier than ever, his green eyes brighter when he wasn’t wearing his glasses. “Let’s get some breakfast. That always makes you feel better.”

Ron gave a wan smile. He still looked too pale and shaken up, but he was trying. “Yeah.”

They dressed warmly, preparing for their trip to see Remus. They didn’t speak much. Percy was in the common room reading. He gave them a warm smile and joined them on their walk to the Great Hall. Percy noticed his brother’s subdued behavior and pale complexion, but when he asked if Ron was alright, his brother wouldn’t really answer, just saying he didn’t sleep well. Ron hardly touched his breakfast, but he grew angry when Percy suggested that he should see the nurse.

“I’m not sick, okay!” Ron snapped. “Just leave me alone!”

“Good morning, boys,” Headmaster Dumbledore greeted them cheerfully as he did every morning. “Tomorrow is Christmas. Are you looking forward to it?”

Ron perked up a bit as he remembered the holiday. “Yes, sir.” He looked to Percy. “Wonder what we’re getting this year.”

Percy answered seriously, “A sweater.”

Ron felt a reluctant smile turn his lips up. “Besides that!”

“Headmaster, I was wondering if I could go into Hogsmeade today,” Harry spoke up, looking at Dumbledore with innocent eyes. “I’d like to go shopping for a few small things for my family and friends and maybe see Remus to wish him Happy Christmas.”

Dumbledore stroked his long white beard thoughtfully, his blue eyes twinkling. “That sounds delightful, Harry, but I’m not sure it’s safe. I promised your guardians I wouldn’t let anything more happen to you.”

“I’ll accompany them, sir,” Percy offered, back straight and chin up.

Dumbledore gave the teenager a smile. “Well, in that case, I don’t see why not. Make sure you are back well before dinner.”

“Yes, sir!” Harry promised earnestly.

On the walk to the village, Ron tugged Harry closer and asked him a question that had been bugging him. He made sure to keep his voice low so that Percy couldn’t over hear. “How’d you know that spell? In the forest. You know, for the unicorn?”

Harry pushed his glasses higher up his nose. It was cloudy today, the temperature cold. His breath fogged in front of his face and he tucked his red and gold scarf closer around his neck. “I’m Pagan. Narcissa has taught me all the major rituals.”
Ron thought he should be surprised, but he really wasn’t. “So you don’t believe in God or Jesus?”

Harry didn’t really know much about the Church. He knew the basics, but he’d never been to a service. He didn’t think the Scourer’s exorcism counted. “I don’t know. Are they really that different?” he asked curiously. “I thought the Church said God’s in all things. That’s what I believe, too.”

Ron was curious now. “Do you believe in Heaven and Hell?” Ron did. He knew if you were evil and worked Dark magic your soul went to Hell. It was only right.

Harry shrugged. “If there is Hell, I would belong there, I think,” he said sadly. He could hear it again, the latin chants, the Scourers calling him evil.

Ron stopped dead in his tracks. He grabbed Harry’s arm and made him stop with him. “What?” He stared at his friend in horror. “Why would you say that?”

Harry nervously tucked his chin down so that the bottom half of his face was covered by his scarf. He didn’t dare meet Ron’s eyes. “I was filthy before, disgusting. Still am really,” he said honestly. “But Draco saved me. I’m Draco’s now, so… So I guess I’d go to Heaven.” He flushed red, embarrassed to even suggest that he deserved something good, but he really couldn’t imagine Draco anywhere else and he belonged to Draco. Uncomfortable, he turned away from Ron and his questions to hurry after Percy.

Ron stared dumbly as he watched his friend chase after his older brother. It felt like like Ron’s whole world had shifted and he was seeing Harry for the first time. Harry was amazing! He was kind and thoughtful and giving. He worked so damn hard all the time. No way in a million years even one toe of Harry’s deserved to go to Hell, but for the first time Ron really understood that Harry didn’t think so. Harry thought he was something bad and only Draco could make him think anything different.

Ron still didn’t know what had happened to make the bond between his friends so strong, but for the first time he really understood how important Draco was to Harry. Draco was almost most of the time, but he was bossy as hell and kind of stuck up. He made all the decisions when they were together, which could be really annoying sometimes. Ron had accepted that, they were friends after all, but he never really liked liked him. This, though, showed him that maybe it was that bossy attitude that Harry could believe in. It’s what saved Ron’s best friend and was continuing to save him, and Ron was truly grateful for that.

“Ron!” Percy stood at the top of the road. He had to cup his hands around his lips for his little brother to hear. “Are you coming?”

Ron waved back at him and shouted, “Coming!”

Hogsmeade was a sleepy little town with small cottages, quaint little shops and restaurants. Dark green garland and wreaths hung over doorways and created repeating arches over the street, fairy lights were strewn here and there, and snowmen waved on street corners and threw snowballs at passerby's. The smell of cinnamon and apples lingered on the cold breeze.

The village was busier than they had expected. Hogsmeade was pretty famous and saw a good bit of tourism, especially at holidays. Despite the cold temperature, there were quite a few people dressed in thick robes or heavy cloaks filling the street with laughter and happy voices. Harry looked into a shop that sold sweets. It was packed. Many walked out with cups of hot cocoa in their hands. Another shop sold small gifts. People came out with brightly wrapped packages tied with wide red ribbon. The happy atmosphere made the three boys feel lighter somehow. A young woman smiled at them as they walked past. She stood outside a cafe and had candied apples on a tray.
“Care for a slice?” she called with good cheer, her cheeks rosy from the cold.

Percy checked on the boys and was surprised to see neither seemed all that interested. He gave the woman a polite refusal and kept walking. A frown marred his features as he kept Ron in the corner of his eyes. Ron *never* turned down free samples.

A group of carolers turned the corner. Bells were charmed to float and chime prettily above them as they sang hymns. Percy carefully maneuvered around the cheerful group, the boys following close on his heels. Again, neither of the boys seemed all the interested in stopping to listen. Percy was now certain that this trip wasn’t an innocent visit to the village. Harry and Ron were on a mission. With this in mind, Percy picked up the pace. The quicker they made it to Mr. Lupin’s, the quicker he’d learn just what was going on.

…

Remus spent the morning tidying up the house and baking a few snacks for the boys. His thick, grey-streaked, dirty-blond hair had been brushed and he’d made sure to shave. His hair had gotten longer now, falling into his eyes, but it wasn’t quite long enough to tuck behind his ears. The scars on his face - the long one across the bridge of his nose, the puckers on both cheeks - had been faded by time, but a fresh cut bisected his left eyebrow. It was thick and scabbed. It’s location made it impossible to bandage without blinding himself in one eye, so he left it off. He had other scrapes on his arms, chest, and legs from his stint as a werewolf, but his clothes fortunately kept them hidden.

Technically, he should still be resting. The full moon had been only two nights ago on the Solstice. Whenever the full moon coincided with a day of Power, he’d go deeper into his wolf than usual, so he still felt the wolf’s instincts riding high even two days later. His eyes had yet to lose their wolf-gold color and they wouldn’t for about a week. In exchange, the actual transformation had been less physically painful, which explained why he was able to walk and move easily so soon after.

He heard footsteps breaking through the snow on his sidewalk several minutes before the boys reached his door. He felt strung tight with excitement. It had been four months since he’d seen his pack, not counting that encounter his wolf-form had with them after Samhain. Remus opened the door with a wide smile, eyes immediately searching for Draco, and when he didn’t find him, latching onto Harry. The dark-haired boy smiled up at him sweetly. He was bundled up in a heavy cloak and scarf. His cheeks and nose were red from the cold, but he looked well enough. Remus knelt and pulled the boy into his arms.

“Harry,” he said warmly. “It’s good to see you.” He reluctantly released him and welcomed the two Weasley boys inside. “Come in out of the cold. Can I fetch you some tea? I made some cookies to go with.”

“Yes, please,” Percy accepted politely, stepping over the threshold and shutting the door behind them.

Remus wore only a sweater over his slacks. He’d made sure the cottage was nice and warm. A steady fire burned in the fireplace in the living room, which anchored the Heating Charms he’d refreshed. “Harry, help me in the kitchen, would you?” he asked as casually as he could.

Harry obediently followed him into the kitchen after hanging his cloak and scarf on a thick peg by the door. Ron and Percy settled on the couch set at an angle to the cackling fire. As soon as they were out of sight of the Weasleys, Remus asked, “Where’s Draco?”

Harry’s answer was solemn. “He’s sleeping in the Infirmary. On the Solstice, a Winter God came to us. I danced, but Draco was taken to some test. The God promised Draco would return stronger, but
He hasn’t woken up yet.”

Remus stared. If he’d had hackles, they’d be raised. “What happened?” he demanded.

Harry ducked his head shyly and shifted his feet. “It’s a long story.” Without meeting Remus’s eyes, he went to the stove and put the kettle on to boil.

Remus frowned. “Do Ron and Percy know?”

Harry nodded. “The basics, anyway.”

“Then I’m sure it’s a story we’d all like to hear, if you think that’d be okay?”

Harry gave a shrug, still refusing eye contact.

Remus led the way back into the living room where the boys had shed their outerwear. Ron and Percy sat side-by-side on the couch. Ron looked a little pale and subdued, his usual enthusiasm missing. Percy, with his horn-rimmed glasses and serious dark eyes, looked more tense than normal, even for him. Remus had to squelch a growl. Something bad was happening at Hogwarts.

Remus set the tea tray on the coffee table and Harry mirrored him with the big plate of cookies. Remus kept his eyes on Harry as he served everyone. No one bothered with small talk. The only sound in the room was the softly crackling fire and the clink of china. Eventually everyone had what they wanted and were ready to hear Harry’s story. Remus had taken the armchair across from the couch and Harry chose the armchair next to him. Harry’s bangs hid his eyes from view as he stared down at his lap, but his voice was even and sure when he spoke.

“Narcissa and Lucius came to celebrate the Solstice. Draco and Lucius got into an argument and we stepped outside for some air.” Harry turned the cup in his hands clockwise. “It was so bright and cold in the courtyard. We were talking and then there was a flash of light, a blast of cold… It didn’t feel like I was at Hogwarts anymore.”

Remus, Percy, and Ron held their breath, eyes wide as the story took a mystical turn.

“The god stepped out of the snow. She was ancient, looked older than Dumbledore even, but powerful, too, with long silver hair, tangled and free. Her eyes looked like the night sky with hundreds of bright stars. She spoke to me. Told me to dance, to help Draco find his way back. I could feel it, winter all around me, and it was cold and beautiful. I thought of how much I love Draco and how amazing winter is and I danced.”

Remus blushed, remembering the dance at Samhain and how that had ended. Let’s just say the woman who were present walked away from that night pregnant. Ron had been too young to remember that time with any clarity, but he could feel it in his gut how magical it would be to see Harry dance like that. Harry’s voice became soft, almost dreamy.

“At some point I realized I was in a gown with heels and bells on my ankles. It felt amazing, so I danced harder. I don’t know for how long, but the god came back to me. She danced with me. She spoke to me. Told me to dance, to help Draco find his way back. I could feel it, winter all around me, and it was cold and beautiful. I thought of how much I love Draco and how amazing winter is and I danced.”

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“At some point I realized I was in a gown with heels and bells on my ankles. It felt amazing, so I danced harder. I don’t know for how long, but the god came back to me. She danced with me. She held me close and guided our steps. She told me I had done well and Draco had made it through, but he still needed to take a test.” Harry’s head lifted, his voice becoming sharper with anxiety. “The god told me that Draco would come back stronger, that I had to go and wait for him. I wanted to stay, but the god spun me and I stepped out of a curtain of snow to see I was in the courtyard. Narcissa and Dumbledore were there. Draco was there, too, but he was lying on the ground, sleeping. We went to the Infirmary, but Madam Pomfrey couldn’t wake him up. She said he was in a coma. All we can do is wait…” Harry looked up at Remus pleadingly, “I check on him everyday! I make sure to give him
my healing magic.”

Remus reached over to cover Harry’s hand where it rested tensely on Harry’s knee. “I know you do. I’m sure you’re doing a great job.”

Harry’s head bowed forward again, neither agreeing or disagreeing with Remus’s statement.

Ron and Percy sat speechless, staring at their friend in awe.

“You know how to destroy the stone,” Harry spoke quietly.

Remus’s hand tightened around Harry’s. “Yes, but…”

Harry’s head came up and he met Remus’s eyes. His own were green and hard. “I need to know.”

“Why? Flamel has never revealed where it is or even what it looks like,” Remus protested. It had seemed like such a random thing to need to know. “And even if you knew where it was, destroying it isn’t an easy task.”

“I need to know,” Harry insisted.

“Why don’t we wait for Draco to wake up,” Remus stalled, he turned his attention to the two redheads with the intent to change the subject. He took his hand away from Harry and moved as if to take a cookie or to offer one.

“No, Remus, I need to know now,” Harry repeated and this time there was an edge to his voice.

Remus’s head whipped around to stare in shock.

Harry met his stare head on, determination clear on his features. “I need to know how to destroy the Stone. It’s really, really important.”

Remus narrowed his eyes. “I think you need to explain what’s going on, then.”

Harry’s face flushed in frustration, his hands clenched. He was half turned in his chair so he could face Remus. Tears stung his eyes even as his heart beat hard in his chest. Draco had left him a mission. He had to protect the stone from falling into the Dark’s hands. He had to destroy it! But Remus didn’t trust him. Not like he trusted Draco. To know what he was doing, and let’s face it, Harry didn’t really.

Harry would do everything he possibly could and more to make sure the Stone was destroyed, because Draco needed it done, and he’d do anything for Draco, but the reality was he’d likely not be enough. Because he was weak. Because he would always fall short. It made him feel sick. He was garbage. But he already knew that, anyway. He had a job to do, and he couldn’t stop doing it just because he was useless.

He looked to Ron, but Ron just stared back with wide eyes and a pale face. He had no answers. Percy was sitting on the edge of his seat, clearly just as interested in what was going on, but Harry couldn’t tell them, could he? What if Remus tried to get the Stone moved somewhere outside of the school? How would Harry destroy it then? Then again Dumbledore seemed pretty set on keeping it at Hogwarts, but if Remus ran to the school scared Harry was going to get hurt trying to destroy it, Dumbledore might make it harder to get to or somehow keep Harry away from it. Then the Stone would get stolen and Draco would be devastated.

No, he’d be beyond devastated. Harry knew that the Stone was a key piece in possibly bringing back
Voldemort. If Voldemort came back, Harry knew Draco would stand against him. Draco and Harry, too, of course. Harry would fight to the death to keep Draco safe, but if he failed and Draco was hurt… The sense of a black pit opened up deep inside his gut. It was gaping and bottomless and would swallow him whole if Draco ever disappeared. Harry wouldn’t survive it. That blackness would consume him. It would become all.

“Just trust me,” he whispered, desperate. “I need to know how to destroy it.”

Remus frowned. “Harry…”

Harry’s fingers dug into the arm of the armchair. “I’m asking. Please. How do you destroy the Stone?”

Remus’s eyes went wide. “Merlin. Are you in trouble? What’s going on? Harry, tell me.”

Harry ducked his head and got up. He didn’t look at any of them. He felt ashamed. Remus could see how useless he was, that’s why they wouldn’t help him. Without a word to anyone, he crossed the room to the entrance way and began to pulled on his winter cloak. He was reaching for his scarf when Remus put a hand on his shoulder, stopping him. Remus knelt and turned Harry to face him. Over Remus’s shoulder, Harry could see Ron and Percy watching with wide, worried eyes. Harry’s stomach churned queasily. He was fucking all of this up, but he didn’t know what else to do.

“Harry! Tell me what’s going on!” Remus demanded, grabbing Harry’s attention. “I’m here to help you!”

Harry wrung his hands, face pale with stress. “Then tell me how to destroy it.”

“If I tell you, will you tell me what’s going on, then?” Remus ducked his head, trying to catch the boy’s eyes. “I want to help. Please let me help you.”

Harry bit his lip. Remus’s golden eyes bored into him, so sincere. “If I tell you, then you might prevent me from doing what I have to do.” His hands practically strangled each other. “I know I’m bad, but I’m going to do it, Remus. I’m going to make sure I get it done. I have to. For Draco. It’s really, really important.”

Remus struggled. He could see that whatever this was about, it was important to Harry and was very dangerous. Remus could feel his pulse pound in his temple. He wanted to snarl and force it out of the boy and shake the idea that he was bad right out of Harry’s head. Instead, he took a shaky breath in and made a decision. “Harry, we’ve been through a lot. You and Draco… You’re my family.” His hands tightened on the small shoulders in his hands. He stared hard into the boy’s wide green eyes, trying to get Harry to understand. “I don’t think you or Draco fully understand what that means. It’s why I left my sickroom when I’ve never left it before last Samhain. I could feel you guys close and I was driven to be with you. You and Draco, you come first. Always. So if it’s best for you and Draco to do this thing, then I won’t stop you. But I can help you, Harry. It’s not a bad thing to need help, and isn’t it more important that whatever it is gets done no matter how? It sounds like it’s really important.”

Harry looked away. He didn’t know what to do. He wrapped the scarf again and again around his hand tight enough to cut off circulation. He wished Draco were here. He’d know what to do. The silence stretched painfully long. Ron was about to shout it all out just to break the tension when Harry finally spoke. “The Stone’s in the castle.”

Harry’s stare was almost a physical weight, making Remus hold his breath. It felt like he was being weighed and measured. There was a grimness to Harry’s stare, as if he knew this could end badly for
him and he was prepared to endure a punishment for miscalculating.

“Dumbledore’s hiding it there because it was already almost stolen from Gringotts. Draco’s tried to make Dumbledore destroy it, but he won’t because he doesn’t have permission from Flamel. But it has to be destroyed because someone Dark is trying to get it and use it to bring back Voldemort.”

Harry reached out and grabbed his shoulder, trying to make Remus understand. “Don’t you see? At first Draco wanted it gone because it’s dangerous with the Dark spy at school, but if the Stone was moved away, we couldn’t get to it anymore. It’s really, really important that we destroy it, Remus, while we still can so that it can’t be used later.”

Remus yanked Harry into a tight hug. “Thank you. For trusting me,” he said roughly, his mind racing. The Sorcerer’s Stone was at Hogwarts? A Death Eater was, too? Damn it, the boys were in danger! He wanted to growl dangerously. What the hell was Dumbledore playing at up in Hogwarts? Harry’s eyes went wide as Remus’s wavy hair tickled his nose. His heart beat hard in his chest. Was it okay? Had he done the right thing by telling Remus? He still wasn’t sure and the anxiety made his stomach churn painfully.

Remus finally released Harry. The boy was giving him such a lost look it about broke his heart. “There is a serum,” he explained. “Vivificantis. It is the most corrosive substance known to wizards. Even though no one knows for sure how the Stone is made, it should be able to break apart even a Sorcerer’s Stone, but I’m not sure what we could do to prevent Flamel from creating another.”

Harry reached up to grip Remus’s forearms tight, the man’s hands still holding him loosely by both shoulders. “Do you have some?”

Remus shook his head. “It’s made with some pretty powerful ingredients, including Basilisk venom. It’s so strong that it can only be stored in a specially prepared container, and if you use it, you have to protect your lungs and eyes because the fumes will scar them. If it comes into contact with your skin, your nerves die so fast that it doesn’t even hurt. If exposed to your bloodstream, it will cause multiple organ failure and kill you.”

“Bloody hell,” Ron whispered, horrified. He still sat on the couch, but his attention was fixed on Remus and Harry in the entrance way.

Percy had one pale next to him, his eyes were wide.

Remus took his arms back and gently coaxed Harry into taking off his cloak and hanging up his scarf before leading him back to the armchair. “I thought you and Draco only needed information, so I don’t have any on me, but I’m sure I can find some. It is only the matter of price. Give me a day or two.”

Harry unconsciously clasped the coin necklace through his shirt. “I need it as soon as possible.”

Remus nodded distractedly. “As soon as I get it, I’ll bring it to you. I’m sure Dumbledore wouldn’t mind if I stayed a few days,” he decided and the golden gleam in his eyes made it clear that there was no point arguing with him. For Merlin’s sake, Draco was out of the picture and there was a Death Eater within reach of the boys up at the school! “Now start at the beginning and explain everything. This time leave nothing out,” Remus demanded.

…

Ron and Harry got dressed for bed without talking. It had been a long day. After visiting with Remus, they picked up a few things in the shops to justify their trip, but the weight of the Stone put a cloud over their visit. They’d had a long lecture from Percy, too, about keeping such a dangerous
mission to themselves. Harry had merely shrugged since it had been Draco’s idea. The twins had sensed the tension at dinner and had grown sulky when none of them would explain what had happened at the village.

Ron cringed, fully expecting to be pranked in the near future. He crawled into bed with Harry, but he couldn’t settle. The dream from the night before came back as strong as ever and sent anxiety shivering down his nerves. He tossed around for a few minutes before he noticed that Harry wasn’t sleeping, either. Ron turned onto his side to face his friend more comfortably, but Harry kept his gaze on the ceiling.

“What’s up?” Ron asked carefully, heart beating double time and trying to hide it.

“I hope it was okay to tell Remus and Percy,” Harry confessed, clearly miserable.

“They’re on our side,” Ron said, trying to reassure his best friend, but it fell flat. He was beginning to sweat and his stomach felt filled with led. He frowned and sat up. This wasn’t working. “Come on. Want to explore the castle a bit?” he asked a bit desperately.

Harry shrugged and got out of bed. They put on thick socks and slippers and pulled on their warmest cloak and robes over their pajamas. As soon as they stepped out of the common room, Ron cast Lumos and they began to walk the halls. The school really did feel different at night, and Ron began to get into their little adventure. They had separated to either side of the hallway to check behind the paintings and statues for secret passages. He gave Harry a genuine smile when he found something an hour later.

“Over here!”

Harry came over to see a very narrow passage just barely taller than Ron behind a suit of armor. It was set between two locked doors that were about thirty feet apart. Harry guessed they were probably old classrooms or guest rooms. Ron had to shuffle through sideways, but Harry only had to turn his shoulders a bit to get through. Full grown adults definitely wouldn’t have fit. Ron, dust smeared across his cheek and cobwebs in his hair, grinned as they came out on the north side of the school, close to the Transfiguration classroom.

“That’ll be bloody useful,” he said cheerfully. “Won’t it, Harry?”

It was the first true smile Harry had seen out of Ron all day. It made Harry relax a bit. Maybe he was doing something right, after all. “Yeah. Yeah, it will,” he said, smiling back.

…

Narcissa cracked open her eyes. Well, she would have if she could, anyway. Only one eye actually opened. She hurt. She hurt in places she didn’t even know she could hurt. Her head throbbed, her shoulder was screaming at her. Sharp little stabs from her ribs made taking a full breath impossible. Worse, she felt sore between her legs, a deep pervading ache that mimicked her monthly cramps but was completely different at the same time. Moaning softly, she turned her head and a bedroom slowly swam into focus. A man sat in a chair just inside her line of sight: older, dark clothes, a severe frown. Narcissa tensed and then gasped as pain from a dozen places hit her like a truck.

Something cold was pressed to the painfully hot side of her face. Something touched her lips. Narcissa realized that, one, she was crying and, two, she had shut her good eye. She cracked it open again and this time she recognized the man. It had been eighteen years since they’d seen each other, but there was no denying that it was Cygnus Black the Third, her father.
It was a small ceramic cup he pressed to her lips. She looked him in the eyes and drank. It was herbal, whatever it was, but it didn’t taste strong. Tears continued to fall down her face. Soft sounds of her pain and the hitching of her breath sounded loud in the silent room. When she’d finished the herbal tea, Cygnus settled back in his chair and kept staring at her.

“I gave you a generalized healing potion. I’m afraid it’s not very strong. You won’t be able to take another dose for at least twelve hours. The tea will have to do in the meantime.”

“Father…” she croaked, feeling a bit lost by his detached and factual tone.

Cygnus sighed and lifted the rag that he’d spelled ice-cold off her face. “Narcissa,” he said calmly.

Narcissa’s heart beat hard in her chest. Adrenaline burned through the pain and soaked her brain, giving her crystal clear focus. “Am I a disgrace, Father?” she asked, voice hushed. “Are you ashamed of me?”

“I brought you in,” Cygnus countered, but it sounded non-committal. “Lucius did this to you?”

Narcissa looked away. “I was an instrument used against him…”

“True.” Cygnus gently took hold of Narcissa’s chin and made her look at him. “But you were ignorant, were you not? Seems a harsh punishment.”

Harsh punishment… Narcissa let tears fill her eyes and blur her vision so that her father would not see the flash of cold anger that made her pulse quicken. Her ribs were certainly cracked if not broken by large, booted feet and she’d been struck with a heavy fist multiple times in the face. Her hair had been severed above her shoulders as she’d been fucked brutally to add to her humiliation.

The worst was still when she’d been stripped in the most brutal way of her connection to wards that she’d been bound to for nearly twenty years. Her core still felt battered. The damage could well be permanent, since her years of searching for Draco had made her core fragile to begin with, and her father called it a harsh punishment, implying that he agreed she should have been punished, but maybe not quite to this extent.

“Father…” she rasped, voice fragile and heavy with tears.

“Who do you blame for all this, Narcissa?” he asked, forcing her to look at him again. “Where will you aim your revenge?”

Narcissa looked her father in the eyes. As soon as she could talk without crying, she said with perfect honesty. “I blame Lucius. It was his responsibility to safeguard our home, safeguard my son. How dare he punish me as if I am the one solely to blame. He kept my sister from me for months. He tortured her in the same house that I slept. I will never forgive him.” She was panting with anger by this point, which made her ribs scream in agony. Narcissa held them carefully, a cry of pain rising from her.

Cygnus shushed her and tended to her the best he could, but he wasn’t a healer and he couldn’t risk bringing one into the house. He had given her the basic healing potion that he knew to make, but there was a lot of damage all told. It would take several days for Narcissa to heal.

“Now you see, sister. You see that I was right to do what I did.” Bellatrix came in through the darkened doorway. Her blue eyes were as manic as her bloodless grin. She walked slowly and with difficulty. Cygnus leapt up to assist her, but Bella refused the chair and sat on the edge of the bed. Her hand stroked Narcissa’s hair away from her battered face. “Draco would have been crushed by that man. I told you, sister, that I saved your Draco. I told you.”
Narcissa sucked in a breath and closed her eyes.

Bella kept stroking her hair and giggled. “Don’t worry. I know what you are thinking. I have always loved you for that, Cissa. Always worried for someone else.” Her voice drew closer, softer. “I have spoken to our Lord. Lucius told him some but not all. Our Lord can be magnanimous. He believes it is a waste to destroy Potter. Our Lord’s connection to the boy is clearly Deep Magic at work. It should be studied and understood not destroyed. Your Draco will have no reason to go against our Lord. He will be safe as long as he and Potter are good little boys.”

Narcissa opened her eye only to flinch. Bella had leaned down close enough that they could kiss if Narcissa tilted her chin up.

“Lucius is a pathetic traitor, cutting the Mark from his soul, and believing he is strong enough to challenge our Great Lord,” Bellatrix hissed, hate and rage thick in her voice. “He would have been killed for that alone, but for this…” Bella painfully pressed her fingertips and sharp nails into the swollen, bruised side of Narcissa’s face. Narcissa went rigid and had to bite her lip to keep from screaming out loud. “I’ll make sure he suffers.”

Bella released her and sat up. A girlish smile was back on her face as she stroked the small rounding of her belly. Cygnus gently coaxed Bellatrix up, saying she needed to rest as much as possible. Bella let their father guide her out of the room with one last smile in Narcissa’s direction, and then Narcissa was left alone. Narcissa felt like she was going to be sick, but she brutally forced that feeling down. She took stock of her situation.

Lucius had done his part well and, when she’d Apparated to the house where she’d traced her sister, she’d blacked out right there on the sidewalk. The damage to her core and the beating she’d received had not been faked for fear of Bellatrix being able to tell and not letting her in. After all, Bella had been at Lucius’s not so tender mercies for eight long months. Presumably she would be able to recognize his handiwork or the lack thereof.

Truth be told, Narcissa was lucky it had been her father and not some dangerous Muggle who had taken her in, but it was still a shock. She hadn’t expected to see her father or for him to look at her so coldly. She had to think; she had to plan! There was no room for misstep. She was now inside, close to her sister, but that was only the beginning. She had to protect Draco and Harry from the Dark Lord! She would do whatever it took to make sure her children were safe. Whatever it took.

Chapter end.

A/N: I really struggled with this chapter. I couldn't get the meeting with Remus right. I'm still not 100% happy with the way it turned out, but I decided in the end to push on since re-writing it several times wasn't helping. I appreciate any feedback you can give.
Percy yawned, drawn forward by both of his twin brothers pulling on either hand. They wore innocent grins for once, still in their wool, long pajamas and their hair messed up with bedhead. It was early, but at least the sun was up. Growing up in a family with very little extra money to spend meant they got gifts only twice a year. No surprises brought home on random days, no splurges on special occasions, so those two days of gifts were especially exciting.

Their first stop had been Harry’s dorm room, but it’d been empty. No real surprise there. Ron and Ginny were both hard sleepers and it normally took a lot of effort to get them out of bed, but never on Christmas. Percy didn’t know how they did it. They weren’t staying up all night. He and their mother always checked to make sure they were really sleeping, but those two still managed to wake before the sun every bloody time and get everyone else up with them, so they could open their gifts right away.

Fred and George stopped at the top of the stairs that led into the common room, leaning forward to look over the banister. Percy pressed in close against their backs to look over their heads. Ron was sitting on the couch-end closest to the warm fire. His head was back, his mouth hung open as he snored. He wore his second-hand winter cloak over his pajamas, but his feet were bare. Harry was curled up against his side, his head pillowed on Ron’s shoulder. His glasses were on his face and he was wrapped up in his cloak so that it was hard to tell what he was wearing. His feet were covered with red, wool socks.

“Musta fallen back asleep waitin’ for us,” George said with a snicker.

“Wish we had a camera,” Fred agreed before collapsing against George and laughing.

Percy wasn’t so sure, but he couldn’t help smiling and shaking his head. He made his way downstairs and came to a stop in front of his little brother with his hands on his hips. “I guess I’ll be opening Ron’s presents then?”

Ron’s eyes cracked blearily open. “Don’touch m’presents,” he slurred. Blinking his eyes, he quickly came awake. Grinning, he nudged Harry and sat up. His blue eyes latched onto the small pile of brightly wrapped presents that had been set neatly in the center of the room. He practically dove forward.

Percy took his brother’s seat and gave Harry a warm smile. “Happy Christmas.”

“Happy Christmas,” Harry answered with a yawn, rubbing his eyes underneath his glasses.

Fred and George were already ripping open presents, paper flying around them like confetti. Percy was convinced they were using a spell, even though neither boy had a wand out. Ron was organizing the piles, placing gifts in front of Harry, Percy, and the twins, pushing his own aside until each package sat near their owner. Harry clearly had the largest pile by more than double.

“Open a present, Harry!” Ron cried as he tore open his first package. He’d chosen the lumpy one on purpose and out spilled a maroon knit sweater with a large golden “R” for Ron on it. He pulled off his cloak and put the sweater on. It was a little big, but that was the way he liked it.

Percy smiled and reached for his own lumpy package. Fred and George already had their sweaters
on. Both were a royal blue with golden letters “F” and “G” accordingly. Percy snapped his wrists to straighten his sweater and smiled. It was a bright red with a golden “P”. He turned to see what color Harry got. Harry sat next to him, his smile gone as he stared so seriously at the wrapped sweater in his lap. He looked tired.

“Harry?” Percy asked carefully.

“I… I should wait for Draco,” the boy answered, voice so small he sounded five instead of eleven.

“Sure,” Ron called, oblivious to the tension in the room. Even Fred and George were watching Harry with a frown. “But not for all of them! You can open the one from Mum! You know she always sends us sweaters.”

Ron tore into his next present and gasped. Bill had sent him an Egyptian Chess set. It was handmade with heavy brass pieces that looked gold or dark brown depending on what side it represented. The pieces were about three inches in height and were carved in the shape of Egyptian gods and goddesses. The board had squares of mother of pearl and wood to distinguish the white and black spaces and was twenty inches wide. It was definitely a luxury chess set, so very different from the inherited and battered board he used now.

“Bloody hell, I love it!” Ron exclaimed with stars in his eyes. He bounded over to Percy and Harry, talking a mile a minute about the set before practically leaping at Fred and George. The twins laughed and fended him off playfully. Practically bursting with excitement, Ron looked to Harry. “You’ve got to open something, Harry! It’s Christmas! And look, here’s one from your Dad! You gotta open that! How’d you think he managed that, Percy?” Ron held the package up. It was lumpy. “Maybe it’s another sweater! Seems like a lot of trouble for nothin’ though.”

Harry still looked undecided so Percy added, “People will expect Thank You cards.”

Harry went pale and began to open the gifts labelled “Harry”. Anything that said “Draco and Harry” he left alone. The sweater from Molly was an emerald green with a golden “H”. He held it up, finding it two sizes too big. Perhaps she had thought he would have grown more by now. He opened the one from “James Potter” next and found it much more remarkable. It was an invisibility cloak and not some cheap one that you usually saw in stores. Harry disappeared completely as he put it around his shoulders and pulled the hood up.

“Bloody hell!” Fred and George gasped in unison. “Let me try!” Fred demanded, George hot on his heels.

Harry took it off and watched as the twins played with the cloak. Ron was asking to try it, but he was clearly being ignored. With a pout, Ron stomped back to his gifts and continued opening them. Charlie had sent each of his siblings a dragon tooth necklace. From the Tonkses, each of the Weasleys received gift vouchers to a popular shoe store. The note said that she knew growing boys could never have too many pairs of shoes. As for Harry, the gifts from both the Tonkses and the Malfoys were addressed to both Harry and Draco, so Harry did not open them.

Remus, on the other hand, had sent two gifts, one addressed to Harry and the other addressed to Draco as he normally did. Harry’s gift fit inside an envelope and he opened it to find a box of seeds for some rare flowers to plant in his gardens. Harry had one at both Malfoy Manor and the Tonks House. He loved working in them. Hagrid had also sent gifts, one for Harry and Draco each. From him, Harry received a hand-carved flute. Hermione and Neville had sent a gift, but it was addressed to both Harry and Draco, so he left it alone. He could guess it was some kind of sweet, though, as Ron had gotten a gift from them, too, and it was a super-deluxe box of Bertie’s Every Flavor Beans.
After the gift opening was complete, Harry excused himself to take all the unwrapped and still wrapped presents back up to the dorm room, to start on the Thank You cards that he could write. Before Harry disappeared upstairs, Percy managed to make the twins give back the invisibility cloak.

“Keep that safe, Harry. It’s very rare and expensive. Draco will want to see it undamaged,” Percy advised, pushing his glasses further up his nose.

Harry took the cloak with much more care after hearing that.

Ron convinced Percy to play a game of chess with him on his new set while the twins ran out into the castle with the mysterious box they had gotten from Bill.

“Probably Egyptian potion ingredients,” Percy guessed with a resigned sigh.

Harry felt like he was drowning. Every Thank You note he wrote seemed to weigh heavier and heavier on his chest. He didn’t deserve things. He was a failure and it killed him that no one seemed to notice. It made him feel like a liar and a fraud on top of being a failure, and it made him terrified of what would happen when everyone around him finally figured it out. Without Draco there, he felt vulnerable and stripped bare for all eyes to see him for what he really was. Draco’s claim was still there, tattooed on his skin and tight around his neck, but Harry was still nervous about his ability to represent Draco faithfully.

It was nearing lunch time, but he felt sick to his stomach. The prospect of facing his friends and ruining their Christmas had him literally swallowing bile. He remembered their looks of concern while he’d struggled with opening presents. His eyes darted to the invisibility cloak that he’d folded at the foot of his bed. He lifted it and swung it around his body, pulling up the hood. He chose his shoes carefully, a pair of soft-soled slippers, so that he made no sound when he walked. Ron and Percy didn’t even twitch as he tiptoed down the stairs. They sat in such a way that he was able to slip out of the portrait without them noticing. It took him about fifteen minutes, but he soon found himself in the infirmary.

It was bright, the many windows letting in the afternoon sunlight. The air was only a little chilly, most of the cold kept at bay by wards and spells. Harry moved, silent and invisible, to the only occupied bed and climbed into it. He sprawled on top of Draco, wiggling his hips in-between Draco’s thighs and resting his head over the blond’s heart. The tension he’d been carrying for days slid from him and he was able to let out a weary sigh of relief. He was safe here. He would always be safe here.

Draco was always so confident; he had the ability to turn even a wrong choice to his advantage. Harry definitely didn’t. He was getting better at it. Making choices. Mostly because he trusted that Draco would be able to pull them out of a bad situation if Harry chose wrong, but Harry wasn’t stupid. He knew that even small decisions accumulated. Big events happened because of a string of smaller choices, and he was now on his own when the choices facing him weren’t small at all.

Did he choose right in telling Remus, Percy, and Ron everything? Did he do okay performing the Rite of the Dead in the forest for the unicorn? Should he have pushed more, demanded Remus get the serum quicker? Should he go to another adult? Dumbledore? McGonagall? Snape? He just… didn’t know. He really, really didn’t. All he had to go on were the decisions and plans Draco had already laid down, but things were changing so rapidly and Harry was trying his best, but it all felt out of control...

If it weren’t for the mission keeping him focused, Harry would have been a paralyzed ball of anxiety
curled up under Draco’s bed unable to move, but he did have it, the mission, and he knew he
couldn’t afford to lose. Draco was so strong all the time - protected him, loved him, guided him, took
up the burden of all those choices that made Harry want to freeze and puke - and Harry refused to let
him down.

“It’s not for forever,” Harry mumbled into Draco’s chest, his hands gripping hard onto the blond’s
I… I can do it. For you.”

... 

Harry actually fell asleep like that, sprawled across Draco’s chest. He’d even left a wet spot where
he’d drooled over Draco’s heart. He hadn’t learned the spell to dry things yet, so he hoped Madam
Pomfrey didn’t notice. It was almost dinner time, so Harry had to hurry to get back to the tower, put
away the cloak, and then rush down to the Great Hall. The Weasleys were tense, but that melted into
instant relief when they saw him.

“Where were you?” Ron demanded.

“I just needed time alone… to celebrate…” Harry invented and internally cringed at how dumb that
excuse sounded.

“We thought for sure you’d be with Draco, but we couldn’t find you in the infirmary when we
looked,” Ron continued. He gave his friend a smile. “As long as you’re okay, I guess. Come eat.”

Harry sat next to him, relieved the questions were over.

The table was even more decked out than
normal. There was a roasted turkey with stuffing, a ham, and a roast beef all half carved for them.
The cranberry sauce looked delicious. For sides, there were gorgeously cooked carrots, turnips, and
parsnips, and of course there was mashed potatoes with two kinds of gravy.

As Harry and the others served themselves, Harry glanced at the Head Table. He noticed
Dumbledore, Snape, and Quirrell were missing, but Sprout, Flitwick, McGonagall, and Hagrid were
present. Hagrid caught his eye and waved enthusiastically, nearly knocking McGonagall in the head.
Harry smiled and waved back.

“Wonder where Dumbledore is?” he asked out loud.

“Don’t know,” Fred answered with a shrug.

“Maybe Ministry business,” George added.

“He was gone all night the night before last,” Fred stage whispered dramatically.

“And a few other nights, too,” George finished in a whisper matching Fred’s.

“Didn’t come back until breakfast.”

Harry shared a look with Percy and Ron. It was more likely that Dumbledore was going to see
Flamel about the Stone. At least, if Headmaster was being honest when he said he was seriously
trying to convince his friend to destroy it. Before the twins could comment on their shared glances,
Ron gave his older brothers a suspicious stare.

“How do you know when Dumbledore’s gone all night, anyway? And when he comes back?”

Fred and George simultaneously touched the side of their noses with serious expressions before
breaking out into identical mischievous grins. “That’s for us to know and you to find out,” they said in unison before breaking into laughter.

Ron crossed his arms and scowled at them. He hated it when they teased him. You’d think he’d be used to it by now, but he still hated it all the same.

“Who won the chess match?” Harry asked quickly, trying to ease the tension.

Ron’s expression softened. His back straightened with pride. “I did.”

Percy gave his brother an affectionate glance. “Ron has always been brilliant at chess.”

“I heard from someone on the baseball team this past summer that the Muggles hold competitions and you can even win money,” Ron told them excitedly. “I was thinking of asking Mum if I could join one.”

Percy shook his head. “You don’t have Muggle papers. How would you register? If a money prize is involved, I don’t think it will be as simple as befuddling a Muggle coach to get you on a baseball team.”

Ron pouted, but Harry made a mental note to ask Andromeda about it later. She had to have Muggle papers, seeing as she lived on the Muggle side of London. She might know how Ron could go about it.

They finished dinner in good spirits. Their plates and the leftovers where whisked away by elven magic and dessert appeared before them. There was a pumpkin and apple pie, raisin pudding, Christmas pudding, and a fruitcake on offer, much to Ron’s delight.

“You can’t seriously eat all that,” Percy said with a frown as Ron served himself one serving of everything.

“Watch me,” Ron answered back with upmost seriousness, blue eyes bright with determination.

Fred and George nearly fell off the bench laughing.

“Hello, boys. Happy Christmas.”

Harry turned to see Remus standing behind them with suitcase in hand. A kind smile softened his scarred face. He wore a warm brown sweater under his winter cloak and had snow melting on both shoulders and in his hair. Remus gave Harry a subtle nod when Harry’s eyes snapped up from the suitcase to meet his golden eyes. Harry felt a wave of relief crash over him. Remus had the serum! Harry hadn’t expected the man to get it so quickly, but he felt a lot less stressed knowing they had it if they needed it.

Remus gave the Weasleys a smile as the four boys chorused Christmas greetings. “I see I made it just in time for desert. Mind if I join you?”

Of course they didn’t, and they all shifted to make room.

Remus was in the middle of telling them about a hilarious Christmas dinner from his time at Hogwarts when McGonagall arrived. She wore a bright red robe and a pointed green hat. Her glasses reflected the fairy lights from the tree sparkling red and gold at the end of the table. Her stern expression had been softened with a genuine smile.

“Remus, what a pleasant surprise,” she said with genuine warmth. “Have you eaten? I can have the
elves make you up a plate.”

“Thank you,” he answered kindly. “It’s not necessary, though. I plan on filling up on desert.”

Her smile widened as if she were remembering something and she shook her head. “I noticed you have a bag with you…”

“I was hoping I could stay a night or two…” Remus’s expression turned a bit melancholy. “It can be lonely sometimes on holidays, and it’s been so long since I’ve spent any real time with the boys.” He looked up at McGonagall in concern. “I heard Draco is in the Hospital Wing?”

McGonagall sighed. “Yes. I’m afraid so,” she said softly, but then pulled her smile back into place. “Well, I’m sure Hogwarts would love to host you, Remus. You are of course always welcome here. I will have the elves prepare a guest chamber for you.”

Remus bowed his head. “I really appreciate it, Minerva. This place holds such fond memories for me.”

McGongall’s eyes misted up. “Yes. It does for us all. Well, I’ll leave you to your meal.”

“What happened after the turkey began to dance?” Fred burst out, demanding Remus pick up where he’d left off in the story.

Remus smiled and did just that. Soon he had all of them, including Harry, laughing.

…

Ron practically wrapped himself up like a mummy in his comforter. He still couldn’t get the butterflies to stop twisting his stomach. He’d been fine all day. A little tired, but no big deal. It’d been great. He adored his chess set and dragon tooth necklace; couldn’t wait to show Dean and Seamus! And Remus was staying, which made him feel a whole lot better about their chances with the Stone. So why couldn’t he sleep? Why did getting ready for bed in the silence of the dorm room make sweat break out along his hairline? His heart punched hard against his chest, slowly picking up speed the longer he tried to lie quiet.

“Harry?” he suddenly burst out, voice a strained whisper. “Harry? You asleep?”

“Mm?”

Ron sat up, fighting out of the tight roll he’d made of his blankets and turned on his bedside lamp. “Wanna see if we can find any more passages?” he asked in a rush, forcing a smile. “Might come in handy when school starts back up. You know, to keep Draco away from the bullies.”

Harry blinked sleepy green eyes and sat up. His hair stuck up in weird directions from being pressed against a pillow. “Yeah. Okay,” he agreed with a yawn. He didn’t have the heart to tell his friend that Draco had already known about the passages they’d found from the twins’ magical map, but if Ron didn’t know about the map already, Harry wasn’t sure he should mention it. Besides, it was clear something was bothering Ron. He looked upset. Their search wasn’t about secret passages, but about making Ron feel better.

“Bring your cloak,” Ron whispered. His hands shook as he pulled on two layers of sweaters and two pairs of warm socks over his feet, and it wasn’t the cold. It was a relief so powerful it almost brought tears to his eyes. “Thanks, Harry.”

Harry pushed his glasses on and gave him a wan smile as he grabbed the invisibility cloak.
“What d-do you see?” Ron asked, breathless.

He stood out in front of all his siblings. He was tall and strong, his shoulders back, his chin up. He had the Quidditch cup in his hand and a Head Boy badge on his robe. Bill and Charlie, the twins, Percy, Ginny, and little Timmy were gathered around him with awe on their faces. Mum and Dad were in the back, tears in their eyes and huge smiles on their faces. This Ron wouldn’t be scared to go to sleep. This Ron could handle anything! He had the respect of everyone!

Harry stared into the strange mirror’s depths. He had no idea how to tell Ron what he saw inside it. There was no way he could ever make Ron understand, so he said simply, “I see Draco and me standing together.”

Draco’s grey eyes were sharp and alert. His whole body practically radiated power. Harry stood next to him. Mirror Harry was shirtless. His muscles were strong and defined. He didn't wear glasses. His green eyes were confident and he made eye contact easily. The black collar sat around his throat like it belonged there and the white dragon stood proudly on his hip with wings outstretched along his side and across his stomach. Power coiled around Mirror Harry, even as Mirror Harry sank to his knees in a graceful drop. Draco placed his hand possessively on Mirror Harry’s head, that pale hand visibly gripping his hair. The blond’s lips moved, saying, ‘Good boy.’ Mirror Harry bared his teeth in a grin, reminding Harry of a guard dog, powerful and obedient. The expression of smug pleasure on Draco’s face sent a shiver through Harry and a warm feeling settled in his gut. Instinctively, he cupped himself and gasped softly as tingles shot across his skin, his penis stiff and sensitive.

“Harry? You okay?”

Harry stumbled away from the mirror, realizing that he was panting. Tears filled his eyes. He wanted that. He wanted what the mirror showed with all his heart and soul, but he had no idea how to get there! Suddenly he was crying, great big gasping sobs. Was it even possible? How in the world would he ever be that strong? What would it take to be able to stand at Draco’s side and actually deserve to be there?

“Hey, it’s okay,” Ron said awkwardly, patting his shoulder. “Don’t cry.”

Harry turned away from him, putting his back to the mirror, and crouched down to hug his knees. He bit his lip so hard that it tore slightly, a small trickle of blood snaking down his chin. He had to pull it together. Ron had been so excited, so happy, talking about trophies and his family. Harry was ruining it.

Ron wanted to comfort him, he really did, but his eyes kept getting pulled back to the amazing vision in the mirror. “You think it’s the future?” he asked. “What’s in the mirror, I mean. Think it’ll come true?”

Harry huddled in on himself, wishing with all his might that it would come true but knowing it probably wouldn’t.

“IT is the Mirror of Erised.”

Ron spun around and Harry lifted his head to see Dumbledore step into the room. His white hair and beard practically glowed in the moonlight spilling in through the small window. He made a soft swishing sound as he crossed the floor to stand next to them.

“You alright there, Harry?” he asked gently and reached out his hand.
Harry knew better than to take it. He stood on his own, his arms wrapped tightly around his chest.

Dumbledore didn’t seem offended. He placed his hand on Harry’s shoulder and squeezed softly. “It shows the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts, my boys. Men have wasted away before it, not knowing if what they have seen is real or even possible.”

“Oh,” Ron said in disappointment.

“That doesn’t mean it can’t come true,” Dumbledore added. “What is it that you see?”

Ron told him, cheeks bright red with embarrassment as he did so.

Dumbledore nodded. “Entirely possible,” he concluded, stroking his beard. “In fact, I believe it is even likely. However, it does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, remember that.” He turned his attention to Harry. He bent down, his eyes unbearably gentle. “And what did you see, my boy?”

Harry wiped his face with his sleeve, erasing tears and blood both, and shook his head mutely.

Dumbledore sighed and straightened. “Do no seek out this mirror again,” he told them both, expression and tone serious. “It will be moved come morning.”

“Yes, sir,” Ron said glumly, eyes still firmly locked on his triumphant form trapped behind the glass.

Harry simply nodded. He didn’t think he could bear looking into it again to see everything he was not. He grabbed Ron’s sleeve and tugged him toward the door under Dumbledore’s watchful gaze.

“Um, sir, I was just wondering what you saw?” Ron suddenly burst out just before they stepped clear.

Dumbledore gave them a happy grin. “Why, I see myself holding a thick pair of socks.” With a wink, he added, “One can never have enough socks.” He lifted his robes a bit and even in the dim moon light they could make out Christmas wreaths repeating over and over on his socks. He also wore fuzzy slippers.

Ron shook his head, smiling, and allowed Harry to pull him out of the room.

…

Percy frowned as he found Ron and Harry asleep in the common room again in the morning. He stood over them, hands on his hips, but before he could decide if he should wake them for breakfast or not, the twins came barreling down the stairs flinging snowballs everywhere. Ron gave a yell and tumbled off the couch, bringing Harry with him. Percy staggered backward having taken a snowball to the face. The bridge of his nose throbbed from where his glasses had been smashed back. Harry got to his feet, blinking owlishly. The twins had already taken off out the portrait, cackling like maniacs.

“You okay?”

“Yes.” Harry even managed to smile. “Is it time for breakfast?”

Percy nodded and helped Ron get to his feet. His little brother’s red hair stood up all over the place. He looked paler than normal and there were circles under his eyes. “Maybe you guys should sleep a little longer, though.”
“I’m up now,” Ron grumbled, hiding a huge yawn behind his hand.

“I want to see Draco,” Harry agreed.

Percy sighed. “Alright. Go get dressed then.”

Remus crouched down by Draco’s hospital bed. He had his hand up by the top of the boy’s head, just resting there, as he breathed in the scent he had missed for months. It was the smell of pack and family and home all rolled into one. He’d been there for a while when he heard two sets of footsteps approaching. “I don’t understand how you can keep letting things like this happen,” Remus said softly. He knew who was standing behind him. Knew who it was before he even entered the room.

Dumbledore sighed. “Hello, Remus. Minerva told me you will be visiting.”

“I understand you had no control over the Solstice,” Remus continued, ignoring the Headmaster’s opening gambit. Dumbledore’s words seemed innocent on the surface, but it was a subtle reminder that Remus was here only because he’d been allowed to be. “But I don’t think the ritual would have started without a catalyst. The mental wounds that you’ve ignored.”

“There was nothing I could do for him beyond what I had already done,” Dumbledore answered gravely. He stood just behind Remus. “I gave him what assistance I could.”

“After he came to you and demanded help, you mean. After suffering and dealing with it alone for too long.” Remus’s eyes were gold. He knew that and stayed crouched facing away from the Headmaster. He was no longer ashamed of what he was, but he was still cautious of others’ reactions. “I notice his attacker is still at large. I find that hard to understand.”

There was a moment of silence that carried on a little too long, but Dumbledore finally answered. “I have done my best by you as I have these children, Remus. I assure you that every effort is being made to discover which student or staff member is harboring evil, but as of yet they remain hidden to me.”

It was Remus’s turn to let the silence stretch this time. He wanted to rage. How dare the most powerful wizard of their time stand there and claim he could do nothing more, that this was the best he could do, when Harry had almost been murdered, Draco’s mind had been broken, a Death Eater was somehow able to walk freely among them, and the Sorcerer’s Stone, an item powerful enough to resurrect the Dark Lord, was in danger of being stolen!

“Remus, the boys are strong. Stronger than we give them credit for. Dark times are upon us again, but we have to have faith. We have to trust each other.”

He could have howled with laughter. Dumbledore had lost all right to speak of trust when his actions were so incomprehensible. How could Dumbledore stand there and do nothing to fix this? How could he not put a stop to all of this before it got any worse and one of the boys actually died? Surely Dumbledore could do better than this no matter his claims to the contrary! Seeing Draco - indomitable, powerful Draco - lying so small and vulnerable on the hospital bed made Remus sick to his stomach, but Dumbledore acted like it was a sad necessity!

So Remus bowed his head and said nothing. When Dumbledore realized their conversation was over, he eventually turned and walked away. The man who’d arrived with Dumbledore and had been standing unobtrusively in the corner for their entire conversation finally stepped forward. Remus remained where he was, crouched close to Draco’s head.
“I have a potion,” Severus said softly. He smelled of potions, snow, and exhaustion. “It will make Draco’s mind impervious to all mental intrusion from the moment he imbibes it. It is irreversible and might break whatever spell he is under.”

Remus turned and got to his feet, facing his old adversary. He ignored the way Severus flinched away from his eyes, instead observing the man in front of him. Severus looked a wreck. His hair was oily and hung limp, a few strings clinging to his sallow cheeks. His eyes were bloodshot. Remus got the feeling that Dumbledore had no idea about what Severus had created, that he had a fragile ally in the other man. He had to be careful here, so he made his voice as gentle as he could so that Severus did not feel like he was being rejected.

“Thank you, Severus. I will tell Draco to come talk to you when he wakes. He will have to be the one to decide if he wants to take it.”

Severus inclined his head and spun, robes flaring, as he practically stormed from the room. He almost knocked into Harry on the way out, but he was able to side-step the boy in time. He snapped out a quick, “Watch where you’re going, Potter!”

Harry apologized and then hurried forward.

Remus gave the boy a hug. “Hey, pup. Did you have breakfast?”

“Yes,” Harry answered, moving so he was next to the bed and placing his fingertips gently on Draco’s forehead.

Remus smiled at the boy. “Draco looks like he could wake up any moment now. You’ve been doing a good job looking after him.”

Harry flushed at the praise, his head ducking, and Remus ruffled his messy hair affectionately.

…

“Harry! Look!”

Harry looked up from his lunch. Remus had walked him down, reminding him that Draco hated when he skipped meals, but Remus had chosen to sit with the adults at the Head Table this time around. Harry followed Ron’s pointing finger to see an owl swooping down on him. He instinctively shielded his face, but it landed on the table next to his plate instead of his head. It gave a sharp cry and offered its leg. Wide-eyed, Harry took the note.

“What’s it say?” Ron demanded.

“It’s from Hagrid. He says to come to his cabin.” Harry made sure his face remained bland. “He’s probably just lonely and wants someone to have tea with.”

The twins and Percy went back to their argument. Something about fireworks. Ron mouthed ‘egg’ at him and Harry nodded. They were quick to dismiss themselves after eating and made their way outside. “Hagrid!” Harry called, knocking on the door.

It opened under his fist and he and Ron were practically yanked inside before the door slammed shut behind them. “Don’ want the cold ta get in,” Hagrid explained quickly. “It’s hatching! Ya about missed it! Shame Hermione couldn’t be ‘ere.” Hagrid was barely able to contain his excitement. His bushy brown hair stood practically on end and they could see white all around his eyes. The huge man moved quickly over to his table where he’d placed the egg in the center in a rough nest of shirts.
Harry and Ron joined him, shedding their snow-covered cloaks and hats along the way. Sure enough the egg was shaking and rocking. Cracks had appeared. Suddenly the egg cracked further and the shell almost seemed to explode away from what was inside.

“Oh, e’s a beauty alright! Look a’that!” Hagrid cooed, completely in love.

The tiny, green, slimy dragon gave a little squeak. It was clumsy on its feet. Its wings were like a bat’s attached to its front arms. They flared and flailed as the dragon tried to get its balance.

“That’s a Norwegian Ridgeback,” Ron exclaimed, his freckles stood out sharply on his pale face. “That’s the kind of dragon my brother works with in Romania!”

“Oh, bless ‘em! Look, e’knows his mummy!” Hagrid boomed, tears on his cheeks as the dragon seemed to orient on him. “‘Ello, Norbert.”

“Norbert?” Harry asked curiously.

“Well, e’s got ta ‘ave a name, don’e?” Hagrid exclaimed and tickled the baby under his chin. “I bet yer hungry! Hatchin’ is hard work!”

Reaching down with his other hand, Hagrid pulled out a freshly killed rabbit and placed it at the edge of the table. Norbert’s head whipped around and he practically dove on the animal. With surprising savagery, the tiny dragon tore into the meat, his clawed-feet scratching at the table’s surface for purchase. As Hagrid cooed and praised the baby, Ron and Harry looked a little green around the edges.

“Double their size nearly every day,” Ron recounted faintly, trying to distract himself from the dragon’s eating. “Be full sized in about two to three months.”

Suddenly the dragon burped and a fist-sized flame erupted from his throat and caught the end of Hagrid’s beard on fire.

“Oh!” Hagrid gave a startled cry and quickly patted it out. With another laugh, he said, “E’ll have to be trained up a bit, o’course.”

“Just how big do they get?” Harry wanted to know. He was eyeing Hagrid’s small cabin.

Ron answered with wide eyes, “Big. Too big to fit in the castle even.”

Harry looked up at his friend. “You can’t keep him hidden here, Hagrid. He’ll be too big in a week! You know that, right? You’ll get caught and Hermione said dragons are illegal. You’ll go to Azkaban.”

Hagrid put his big hands over the tiny dragon as if protecting him from their eyes. “I know that. I’m just gonna make sure e’s big and strong. Then I’ll send ‘em somewheres nice.”

“I could owl Charlie,” Ron offered.

Hagrid sniffed sadly and pet Norbert along his back lovingly. The little dragon had eaten all it could and had curled up in the now bloody shirts to sleep, it’s belly round and distended.

“How’d you get him, anyway?” Ron asked curiously.

“Won him down at the pub. Guy seemed glad to get ‘em off ‘is ‘ands, actually.” Hagrid said this in a completely baffled voice, as if he couldn’t understand why someone wouldn’t want a dragon egg.
“Seems dangerous.” Ron had found his courage and was gently stroking the dragon’s head. “Even having an egg is illegal. How’d he know you wouldn’t turn him in?”

“Well…” Hagrid rubbed the back of his head sheepishly. “We were talkin’ about dangerous creatures and ‘ow they’re misunderstood. I may ’ave mentioned ‘andlin’ a few creatures that aren’t seen too kindly by the Ministry. So e’knew e’could trust me. In fact, e’seemed mighty impressed with Fluffy!”

“Fluffy,” Harry repeated. He remembered their long ago conversation about the cerberus Hagrid had raised that was now the first barrier guarding the Stone.

“Aye, an ’e was mighty impressed that I trained Fluffy to go right ta sleep if I played ‘em music.”

Ron and Harry exchanged shocked looks. Clearly the spy at Hogwarts was collecting the information he needed to get past the barriers that protected the Stone. There couldn’t be that much left that he needed to know before he was ready. Harry had a feeling that their enemy was going to make his move soon. It made him feel cold, but it also made him feel calm, too. Harry was going to destroy the Stone. No matter what it took.

Chapter end.
Call To Battle

Harry and Ron once again spent most of the night exploring. This time Harry couldn’t sleep, either. Hagrid casually confessing that he’d told a stranger in a pub about Fluffy’s weakness made him too anxious to sleep. So, for the third night in a row, the two First-year boys climbed through the portrait hole around four in the morning and crashed on the common room couch in front of the fire. They were woken around eight by Ron’s brothers for breakfast.

“Is something wrong with your dorm room?” Percy demanded.

He’d asked in much subtler ways on the walk over, but Ron had put him off and Harry had remained silent. Percy wouldn’t be put off this time. They were sitting together at the end of Gryffindor table, Ron’s elbow propped up next to his plate with his hand holding his head up. He was shoveling some food half-heartedly into his mouth.

“Just too excited to sleep,” Ron denied quickly, straightening and trying to look more alert. No way was he going to confess that he got scared at night. His brothers would just tease him and make him feel stupid! “We’ve already found four secret passages!” His expression turned smug as he shot the twins a look. “And we’re not going to tell you where they are.”

Percy narrowed his eyes first at Ron and then at Harry, but Harry was too practiced at masking his expression. He stared innocently back at Percy, meeting his eyes with apparent calm. “You’re sleeping in your beds tonight and I’m going to stay with you.” Ron’s cheeks flushed with anger, but Percy cut him off. “You’re going to get sick at this rate. Look in the mirror before you complain. You both need a good night’s rest.” Percy was not taking no for an answer and glared his brother into silence.

“Little Ronikins need a nap,” Fred sing-songed with a grin.

“Shut up! I don’t need a babysitter!” Ron exploded. He stood up so fast that the table jerked as his thighs hit the underside. “Why don’t you mind your own bloody business for once, Mr. Perfect Percy!” he spat with vicious disdain.

Harry stared wide-eyed as Ron stormed away.

Percy shot the twins a heated glare, red eyebrows lowered ominously. “Was that necessary?”

Fred shifted, staring at his food with a sulky frown. “I was just teasing.”

“Trying to make it seem like it’s not a big deal by joking about it,” George added in defense of his twin.

“You failed,” Percy said coldly. “Try and remember it’s your little brother you’re tormenting and, whether you mean to or not, you can actually hurt him.”

“He’s being a baby!” Fred snapped back. He stood and George followed his lead. They left without saying anything else.

Percy sighed and glanced over at Harry, who had watched all the drama silently. “Finish breakfast, Harry. I know you want to see Draco. Doing your healing thing takes energy, so you’re going to need the fuel.”
Harry ducked his head and obediently finished his meal.

Harry spent the day in the infirmary with Remus. Remus had managed to talk Madam Pomfrey into allowing a little table with some padded chairs. Remus had brought some books that would further his research and Harry had an elf bring him his notes and textbooks. They worked in companionable silence, Remus occasionally helping Harry understand something he was studying. Harry would have stayed all night, but Remus insisted on walking him to dinner.

The Great Hall was still decorated with trees and wreaths and fairy lights, but Harry was too tired to really appreciate it. Ron and Percy were at the table, but Fred and George were nowhere to be seen. Harry hesitated until Ron gestured at the spot next to him and he gladly sat down. There wasn’t much conversation though. At least, not until the owl arrived.

It was brown and somehow sleeker than other owls. It landed in front of Dumbledore. Dumbledore set the letter it carried aside as if to read it later, but the owl flapped its wings threateningly. The boys watched as the aged Headmaster frowned over the note before quickly excusing himself. Harry shot Remus a look, but the man shook his head. McGonagall had been sitting between Remus and Dumbledore, so he’d been unable to see what the note had said.

“Wonder what that’s all about,” Ron muttered.

“Looked like a Ministry owl,” Percy said, pushing his glasses up higher on his nose.

Ron remembered that he was mad at Percy and glared at his brother before going back to ignoring him completely.

Harry sighed.

Percy sat against the headboard reading a thick textbook, the comforter pulled over his lap. He acted like he was alone in the room and completely ignored Ron and Harry. Ron stomped around as he got ready for bed. Percy wasn’t giving him much to work with, however, so it was hard to stay mad. He was so bloody tired! Ron crawled under the covers and lay with his eyes wide open, staring at the ceiling. Harry was already under the covers of the far bed, his back to them.

Percy’s lamp was the only light in the room and every few minutes Ron could hear the sound of his brother turning the pages of his book. It was soothing somehow. Ron almost felt like he could fall asleep, but every time his eyes fluttered closed alarm jangled through his nerves and sent his heart beating fast in his chest. He’d look around for something, something that terrified him, but nothing was there.

“Go to sleep, Ron,” Percy said gently, hardly above a whisper. “I’ll keep watch.”

Ron rolled so he was facing his brother. His vision was blurry with exhaustion, but still he couldn’t sleep. He stared dully at his brother’s bed, listening as the pages turned. He had no idea how long he’d laid there when Harry suddenly sat bolt upright with a gasp. Ron felt like his brain was made of cotton. He stared uncomprehending as Harry flew out of bed and began to get dressed at a furious pace. Percy mirrored him. Harry was already running out the door when Percy turned to him, expression urgent, hands tight on Ron’s shoulders.

“Get Remus! Bring him to the third-floor corridor.”
Ron’s heart suddenly kicked into overdrive. He jumped out of bed and bolted down the stairs. The thief was going after the Stone!

... 

Harry stood in front of Fluffy’s door, his heart thundering and his lungs laboring. He had on a pair of Draco’s Converse sneakers, black jeans, black t-shirt and Draco’s black sweater. On his back, he wore a backpack prepared with things he thought he might need, including the invisibility cloak. He was ready to do battle. Percy caught up to him. His dark eyes were wide behind his glasses.

“We need to wait for Remus!” he hissed in an urgent whisper.

“He’ll catch up,” Harry snapped back, breathing hard from his run. “We can’t get too far behind.”

The coin necklace that Hermione had charmed was still hot against his skin. Quirrell wasn’t far ahead of them. Harry was determined to keep it that way. Without waiting for the redhead’s response, Harry grabbed the door handle and turned it. The door wasn’t locked. It swung open easily. The soft sounds of a harp drifted out to him, almost masked by their heavy breathing. Wiping sweat from his face, Harry moved into the dark room. The air felt heavy, the scent of dog was overwhelming. Percy cast *lumos* and they saw the trapdoor open between a sleeping Fluffy’s paws.

“I’ll go first,” Percy whispered firmly, grabbing Harry by the shoulder. He jumped through the hole before Harry could argue.

Harry was about to jump in after him when something wet hit his shoulder. He flinched sideways, head snapping back to look up. The harp had stopped playing and three massive heads towered over him. Three mouths full of sharp teeth were bared in a snarl. The other two lunged down at him, mouths gaping open to bite him in half. Harry dove head first through the trapdoor.

Pain screamed up his leg as one of the heads managed to bite his ankle. His foot slipped through the dog’s teeth before it could snap closed. It was just a graze, but it still hurt like the blazes! His shoe began to feel wet; he was bleeding. *Damn*, it hurt! Harry didn’t have time to see how bad it was. He’d landed on a pile of thick vines half as wide as his waist. They began to move around him, undulating and beginning to coil around his legs. Devil’s Snare! Just as Ron had predicted!

Gasping in pain, Harry flung his wand out and cast, “*Lumos Solem!*” Sunlight streamed from his wand, forcing the vines to flinch away. With a startled yell, Harry found himself falling through them. There was a short drop and Harry hit a stone floor hard, yelping as his leg screamed in pain.

“Harry!”

Percy quickly knelt by the younger boy, his curly red hair falling into his eyes and sticking to his forehead. A quick *lumos* revealed Harry’s pant leg was torn and soaked with blood, as was his shoe. He’d landed on a pile of thick vines half as wide as his waist. They began to move around him, undulating and beginning to coil around his legs. Devil’s Snare! Just as Ron had predicted!

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“Harry!”

Percy quickly knelt by the younger boy, his curly red hair falling into his eyes and sticking to his forehead. A quick *lumos* revealed Harry’s pant leg was torn and soaked with blood, as was his shoe. Instead of black with white lettering, the Converse was now black with red lettering. A Severing Charm cut the material of Harry’s jeans off at the knee. A bleeding gash ran from the boy’s ankle to halfway up his calf.

“Tell me you packed medical supplies,” Percy demanded hotly.

Harry nodded and dug through the backpack.

“What happened?” Percy demanded, voice hushed, as he used the disinfectant ointment and skin-seal that Harry handed him.
“Harp stopped playing,” Harry explained. He grimaced as white bandages were wrapped around his leg from ankle to knee. The cut from the dog’s tooth burned and throbbed, but he was determined to ignore it. “I’m okay,” he said softly.

His ankle hurt, but it wasn’t broken. He could walk and got to his feet to prove it. A quick Cleaning Charm from Percy mostly fixed his shoe so he didn’t squish as he walked. “What’s that sound?” They were in a nearly pitch-black room. Percy’s wand-light barely touched the shadows, but Harry could make out stone walls close around them. The Devil’s Snare acted like a living roof over their heads. There was a door cracked open in front of them. The soft buzzing hum was coming from the next room.

“We’re waiting for Remus,” Percy said firmly, grabbing Harry’s wrist. “You’re already hurt. This isn’t a game, Harry!”

Harry’s head whipped around. “Does it look like I’m playing a game?” he spat furiously. “Let me go. Now.”

Percy’s fingers went loose with shock at Harry’s ferocious tone and the smaller boy managed to yank his arm away.

“I almost hope Quirrell kills me,” Percy muttered as he followed Harry into the next room. “Because if he doesn’t, Draco most certainly will and it’ll hurt more.”

The second room was much larger and taller than the one under the Devil’s Snare, but with columns standing a foot away from the walls and range support beams branched out in weird and random patterns from dozens of arches along the tall ceiling, it somehow felt more crowded. At least there were windows high above them that let in moonlight. It was bright enough for them to see by without Percy’s wand and he canceled his Light spell.

In the moonlight, they could easily make out the source of the humming. Filling all that empty space above them, a hundred flying things dipped and swayed languidly in graceful patterns. Their wings looked like snitch wings, humming as they beat like a dragon-fly’s. Percy and Harry stood tensed for an attack, but the flying things didn’t react to their presence at all.

“Broom,” Percy said tightly, gesturing with his wand. It floated at waist height as if waiting for them.

Harry nodded. He’d seen it. He’d also seen the doorway across from them. Whatever the flying things had been about, the thief had already solved it. The doorknob turned under Harry’s hand, telling them that it was unlocked. Before Harry could open it, however, Percy tried again to get him to see reason.

“We’ve come far enough. Please, Harry. Let’s wait for Remus.”

“I’ll just take a look,” Harry insisted and pulled the door open a crack.

Almost immediately the flying things came to life. The boys quickly realized they were flying keys as the sharp metal teeth cut into the skin of their cheeks and necks and hands as they were swarmed. Percy shoved Harry through the door and dove in after him, slamming it shut behind them.

“Quirrell must have used the broom to capture the key that unlocked the door. Wonder how he knew which one it was,” Percy grumbled as he got up off his hands and knees.

The smell hit him first. It was worse than dog. It smelled sour, almost like the locker room after a week of hard practices. It was rancid. Percy straightened his glasses and actually took in the room. It was round and windowless, but it was well lit by torches. In the center, sprawled a dead troll. Its
filthy body was sprawled on its back almost thicker than they were tall. It’s skin was a yellowish-green. It had a loin cloth, but that didn’t hide much. It was fat and muscular at the same time and stunk so bad they had to breathe through their mouths or risk getting sick. It wasn’t moving, but that was because its head was severed from its shoulders. Black blood oozed across the floor, looking disturbingly like black ink. Percy shuddered as two dead eyes stared straight through him from the decapitated head three feet away.

Desperate to look at anything else, Percy turned his attention to Harry. The boy’s sweater and jeans had dozens of little tears from the keys. Blood coated Harry’s cheek, painting it a bright red. He looked a mess. Percy didn’t look much better. He wiped at the blood on his face and neck as he followed Harry across the room. They were almost there when they heard it. A huge crash of stone crumbling. For a split second, Percy felt terror scream along his nerves. The roof was coming down on them! They’d be crushed! But reason kicked in and he realized the noise was too contained for the room to be collapsing. It must be Quirrell! Percy’s grabbed Harry by the upper arm.

“Get the cloak on! Hurry,” he hissed.

Harry’s heart pounded in his chest. He could feel it in his throat, beating against the leather of his collar. He took his bag off and pulled out the invisibility cloak as quietly as he could. Putting his backpack back on, he slipped the cloak on over his body, bag and all, and pulled up the hood. Percy was already crouched down at the door, peering through the crack. Harry didn’t bother crouching since he was invisible. He stared into the room, squinting, but he couldn’t see much.

There was rubble up ahead and stone statues. He could hear Quirrell talking. There was the grating sound of stone against stone and then another crash. Harry wanted to sneak in to see what was happening, but Percy blocked the cracked doorway with his body and Harry knew the redhead absolutely would not let him enter with Quirrell still in the room.

They stood there for what felt like hours. Harry was about to force his way past Percy when there was a final explosion and then a metal clang. Then silence. Holding their breath, they could just make out the sound of a door opening and closing. Suddenly, a hand grabbed Harry’s shoulder from behind! Harry spun, a scream trapped in his throat, but it was just Remus. The man’s eyes were completely gold. The scars on his face stood out starkly in the flickering light. Harry pulled down his hood so that his head could be seen. His heart beat furiously from the scare.

“How’d you know where I was?”

“Smelled you,” Remus answered shortly. “You’re bleeding.”

“I’m fine,” Harry insisted. He met Remus’s eyes head on and dared him to try and stop him from doing this. It was harder than you’d think. Remus’s expression was dangerous; he didn't look at all like himself. Sweat rolled down Harry’s face, but he refused to blink.

Percy was oblivious to the tense standoff between them. His hands shook and his knees felt weak with relief, so he sat carefully on the floor next to the door and leaned against the wall for support. “Ron?”

Without blinking or looking away from Harry, Remus answered, “I had to Stupify him.”

Percy winced. Ron would be furious in the morning, but Percy was really glad his little brother would be safe.

“Let me go first,” Remus said lowly. It was a compromise. Harry could stay, but he had to stay as far out of danger as possible.
Harry reluctantly stepped aside and pulled his hood back in place.

Remus slunk into the room on the balls of his feet, his movements fluid and his body tensed and ready. He was hyperaware of the two boys following in his wake. The room was large and lit by magical light streaming from the ceiling. The statues turned out to be chess pieces. The crashes they’d heard had been the pieces destroying each other. Even as they watched the broken rubble began to repair itself along the side of the room. Remus moved quickly to the door on the opposite wall and found it unlocked. It wouldn’t stay that way, though. Once the board reset, the door would lock once again.

They didn’t have time to play through a game, so with a quick movement, Remus cracked the door just enough to slip inside. He pressed his back firmly against the wall and froze, waiting to find out if he’d been seen, and held an open hand in the doorway, signaling the boys to wait. The room was shaped like a large octagon and well lit by torches. Purple and white tiles created an intricate spiral on the floor. Set in the center was some type of table or altar. Remus couldn’t see it too well because the cloaked form of Quirrell blocked his view. The cloaked man was slightly hunched over and there was the whispered sound of muttering. Across the chamber, an open doorway loomed. Remus had no idea why the man didn’t just cross and go through it, but he found out a moment later.

Quirrell must have touched something because suddenly fire exploded into life in both doorways. Remus flinched back, crouching low to the floor, trying to stay in the shadows as the door began to burn with a hungry roar. The heat was incredible! Remus was instantly drenched in sweat. At least Harry was now trapped on the other side and unable to move forward. His cub was safe.

Remus breathed fast and soft through his mouth, trying to stay silent and invisible. There was nothing to really hide behind except the two pillars half as wide as he was on either side of the door. If Quirrell looked his way, he’d know someone was there. Fortunately, whatever was on table had Quirrell’s complete attention. Remus could no longer hear him over the roar of the flames, but the man seemed agitated, his arms pointing and jerking, his head tossing at intervals. After about fifteen minutes by Remus’s guess, the man lifted something to his mouth and tipped his head back, drinking. Then he strode quickly toward the flames in the opposite doorway, walking boldly through the raging fire.

Remus gave it a minute, but when the flames didn’t die away and Quirrell didn’t reappear, he moved carefully forward toward the table. He could see that it had seven potion vials arranged in a row, all different shapes, colors, and sizes. Now that he was away from the flames, the smell of rotting flesh and garlic hit his nose. It was so putrid that tears burned his eyes. He quickly breathed through his mouth to spare himself the worst of it. Remus bumped into something right in front of the table and the scent of fresh, clean blood lifted up to him.

“Harry?” he gasped, surprised.

Harry’s head was revealed as the boy took down his hood. He stared at Remus with defiance. Remus was speechless. The boy must of crawled under his hand through the doorway before the fire erupted! He had no idea what was pushing Harry so hard or why he was being so reckless. Did he not realize if something happened to him Draco would be utterly destroyed? Frustrated fury bubbled up from his center and he had to hold himself perfectly still for fear of slapping Harry across his obstinate face.

“It’s a puzzle,” Harry explained, oblivious to Remus’s anger. He picked up a letter that Quirrell had discarded on the floor and proceeded to read a long poem about the potions.

“Harry… Harry, stop.” Remus knelt and gently rested his hands on Harry’s small shoulders. They were about eye to eye in this position. Harry was dirty, sweaty, and dried blood coated one side of
his face from his misadventure with the keys. He was a child, eleven years old! He couldn’t be here! “Harry…” It was hard to speak calmly when all Remus wanted to do was scream and shake him. “I know you want to help. That Draco’s counting on us to prevent the Dark Lord from getting the Stone. But you can’t put yourself at risk, Harry. A lot is lost if the Dark Lord comes back to power, but all is lost if you are. Don’t you understand that, Harry? That if you die, Draco would be destroyed as well? Quirrell is dangerous, Harry! He could kill you.”

Harry’s expression twisted, revealing an ocean of frustration as tears filled his crystalline eyes. “I know that, Remus! But I - I have to help! I have to make sure it’s done right! I - I have to fight, okay?”

He didn’t know how to explain that it felt like if he didn’t do this he’d never get better. He’d always be this weak thing huddled at Draco’s feet. He didn’t want that! He wanted to be the fierce force he saw in the mirror, a power that Draco could wield and be proud of. A power that would protect Draco and not just be protected by him.

“I’m going,” he insisted, wiping his tears and staring Remus down. “You can’t stop me.”

Remus literally growled. It was a deep sound that resonated through the man’s entire chest and sent Harry’s heart stuttering with instinctual fear. The golden eyes of a wolf bore into him. “I could, actually,” Remus whispered, low and dangerous.

Harry knew instantly that he couldn’t beat Remus, and if that were true, then what chance did he have against Quirrell? Despair swamped Harry completely, so much so that his knees gave out and he sank to the floor. What was he thinking? He would just get in the way. The vision in the mirror darkened in his mind. There was no way that could ever be the future. It had been beyond stupid to think it could be possible.

Remus was startled by the sudden and complete change in Harry’s demeanor. He stared wide-eyed at the child who now sat defeated, head bowed forward, tears silently wetting his cheeks as if the strings that had been holding him up had been cut. He hadn’t meant to hurt Harry, but he couldn’t let Harry get hurt, either!

Frustrated, hating himself for breaking the boy, Remus climbed to his feet and held out his hand.

“Let me see the letter,” he said softly, voice tight.

Harry obediently lifted the letter, his arm heavy, his hand limp.

Remus winced and took it from him. He could hardly focus on it. The broken form of his cub on the floor kept pulling his attention. Remus growled again, this time at himself, and forced himself to focus. “One among us seven will let you move ahead. Another will transport the drinker back instead,” he read out loud. “Then there are two nettle-wines and three poisons that will kill me instantly. Just great,” he muttered, but there must be a way to figure out the answer because Quirrell had passed safety through the fire ahead.

Remus sniffed at the potions, but they all smelled the same. Severus really was a genius. Okay, the poem gave him four clues. He read them out loud. “First, however slyly the poison tries to hide, you will always find some on nettle-wine’s left side. Second, different are those who stand at either end, but if you would move onward, neither is your friend. Third as you see clearly, all are different size. Neither dwarf nor giant hold death in their insides. Fourth, the second left and the second on the right, are twins once you taste them, though different at first sight.”

Worry about Harry faded into the background as Remus grew more involved with the seemingly impossible puzzle. He tapped his chin thoughtfully, one arm across his chest bracing his elbow.
“Every bottle of nettle wine will have poison to its left. Now, this doesn’t necessarily mean that every bottle of poison will have nettle wine to its right since there are three bottles of poison and only two of nettle wine. That means there will be two pairings of nettle wine-plus-poison with the wine on the right and the poison on the left. There will be one poison left over as well as the forward potion and backward potion.

“We know the potions on either end of the row are different from one another and secondly that the move forward potion is not on either end. Because the nettle wine always has to have poison to its left, the far left potion cannot be nettle wine. It could be poison or the move backward potion, though. If the far left one is poison, the far right one has to be either nettle wine or the move backward potion. If the far left one is the move backward potion, the far right one has to be either nettle wine or poison. But! The potions next to the outside potions are identical. Neither of those can be the move forward or move back potion because there are only one of each. So in the end, we’re left with eight possible arrangements of the seven potions. In all of the arrangements, the move forward potion is in position three, four, or five.”

The answer was evident now. The largest bottle was in position two, the smallest was in position three. That meant that the move forward potion was in the smallest bottle and the biggest bottle was wine. The move back potion was in the far right potion. He was definitely sure about that one. He could be wrong about the move forward potion. It could be the fourth bottle not the third, so either he moved ahead or he drank poison. Fifty-fifty.

Remus glanced down at Harry. “I think I figured it out. This far right potion will take you back to Percy. You should both get ready. If I can’t get the Stone, then you and Percy will need to try and stall Quirrell as long as possible. I sent word to Dumbledore, but it will take time for him to get it and return from London. All the other teachers were put to sleep. I couldn’t wake them.”

Harry nodded his head wordlessly.

“I think the correct potion is in the smallest bottle, but it could also be poison,” Remus continued through gritted teeth. Damn it, what in the bloody hell was he supposed to do? He couldn’t let Harry kill himself, but all the light had gone from Harry’s eyes, and there was no time to try and fix it! Quirrell had gone on at least fifteen minutes ago. Anything could be happening in there. Without another word, Remus lifted the smallest bottle and took a mouthful. He waited, but he didn’t feel sick, so he flashed Harry an empty smile and made his way through the flames ahead of them.

Harry watched him go, eyes dull and uncaring. A black hole had opened in his gut. What was the point of any of this? Draco would keep getting hurt, fighting against this evil. Harry would keep weighing everyone down. It was a horrible cycle that Harry saw no hope of escaping. It made him want to scream and end it all! It was so tempting to drink the poison sitting only a foot away from him on the table, but his hand unconsciously cupped his side where the dragon was tattooed on his skin.

Draco owned him, body and soul. Draco had made it clear that Harry’s life was his. Harry wasn’t allowed to take it. Cut off from all sides, Harry had nothing left at all. He was crying hard now, hardly able to see. He took his glasses off his face and wiped at his eyes, but it didn’t help. Something warm and hard shoved at his forehead. Startled, Harry pulled his hand back. The head of the white dragon had lifted off the skin on the back of his hand! Harry stared, shocked. This had never happened before! He quickly shoved his glasses back on his face so he could see it clearly.

Draco had created the tattoo for one purpose. To tell the world Harry was his… including Harry himself. Draco had inked the dragon into Harry’s skin after Harry had tried to kill himself. Its purpose was to remind Harry that suicidal thoughts were forbidden. It was designed to ensure
Harry’s internal darkness was kept in check if Draco wasn’t there to do it himself. In the two years Harry had worn it, it had never had to activate and become physical like this before!

The dragon’s head was sleek and beautiful and powerful. The dark green of the dragon’s slitted eyes shone with a power that was all too familiar to Harry. Draco! It opened its mouth and the head lashed downward, its needle-sharp teeth closing around Harry’s thumb. The bite stung painfully. A tiny trickle of blood snaked down his hand and over his wrist.

Harry gasped at the pain. Suddenly, the image he’d seen in the mirror appeared in his mind’s eye as vivid as before. It could come true! It could! He was Draco’s! He was a part of something amazing and powerful! Draco may work with others, like Remus, but they weren’t Draco’s the way Harry was. Harry wasn’t on the bottom of some totem pole, answering to everyone else. Harry answered to no one but Draco! And Draco had entrusted Harry with his mission, not Remus!

Heart beating with new life, Harry looked to see the dragon had returned to its place underneath his skin. However, its head stayed on the back of his hand, watching. Its powerful neck disappeared under the sleeve of Harry’s sweater. If Harry were to look, he knew the rest of its powerful body would be inked into his forearm. Harry’s thumb still oozed blood from the warning bite and Harry sucked it clean reverently.

“Yours,” he whispered to the dragon and, through it, to Draco. “No one else’s.” Harry climbed to his feet and locked his knees. Chin set in defiance, he took up the smallest bottle and drank it. Then, flinging his hood back on, he ran straight through the flames.

xXx

Panther-like body covered in ink-black scales, poisonous green eyes slitted like a snake’s, whip-cord tail, jaws of a wolf, claws of a cat… Healthy, he was sleek and dangerous, but also beautiful with a sinuous grace. Now… Draco looked like a beast from hell.

Standing against the wall. Hands braced in front of him, they trembled no matter how hard he pressed them flat. The paddle hit his ass again and again with the full force of a full grown man behind it. The sound of wood impacting flesh melded with his grunts and gaps and sobs. The CRACK hit his ears as screaming pain tore along his nerves. Each blow lifted him up onto his toes. Battered - in so much goddamn pain - teeth bared and drenched in sweat - the Master was laughing… Voldemort had tried to twist his wordless cries of pain into promises of being good. Tried to make Draco believe he should submit to someone stronger than him. Draco tore the corruption free of the memory with an ice cold wind, shredding pieces of the real memory with it.

Draco’s body was skeletal, chunks of flesh missing revealing bloody muscle. The scales of his jaw had been melted away by the poison, revealing blood-smeared bone. He was caked in mud and filth from his battles with his own corrupted mind. Still, he never hesitated. Not once. He flung himself deep into the jungle of his mind again and again and rooted out all of the thorns that had spread since Voldemort had entered his mind.

Swaying slightly, queasy with pain, body nearly broken beyond repair. Half of his torso was black with overlapping bruises. The wounds radiated painful heat. It felt like a knife was sawing at his ribs with every breath. Holding his torso straight as he could, Draco stared at the cargo through animalistic eyes. They were no longer bleating and crying. They were silent. Deathly silent. The scent of illness, vomit and sweet-smelling sweat, filled the room like a cloying fog.

The children lay like discarded dolls across the Hold. One was having seizures even as Draco watched. Another stared at him, dark eyes glassy and vacant, drool and bile oozing from the corners of her mouth. The rest were still. All of them. Draco stared at them, chest on fire with agony and
waited. Waited for the contamination to crawl over him and invade his body. Waited to die. Mouth stretching, Draco smiled as he heard the one seizing breathe out in a long sigh and go still. The boy didn’t breathe in again. Another one, he thought, demented smile stretching wide in a death-head grin.

The corruption tried to twist his morbid laughter into joy at the death of the child, tried to make him want more of it, but Draco didn’t get off on the kid dying. No. He was laughing because the Bastard had just lost one of his precious slaves. Anything that hurt that motherfucker put a smile on Draco’s battered face. He hoped all the kids died! Better dead than in the hands of monsters like the Master.

Draco relived the horrors of his past, erasing the subtle changes Voldemort had wrought and losing bits of himself along the way. Slowly, he sank deeper and deeper. If it weren’t for the memories, he’d have forgotten what it was like to have two legs and soft, human skin. The jungle, the past, it was all there was.

Standing on a stage, wrists bound in cold chains above his head, lifted nearly off his feet, shoulders screaming in agony, a whip slicing his back open… It was all background noise. It didn’t matter. His screams were reflexive. His attention was across the room. Riveted on the horrific scene playing out in front of him. Harry… the small boy who had somehow stitched together the last of Draco’s humanity… who had given Draco love and safety and purpose… was folded over a padded bench. Small, thin legs dangled nowhere near touching the ground. A man almost twice as wide as the little boy stepped up to the boy’s terror-struck face.

The sounds of that little boy crying and shaking in fear tore deeper than the whip cracking across his back could ever reach. As that bastard took his fucking dick out and pressed it into Harry’s mouth, something crazy burned to life in Draco’s chest, raw and ravenous. He knew with absolutely certainty that he would kill them all. No one who laid a hand on Harry would survive…

The fucker choked the small boy. Shoved right into Harry’s throat. Draco was close enough to see it; the man’s dick stretching the slender throat, in and out in a brutal push-pull that kept the boy from breathing, strangling him from the inside out. Harry’s green eyes were wild with panic. Seeing Harry brutalized that way felt like someone had torn Draco’s heart in half and set it on fire, but that wasn’t even the worst! No, it was the dark, fat dick spreading Harry’s ass open. The motherfucker thrust with short stabs as he punched deeper and deeper into Harry’s fragile body.

The red of blood smeared across that fucker’s cock as he rutted fully into Harry’s small body made Draco howl with rage. But instead of breaking free and tearing those bastards apart, Voldemort had tried to twist it so that Draco had never escaped… Twisted it so that Harry was fucking brutally for hours - mouth and ass. That in the end the little boy who so precious to Draco was nothing more than an unconscious, limp sleeve to be used. That Harry - sweet and shy with a soft, breathy laugh - was left gaping open on the bench, hanging like discarded laundry, cum and blood spilling from both ends. Voldemort wanted Draco to believe he was a failure. That Draco was unable to save Harry or himself.

Draco tore through Voldemort’s lies with reckless abandon, scouring his mind clean of the taint. Reveled in the sharp mind-numbing agony of shredded skin and dislocated thumbs. He screamed in joy at the feel of the whip in his hand and not in the hand of his tormentor. Howled with laughter as the monsters who’d touched Harry died in agony!

Purgatory… Hell… There was no leaving this place… These memories… And yet the brutality revisited on his mind only made him more determined to push forward. Made it impossible for him to submit, yield, give in. Made him a snarling ball of rage and fury. A cold, cleansing wind wound around him. Draco lifted his head to the jungle canopy above him, eyes closed in pleasure as it
cooled the fire of his hate enough that he could think clearly again. His heartbeat slowed. His breath came in steady pulls. His muscles uncoiled one by one.

“You have been removed the last of the Taint.” A voice that resonated deeper than the ocean vibrated through the core of Draco’s being. “You are ready, Hunter.”

Draco lowered his head and slowly opened his eyes, looking fearlessly into the starry expanse of the god’s eyes.

The god gave a smile, revealing blood-stained teeth in the face of an ancient, wrinkled face. Tangled long white hair fluttered in a breeze that Draco could not feel. Knotted and age spotted hands lifted and caressed Draco along the head, curled around his jaw. “Your Prey awaits.” Sharp, thick nails pierced through Draco’s scales and drew hot blood to the surface. “Let us see who will stand Victorious.”

Suddenly Draco could hear the ringing of small bells calling him. The bond opened with a flood of Harry’s emotions - urgency determination love self-sacrifice fear -

Draco’s eyes slammed opened in his human face. They glittered silver as he took in the empty hospital beds around him. His hand immediately went to his neck, but the charmed coin wasn’t there. Draco’s empty hand clenched into a fist as it fell to his side. With terrifying calmness, he pulled the blankets off and swung his legs over the side of the bed. Then he was off and running, deadly intent singing in his veins. Unknown to him, he was grinning madly and the floor under his bare feet frosted over wherever he stepped.

Chapter end.
Leaping through the flames, Harry found himself in a wide, dark stairwell that led down. The light from the fire barely penetrated the dark gloom. Without hesitation, Harry ran down the steps and into the darkness. He stepped out onto a short landing, ran the few steps forward, and went down more stairs. He could tell he was dungeon level now. The walls were cold, the air moist. Another landing and he could hear the sounds of a vicious duel. Words of power were yelled out, bitten off. Magic pulsed and lashed, making all the hair on Harry’s arms and the back of his neck stand on end. His mad rush downwards slowed, became more careful. A fourth landing. He looked down the last set of stairs and saw an open room with dark stone walls and dark stone floor.

It was round with columns set into the walls. A few torches created flickering light enough to see by. A mirror - the mirror - stood in the center. Open arches along the walls led to areas Harry couldn’t see, the darkness beyond them too thick to see through. Spell-light flashed and Remus came tumbling though one of the archways into the light. He had blood drenching half of his face from a cut on his hairline. His sleeves were burnt away, revealing red, blistering flesh. He rolled fluidly to his feet, poised for battle, his wand steady and aimed with pinpoint accuracy. Remus’s eyes had gone completely gold and a snarl twisted his features.

A dark sinister laugh echoed from the darkness as Quirrell strode forward, his stride long and fluid and fast. It almost seemed like he was flying across the floor. His movements practically screamed his eagerness for battle. “It’s been so long!” the man exclaimed joyfully and high-pitched. “I haven’t seen the light die in someone’s eyes in so long, their despair and terror thick enough to drink! I’m going to enjoy killing you slowly!”

Quirrell’s hood had fallen back revealing a completely bald head. His eyes were like empty pits in his face, wide and manic. His mouth was stretched wide in a monstrous smile. The man’s right hand looked to be rotting, withered black and grey-blue like that of a corpse. The whole arm hung limp at his side. Black and red lines of infection and corruption spider-webbed across his neck and that half of his face. Harry bit his lip, fighting a gasp of horror as he saw the skin at the back of Quirrell’s head writhe as if fat worms were fighting to break out. For a split second, Harry saw a face press up from the back of the man’s skull just underneath the skin and a sharp bolt of molten agony shot through the scar on his forehead.

Remus didn’t bother answering the madman. He was utterly focused on shielding and attacking. He managed to deflect Quirrell’s spell and it flew to the side near where Harry stood invisible. Dust fell from the ceiling as the force of the magic impacted the wall. Harry staggered, biting his lips to hold back a surprised yell. Low to the ground, Remus ran to the right, shooting spell after spell even as he moved. Quirrell laughed, high-pitched and insane. He deflected the magic with ease and chased after the werewolf.

Harry was breathing hard. He’d crouched without even realizing it, trying to make himself a smaller target. He had to hurry! The Stone was all that mattered! Where was it? Harry’s eyes darted around frantically, but there was nothing to see but dark archways and the mirror. Was it hidden somewhere beyond this room? The sound of a scream cut through the air. Harry trembled, terrified, but his eyes kept moving toward the mirror. What was it doing here? Why was it displayed in the center? Harry winced as a cracking sound and a howl erupted from the darkness. Remus ran back into the light. His left arm hung useless, flapping as he ran. It bent and moved in an unnatural way that made Harry’s stomach churn.
A pulse of magic erupted from where Remus had come from and Remus was flung with great force several feet backward into a wall. He bounced off the hard stone and collapsed on his stomach, bloody and winded. Quirrell swooped out of the darkness practically on top of the other man.

“I’ll tear it out of you! All that gorgeous blood! Scream for me, worm! Scream!”

Remus arched as the man twirled his wand in sickening loops faster and faster over Remus’s body. A scream of pure torment was wrenched from his throat. Harry crouched even lower, biting back whimpers. Remus lay unmoving, collapsed on the floor, his chest heaving.

“Enough!” a sibilant, hissing voice cut through the screams, making Harry shudder. “The Ssstone. Find the Ssstone!”

Quirrell didn’t have the Stone! Harry’s heart beat a mile a minute, eyes wide behind his glasses. He half-crawled deeper into the room. He was on his feet, but he was crouched low to the ground, half his weight on his hands. He moved forward in perfect silence. He breathed carefully through his mouth, so his shallow breathing couldn’t be heard.

“The room is empty, Master! The Stone’s not here!” Quirrell simpered.

“Look again!” the voice hissed, threat practically dripping off every syllable.

As Quirrell took off to search beyond the archways, Harry crawled forward toward the mirror. It had to be there for a reason! Heart practically punching a hole in his chest, Harry’s eyes widened as he saw his reflection even though he wore the invisibility cloak. Mirror-Harry was on his knees, his body turned sideways so that Draco stood between his thighs. This time the blond was clutching a dark green leash that was attached to Harry’s black, leather collar. Mirror-Draco was smirking wider than ever as he stroked mirror-Harry’s hair with casual possessiveness.

The blond wore tight black jeans, his feet and torso were bare, revealing milky white skin covered in scars. From thin white lines to raised pink tissue, mirror-Draco’s body looked identical to the real one. His blond hair hung loose around his face, falling just past his sharp jawline, and his eyes… His eyes shone silver. Harry stared at him with a longing so powerful that he nearly couldn’t breathe around it. Mirror-Harry’s eyes reflected that same longing as he stared up at the blond from his knees. Mirror-Harry had on a black corset over a dark-green, long-sleeved lace shirt with a wide, round neck. It left his collarbones exposed and nearly fell off his shoulders. He wore the short black shorts that Draco favored and silk, thigh-high stockings with black, high-heeled ankle boots.

Those uncovered green eyes dropped to stare dead into Harry’s eyes. Mirror-Harry smirked, all teeth and threat. Harry shivered in desire as mirror-Draco tugged sharply on the leash. Mirror-Harry stood immediately, all fluid grace. The high-heels put him on level with Draco’s height, but there was no mistaking who had all the power.

Mirror-Draco looked into Harry’s eyes, ignoring mirror-Harry who stared at mirror-Draco with perfect submission, ready for whatever would be asked of him. Mirror-Draco lifted a thin eyebrow and pulled a red stone from his pocket. Harry’s mouth went dry. Mirror-Draco’s smirk softened into the smile that was reserved just for Harry. It made Harry’s cheeks heat and his head dizzy. Mirror-Draco fisted mirror-Harry’s hair, yanking it brutally back so his face pointed toward the ceiling. Mirror-Draco pressed the red crystal to mirror-Harry’s lips, which obediently opened. Harry’s eyes widened in shock as he felt his jaw part as the weight of the stone appeared on his tongue.

Draco! he thought near desperately, filled with - need want lust.

A shadow fell over him, his scar pulsed hotly, and terror hit Harry’s senses like a bucket of ice water.
Abruptly he remembered where he was, crouched in front of a magical mirror in a dark, dungeon chamber with an insane Quirrell and hurt, possibly dying, Remus. Harry could hardly breathe around the Stone in his mouth, his every breath coming fast and thin through his nose. Dread sitting heavy in his gut, Harry slowly turned his head and looked up. Quirrell was standing a few inches from him, staring over his head from where Harry still crouched invisibly. He was looking into the mirror.

“I see myself holding the Stone…” he hissed in frustration, anger lacing his voice. “But how do I get it?”

Pale, all the blood having rushed from his face in fear, Harry slowly lifted a trembling hand. He took the Stone from his mouth and carefully shoved it into his jean pocket. It was a good thing he did because Quirrell’s wand snapped up as if it had a mind of its own and magic blasted into him, ripping the cloak from his body. Quirrell’s expression of frustration morphed into surprise and then joy.

“Potter!” he practically giggled. “I was wondering if I’d run into you.”

Dizzy, black spots dancing in his eyes, breathing too fast to be healthy, Harry slowly stood. He barely came up to the madman’s chest, but he tilted his head back and looked defiantly into the wizard’s eyes. His scar was on fire now, making tears form in his eyes, but he did his best to ignore it. He had a death grip on his wand.

“Nothing to say?” Quirrell asked almost sweetly.

“Use the boy!” the hissing voice ordered.

Quirrell’s expression turned furious in an instant. “Look into the mirror, Potter! Now!” he screamed, his wand less than an inch from Harry’s face.

Harry could feel the malevolent magic waiting to lash out at him and he shakily turned to face the mirror. He saw mirror-Harry leaning against mirror-Draco’s side, but Mirror-Draco was watching the real Harry, a look of concern on his face. Having Draco’s eyes on him, even if it was in a mirror, made him breathe a little easier.

“Tell me. What do you see?” Quirrell asked softly from behind him.

“I-I see… I’m w-winning the House Cup. I-I’m being made P-Prefect…” Harry stuttered fearfully, Ron’s vision the first thing that came to mind. He had to get the Stone out of here! He had to use the serum to destroy it!

“He liesss!”

Harry’s scar hurt so badly that he couldn’t stop tears from streaking his cheeks.

“TELL THE TRUTH! What do you see?”

“Let me ssspeak to him.”

Quirrell sounded terrified. “Master, you’re not strong enough!”

“I have strength enough for thisss.”

Harry turned around, legs shaking. Quirrell stared at him in utter hatred before he too turned around. Harry felt his stomach roll as he came face to face with the back of Quirrell’s bare skull. Once more the skin rippled there and a face pressed up from underneath the man’s skin. It stretched for a second
before settling into the features of a monstrous man.

“Harry Potter… We meet again…” the grotesque face hissed, chilling Harry to the core.

“Voldemort,” Harry gasped, near breathless with pain and terror.

“Yesss… You sssee what I’ve become… Ssssee what I must do to ssssurvive… become a parasssite… living off unicorn blood to ssssusstain my hossst… But it cannot give me a body of my own… But there isss ssssomething that can… Ssssomething that, conveniently enough, liesss in your pocket!”

Harry tore his eyes from the face in Quirrell’s head and bolted in sheer panic back toward the stairs.

“Ssstooop him!”

Harry looked over his shoulder to see Quirrell had spun around. Eyes wild, the man screamed a spell that Harry didn’t quite catch and burning hot fire erupted in front of him, filling the stairway. Harry darted to the side and hid behind one of the archways.

“Don’t be a fool, Harry,” Voldemort hissed, sounding calm now that the only way out was blocked by deadly flames. “Why suffer a horrific death when you can join me and live?”

Harry looked around frantically, but there was nowhere to run. It was a dead end! The space beyond the archways was empty, just a few more feet of room before ending in a wall.

Voldemort hissed a cruel laugh. “We do not have to be enemiesss, Harry. Would you like to sssee your mother and father again? Come to me and together we can bring them back. All I asssk… isss for sssomething in return.”

Harry swung his backpack off and pulled the Stone from his pocket. It wasn’t really safe to use the serum like this. He had no protective gear on, no way to protect his lungs if he were to accidentally breathe it in, but he had to do it! He couldn’t let Voldemort get the Stone! Voldemort’s voice drew closer and closer.

“There isss no good and evil, Harry. There isss only power and those too weak to ssseek it! Together… we will do extraordinary things. Just give me the Ssstone!”

Harry had the vial of Vivificantis serum in one hand and the Stone in the other when Quirrell suddenly flew around the archway and cast a spell that sent Harry flying and tumbling back into the center of the room. Harry came up hard against the mirror. The room spun, his shoulders and head ached from his tumble, and the gash from Fluffy throbbed hotly down his leg, but he still had a death grip on the vial and the Stone. HIs glasses had gotten knocked off his face in the fall. He squinted, trying to get Quirrell into his field of vision.

“Get the Stone!” Voldemort screamed, growing excited upon actually seeing the ruby-like gem in Harry’s hand. “Kill him!”

Quirrell came swooping down on him! Harry screamed and rolled to the side, but before the madman reached him, Remus staggered to his feet and cast a powerful blasting curse.

“Harry! RUN!” Remus bellowed, blasting Quirrell again and again.

Harry had seconds, a minute at most, before Voldemort would be on him again. He scrambled to his feet, slipping slightly as he tried to get traction on the stone floor, and bolted toward the fire blocking the stairway. It didn’t matter if he’d get burned. All that mattered was that monster didn’t get the Stone. Harry had to stop him. To protect Draco!
The fire was hot. Even from feet away it made his skin tight. It roared, cackling hungrily. Harry, heart pumping painfully hard, braced himself for the shock of pain, but just before the fire licked at his skin, it suddenly sputtered and went out as a blast of cold air hit Harry in the face. Frost and ice coated the floor, crawled up the sides of the wall, and fanned out along the ceiling. Harry stood in utter shock and would have dropped to his knees, but Draco grabbed his arm and roughly pulled him forward.

The blond jogged back up the stairs onto the first landing, so they were mostly out of sight of Quirrell and Remus. He yanked Harry’s body flush against his and fistied the boy’s hair. He’d seen the Stone, of course, in the boy’s hand and an unfamiliar vial. Staring down in Harry’s eyes, their mouths close enough to kiss, Draco’s voice filled Harry’s mind like glorious thunder.

**Harry. Can you destroy the Stone?**

Harry tired to nod, but the grip Draco had on his hair was painfully, wonderfully tight.

Draco’s understood his answer, though. His mouth parted in a sharp, predatory grin. **Do it. Be careful. Go!**

Harry bolted forward and ran up the stairs. He burst into the logic puzzle room and kept running. He ran past the chess board, eyes wide as he took in the fact that it had been demolished, frozen and shattered. Ran into the room with the troll. Here, he stopped, panting hard, and gasped for oxygen. His mind spun with shock - **Draco was awake! Draco was here!**

He didn’t know what made him think of the troll. Harry’s mind had raced to think of a way to protect himself from the Vivificantis serum. He’d frantically tried to come up with something that could surround the Stone, something he could pour the serum inside. For some reason, he had remembered the dead troll, remembered the severed head.

Harry shivered, repulsed, but he pried the mouth of the troll open. It’s skin was thick, more like leather than skin, but waxy and smooth, almost slimy, not rough like leather. Harry expected it to be difficult, the jaw stiff, but it opened easily. The tongue sat heavy, an ugly grey-purple. Harry literally gagged as his fingers touched it, but the Stone easily fit inside the cavern.

**Very, very carefully, Harry opened the vial of acidic serum. He held his breath and kept his hand perfectly steady so nothing would splash on him. Even one drop would do horrific damage to his skin and body. One sniff of the fumes could destroy his lungs.** Harry braced himself and, in one smooth motion, he turned the vial upside down and dropped it into the troll’s mouth while his other hand simultaneously shut the jaw, sealing the Stone and the dangerous serum inside.

Harry didn’t understand the science of it completely, of course, but Remus had explained that once the Vivificantis serum was exposed to air, it would destroy everything it came in contact with for about thirty minutes before fizzling out. Something about it exhausting itself. Still, in that time, it should easily destroy the Stone. It would also dissolve the skull and maybe even corrode a hole in the floor. While doing that, it would create poisonous fumes, but not before Harry was long gone in another room.

He’d done it! The Stone was safe! He’d completed the mission! Harry’s knees nearly gave out, but there was still more to do. Draco was here! He was fighting Voldemort! Straightening, Harry ran back the way he’d come. He had to help Draco!

**xXx**

Draco stood barefoot in hospital pants and a t-shirt. His body language screamed danger, his eyes
completely silver, as he entered the fray. The grip of frost slowly left his body as he entered the arena. The god had let him borrow the power of Winter long enough for him to reach the enemy. Now that Draco was here, face to face with Quirrell, he was on his own. He had to prove his worth in combat.

Rage and hate made his vision crystal clear. In an instant, he took in the round room lit by a ring of torches, the archways and shadows beyond, the long mirror in a gilded frame. He saw in perfect detail Remus, bloody and battered, standing on unsteady legs, backing into a corner as he desperately fired off curses. Saw Quirrell in a heavy cloak, mouth distorted in a furious scream. The madman flew at Remus and the wizard went down with a scream, both of his legs snapping brutally at the thigh. Quirrell raised his wand with murder in his eyes…

“Couldn’t heal your hand, could you?” Draco asked sweetly, as he stalked forward and distracted the man. “You went for the Stone sooner than you wanted. Got sloppy. Because no matter what you tried, you couldn’t stop my poison.”

Quirrell spun around to face him, leaving Remus clinging to life behind him. “You…” His eyes narrowed into slits. “What are you doing here?”

“He hasss sssomething for usss… Isss it the Ssstome?” Quirrell turned his back to Draco while the strange, hissing voice spoke, and Draco watched through hate-filled eyes as Voldemort’s shade pressed up from the back of Quirrell’s bald head. “Give it to usss, boy, and we will not kill you for doing thisss to usss.”

Draco bared his teeth. “Voldemort. Good. I have a fucking message for you before I give you the Stone.” He took small steps closer, never looking away from the disfigured eyes of the specter possessing Quirrell. “I’m going to destroy you, bitch.”

Draco leapt forward and jumped the distance between them in a flash. Quirrell tried to swing his arm back to point his wand backward while simultaneously trying to turn. He was clumsy and awkward. Both things he couldn’t afford to be. With a hungry howl of a rabid animal, Draco was on him! He had a small, sharp skinning knife he’d stolen from the kitchen, and with absolutely no hesitation, Draco stabbed the short blade into Quirrell’s neck.

Shocked, the man staggered and went to his knees. Blood sprayed out with shocking force and drenched Draco in seconds. Quirrell’s vile magic lashed out in a defensive push, but Draco’s magic met it, burning around the small boy with so much fury that Quirrell’s magic could do nothing more than heat Draco’s hands and push at him lightly.

Draco pushed back and pulled the knife across the bastard’s throat, opening up a bigger gash that sprayed more blood. Quirrell was flat on the ground now, the blood beginning to spurt softer, the man nearly unconscious. Draco crouched over his enemy’s chest and forced the man’s head brutally around so he could put his face inches from Voldemort’s. He stared right into the monster’s eyes.

“I hope you fucking remember this, Voldemort. Because this is how it’s always going to fucking end between you and me,” he whispered with cold hatred.

Suddenly, a black shadow began to peel itself from Quirrell’s corpse. Draco pulled back enough that he was standing beside the corpse, poised to protect himself, eyes the silver of a predator, as the shadow stretched and grew. He watched as it took on the features of a deformed face, mouth stretched wide in a furious scream and eyes glowing an ember red. The shadow dove for Draco.

Draco braced himself for the impact, teeth gritted so hard that his jaw ached, but Harry was suddenly there, flinging himself between Voldemort’s shade and Draco’s body, arms out flung as he bellowed
Draco instinctively wrapped his arms around Harry’s chest from behind, trying to protect him. His magic spiked with anxiety - *His boy! His boy was in danger!* - and collided with Harry’s magic that had flared with protective fury - *Draco! Got to protect Draco!* - The two magics - two halves of one whole - clicked and merged in a split second and became one great force!

Voldemort’s shadow exploded on contact as if he’d run head first into a solid wall. Harry screamed in agony, his scar erupting in pain and spilling fresh blood down his face. Harry’s eyes rolled back in his head and he went limp. Draco caught him and held Harry to his chest, sinking gracefully to the floor under Harry’s weight. Voldemort’s shadow awkwardly gathered itself, but it didn’t come back for another attack. It fled up the stairs, disappearing in an instant.

Draco felt his heartbeat slow in his chest and he curled around Harry, who was sprawled across his lap. Remus crawled over. His face was bone white from the pain, but he dragged his broken legs behind him until he was close enough to wrap his arms around Draco and Harry both. Before any of them could say anything, a shadow pulled away from the darkness beyond the archways. The God of Winter stepped into the light of the torches, grinning ear to ear. White hair a tangled mess falling to the floor behind it. Round eyes filled with the blackness of space, saw only Draco as it stepped closer. “Victor. You have Proven your strength,” it spoke, voice penetrating every space in the room and resonated down to their bones.

The god stepped close enough that it could touch Draco and it pressed the tip of its thick nail to the base of Draco’s throat. The blue celtic knot left by the fairies appeared. The mark of Winter, a pale white, appeared and surrounded it. “Wear My mark Proudly, Child of Mine.”

“Thank you,” Draco answered calmly. He stared up at the god with no fear.

Remus’s thought he’d have a heart attack and ducked his head to bury his face in Draco’s hair, inhaling the boy’s scent underneath the scent of blood and ice that saturated the air of the chamber. The god must have left while he was having a panic attack because when he looked up again the god was gone and so were the marks on Draco’s throat.

“I should get help,” Draco spoke when he felt Remus’s breathing even out, the man no longer clutching him desperately.

“Voldemort’s gone,” Remus croaked, voice tight and hoarse. “The spell holding the staff should break. They will come.” He paused and looked over Draco’s shoulder. Harry was still unconscious in Draco’s lap. “How is he?”

Harry’s emotions were muted, but Draco could sense the *pain love* easily. “I think he’s okay. Exhausted. Voldemort has a weird effect on his scar. It probably overwhelmed him from this close.”

Remus accepted that and fell silent. He was feeling a bit overwhelmed himself. He couldn’t get the vision of Draco brutally murdering Quirrell out of his head. Draco had done it with such ease. On one hand, Voldemort and Quirrell were dangerous enemies that had to be removed. The werewolf in him was thrilled by his Alpha’s power and wanted to howl and feast on the flesh his Alpha had provided for him. On the other hand, Draco was still a child. It had been sickening to see the eleven-year-old covered in blood, grinning as he bore the man down to slash the hole in his neck wider.

Remus's mind shied away from the encounter with the god. He was still drenched in sweat and trembling, completely shocked by being so close to such a powerful presence. In fact, he tried not to think of anything at all. Instead he focused on the bright, hot pain in his legs, and just held the two
boys close, glad that it was over for now and they had made it out alive.

Chapter end.

A/N: I hope the fight scene was everything you guys hoped it would be! It’s my birthday, so this is an extra special update. Show me love by leaving detailed feedback! Thank you guys for sticking with me and with this story. Can’t wait to hear from you!
Repercussions

Dumbledore completely abandoned his dotty elderly image as he sprinted through the castle. His long legs made his stride surprisingly fast, his lavender robes and long white beard flapping behind him carelessly. His expression was one of utter focus. He had come straight from the Ministry of Magic as soon as he realized he’d been drawn purposefully away from the school. It had shocked him terribly! Not in a million years would he have predicted that the Dark Lord’s agent would move so soon, but there could be no other purpose behind the subterfuge.

*Whosoever the traitor might be,* he thought grimly. Anxiety strummed through him at finally finding out who was working for Voldemort.

In the four months the school had been open that school year, Dumbledore had managed to eliminate all the students from his list of suspects. That meant someone on staff was the traitor, but he didn’t want to believe it. Everyone on staff had worked for him for at least six years and some had been with him for close to forty! He knew them all very well and couldn’t imagine them turning against the school! They were eccentric and some held views different from his own, but none of them were Voldemort supporters. He’d made sure of that!

It took him close to three hours to figure out he’d been tricked away from the school. Another twenty minutes to get to a floo and floo into his office. Another thirty to run down to the dungeons. Breathing heavy, Dumbledore entered the secret passage a few hallways down from one of the potions classroom. It was warded with delicate and intricate magic that was not easily detectable, especially as Dumbledore had rooted the concealing charms in the school’s wards. This passage led directly to the dungeon room containing the Mirror of Erised and the Stone and conveniently bypassed the trials one would face using the more “public” passage.

His most trusted staff members had had reservations, of course, when Dumbledore had made it clear what he wanted. The truth was… the trials were not to protect the Stone, but for Harry and Draco. You see, the Second War was coming, sooner than anyone realized. Young as they were, the boys had to begin preparing mentally as well as physically. Confronting the agent after the Stone while under Dumbledore’s supervision and protection would allow them an invaluable experience that would prepare them for future battles. Thus, Dumbledore had created an arena in the boys’ favor.

Fate, magic, luck, karma… Whatever the label, it was a powerful force. If the boys were able to overcome the trials that the teachers had created, they’d manage to secure an extra protection in their battle with the traitor. Meanwhile, the Mirror would prevent the traitor from actually getting the Stone, so it was never in any real danger, and with the Magic of a Champion on their side, Harry and Draco would be safe enough to face the traitor for a little time before Dumbledore stepped in.

However, Dumbledore had never expected the traitor to be wily enough to be able to successfully lure him away! Dumbledore had never meant to put the children in any real danger! And the fact that Draco was currently unconscious sent terror shivering down his spine. Harry was exceedingly vulnerable without his magical twin! In retrospect, the fact that Draco was unconscious made the traitor’s premature attack on the Stone perfectly understandable.

After the bold and terrible attack on Draco’s mind, it was clear the traitor saw Draco as a threat. The traitor must have also ensured that the castle’s inhabitants could not interfere, most likely casting a powerful, location-based sleeping enchantment. Why else would his staff not be up in arms? The
wards were practically screaming! The fact he’d run into no one also gave him hope, however. It was possible Harry had been caught up in that same enchantment. Perhaps he was safe and had not gotten involved in the fight over the Stone!

As Dumbledore raced down the spiral staircase, his heart beat hard against his chest. His stomach sat hard and heavy as if he’d swallowed lead. His mind raced, filled with terrible possibilities. Images of Harry’s broken or even dead body flashed through his mind’s eye. Or the mirror bested and the Stone gone, the traitor long since fled, and Voldemort returned to power.

Dumbledore pressed open a hidden door in the shadows beyond the arches of the chamber. The smell of blood, of soot and strangely ice, sat heavy in the air. The sound of absolute silence felt almost tangible against his skin. The room took on an ominous air. Stone walls and floor, dark archways, and a wide staircase leading up into darkness, a mirror standing in the center, and from behind it a glistening dark puddle of blood…

Dumbledore trembled with nerves, his wand held in a shaking hand, as he stepped deeper into the room, out of the shadows and into the light of the torches burning above the archways. Slowly moving from behind the mirror, Dumbledore braced himself for the worst, heart quivering. He saw the body first, the source of the blood. Saw a white throat slashed halfway through. Muscle and veins and meat brutally exposed and severed. A bald head twisted around awkwardly from the torso, which lay on its back. Eyes wide and staring and empty of all life. Skin pale and bloodless. Pain etched on his young features…. Quirinus Quirrell…

Dumbledore ached for the brilliant young man. Where had Quirinus gone wrong? How had Dumbledore missed the signs that he was in trouble? And then Dumbledore’s distracted, painful thoughts scattered as he stepped fully around the mirror and saw the children and Remus Lupin, blood-spattered and terribly injured. Both Harry and Remus looked unconscious, Harry sprawled in Draco’s lap, Remus slumped at their side. Draco’s grey eyes calmly met Dumbledore’s as the Headmaster rushed to their side. The boy was practically soaked head to toe in blood. His face was horrifically splattered with dark red.

“ Took you long enough, old man. I was getting sick of waiting.”

“Are you injured?” Dumbledore demanded, sinking to his knees next to the boy.

“None of it’s mine,” Draco answered casually, eyes still watching him.

Something silver drew Dumbledore’s attention. He saw a small, terribly sharp knife discarded on the stone floor, no more than an inch from the edge of the pool of blood that had spilled from Quirinus’s body. Dumbledore stared at the small boy in utter horror. “You… cut his throat?”

A disturbing smile curled Draco’s lips as he answered with a simple, “Yes.” He finally looked away from Dumbledore, eyes darting down to Remus as he rested his hand on the crown of the man’s dirty blond head. “Both of his legs are broken, as well as one arm. There’s probably other stuff wrong with him, too.” Draco nodded to Harry. “Cuts and bruises, nothing too bad. Unconscious, though. I want him set up in the private room next to the infirmary with me until he wakes up.”

“The Stone?” Dumbledore asked faintly, still completely shocked.

“Harry destroyed it somehow. I didn’t see it, so I don’t know what he did.”

“Destroyed it?” Dumbledore blinked. That was impossible! The Stone was a powerful artifact!

Sudden fury flashed across Draco’s small face. “Help me get them to the infirmary, Dumbledore.
A gasp sounded behind them. Dumbledore turned to see Minerva and Severus coming around the mirror. “Percy Weasley came for me. He managed to break the spell,” Minerva explained. Her face had gone pale with horror at seeing her young colleague and former student murdered, as well as Remus and the boys bloody and hurt.

Severus was already kneeling next to the boys. He didn’t explain how he’d managed to break free of the enchantment. He was busy straightening Harry’s body and orientating him on his back under Draco’s unblinking gaze. Carefully, he levitated the messy-haired child on the equivalent of a magical stretcher. “Get Lupin,” he bit out, eyes flashing up to the frozen Minerva.

Minerva snapped into motion and rushed to her former pupil’s side. She gasped again at seeing the state of his body. “He’s going into shock!”

Dumbledore pushed awkwardly to his feet. “I’m going to secure these rooms and see if I can find the Stone,” he announced gravely. “Minerva, Severus, after you get them secured with Poppy, please check on the rest of the staff.”

Severus made no reply, but Minerva gave a quick, “Of course.”

A queasy, shivery feeling shot down Dumbledore’s spine as he observed Draco. The young child stood barefoot in hospital pants and shirt, his front covered in blood, and yet he was completely uninjured and unaffected with a man murdered and dead at his feet, his twin and Remus unconscious and broken floating on stretchers at his side… It was beyond disturbing.

Draco never once looked back at the Headmaster as he calmly followed Severus and Minerva into the secret passage beyond the archways. He also never made an attempt to wipe his face. Dumbledore’s gut reaction was fear. The boy was dangerous, damaged… wrong… but Dumbledore forced the feeling away. Draco had clearly defended himself. Whatever had happened here, Remus and Harry’s injuries proved it had been violent and life-threatening. Dumbledore had to think clearly! Locking away his emotions, he began to examine the evidence closely. He’d think about how to handle Draco once he had all of the facts.

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Remus had been placed in a hospital bed in the main infirmary. As Draco requested, since there were currently no adults awake to argue against him, Severus levitated Harry into the closest private room within the Hospital Wing. It was identical to the one Narcissa had secured for the boys after Harry’s nearly fatal fall down the stairs.

Small, with a single window. A bed with white sheets and a nightstand with a single vase of flowers and two drawers. There was a long table against the wall that was empty for now, but most likely was where medical supplies and potions would be set if needed. A padded rocking chair had been placed in the corner. It was a comfortable room, but it had a sterile feel to it.

“You can put him on top. I want to clean him before I put him under the covers,” Draco ordered softly.

Severus made no complaint. He was just happy Draco didn’t seem to hate and suspect him any longer. “Madam Pomfrey should arrive soon,” he spoke just as carefully. “As soon as Professor McGonagall manages to revive her and she performs first aid on Lupin.”

Draco nodded his head. He kept his eyes diverted, but his body language wasn’t submissive. He was
merely trying to avoid a confrontation. Voldemort’s spell had been broken, but he still remembered
the burning conviction that Snape was his enemy. It was a hard feeling to shake even though
intellectually he knew that feeling was implanted by his true enemy.

“I suggest you clean up as much as you can before she arrives,” Severus continued awkwardly. He
conjured a bowl and a pitcher. A third spell summoned water. A fourth enchanted the pitcher to be
Never-Empty. “Do not drink the water,” he advised. “Summon a House Elf if you are hungry or
thirsty.”

“I will,” Draco answered, voice neutral. He kept his body between Snape and Harry.

Severus turned to leave, but he stopped and turned back before he reached the door. “I brewed a
powerful potion for you on the night of the Solstice. It will create an impenetrable barrier around
your mind. No one will be able to enter it again, nor will you ever be able to enter the mind of
another barring your twin.” Dark eyes caught and held Draco’s grey solemnly. “It is permanent and
irreversible should you choose to drink it.”

Draco nodded to indicate that he understood, his face still carefully blank, and Severus slipped
quietly out of the room.

Draco cleaned his face, neck, and hands as best he could, but then he turned his attention to taking
care of his boy. It was difficult with Harry limp and unconscious, but Draco managed to get him
undressed. First to go were the Converse shoes, one of which was dyed red with blood much to
Draco’s extreme displeasure. Carefully, he peeled Harry out of the torn black jeans and the dirty shirt
and sweater. He had just begun to wash Harry clean when the door opened behind him.
Instinctively, Draco turned, teeth bared, and opened his arms to block Harry from sight as much as
possible.

Madam Pomfrey ignored Draco’s defensive posture. She was flustered by the extensive injuries
Lupin had suffered and was anxious to assess the extent of the damage on the children. “Step aside,”
she ordered distractedly. Unimpressed, Draco nonetheless lowered his arms and took a single step to
the right. He watched the nurse like a hawk as Pomfrey twirled her wand over his boy for several
minutes.

“Contusions and minor lacerations,” she concluded. “I’m more concerned about his unconscious
state. Do you know what caused it?”

Draco didn’t answer. He didn’t trust her one bit. Like hell would he reveal Harry’s connection to
Voldemort through he black core. Besides, from her perspective he was just a dumb kid. She wasn’t
really expecting useful information out of him. To prove him right, she had already moved on to
other tests, her wand dancing. She did not share with him her conclusion once the spells were done.

“Let me get a look at you. Take a seat on the bed,” she ordered.

“I’m fine.” He did not comply. “The blood’s not mine.”

She looked uneasy at this statement. If bloody clothes - granted, really bloody clothes - made her
uneasy, it was a good thing he’d washed his face. “Very well. I’ll bring you and Mr. Potter fresh
clothes when I return to treat his leg. In the meantime, I suggest you take a very thorough shower.”
She gestured to the door that was set against the side wall and the bathroom beyond it.

Draco stood by Harry’s side, calmly stroking the boy’s hair while he waited for Pomfrey to return.
As promised, she brought clean hospital pants and t-shirts. Draco accepted the clothes, but he
intended to have an elf fetch his own. He did not like the thin hospital attire.
Draco carefully finished washing Harry and dressed him in the hospital clothes before finally taking the prescribed shower. He turned the water on as hot as he could stand and did a quick scrub down. He left the bathroom door wide open, unwilling to let Harry out of his sight, especially with Harry in such a vulnerable state. Once he was clean, an elf brought him thick socks, a pair of his Converse, a comfy pair of jeans, a t-shirt, and a warm sweater from the armoire in their dorm. A glance at his watch revealed it was just past midnight. Asking the date, he realized he had been in a coma for six days. The thought made his skin crawl. Anything could have happened to Harry in that time. Including coming face to face with Voldemort and a mad-wizard intent on killing him, it seemed. Draco was not amused.

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Dumbledore arrived at the infirmary nearly an hour after the boys had arrived. Pomfrey had just completed the administration of her first treatment for Remus’s many injuries. She stepped back with a deep sigh, her laser focus relaxing as she turned to the Headmaster. Her face bleached white however when she saw who he was hovering behind him.

“Albus! My God!” she exclaimed in horror, rushing over to the Headmaster’s side as the body was set gently on a bed. “Quirinus! What happened, Albus!”

Gravely, Dumbledore covered the dead man with a white sheet, hiding his mutilated body from view. He turned to his long-time associate. “Poppy… I need to speak to Remus to get a full understanding of what happened. Is it possible?”

She didn’t answer, her eyes still glued to the form under the white sheet.

“Poppy,” he repeated firmly, putting a hand on her shoulder.

“I…” the matronly woman folded her hands before her as if in prayer. Tears filled her eyes. “Yes… An Ennervate should wake him, but he may be groggy from the potions and pain…”

“Thank you.” Dumbledore gently turned her so that she could no longer look at the bed and instead faced him. “Poppy, do you feel capable of examining Quirinus? It might help us understand what happened to him. We owe his family that much.”

“I… Albus…” Tears rolled down her cheeks, but she straightened her shoulders. “Yes. Of course.”

Dumbledore gave her a look so proud that she couldn’t help flushing red in the cheeks. Tiredly, he turned from the nurse and made his way to the bed where Remus slept. There was no twinkle in his eyes tonight. His face looked decades older than it had the day before. Yet his hand was rock steady when he cast a mild Ennervate on his former student.

Remus’s lax expression tensed, his brows dipping down as golden brown eyes opened slowly, the pupils blown wide. The man’s breathing picked up, tension lined his body, but he was unable to move. His legs were strapped to splints, as was his right arm.

“A-Albus…” Remus rasped, a nearly inaudible whimper escaping his lips.

Dumbledore conjured a chair and pulled it very close to the bed. He placed a warm hand on the man’s shoulder and bent his face close so Remus would not have to work so hard to be heard. “I know you are in pain, my boy. I am very sorry for that, but I need to know what happened tonight. Can you muster the strength to tell the story? I promise to let you rest once you’re done.”

“Harry?” Remus asked weakly, ignoring the Headmaster’s request.
“He’s well taken care of under Madam Pomfrey’s care,” Dumbledore assured him patiently, but his eyes grew brighter, magic activating around him in a subtle compulsion to talk and tell the truth. “What happened, Remus? I need to know if I’m to protect them.”

That made sense in Remus’s groggy mind. Besides, he knew Dumbledore would find out what happened regardless. There was no point in trying to keep it a secret. Exhaustion pulled hard on every cell of his being, pain rumbled in the distance of his mind, threatening to overwhelm him. Sharp spikes of pain stabbed him from the inside out again and again centered mostly around his thighs and arm. “Ron… Ron came… I was sleepy, but I knew I had to get up. To move… Ron wanted to come. Cast Stupefy…”

“I will fetch him,” Dumbledore promised when Remus looked at him in concern.

Remus nodded. Sweat beaded up on his face, his voice grew tight from the pain. “Went after Harry and Percy… Found them before they reached the chess room… Let them come as long as they just watch… At potion room… caught up with Quirrell… ordered boys to go back, but Harry followed… Fire kept me from sending him away… I figured out potion. Ordered Harry stay… He looked… He looked so…”

Remus shook his head, tears leaking out of eyes and rolling down his hair line. “Went down into the dungeon room… Quirrell… was different, wrong… laughing, crazed. Attacked me. With powerful dark magic. Fought him. Lost. Strange voice spoke before he killed me. It was… high-pitched. Quirrell talked to it, listened to it. I passed out. When I came to, Harry… Harry was there. Quirrell was attacking him. There- there was something… A face on Quirrell’s head… He was possessed, Headmaster! I- I tried to protect Harry. Attacked Quirrell. Gave it everything I had…” More tears spilled. “But… I couldn’t…”

Dumbledore squeezed his shoulder tightly. “You did wonderfully, my boy. Harry is perfectly fine. He’s safe.”

Remus nodded and continued, voice wrecked with repressed sobs. “Draco… Draco saved me. Quirrell was about to cast the Killing Curse… Saw the light building… Draco came. Distracted him. Attacked him. Saved me. Then… Then something came out of Quirrell… A dark shadow… a Shade… It attacked Draco, but Harry… Harry jumped between them. Draco wrapped his arms around Harry and Harry flung his hands forward… There was a flash of light… It was so bright… The Shade exploded and Harry collapsed. The Shade… It came back together… I tried to crawl to them… But it fled up the stairs… It didn’t attack again…”

“Thank you, my boy. You did brilliantly,” Dumbledore praised again. He rested a gentle hand on Remus’s head. “Get some sleep. You need to rest.”

Remus didn’t even hear him. He’d reached the last of his strength and had passed out again.

Minerva had appeared halfway through this retelling. Once Remus had fallen silent, she approached Dumbledore carefully and put a hand on her friend’s shoulder. “I’ve revived the staff and returned Percy and Ron to the dorms. They are very concerned for their friends.”

Dumbledore nodded and stood, the chair he’d conjured disappearing.

“Albus… What happened to Quirinus?” She asked tearfully, but her back was straight and her eye contact was strong. Her grey-streaked hair was pulled back in her customary bun and she wore her most severe black robes.

They had both taught Quirinus while he’d attended Hogwarts. A timid boy but brilliant when it came
to research and studying. He’d been a good addition to the staff when he’d taken the position of Muggle Studies professor nearly six years ago. His students did well under his tutelage and he worked well with the other staff members. He’d also been equally knowledgeable in the theory of defense, so when he’d asked to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts for a year, Dumbledore had accepted, believing Quirinus to still be young enough to need stimulation or he’d grow bored. Dumbledore would have hated to lose Quirinus as a teacher and allowed him to take a sabbatical abroad to gain more hands-on experience before taking up the DADA position. It was understood that after his year was done, Quirinus would return to his position as Muggle Studies professor to avoid the DADA’s curse.

Grieving for the loss of a former student and a young man under his care, Dumbledore led her toward the doors, away from Poppy and Remus. He kept his voice low and peered at her over his half-moon spectacles. “The Dark Lord possessed him sometime during his sabbatical,” he told her gravely. “Voldemort used him in an attempt to gain the Stone in order to perform a resurrection.” He looked into the eyes of one of his few true friends and was completely honest with her. “Minerva, we are running out of time. If we are lucky, we will have a few years yet before Voldemort returns, but he is coming.”

She paled, a trembling hand coming up to cover her mouth.

Taking a deep breath, Dumbledore pushed his grief and fear aside. His expression hardened into that of a war-leader. “Contact Quirinus’s family. They will need to collect his body and prepare for his funeral. Tell them that Quirinus died defending the school and students from a Dark wizard. Contact the Aurors as well and prepare Hogwarts to receive them.”

Minerva came to attention. “Yes, sir.” She turned and strode away without asking any further questions.

“Headmaster…”

Dumbledore turned to see his very ill looking nurse standing a few feet behind him. “Poppy?”

“He was in terrible condition, Headmaster,” she told him. Despite her ill appearance, she spoke evenly and clearly. “I don’t know what he came in contact with, but his hand had completely rotted. It was degrading the rest of his arm and would have continued to spread. Unrelated to this rot, his organs were also in near critical condition and his brain had begun to form small growths. The unicorn blood I found in his system was the only thing holding him together. He would not have lived more than a few weeks longer had his throat not been cut. Official cause of death was blood loss. His jugular artery had been severed. He bled out in less than two minutes.”

Dumbledore took a minute to absorb the information - the realization of what had been killing the unicorns caused him deep pain. Poor Quirinus. In his right mind, he would have been beyond horrified! “Thank you, Poppy,” he finally answered. “If you would be so kind as to write up a report for his family… perhaps omitting the state of his organs and the unicorn blood… I know his hand and arm cannot be hidden, nor his cause of death, but I’d like to afford him some dignity…”

Too shocked and horrified by the events that had occurred, Pomfrey didn’t even argue. She nodded and almost robotically made her way to her office.

The Aurors would arrive soon, Dumbledore couldn’t put it off any longer. He made his way to his office. He didn’t bother to sit down, instead taking up a quill and pulling parchment over to him as he bent over his desk. He wrote two very brief explanations and moved to his beloved phoenix. “Fawkes.” With trembling fingers, Dumbledore stroked the bird’s bright red feathers. The phoenix trilled, the sound sweet and soothing, making Dumbledore smile softly. “Take one to
Malfoy Manor. The other to the Tonks Residence, please.”

Fawkes flapped his wings and trilled once more before taking the letters into a taloned claw. He lifted off from his perch, his long tail feathers dangling near to the floor before he flew toward the window. Before he ever made it outside, a ball of fire enveloped his body and he was gone, leaving behind the scent of a campfire in his wake.

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Lucius was pulled from a restless sleep when a ball of fire erupted with heat and light above his bed. With a yell, he tossed himself to the side and snatched his wand from under his pillow. Disoriented and confused, it took him a minute to realize there was a phoenix hovering above his head. Lucius stumbled to the chair sitting in the corner and took up the dressing robe he had had draped over its back. Stepping into the outer chamber of the master suite, he sat heavily in a chair at his small personal desk and waved his fingers, bringing the lights in the room to full. The phoenix followed him, of course, trilling and cooing, making it impossible to maintain his temper. He carefully accepted the letter that the phoenix bore and it disappeared in another ball of fire.

A sneer immediately made its way onto his face now that the trilling was gone. Lucius tore the letter open and read it quickly. Draco was awake. There had been an incident at the school. Harry was unconscious in the infirmary. It was requested that Lucius come to the school. The floo to the Headmaster’s office would be unlocked. Before Lucius could even get upset by another catastrophe at the school involving his ward, the Unbreakable Vow, made all those months ago, twanged painfully. Draco was awake. Lucius had to tell him everything he’d learned regarding Harry’s “black” core. And it wasn’t going to be pretty.

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Andromeda was a light sleeper. As soon the phoenix arrived, her eyes shot open. Ted was on his side, snoring softly beside her, one arm flung casually over her stomach. He didn’t even stir. She smiled and carefully slipped out from under his arm. The phoenix had perched on the small desk she had placed to the side of the room. It trilled sweetly, making her smile grow. A letter was clutched in its talons. She accepted it, and with a last coo, the phoenix flew around the room and disappeared in a ball of fire. She hardly noticed, her attention riveted to the letter in her hand.

Oh, hell no! Harry was unconscious in the infirmary again! Rage began to burn in Andromeda’s core. Like hell was she going to let things slide any longer! The Headmaster had a lot of explaining to do, and if she didn’t like his answers, there’d be hell to pay!

xXx

Dumbledore stood in front of his desk deep in thought. His head was lowered and he stood absentmindedly stroking his long beard when Fawkes returned in a ball of fire that brightened the room and filled it with warmth. Until that moment, Dumbledore hadn’t realized just how much the cold had seeped into the room. A gesture of age-gnarled fingers and the hearth blazed bright and warm, the fire growing two-fold. He also summoned additional candles and had them float along the ceiling. The instruments on the shelves by his desk glimmered in the now bright light.

The room was full of colors and textures, rugs on the floor, dozens of paintings high up on the walls filled with watchful Headmasters and mistresses of the past. His books looked old and worn. Fawkes, a splash of vivid red, sat on his perch grooming himself, head tucked under one wing. Dumbledore conjured four mismatching chairs close to the fire in anticipation of his guests. The conversation ahead of him would no doubt be difficult. As if summoned by his thoughts, the newly strengthened fire flared green and Andromeda stepped out wearing jeans, boots, a sweater and a
jacket. Her long, brown hair had been pulled up into a messy bun, but her casual appearance did nothing to soften the look of cold fury on her face.

“What happened?” she demanded, eyes unblinking and trained on him.

Dumbledore inclined his head and gestured to one of the plush armchairs he’d set in a close square, all facing inward so they could talk comfortably. “Let us wait for the Malfoys,” he suggested softly.

Andromeda moved stiffly to one of the chairs, but she didn’t sit down. Dumbledore remained standing with her.

The fire flared green a few minutes later, breaking the awkward silence. Lucius Malfoy stepped from the hearth dressed immaculately in full robes of dark blue and black layers and a dark grey cloak. His long blond hair had been tied to the side with a black ribbon and fell over his shoulder. His silver-headed cane finished off the intimidating look. He did not speak, instead he studied Dumbledore dispassionately.

Dumbledore dared to ask, “Shall we wait for Lady Malfoy?”

“She is unable to attend this meeting,” Lucius answered, voice bland and devoid of inflection.

Dumbledore was very perplexed by this turn of events, but he gestured to the chairs nonetheless. “Then let us be seated, please. This will take a moment.”

Lucius took two graceful strides forward and sat regally in the offered armchair. Andromeda was still coldly glaring, but she took a chair.

Dumbledore sat with them. He linked his fingers over his lean stomach and studied them solemnly over his half-moon glasses. “It is not common knowledge, however, ten years ago, certain facts suggested to me that Voldemort had not fully perished in Godric’s Hollow. I have been ever vigilant for signs of Voldemort’s return and grew concerned over the last year when interest began to surface regarding the Sorcerer’s Stone.”

Dumbledore looked at the two former Slytherins across from him, but neither looked as if they wanted to interrupt. They sat still and watchful, listening as carefully and patiently as any snake, so he continued. “As the Stone is a uniquely powerful artifact that could potentially return Voldemort to power, I prevailed upon my good friend Flamel to store the Stone somewhere unassailable. Thus, over the summer, he placed it in a secured vault in Gringotts. Unfortunately, I was given reason to believe that it was not safe even there.

“It took a significant amount of persuasion, but I managed to convince my friend to let me guard the Stone personally and retrieved it from the vault. That very night the vault that had previously held the Stone was broken into. This worried both of us a great deal and I kept the Stone here in the school behind many protections, wards, and spells. Shortly after, those defenses were tested and it became clear a Dark agent had infiltrated the school.”

“Infiltrated…” Andromeda repeated slowly, hazel eyes narrowing. “You are implying that you were unable to discover this person despite your great power, knowledge, experience, and access to the most comprehensive wards in the UK?”

Lucius offered her a cold smile. “Do you not know his modus operandi? Dumbledore is perfectly inept when it is convenient for him to be so.”

Dumbledore’s thick eyebrows bunched over his pale blue eyes. “I understand your suspicion given our opposite political positions, Lucius, but I assure you that I would never willingly harbor
Andromeda’s anger disappeared under a wave of alarm. Her eyes went wide. “Voldemort? Here?”

“His Shade possessed one of the professors,” Dumbledore reported with honest regret. He flashed Lucius a narrowed-eyed look. “I hope you can agree that possession is incredibly difficult to detect.”

“He retrieved the Stone?” Andromeda demanded urgently, breaking into the stupid staring contest between the men.

“No.” Dumbledore shook his head. “Fortunately, that is not the case. The Stone was destroyed by Harry before Voldemort could gain access to it. However, the battle that led up to the Stone’s destruction was brutal.”

Andromeda and Lucius listened as Dumbledore outlined the fight as he knew it from the evidence he’d gathered from the rooms and Remus’s testimony. He concluded his tale by describing in a clinically way the current condition of all those involved, including Quirrell’s death. Andromeda sat pale and still except for the trembling in her hands. A few things stood out to her.

“My child, within your school, unaided and unprotected, fought a full grown Dark wizard possessed by one of the most evil Dark Lord’s of the age. To protect a Stone that you were supposed to protect. And you did so with a troll and a logic puzzle any Ravenclaw could solve. Against a Dark wizard who you knew was motivated enough to break into Gringotts of all places and get out without being caught.”

Lucius was reeling over another detail. “Harry used the troll’s head as a bowl to pour Vivificantis serum and I repeat - Vivificantis serum! - over the Sorcerer’s Stone… The most dangerous and deadly magical substance in existence. So dangerous, in fact, that simply breathing in the fumes is a death sentence. How is it that he came to be in possession of such a substance?”

In the face of their growing outrage, Dumbledore was compelled to explain the mirror’s role in the protections around the Stone and to assure Lucius that there was no way to detect the serum while it was inert. However, he insisted with absolute conviction that Harry had not gotten the substance from anyone on the staff or from the village.

“I don’t understand,” Andromeda snapped. “If the mirror was so fail-proof, why did you have the other protections at all? What purpose did they serve except…” Her eyes widened in horror. “They were for the boys.”

“Now, Andromeda, you must understand…” Dumbledore tried to say.

Almost without realizing it, the witch slowly stood, her voice rising in volume until she was yelling. “You planned all along for Draco and Harry to go after the Stone. You planned for them to do battle with an unknown Dark wizard! You were testing them, you amoral bastard! Testing two First-year boys you have been charged to protect!”

Dumbledore felt himself go still as Andromeda’s aura flared around her in dangerous pulses. Several instruments on his shelves squealed and gyrated furiously. Voice dropping from a yell, Andromeda whispered in a furious hiss, her eyes slitted and her fingers tensed as if they were claws. “Are you out of your bloody mind, Dumbledore?”

Lucius’s voice, cold as the arctic, cut into the standoff. His eyes had taken on a silver sheen. “I am taking the boys, Dumbledore. You will be hearing from me soon.” The threat in that promise was thick enough to cut with a knife. He stood and made his way to the door.
“Remember that I am an ally. We have a bigger enemy before us,” Dumbledore implored quietly.

Without turning around, Lucius answered, “I know exactly who my enemies are.” His hand reached out and rested on the handle of the door.

“Your son slit a man’s throat in cold-blood, Lucius, and shows no remorse. Be careful or more than my actions will be brought to light.”

Lucius made no response to that pathetic attempt to blackmail him. He flashed the old man a disgusted sneer before slamming open the door and storming down the stairs. Unfortunately, Andromeda followed quickly on his heels.

“I want the boys to come home with me,” she demanded, temper still hot, her cheeks flushed with rage. Her eyes glinted more blue/green than brown at the moment.

Lucius didn’t slow his pace or even turn to look at her, answering with a simple. “No.”

“Excuse me?” she snapped and boldly grabbed his arm.

Lucius spun to face her, his cloak flaring along the bottom, but his voice remained tightly controlled. “They will come home with me. The manor’s wards are more powerful and will provide a more secure environment. We will renegotiate when Harry regains consciousness.”

Andromeda had to concede that was true. She also didn’t expect Harry to be unconscious for more than a day or two. She could be patient. Compromising, she demanded, “They need to be seen by a real Healer as soon as possible.” Frowning, she added, “And where is my sister?”

Lucius ignored her question, but he agreed to summon their personal Healer. Andromeda didn’t bother asking after Narcissa again. Truth was she had no right to ask him anything unless it pertained to the safety and care of Harry. She was by no means a friend and barely an ally.

Madam Pomfrey directed them to a private room further down the Hospital Wing. Lucius entered first. They found Draco sitting with his back to the headboard, one foot set firmly on the floor, the other leg bent and hiding Harry’s upper body from view.

“Draco!” Andromeda rushed past Lucius as he stood still just inside the doorway. She wrapped Draco in an awkward hug, the boy not moving from his position. She pulled away but kept her hands on his shoulders. Lucius came to stand beside her. “Are you okay? What happened?”

“Dumbledore didn’t tell you?” Draco asked quietly.

There was no warmth in his eyes upon seeing them. He casually propped his forearm on his bent knee. His hair had fallen from behind his ears and framed his face, but it did nothing to soften his expression. Surprised by his unwelcoming demeanor, Andromeda’s hands fell to her sides. With no one else to turn to, she looked up at Lucius for help.

“Come. We are returning to the manor,” Lucius stated, feeling simple directives were best at this point.

Draco lifted an eyebrow. He made no move to get up.

Lucius stepped closer, forcing Andromeda to back up. He put his mouth near to Draco’s ear and whispered, “I must speak to you in private. Now. The vow demands it.”

When Lucius straightened, Draco gave a slow, close-mouth smile. He turned and dropped both legs
to the floor and stood. “By all means. Lead the way.”

Lucius mirrored Draco’s cold smile and took Harry up into his arms. The boy was small and light. Lucius instinctively held him closer.

On the way back to the Headmaster’s office, Andromeda followed a single step behind them. Draco walked precisely at Lucius’s side, always within reach of Harry lying unconscious in Lucius’s arms. None of them spoke until they reached the gargoyle guarding the Headmaster’s Tower. Andromeda pulled Draco to face her by a hand on his shoulder.

“Owl me when Harry wakes,” she insisted, voice full of passion. “I won’t allow Dumbledore to get away with this.”

Draco shrugged, dislodging her hand, but his expression had softened. “I will.”

She had to be satisfied with that because Lucius had begun to climb the staircase and Draco had turned to follow close on his heels. As alarming as Draco’s distant behavior was, she took great pleasure in watching Dumbledore watch with helpless resignation as Lucius and the boys flooed away without once acknowledging his presence. Not even the phoenix was able to lighten the heavy atmosphere.

“We’ll be in touch,” she promised her old Headmaster with sweet malevolence before stepping into the floo herself.

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The bedroom was dark. Only a single candle flickered on the nightstand. Harry was tucked into bed and Draco stood next to it with Dobby beside him. Draco turned and crouched so that he could look directly into the elf’s big green eyes. Dobby trembled as Draco gently but firmly pinched his large, pointed ear.

“If he wakes or if anything changes in here, come to me immediately,” Draco ordered, staring hard into the elf’s eyes.

“Yes, young master Draco!” Dobby promised in a rush. “I will do it exactly as you say!”

“Good.” Draco released the elf and left the bedroom, shutting the door securely behind him.

He found Lucius standing with his back to the room, looking out one of the windows. Unlike the bedroom, the sitting room was brightly lit with a warm fire burning in the hearth. His hands were linked tightly at the small of his back, his cloak having been draped over the back of a love seat.

Lucius heard Draco come out of the bedroom, but he continued to stare out at the cold night until he heard Draco settle into the armchair behind him. He finally turned and came to sit on the love seat opposite his son. He almost felt numb, dreading this confession, but the Vow he’d made hung heavy and ominous over him, his life hanging in the balance.

Draco watched his father calmly with a stillness that set Lucius’s teeth on edge. Adrenaline dumped into Lucius’s veins. He was excruciatingly aware that this might be the last time he spoke to Draco for a long while. His boy was the definition of unforgiving.

“After studying the notes Lovegood left you, I made a connection to Hempo the Foul who lived in Ancient Greece around 600 B.C.E. He created a forbidden, Dark ritual that was intended to grant immortality. It essentially severed a piece of his soul and stored that piece in a vessel. He called it a Horcrux. Should he suffer a fatal injury, he could be resurrected due to his soul being anchored to
this plane. Should the soul in his body somehow be destroyed, the soul piece in the vessel would awaken and could also be resurrected. However, as time went on, Hempo began to dissolve into madness. He eventually perished several hundred years after he performed the ritual, so the ritual was deemed a failure and was forbidden.”

Draco sat quietly, listening with great attention. He already knew where this was going.

“Before I left the Dark Lord’s ranks, before you were stolen, I was given something to guard, something the Dark Lord valued greatly. It was a book. A diary. I could feel the magic imbued in the item, but it didn’t have any words written inside, so I stored it away and forgot about it. I remembered the diary after reading about Horcruxes. As I feared, the book was a Horcrux, and because the Dark Lord is currently a Shade, the soul piece in the diary managed to awaken when I wrote upon the pages. I quickly realized that the soul inside was different from the Dark Lord’s, at least as I knew him. The soul held only the knowledge and personality up to the point of separation, that of the Dark Lord’s sixteen-year-old self. This personality informed me that he had not believed in Hempo’s warnings of insanity, instead blaming the failure on Hempo being weak-minded.”

Lucius took a deep breath. The room was dead silent except for the crackling of the fire. Draco sat completely unresponsive in front of him, which set Lucius even more on edge. This was going almost too well. It made his palms slick with sweat. “I believe the Dark Lord either intentionally or accidentally made Harry a partial Horcux and that is the Black core that Lovegood found in Harry. It is a piece of the Dark Lord’s soul grounding him to this plane.”

Draco’s head tilted forward, his hair falling softly around his face. “Can it be killed?”

“By all accounts, the vessels is destroyed along with the soul piece,” Lucius whispered apologetically.

Draco’s eyes flashed up at that and Lucius quickly raised his hand in a wait gesture.

“The transcript I possess recounts Hempo’s experiences before and after the Horcux ritual, but it does not give instructions on how to perform the ritual. I am still trying to track down more details. If we know the formula, there may be a way to alter it to transfer the soul piece to another vessel.”

“We can just ask the diary,” Draco pointed out, the beginnings of a frown tugging down his lips. “Obviously Voldemort knows how to do it since he made one.”

“The diary became evasive whenever I tried to get the specific details of the ritual from him,” Lucius admitted quietly.

Draco sat quietly for a long second, staring at his father with an increasingly distant expression. He had noticed the past tense in that sentence. With a dangerously quiet voice, Draco asked, “Where is the diary, Lucius?”

Closing his eyes, Lucius reached into the inner pocket of his robe and pulled out a thin black book. It looked faded and worn by time. There was nothing magical about it at all anymore. The pages were empty. Draco accepted the book. He examined the plain black leather, the faded name of Tom Marvolo Riddle in gold on the back. He pressed his thumb to the pages and flipped them from one cover to the other. He got up and went to the small desk and opened it randomly to a center page. Lifting the quill, he wrote, Can you hear me? He waited a long beat, but nothing happened. Lucius stared at his son’s back. Draco was so small still, but the will inside that body was fearsome. “Winter Solstice a year ago, I discovered the identity of the woman who kidnaped you. She was being detained in Azkaban prison for a different crime. I faked her death with a golem and secured her here in the basement.”
Draco turned to face his father. He leaned back against the desk, the edge digging into his back. He held the empty diary loosely in one hand.

“She was one of the Dark Lords closest followers. Her name is Bellatrix Black, your mother’s youngest sister. Not long after you departed for school, your mother discovered her sister’s presence. She took custody of Bellatrix and had her imprisoned in a guest apartment. When we returned from the Solstice this year, we discovered her missing.”

Draco said nothing. He merely watched as Lucius continued to dig his hole deeper.

Lucius felt his cheeks heat with the remnants of his rage. “It should have been impossible for her to escape this manor! The wards are ancient and strong, but after your kidnapping, I continued to build on them and tighten them.” His hand curled into a tight fist and it sat trembling on his thigh. “I couldn’t make sense of it. The only way it could have been remotely possible is if someone keyed to the wards helped her. Bellatrix and your mother always had a strange relationship, so I looked to her first. I found mental blocks in Narcissa’s mind and broke through them. As I had feared, Bellatrix had used the blood connection to your mother to manipulate the wards and escape.”

“What happened to the diary?” Draco demanded sharply, growing impatient.

Lucius’s back went ruler straight and he stared over his son’s shoulder. “I believe she used the power of the Solstice to pull the soul-shard into her own body in the beginnings of a resurrection ritual,” he admitted.

Cocking his head, Draco asked coldly, “Where’s Narcissa?”

Lucius swallowed, sweat prickling on his brow. “I do not know her exact location. I severed the magical bond between us to break her connection to the wards so that the manor could no longer be breached by the enemy. All I know is that she went after her sister with the intention of stopping the resurrection.”

Draco stared first at his father and then down at the empty, old book in his hand. It had once held the soul of the enemy. Now that enemy was working to be reborn, just like the monster they had fought in the dungeons of the school. On top of that, this new Voldemort was in the custody of the woman who kidnapped him. The woman whose hatred of all things Malfoy would have now reached epic proportions.

“A year, huh?” he asked, almost absentmindedly, still staring at the black diary. “Did you cut her? Make her bleed?”

Lucius’s hands had gone numb. Tears inexplicably filled the corner of his eyes.

Draco looked up, fury written in broad strokes across his face. “The truth, Lucius. Tell me the fucking truth for once in your fucking life.”

Lucius sucked in a sharp breath and steeled himself. “Yes. I made her bleed.”

Draco’s eyes narrowed. His mouth was a tight, tense line, his voice a hate-filled whisper. “Beat her?”

“Yes.”

“Burn her?”

Lucius was trembling now. “Yes.”
“Did you make her piss and shit herself?”

Lucius paled, whispering, “Yes.”

Draco stepped closer, eyes unblinking. “Did you fuck her?”

“No!” Lucius bellowed, honestly horrified.

Draco sneered. “What? You didn’t put your dick in her mouth and make her drink it all down? Or spread her ass and fuck her bloody?”

Panting, Lucius realized that he was standing. He stared down at Draco, nearly crazed with rage. “I would never touch that vile woman.”

Draco laughed, cruel and low. “Don’t fucking lie. You didn’t keep her for a year locked in your dungeon and not enjoy it, Lucius.” His silvered-eyes bore into him. “You may not have fucked her, but I bet you jacked off over her broken body. Splattered her with your cum. Or if not that, I bet you came up here and fucked Narcissa ’til she was dizzy after.”

Dark spots filled Lucius’s vision. Hearing what he’d done from Draco’s mouth… It made something twist inside him, made him feel revolted. “She took my son…” he gasped weakly.

“Don’t fucking lie to yourself! If it were really about me, you would have fucking killed her! Torn her apart and been done with it!” Draco screamed, eyes blazing. “But it wasn’t about me! It was about you! It was about your pleasure! Now there might be TWO fucking Voldemorts to deal with!” With a scream of rage, Draco shoved Lucius hard in the chest, making him stumble back and sit clumsily on the couch. Before Lucius could recover his balance, Draco swung the empty diary around with all of his strength and hit Lucius across with cheek with a loud SMACK.

Lucius gaped, chest heaving in fast pants. The blow had stung, but he was shocked more by the sudden violence. Rage exploded through his chest and his arm jerked before he could still it, almost slapping Draco across the face.

“You disgust me,” Draco hissed, breathing almost as hard as his father. “Get out.”

Lucius didn’t move. He’d locked up, afraid moving an inch would mean he’d lash out at his son. His lips lifted from his teeth as he choked on a flood of angry words. We needed the knowledge stored in the pages! and She forfeited her life when she touched you! and You have no idea what I have done, what I will do for you! and How dare you, you ungrateful wretch!

“GET OUT!” Draco screamed at the top of his lungs.

Standing stiffly, rage making his cheeks hot, Lucius very purposefully said nothing. He yanked his cloak off the back of the love seat before storming out of the room. The door slammed behind him hard enough to make the painting hanging on the wall fall with a crash. The frame cracked with a sound like a gun going off.

Draco stood in the center of the sitting room choking back sobs of rage. His whole body shook. He couldn’t get his breath. He couldn’t even see straight he was so angry! “Dobby,” he gasped.

The elf appeared with a soft pop, eyes wide as saucers. “Yes, yo- …”

“Take me to London,” Draco interrupted, words bitten off, seeing nothing but red.

Dobby’s fingers shook as they very carefully curled around the shaking child’s upper arm. They
disappeared with a much louder *pop* and appeared in an alley next to the Leaky Cauldron.

“Go back to Harry,” Draco growled. “Same rules.”

Dobby nodded frantically, but Draco didn’t see it. He was already off and running. He ran until his lungs screamed for air and the red flooding his vision was crowded out with black. He ran on instinct, stumbling on curbs, his shoulders clipping the edge of buildings and parked cars. Thankfully it was still really early and there weren’t that many drivers on the road, so he wasn’t killed during his wild dash across the streets.

When he collapsed an hour later against a brick wall, he was panting and heaving. The sky had brightened to the pale blue-grey of dawn. He realized that it was bitterly cold, searing his insides and his sweat nearly freeze against his skin. He felt raw, his nerves scraped and shredded. The war loomed over him, a dark shadow with an empty, black vortex of a mouth, ready to swallow them whole. Draco had no idea if they could survive it. He was just a goddamn kid and everyone was the fucking enemy, but if he had to tear himself to shreds or rip apart the world, he’d do everything he could to protect Harry.

Harry, *god he loved Harry*, still so small and unsure, but so damned brave and determined, so selfless. Draco was going to do everything in his power to make sure his boy survived and if he failed, well… Draco smiled. It was the soft one that only Harry got to see and he curled around his legs, pulling them tight into his chest. He pressed his forehead to his knees. If he failed, well then he and Harry would go out together and leave this fucking shit show behind.

*Chapter end.*
Reunion

Harry slowly opened his eyes. At first, he didn’t know where he was, but he wasn’t upset by it. He could feel himself breathing slow and even. He felt almost numb, like he was dreaming. There was an almost-sound filling his ears, a sensation of static. Nothing hurt, but nothing felt real, either.

The room he was in was shadowed, a single candle creating a gentle yet flickering light. The ceiling had stars painted on a blue-black expanse, the walls that surrounded him were an ivory white, and the antique furniture was a dark brown. There were three doors: one on the same wall the bed was set against, one in the wall to the right, and one set in the wall at his feet. All three doors were shut. A large, curtained window took up half of the wall to the left. He knew this place, but he couldn’t make the connection to it, couldn’t put a name to where he was.

Draco sat at the desk in the sitting room outside of their bedroom. The bond with Harry had been still, a sense of presence but no real emotion, when suddenly static hummed through his chest. Draco straightened in his seat, his whole body coming to attention as he lifted his head from the transcript of Hempo the Foul’s writings. Dobby appeared with a pop, but Draco didn’t need the elf to tell him that Harry was awake. He knew. The little elf caught one look at Draco’s intensely focused expression and disappeared again without saying a single word.

For a long second, Draco stood outside the bedroom door just listening to the bond. He wanted to understand what Harry felt in order to give him what he needed, but the static was too neutral to get a hold of. Turning the knob, Draco stepped into the room and shut the door quietly behind him.

Harry lay in the bed several feet away from him and a little to the right. His head turned toward the door. In the light of the candle, his eyes looked completely blank. Draco shuddered, his hand spasming almost painfully tight around the doorknob he still held. Then, like a fireworks, recognition sparked and flared, and a burst of emotion crashed through the bond.

- LOVE NEED JOY ANXIETY -

Tears filled suddenly bright green eyes and a soft, barely-there whine rose from Harry’s parted lips. Draco smiled, soft at first and then wider, as he moved quickly across the room. Eyes burning with tears, a mirror to Harry’s own, Draco crawled onto the bed and scooped his boy into his arms.

With a soft cry, Harry clutched at Draco’s sweater so tightly that his little fists shook. Taking gasping breaths, heart pounding a mile a minute, he pressed his face against the blond’s neck, just breathing in the scent that was uniquely Draco. It grounded him, gave him a sense of safety that unlocked all the stress and anxiety and fear that he’d kept packed down tight under his mask and, suddenly, he burst into loud, desperate sobs.

Draco held Harry just as tightly. One arm curled around Harry’s back, his hand sinking into Harry’s wild, black hair and fist it. The other arm went low around Harry’s waist, his fingers gripping firmly at Harry’s hip. He pressed his cheek against the side of Harry’s head and closed his eyes tight, tears sliding down his cheeks. “Shhh. I’ve got you. I’m here now,” he whispered over and over, a litany of love and reassurance. He curled around Harry as much as he could and tried to press him into his body.
Harry clung and cried. He was completely non-verbal, but eventually his cries lost strength. His grip loosened and he went limp in Draco’s strong grip.

“That’s it. Let it all go,” Draco praised. He pressed kisses to Harry’s temple until Harry’s breathing evened out and his tears came to a stop.

Draco turned so his back was against the headboard and pulled Harry between his legs. Harry moved with him, pliant and sweet, as Draco shifted him sideways in his lap. Draco’s left leg curled around and supported Harry’s lower back while both of Harry’s legs draped over Draco’s right thigh. With a sigh, Harry let his head rest on the blond’s shoulder. Draco cradled the back of Harry’s head and firmly gripped his soft hair once more.

“Dobby,” Draco called, but his eyes remained locked on Harry’s face, drinking it in.

Harry stared back with open devotion need.

The little elf appeared with a pop. “Yes, young master?” he asked quietly, almost reverently.

“Bring us a tray of finger foods and a tall glass of cool water.”

Draco’s will was done and within five minutes there was a silver tray with food on the bed next to Harry’s hip, between Draco’s legs. A tall glass of water was placed within reach on the nightstand. Draco took up the glass first. He brought it to Harry’s lips and stared deep into Harry’s eyes as the boy drank in soft, gentle swallows. Harry’s subconscious stirred; he was cradled on his back against Draco’s chest, drinking almost as if from a bottle. Something deep in Harry’s soul began to flutter and Draco lovingly kissed Harry’s cheek, drinking in the boy’s fresh tears.

Harry finished the glass and Draco set it aside. Not looking away from Harry’s light green eyes, Draco took up a finger sandwich. It was small enough that could be eaten in two bites. He held it between his pointer finger and thumb and brought his hand to Harry’s mouth. At the feeling of Draco gently caressing his soft bottom lip with his middle finger, Harry obediently parted his lips.

His whole world narrowed down to Draco’s intense eyes and the feeling of being fed. As a toddler and a child, he’d been routinely starved. The gaping emptiness of his stomach, the weakness and mental fog he lived with for so many years… It made the act of being fed when his stomach felt so empty from being unconscious for over a day so momentous that it was impossible to put into words.

Harry’s teeth closed over the perfectly soft bread, the flavor of the deliciously delicate egg salad settling onto his tongue, and whimpered helplessly. He belonged to Draco heart, mind, and body, but this… This broke him down in a fundamental way. Reached so deep inside him that his very foundations trembled. Harry came completely undone, utterly exposed, and lay helpless in Draco’s arms.

Draco felt an inferno begin swirling deep in his core as Harry’s complete and utter submission, deeper than ever before, saturated the bond. His body literally tingled wherever it came in contact with Harry’s. His attention was riveted on the bond and the sensation of Harry’s lips and mouth against his fingers. Smiling, eyes glittering, Draco ran his finger in gentle swipes along the outside of Harry’s teeth and pink gums as the boy chewed. He was entranced with the way Harry’s throat worked as he swallowed every offering and thrilled in the soft sounds of complete surrender that escaped.

Harry stared up at Draco, tears rolling down flushed cheeks. He chewed and swallowed and held his mouth open to Draco’s fingers. His hands curled into the sheet under him, his back arched
gracefully, and his heart pounded fast as the empty pit of his stomach began to fill.

Enthralled by the drool that spilled from the corners of Harry’s lips, Draco stroked Harry’s tongue between bites and held it between his fingers just to feel the involuntary, undulating movements of the slick muscle. Releasing it, Draco made teasing swipes at the roof of the boy’s mouth and pinched Harry’s bottom lip. Draco held it open to watch Harry’s saliva pool. With spit-slicked fingers, Draco wrapped his hand around Harry's throat just above the black collar to feel him swallow. The sensation of Harry’s throat working against his palm made Draco shiver, his cheeks flushing a rosy-red with desire.

Draco opened the next sandwich, peeling the two pieces of bread away from each other. He discarded one half and rubbed the cucumber spread of the other around Harry’s mouth - along the inside of each cheek, over the roof of his mouth, and painted his lips. Heart pounding hard and smooth in his chest, Draco watched as Harry hung his mouth open and let Draco rub the sandwich gently over his tongue, back and forth over and over, until it grew too soggy. Draco released it for Harry to chew and spread his fingers, stretching the boy’s lips wide to watch.

When the last of that piece had been swallowed, Draco snatched the next tiny sandwich and shoved the whole thing into Harry’s waiting mouth and then immediately another. Harry gagged, but he remained pliant and trusting in Draco’s arms. His tongue rolled the large mouthful to the side, making his cheek bulge as he worked on chewing.

Eyes burning with heat, Draco pressed at the ball of bread from the outside of Harry’s cheek. He felt it give and squish under his touch and he played with it, pinching and stroking, until Harry had swallowed it all. By this point, Harry’s mouth and chin were wet and shiny, messy with crumbs and drool. Draco shivered as a bolt of pure lust shot down his spine. His dick grew harder than it had ever gotten before, but it was background noise. All of his attention was riveted to Harry’s sweet lips.

Draco was breathing hard, nearly panting, as he plunged his first two fingers back into Harry’s now empty mouth. He pressed down on the back of the boy’s undulating tongue and opened the boy's throat. Harry gagged, his throat fluttering and constricting around Draco’s fingers, and Draco groaned from deep in his chest. As Draco’s fingers slid back out, Harry’s tongue chased after them, his mouth hanging open.

- need submission desire -

Harry’s pupils had blown wide, black nearly swallowing the green. He was gone. That blissed out look, the sloppy mouth, the overwhelming feedback pouring through the bond, all of it combined to make Draco’s mind haze over, and Draco roughly fisted the boy’s hair, pulling Harry’s head back. With an audible growl, Draco lapped hungrily into Harry’s gaping mouth. Ran his tongue over the boy’s lips, licked at his teeth, and thrust against Harry’s tongue with his own. The moist cavern tasted of fresh bread, cucumbers and whipped eggs. Harry was so fucking delicious that Draco was practically drooling a puddle into Harry’s open mouth. In response, Harry arched sensually, eyes rolling back in his head, and began sucking and slurping at Draco’s lips, the sounds electrifying Draco’s nerves.

Draco rolled his body around and over Harry’s, straddling the boy’s waist. He used both hands to keep Harry’s head where it was. He was half-sitting up and, with Draco lifting onto his knees, it put Harry’s slick lips right at the level of Draco’s jean-covered crotch. - LUST submission need - Green eyes nearly swallowed by black stared up at him with perfect trust and want. Drool slid from the corners of Harry’s open lips, further soaking his chin.
Nearly gasping for breath, Draco quickly popped open his jeans and shoved them down to his thighs. Using that same hand, the one not holding Harry’s head steady, Draco gasped the base of his dick and slid the spongy head over the boy’s lower lip and into his ready mouth. *Keep your mouth open,* he moaned directly into Harry’s mind. His attention was locked on Harry’s wanton expression. He drank in the voracious pleasure that pulsed down the bond. *So good. So pretty. Always perfect for me.*

Harry’s whole body arched upward toward Draco’s, a sensual wave, as a whine of pure hunger curled up Harry’s spine. He wrapped his arms around Draco’s legs, clinging with all his strength. His long, black lashes fluttered, mimicking his throat as he worked to swallow down a flood of saliva.

Draco slid his cock in and out of the boy’s open mouth, just rubbing it along the boy’s tongue and cheeks, getting it soaked with spit. He groaned as Harry’s tongue writhed against the sensitive underside. Each of Harry’s gasping breaths blew hot air around Draco’s sensitive, wet cock. His pulse like thunder in his ears, Draco rocked forward and hit the back of Harry’s throat.

Harry gagged, eyes wide and hungry. His hands clutched at Draco tighter, holding him close. Draco gasped in wide-eyed wonder as the extra hardness of his cock let him press deeper. The head of his dick slipped into the boy’s throat where it closed tight around him, constricting. Draco’s toes curled and he gave a long, low cry as he pulled his hips back, his dick dragging once more over Harry’s silk-soft tongue. Before Harry could even catch his breath, Draco pressed back in hungrily, shivering as Harry’s throat again squeezed closed around him. Draco held himself there for almost a whole minute, groaning long and low at the sensation, before pulling his hips back and breaking that gentle seal.

Harry went limp, held up only by Draco’s hands fisted in his hair. All conscious thought was obliterated by the rolling of Draco’s hips pushing and pulling like the tide. Harry coughed and gasped every time Draco pulled out of his throat. His hands clawed softly at the jeans bunched under Draco’s ass. Draco pressed in and out of his throat, cutting off his air and making him gag.

Harry’s shirt was soaked with spit by this point as he kept his mouth hanging obediently open. His mind was a whirl, his body on fire. Draco’s silver eyes bore into him from way above him, burning with a scorching, hungry heat. Pleasure was building in his gut, electrifying his nerves, tightening his nipples. The feel of Draco in his throat, controlling his every breath, got tangled up with the sense-memory of Draco feeding him and Harry was flying so high his whole body felt on fire.

Like an animal, Harry moaned and slurped and gasped, hugging the head of Draco’s cock with his throat for as long as he could, starving for it, and suddenly his vision flared white as his body arched off the bed. His cock exploded, shocks shooting down every nerve, and a black wave of hot, throbbing pleasure crashed over him and swept him away. Harry’s eyes rolled up, his arms and mouth fell slack, as he blacked out.

Draco gave a hoarse yell. He fisted Harry’s hair and wildly bounced in and out of Harry’s throat, splattering the inside of the boy’s mouth with cum again and again and again. He came so hard his vision went black, his body twitching with minute spasms that felt like earthquakes. It seemed to go on forever until Draco slipped messily from Harry’s sloppy lips and collapsed on his side.

Vision still filled with throbbing black spots, body shaking, Draco nonetheless grabbed Harry’s jaw and turned the boy’s face toward him. Heart thudding fast and furious, Draco stared fascinated at the thick, white cum that coated his boy’s mouth and oozed out the corners of his cherry-red lips. He held Harry’s mouth open and dipped trembling fingers in to scoop as much out as he could. It was thicker than the clear stuff that normally came out of him and there was more of it than usual. Panting, Draco rolled it between his fingers, all too familiar with the tacky feel. This was the same
stuff that shot out of Raymond and all those other fuckers. Draco stared, fascinated, unable to look away.

Harry weakly gasped and coughed, eyes fluttering as he came slowly back into awareness. He swallowed several times to get Draco’s sticky stuff out of his mouth and rolled limply onto his side, tears soaking his face. He felt raw and yet whole for the first time in a long time. His body felt like it was vibrating softly. - love gratitude need - Harry pushed himself a little higher up on the bed so that he’d be even with the blond. Looking demurely into Draco’s eyes, his begged, voice raspy and sweet, “Please? Please, Draco?”

Draco’s eyes refocused on Harry and the frown that had begun to form faded. He smiled and wrapped his arm around Harry, pulling him closer, their foreheads resting together. “Yes,” he said, voice low, granting Harry permission, and let the boy take his cum-coated fingers into his mouth.

Still trembling, Harry closed this eyes in soul-deep relief as he sucked and slurped at Draco’s fingers. It was a bit bitter and had a sticky texture, but the sheer fact that Draco had given this to him, had felt pleasure with him and was letting Harry wash him clean, was so overwhelming that Harry teared up once more. He didn’t want to miss a drop, wanted to drink it all down, needed to thank Draco with all that he was.

Draco whispered gentle words of love and praise into Harry’s ear as he stroked Harry’s hair and back with his free hand. Slowly, Harry calmed, his sucking gentled until Draco’s fingers lay limp in his mouth. He stared into Draco’s eyes with utter - love devotion. It made Draco’s heart constrict.

* Love you, Harry, * he said with perfect truth. * You’re mine. Forever. I’m always going to take care of you. *

Harry whimpered - LOVE gratitude submission. Crystalline tears glittered on his lashes as he suckled gently at Draco’s fingers.

“Harry, I want to know what happened while I was out,” Draco ordered softly, never looking away from his boy’s eyes. He slid his fingers from Harry’s mouth and caressed the boy’s swollen lips. “Walk me through each day. I want to be there with you. I want to know what you were thinking and feeling. Leave nothing out.”

Harry began slowly, voice hushed between them. He told Draco how the God had come to him, the universe in Her eyes. How the God asked him to dance and Harry agreed, telling Her, “for Draco”. It felt like he’d danced forever when the God stopped him.

“The God told me you were going to be tested. She brought me to a forest. It was so familiar…” Harry closed his eyes, remembering. “You stood between two vine-covered trees, naked and dirty.” Harry’s voice began to tremble softly. “You were bleeding along your sides and there were cuts on your upper arms. You promised me you were going to come back and rubbed your cheek against mine. Then you left me. I tried to follow, but She held my arm. A snow gust flew into my face, blinding me. I stepped forward and stepped out into the courtyard at Hogwarts. Narcissa was there. She tried to talk to me, but I was looking for you. You were collapsed in the center naked. I was so upset! You promised and the God promised, but seeing you lying there like you were dead…” Harry whimpered.

Draco hushed him and fed him his fingers. He let Harry suck for a few minutes until the - anxiety - that had spiked through the bond quieted.

Harry continued his tale, telling how he’d returned to the Tower that night and how the Weasleys were worried about Draco and really surprised that Harry was wearing a gown. “The twins said I
was pretty,” he confessed, blushing with happy surprise. “Ron thought it was really weird, but Percy helped me get undressed. He did his best to take care of me.”

Harry explained how he’d woken late the next morning, confused and cold with Draco gone. How he and the Weasleys had all gone to the Infirmary to visit Draco right away. “Your nose was bleeding and Madam Pomfrey told me to leave.” Harry’s eyes hardened. “I knew you needed me, so I ignored her. I climbed into your bed. It felt so good to be with you. I felt like everything was okay again. I went to that place where I know I’m yours and I kissed you. I felt the warmth leave me and your nose stopped bleeding. I was dizzy afterward and Madam Pomfrey got upset. She told me to eat and rest, told the Weasleys, too.”

Harry explained how they had gone to the kitchen and how he’d gotten so tired, so he’d gone up to sleep in the Tower, even though it wasn’t even lunch time. “I didn’t wake up again until the next morning.” Harry frowned, eyes tearing up. “You weren’t there and my throat hurt to swallow and felt really hot. Ron was sleeping, but I didn’t want him. I wanted you. Needed you. So I went to the Infirmary.”

Harry explained that Madam Pomfrey had realized he was sick and, while she was treating him, Andromeda and Ted had arrived. He described how upset Andromeda had been and Ted’s unusual quietness. “I told them everything. Madam Pomfrey came with a potion and Dumbledore tried to convince Andromeda we should stay until you woke up.” Harry’s expression grew fierce. “Narcissa told me that it might be dangerous to take you away, so I told Andromeda we needed to stay. I told her I would take care of you. That reminded me about the Stone and I decided to protect it since you couldn’t.”

Harry then told Draco about how he’d taken the necklace that Hermione had charmed. “Andromeda and Ted went home after breakfast, and Ron and I went to Hagrid’s.” His voice dropped, heavy with sorrow. Harry closed his eyes, ashamed but unwilling to hide anything from Draco. He told Draco about going into the forest and finding the dead unicorn. Told him how guilty and horrible he’d felt, how he’d remembered what it felt like to kill the beautiful creature.

“I performed the Rite of the Dead,” Harry whispered, eyes shinning with tears. “And it was accepted. The Earth responded even though it was Winter and snow was on the ground. I… I felt like… she could be free… That she wouldn’t suffer anymore…” - guilt sorrow painful-hope - bled through the bond and Draco pulled Harry close to pepper his face with kisses. Voice rough with tears, Harry continued his tale. “We went to Hagrid’s cabin after that. Helped Hagrid take care of his egg. We were there all afternoon.” He then told Draco about how they met up with the rest of the Weasleys for dinner and how Remus had sent him an owl. “He said he wanted to meet.”

Harry explained that he’d felt on edge, too tense to sleep, so he’d asked Ron to sleep with him. He then described how the next morning Ron had been panicked and terrified because of a nightmare and how he’d done his best to help him. “After breakfast, Dumbledore gave Percy, Ron, and me permission to go to Remus’s cabin in Hogsemade. I had to tell the story again about the God and where you were. I was really upset. I just… I just felt like I was doing it all wrong. Ron was having nightmares, Percy was worried, and Remus was upset, but Remus told me he knew I was taking care of you and that made me feel a little better.”

Harry’s eyes flashed up to look at Draco dead-on, suddenly outraged. “But then he told me he knew how to destroy the Stone, but he’d changed his mind on telling me how! I felt so desperate! I had to know what he knew.” Harry described their argument and how he’d convinced Remus in the end. He explained how dangerous Vivificantis serum was, but that Remus had still promised to get some. Remus had also promised to come to the castle to watch over them. Harry explained how Ron and he couldn’t sleep again that night because they were anxious about everything, so they stayed up all
night exploring. They’d fallen asleep at dawn on the couch in the Common Room.

“When we woke up, it was Christmas morning. I felt sick,” Harry confessed tearfully. “I had all these gifts and the Weasleys were so happy. I - I wanted you! I didn’t want anything else! But Percy said it was rude not to open the gifts and that I had to write thank you notes.” Sweat beaded up on Harry’s lip. “Narcissa would be so disappointed if I didn’t perform my duties.” Harry shuddered. “I… felt like I was drowning. I couldn’t eat, so when the others went to lunch I snuck into the Infirmary with this cloak that makes me invisible. The tag said it was from my father. I used it to get into bed with you, so Madam Pomfrey wouldn’t make me leave. I stayed with you until dinner.”

Harry told Draco about how Dumbledore hadn’t been at dinner, but that Remus had arrived that night. Ron hadn’t been able to sleep again, so even though Harry felt a bit better about his chances now that Remus was there, he’d stayed up with Ron. “We found this mirror. It was magic. It showed you what you wanted most. Ron saw himself winning the Cup and stuff, but I…” A cute blush darkened Harry’s cheeks. “I saw us…” Draco listened intently as Harry described his vision inside the mirror. Harry finished by saying, “It seemed so impossible, like it could never be true, and I just started crying. That’s when Dumbledore came and explained what it did.”

Draco stroked Harry’s hair. “It’ll come true, Harry. You’ll see.”

Harry blushed - hope disbelief.

“What happened next?” Draco prompted with an encouraging smile.

Harry described how he’d spent the next morning in the Infirmary with Remus. “I just… I had to be close to you. I was trying really hard to be strong, I promise, Draco! I just… really needed to be with you.”

Harry explained that at lunch Hagrid had sent an owl, and he and Ron had gone down to watch the dragon hatch. “It was amazing, but then Hagrid us that he’d told the person who gave him the egg all about Fluffy and how to get around him, and I knew! I just knew that it was the enemy and they were going to be ready to go after the Stone soon.”

Harry remembered how after dinner he hadn’t been able to sleep and, again, neither could Ron. Harry explained how Percy found them in the Common Room for the third morning in a row and how upset he’d gotten and that had led to Ron and his brothers fighting. “Everyone was so upset and I was so tired and worried about the Stone…” Harry bit his lip. “I should have helped Ron, but I couldn’t. I ran away and hid in the infirmary with Remus all day. It was all I could do,” Harry confessed, deeply and truly ashamed of his weakness.

“What happened next?” Draco prompted.

Harry swallowed. “Dumbledore got an owl at dinner. It was a special looking owl and Percy said it was from the Ministry. It made me worried. My stomach was all in knots and I was glad when he said he’d sleep with us that night. I’d just fallen asleep, I think, when the necklace heated up.”

He described the harrowing ordeal of getting past the tasks with Percy and his meltdown with Remus. Draco listened very intently as Harry described how the dragon tattoo had come to life when he’d wanted to kill himself to stop it all.

Draco held Harry tightly, sick at the thought of Harry taking his life and fiercely glad the magic that he’d placed in the tattoo had worked. “Your life is mine,” he growled.

“Yes, Draco,” Harry agreed - remorse submission. “I’m sorry.”
“Then what happened?” Draco demanded, still holding the boy tight to his chest.

Trembling, Harry recounted the dangerous battle for the Stone. He confessed how scared and desperate he’d been. “When you came… I almost couldn’t believe it… I didn’t have to throw myself through the fire anymore and I knew you would take care of everything… I just wanted to collapse, but you told me to destroy the Stone,” Harry remembered, heart beating hard, adrenaline sizzling along his nerves. “I didn’t know what to do! Remus was hurt! And you could get hurt, too! I just ran to the troll as fast as I could and used it’s head to pour the Vivificatis serum over the Stone.”

“You did great,” Draco told him, voice thick with emotion. Harry had been through so much! It was a lot to take in. “You did so good.” Harry looked up with such painful hope that Draco’s throat nearly closed. He kissed Harry, deep and long, thrusting his tongue into the boy’s mouth. *Good boy. You were good, Harry. I’m proud of you.*

*Good boy. You were good, Harry. I’m proud of you.*

-Shifting against the sheets, arms entwined around each other, they pressed their bodies together so hard it was as if they trying to merge into one. Harry whimpered; Draco moaned. Their lips grew slick and tender, flushed a deep red. Draco cupped Harry’s face, holding it still so he could thrust his tongue deep inside. Harry clutched at the back of Draco’s shirt.

After long minutes of making out, Draco became aware that his jeans were still bunched uncomfortably around his thighs and Harry still wore hospital pants that itched where his cum had dried. Draco giggled and pulled away. He sat up and began to pull off his clothes. Harry, smiling tearfully, followed his lead. Soon enough their clothes were abandoned over the side of the bed and they were back on their sides, wrapped in each other’s arms. Only, this time, naked skin pressed against naked skin. Simultaneously they let out contented sighs.

“What happened with you?” Harry asked softly.

Draco pet Harry’s wild hair as he thought about his answer. “Quirrell… He attacked my mind on Samhain. He used some spell that targeted certain emotions and twisted them so I would be more… vulnerable, I guess. More controllable by Voldemort. So I had to go through each memory and get rid of the spell. It hurt like hell, but I couldn’t give up. Not if I was going to win.”

- sympathy concern love - Harry peppered Draco’s face with kisses and slowly the blond’s shoulders relaxed.

“I woke up and I felt you screaming through the bond,” Draco continued. “I knew you were going after the Stone. Knew you’d be fighting Quirrell. So I ran to the kitchen as fast as I could. The elves tried to stop me, but what could they do? I took a skinning knife. The Winter God helped me and put the fire out, but then I was on my own. The God wanted me to prove myself.” Draco shrugged, eyes going cold. “Didn’t give a fuck about that. All I cared about was protecting you and killing that bastard.”

“You were amazing,” Harry said softly, eyes shining with admiration. He stared adoringly into Draco’s eyes. “You saved Remus and me both.”

Draco flushed, a wave of warmth washing over him. He smiled and ruffled Harry’s hair. “Thanks. Anyway, Dumbledore, Snape, and McGonagall came. Snape and McGonagall took us to the Infirmary while Dumbledore stayed. Pomfrey put us up in a private room. Snape told me he’d made a potion that will keep anyone from ever going into my mind again. Pomfrey took a look at you, healing your cuts and bruises, and then Andromeda and Lucius came. Lucius said he needed to talk
to me, so we came here. Turns out Lucius has had some witch in the basement for since last Yule and she escaped with something powerful that might bring the Dark Lord back, so Narcissa’s gone after her.”

Harry stared at Draco with wide eyes.

Draco smiled at him. “Don’t worry, Harry. Narcissa can take care of herself.”

Slowly, Harry nodded, accepting Draco’s judgment. “Yes, Draco.”

“Lucius on the other hand… He really fucked up,” Draco growled, eyes slitted in anger. “Not only was he dicking around, torturing this girl right underneath us all these months, but he let her escape with an item he should have destroyed!” His grip turned painful on Harry’s arm. “Here we are, putting our lives on the line to keep Voldemort from getting the Stone and he goes and lets this deranged bitch make off with something even worse! I’m sick of his shit!” Sighing, he gentled his grip on Harry and pressed their foreheads together. “We need to get out of here before I do something I might regret. Like killing his ass and taking his fucking title.”

It wasn’t even like Draco wanted the Malfoy title. It would be a lot of work to maintain and Draco didn’t want the hassle. Not when he needed to concentrate on the war. But if Lucius continued to be a problem, Draco wouldn’t hesitate to do what needed to be done.

“Yes, Draco,” Harry said easily. He’d never really felt close to Lucius, so it wasn’t like he’d miss the man if he were gone. Even if they had been close, Draco knew what was best for them. Harry wouldn’t question Draco’s decisions.

Draco melted as Harry’s - trust love - flowed into him. “Try and get some rest. I know you’re tired.”

He kissed Harry’s lips sweetly, once more starting up a petting motion through Harry’s hair. “The sun will be coming up in an hour or so. We’ll have breakfast, pack what we need, and then we’re leaving.”

Eyes falling obediently closed, Harry asked softly, “Where?”

“Andromeda’s.”

While Harry slept, Draco planned. For the last twenty-four hours, while Harry had been lying unconscious, Draco had been studying the transcripts of Hempo’s writings and trying to come up with a game plan regarding the Horcruxes and Voldemort’s spirit. Now that he’d heard from Harry everything that he’d missed, he had a better idea of what needed to be done. Surprisingly, the first thing he’d do after getting Harry situated at Andromeda’s had nothing to do with Voldemort. He actually needed to make a trip to Hogwarts.

One: After weighing the pros and cons of having his mind permanently locked against outside forces, it was worth the trouble it might cause not being able to let someone in his mind even if he wanted to. It was more important to ensure his mind was protected. Draco would take Snape’s potion.

Two: Remus was still recovering there and Draco wanted to check on him. He also needed to deliver a very serious warning. Remus had done good by bringing the serum and coming to stand guard over Harry while Draco was unconscious, but he’d also fucked up. Remus had pushed Harry so hard that the boy had actively contemplated killing himself! Draco needed to make sure what happened would never happen again.

Three: According to Harry’s story, Ron had woken up panicked and terrified after a nightmare and
never felt able to sleep again after that. It had gotten so bad that Percy hadn't felt comfortable leaving the boys in the dorm at night by themselves. It was clear to Draco that something worse than a simple nightmare had occurred and Draco was going to find out what!

Four: Apparently there was an invisibility cloak missing that belonged to Harry and Draco wanted it back.

Five: Hagrid was still probably trying to hide a dragon in his hut. Draco would have to take care of that fast before the dragon grew too big to handle.

Six: the God of Winter had bestowed upon Harry a gown that Harry had been very pretty in. Draco was going to grab that, too.

**Chapter end.**

**A/N:** I hope the recap by Harry wasn't too redundant or tedious to read. It didn't feel right just writing, "So Harry told him everything." Let me know if you think I made the right call.
A/n: I want to thank a fan who was open to helping me with the Dumbledore confrontation as well as helping me when I struggled with Remus’s character development. DedicatedReader842 you were instrumental to getting my head on straight and this chapter out. THANK YOU!!

…

Dumbledore and Remus

“I just don’t understand why you would want to speak to that man!” Andromeda’s arms were crossed tightly under her chest and she stood blocking the fireplace with her body. Gone were the big smiles and hugs of when they had first arrived. “He should be prosecuted for using children in his care as bait! We need to go to the papers!”

“You’re being hysterical,” Draco cut in coldly. “The Stone was bait not us.” He turned and faced her head-on, expression defiant. “I want to talk to him before I decide what I want to do about it. I need to know what he was thinking.”

“He clearly wasn’t thinking at all!” Andromeda glared fiercely. “He put your lives in danger! He knew there was a risk to you and, instead of moving to get rid of it, he set up trials for YOU! Did you not hear me, Draco? Those ‘challenges’ were never meant to keep the traitor from the Stone. They were meant for you and Harry!”

“Which makes sense if you think about it!” Draco snapped back, frustrated. “If we were held up by the challenges he created, then we wouldn’t be strong enough to face the traitor and would have been kept safely away. And if we could get through them, then we had a chance to stop the traitor once and for all and destroy the Stone. The stupid bastard swore a vow that prevented him from destroying it himself and none of his other flunkies would do it, so of course he had to depend on us.”

“THAT’S INSANE!” Andromeda screamed at him, arms flailing wide. “You could have DIED! Harry almost died, Draco! You two had no business anywhere near the Stone or a dangerous man like Quirrell! I’m shocked you would take Harry’s safety so lightly!”

Draco’s eyes flashed dangerously and Harry, who had been sitting on the couch with little Dee watching the argument like a tennis match, rose. He gently took ahold of her skirt and looked up at her with big, green eyes.

“While Draco’s getting information,” he said innocently, purposefully phrasing it so that it would remind her that more information was never a bad thing, especially to a Slytherin like Andromeda. “I was wondering if you’d help me write a statement about what happened before I forget the details. Just in case we need it later. If we do go to the papers, it’s important we have the story straight. I know you’ll help me word it just right.”

Draco had to fight back a smirk, impressed with Harry’s cunning. * Good boy, * he practically purred.

- happy amused - Harry’s cheeks warmed with blood, but otherwise his expression didn’t move from the innocent, wide-eyed mask he’d put on to convince Andromeda to go with him.

Andromeda huffed. She knew she was being manipulated, by flattery and by the promise of more
information, but that didn’t make her immune to Harry’s puppy-eyes. The truth was she was dying to know exactly what happened that night. She still hadn’t been given any of the details. “Fine.” She gave Draco a cold look, but she moved away from the fireplace. “Do what you want.” She took Harry’s hand and led him out of the room.

Ted moved to the couch and lifted a wide-eyed Dee onto his hip. He’d been standing in the doorway, an anxious expression on his face, but now he gave Draco a warm smile. “Be safe.”

Draco nodded and threw the floo powder onto the fire. “Headmaster’s office, Hogwarts.” He had to wait only five minutes or so before Dumbledore’s office came into view, the old man coming to stand attentively before the fireplace. Draco didn’t wait for him to speak. “Let me come through.”

Dumbledore lifted an eyebrow, his faded blue eyes peering over the straight edge of his glasses. “Of course, my boy.”

Dumbledore mirrored him, but he sat on the other side of his desk across from Draco. “How’s Harry?” he asked carefully.

Draco, at least, looked well enough. He wore a blue peacoat, over a long-sleeved t-shirt, jeans, and his sneakers. His hair was a little oilier than normal and hung around his cheeks in slightly stringy strands, but his eyes were bright and alert and he moved with the easy grace of a child.

“Tired, but he’s okay,” Draco answered honestly.

They sat quietly for a moment, just observing each other. Dumbledore’s face was creased and wrinkled, his hands were age-spotted, his body was slender and tall. With his love of strange color combinations, he seemed like a harmless old man. Even now he wore pale-peach robes with dark red carnations down the front and along the bottom hem. It was hard to feel threatened by a man wearing big red flowers, but that just proved Dumbledore was crafty as hell. He knew how to work his image and downplay the power - both political and magical - at his disposal.

Draco braced his elbow on the arm of the chair and casually leaned his cheek against his hand. “What’d you tell the police?”

“They are called Aurors, and I told them truth. Mostly,” Dumbledore answered quietly. “Quirrell was possessed by Voldemort’s spirit and tried to steal the Sorcerer’s Stone that I was protecting for my good friend. Fortunately, Remus caught on to the nefarious scheme and acted to protect the Stone. In the ensuing battle, Quirrell was killed, Voldemort’s spirit fled, and the Stone was destroyed.”

Draco snorted, slouching in his chair. “Why keep our names out of it?”

Dumbledore cast the young boy across from him a deep frown. “I don’t believe the world is ready to know to what lengths you’ll go to win.” He folded his hands on his desk, looking more tired than ever before. “When I suspected you and Harry would go after the Stone, I did my best to create a favorable arena. I had no idea Voldemort was possessing Quirrell or that the danger was so great. It was never my intention for you to do battle without help close at hand. For that, I am deeply sorry, my boy.”
Draco cocked an eyebrow, honestly confused. He used his hands to hook his hair behind his ears and sat forward. “I don’t see how it could have gone any other way. Of course Quirrell was going to make sure you and the other teachers weren’t around. And even if he wasn’t possessed, he was an adult wizard. It’s to be expected he’d try to kill us.”

“Wizards aren’t usually so competent,” Dumbledore corrected, voice soft. “I knew he might hurt you if you were to get in his way, but actual murder… That is more rare than you would think. I had every confidence that I would be able to intervene before it escalated to that point.”

Draco shook his head and scooted to the edge of his seat. “I get that you couldn’t destroy the Stone, so you were kind of hoping we would do it for you, but why didn’t you create a way for us to get to the Stone without coming into contact with Quirrell at all?”

Dumbledore sighed. He took his glasses off and rubbed at his eyes tiredly. When he spoke, his tone was regretful. “Sooner than I’d like, the war will start again. You and Harry will be in the thick of it, and I want to make sure you are as prepared as possible. Every battle you face will make you stronger.” At Draco’s unconvinced look, Dumbledore continued, staring intently into Draco’s eyes. “I did not ask you to go after the Stone, but you and Harry ended up there regardless. Yes, I made preparations because I suspected you would eventually be involved in the fight, but I did not encourage your participation. I fully believe that this event was fated to prepare you for something much more difficult later.”

“Of course we got involved,” Draco sneered in disgust. “It wasn’t fate or destiny or anything like that. It was logic! You made sure no one else would do anything about it, not you or the teachers or Flamel. So who else was gonna? We were on our fucking own, so of course we had to do something about it. Or do you think I’m stupid enough to let our greatest enemy walk off with something like the Sorcerer’s Stone?”

“My boy,” Dumbledore began, voice tender.

Draco slammed his hand on the desk with an angry glare. “Shut up, old man. You’ve said enough. It’s my turn.” He stood slowly and leaned forward, putting his weight on his hands that were pressed flat to the desk. “If I had not woken up when I did, Harry would be dead and Voldemort would have the Stone, so let me give you some motivation to do better.” Draco’s eyes glinted a dangerous silver. The Dark aura of his magic flared, making several instruments next to them spin wildly. “If Harry dies because of the Wizarding World, Voldemort will be the least of your problems,” he promised, voice thick and full of threat.

Dumbledore leaned back, eyes wide. Fawkes gave a musical cry, but he was ignored. “Draco, I understand your feelings, but evil is never the answer. You would turn the world against you. You would cause everyone who loves you to suffer. Would you really wish for such acts to be done in Harry’s name?”

Draco stared at the old man for a moment and then laughed. It was a true laugh, full of mirth. He stood straight, abandoning the intimidating posture. “You really don’t understand, do you?” He shook his head. “Oh, well. You can’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Dumbledore said nothing. He was disturbed by this child. Disturbed by the boy’s conviction and readiness to become evil. Disturbed by his blatant disrespect and lack of gratitude. Dumbledore had protected him from the authorities. Draco had received no punishment for blatantly breaking school rules again and again. In fact, as Dumbledore stared across his desk into cold grey eyes, he was reminded of another student from long ago. Except there were two big differences between them.

One, Tom Riddle had kept his sadistic and power-hungry nature hidden behind sweet smiles and
charm while Draco wore his ruthlessness on his sleeve for all the world to see. Two, Draco loved Harry wholly and completely with all his heart. The fierceness of that love was dangerous, but it was also salvation. Tom had known nothing of love. Dumbledore wasn’t even sure the boy had been capable of the emotion, so Dumbledore was banking hard on the fact that Draco’s ability to love would eventually save him.

A chill went down Dumbledore spine as he remembered another power-mad teen, a teen who had started his quest from a place of love for the world, which had eventually morphed into obsession and tyranny. A man who, unlike Tom, had been able to love and was loved in return, but love had not saved Gellert. Dumbledore’s heart constricted painfully, his arm tingling as a very heavy grief surged up from his soul. Because maybe love would have saved him had Dumbledore not been afraid to act on that love. Maybe things would have gone differently.

Dumbledore still remembered with painful clarity the night he and Gellert had finally given in to their feelings. Merlin, he’d never felt so whole or alive. It was indescribable! But his brother and sister had walked in on them entwined and sharing passionate kisses. It had lead to a horrific duel, Gellert fighting for them, Dumbledore too terrified to act, and Ariana… Merlin, Ariana… She had tried to stop Aberforth and Gellert. She had stepped in the path of their spells…

Dumbledore’s hands went numb as he remembered her broken body falling. Gellert had looked at him, eyes wide and frantic, pleading… but Dumbledore had stood paralyzed. He’d made no move to reach out or speak and Gellert had turned away, rejected and alone. Dumbledore never saw him again until years later when news of a Dark Wizard on the continent began to spread. By then, Gellert was no longer the wizard Dumbledore had once loved. Dumbledore blinked the tears from his eyes and refocused on the present, realizing Draco had asked him something.

Draco lifted an eyebrow. “You okay?”

Dumbledore gave a weak smile. “Yes. Sorry, my boy. My mind wandered off for a moment. What did you say?”

“I asked if you’d recovered a cloak? It belongs to Harry.”

“Ah, yes. James Potter’s invisibility cloak.” Dumbledore opened one of the drawers in his desk and pulled out the silvery material. He handed it to Draco.

The boy felt it in his hands, an innocent look of curiosity on his face as he made his lap disappear and reappear. It made Dumbledore smile. Yes, Draco reminded him both of Tom and Gellert, but he was also radically different. He had the one thing that both of those warlords lacked: a lover to stand at his side and hopefully channel all that passion and talent toward something more positive for the world. Draco was not yet lost to the Light.

After a few minutes of examining the magical item, Draco looked up and made eye contact once more. “I’d like to speak to Remus. And after that Ron and Percy. I also need to get a few things from our room.”

“Of course.” Dumbledore stood and gestured with his arm to the door. “Remus is still in the Infirmary recovering. I will be here should you need anything else.”

Draco nodded. He folded the cloak carefully over his arm and stood. He gave Dumbledore one more look before heading for the door. The Headmaster was like a child, caught up in fantasies and ideals, unable to fully understand the harsh truth of reality, but there was nothing Draco could do about that. He’d just have to keep an eye on him and make sure Dumbledore was working in line with his plans.
Remus’s dreams were watery and unclear, glimpses of unrelated images, but then something touched his hair and it felt like an anchor. With a soft groan, he cracked blurry eyes open. It was early, only an hour or two past dawn. The light streaming in through the windows still had a golden cast. Rolling his head to the side, he found Draco sitting beside his hospital bed, stroking his hair. Adrenaline kicked through his system and suddenly Remus was wide awake.

Draco gave him a small smile and asked, “How are you?”

“I’ll recover,” Remus answered softly. He made restless moves, but he couldn’t sit up while Draco was holding him down by the gentle touch on his head. Fortunately, Draco understood what he wanted and lifted his hand away. With a relieved smile, Remus put his back to the wall and was able to talk more easily. “How’s Harry?”

“Awake.” Draco tilted his head slightly, as if curious. The way he narrowed his eyes had Remus swallowing nervously. “We talked.”

Remus fisted the sheet at his hip. Sweat began to form on his upper lip in spite of the cool temperature of the room. He began to get the sense that he was in trouble and he frowned. He’d done everything he could, even landed himself in the infirmary, to protect Harry! What could Draco possibly be upset about?

Draco saw the stiffness of Remus’s posture and sighed. He sat back in his chair, putting a little more distance between them. “Thank you. For helping Harry. Getting the serum and fighting Quirrell.”

Remus gave a smile, felt the deep scars in his cheeks pull. “Of course. After everything we’ve been through, we’re family.” He was surprised to find it feeling awkward and untrue on his tongue. His frown deepened. “We’re pack.” That felt way more accurate and he unconsciously relaxed at hearing it said out loud. They were a pack.

Draco sighed and drummed his fingers along his knee. He said nothing. He just continued to stare, a frown on his face.

A surge of frustration nearly overwhelmed Remus, Draco’s silence feeling like rejection. “What more do you want me to do to prove myself?” he snapped, louder than he really intended. Embarrassed, he ducked his head, knuckles white around his grip on the blankets.

Draco’s hand came into view and covered his shaking fist. “We’re a pack,” he said, taking the sting away from his previous silence. “But we’re not quite family.”

Remus flinched at Draco’s gentle tone. He couldn’t bare to lift his head and meet Draco’s eyes. “No. I don’t suppose we are.”

“Maybe we could be, but you still don’t understand us, Remus.” Draco took his hand away, body language shifting and forcing Remus to lift his head and notice.

Remus felt a chill go down his spine as he looked into Draco’s face. It was as if there were an invisible wall between them and it hurt. He wanted to lash out at it, but he immediately shoved that feeling down. Taking a breath, he forced himself still, forced himself to be calm, to be in control. It was a technique he’d used all his life. He’d always been afraid to be seen as aggressive or wild, always hiding the wolf inside, which led to his reputation for being mild-mannered and gentle. Only James, Peter, and… Well, only they knew that under the calm surface, ferocity churned restlessly.

Voice mild, he said, “It takes time to understand someone. You and Harry have been through a lot.
It’s not something other people can understand easily.”

Draco flashed Remus a furious glare. “That right there. You retreat. You give up. That’s why we’re not family. You don’t trust us. Not really. So of course we’re not going to let you in.”

Remus felt his heart pound in his throat, but what he said was a soft, “I’m sorry you feel that way.”

The blond slammed his hand down on the bed, the impact making a soft whomp. “Look at me.” Draco was standing now, eye level with Remus. His tone of voice was commanding and low. It was impossible for Remus to disobey. The sweat rolled down the back of his neck. Draco’s eyes had gone silver. Remus wanted to cower, to show his neck and belly, but he was held frozen by Draco’s furious glare.

“Since you can’t bring yourself to really connect, let me spoon-feed it to you,” his Alpha said coldly. Draco stood tall, shoulders back, in a blue coat, white t-shirt, jeans, and sneakers. His blond hair was tucked behind his ears. On the surface, he was just a child, but his eyes and unyielding expression made him so much more than that. Remus unconsciously leaned away from him, eyes wide.

“The way you handled Harry in the potion room was unacceptable. You told yourself it was to protect him, but then you deliberately ignored the signs that Harry wasn’t reacting well. You prioritized the war over Harry’s mental health.” Draco leaned forward, closing the gap slightly between them. He was very aware of Remus’s quickened breathing, the way the blood seemed to have drained from the man’s face, and he smiled dangerously. “Well, listen up, Remus. Had I not taken steps in advance, Harry would have taken the poison you left him with and killed himself right there. You would have been fighting for a corpse cold on the floor.”

Remus gasped. “What… Why?”

Draco practically snarled at him. “If you haven’t noticed, Harry’s mental health is still uncertain. If I hadn’t intervened, he would have killed himself at least half a dozen times by now. It’s because I take care of him that he’s alive today. You cannot assume ‘he’ll get over it’ or ‘I’ll talk to him later’. He isn’t a spoiled teenager who’s throwing a tantrum. It’s more serious than that. Harry has to fight every day to believe that he deserves to be alive, that he isn’t a plague to everyone around him.”

Draco’s attention was laser sharp. He knew he had to break through the wall that Remus had always kept between himself and everyone else, even Harry and him. Draco could no longer afford the man to hold back. Not if they were going to fight side-by-side. Not when Remus may have contact with Harry without Draco’s supervision. So he grabbed Remus’s hair in a tight fist, leaning over the edge of the hospital bed and getting in his face.

“You told Harry that he couldn’t help in this war, not just right then with the Stone, but ever. You created a future where Harry was helpless and, if he tried to help, he’d only put himself at risk, which would hurt me. You created a future where people, where I, fought for him and he had to sit back and watch while those people got hurt or even killed.” Draco spoke with such fury that Remus literally whimpered.

Breathing hard, Draco released his hold on the man’s hair and stood straight. It wasn’t his intention to hurt him; he just wanted Remus to truly understand. Draco crossed his arms over his chest and looked at the man through cold grey eyes. “Harry sees it as his fault, you know. In that moment, he was guilty for the suffering of hundreds, and the only way to stop that cycle, stop that horrible future, was to take himself out of the picture.”

“I was trying to protect him,” Remus argued, voice shaky but finding strength now that Draco didn’t
have a physical hold on him. “What was I supposed to do? Quirrell almost killed me! If I hadn’t gone first, then…”

Draco threw up his hands, visibly frustrated. “You saved him. I know you did, but you handled it wrong. Next time don’t tell Harry what ‘not’ to do. Tell him what ‘to’ do. Give him a task. He isn’t a glass vase to sit on a shelf and be protected. He’s perfectly capable of assisting and participating in this war. You can’t expect him to have faith in himself if you don’t have faith in him first!”

“Draco, there wasn’t time… and the fire… I couldn’t possibly have known…” Remus explained, defensive.

“You make time!” Draco yelled. In his fury, his hand lashed out and firmly gripped Remus’s throat just below his jaw. Startled, Remus froze. Draco’s hand was small. Too small to get a good grip or keep him from breathing, but Remus could feel it there. His whole body went limp, the wolf inside him screaming - Submit! - “Enough with the excuses and reasons why you did nothing wrong,” Draco snarled, face inches from Remus’s. “I don’t fucking care about that anymore! I just want to make sure it doesn’t happen again!”

Draco relaxed his grip, aware of Remus’s sudden submission. It was clear in his eyes which had dilated and watched him with a calm acceptance. The way the man’s arms had gone loose beside him, no longer fistimg the blankets. The way Remus’s breathing had deepened and slowed. The way his head tilted slightly to offer more of his throat. Draco couldn’t help responding to that body language. He let out a breath and let his anger go, his hand sliding to rest at the base of Remus’s throat, no longer gripping.

“Look, if were going to be a family, we have to act like it. That starts with trust. We need to trust you with our very lives and you have to trust us with yours. You’ve got to show us what you’re really thinking and feeling, and you’ve got to respect our needs and really care about what we care about. It’s a give and take that’s missing. I don’t expect you to be perfect, but I expect us to talk, really talk, and understand where each other stand. Like this for example.” Draco put a little pressure on his hand. “What’s happening here?”

Remus struggled to gather his thoughts. He waited for Draco to let him go, but the blond didn’t this time. He kept his hand resting on his throat. “It’s the wolf,” he admitted. “I was concerned when I broke out of the Shrieking Shack on the full moon after Samhain. I could have hurt someone. So I did some digging. Apparently, when you and Harry were at the lake, you were close enough for the wolf to sense while I was transformed and felt compelled to break out and go to you. I suspect my wolf sees you as its Alpha. I think because of something that happened in the faerie realm.”

“Alpha?” Draco asked, eyes narrowed. “What does that mean exactly?”

“I have the push of the wolf’s instincts regardless of the moon, but I feel this most strongly.” Remus blushed. Even though he’d come to understand the wolf was a part of him and he’d been mediating and working on accepting that, it was still hard for him to admit how close the animal sat to the surface. Some days he didn’t know if he should even be trying to accept the wolf, but it was undeniable that he was less violent when he transformed the more he worked on it. “I want to follow your lead. I want to help you and watch out for Harry. I want to do violence to anything that threatens you. I want to hunt with you.”

Draco frowned. His hand fell away completely and he even gave Remus more space.

Remus was shocked by the blond’s retreat. “I thought you’d like it.”

“Do you like it?” Draco asked back. “It took you two weeks to write me back when I sent you the
letter asking for help. Harry told me what your letter said. You were busy researching this, right? You were probably frantic.”

Remus blinked. He had been, actually. He’d been terrified that his wolf had gotten stronger, enough to break out of the heavily warded Shrieking Shack for the first time, but then he realized his wolf wasn’t stronger. It had just been given a boost of strength because it was responding the call of his Alpha. It wasn’t likely to happen again as long as he holed up somewhere far away from Hogwarts the night of the full moon. As for how strong he reacted to Draco when he wasn’t transformed, he had to admit it was unsettling. As much as he respected Draco’s intelligence, he found it concerning to follow an eleven-year-old child, but he’d come to terms with that as well. Hadn’t he? He certainly couldn’t change it and he didn’t want to leave the boys, so…

“Look,” Draco said again. Grey eyes seemed to pierce straight through to his soul and Remus held his breath. “I’m going to be blunt, okay? I want you to understand that for me submission is very serious. I’m okay with you submitting to me, but you’re not like Harry who chose me and takes comfort from submitting. You had these feelings put on you. So unless you are willing to be in this one hundred percent, I think it would be best if we don’t see each other anymore.”

Remus immediately shook his head, terror washing through his system. He found himself on his knees on the bed, having moved before he’d even realized it. It put his head above Draco’s by about a foot and that made him uneasy, but he ignored that and reached out. “No… Draco… I…”

Draco sighed and touched the wrist of the hand Remus held out stretched. He stroked Remus’s arm in a soothing motion. “I’m not rejecting you. You are not being punished,” he said as clearly and calmly as he could, looking into Remus’s wide eyes.

The words were like magic and some of Remus’s instinctual panic drained away. Remus blinked at the young Alpha, shocked Draco knew how to take care of his needs before Remus even fully understood what he was feeling himself. His thighs had begun to ache painfully. He winced. Draco waited, still stroking his arm, as he got into a comfortable position sitting at the edge of the bed, his feet on the floor. It made them more eye-level, too, which helped calm him down.

In the same soothing tone, Draco continued. “I can see this is a strong impulse. I can also see you don’t fully understand or want these feelings. I can’t be sure I won’t pressure you or know what orders you’re compelled to follow. Not as it is now.”

Remus again opened his mouth to protest, but Draco’s stroking hand gripped his wrist and shook it gently, making him shut up and listen.

“So this is what I want you to do. I’m going to have to insist actually.” Draco stared intently into Remus’s eyes. “I need you to go away. To the place you go when you transform that’s not near here. I know you got a place after Samhain, so you breaking out wouldn’t happen again.”

Again Remus was impressed with Draco’s perception.

“Go there and really, really think about this. You need to decide if you’re okay with submitting to me, if you actually want it and it’s not something to just endure. If you’re not comfortable with submitting, then don’t come back. You can make a clean break or, if you feel like it can work, we can communicate through letters. Nod your head if you understand.”

Remus nodded.

“Okay. Good.” Draco gave him a small smile. “If you feel like you’re okay with submitting, then you’re going to have to do your research. I want you to go to London and find a BDSM club. Talk
to doms and subs. Explain to them that you aren’t sure about the lifestyle, but that you think you want to be a sub. Learn what you can and then come back to me and we’ll talk about it together. We’ll make up a set of rules, like a contract, to make sure we both understand what each other expect and need. Okay?”

Remus’s face had turned red as soon as Draco had said the letters BDSM. “I don’t want to have sex with you!” he blurted.

Draco scowled in annoyance. “I hope you heard the rest of what I had to say, but good to know. BDSM doesn’t have to involve sex. It often does because sex is a primal instinct that drives most people. Even taking sex out of the equation, that group will still give you the best understanding of dominance and submission. Besides, I practice BDSM with Harry. I’m a dom. So if you really want to make this work, it’d be better if you understood.”

Remus was still red in the face.

Draco sighed. “Look. BDSM just means I will need you to be very open with me. You’ll need to be comfortable with exposing everything you think and feel. Because I can’t be your Alpha if I don’t understand what you’re okay with and what you’re struggling with. That means you can’t run away from our connection anymore. You can’t hold yourself back and be supportive from the outside like you have been up until now. No sex doesn’t make it any less intimate.”

Draco suddenly reached forward and fisted Remus’s hair, forcing the man to tilt his head and expose his neck. Not that Remus resisted. His mind was spinning from all the information, but all that came to a screeching halt as Draco put more steel in his voice. “Go, Remus. Think about what this Alpha thing really means for you. Do your research. Then we’ll talk. Really talk. I don’t want to see or hear from you until this is done. If you don’t do what I say, I’m going to be very angry. Do you understand?”

Remus nodded even though it made the grip on his hair painful.

Draco gave Remus a genuine smile. “Good.” He released him, turned, and walked out without another word, giving Remus the space he’d promised.

“What just happened?” Remus asked the empty room, blinking.

Chapter end.

A/N: Remus was giving me a lot of trouble this chapter. I hope you guys like how it unfolded. I want to try and bridge the gap between the Remus of canon and what he’s evolving to here in the Freedom series. Please let me know what you think? If the scene felt natural or forced? Also can you picture Remus in a BDSM club?! XD
Unmasking the Guilty

Draco hardly noticed the empty hallways and corridors. His thoughts continued to circle around the conversation with Remus. Every few minutes or so, he would shake his head lightly, as if to get rid of an annoying sound. Jess and Drey had called him an Alpha, but they’d just meant that he had the charisma and mental strength to dominate doms. Most doms had at least some percentage submissive in them. It ranged from ten to thirty percent. Any more than thirty percent and they’d technically be considered a switch, who vacillated between a dominant and submissive role depending on their partner or even their mood. Draco didn’t have a submissive bone in his body, which was rare but not impossible. Brendon had been an Alpha.

Remus was talking about something completely different. He was talking about a wolf pack Alpha. Something animalistic and not based on the human psyche, although there might be some similarities as humans were a predatory pack animal much like wolves were. Still, if Remus decided to pursue this bond, Draco would have to do research to make sure he was able to give Remus what he needed.

Draco shook his head again, bemused. He remembered how at first Remus had pulled away emotionally after they’d gone through torture with the Scourers, but the man had come out of his shell as he’d worked with Laila and after the faerie ring. After returning to the British Wizarding World and their families, they’d spent half of their time with the Malfoys, and Lucius and Narcissa had not approved of Remus. That meant they'd only been able to see Remus while they were at Andromeda’s, and only if it wasn’t the week of the full moon.

Their contact had primarily consisted of casual dinners, special events, and day visits. During that time, there had been moments when Draco had felt there was something weird going on with Remus, his reactions sometimes pinged on Draco’s radar, but he hadn’t known enough to question it. Remus’s body language in the infirmary just now was on a whole other level. Draco wasn’t sure if it was due to being vulnerable because of the injury or the fact that Remus was strengthening his bond with the wolf side of himself, but he was definitely in the grip of submissive instincts where Draco was concerned. And if that wasn’t by Remus’s free choice but forced upon him, then Draco refused to be a part of it. Remus would have to make some hard choices and really commit or Draco would refuse to see him ever again.

At this moment, Draco wasn’t even sure which way he preferred it. Harry would miss Remus of course, but he had always kept them at arm’s length, emotionally speaking, so it wouldn’t be a devastating loss. Not like Liam… Draco actually had to stop as he suddenly thought of his adopted brother. He put his back to the stone wall and just closed his eyes for a minute. Damn, how long was it going to hurt like this?

Liam had saved their lives after Draco and Harry had escaped slavery and they’d become a true family. He had given them their first birthday parties, their first Halloween, first theme park, first school, first doctor visit… Hell, Draco, Harry, and Liam had even chosen their apartment together, decorated together - ate, lived, slept together. Liam had opened so many doors for them and had helped them forge a normal life not in the shadows. They'd looked out for each other and loved each other so much that it damn near broke them to leave Liam behind when the Wizarding world had found them.

America, where they’d lived with Liam, had an extremely strict policy on non-magicals raising
magical kids. And England would have refused Liam custody of the famous Harry Potter, Boy-Who-Lived. Not to mention, Draco had just turned nine while Harry was still eight. They knew shit about magic. They couldn’t protect Liam. It’d been too dangerous. Better to say goodbye then to see Liam dead.

Draco shoved the memories away and realized he was only one hallway away from the portrait guarding the Gryffindor common room. Giving himself a mental shake, he pushed off the wall. He’d expected the common room to be empty; it was too early for the Weasleys to be up. However, he found Ron burrowed under blankets on the couch by the fire and Percy sleeping slouched in a very uncomfortable position in an armchair close by. Draco frowned. Percy had faint shadows under his eyes. He looked exhausted. His curly hair was a mess. He was wearing the clothes he’d worn the day before, no pajamas. A book had fallen to the floor, the pages bent and crinkled. It was all so unlike the super neat and groomed Prefect.

Tip-toeing over to Ron, Draco pulled away the pillow that rested on top of the boy’s head and his expression turned grim. Ron made Percy look merely slightly ruffled. He crouched down and put a protective hand on Ron’s head. Black circles underlined the boy’s eyes. He was pale, his forehead creased even now in restless sleep. He was also fully dressed. His long legs were pulled halfway to his chest awkwardly, the couch not nearly wide enough for the defensive curl that Ron was apparently trying for. Worse, there was an air of injury around him, even while he was asleep.

“What time is it?”

Draco looked over his shoulder, not moving from his position, to see Percy rubbing his eyes tiredly. “Not sure.”

Percy cast a time spell and revealed it was just past seven thirty in the morning. “He’s been asleep for maybe three hours. I tried to stay up in the dorm with him, but he kept bolting awake, terrified. At least he gets a couple hours down here.” Sudden tears blurred his vision, his voice growing fragile. “Do you think… it’s happening to him?”

Draco stood and went to Percy’s side. He sat on the arm of the armchair and wrapped Percy in a firm hug. “I don’t know, but I swear I’ll find out. Whatever it is, I’ll handle it.”

There was such conviction in Draco’s voice that Percy couldn’t help believing him. He leaned into the blond, trying to absorb his strength. Percy was just beginning to feel calm when Ron’s breathing picked up and a low groan of pain escaped him. Draco squeezed Percy one last time and returned to Ron’s side, crouching down again. He hesitated to reach out, afraid to trigger panic, so he let his hands rest limply between his thighs, his forearms braced on his legs.

“Hey. It’s okay. Wake up for me, Ron. It’s just a dream,” he called soothingly.

Ron’s body jerked; his eyes flew open. He sat up so quickly that Draco was glad he hadn’t been leaning over the kid. Otherwise he’d have a serious bruise right now. The redhead looked around, terror in his eyes, but that quickly faded to irritation. Ron scrubbed his hands roughly over his face and through his hair. Then he realized who was crouched down at his knees.

“Draco!” Ron leapt to his feet with adrenaline-fueled energy. He wore a maroon sweater with an R on it and jeans. His feet were covered in fuzzy orange socks. “Are you okay? What the bloody hell happened to you two? Is Harry here? Remus spelled me, that bastard! Can you believe it?”

Draco stood and gripped Ron’s upper arm, tugging him back down to sit on the couch. Ron looked so pale that Draco was afraid he’d pass out. “It’s a long story and I’ll tell it on one condition.”
Ron scowled at him. “What the hell? A condition?”

Draco ignored the flash of temper. Ron was clearly nearing a breakdown. It was to be expected his emotions would be all over the place. “I want you to answer some difficult questions as honestly as you can, okay? I promise it’s really important or I wouldn’t ask. Is it a deal?”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Ron demanded, crossing his arms. “Why the secrecy? Don’t you trust me?”

“I don’t make deals with someone I don’t trust,” Draco reassured him. He tucked his hair behind his ear and met Ron’s eyes directly. “It’s a secret because Dumbledore lied to the Aurors to protect Harry and me and, for whatever reason, it looks like the Ministry is keeping what happened under wraps. In exchange for the real story, you just have to answer a few questions. Deal?”


Ron and Percy sat on the edge of their seat as Draco relayed what Harry had told him from the time the charmed necklace had heated up to when Dumbledore and the other teachers had arrived after the battle. Draco was a good story teller. He knew how to keep his audience listening. He also knew what to downplay and what to emphasize in order to get the result he wanted. By the end, Percy and Ron were in awe of the battle they’d survived and weren’t upset by Draco taking out Quirrell.

“I can’t believe I was out for all of this!” Ron muttered petulantly, flopping back against the couch.

“I’m so glad Harry’s okay,” Percy added, genuinely relieved. He’d been terrified out his mind when he’d realized Harry was gone and that fire blocked his way forward. He’d waited around for a while, but then he’d fled and tried to get help from the teachers.

“Harry’s fine,” Draco promised, giving Percy a soft smile. “He’s with Andromeda. They’re writing a statement about what happened in case we ever want to go public with the truth.” He turned suddenly sharp eyes to Ron. “Okay. Your turn. Would you like to do this here or somewhere else? The questions are going to be kind of personal.”

Ron scowled over his still crossed arms and didn’t saying anything.

Percy stood, casting Draco a pleading look. “I’ll go check on the twins and make sure they don’t disturb you.”

“Oh, great.” Ron flung his arms up and out dramatically. “Percy set you up to this, didn’t he? Why won’t he mind his own business?” He got angrily to his feet, but Draco caught his wrist before he could storm off. Ron stood still. Draco’s grip was tight. Even pissed off, Ron knew not to test that grip, so he stood, silently fuming, with Draco still sitting on the couch.

Draco waited for the Percy to disappear up the stairs before turning his attention to Ron once more. “Okay. It’s just us,” he said calmly. Draco let Ron go and stood up to take his jacket off. He flung it carelessly over one of the armchairs and turned back to Ron in just a long-sleeved t-shirt. It was freezing outside, but between the climate spells on the tower and the lit fireplace not five feet from them, Draco was warm enough.

“What did Percy tell you?” Ron asked darkly, eyes full of suspicion.

“He hasn’t told me much of anything actually,” Draco answered with an easy shrug. He sat on the couch again and patted the cushion next to him. “It was Harry. He told me about your panic attack and how you weren’t able to sleep at night afterward.” He looked into Ron’s eyes with sincerity. “Thank you. Harry told me how great you were. That you helped him so much while I was in the
infirmary. He’s so worried about you. It would make him feel so much better if you let me help you.”

Ron’s temper deflated and his arms fell limp. Harry was his best friend. He’d do anything for Harry, so how could he say no to that? He blew out a loud breath and sat heavily on the couch next to the blond. “What do you want to know exactly?”

Draco turned so he was facing the redhead, his leg bent in front of him on the couch. “I want you to think back to that first panic attack,” he said in a soothing voice, eyes staring unblinking at Ron, taking in every clue the boy’s body language gave.

“It wasn’t a big deal,” Ron immediately denied, his arms coming back up across his chest. “I’m just not sleeping well. I’m fine.”

Draco tilted his head. He thought he knew what Ron was most struggling with. “You’re handling it great,” he agreed. “I’m just worried that someone put a spell on you. Like what happened to me. If that’s the case, anyone would be having trouble, not just you. In fact, you’re holding it together better than I did, right? At least you’re not bashing your own head in or anything.”

Ron’s eyes went wide and he leaned forward, the defensive posture falling away instantly. “You really think that? Someone could have cursed me?” The idea made him feel so much lighter. That meant he wasn’t being weak or a baby! A curse was making him feel like this!

Draco nodded. “That’s what I want to find out.”

“Okay.” Ron sat back and ran both hands through his limp, oily hair. “Okay,” he said again. He looked at Draco with his very blue eyes. He, Charlie, and Timmy were the only three who got blue eyes. “What do you want me to do?”

“This is going to be hard, but I know you can do it,” Draco encouraged, giving him some praise. It never hurt when dealing with Ron. “I want you to lean back and get comfortable. Then think back to that first panic attack. I want you to tell me what you remember, what you felt. No matter how small or little. Anything you can remember will help us figure this out. Okay?”

Ron nodded. “Yeah.” He already looked shaky, but he wasn’t a Gryffindor for nothing. He leaned back and rested his head against the back of the couch. He took a few deep breaths and unconsciously checked on Draco to make sure he was close.

Draco scooted forward enough that his knee gently pressed against Ron’s thigh, giving him an anchor to focus on if he needed it. He smiled as that let Ron feel safe enough to close his eyes. “Good. You’re doing really good,” he said easily, not soft or loud, using a normal talking voice to cause Ron as little distraction as possible. “So you were sleeping. What do you become aware of first?”

Ron was silent for a long minute. When he spoke, his voice was soft, distant. He’d slipped easily back into the memory. It had been haunting him for days. He also hadn’t gotten any sleep for the last week, so it was easy to fall into a trance-like state. “Drowning. I felt like I was drowning.”


“The giant squid… It had a tentacle wrapped around my throat…” Ron’s breathing picked up, his hands fisted next to him. Sweat glistened on his forehead. “I… I tried to fight it off… It wouldn’t let me go… I couldn’t breathe!”

“You’re not there, Ron. You’re just remembering what it felt like. Take a deep breath. Breathe with me. In… Then out… Good. That’s good.” Draco was holding Ron’s wrist tightly. To offer comfort,
but also to keep an eye on his pulse. Ron’s heart was beating worryingly fast. “Where are the tentacles, Ron? Are they anywhere else besides your throat?”

Tears glistened on Ron’s eye lashes. “They were wrapped around my torso, too… I think they were on my face… holding my mouth open. I-I think it k-killed me… The lake was so dark and cold…” His eyes snapped open and he curled over his lap, visibly shaking. He tried to get a grip. Tried to swallow the tears flooding down his cheeks, but he just ended up making these whimpering choked sounds. Like some kind of wounded animal. He hated it! He hated being weak! Enraged, he was suddenly on his feet. “Just leave me the bloody hell alone!” he screamed, wild-eyed and crying. “I’m fine!”

Draco knew Ron needed a fight, so he gave him one. He leapt to his feet and got in his face. He had to stand on tip-toe to do it, Ron was a few inches taller than him, but it didn’t matter. “You’re just scared! Scared of what it will take to make this go away. Scared that it never will.”

Ron shoved Draco hard in the chest. “I’m not scared!”

Draco staggered, but then he was right back in Ron’s face. He put his finger against the other boy’s chest, glaring in challenge. “Oh, yeah? Prove it.”

“What the hell do you want from me?” Ron bellowed back.

Draco crossed his arms, a cocky smirk on his face. “There’s a way I can test if you were cursed, but it’s going to hurt a little. Think you can handle it?” he goaded him.

Ron glared hotly. If looks could kill, Draco would be dead. “Fine! Do whatever!”

Draco stared Ron dead in the eyes. The other boy was breathing hard, tears still glistened on his lashes and stained his flushed cheeks, but he didn’t flinch when Draco grabbed his hand. His eyes went wide, however, when Draco took one of Ron’s fingers in his mouth. Ron didn’t have time to jerk away. Draco was already biting down, ice throbbing through his core. He ordered it to cut not poison and Ron’s skin parted like paper. Hot blood splashed across Draco’s tongue.

Ron stood frozen, heart thundering in his throat, as he watched Draco’s pupils expand rapidly. Ron wasn’t even aware of the pain of the bite anymore as he watched as black swallowed grey. It felt like Ron was staring into a dark abyss and that it would suck him in.

Draco was blind to Ron’s horror. The hot taste of copper consumed his senses followed by cold, black water rushing up all around him. The slimy feel of tentacles tangled around him painfully tight, restraining him and dragging him down deeper. God, his throat fucking hurt, but it was his jaw that was on fucking fire! Draco knew that feeling. His jaw was dislocated! But even that paled in comparison to the scream of his lungs because he COULDN’T BREATHE! Draco bit down on the pain and panic; he tore into the dark and demanded answers. Something was calling to him. Something hidden in the dark water. Something repulsive and bloated, the white of a swollen, waterlogged corpse…

Draco staggered back and half fell onto the couch. He was panting like he’d run a mile, sweat dampened his hair. Impatiently, he wiped at his face with his sleeve and looked up at Ron, checking on the kid. Ron stood rooted to the spot. His hand had fallen limp as soon as Draco had let him go. His finger was still bleeding a steady trickle, creating a red stain that grew wider on the rug with every second that passed.

“Shit,” Draco croaked. His throat felt tight and he scowled, rubbing it briefly as he got to his feet and grabbed Ron’s hand again. “You’re still bleeding,” he said, pointing out the obvious.
“What the hell?” Ron asked weakly, still staring dumbly. “What the hell?”

Draco sighed and towed the boy up the stairs by his bleeding hand. He didn’t bother knocking when he reached the twins’ room. Fred and George were up and sitting side-by-side on their bed; Percy sat across from them. They’d been talking quietly, but at Draco’s entrance, they’d fallen silent. Draco raised Ron’s hand and shook it lightly. “He’s bleeding. Help him.”

Percy immediately rushed to the twins dresser and pulled out the first-aid kit, a necessary tool due to all their experimentation. He didn’t ask what happened. He vividly recalled Draco biting him all those years ago and what it had revealed. As he tended Ron’s finger, he gave Draco a searching look. Draco didn’t have the answers Percy was looking for. Not yet. This vision had been more metaphorical than any of his previous ones, but he knew without a doubt that an outside force had wrought this fear in Ron. He also knew that Ron had been physically injured, and badly, around the face and throat. Draco had gotten one more thing from the vision, but he would need help with that one.

“Why don’t you guys go get breakfast,” Draco suggested significantly.

The twins shared a look. They were unusually subdued, clearly worried for their younger brother. “Sure thing,” they said with only a fraction of their usual cheer.

Draco nodded, confident that Percy at least understood his message and would stay away from the tower for awhile. He turned and walked quickly from the room.

As the twins dressed, Ron didn’t speak a word. He was still in shock. He was just an eleven-year-old boy at the end of his rope, exhausted. The thing with Draco had been the last thing he could cope with. Percy finished wrapping Ron’s hand, but he didn’t let it go as he led his little brother downstairs. He didn’t bother stopping for Ron’s shoes. Anxiety buzzed around his chest, making Percy desperate to leave the tower as quickly as possible. The twins must have picked up on the tension. They didn’t make a single joke about Ron’s fuzzy socks.

... 

The muffled sound of someone banging on his front door yanked Severus from sleep. Adrenaline burned through his veins and he was up and dressed in three minutes, pulling on a black, form-fitting wizard’s robe that flared out from his hips down to the floor and a pair of black slacks. Meanwhile, the banging never ceased. Stomping his feet into his shoes, he gave a quick flick of his wand to tie the laces. Severus flung the door open. The vicious glare he wore on his face to keep up appearances melted instantly upon seeing Draco Malfoy standing before him.

“Snape,” Draco said quickly. “I need you to cast a spell in Gryffindor Tower that will reveal something hidden. You’re the only one who can do it because I know that spells involving secrets are typically Dark magic because of the resonance.”

Severus lifted his eyebrow. “Dumbledore…”

Draco slashed his hand out impatiently. “His denial will slow him down. I need this done quickly.” His eyes glinted silver. “Come on, Snape. You owe me.”

Severus wanted to argue, but there was no point. They both knew it was true. Draco had suffered terribly under Severus’s watch. And Severus had done nothing to help him recover. All he’d managed to do was brew a preventative to make sure it never happened again, which is the definition of too little too late. So Severus bowed his head forward, his oily, stringy hair falling in front of his face. “Very well.”
It took them about fifteen minutes to make their way up to the tower from the dungeons. Draco remained silent and focused the entire time. Severus began to understand that, whatever this was about, it was dangerous, which only made him more curious. “What exactly do you expect to find?” he asked quietly once they stood in the common room.

“I’ll know when I see it,” Draco answered darkly. He gave Severus a ‘go-ahead’ gesture. “Well?”

“As you pointed out, this is a Dark spell,” Severus explained as he turned in a circle, just getting a feel for the room. “The wards will alert the Headmaster.”

Draco gave him a very unimpressed look. “How does that work, exactly? I mean, he couldn’t tell Quirrell was possessed or that I had been attacked.”

“At the time of your attack, the troll had created enough disturbance in the wards that smaller Dark works would go unnoticed. Quirrell was very careful to toe the line between grey and Dark magic, and when Dark magic was unavoidable, he likely cast an obscuring ward that would let him use the ambient magic of a school full of adolescents as a screen. As Hogwarts is mostly empty at this moment, that isn’t an option at this time.”

Draco snorted and flashed Snape a contemptuous look. “How convenient.” The spell over his mind may have been broken, but he still felt the lingering effects of his suspicion and dislike. “Then you’d better work fast, right, Snape?”

Severus cocked an eyebrow, reminded sharply of a young Lucius Malfoy, arrogant and demanding. It made his lips twitch in the beginnings of a smile, knowing Draco would hate the comparison. Returning his attention to the task at hand, he explained what would happen. “I’ll be able to hold the spell for about nine minutes as I’m well rested. It will create a… vibration… around things saturated in negative psychic energy that were hidden. Whatever you’re looking for, be prepared to also find a disgusting amount of childish contraband,” he warned.

“I don’t care about any of that crap,” Draco reassured him. “I’ll move quick.”

Severus closed his eyes. His pale skin looked less sallow in the soft morning light, but his hair still had an oily sheen. Finding his center, he lifted his arms as if he were about to conduct an orchestra. Wand lightly held in his right hand, Severus intoned, voice hard and deep, “Revelabo stultitiam.”

Three places in the common room began to vibrate, little hidey-holes that held stolen candy, money, and a sweater. Draco quickly moved on, heading up the stairs to the dorms. Severus followed in his wake, his arms still up-raised with his wand swaying like a snake-head back and forth.

Each dorm had dozens of hidden things just as Snape had warned, but Draco wasn’t deterred. As quickly as he could, he unlocked and uncovered each hidden nook before moving on to the next with single-minded determination. He didn’t bother wasting time putting everything back where he’d found it and left each dorm a mess behind him. They were moving on to the second floor with only two minutes or so to go when Dumbledore showed up. Instead of interrupting or asking questions, he stood behind Severus silently and simply watched, a look of curious concern on his face.

As soon as they reached the second floor landing, something behind the bathroom door rattled with such violence that all three paused in surprise. Then Draco was moving forward quickly. He flung the bathroom door open with force, his eyes immediately drawn to a section of tiles under one of the sinks. They shook and vibrated so much that they seemed about to explode. Draco crouched down and crawled under the sink. His unlocking spell wasn’t enough to get the secret compartment to open. Severus dropped his hands, the Dark spell fading from the air. He shared a look with
Dumbledore and nodded. Dumbledore gravely cast a stronger spell and the tiles flew off and hit the opposite wall with a crash.

Eyes silver, ice cold magic radiating from his core, Draco reached into the dark hole. His fingers could feel the hard outline of a wooden box. He pulled it out. It was a little smaller than a shoebox and he set it on his lap. He tried to open it, but another spell held it sealed shut. Draco shifted out from under the sink, still kneeling, and held the box up to Dumbledore.

“Open it. Please,” he asked, voice tight and hushed.

Dumbledore raised his wand. It took him a few tries, but they heard a distinct click and the lid opened a crack. Draco pulled the box back in toward his lap and opened the lid wide. Shock hit his system, making time come to a screeching stop. Harry’s photograph sat on top of a pile of pictures. Harry was laying asleep in a small white corset Draco had never seen. It’d been cinched tight, too tight, around Harry’s waist. He couldn’t hear his boy, but he could see the gasping mouth, the flushed cheeks, and they way his chest fluttered with quick shallow breathing, and holy shit, Harry’s chest… It had only looked like that once before and never that bad.

His chest had been sucked until it was dark red, verging on black. The nipples sat fat and distended, the soft tissue swollen and bubbled up into tiny breasts. His abused skin glistened with spit. The top of the corset was wet and the sheet underneath Harry had damp patches, indicating an obscene amount of drool.

A roaring, rushing sound of a raging fire filled Draco’s head as he flipped to the next picture. It was of the same scene but a different angle. He quickly flipped to see there were four in total. One was a close up of Harry’s face, which showed Harry clearly deeply asleep, mouth gaping as he tried to breathe around the constriction of his lower ribs and diaphragm. Two were closeups of his chest. In one, the white dragon tattoo appeared for a brief flash, head poking out of the corset, teeth bared, then gone as the photo looped.

The second photo had caught the dragon standing, feet planted wide, tattooed on Harry’s sternum. Its head held back to look up at the camera, mouth falling open in a silent roar, its two wings outspread protectively over Harry’s bruised breasts, but it was just ink under his skin, a realistic drawing. It wasn’t manifesting the way Harry had described when he’d thought of killing himself. Draco knew instantly it was because the magic within the tattoo hadn’t been ‘instructed’ or ‘programed’ for a situation like this. Draco had never thought it possible, not when the black collar sat clearly around Harry’s throat and Draco was with him everyday.

The fifth picture was still of Harry, but it had to have been taken on a different night. It was focused around Harry’s face. An open sleep-robe was underneath him. He’d been pulled to the edge of the bed. His right arm hung limp over the edge. His head was turned sideways, his face wrecked. His lips were bruised a dark red and swollen. His mouth gaped open. Cum splattered his face, his hair, across his nose, dripping from his mouth, his chin. Draco could see the white stuff in Harry’s mouth along with a flood of spit that dripped in strings to the floor. Draco watched the boy silently pant and cough, tears beading on his closed lashes and rolling from his temple to his hairline. The dragon, still a picture underneath Harry’s skin, sat covering most of Harry’s throat; its head rested on Harry’s jaw and it gave a fierce roar before the picture looped.

The sixth picture was also of Harry. Again, he was sleeping peacefully. He was spread out naked on his open sleep robe, but this time he was in the center of the bed. His arms had been posed, stretched above his head, his thighs had been pressed open wide. Cum splattered his chest. His dragon tattoo sat where it normally resided, curled on the side of Harry’s waist above his hip. In the photo, it lifted its head, clearly confused, looking this way and that before the photo looped back to
Blood roaring through his veins and throbbing in his temples, Draco quickly set all the pictures of Harry close to his side, out of Dumbledore and Snape’s view, and quickly flipped through the rest, his mind racing. They were all of boys in their First to Third-year, slender and mostly pale-skinned. None of them had been damaged like Harry. Their sleeping bodies had been positioned on their stomachs with their thighs pressed together - or on their backs with their knees bent, thighs closed, and hips tilted to the side - or they were placed on their side directly. In all of these full body pictures, the boys’ thighs glistened with cum and oil. There were closeups, too, of limp hands half-curled, palm-up, by cum-splattered sleeping faces and of round asses and slick thighs. Ron was in four full body photos and Draco recognized his freckled skin in five closeups. The twins also had a few pics. He took those out and set them with Harry’s. There were at least a hundred other photos. Draco placed them back in the box and shut the lid.

Time seemed to slow. Dumbledore and Severus stood frozen, still trying to comprehend what they had seen in the photos Draco had sifted through. They stared at Draco in horror, braced for some violent action. Draco’s hair curtained his face, keeping it mostly from view, but they could just see the edges of his furrowed brows.

Draco stared blindly down at the box of horrors in his lap. Percy hadn’t been in any of the photos. It was clear to Draco that after Percy’s Third-year, the rapist had been forced to move on. The pedo had also learned to be scared of being caught. None of these boys besides Harry and Ron were physically damaged and, unlike Percy, they were kept deeply unconscious.

But it hadn’t been as satisfying, so he’d taken photos to help recreate that feeling of power and sexual ownership. It had been enough for awhile, but as time wore on, he’d craved penetration, which had resulted in Harry’s abuse. Reasons the bastard had snapped when he’d gotten to Harry flew through his mind: because Draco had been out of the picture. Or in revenge for making Percy off limits. Or because Harry was androgynous. After all, none of those photos had focused on the boys’ genitalia.

In fact, in a lot of the photos, the pedo had purposefully posed the boys to hide their dick and balls. Harry had a round ass, and especially with the corset, the most girly curves. His face colored really pretty, too. His lips easily flushed red, his pink nipples also darkened with a little rough teasing. His throat was long and slender, his collarbones and musculature were delicate from the long-standing starvation and malnourishment as a child. Quidditch had put some muscle on Harry, but he was still lean and slender. But if the fucker was really into girls, why was he going after boys?

Draco’s breathing picked up as his mind raced, answers suddenly coming clear. The bastard must be trapped at Hogwarts for some reason. He’s unable to get to the girls in the dorms because of the ward against males yet he hasn’t left Hogwarts to seek them out, so he’s afraid to leave. This is someone who’s terrified of being caught. Not because of playing with little boys, either. No, he’s hiding from something bigger.

Draco dropped his hand from the box to cover the stack of photos at his side. The bastard usually kept the kids asleep. He did that to ensure he wouldn’t get caught, like he had with Percy, but he really wanted them awake. He liked them weak and crying. It’d given him a sense of power when clearly he has none if he’s on the run and hiding twenty-four/seven. He’s going to panic big time when he realizes his stash has been found. It’s going to force him to flee!

Draco jumped to his feet, startling Snape and Dumbledore. “Block all the passages out of Hogwarts! Especially the secret ones! We might be too late, but there’s still a chance!” Draco pushed the box into Dumbledore’s arms and shoved the stack of photos of Harry and Ron into one of the big pockets
of his coat. "We’ll catch him running!"

Severus ran behind the boy as Draco took off out of the bathroom, bolting for the stairs. “How do you know he’s still here?” he demanded, a hungry look in his eyes.

“He’d’ve taken his trophies if he’d left before now,” Draco explained impatiently and called over his shoulder, “I’d get the elves to help you. Even an ant trying to cross out of Hogwarts should be caught. Dobby!” he cried, running out of the portrait hole to the screams of dismay from the Fat Lady.

Dobby quickly popped into existence. His eyes widened and he sprinted after Draco and Severus, calling, “Yes, young master Draco?”

“Go to the Shrieking Shack in Hogsmeade,” Draco ordered. He’d learned the more specific you were with elves, the better the result, so he added, “Anything alive, no matter how small, that enters the shack, I want you to immobilize. Don’t be seen. Go!”

“Yes, young master,” Dobby cried and disappeared with a pop.

Draco had never run so fast or so recklessly. He literally slid down the banisters and, when he couldn’t, he took the stairs three at a time. Snape quickly fell behind. He was betting on two exits. The statue of the one-eyed witch by the stairs to the DADA classroom, leading to the cellar of Honeydukes, or the Whomping Willow, leading to the Shrieking Shack. Both passages would take the bastard directly outside Hogwarts’ wards to freedom. Draco was betting on the willow. It would take the bastard out of the castle the quickest. If he saw pursuers, he could hide better outside than in a corridor. Plus, it was faster to get to the Entrance Hall from the Gryffindor Common Room than transversing hallways to get to the one-eyed witch statue.

Draco hit the Entrance Hall running and flung himself at the main doors, shoving it open just enough to slip through. Icy cold wind smacked him in the face as he bolted out of the castle. Draco definitely wasn’t dressed for the weather. He was fucking freezing. His hands and face already felt like ice. The thin t-shirt he wore under his open coat did nothing to keep his torso warm, but Draco didn’t fucking care. He grit his teeth to prevent them from chattering and ran across the grounds, curving toward the Whomping Willow.

Shit! The man had a fucking huge head start! If Draco was lucky, the bastard hadn’t realized he was about to get caught until Draco had arrived with Snape, but he could have overheard Draco talking to Ron about his dream, in which case the bastard had close to an hour already to get out. Draco was fucking hoping the bastard only caught on when Snape cast his spell, otherwise Draco would probably never catch this fucker. He’d fucking get away with it!

Adrenaline made Draco’s vision almost painfully sharp, but he couldn’t hear shit over his thundering heart. If this fucking bastard got away… Draco had to bite back a howl of rage. The willow came into view, and as it did, Draco saw two figures. Running closer, he saw it was the twins. One was knocked unconscious, his head bleeding. The other was clearly distressed, crouching over him and holding a bloody scarf to his head.

“What happened?” Draco demanded breathlessly, hooking his hair behind his ear. He crouched down and felt relief when he saw that Fred was still alive.

George looked up wild-eyed, face pale as a ghost. “We were leaving the Great Hall after breakfast. Ron saw Scabbers run out the front doors and took off after him. We chased him all the way here and Scabbers did something to the tree. It froze for a minute and a hole opened up. Ron and Percy dove inside. We heard Ron scream and Percy shout, but when we tried to go after them, Fred got
knocked in the head really hard. I dragged him clear, but I can’t get close to the tree! We have to help them!”

“How long ago?” Draco snarled. Fucking *Scabbers!* Percy’s fucking rat!

“I don’t know! Ten minutes?” George cried, panicked.

“Snape’s on his way. Wait here for him.” Draco got up and dove for the tree.

Remus had given Draco a primer on Hogwarts. It had included the Whomping Willow, so he knew how to slide under the violently swinging branches. He kicked the knot exposed at the base of the tree and a section of the ground fell away. He dropped down into a dark passage, landing in a crouch. Another body dropped down next to him just as the ground reconstructed over their heads.

Draco spat, “*Lumos.*”

George met him glare for glare. “Snape can get Fred. I’m going after my brothers!”

Draco didn’t have time to argue. It was a good sign that they hadn’t found Percy or Ron’s dead body at the entrance of the tunnel, but that also meant the bastard had taken them.

They made their way at a quick jog down the dirt tunnel, which was long and winding. The floor gradually slopped upward, making Draco’s calves and lungs burn, but he didn’t slow down. George panted beside him. He was clearly afraid. Damn Gryffindors and their bravery. Fuck. The end of the tunnel came into view suddenly, much closer than expected. Draco reached out and grabbed George’s arm to stop him.

“Dobby.”

The elf popped next to them. “Yes, young master?”

“Did you catch anyone?”

“Yes, young master. A man, two boys, fifty-six spiders…”

“Enough.” Draco held up his hand, not wanting to hear a litany of insects. He rubbed Dobby’s head as he passed. “Good job.” He bounded up the stairs and through the hatch without fear. A cruel smile cut across his features.

A short, pudgy, dirty man had Ron by the hair. The boy was missing one of his socks. He was filthy and exhausted, but he wasn’t afraid. Ron glared fiercely up at the man who was cruelly dragging him along by his hair. The man also had a wand, it looked like Percy’s, pointing to Ron’s head, but the grubby man’s attention was not on Ron but on Percy. His beady eyes were glittering, almost feverishly, as he ordered the teenager around. Percy had his hands upraised in surrender. He was clearly terrified for his brother. The man was feet from the shack’s front door and freedom, but he’d gotten caught up in whatever scene was going on.

“Good boy,” Draco muttered, speaking to Percy, proud and grateful as fuck that the teen had been able to stall.

“Ron!” George cried and pushed past Draco to go to his brother.

“Wait!” Draco commanded and the redhead froze. Draco looked at Dobby, who stood beaming happily at his side. “Can you leave just the man immobile?”
Dobby nodded enthusiastically. “Yes, young master Draco!” He snapped his fingers.

Ron and Percy both came to life, Ron grunting in pain and Percy in mid-word. Both quickly realized what was happening as George ran up to help Ron get his hair free from the man’s frozen grip.

“Draco!” Percy cried in relief.

Draco gave him a brief smile before yanking the wand out of the man’s hand and tossing it back to the teen.

“Get mine, too!” Ron demanded, panting and pissed off. “It’s in his pocket.”

As Draco rummaged in the man’s dirty coat pocket, Percy asked quietly, “Who is he?” He had a protective grip on both of his brothers, holding them by their upper arms and drawing them a few steps away.

Draco found Ron’s wand and tossed it to the boy. He knew by Percy’s tone of voice that the redhead understood that this was the man who had hurt him and his little brother, but Draco couldn’t comfort him right now. He had another job to do and his heart sang with a dark joy as his core magic began to flood his system.

“Peter Pettigrew,” Snape hissed in shock as he stepped through the trap door. His eyes looked crazed as he stared at the frozen man. “That’s not possible.”

“He attacked me and Percy! Said he missed Percy. That no one was as good as him, not even Harry. What was he talking about, Percy?” Ron demanded, looking up at his brother, suspicion written all over his features.

“Be quiet,” Draco hissed, flashing Ron a dangerous look that shut him up quick.

Peter Pettigrew? Draco stared at Snape, but the look on the man’s face told him he Snape was certain. Remus had told him and Harry stories of his time as school. Of course he had. Peter and James had featured prominently. As well as a third name, but not quite as often because it caused Remus even greater pain to speak it. Sirius Black. The betrayer of the Potters and the murderer of Peter and a dozen muggles. Yet here stood Peter. In hiding and molesting little boys at Hogwarts.

“Incarcerous.” Severus cast with such force and hatred the man was wrapped from chin to ankles in thick rope. “Remove your spell, elf.”

Dobby looked to Draco, his long, pointed ears flapping cutely.

Draco stared fiercely into Snape’s dark eyes. “No,” he said, coldly defiant.

“We must take him back, Draco,” Severus argued, tone heavy with meaning.

Draco didn’t give a shit about whatever information this man may or may not have. He didn’t care about the implications. There was no way Draco was going to leave him alive. Not after what he had fucking done. “We take care of this here. Now.”

“In front of the children?” Severus demanded, eyes flashing briefly to the Weasleys who had fallen quiet as they watched.

“Yes,” Draco insisted and repeated, “Here. Now. If you can’t handle watching, turn away.” Deadly magic burned through his veins.
“Murder is not the answer!” Severus snapped, but then his voice gentled. “He will suffer unimaginably, Draco. Trust me in that.”

“You may ask him questions, but then he’s mine,” Draco insisted, compromising as much as he was going to.

“That is enough!” Severus bellowed, enraged at the boy’s attitude. “Murder is not an option, you sadistic savage! I am taking him back to Hogwarts where we will make sure he is punished in a way that will not land you in Azkaban Prison! I’m not asking, Draco! I’m telling you. Remove. The. Spell. Now.”

Draco bared his teeth, but he bit out a sharp, “Do it.”

Dobby, smile long gone, looked back and forth between the dark wizard and his young master and snapped his fingers. Pettigrew gave a pained grunt, nearly falling as the ropes curled tighter. His wild eyes took in Snape and Draco. He gave a rat-like squeal of terror and began to rapidly shrink. Within the blink of an eye, he was out of sight behind a huge pile of rope. Snape cast a spell that was shielded by the very rope he had conjured. Ron shrieked and Percy tried to shield his brothers with his body.

While Snape’s reaction was to cast magic and the boys went on the defense, Draco was a predator. His body had reacted the split-second Pettigrew had begun to shrink and lunged forward. He was halfway to the rope-pile when Snape’s spell hit harmlessly. Draco instinctively knew where the rat would run - toward the door, toward freedom, away from Snape. Draco’s hand snapped out with frightening precision, eyes gone silver, and closed around the body of the rat just as it leapt for freedom between two coils of rope.

It had been two short days since Draco had woken from what had felt like an endless retelling of his past. The instincts and bloodlust of a feral slave boy who lived in the dark bowels of a ship ruled Draco completely. The rat barely had time to scream before Draco ruthlessly bit down, violently tossing his head to the side and twisting his hand away. The force tore the rat’s head clean off. Blood sprayed the side of Draco’s face. He spat the disgusting head out of his mouth and dropped the body. They were already transforming back to human.

George and Ron both screamed as the head rolled and grew, spurting blood. It came to a stop mere feet from them; its watery eyes staring dead at the ceiling. Percy grabbed them both, physically blocking their view with his body, yanking them close and holding their heads to his shoulders. George resisted, staring at Draco with wide eyes over his older brother’s shoulder. Draco stood slowly and spat once more to try to clean his mouth of the taste of blood.

Enraged, shocked, Severus flew at the boy, screaming, “You imbecile!” His hands raised to shake or slap the boy, he had no idea, but he froze as Draco’s pupils suddenly dilated.

“Blood black as tar with guilt and fear: betrayer, rapist, murderer, thief,” Draco spoke in a weird sing-song, voice dark and smooth as silk. “Broke the soul of one, destroying her mind to save a brother. Betrayed a family to protect the secret that had been uncovered. Murdered dozens to ruin the brother he had saved. Raped innocents to ease his suffering. Touched the forbidden to feed the growing addiction. Stole the life of a child, gave it back, but tried to keep it hidden. Suffered death stained black with guilt: betrayer, rapist, murderer, thief.”

Draco’s knees gave out and Severus caught him, his body reacting before he could think. Severus stared into eyes that were nearly all pupil, only a tiny sliver of grey lining the black. He shivered; it was like looking down into an endless dark tunnel. Forcing his eyes from the boy’s, Severus stared at the severed head of Peter Pettigrew. His mind raced, the truth of Draco’s words resonating through
his entire being. Pettigrew’s first guilt: *Broke the soul of one, destroying her mind to save a brother.* Merlin, it had been him. Pettigrew was the one who had instilled the compulsion in Lily to love James above all else.

*Why? Why did you do it?* Severus’s mind screamed in anguish.

“Come on,” Percy’s voice, thick with tears, cut through the silence. “Don’t look.” He kept his head ducked, not meeting Severus’s eyes as he led his two silent brothers toward the tunnel back to Hogwarts.

Severus looked down to see Draco blinking, his pupils constricting back to normal. He carefully tested the boy’s legs. Once he was satisfied Draco wouldn’t fall, he released him and stepped away.

“Should I get rid of the body, young master?” Dobby spoke up softly, looking up at Draco with innocent curiosity.

“No,” Severus answered harshly, glaring at the blond.

“No,” Draco agreed and tugged gently on the tip of Dobby’s ear. “Thank you, Dobby. You did an amazing job today. I don’t know what I would have done without you.”

Dobby beamed up at Draco with pure joy, tears filling his eyes and spilling down his cheeks. “Young master doesn’t need to thank Dobby! Dobby would do anything for young master.”

Draco gave him a small smile and tugged affectionately one more time on his ear. “You can go home, Dobby. You did a good job.”

Severus sneered in disgust as the elf left sobbing tears of joy. He cast Draco a dark look. “You will come with me to the Headmaster.”

Draco shrugged easily. His lips curled in satisfaction as watched Snape shrink and store Pettigrew’s corpse in a box he’d conjured. The sick bastard would never hurt another kid again, but more importantly he wouldn’t walk around with the memory of getting off by hurting Harry. Something protective and fierce burned hot in his core and he followed after Snape without an ounce of regret.

…

Snape dropped the Weasleys off at the Hospital Wing before taking Draco directly to the Headmaster’s office. Draco had asked about Remus while they were there, having noticed the empty bed, and Pomfrey had informed him that Remus had left shortly after their visit. Draco sighed. He didn’t want to interrupt Remus while he was making his decision. It was a critical one that would effect his entire future, so Draco would wait to tell him about Pettigrew when Remus contacted him with his answer.

Not five minutes later, Draco found himself ensconced in an armchair in front of Dumbledore’s desk while a horrified-looking McGonagall and the Headmaster listened to Snape’s recounting. They stood by the window, behind and to the right of Draco’s position, so Draco had to turn sideways in his chair to watch them. Draco noticed that McGonagall held the box of photos, her grip blanching her knuckles white. She unconsciously held it slightly away from her body, clearly distress over the contents. She wore her tight, perfect bun, her favorite green robes, and looked prim and proper as always. Not that it would help her during this conversation.

Dumbledore had also cleaned up a bit. He’d tied his beard with twine since Draco had last seen him, and his long, silvery hair was held back away from his face in a low ponytail. In contrast to the other two, Snape looked completely disheveled. His ink black hair was tangled from the gusty winds
they’d encountered on their walk back to the castle. One hem of his pants was tucked haphazardly into his shoe and the buttons on his wrists were undone, leaving his sleeves loose. After ten minutes or so, the adults fell silent. Dumbledore spelled the chair Draco was sitting in to turn so that Draco faced them. When the Headmaster spoke, his voice was as hard as granite.

“Explain this, Mr. Malfoy. I’ve heard from Professor Snape. Now I’d like to hear these events from your perspective.”

Draco sighed. Why these supposedly brilliant people need him to hold their hands, he’d never understand. “Ron’s hardly been sleeping for over a week now and unconsciously fears the dorms, so Percy asked me to talk to him since I’m not a Weasley. He thought Ron might open up more to a friend than a brother. So I did.”

McGonagall moved with heavy steps to sit in the armchair next to Draco’s. She turned it so that it faced the room, the same as Draco’s, and quickly set the box as far away from her as she could on Dumbledore’s desk behind her. The reality of what she’d missed in her own House was a visible weight on her shoulders. Draco took her reaction in with an uncaring glance and continued.

“When I talked to him, Ron told me he remembered a nightmare of drowning, of suffocating. Tentacles wrapped around his throat and held his mouth open. He remembered dying.”

McGonagall made a soft sound and Dumbledore had to look away from Draco’s too knowing eyes. Snape, on the other hand, looked made of stone as he stared at Draco unblinking. “The wards would have registered a student dying.”

“Should have,” Draco agreed, flashing a sharp smile. “Magic school like this. Would think there’d be protections against child rape and murder.”

Dumbledore’s head bowed, still turned away from Draco, while McGonagall flinched in her seat.

Draco continued, still ignoring them. “I knew exactly what that dream meant.” His eyes were full of a dark and gruesome knowledge. “Pedo’s typically like trophies, so I went looking. Didn’t expect photos, but it makes sense. Another form of power. Bastard was practically gagging for it.”

“We need to call the Aurors,” McGonagall said roughly, distraught.

Draco shook his head hard. “Except for Ron, those kids don’t know shit about what happened. If it gets put in their files, you’ll be fucking them over a second time. Staining them with something that they could be spared from. We need to do right by them. Protect them.”

Dumbledore turned his face back to Draco. “Ronald…”

“He’s suffering,” Draco agreed, nodding. “He remembers the violation. He remembers being used whether he’s consciously aware of it or not. He needs help. A Mind Healer. The Aurors, too, I guess, if that’s what his family wants, but his abuser is dead, so I don’t much see the point unless it’s to prosecute you and McGonagall for your complete failure to protect and care for your students.”

Dumbledore actually faltered. Snape, wide-eyed, had to support his mentor with an arm while McGonagall began to cry silently.

Draco watched them through cold eyes, unimpressed. “So back to my perspective. I asked Snape to come. Hidden secrets resonate with Dark magic and I judge him to be the most efficient at helping me find anything that might be there. Dumbledore arrived and actually didn’t get in the way for once and we found the stash in the bathroom.”
Draco leaned forward, eyes intent on Dumbledore who watched him back with horror, still leaning on Snape. “The photos themselves told me a lot. Pettigrew’s been doing this for at least two years, but seeing as he’s been posing as the Weasleys’ pet rat for who knows how long, I can’t really be sure of when he started raping kids. The fucker kept his desire in check, though, while he was here. He only used the boys’s hands and thighs while they were unconscious and didn’t penetrate them, but while I was out, he snapped when he got to Harry.”

“My god,” Dumbledore whispered faintly. Blood drained completely from his face. Draco had hidden the first handful of photos. He’d suspected Draco was protecting someone, but he’d really hoped it wasn’t Harry. “Harry was in the photos?”

Severus's angry facade completely crumbled. His hand spasmed painfully tight around Dumbledore’s arm.

Draco lifted an eyebrow. “I took those photo’s out. You don’t need to see them. Also the photos of Ron. Anyway, Pettigrew snapped when he got to Harry. This could be because he just couldn’t contain it anymore or because Harry looks the most girly of all these boys. Or it could be because he had a connection to Harry because he’d been friends with Harry’s parents. Either way he fucked Harry’s face, abused his throat pretty bad. I think you remember when Harry was in the infirmary with a sore throat, hardly able to talk. His voice would have been hoarse and raspy. You know, when your qualified nurse diagnosed him as coming down with a cold.”

“My god,” Dumbledore repeated. He looked like he was going to be sick.

McGonagall gasped, tears streaming silently down her face. “No…” she denied helplessly.

Severus snarled something unintelligible. He released Dumbledore to pace toward the window, rage in every line of his shoulders and back.

Draco’s lips curled in dark amusement at their complete uselessness. “Well, that’s when Pettigrew got a taste for fucking a kid’s face and there was no going back after that. There’s not a photo of it here, but I think he fucked Ron’s throat like he did Harry’s, but the bastard got too violent or the angle was wrong.” He didn’t mention that Harry was also familiar with breath-play and so his body may have instinctively handled it better. “The fucker dislocated Ron’s jaw and strangled him with his dick.”

“Enough!” McGonagall demanded, breathing hard. “Please…”

Draco cast her a disgusted sneer. “What? You can’t handle the truth?”

“You may leave if you need to, Minerva,” Dumbledore whispered. He kept his eyes on Draco, the expression on his face utterly broken. “Let the boy finish.”

Draco snorted. “Sure. Well, Pettigrew obviously revived Ron and healed him somehow. I mean, Ron never went to the infirmary with a sore throat like Harry did. Not that it would have done him any good if he had,” he added innocently, gleefully rubbing salt in their wounds. “Pettigrew likely learned from his mistake with Harry.” Draco pointed out that the photos hinted that Pettigrew actually preferred girls, but that he hadn’t gone out to find them, which suggested he couldn't leave for whatever reason. Draco then walked them through his logic on why the Whomping Willow and the Shrieking Shack had been the most likely escape route and repeated what he’d learned from George at the willow.

Dumbledore had to admit, if to himself, that the fact there had been photos of Harry in that pile made Draco’s horrific actions more understandable, but it still begged the question. “Why did you kill him
“as you did?” he asked, practically begging for understanding. “Surely there were other ways?”

“Sure.” Draco shrugged. “There’s lots of ways to kill someone. Does it really matter how it’s done?”

“Yes,” McGonagall said softly. “Yes, it does.”

“It really shouldn’t. Dead is dead,” he argued, but he knew it was pointless. For whatever reason, they were essentially right. Manner of death mattered a great deal to society in general and Draco would do well to remember that. “I wasn’t intending to kill him like that. I was going to poison him. It’d be painful, but it wouldn’t last more than a few minutes.” Draco stared off to the side, wondering how much he should tell them and figured he should probably do some damage control with the truth. He sighed and met their eyes. “Truth is, I just reacted. Down in the Hold, the rats got really bad sometimes. If you got too weak to fight them off, they’d attack you. Bite you all over. It hurt like a motherfucker and those fucking bites always got infected. The Master got rid any merchandise that got sick. Usually killed the kid right in front of the rest of us. It wasn’t pretty. I guess I still really hate rats.”

McGonagall got up and walked toward the door, but she hesitated there, her back to the room, her shoulders shaking. Severus had turned around to face Draco once more, eyes full of anguish, while Dumbledore hung his head.

Draco hardly noticed. The memories were too vivid. “So we learned to snap the necks of the rats that got to close. Kill them before they killed us. We’d grab them by the head and whip their body hard as we could. It was the fastest, safest, way of getting rid of the fuckers without getting bit.” Draco shook his head, blinking back to the present. “I’m not going to lie. I wanted Pettigrew dead. He was too good at hiding and escaping. He hurt so many people. He hurt Harry. Seeing those photos with cum all over Harry’s face, watching him silently gasp and cough, crying in his sleep after that fucker got done with him… No. I couldn’t let him go. He’d always be out there, a threat looming over us. It all got mushed up in my head and I just reacted.”

“You gave a type of prophecy. I know the signs. It was legitimate,” Severus rasped, desperate to change the subject. He didn’t think he’d ever forget watching Draco spit out the rat’s head or the way the blood had gushed as the body transformed back to human.

Draco sighed. “Yeah. I’d like to keep it secret, but I’m a hemopath. I know shit when I taste someone’s blood. Pettigrew… I saw him do something to a girl. He did something to her soul and mind.”

“Lily,” Severus whispered hoarsely. “He altered Lily.”

“Most likely,” Draco agreed, hooking his hair behind his ear. “He betrayed a family, so I’m guessing he gave up the Potters. Then he framed a brother, which would be Sirius Black. Then he raped innocents. The boys here at Hogwarts. Then he killed Ron, but fortunately he was able to revive him.” Draco sneered in disgust. “Pretty revolting bastard all around.”

McGonagall turned to Dumbledore, eyes bloodshot and wide with horror. “Albus, if this is true…!”

Dumbledore held up his hand to forestall her. “It is my hope to not involve the Aurors in this case. Pettigrew officially died a decade ago. It will not be difficult to keep this internal.”

“What about…” McGonagall insisted.

Severus turned on her, snarling, “Predictable! Always trying to save Sirius Black no matter how high the cost!”
Dumbledore interrupted the argument before it could get any farther. His tone was harsher than Draco had ever heard it. “Even should we turn the body in and truthfully explain the situation, I doubt the Ministry will be so willing to correct their mistake. The unlawful imprisonment of an Heir of a Noble House is no small matter. Mr. Pettigrew is unable to testify or confess. His body would not be sufficient evidence to overturn Sirius’s conviction. Moreover, Draco would undoubtedly face criminal charges. It would also make the experiences of those poor boys public. If we can protect them from further injury, we should do everything in our power. We owe them that much and more.”

Dumbledore strode around his desk and sat heavily in his chair. Draco had to lean over the arm of his armchair and look behind him to keep Dumbledore in sight. “That being said, we must speak to Mr. and Mrs. Weasley. They will need to know what Ron has endured and that her children have witnessed a man’s death. If they wish to bring this to the Aurors after I’ve explained the situation, then I cannot rightfully stop them. We will have to wait to decide our next moves until after they’ve made their decision.”

Draco got up and stood facing the desk. Leaning his hip against the chair, he crossed his arms across his chest. “While you wait on that, why don’t you work on a way to make sure this never happens again?” he suggested sweetly, rage beginning to sparkle in his eyes.

“Draco…” McGonagall began, apology clear in her expression and tone.

Draco continued right over her, his eyes on Dumbledore. “I was just barely willing to let you off the hook about the Stone and being blind to Voldemort being in the fucking school, but a magical school that can’t prevent or detect the rape of its eleven-year-old students is fucking pathetic. Not to mention a staff that’s completely blind to the total mental breakdown of a student! Especially when there’s only a handful left in the school! Ron was falling apart and yet it took his fifteen-year-old brother to get him the help he needed! Whatever the Weasleys decide, Harry and I won’t be back until Hogwarts makes significant changes, starting with your resignation, Dumbledore.”

McGonagall’s mouth fell open in shock. Severus stood oddly still and silent.

“It’s clear you’re too distracted or out of touch to be Headmaster,” Draco pointed out with brutal honesty. “Maybe you’re spread too thin, I don’t know. Same for McGonagall. Maybe she has too many jobs, but a Head of House’s first priority is the monitoring of their assigned students’ health, behavior, and academics. There are too many kids in Gryffindor who needed attention and never got it or were left to the older students, and I should never have had to face the amount of bullying that I did from my own House. Furthermore, the blatant bullying at this school is due in part to the rampant discrimination and favoritism actively practiced by your staff as well as the inconsistent discipline. By Muggle standards, this place would have rightfully been shut down long ago for that alone.”

The silence was so deep Draco could hear his own breathing. Giving a dark, mocking smile, he pushed away from the chair with his hip and gave a mocking bow. “I’ll send an elf for our things, but before I go,” he turned to Snape. “I believe you have something for me?”

Severus left McGonagall and Dumbledore staring mutely and made his way down to his private chamber on autopilot. His mind was a whirlwind. Pettigrew - child molestation - Sirius Black - Lily - a Hogwarts without Dumbledore - two brutal murders - Voldemort’s shade - bullying - the idea of Harry in one of those horrific photos - Aurors and Azkaban - It was too much! He needed time to process and analyze everything.

Before he knew it, Severus was standing in his living room at his bookshelf, taking down a vial of dark purple potion with a spiraling black swirl in its depths. “This will prevent anyone from using magic to affect your mind, for example Legilimancy, memory or mood-altering charms, Imperio… Creatures that affect the mind like Dementors and boggarts will also be blocked. Your bond to Harry
should not be affected. It is already a part of your magical signature and your mental landscape."

Draco accepted the vial and turned it this way and that. It had the thick consistency of maple syrup.
“What’s the downside? Why don’t more people take it?”

“It is exceedingly difficult to brew correctly. It also prevents any spells meant to support or heal your mind as well as preventing you from using any mental spells on other people. You won’t be able to cast Legilimency, for example,” Severus answered clinically, as if from a great distance. “It will also prevent you from being able to remove or store memories should the need arise. When it’s discovered, you will be viewed with suspicion. Typically it is the guilty who use this potion in an attempt to hide their crimes. Also, any magical device that requires access to the mind will not be functional for you. For example, the Sorting Hat.”

Draco nodded, but he’d already thought about this. The risk of his mind taking any more damage was too great. Without his mind, he was nothing. Taking a deep breath, he uncorked the vial and poured it into his mouth. He immediately had to resist spitting it out, the potion almost painfully bitter. His eyes teared up, his jaw ached, his tongue curled, but he forced himself to swallow. Draco could feel the potion slide down his throat and coat his stomach. Something heavy and cold seemed to wrap around his head, like a steel crown that had been sitting in the snow. It felt so real that Draco lifted his fingers to touch his forehead, his fingertips meeting normal skin.


Draco handed Snape the vial and gave him a genuine smile. “Thanks.”

Severus could only nod, accepting the vial with a limp hand.

Chapter end.

A/n: Whew! Okay. Was this the ending you craved when it came to Pettigrew? I know he didn’t really suffer enough, but he’s gone for good. That has to count, right?
Judgement

**A/n:** Pixi56 has added art to the collection for Freedom Found in Chains! The newest art is from Draco and Harry's escape from the Hold. It's amazing! If you'd like to see it, please stop by and leave a comment or kudos. :D Thank you, Pixi56! It's incredible to see words made into images. Your art is awesome and really captures the emotions of the story. [https://archiveofourown.org/works/8470558](https://archiveofourown.org/works/8470558)

**Judgement**

Draco stepped out of the floo feeling exhausted. The photos in his pocket were burning an acidic hole through his stomach, but the memory of Pettigrew's headless corpse helped keep him calm. Harry got up from the couch, a warm smile on his face, his eyes bright - *love happy*. Draco opened his arms and Harry flew into them, hugging him tightly. His head fit perfectly in the crook of Draco’s shoulder, his forehead pressing gently against Draco’s neck. Draco felt himself relax for the first time in hours. With a soft sigh, he rested his cheek on Harry’s soft, messy hair. Harry didn’t resist or question, filling the bond with *love gratitude*.

* I love you, Harry, * Draco whispered with perfect truth into Harry’s mind.

- *LOVE* - surged strongly through the bond, washing Draco from the inside out with warm sunshine. “Love you, Draco,” Harry answered back, voice sweet.

“Didn’t go well, I take it?” Andromeda asked archly from the doorway, her arms crossed once more. She wore a deep purple, long-sleeved blouse tucked into a white gauzy skirt, emphasizing her curves, and black ankle boots. There were a few strands of grey in her light brown hair, noticeable only because she had her hair pulled back in a strict bun. She had the same aristocratic features as Narcissa, her face full of sharp angles, which were echoed in Draco’s face. The look of disdain she wore now was sharp enough to cut most people.

Draco ignored her. Andromeda shifted restlessly in the doorway, leaning forward, expressing becoming thunderous. Draco relented, but he still didn’t speak to her. He spoke to Harry. Pulling back to look into his boy’s bright eyes, he told him, “I asked for Dumbledore’s resignation. We don’t need to discredit him publicly. We still have Voldemort to face.”

Andromeda’s eyes lit up, her whole body language unfolding. She flashed a sharp, victorious smile. “Good. Lunch is ready.”

“I’m not hungry,” Draco finally let Harry go, but he held tight to his boy’s hand. “I’m kind of tired. I’m going to take a nap. Didn’t sleep last night.” He gave Harry’s hand a squeeze and let him go. “Go eat. Meet me in the bedroom when you’re done.”

Harry nodded, accepting the decision, however, by the way his eyes glinted, Draco knew Harry would eat fast in order to join him as quickly as possible.

Draco smiled that soft smile that belonged only to his boy and went upstairs to their room. The first thing he did was open the little drawer in their small desk and grab the box of matches they’d thrown in there for lack of a better place to put them. Alone in the quiet of their bedroom, Draco took the photos out of his coat pocket. Rage slammed through his chest like a speeding train as soon as he saw the images of Harry’s abuse once more.

With deliberate movements, he stalked to the wastebasket in the corner and picked out all the photos
of Harry, setting aside the closeup of Harry’s cum-smeared face. He dropped the rest into the empty wastebasket. Teeth bared, hot blood raging through his veins like a tsunami, Draco struck a match.

Wizarding photos burn just like muggle ones. He caught the corner of the face-shot photograph he held and dropped it on top of the others. Quickly growing yellow flames reflected in his pale eyes as he watched the pictures burn. He stared unblinking as they turned black and shriveled, ashes floating up on the heated air. He watched until every last shred of evidence of Harry’s abuse had been erased. He wished he could destroy the ones of the Weasley boys, but it wasn’t his place.

Stomping back over to the desk, Draco yanked the wooden chair out and sat, his movements sharp with anger. Taking out some muggle stationary and a pen, he wrote out a quick note. (No matter how much Narcissa had tried, Draco had never really liked wizarding materials.) The letter was a simple request to Mrs. Weasley, asking her to meet with him at her earliest convenience. His second letter was much longer.

To Hermione and Neville, he began. He wrote out the story of the battle of the Stone, telling it in the same way he’d told Ron and Percy.

He ended it with: In short, those barriers were never supposed to protect the Stone but test us! The Devil’s Snare for Neville. The flying keys for Harry. The chess set for Ron. The troll for me. The logic puzzle for you. Add this to the fact that it wasn’t just a Dark wizard we were up against, but Voldemort’s unresting shade! We nearly died! I had to kill Quirrell to protect myself! We’re only eleven and Dumbledore’s already taking these kinds of risks?

I hate to say it, but Harry and I won’t be back to Hogwarts unless Dumbledore resigns. He’s clearly more interested in the war than our education and safety. That’s fine in its place, but while we’re at school, I need our education to be priority. Especially if we’re to survive. When school starts again, please forward the assignments. Harry and I will do them from home. If by next year, Dumbledore still won’t step down, we’ll find another school. Beauxbaton or Salem Academy or even private tutoring.

Draco didn’t seal the letter. He knew Harry would want to add something to the bottom. He stood and stretched, his anger having burnt down to ashy embers. He took off his coat and dropped it carelessly over the back of the chair. As Draco flopped face-first down on the bed, a pop sounded from the center of the room. Undisturbed, he turned his head to see Dobby standing in the middle of the room. Their expensive, top-of-the-line school trunks sat at his feet and their non-foldable clothes floated on hangers in the air.

“Thank you, Dobby. I’ve asked you to work really hard today.”

Dobby flapped his ears, smiling happily up at his young master. He carefully deposited the nice clothes into the closet. “Being my pleasure, young master Draco, sir!”

The bedroom door opened softly and Harry slipped inside, locking the door behind him. He smiled at seeing the excitable little elf. “Hello, Dobby! Did you bring all our stuff? Thank you!”

Dobby gave Harry a tender smile and bounced over to hug the boy around the thighs. He’d been delighted when he’d learned years ago how much Harry enjoyed gestures of affection, even from a lowly elf. “Do yous be needing anything else?”

Harry smiled brightly at the elf’s hug and happily returned the gesture. “I’ll unpack. It’s okay, Dobby,” he denied quickly, hating to give him more work.

“Take the folded letter to Mrs. Weasley, please,” Draco told him, gesturing lazily to the desk. “I
promise I won’t bother you again today.”

Dobby quickly fetched the letter. “Oh! No! Yous not bother Dobby at all! Call Dobby any time, young master Draco, Harry sir!”

“We will,” Harry reassured him and waved as Dobby disappeared with a pop. Harry then turned his attention to Draco. Making his way to the bed, he crawled across it to join the blond. “He was happy.”

Draco grabbed Harry and rolled him so that Harry was lying underneath him. With an unusually needy look, he leaned down and kissed Harry gently, simultaneously hooking the boy’s black-framed glasses off his face. Harry melted into the kiss, his hand coming up to card through Draco’s silk-soft hair. Draco leaned into the gentle touch and deepened the kiss, hungrily swallowing Harry’s moans.

A surge of emotion rose hot and heavy through Draco’s core. He moved his mouth to Harry’s chin, kissing and sucking softly on the skin there. His lips slid up Harry’s jaw, over the boy’s cheek, and across his nose. Harry giggled, fingers tangled in Draco’s hair. Draco smiled against Harry’s warm skin, kissing along the boy’s blushing cheek and down the other side of his jaw. Salty tears dripping from his cheeks further wet Harry’s skin, washing it clean.

* Mine! * he growled along the bond. And it was true. This was his! Harry was his! No one would ever see the way Harry’s eyes sparkled when his face was tickled with kisses or the way he flushed and smiled so sweetly, so honestly. No one else would get to see Harry reaching out to them with desire and need. They wouldn’t feel Harry’s heart coursing with so many powerful emotions. Pettigrew had manipulated Harry’s body, but that had been hollow, a reflection of his own desire. Harry had not been there.

Overwhelmed with a painful mixture of joy and anger, Draco pulled away and sat back on his knees. Harry’s eyes went wide, his smile melting into a look of concern as Draco covered his face and cried. Harry sat up, enfolding Draco in his arms - compassion worry. In response, Draco wrapped his arms tightly around Harry’s waist and pressed his wet face against the boy’s chest, directly over his heart.

* I’m okay, * he promised, mental voice soft and needy. * Just hold me a minute. *

Green eyes going soft, Harry held Draco close. - Love admiration - filled his heart near to bursting. He didn’t know what Draco had faced at Hogwarts, not yet, but he knew whatever it was had been difficult. Whatever had happened Harry knew Draco had faced it head on, fearlessly, and hadn’t flinched away from making hard decisions. Draco had taken care of everything, and Harry was so grateful it hurt. Now it was his turn to take care of Draco.

As Draco pulled away from the hug, the last of his tears catching on his lashes, Harry feathered his fingers over the blond’s jaw and lips. “Please, Draco?” he asked softly, looking lovingly into the blond’s eyes.

Draco gave a wan smile, practically vibrating with emotion. He shifted off his knees and fell softly back onto his ass. Harry sat in front of him in jeans and a big red sweater with his legs bent on either side in a w-sitting position, his knees comfortably spread. His wild black hair fell cutely over his forehead and over his ears, cheeks a soft pink, eyes unshielded by glasses. He was beautiful.

Draco draped his legs over Harry’s and set his feet firmly in the space between each of Harry’s outturned feet and his ass, caging Harry’s body. Leaning backward, placing his weight on hands placed
slightly behind him, Draco looked at Harry, eyes dark and vulnerable. “Show me,” he said, voice rough from holding back tears.

Heart pounding, Harry reached eagerly for the hem of Draco’s t-shirt. His fingers brushed the blond’s warm stomach, making his own jump in anticipation. Draco leaned forward off his hands, allowing Harry to pull the shirt over his head. As Harry dropped it carelessly to the side, Draco settled back on his hands again, his torso on full display.

“Mmm…” Harry hummed in pleasure, running his fingers lightly over the lines and blotches that covered nearly the entirety of Draco’s chest. But this wasn’t the time to selfishly absorb himself in all the planes and textures of Draco’s body. He was supposed to be taking care of Draco. Concentrating, he stroked Draco’s skin, running his fingertips in a sensual caress down from the blond’s collarbones to the waistline of his pants. Goosebumps rose along Draco’s arms, the blond’s lips parting as his breathing deepened.

Harry’s eyes fastened to the pale, white-pink of Draco’s nipples. He stroked them, thrilling when they pebbled under his touch. Draco’s tense expression had melted into something more relaxed and watchful. His head fell back slightly to the side, expression patient, as Harry continued. Harry smiled at his love, heat beginning to pool low between his legs. Instinctively, Harry’s knees tried to draw together to relieve the building pressure, but Draco’s hips were in the way, holding them spread. A knowing smile curled Draco’s lips and Harry shivered, eyes fluttering closed.

* Eyes on me, Harry, * Draco murmured, a silken purr through his mind, eyes beginning to glint silver. He wanted to see that beautiful, bright green. Needed Harry awake and aware and making his presence known. Needed Harry to be with him, fully and completely, to obliterate the images burned in his mind of a sleeping and passive Harry getting abused.

Obediently, Harry kept his eyes on Draco’s as he leaned forward and pressed his hot tongue flat to Draco’s chest. He dragged it slowly upward, leaving a wet trail of saliva in its wake. His tongue slid hotly over scar tissue and smooth skin and finally bumped over Draco’s nipple. Harry lifted his face away, lowered his head back down and did it again, never breaking eye-contact. Each time he licked over the blond’s nipple, Draco’s breath hitched and Harry smiled, delighted.

After several minutes, Harry switched sides, letting the cool air slowly dry the spit he’d left behind on the other. Heat began to radiate off Draco’s body, absorbing into Harry’s own. It was hard to keep his eyes open, even though he couldn’t get enough of Draco’s flushing cheeks and predatory eyes. Harry’s lashes fluttered with every soft sound of pleasure Draco made, the heat in Harry’s blood lapping higher and higher with each soft sigh and sucked in breath.

Their pleasure fed on each other’s until things began to blur. Harry found himself leaning over his own lap, head cradled to Draco’s chest, nursing hungrily at the blond’s nipple. Draco had curled over him, lips brushing Harry’s temple, pressing words of love into Harry skin that he couldn’t hear but nonetheless felt as loud as a shout. Harry’s entire body felt dipped in warm honey. He throbbed in time with his heartbeat and his fingers played entreatingly with the button of Draco’s pants until, finally, Draco unhooked them, gifting Harry access.

Draco never wore underwear so Harry slipped his hands inside that open V and instantly came in contact with Draco’s rigid length. It felt so familiar to Harry, but also new somehow. Was it harder? Longer? Sensing his curiosity, Draco’s sheltering arms fell away. He leaned back and braced his arms against the mattress once more, watching Harry with a heated gaze.

Breathing heavier now, Harry touched and fingered Draco’s length. The heat of it, the contrast of rigid muscle and silky skin, it ratcheted up Harry’s desire. His eyes darkened with lust and he looked up at Draco, begging wordlessly for permission. Draco considered it. Harry’s desire pulsed and
throbbed, undulating through him. He leaned his weight onto one hand, freeing the other to come up and brush at Harry’s bottom lip. Harry’s mouth was flushed and swollen, slightly parted. Draco stroked his lips softly. Harry opened his mouth wider, but this time Draco ignored the invitation.

Like lightning, the image of Harry’s sleeping face, tear-streaked and covered with Pettigrew’s cum, flashed before his eyes. The knowledge that Harry had gone to the Healer, throat inflamed and battered, voice hoarse, echoed like thunder. It made him want to mark the boy’s face and also feel repulsed by the idea at the same time.

“You want to taste it?” he asked, voice low and calm, hiding the turmoil raging inside. He already knew the answer, but he needed to hear it. Needed to see Harry’s eager desire, a vivid contrast to Harry’s unconscious body in those horrific photographs.

“Yes, Draco,” Harry answered eyes bright with no notion of shame, a flood of - excitement desire pleasure - rushing through the bond.

Draco rebelled against the horror in those photos. Harry’s honest desire went a long way, but he still couldn’t bear the thought of penetrating the boy’s throat. Not tonight. Not while the ashes of corruption coated the wastebasket in the corner. “Tongue only,” he growled, dropping his hand back behind him, bracing his weight and opening himself to his boy.

Harry folded forward gracefully, a happy sound escaping him as he gripped the base of Draco’s dick to hold it steady. He pressed his tongue flat, dragging it across the top of the sensitive head in slow licks. When it began to ooze milky pre-cum, Harry eagerly tried to lap inside the tiny hole, chasing the bitter/salty taste. Harry glanced up into Draco’s burning gaze and bestowed tickling kisses around the head before swirling his tongue wholly around it.

Draco watched, lips parted, as Harry teased him. His body twitched again and again as shocks zapped straight to his balls and up his spine, his nipples tingling like mad. Eventually he let his head fall back, his eyes falling closed, basking in Harry’s - devotion pleasure excitement. “So good…” he moaned in praise.

His thighs closed tight around Harry’s shoulders, holding him in place. When the pleasure began to sharpen, Draco’s core pulsing brighter, faster, he quickly tugged Harry up and off. Fisting the boy’s hair, Draco pulled Harry into a wet, opened-mouth kiss. They panted heavily into the kiss, Harry surrendering sweetly to Draco’s plundering tongue.

Just as Harry grew dizzy from not enough oxygen, Draco released his hold on the boy’s hair, letting him breathe. “Get your pants off. Climb into my lap,” he ordered, voice husky.

Harry immediately got to his knees and undid his pants. Draco’s gaze was an almost physical sensation on his skin. It was filled with so much desire and appreciation that Harry nearly fainted. It still blew his mind that someone, anyone, let alone someone like Draco, could find him desirable. That heated look consumed him; he lived for it! So his hands slowed, turning his movements into a striptease.

Draco’s pulse jumped as Harry put on a little show. “God, Harry…” he murmured in approval. He watched, still in the same position with his knees bent, legs open, and his hands braced behind him. His dick stood up hard against his lower belly, framed by the sharp V of his hips and the open mouth of his jeans. He was topless, but still wore his sneakers as well as his pants.

Checks burning red, shyly staring at Draco through his lashes, Harry slowly pushed his pants down over his hips and even slower down his thighs. Rocking his weight backward, pelvic swaying toward Draco, he got his toes under him and pushed up to his feet, knees still bent in a crouch, pants
caught in the crook of his knees. Heart beating a mile a minute, Harry carefully stood, swaying his hips. His pants fell to his ankles and Harry kicked them to the floor. He stood before Draco in a big red sweater and small black underwear, an inferno of - *excitement pleasure need* - burning through his core.

With Harry standing and Draco sitting, the blond got an excellent, eye-level view of Harry’s stiff cock held captive by his tight, black briefs. Draco ran his eyes over Harry’s slender body that was engulfed in the baggy sweater he wore with long naked legs on display. He took in every detail, thrilling when it made the boy shiver, those uncovered green eyes burning bright.

“Now the rest,” he prompted, voice a low rasp.

“Y-yes, Draco,” Harry answered breathlessly, nearly panting.

Glancing down submissively, Harry repeated the slow downward movement with his black underwear. He kicked them aside and knelt once more. Slowly, teasingly, he tugged his sweater up his stomach, over his chest, and off. Looking into Draco’s face for first time since he’d touched his underwear, Harry moaned as he looked into the blond’s molten silver eyes.

With that one look, playtime was over. Hunger drowned out all other thoughts. All there was, was need. Their magic locked together like two sets of hands, pressing at each other, wrestling. Harry was panting, trembling. Draco sat perfectly still, a predator watching prey from tall grass.

“On my lap,” he ordered, still not moving an inch.

Hypnotized, dizzy with lust, Harry carefully knee-walked forward in-between Draco’s legs. He braced himself against Draco’s shoulders and chest, awkwardly climbing into the bowl of Draco’s lap. Draco groaned hungrily as Harry’s thighs spread open wide around his jean-covered hips. In this position, he had a glorious view down Harry’s back of the boy’s round ass. Once Harry was settled, he canted his hips, arching his back slightly, and gasped, their bodies slotting together.

The atmosphere became charged, heavy. Instead of two forces pressing at each other, their magic melded into one throbbing whole. Hot and cloying, the room filled with humid heat. Draco’s jeans rubbed roughly at Harry’s ass and thighs, the open zipper was a threatening bite against his skin, but Draco was pressed perfectly against him, their rigid lengths trapped side-by-side pressed between their bodies.

Harry braced his hands on the bed next to Draco’s hips and began to move. His hips rolled in an undulating motion that made his ass bounce sensually. He gave a warbling cry, feeling his dick dragging against Draco’s and rubbing against the sweat-damp skin of the their stomachs. The sting of Draco’s jeans added another note to the overwhelming symphony of pleasure.

Draco panted hard against Harry’s ear. He held himself perfectly still, taking in everything he could - the way Harry’s ass moved, the way the boy rubbed his entire body against Draco’s, the song of Harry’s gasps and moans. He hungrily drank down the sweet, musky smell of Harry’s skin and the earthier flavor of sex. The feeling of Harry *alive* and *wanting* and *aware* working his body passionately against Draco’s burned through him, bringing tears of triumph to his eyes.

In minutes, Harry was drenched in sweat, his hair hanging heavy and limp, curling around his cheeks and neck. He literally soaked Draco underneath him. Draco growled, low and hungry, but still he didn’t move. He let Harry work until his muscles burned and trembled with exhaustion, his voice lifting in audible cries of pain/pleasure. Until Harry flung his arms around Draco’s neck desperately, panting helplessly, body shuddering, on the edge of flying apart, and then Draco *moved*.

Magic dragging invisible claws down Draco’s back, he rolled so that Harry was under him.
Instinctively Harry wrapped his legs tightly around Draco’s waist, his arms holding just as tightly to Draco’s neck. Draco crushed their mouths together, swallowing Harry’s cries, muffling them. He thrust with careful force, dragging his entire body up and down the slippery planes of Harry’s torso and dick. Harry responded in kind, undulating and pressing desperately up against him.

Magic curled and twisted in on itself, strumming a vibrant note of urgency through the room, and they moved as one, hips rolling, a storm building between them. Draco thrust his tongue again and again deep into Harry’s mouth, owning it. Harry swallowed greedily, but still spit spilled past the seam of their lips, soaking his chin.

Draco crushed their bodies together, wrapping himself around Harry as if he were trying to engulf him completely. It was like a pressure cooker. Soul-deep pleasure climbed through his nerves like the low whistle of a tea kettle growing louder and louder.

The explosion hit simultaneously, magic punching down through their fragile bodies. They screamed into each other’s mouths, vision going dark, ears ringing. Bright pinks, oranges, and yellows flared along their nerves as muscle spasms locked them even tighter together. Hearts stuttering, eyes rolling, they passed out in each other’s arms. The leftover magic rippled outward in a wave, saturating the surrounding area. The bulk of it was absorbed by the complex wards tied to the house keeping them safe.

…

They slept straight through dinner and would likely have slept straight through the night except for Andromeda knocking loudly on their door. “Draco? Molly is here to see you!”

Draco’s eyes snapped open, heart pounding with the influx of adrenaline. He was sprawled on top of Harry’s naked body. Pushing up, he literally had to peel their chests apart. Harry gave a sleepy grunt, face screwing up in discomfort.

“Draco!” Andromeda rattled the doorknob. “You know I don’t like you locking your door!”

“I’m coming!” he shouted back, completely ignoring her complaint just as she knew he would. He turned his attention to Harry, the boy squinting up at him in the shadows of the darkened room. “Come on,” he said, pulling the boy up into a sitting position by his forearms. “Go take a shower while I talk to Mrs. Weasley.”

Harry frowned, but he didn’t hesitate to get out of bed and reach for his jeans.

Draco reached out to smooth his hand down the boy’s bare arm. “We’ll talk after she leaves,” he promised softly.

Harry accepted that with a nod, saying, “Yes, Draco,” in an equally soft voice. He pulled his sweater on and picked his glasses up from the floor.

Draco pulled on his jeans and an old, grey hoodie that he’d left in their closet. He took the photos from the pocket of the blue coat he’d flung over the desk chair and shoved them into the front pouch of the faded hoodie. Harry didn’t ask any questions. He knew whatever Draco held wasn’t anything good by the rigid line of the blond’s shoulders. Harry felt himself stand straighter. Whatever it was, he wanted to be strong enough to help Draco with it.

They left the room together, but they separated quickly: Harry to the bathroom and Draco heading downstairs. Mrs. Weasley hadn’t made it far from the floo in the living room. She paced in front of the sofa restlessly while Andromeda and Ted stood side-by-side next to the hearth, watching with
wide-eyes and uncertain expressions.

Mrs. Weasley wore a long-sleeved dress, maroon with pink flowers, and a brown, self-knitted cardigan. Her bright orange hair was frizzy and wild around her head. Her eyes were red-rimmed, her expression hard and grim, mouth set in a tight line. She didn’t seem to notice Draco standing in the doorway.

Draco cleared his throat and said, “Thank you for coming.”

Mrs. Weasley whipped around and pinned Draco with a ferocious look that honestly shocked him. This was the first time Draco had seen the matriarch truly angry and he suddenly remembered that four years ago both Molly and Andromeda had been called to the Hunt while their husbands had been left behind to Dance. Draco turned with forced calm toward Andromeda and Ted.

“We need a minute alone, please.”

Andromeda frowned at that. “What is this about?” She looked to her good friend in entreaty. “Molly?”

“Please,” Molly said carefully, not looking away from Draco. “Give us a minute.”

Ted placed a gentle yet insistent hand on his wife’s arm. “Come, Dromeda. Let’s make some tea.” He gave Draco a supportive nod as he pulled her from the room. Andromeda wasn’t happy with it, though, and she flashed Draco a look that promised they would talk about it later.

Draco quickly moved to Molly’s side. Boldly, he took hold of her wrist and tugged her to the sofa. He sat, pulling her with him. “We don’t have much time,” he told her quietly, meeting her brown eyes - eyes that most of her children shared. They were the same color as Percy’s and the twins’. It made Draco's heart ache.

“I got your note,” she told him stiffly. “I’m only here because I assume you know something about what happened at Hogwarts?”

“Yes,” Draco admitted, voice neutral and as factual as he could make it. “When I first met Percy, during Yule break of his Third-year, I knew something wasn’t right. I did some digging and discovered he’d been molested and raped at the school.”

Hot tears filled Molly’s eyes. Draco could see the trails of previous tears on her pale cheeks. He sighed, bowing his head slightly forward in apology.

“I didn’t think it was still going on. At least, I didn’t suspect any of your other children of being touched. They didn’t show the signs that Percy had that one Yule.” Looking into her devastated face, he wondering how much she was understanding. “I don’t know if you were told, but during the Winter Solstice, Harry and I accidentally started a ritual that summoned the Winter God. I was pulled into a type of vision quest, I guess, and was unconscious for several days. Pettigrew must have been emboldened by me being away and by the school practically being empty. His molestation grew more violent. He hurt Ron terribly, nearly killing him.”

Molly moaned, but by the end it sounded near a growl. “I was told,” she rasped tightly.
Draco met her glare for glare, sharing her rage. “I knew something was wrong when I woke up. Ron suddenly showed similar signs that I recognized in Percy two years ago. I went looking for evidence and found a stack of photographs. Pettigrew had stopped raping kids after Percy, afraid to get caught. He got off on their sleeping bodies instead. The kids had no idea. They had no memory of it, so it didn’t change their behavior. For them, it’s as if it never happened at all, which is a blessing.” Draco squeezed her hands. “They are free of that burden. Do you understand?”

Molly swallowed hard, her expression broken. “Are you saying…?”

“Yes,” Draco confirmed sadly. “Fred and George were used this way. As was Ron a few times before he was hurt.”

Molly got to her feet. Her body almost seemed made of stone as she held herself in a tight embrace facing the fireplace. “There were photos?” she asked in a hollow whisper.

“Yes,” he confirmed quietly. “Of Harry as well.”

Molly whipped around, eyes wide in horror.

Draco gave her a grim look, rage hardening his features. “Yes. Unlike the twins and the other kids, Harry was hurt like Ron. Fortunately, not as bad, and he doesn’t remember. The damage to his throat was healed by Pomfrey and she told him it was because of a cold, so he didn’t think much of it.”

Molly looked sick. “A cold?”

Draco sneered in disgust. “Apparently Pomfrey doesn’t know how to recognize sexual abuse unless it is in more obvious places.” Gentling his expression and voice, he told her, “I burned the photos of Harry. I didn’t know if you wanted me to do the same for the ones of your boys before you saw them. I made sure no one but me knows the twins and Percy were involved.”

Almost robotically, Molly held out her hand. Draco reached into his hoodie and pulled out the photographs. Dazed, Molly turned her back. Draco listened bleakly to the sound of the photographs dragging against each other as she looked at each one and watched as the mother’s shoulders shook in silent sobs. With a strangled scream of rage, Molly suddenly flung the bunch into the fireplace.

“I demanded to see the body,” she said, back still turned. Her hands were fisted at her sides tight enough to draw blood from her palms. “Pettigrew,” she growled with utter hatred. “We took him in as Scabbers… took care of him for years… as our pet… gave him to our children…” Suddenly she turned back to face him and she was furious. She looked crazed. “He didn’t suffer nearly enough for what he’s done to my boys!” she screamed before visibly forcing herself under control. Voice a tight, hushed growl, she said, “I’d appreciate it if you didn’t try and contact us until further notice.”

Ted and Andromeda appeared in the doorway to the living room. Ted carried a tea tray while Andromeda carried a plate of biscuits. Molly couldn’t bring herself to speak to either of them. She turned, stiffly grabbed the floo powder, and flung it into the flames. “The Burrow!” she called and disappeared in a flash of green.

Draco slumped back against the sofa, exhausted.

“What is going on?” Andromeda demanded. She marched into the living room and set the plate she carried down roughly on the coffee table. Hands on hips, she stared hard at Draco. “I want answers.”

Draco glared up at her, scratching a hand through his hair in frustration. “What’s your problem?” he
Andromeda stood stock-still, fury building in her expression. Ted set the tea down quickly and went to her side, but she pushed him away. Taking a threatening step forward, she glared down at the boy on her sofa. “My problem is ever since you’ve started Hogwarts I’ve been pushed aside and kept in the dark while you and Harry have put yourselves in grave danger! My problem is you tell me only what you want me to know and that’s it! My problem is you locking your door and keeping secrets! It has to stop, Draco! Things with the Headmaster did not have to escalate to the point of risking your lives in a death match! We should have stepped in and put a stop to the old man’s machinations when Harry was first sent to the Hospital Wing with a near-fatal injury! But you insisted you had it handled! You are still a child, Draco! Believe it or not, sometimes we do know best and you should listen for once!” Red-faced, eyes glittering with fury, she crossed the few feet separating them and loomed over the boy. “Well, it is going to stop and it is going to stop now! You will tell me everything. Including what is going on with my friend. The truth, Draco. All of it.”

“You think you scare me?” Draco snorted and cast her a dark look through his bangs. His hair had fallen from behind his ears and halfway over his eyes, curtaining his cheeks and jaw. “Fuck off, Andromeda. I’m not in the fucking mood,” he warned. Instead of a pathetic spirit floating around, we’d have a fully resurrected Dark Lord back to kill Harry breathing down our necks! So don’t tell me I got it fucking wrong! Harry’s safe now because of me!” He shoved her in the chest and she didn’t stagger only because Ted still had a hold of her arm. “Yes! We almost lost! I know that better than anyone! But it was still the right fucking call!” Voice dropping from a yell, Draco’s voice turned dark and ugly. “Harry’s stronger than you or anyone else gives him credit for. He’s not going to just roll over and let anyone fucking kill him, and I sure as hell will do whatever it takes to keep him safe. So if I’m not ‘listening’ to you, you bleating cow, it’s because you haven’t earned it. If I lock our door, it’s because you haven’t proven you can be trusted.”

Suddenly, Draco barked a cruel laugh, his eyes flashing a cold silver. “You want the truth? That’s fucking hilarious coming from you, since you’ve buried your head in the sand from day one. You still can’t fucking admit what you know about Harry and me, about what we do behind that locked door.” He grinned at her horrified expression. “You can’t fucking handle it, Andromeda. So do me a favor. Don’t go begging for more shit you can’t handle. Keep your temper tantrums for Ted over there because I don’t listen to toddlers who scream about getting their way and think everything is everyone else’s fault.”

Draco shoved past both of them angrily and stormed up the stairs. He was so mad he was almost seeing stars. He could hear little Denebola, or Dee as they called her, crying in her bedroom, disturbed by their fight. Draco ignored her. He knew if he tried to calm her it would only go wrong and he’d upset her more. Harry stood from where he sat at the edge of the bed when Draco stormed in, the door slamming shut behind him. Harry’s hair was wet and dripping some from the shower, making the collar of his sweater damp.

“Draco?”
“Fuck,” Draco spat, roughly pushing his hair out of his face. “Put some shoes on,” he ordered.

Harry, wide-eyed, did as instructed.

Draco grabbed his blue coat, held tight to his hoodie’s sleeves, and shoved his arms in it. He roughly pulled his hood out from under the coat and over his head. “Dobby!” he called sharply.

The little elf appeared with a pop. “Ye- …”

“Take us and our shit to Hogsmeade!” Draco snapped, interrupting him.

Dobby, aware of Draco’s mood, moved quickly to stand directly in front of his two charges. He carefully grasped hold of each of their wrists and teleported them all the way to Scotland.

There was a reason people didn’t travel often with House Elves. Their magic was fundamentally different from a wizard’s. Draco and Harry arrived in the middle of the main street of Hogsmeade and immediately collapsed to their knees, Harry groaning and Draco painfully gritting his teeth. The bitter cold actually helped in this case, easing their nausea.

Harry climbed to his feet first and offered his hand to Draco. Draco took it and stood awkwardly, limbs stiff. It felt like his brain was sloshing in his skull. There was something seriously wrong with elf-travel. Dobby was no longer with them, possibly being summoned by Lucius or Narcissa, not that it mattered. Draco didn’t need him for anything else. He grabbed one of the side handles on one of the trunks and it immediately hovered behind him. Harry did the same with the other one and walked at his side.

They didn’t speak as they made their way to the outskirts of the town. By the time they made it to Remus’s cottage, a light snow had begun to fall. Draco’s face and hands were numb with cold and Harry, who wasn’t wearing a coat and was slightly damp at that, was shivering badly.

The wards around the little house recognized them and the door unlocked, letting them in. They left their trunks near the front door and quickly made their way to the living room fireplace. Draco started a fire and sat directly in front of it, pulling Harry between his legs and wrapping himself around his boy, plastering his chest to Harry’s back. The snow that had caught on their hair and clothes quickly melted. After a few minutes, Harry’s shivers began to calm.

“I found out who hurt Percy,” Draco suddenly said.

Harry turned his head and was only able to get a glimpse of Draco’s profile from his periphery. The look on Draco’s face made Harry’s heart ache with empathy. Draco was hurting and Harry wanted more than anything to make it better.

“It was Scabbers the whole time. Wizards can turn into animals. We knew that the first day of Transfiguration,” Draco said angrily, self-derision thick in his voice. “Bastard knew about the snake because he watched us put it on Percy. He knew he’d been caught, but not by adults. His secret was still safe. So he got smarter. He never touched Percy again and didn’t fuck the kids like he had Percy. Instead he made them sleep so they wouldn’t remember, so they couldn’t tell anyone what happened. He did this for two years… All the boys in Gryffindor who are fair and thin and were in Third-year or younger. He used Ron and the twins that way a couple times.”

Harry knew where this was going. He felt a surge of - anger sympathy protectiveness. Draco had said ‘all’ the fair, thin boys. That included Harry, but did it also include… “Draco?” He tried to turn around, but Draco held him tighter and wouldn’t let him.

“While I was unconscious, Scabbers got his chance. He touched you in your sleep. He got a little
rough. That’s why your throat hurt. He did the same to Ron, but he must have gotten carried away. Ron… Ron was smothered to death. Scabbers was able to revive him, but dying broke the sleep spell. Ron remembered some of it. The trauma of it marked him deeply. It’s why he couldn’t sleep and felt so frightened in the dorm. Percy asked me to help him and that’s when I figured it out.”

Harry insisted on turning, pushing against Draco’s restraining hold. This time Draco gave in. Harry was allowed to turn and he got on his knees, facing the blond. The fire was at his back now and it cast his shadow over Draco, but he could still see the darkness and pain in the blond’s eyes.

“I’m sorry, Harry. I should have put more effort into finding out who hurt Percy. I should never have left you so unprotected.”

Harry shook his head and cupped Draco’s face. “I was still protected,” he argued softly. “He didn’t kill me. He wouldn’t dare. And I’m sorry, too. I know the signs. Maybe not as well as you, but I know. I should have realized Ron had been hurt that way. That we weren’t safe and to get help. I even thought his panic attack reminded me of your flashbacks, but I still didn’t realize.”

“You couldn’t have known,” Draco denied roughly. “It’s my job to protect you and I failed.”

“You killed him,” Harry stated without any doubt, green eyes fierce.

Draco felt a flash of fierce protectiveness and yanked Harry into a tight hug. “He’s dead,” he growled into his boy’s damp hair. “He’ll never hurt you or anyone else ever again.”

Harry smiled into Draco’s chest. “Then you didn’t fail. I’m here. I’m safe. With you.”

Draco squeezed his eyes shut for a minute, eyes burning with tears. He didn’t deserve Harry’s unconditional love or forgiveness. He really didn’t.

*Thank you, Harry,* he said, words resonating with soul-deep gratitude.

“I love you, Draco,” Harry answered, wrapping his arms around the blond’s waist.

Draco was amazing! He never let anything stop him from doing what needed to be done, but Harry didn’t want him to be alone anymore. Draco had always taken care of him and he always would, but Harry wanted to be there at his side. He didn’t want Draco to bear the consequences alone. It wasn’t fair! It was for both of them and they should face it together! The vision in the mirror came back to him. Of belonging completely to Draco, but also standing strong and powerful at his side. A power to be feared. He didn’t know how to ask for what he wanted. He didn’t have the words, but he had to try!

Lifting his face from Draco’s hoodie, he looked up into the blond’s eyes. “Help me get stronger, Draco. I want to be strong for you,” he pleaded, eyes burning with desperate desire. “I want to help you, Draco. Please? I want to be useful!” Suddenly he realized that he was crying. Because wasn’t he asking for the impossible? Wasn’t he putting another burden on Draco’s shoulders?

“Shhh,” Draco soothed as the bond grew tumultuous. He pulled Harry in, cradling him against his shoulder and rocking slightly. “I’ve got you. It’s going to be okay, Harry. I hear you. I know what you want. We’ll make it happen together, okay? I promise. You’re going to be a force to be reckoned with. My right-hand. You’ll be glorious, Harry. I swear it,” he vowed fiercely.

Harry went limp, giving himself over to Draco. He felt his heartbeat calm, his tears dry. If Draco promised, then it would be true. Harry had no idea how it would be possible, but he had perfect faith in Draco. “Yes,” he breathed reverently. “I’m yours.”
Draco sucked in a delighted breath and bent his head to bite at the black collar around Harry’s throat. His teeth pinched the skin underneath, likely causing it to bruise. *Yes… Mine…* His words rumbled through Harry’s mind like thunder.

“Yes…” Harry repeated - *joy submission peace.* “Forever.”

**Chapter end.**

Please let me know your thoughts! I truly value your insight and opinions. I want this story to be the best it can be.
A/N: I want to thank ALL OF YOU for all the very well expressed feedback. I am still mulling it over and going back and forth to be honest. There were SO MANY good points. :D I have a few chapters to make a final decision. I think I’m pretty set on them not returning for the rest of 1st year at least. Dumbledore has that much time to decide (and me lol).

THANK YOU TO MY FABULOUS READERS!!!

Deeply unhappy, Remus stared anxiously across the street at the unassuming stone building in front of him. Cars drove past. People walked quickly along the sidewalk, bundled in their scarves and jackets. At the end of the street was a local grocery. He could just see the spire of a church a block over to the right. The park behind him had a little pond and a fairly wide stretch of lawn. There was slush gathered here and there in the areas that didn’t get much sun. Bare oak trees were scattered about. In spring and summer, they would likely provide lovely shade.

Amidst all this normalcy sat a club that Draco had told him to find. Remus had no idea why Draco thought seeing this type of lifestyle up close would make him more accepting instead of less, but he owed Draco at least this much trust. The day was overcast and the wind was biting. It was cold, but Remus hardly felt it. He had been sitting there for hours, lost in thought.

Laila had warned him about his habit of avoidance and escapism. It was his prime coping technique and it was decidedly unhealthy because it never settled anything. He had a swamp of issues and feelings that only kept growing deep in his subconscious. Laila had taught him the signs to look out for if he began to avoid dealing with difficult things again, but even still he hadn’t noticed he was doing it again. Because he had wanted it to. Because it was so far outside his comfort zone and bore such a heavy consequence.

He was a werewolf. He had inhuman thoughts and urges tugging at him all the time. The closer to the full moon, the worse it was. He would be hated and feared by society if they knew, but he hadn’t hated himself enough to turn himself in to be euthanized or hospitalized for the rest of his miserable life. And he couldn’t reconcile knowing that he was an evil thing dressed as a man and yet he was not being willing to do the “right” thing and sacrifice his life. What kind of person did that make him? So he avoided thinking about it. Just shoved it away and focused on keeping everything locked down and hidden so no one could figure it out and force him to choose.

He ran when the war had grown more intense. He’d been afraid the violence would break down the walls he’d built, terrified he’d be exposed for what he was. His friends… They’d understood. They’d forgiven him for running. But he never stopped. He heard of their deaths and just kept running. Running from the knowledge that his beloved friends, his pack, had fallen apart, and the certain knowledge that it wouldn’t have happened had he been there to protect what was HIS!

But that was the mad howling of the wolf. So he’d shoved everything down even further. Pushed and shoved and locked it all away. He hadn’t even realized ten years had passed. It was a blur of full moons and sleepwalking through life, drifting rootless and alone. Then Dumbledore had come to him. Told him about Harry - the one remaining piece that connected Remus to the only time he’d been happy. Dumbledore had shown him the memories they had secured. To prepare him for what to expect when he found Harry. Remus had seen a small, defenseless child, brutally starved and subservient and helpless… and for the first time in Remus’s life, he truly cared about something more than his curse and hiding it.
He didn’t care what it cost - coming out as a monster, even his pathetic life - Nothing mattered as much as getting that child back and making sure he was safe. For the first time in over ten years, Remus felt clear-headed and fully present in his own life. He would stop at nothing to get to Harry. That had been the turning point. That was the point at which something changed in him and he began to break free of his self-imposed prison.

As well-read as he was, as much as he knew about other countries, and histories, and cultures of the world, he never allowed himself to acknowledge that the way other cultures saw his condition was different from Europe. Finding Shamanism and being embraced by a cultural acceptance for lycanthropy while he was in America was like being blind all his life and thinking it was normal to being able to see for the first time. The mere possibility of forgiveness and control gave him a newfound strength. He’d been on a mission to find Harry, but in the end he’d found himself.

And that was just the start. With Harry had come Draco. Draco’s mind was almost as alien to a normal human’s as a werewolf’s because Draco’s mindset clashed terribly with conventional norms. He clashed with all the ideas of what a child was and should be. Especially the place of a child in relation to an adult. Draco defied all of it. Remus had thought he had come to terms with who Draco was, with what Draco was to him, but Draco was right. He hadn’t faced it fully.

The truth was Draco was extremely intuitive when dealing with others and he made decisions rationally and pragmatically. Unlike Dumbledore, he was never mysterious or self-serving in his decisions. Sometimes he could be ruthless and cruel, but unlike Sirius - it was never without a practical reason. Remus would have no reservations in trusting himself to the leadership of such a man, but Draco wasn’t a man yet. Remus’s mind still had trouble accepting the idea of a grown man of thirty-two submitting to the leadership of an eleven-year-old.

But hadn’t he already done just that? Draco had always made the final decisions when it came to him and Harry. The fact that those decisions lined up with what Remus thought they should do made swallowing that truth easier, but if he were honest, Remus had always known that should Draco ever disagree on the direction they were taking, Remus would be unable to change Draco’s mind or force Draco to follow his directions.

Was obedience from a child like Draco really so necessary? Draco was as reasonable as any adult. If he felt another option was better after hearing everything Remus had to say, then it was likely that Remus would be the one convinced to change his mind and support the new direction. It had happened regarding the Vivificantis serum, had it not? And Draco hadn’t even been present for that! His decisions had been spoken through Harry and still Remus had come to agree with and accept it. So why was he resisting? Draco had clearly been acting as Alpha all this time and Remus had no complaint. Draco was a great leader regardless of his age. He could be trusted to maintain the role with responsibility and respect.

Remus growled in frustration and ruffled his hair. He was running away again. He knew what was holding him back; he just didn’t want to admit it. If it was just a matter of accepting Draco’s leadership, he would have already accepted that and moved on, but it was Draco’s relationship with Harry that still gave Remus pause. Accepting Draco as his Alpha meant accepting the boys’ relationship, which he’d done his best not to acknowledge up to this point. He hadn’t accepted Draco’s sexuality deep down where it mattered. That coupled with Remus’s resistance to fully accept and forgive the monster inside him and Remus had gone back to old habits. He’d avoided and shoved down and passively allowed events to unfold.

But as the years went on and Remus slowly built trust and acceptance with the creature inside him, as the monster became a wolf, his instincts toward Draco grew stronger. He’d let himself get carried away by them without fully acknowledging how it would change his relationship with both boys. He
needed to stop running from this. He needed to look it square in the face and either accept it or leave, just as Draco had said. But the mere thought of leaving the boys for good sent pain spearing through his center strong enough to constrict his chest and prevent him from drawing a full breath.

Remus knew for a fact that Draco had healed something in Harry. That Harry had been so far damaged that he likely wouldn’t have survived or would have even become an Obscurus if it hadn’t been for Draco. Remus had witnessed with his own eyes again and again how genuinely happy Harry was with Draco. Still, the fact that they were sexual at so young an age was disturbing. Add in the fact that it was a bit more extreme than just sex… Remus could hardly even think of it, let alone accept it…

Night had fallen while Remus had sat in thought. The pedestrians and cars had become fewer. Now cars were coming and parking along the street. People in trench coats rushed from the warmth of their vehicles to the club’s door. Remus could just make out the soft thump of music every time it opened. He had to admit the soundproofing was good. There wasn’t a sign advertising the club, just two words drawn in black cursive on the door: The Garden.

Remus pushed it open and was hit in the face by loud music. It was music he had never heard before. Repetitive and provocative with a lot of bass. There was a small entrance hall with curtains blocking off the rest of the club. Two bouncers were waiting for him there. They were both topless and wore leather pants with steel-toed boots. One had a bunch of silver pierced through his skin, chest and face. The other man was even more disturbing. He had on a black latex mask that covered his entire face except for his mouth and eye holes. Remus cringed inside.

“Ten pounds,” the non-masked bouncer announced. “You can put your coat in the closet.”

Remus would rather not, but it was warm inside and he bet it was even warmer past the curtains. He could hear cheering now. Numbly he put the money in the man’s hand. The coat closet was over-full so he just stuffed it in at the bottom. The bouncers both gave him curious looks for the plain black slacks and grey t-shirt he wore. He’d done research and knew that the dress code was extravagant, skimpy, and bizarre, but he just couldn’t bring himself to even attempt anything so outrageous. Dressing in black and dark grey was the best he could do.

The red curtains parted and Remus was plunged into overstimulation. The room was dark with flashing lights and lasers. Hanging from the ceiling, there were men and women on hoops and ropes, practically naked with leather straps and harnesses decorating their bodies that covered nothing. They wore bold, bright make-up and twisted and turned in the air.

Floodlights highlighted a half-dozen small stages scattered about the room. Some men and women were giving strip shows, others were being spanked or whipped. On one stage, a man was drawing something on a girl’s skin with a tattoo gun.

In the far back was a DJ in front of a table with odd contraptions all around him. The space in front was an open dance floor where people jumped up and down and gyrated. The room was full, but it wasn’t packed. He could clearly see the costumes that were being worn.

People were covered in feathers and leather and latex. Some were more covered, others were more naked. There were a lot of exposed breasts and asses. There were a lot of couples, Remus noted, mostly men with women, but there were a good number of gay couples. A woman came in behind him and Remus quickly scurried out of the way, heading toward the bar, the one place that seemed the most familiar.

The bar was enormously along the right side of the massive room with four bartenders. People were gathered there, shouting drink orders over the electric music. Remus took the stool on the very end,
closest to the red curtains and escape. As sipped on his white Russian, he braced himself to observe the crowd once more.

It was all so shocking! What these people were *wearing* was almost more than he could overcome, but as an hour passed, he began to notice all the laughter. The atmosphere was exotic and sensual, but there was a lot more playfulness than he expected. People were getting drunk and silly. There was as much dancing and watching the acrobatic shows as there were punishment scenes. And even Remus could admire the athleticism and artistry of those aerial hoop shows.

Remus turned bright red when he noticed in a shadowed booth in the corner near him there was a couple having sex. The man was on his back on the wide booth seat. He had on leather chaps that left him completely exposed and nothing else. The woman had on high-heels, stockings, and a black corset, but between her legs was bare to the world.

Remus felt mortified for them, but he realized there were no crude comments or jeers as they were discovered. People watched in appreciation before moving on. A few made out while watching, but the couple wasn’t disturbed or made to feel disgusting. The woman was clearly in control of the scene as she rode the man. She was beautiful and unashamed. The man looked like he was in heaven.

Remus had no idea what in the hell to think. He was buzzed by this point, but not so much so that the frown had left his face. A gentle hand touched his arm and he nearly jumped off his stool. He turned to see an Oriental woman smiling gently at him. She wasn’t dressed as outrageously as some of the others, but she would still draw looks on the street.

She wore a black, skintight skirt that fell to mid thigh and a red corset that hung low enough to expose most of her breasts but kept her nipples covered. She had exotic and fading tattoos in a rainbow of colors down her left arm. Her hair was ruler straight and had a sheen to it. It fell past her shoulders. Her straight bangs fell just above her eyes, covering her forehead completely. She was not young but not old. It was hard to judge her age, but her dark, slanted eyes spoke of knowledge somehow.

“What’s a fine man like you doing here?” she asked just loudly enough to be heard over the pounding bass.

Remus blushed a dark red and spluttered something inarticulate.

She gave him an understanding smile and took him gently but firmly by the wrist. She led him back to the red curtains. Remus figured he was being kicked out, but then she turned and they slipped down a shadowed hallway. She took out a key from somewhere and unlocked a door. Light flooded out into the hallway and Remus had to squint a bit as he stepped into a perfectly normal kitchenette.

There were light blue counters with white tile countertops. A microwave sat in the corner next to a fridge. A darker blue couch with white pillows was placed against one wall. The woman guided him to the round wooden table that sat in center of the room. It had four chairs placed around it. She pulled out a seat for him before moving gracefully to the fridge.

“We can speak more easily in here,” she explained. She took out chilled bottles of water and returned to sit next to him.

It was then that Remus realized the music had been greatly muffled. He was again impressed with the soundproofing of the building. He accepted the water, keeping his eyes down as he drank some. He waited for her to say something, but she just sat quietly.
“I’m not sure about the lifestyle, but I’m thinking about becoming a sub,” he suddenly spoke into the silence, quoting Draco almost verbatim. “Can you explain it to me?” He looked up to see the woman tilting her head slightly as if curious. When she saw him looking, her mouth curved into a smile.

“Yes, of course.” She leaned back in her chair and crossed her legs. It made the skirt ride up a bit and Remus blushed and quickly averted his eyes. “First, having a dom/sub relationship as a lifestyle is not the same thing as the party out there.”

Surprised, he met her eyes. “It’s not?”

She shook her head. “No. Today’s society is very rigid and people’s desires are suppressed. This is a place where people can let their inhibitions fall and be free to express all the feelings and desires that they have to repress in their day-to-day lives. A lot of these people go home to normal lives by society’s standards. It’s very different from truly living the lifestyle.”

“You mean, they have to be like that everyday to be considered in the lifestyle?” Remus asked, his expression twisted with distaste.

“Not at all.” The woman leaned forward slightly, resting her arm on the table. “In fact, I know many couples who are in the lifestyle who would never come to one of these parties. These parties are all about exhibition and voyeurism. It’s a thrill and there is a beauty to it, but everyone is unique. Such shows do not appeal to all.”

Remus considered that. It was true that he couldn’t actually see Draco at a party like this one or happy about showing Harry off, either. His frown deepened by realizing just how much he didn’t understand. “Then why did he send me here?”

Her smile sharpened, her dark red lips parting to show perfect white teeth. Humor danced in her eyes. “That is the question. Maybe to shock you. To test you,” she reasoned. “But it might also be because we are a very private group. This is one of the only places to make contact with someone who could answer your questions.”

Remus’s brow furrowed. Was Draco testing him?

“In any case, it was a risky order,” she said slowly, her smile gone. “There are many people who practice and the spectrum is very large. Not everyone has strict ethics as I do. I will not lie and say there isn’t a dark side to those who are attracted to this lifestyle. Someone with less discipline or integrity can perpetrate or become victim to true slavery and abuse.”

Remus cringed and took a deep swig of his water.

She sighed and leaned back, her arm sliding off the table. “I can tell you are deeply uncomfortable with this subject. May I ask why you are even considering it?”

Remus rolled the water bottle between his hands and thought about her request. He’d come here for answers, but could he really explain the situation in a way she could understand?

Long minutes passed and she didn’t once grow impatient or try to hurry him. That made up his mind. He looked up and met her eyes once more. “Do you mind if I ask you a question first? If you’d rather not, I understand that you have no real obligation to help me.”

She smiled her gentle smile. “Ask.”

“Why would someone want to become completely submissive to another person? Why would they want the person they loved to hurt them?” he asked a bit more heatedly than he’d meant to, his
thoughts on Harry.

Harry was probably his biggest hangup. Harry was so sweet. Why would he want anything like what was out there in that club? Why wasn’t being in love and having sex enough? Why was there a BDSM edge to it? Draco lived for Harry. Remus was clear on that. So Harry must in someway be asking for that kind of dominance for Draco to respond in kind. And why would Draco accept it instead of steering Harry away from it? Unless there was a part of Draco that enjoyed it, too? Remus was only making himself more confused. Thankfully, the woman’s voice drew him from his thoughts.

“People submit for many reasons,” she said, calm and completely at ease with the conversation. “But it sounds to me like you are describing a true psychological need.” The woman leaned forward again, bracing her forearms on the table, her hands clasped. “In that case, the reason is simple. Security and reassurance. Think of someone with a broken back. They cannot move or walk on their own. It truly feels that way to some. Fear and anxiety can be just as crippling. A dom’s authority can break a sub free from that and grant a sub true peace. Better yet, through service the submissive can give back to the dom, which will boost self-confidence and self-esteem.”

Remus stared at her, surprised by the educated answer.

She smiled, amused, and reached over and let her fingertips rest on the back of his hand. “Every human soul suffers damage as we move through life. We seek companionship in part to soothe those damaged bits. A healthy dom/sub relationship does exactly that. It allows the dom the control he or she needs to feel safe enough to open their hearts, and it allows the sub security and focus.”

“So it’s not about sex?” he asked, bewildered.

She shrugged her bare shoulders, bringing attention to the wide expanse of pale skin across her chest on display. “It is and it isn’t. There are some who practice without sex and there are some where sex is the core of their relationship.” Her smile this time was full of carnal knowledge. “We are sensual beings. Sexuality has been long repressed and seen as depraved, but sex is born from the most primal aspect of our being. Our need to connect with one another and feel decadent pleasure. When we deny an entire aspect of our humanity, we get things like the party out there. As shocking as it seems, it’s basically a harmless and much needed release of too much repression and tension.”

“How…” he echoed dubiously.

She actually laughed. “The club is surprisingly safe. We have staff blending in to make sure people don’t get carried away in the heat of the moment and that the house rules are being followed. In my old place of business, we didn’t allow alcohol and play to mix. To prevent accident or overindulgence. But we have fewer incidences than you would think. No more than any other more socially acceptable club or bar. There are depraved people in the world no matter where you go, but here we have people in place to make sure no one is being truly harmed. In that way, you are safer here than any conservative club you would call normal.”

Remus nodded his head to show he understood. She did make good points. Taking a deep breath, he decided he couldn’t let this opportunity slip by. He wasn’t sure why she was taking the time out to speak to him, but he was sincerely grateful.

He dropped his eyes to the water bottle clasped between his hands. It crinkled loudly under the pressure of his grip. “If you would spare me a few more minutes, I’d like your thoughts on my situation.”

“I am very curious,” she admitted.
“There’s this… person…” Remus couldn’t tell her Draco was a child. She would rightfully be
doubtful of his claims of not being sexually attracted to the boy and likely call the police. “I’ve… I
guess I’ve always been looking… for someone to follow…” Remus shrugged his shoulders
uncomfortably. “I haven’t always been truthful about what I want or need. I’ve… suppressed it, I
guess. Like you said.”

“Something changed?” she prompted when he fell awkwardly silent, dark eye soulful and
compassionate.

Remus looked at her, almost pleading. “I just… It’s so hard to explain…”

She grabbed his hand again, this time more firmly. “Don’t worry about me understanding what you
are trying to say. Just say it in words that make sense to you.”

Remus nodded shakily and gripped her hand back, surprisingly grateful for the support. He closed
his eyes and just thought about what he wanted to say. “I met this person and he… He has this aura.
He’s so confident and decisive. I’ve seen others around him get resentful about that, but if anyone
wanted to voice an opinion on the decisions, he always listens.” Remus smiled against the darkness
of his closed eyes. “That’s not to say he’ll go with what you want, but he always listens. Truly
listens. He’s a great leader. People follow him naturally. He’s very insightful, and he’s good at taking
care of people. Everything in me screams to follow his lead, to support him and help make his goals
into a reality, but… It’s so hard. There’s an age difference and he’s male…”

Remus flashed his eyes open to look at the woman, needing her to understand. “I don’t want to sleep
with this guy. At all. I am completely straight.” A traitorous memory of waking up after Beltane
inside of another man’s body flashed before his eyes and he scowled. “So I’m a little disturbed by the
sexual dominance/submissive aspect of his relationship with this other boy. I guess I don’t understand
why such… extremes… are necessary.”

Dark eyes looked at him compassionately from under pitch-black bangs. “I don’t think you are going
to like what I have to say, but I am going to say it anyway.” She took her hand away, giving him
space. “You are very lucky this dom is so understanding. You clearly need the relationship more
than he does, and you’re questioning a pre-established relationship of higher intimacy. Most doms
would not stand for that because it might unbalance or upset their sub. The fact that you are not
asking for a sexual relationship is probably the only reason this dom is considering accepting you,
but even without sex, such a relationship is by its nature intimate. He and his sub must feel extremely
confident of their bond to allow a third party to intrude. Successful polyamorous relationships are
rare for a reason.”

Remus swallowed hard. He was such a selfish bastard. He never once thought what Draco being his
Alpha would do to Harry. He just figured since sex wasn’t involved it wouldn’t affect him. But that
was so stupid on his part. He knew that anything to do with Draco would affect Harry, especially
something like this were Draco would have to make a big commitment.

“I think on one hand this dom and his submissive are not your concern. It doesn’t sound like they
would perform in front of you or anything. It is the dom’s place to take care of the details. It is the
sub’s place to take care of the dom. He will know if and when things are out of balance or needs
adjustments. At least, if he is a good dom. If you see things that concern you, always talk to him
about it, but then you must accept that he will take care of it and let it go. If not, you are not truly
accepting his authority. There will be no true trust between you. On the other hand, if you are that
disturbed by their sexual relationship, that will definitely affect this other sub. Subs are extremely
sensitive to judgement. It will poison, not only your relationship with the dom, but the relationship
between the dom and his sub, so I definitely don’t recommend you attempting this relationship if you
are not able to accept that they are together and practice this lifestyle.”

Remus wilted. She was right. She was right about all of it. It did boil down to trust and the fact that, as much as he professed to trust Draco and Harry, he clearly didn’t. Not implicitly anyway.

She took his hand once more. “I think you are trying too hard. Understanding may be impossible, but acceptance is not. They are two different things. The sexual aspect is clearly not attractive to you, so it is not something you can truly understand. Instead accept that you will not understand, but that it exists. No true harm is being done to this sub or you would have reacted completely differently. That’s all you really need to understand, yes?” Her dark eyes stared into him, making him feel small but at the same time at ease.

“Yes… That’s true… I’ve thought much the same for a long while now, but actually admitting I want a deeper relationship with the… dom… made me confront it again, if you know what I mean?”

She smiled softly. “I do. It sounds complicated, but…”

She was cut off by the door opening behind him. Music flooded the relative quiet of the room. The woman was sitting with her back to the fridge so she was able to simply turn her head to see the man who had entered. Remus had to turn halfway around.

Remus’s eyes widened, recognizing the man instantly. He stood so abruptly that the table rattled and slid a few inches across the floor. The man’s face was one he would never forget. Not after watching the gut-wrenching goodbye in the hospital room.

Black wavy hair pulled back into a low ponytail - angular features - thick brows over glaring blue eyes - thin frame and of average height. The man wore faded blue jeans, combat boots that were only half-laced, and a black leather jacket over a skin-tight black t-shirt. Smiling wide enough to split his face, the man moved forward in a long, graceful stride and grabbed Remus by the shoulders.

“Fuck! I was startin’ ta think we’d never find you,” he said brightly, his New York accent as thick as ever. “How are Draco and Harry?”

The woman got up and shut the door behind the man, plunging the room into relative quiet. She came to stand a little behind the man as calm as ever. Remus stared at her and realized he recognized her, too. In his defense, he’d been more than half out of his mind from literally being tortured when he met her. She was the woman who had saved him from the Scourers! He felt surprisingly betrayed. She had set him up! She must have recognized him immediately and called this man… Wait…

“I thought they wiped your memory?” Remus frowned at the man still holding his shoulders. “Both of yours.”

“They did.” The woman shrugged. “I don’t remember you or seeing the boys in that basement, but Liam gave Drey and I a description of you. Anyone who came close, we got alone and waited for Liam to come confirm the man’s identity.”

Liam stepped back and ran a shaking hand over his hair. “That chick at the hospital. She felt bad, I guess,” he explained, talking fast in his excitement. “She pretended to wipe my memory. Told me to get out of America. Said she’d erase my memory for real next time she saw me. Said I deserved a chance seeing how I came to rescue Draco an’ Harry an’ all. ‘Sides, in Europe they ain’t so strict about non-magical people like me, so she figured it was England’s problem not America’s since I wanted to go after the boys anyway.”

Remus couldn’t help chuckling in disbelief. He remembered Betty. Such a risky and highly illegal action sounded just like her.
“How are they?” Liam demanded again, staring Remus down. The desperation and sincerity of that question was hard to miss.

Remus considered his options. It was illegal to tell a Muggle about the Wizarding world if that Muggle wasn’t related to a magical child, but in this case Liam was a type of family and he’d come all this way on the mere chance of seeing Draco and Harry again. That kind of devotion was hard to refuse. “I want to explain something first.” He took a deep breath, meeting their eyes solemnly. “Harry is a target of a very dangerous wizard. A magical war is coming, and Draco is doing all he can to make sure they are on the winning side. I tell you this because without magic you will be a very tempting target to use against the boys. Knowing this, do you want to risk getting involved in their lives?”

Liam opened his mouth, a frown darkening his features, but Jess cut him off, placing a hand on his arm. “We would rather not die or be used to trap or hurt the boys,” she said reasonably. “Is there a way to limit the risk and still be a part of their lives? And can you afford to make the decision alone?”

Remus flushed a dark red, realizing that she now knew the dom he’d been talking about was Draco.

Jess kept her gaze even with his. “I think we should discuss this with Draco before making a decision. If it is decided that we should stay away until after the war, then that’s what we will do. But I want you to consider that Draco will eventually need guidance from a more mature dom. As the boys hit puberty, things will get more chemical and intense.”

Remus swallowed hard, terrified by the pronouncement.

Jess hoped he was listening. “A dom/sub relationship is an intense one. No matter how true and good the couple, it needs tending and maintenance to avoid it becoming negative or stagnant. Draco has incredible instinct, but there a lot of damage can happen in such a relationship by the trial and error method. I say all this to let you know that if we need to keep our distance, you will have to find another mentor for them. Personally, I believe we were reunited for a reason. We are meant to be in their lives.”

Liam waved his hand in an abrupt gesture, as if pushing that issue to the side. “How are they?” he asked again, this time quietly although no less intense.

Remus sighed. “They are doing well, but they are having a difficult time adjusting to the school.”

Liam shared a knowing glance with Jess before turning his full attention back to Remus. “Like how?”

Remus didn’t know if he should tell them more. Would it pull them in? Would it make it harder to say goodbye if they were deemed too much of a risk? Or would knowing more give them some peace, enough to wait for the war to be over, however many years that would take? “It would be better for Draco to tell you himself,” he finally decided. “As I wasn’t actually with them at Hogwarts.”

Instead of getting angry at the denial, a large smile spread across Liam’s face at the implication of being allowed to see Draco again. A smaller, but no less sincere, smile softened Jess’s face.

Reassured that he’d made the right decision, Remus smiled back, tension bleeding from his frame. “Thank you for your help earlier,” he told Jess, giving her a short bow, cheeks blushing red. Then doing his best not calm down, he looked back to Liam. “Where should I bring Draco to meet you?”
“Our apartment.” Liam tossed his head toward the door, still grinning like mad. “I’ll take you now so you know where it is.”

Remus nodded and followed him out the door. Music crashed over him like a wave as soon as the door opened, but he barely spared the party raging inside a second glance. He felt almost dazed. Between the drinks, the outrageous club, his conversation with Jess, and meeting Liam again, Remus almost felt like he was dreaming. Draco and Harry’s adoptive family from New York were living in London! He couldn’t even believe it. Remus had only met Jess once when she pulled him down off that godforsaken cross. He hadn’t even really met Liam. He’d merely stood in the doorway watching helplessly while the boys were forced to say goodbye. But Liam had spoken to him, just before Remus had turned away, and he wasn’t ever going to forget that moment…

… The young muggle, no older than nineteen, had been spelled unconscious on a hospital bed in a private room as far away from the magical patients as possible. Draco hesitated when he saw the man lying so still and pale, but then Liam opened his eyes, clearly feeling groggy and Draco relaxed. He pulled Harry fully into the room just as Liam sat up-right and swung his legs over the side of the bed, swaying woozily.

“Take it slow,” Draco advised.

Liam’s head turned quickly toward the sound of Draco’s vice and he grinned, tears filling his eyes as he saw Draco whole and well standing a few feet from him. Harry was right behind the blond, slightly to the side. He had a hand hooked in Draco’s white cotton shirt. He wore an identical shirt, and they had on identical white pajama bottoms. It was what all the patients at the hospital wore. Remus felt his hands clench into fists, his breathing becoming rough as he fought back memories of their torture and capture by fanatical, magic-hating muggles. They were almost dead when the boys’ adoptive brother had saved them all.

“Draco. Harry.” Liam reached for them, clearly feeling too unsteady to stand. Draco took his hand and stepped closer so that Liam could pull both boys into a hug. “Thank god you’re okay.”

“Thanks to you,” Draco answered, voice uncharacteristically soft against Liam’s chest. “How’d you find us?”

Liam pushed the boys back just enough so that he could see their faces. Harry was unusually silent. Remus winced and couldn’t imagine how Liam must feel. Harry may look well, but he wasn’t, and neither was Draco. Not after what those bastards had done to them.

“I tore through the underworld ’til I found someone who knew something. Busted up a few people doing it. Might be a good idea for us to get out of town,” Liam confessed with a lopsided smile.

Instead of looking relieved, Draco looked infinitely pained. “Look.”

That one word and Remus saw Liam’s expression harden and shut down. Like he knew what Draco was going to say.

“Liam.” Draco straightened his back and looked him in the eye. “I don’t think we can stick with ya. Those Scourers, they’re not gonna stop ’til we’re dead this time. We’ve got to stay with magic people and learn how ta protect ourselves. We need ta learn how ta control this power we have. And you ain’t got magic. It’s illegal for us to be with you cause you don’t got it an’ we do, so we can’t go with ya.”

Liam stared into Draco’s serious little face and said, “No.” Grey eyes widened and, with a grin, Liam said it again. “No. Hard rule. We stay together. I don’t give a shit about those psychos. Don’t care
about some stupid law. Hell if I'm going to let that happen! We stick together, Draco. We're family.”

“Look…” Draco tried again, frustrated.

“No,” Liam said simply, forcing a bored expression.

“Liam…”

“No.”

Fire ignited in Draco's suddenly silver eyes. “Shut the fuck up and listen! It's not like we want you to go, but what the fuck are we goin’ ta’ do? They got magic, Liam. They're gonna make ya think you're happy we're gone. I can't stop that. You definitely can't stop it. And you may not care about the danger, but that just means you're a stupid, selfish fuck!” Draco was panting by this point, fists clenched, cheeks red. “I sure as hell fuckin' care!” he yelled angrily. “Care what it'll do to us if we have'ta watch you die like we did Brendon! Care that sticking together might end up getting us all killed!”

Liam reached forward and hugged Draco tightly to his chest. Harry pressed up against Draco's back, up against Liam's arms. Remus could see that Harry was trembling. He bit his lip, wondering if he should intervene, but then he saw the grief and acceptance in Liam’s eyes and realized he didn’t have to.

“Shit. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Draco. You're right.” Liam visibly braced himself and whispered into Draco’s ear, Remus hearing only because of the nearing Full Moon. “Fuck, I love you guys. So damn much.”

Remus felt tears prickle in his eyes as Harry began to sob, loud and heartbreaking like only a child could.

Liam pushed Draco gently away and ruffled Harry's hair. “Hey, none of that. I'm sure you guys are going to go on awesome adventures and do kickass magic, right? I'm going to be alright, Harry. Really. You guys helped me out a lot. We're always going to be family, even if we don't see each other again. Family, real family, they stay in here with us always.” Liam placed his hand flat against Harry's chest over his heart. He offered him his best smile.

Draco grabbed Liam’s other hand and pressed it flat over his own chest, mirroring Harry. Remus could tell by the slight shift in Liam’s expression that the man could feel the flesh there was just slightly raised and uneven with scar tissue. Simultaneously the boys lifted a hand (Draco's left, Harry's right) and pressed them flat on Liam's chest.

“You saved us,” Draco told him solemnly. It was said with a wealth of meaning, telling Liam that Draco would never forget.

Liam's lips trembled.

“I love you, Liam,” Harry said with a simple honesty that was just so him. Honest, pure, open; he was the most generous and loving person Remus had ever met.

Tears slipped down the man’s cheeks, but Liam forced his smile to hold. He pushed on their chests hard enough to make them back-step. Remus knew they had to go. Now. Or Liam wasn't going to have the strength to follow through. He'd grab hold of them and make the Aurors separate them by force. The boys didn’t need any more trauma.

“See ya around, kiddos,” Liam said as lightly as he could. “Maybe we'll run into each other again in
a few years and you can fill me in on all of your adventures.”

Crying, Harry curled into Draco's side, pressing his face against the blond's shoulder. He looked so small in Draco's arms.

Draco mirrored Liam's fake smile and gave a wave. “Bye, Liam. Thank you.”

“Bye,” Liam whispered back and watched the boys walk out of the room, Draco's arm firmly around Harry. That was when Liam had locked onto Remus. Voice with both rage and grief, spat an order, fierce and bitter, “You better fucking keep them safe! You hear me? Keep them safe!”

Remus had met Liam’s eyes solemnly before giving a nod. Then he left, leaving the man to scream and rage before spells pulled him down into unconsciousness…

Chapter end.

A/N: So this chapter brings back some OC’s from Freedom Found In Chains. If you haven’t read that, I promise to make these characters as distinct and real for you as they already are to those who read FFIC. All of you who missed Liam, Jess, and Drey…. Can I get a HALLELUJAH?! LOL! Surprise!!! XD
A/N: Thank you guys for all the feedback and support!!! I have a ton of good ideas thanks to everyone!

I had a few people ask about my updating schedule. I usually update every week or every other week, but as the story is in a critical stage where I have to make decisions on the future of the work, updates will be a little slower.

Expect monthly updates.

If I can get chapters done faster than that, then I will post them, of course, but I’m going to take some time to make sure the story is true to itself and also that it is moving forward the way I envisioned when I started the project. As the boys get older and more characters are introduced to the story, I am finding the story line splitting attention away from Draco, Harry, and their relationship. I need to think about how I’m going to balance the plot with the character study this was meant to be.

Again, thank you SO MUCH for sticking with me and continuing the series! I hope to get back to weekly updates soon!

Hide and Seek

Remus crunched through snow almost calf-deep in places. The sleepy little village was quiet, not even birds sang in the cold morning air, and yet… It was still beautiful. The shops hadn’t opened their doors. The windows remained dark. Many wouldn’t, as it was December 30th, New Year’s Eve eve. The sun had begun to crest the mountain ridge at his back, edgeing the air with gold. Clear and pristine, the sunlight was pure in a way it rarely was. For a moment, he could exist in the sunlight and think of nothing else.

The smell of baking bread was just beginning to fill the street as he passed the last house along the road and started up the path to the school. His thighs ached terribly, the pain becoming hard to ignore, burning hot and fierce. He’d left the hospital too soon, driven forward by Draco’s ultimatum and the realization that he’d been running from reality again.

Liam’s apartment had been only a few blocks from the club, but getting back to the Leaky Cauldron had been a much longer walk. Remus should have found a shadowed alley and Apparated, but he hadn’t even thought of it. His mind was still trying to grasp everything he’d seen and learned. He was still reeling from the past colliding with the present. He was anxious. He didn’t know what it meant for the boys or their future. He didn’t know what it meant for him, selfish as that was.

Remus had become nowhere near as influential or significant in the boys’ lives as Liam had been. Remus had hovered on the edges of their world, let the Malfoys and the Tonkses take over. He had no right now to worry about being pushed out. But he was. He loved those boys more than he’d ever allowed himself to admit. He cared about their wellbeing and future. He wanted to be there for them. It wasn’t until Draco had threatened exile and Liam had burst through that door that Remus had realized just how much.

Regret stung him bitterly that he’d wasted so much time fading into the background! If Draco and Harry were cut out of his life, it would be left so damn empty and barren. They were his family. He knew that now. He’d only been hurting himself and them by keeping his distance.

Like Jess had said, he didn’t by any means understand what the boys had together. He didn’t
approve of it. But he loved them. And, the truth was, he couldn’t honestly say he was worried about their safety. Draco was too much in control and too focused on Harry’s wellbeing. And Remus couldn’t honestly say the relationship was damaging them emotionally. He had evidence that suggested that the boys would be even less well-adjusted without the relationship in place. So their relationship wasn’t something he could or should change, not as it was now at least. Understanding and approval weren’t necessary. Acceptance was.

The castle seemed to sparkle as he passed the gates. Sunlight danced on the windows, making them shimmer almost like waves, and Remus felt warmth pass over him. Had it not been so cold, he may not have even noticed. Red stained his cheeks and a smile softened his lips. He was being welcomed home.

Despite the cold air, he was sweating before he even started up the grand staircase toward Gryffindor Tower. He had to stop and take several breaks along the way. He’d gone from limping to out-right staggering, but he told himself he could rest in the tower. He had to see the boys. He had to tell them he was theirs and that Liam was back.

“By Merlin, are you quite all right?” The Fat Lady stared at him in shock as Remus staggered up to the painting, his shoulder hitting the wall hard as he panted and sweated, gritting his teeth.

Remus flapped his hand and took a few minutes to catch his breath. “Yes, I realize now I should not have attempted the stairs, but once I was halfway, I felt I had to push on.” He gave her a wane smile. “Do you know if the boys are up yet, Lady?”

She titled her head, a look of concern on her face. “There is no one in residence at the moment, sir.”

Remus blinked. The day after the battle over the Stone, Remus had been potioned mostly into unconsciousness. When Draco had come to speak to him a day after the battle over the Stone, he seemed well enough and he’d said Harry was awake. They had talked. Had something gone wrong? Had his conditioned worsened? “Draco and Harry are still in the infirmary?” he questioned rather sharply, worried about Harry’s condition.

“I do not know,” she answered, wide-eyed. “Something occurred and everyone has been removed from the tower. Even the Weasley children staying over the holiday have returned home.”

Remus closed his eyes. So while he was agonizing over selfish concerns and his own personal weakness yet another situation had occurred. “Very well.” His eyes opened, a little more golden than they had been. “Thank you for the information.”

“Of course, dear.” Her face softened. “You were always such a good boy.”

Remus gave her a polite smile and made his way slowly back down the stairs. It took him nearly an hour, but he finally made it to the Headmaster’s Tower. He rode the moving staircase up to the Headmaster’s office in silence. Truth was, he exhausted from the pain, but he refused to show it. With a blank - albeit pale - face, he pushed open the office door… only to stand there and gape.

The office was, simply put, trashed. The bookshelves were half empty. Books were flung about, lying open or face down here and there. The curtains had been torn from the window and lay half burnt across the floor. Debris and knickknacks were strewn about. Some looked bent out of shape and damaged. There were claw marks scratched into the walls and across the floor as if some huge beast had attacked. Dumbledore’s desk had been cracked in half. The tall-backed chair behind it was knocked on its side. The two guest armchairs had been reduced to kindling.

Remus’s legs could no longer hold him. He staggered over to the steps that led to the Headmaster’s
apartment and sat heavily, giving a low, pained cry as he did so. His head hung. Sweat dripped down his face and he tried to breathe through the screaming agony. It felt like his thigh bones were about to snap in half once more! Fortunately, after a few minutes of getting off his feet, the hot poker through his legs became a less painful burning ache. That was when Dumbledore arrived, undoubtedly alerted to Remus’s presence in his office by the wards. Remus should have stood or greeted his old wizard, but courtesy left him completely as he just stared. A darkening bruise marred the side of Dumbledore’s forehead along his hairline. He walked with a slight limp and held himself stiffly.

“I am in a bit of disarray,” Dumbledore said softly with none of his usual brightness. “I hope you forgive the mess. Pulling his wand from his robe, he lifted his knocked over chair over the broken desk and set it in a clear area facing Remus. “I assume our young Mr. Malfoy sent you here for his answer?”

Remus blinked, his mind suddenly racing. Something significant had happened. Something between Draco and the Headmaster. And Remus had stumbled into it. He hesitated, trying to decide if silence or admitting ignorance would be more damaging to whatever Draco had in play here. Had Draco destroyed the room? Attacked the Headmaster? Remus’s heart pounded in his chest. If Draco had, then Remus was now in the presence of an enemy.

As Dumbledore looked into Remus’s guarded expression, he felt even older than his one hundred and ten years. Molly’s reaction to the news had been more violent than he had anticipated. Her magic was vengeance-based, a mother’s magic, and not so easily erased or dispelled, so he would have to bear the bruising for a few days before potions could heal him. He was also exhausted. He’d been closeted away with the four Heads of Houses discussing what would be done with the school for nearly eighteen hours now. Remus’s arrival had been surprising, but a welcome distraction.

Leaning tiredly on the arm of his chair, Dumbledore slipped his glasses off his face and sighed. He could feel Remus’s silence like an added weight to his shoulders and he wondered just how much Remus had been told. Did he know the perpetrator had been Peter? Did he know about Sirius’s wrongful and horrific imprisonment? He suspected not. Remus’s closed off expression was hard to read, but Dumbledore suspected Remus would be very easy to read indeed if he knew the names of all involved.

“I must say, I am surprised Mr. Malfoy would require an answer so soon,” he said tiredly into the lengthening silence. “The children haven’t yet returned back to the school.”

“Did Draco…” Remus hesitated, his eyes flickering around the room.

Dumbledore did smile then. “No. He is innocent of this much at least.”

A frown flickered over Remus’s face, not liking the implication that Draco was ‘guilty’ of something else. Perhaps especially because he was. Dumbledore of all people should understand that Draco had been forced to it, in large part due to the Headmaster’s own manipulations!

“No,” Dumbledore repeated and his smile died, replaced by a deep look of sadness as he gazed around at all the destruction. “Mrs. Weasley was justifiably upset and could not control her magic when she heard the news.”

Remus’s eyebrow lifted. Molly Weasley?! What in the hell had happened! It was time to come clean. He bowed his head. “I apologize, Headmaster, for not speaking up sooner. I was taken aback by everything and my legs are causing me a fair bit of pain. I’m exhausted. I did not mean to imply otherwise, but Draco did not send me. In fact, I am in search of him.” Looking up at the Headmaster, he asked softly. “May I ask what has occurred?”
Dumbledore sighed, slumping a bit in his chair. “I must say I am glad I was mistaken for I have no answers to give at the moment.”

Remus was really quite startled at the Headmaster’s condition. He looked incredibly weak and fragile. It felt so wrong to be sitting on the steps like a disrespectful child while the Headmaster clearly had need of assistance. “Can you summon some tea, sir? I would offer to fetch some, but as I said my legs are very unhappy with me at the moment.”

Dumbledore straightened a bit. “No, no. I am fine. I will go up and rest in a moment. I will send for Poppy. She will help you with your legs. I believe Draco is in the care of his father at Malfoy Manor. Feel free to use my floo.” That being said, the Headmaster cast his phoenix patronus and it soared through the office wall. Remus pulled himself to his feet, wincing as it made the pain in his legs flare up unbearably again. Dumbledore gave him an exhausted smile and briefly rested his hand on Remus’s shoulder as he passed him on the stairs. “Do excuse me, my boy.”

Remus watched in shocked silence as Dumbledore entered his apartment and shut the door firmly behind him. Staggering over to the Headmaster’s chair, Remus sat heavily.

When he had been charged with finding Harry, he’d suddenly had children to protect and care for and his hero worship for the Headmaster - faded after ten years of traveling Europe - shattered completely. Dumbledore was a great wizard and even a great man, but he was as flawed as they all were. That didn’t make the Headmaster evil or an enemy, but it made him human. Even still, seeing him like this, it sent a chill down Remus’s spine. He couldn’t imagine what had happened to bring the man so low. Dumbledore being defeated meant terrible things for the rest of them and that was quite frankly terrifying. He had to find the boys!

Poppy arrived just when Remus had convinced himself not to wait for her treatment. He opened his mouth to ask her if she knew what was going on, but after seeing her expression, he closed it without speaking a word.

Poppy’s eyes were red-rimmed and swollen from hard crying. Her face was pale and she looked exhausted. She refused to meet his eyes and went about checking him without any conversation. Once her scans were complete, she handed him two potions from her apron. “It is as I suspected. Take the orange potion now and the purple in an hour,” she told him, still not meeting his eyes.

“Is it okay for me to walk?” he asked carefully.

“It will be painful and will prolong your recovery, but due to your accelerated healing, it shouldn’t cause permanent damage.”

“Thank you,” Remus said softly, but she didn’t seem to want his thanks. She turned and left without another word.

Grimly, Remus swallowed the tangy orange potion. It sizzled on his tongue and down his throat. He pocketed the purple and made his way to the floo. Throwing powder down, the fire flared green and he called the address to Malfoy Manor. A magical wall prevented him from stepping through, but an elf’s head appeared and asked him for his name.

“Remus Lupin,” he said, body tense. He knew the Malfoys disapproved of him. He would likely not be on the welcomed list and would be prevented from coming through. “It is urgent,” he added desperately.

The elf titled its head. “Yous may come through, Mr. Lupin,” the elf declared and disappeared from the flames.
Remus, surprised this had worked, stepped through into the opulent Malfoy receiving room. He was greeted by elegant, antique furniture. Creams and peaches shaded the walls and accents of the room. Beautiful marble and china seemed to hold a shine in the golden morning sun that flooded through the large window. He immediately felt out of place and shuffled his feet painfully on the thick rug covering the golden hardwood floor. Fortunately, he only had a minute to get worked up before Lucius Malfoy strode into the room, distracting him.

Lord Malfoy looked like the aristocrat he was. Hair pulled back at the nape of his neck and secured with a ribbon. Expensive midnight-blue day robes, sleeves rolled up as if he’d been pulled from some task. Malfoy unrolled them in quick, efficient tugs and buttoned the cuffs. His cold grey eyes were filled with disapproval, the corners of his mouth turning down, as he took in Remus’s slightly disheveled Muggle clothes.

“Has Draco sent you, then?” he asked, tone as chilly as the winter winds outside.


Lucius sneered. “What my son sees in you, I will never understand,” he drawled with perfect contempt. Turning his back, he snapped, “Draco and Harry left for Andromeda’s. You know the way out,” and he strode from the room with a swoosh of his robes.

Shaking, Remus turned and grabbed for the floo powder. His legs were burning like fire, but he was even more alarmed than before. Why had Lucius greeted him personally? It was the wife’s place to welcome guests, even unwelcome ones. There had been something ominous in the air around Lucius and shadows under his eyes. What in the hell as going on?! Dumbledore had said the boys went home to the Manor. What had caused them to leave so quickly?

Remus flung the powder down and called out the address to the Tonks’ home in London. Their wards couldn’t compare to the wards around Malfoy Manor, which had been added to and built upon for centuries, but they were some of the strongest wards Remus had seen around anyone’s personal dwelling and required a substantial amount of power from both Ted and Andromeda to maintain. Fortunately, Remus had been keyed into the wards and he could pass through without problem.

Stepping clear of the fireplace, Remus became aware of low, intense voices coming from the kitchen. He heard the low timber of Ted’s voice, but he couldn’t make out what the man was saying. Andromeda’s higher voice, although hushed, was more audible.

“I don’t care, Ted! We’ve been a this for hours! Even if you could, by some miracle, convince me two men together isn’t unnatural, they are too young! It’s not right! I won’t have it!”

Remus opened the kitchen door and found Andromeda standing on one side and Ted standing on the other. Andromeda stood with her feet braced, her cheeks flushed, and tears falling from her eyes. She looked mad. Her hair messily framing her face. Ted, on the other hand, looked as calm as ever, but his eyes held an intense gleam that was very unusual for the usually laid-back man. Both of them looked over as Remus entered. Andromeda gave a huff and turned her back, hiding her face.

“Remus,” Ted rumbled a polite acknowledgement.

Remus’s first instinct was to ignore what he’d overheard. It touched too close to home. A subject he, himself, was still struggling with. But the hot throbbing of his legs, the exhaustion of the constant pain and a sleepless night, made evasion impossible. He gave a sigh of his own and leaned painfully against the door jamb.
“I’m not going to pretend not to know what you’re talking about,” he said quietly, dropping his eyes to study the kitchen tiles. “You aren’t alone in worrying about the boys, Dromeda. However, I’ve come to the conclusion that there is no denying the boys are happier, stronger, and healthier together than they would be apart. Believing anything else is ignorant delusion. As contradictory as it may feel, if it is the truth that you love them and want the best for them, then you will have to accept, even if you can’t agree with, this fact. The only other choice is to wage war with Draco in trying to tear them apart, and don’t fool yourself into thinking Harry wouldn’t fight you just as hard if not harder. Kids or not, they would win and you would lose them forever, at the very least. The only other possible choice is to let them go. Let them be together, but cutting them out of your family and receding their welcome. Those are the only choices before you.”

Andromeda had turned around and stared at Remus in shock. Ted looked just as surprised, but his attention quickly returned to his wife to see how she was taking this. Remus’s eyes held flecks of gold as he looked up and made eye contact with the distressed woman.

“Personally, I find two of those choices unbearable. Therefore, I have decided that I will stand by the boys and accept that though their love for each other is something I can’t understand completely, I love them both regardless and nothing will change that.”

Andromeda slammed her hand down on the counter. All attempts at keeping her voice down, not wanting little Denebola to get more upset than she already was, went out the window. Her hazel eyes glinted with fury. “You make it sound so noble. I am shocked at you, Remus! They are elven years old! Mere children! Clearly the horrific abuse they suffered left more damage than we realized if they are performing such acts together. They need help! Not half-hearted approval given out of a fear of losing their love! We are the adults! It is our responsibility to make sure they grow up healthy and safe! Even if it makes us unpopular!”

“And how exactly do you plan to do that?” Remus asked, voice pitched low and dangerous. He felt his protective instincts flare at the violent act. It was a tone neither Tonkses had heard before from the usually mild-mannered man. They stared at him in shock. “I take it the boys aren’t here. They fled the Manor only to face further rejection. I fail to see how you could possibly perceive that as helpful.”

“How will you get them to return or to trust us if you insist on this, Dromeda?” Ted exclaimed. “I am Harry’s guardian!” she snapped. “And I will do what’s best for him! I’m sure the Malfoys would not approve of this development between the boys. I doubt they’d disagree if I proposed they keep their son while I take Harry!”

Remus flashed a sharp, predatory smile made the worse by the scars that distorted his cheeks. “So like a Black. So fixated on your own desires that you’ll destroy the thing you claim to want while trying to get it.” He turned his back. “I hope you change your mind, Andromeda Black. Because if you don’t, you’ll lose everything.”

He didn’t wait for her response, instead furiously limping down the hallway and back toward the
fireplace. Did these people not realize the stress these boys were under? It was infuriating! Draco and Harry had come face-to-face with the specter of Voldemort. They nearly died! Draco had been in a coma for nearly a week before that. And then something else happened on top of that, something that led Molly Weasley to trash Dumbledore’s office, attack the most powerful wizard of their time, and take all her children home.

The boys didn’t need this strife and conflict where they should have felt safe. He had to find them! Remus had to hope that Draco hadn’t taken to the streets. Not during winter in London. There was one more place they could have fled. Remus was praying he’d find them there. They’d figure all this out once he had the boys somewhere safe. Andromeda wouldn’t be the first Black he’d had to reign in.

12 Grimmauld Place was an old townhouse in the Muggle Borough of Islington. It was an ironic location for Pureblood supremacists like the Black Family, one of the twelve Sacred Bloodlines. However, it did make a kind of sense. The Blacks had survived in part due to their healthy paranoia. Crouching in a purely Muggle neighborhood, they could monitor and guard against magic used in the area, and after several hundred years, 12 Grimmauld Place was a magical fortress. Tucked away in northwestern London, a twenty minute walk from King's Cross Station, it was both Unplottable and hidden behind a Fidelius Charm, the house was invisible to all but a few. In fact, the neighboring Muggles didn’t even know the unit existed!

Ownership of the house transferred with the title of Lord Black. Orion, Cygnus’s cousin/brother-in-law (yes, Orion had been a Black who had married a Black), had inherited the title Lord Black from Walburga and Cygnus’s father, Arcturus Black the Third, in 1953, but in the year 1979, Orion challenged the Dark Lord in a fit of madness, blaming Voldemort for the death of his beloved youngest son, Regulus, who had gone missing. Orion had not survived the duel. The title Lord Black had then passed on to Cygnus’s disgraced nephew, Sirius, but once Sirius was sentenced to Azkaban in 1981, the title had then passed on to Cygnus.

Tragically, Cygnus had not known of this until nine years later when he’d been forced to leave his refuge by Malfoy. He’d returned to Grimmauld Place and had been shocked at its disrepair. He’d spent the following year getting caught up on all he’d missed: his nephew Regulus’s disappearance, his brother-in-law and cousin Orion’s death, Narcissa’s infant son’s kidnapping, the fall of the Dark Lord, Sirius and Bella’s imprisonment, his sister Walburga’s death, and finally Narcissa’s son’s return with a soul bond to the Boy-Who-Lived. It had been a lot to comprehend! And the more he learned, the more questions he’d had.

Apparently Walburga had remained in Grimmauld Place, isolated and alone except for her House Elf until she died in 1985. Her portrait had hung in the hall, but it was hard to get information from her through all the fanatical rants. Clearly, her madness had already progressed too far when she’d done the magical impression. No one knew what had exactly killed her, not even her portrait, but there were many whispers of suicide. Much like his beloved Druella. Cygnus, even after all this time, felt deep pain at the thought of his wife.

In 1973, Druella had chosen death, which was the cause of his complete seclusion with the Hermits of the Noble Path. He had done everything he could to console his wife after Bellatrix had refused her arranged marriage, taking up the Dark Mark, and Andromeda had given birth to a Half-blood daughter, officially contaminating the Black bloodline, but he hadn’t been enough. In a moment of inattention, she had managed to take her life.

Druella had been an incredible woman. A Rosier at birth, a Black by marriage, she was brilliant and
absolutely beautiful. She would have raised incredible sons, but instead fate had given her three
daughters. Cygnus had done his best to support her, but only Narcissa hadn’t disappointed them in
the end. Andromeda had always been contrary and willful - Cygnus suspected the Black madness
had taken her early. As for Bellatrix…

He had to admit that Bellatrix had been their fault. Druella had fallen into a downward spiral,
consumed by the Dark, and his youngest daughter had suffered because of it. By taking the Dark
Mark, Bella had forebore marriage and childbirth, thus refusing to continue the bloodline and carry
forward their history. It had been a terrible blow, but at least Bella’s heart had been in the right place
by supporting the Dark Lord in his effort to restore the Wizarding world.

In the end, it had turned out that Bella had a higher purpose. A fate more important than they could
have ever conceived. Their sweet Bella would indeed give birth to a child, a child that would change
everything. Had Druella survived to see this day, she would have been overjoyed! His Druella
would have thrived in this environment, with the political intrigue and strategizing. She would have
made an incredible advisor to the new Dark Lord. This knowledge only made Cygnus’s grief all the
more unbearable. How cruel fate was!

Cygnus stepped into the sitting room on the lower floor of Grimmauld Place to find Bella sitting on
the window seat. The sun fell on her black curls and lily-white skin. She basked in it despite the
winter cold coming off the glass. Eight days after the Solstice and Bella’s stomach already had a
gentle curve to it, the child within growing at an unnatural rate. Cygnus wasn’t concerned. It was
only to be expected as the baby was conceived and born of ritual magic and not nature. Narcissa sat
with her, running a brush through Bella’s curls. She was completely healed from her beating,
physically at any rate. From what he could tell, the damage to her core after years of searching for
her son would be more long lasting, perhaps even permanent.

Cygnus couldn’t help but admire his daughters’ beauty, especially when paired together. With similar
angular features and crystalline blue eyes, they were essentially opposites. One was tall and slender,
blonde hair cut to her shoulders and straight. The other shorter with an hourglass figure, black hair
curly and falling just past her jaw. One was reserved and serene. The other was wild and passionate.

“How are you feeling?” he asked Bellatrix quietly, coming to sit near them in an armchair. Narcissa
stopped her brushing motion upon Cygnus’s entrance and dutifully gave him her full attention.

“I am well, Father,” Bella answered with a wide grin. Her hand cupped her stomach. “He grows
strong.”

Cygnus nodded his head. “Make sure you eat,” he told her absently, but most of his attention was on
Narcissa. He still wasn’t sure how much he could trust her. She had arrived near beaten to death for
her betrayal to House Malfoy, but she was still a woman. In disgrace or not, she was bound to
Lucius, and her son would always be a priority. She could not be fully trusted not to turn on them if
it meant protecting her husband and child.

Not that that was necessarily bad. Draco Malfoy was of Sacred Blood. He was Pure. He was
powerful and from what Cygnus had gleaned, Draco was also brilliant. He was a male Heir to both
the Black and Malfoy lines. He should be protected. Lucius was the problem. He had proven many
times to put his own self-interest before the success of the Restoration.

“How Narcissa, we must prepare,” he began, eyes pinned to his middle daughter. She may not be capable
of devoting herself wholly, but she could still be useful to him and the cause. “The Ministry has only
grown more complacent and bogged down with bureaucracy. The Muggle threat looms more than
ever, their technology a growing danger to our survival. All the while, the Sacred and Pureblood
families have dwindled at an alarming rate.” He stepped forward and placed a gentle hand on his
daughter’s dark curls. “Bella is doing her duty. But what of you? What role do you hope to play in the Restoration?”

Bellatrix turned so she was sitting side-by-side with her sister, the sun now hitting her back. She reached over and gently stroked Narcissa’s forearm. In a soft humming-like, sing-song voice, she said, “Cissa’s a good girl.”

Both Narcissa and Cygnus ignored her. They’d come to accept that due to either her bloodline, the ritual, Azkaban, or Lucius, Bella was quite mad. Narcissa met her father’s eyes, a calm strength burning in their depths. “I am with our people, Father. I will do whatever is necessary to protect our culture and our home.”

He nodded, hand dropping from Bella’s head. “You will speak with your sister. Compile a list of every known Death Eater. I will need to begin collecting those whom I feel will be useful to our cause.” His dark blue eyes pierced her to her core, expecting perfect obedience. “The strongest wizard in one hundred years will be born again. This time we must make sure he is successful. I fear the Wizarding world only has one last chance to save itself before turning to rot and ruin.”

“Yes, Father,” Narcissa answered dutifully, dipping her head in a bow. Bellatrix hugged her.

“Also, I would also appreciate it if you were to put together a detailed portfolio of current events for the Dark Lord to review.” Cygnus added casually, but his eyes were sharp. This would be a perfect test. Information she exaggerated or left out would be telling on where her loyalties lay. “Knowledge is power. He will need to be well informed to be successful.”

“Yes, Father,” Narcissa answered again for all the world looking like the perfect Pureblood woman, attentive, intelligent, and graceful.

Cygnus reached out to gently touch Bella’s hair once more, but there wasn’t a soft look of love on his face. His expression was hard and calculating. “The Dark Lord shall have a solid foundation to work from when he returns.”

Narcissa watched her father leave the room with a calculating look of her own. Lucius had provided his memories of every interaction with the entity stored in the Diary. Bellatrix also loved to recount her experience with the Dark Lord during the Ritual of Rebirth. It was clear to Narcissa that this new Dark Lord was not the terrifying wizard they had known ten years ago. Lucius was correct in that assessment at least. Therefore, there was still a chance to save her sons.

The job she had been given was perfect. She could document the Dark Lord’s instability and ineffective campaign that culminated in his defeat in ’81. It might influence this new incarnation to take a different path. She would also have to build a strong case for why Draco and Harry should not be targeted. It shouldn’t be too hard, after all Harry did contain a piece of the Dark Lord’s soul. But perhaps that was also damning. Perhaps the Dark Lord would tear through Harry to get it back. If she could just arrange it so that the new Lord swore a vow of neutrality, Draco would do the same to keep Harry out of the line of fire.

A sense of grim determination washed through her, seemingly dulling the colors around her even as her focus seemed to sharpen. Narcissa was aware her plan depended on the new Lord being reborn as sane and young as Lucius and Bellatrix had found him. She hated gambling with her sons’s lives, but she had no choice. Bellatrix was mad, but she was still a powerful witch. Her sister would not give her an opening to assassinate her or the child. For all her humming and sweet gestures, she watched Narcissa like a hawk and slept behind powerful protection wards. Their father was also very much alert to any betrayal. One wrong move, even the suggestion that she was not with them, and Narcissa would be removed ruthlessly.
The thought pained her deeply. Her father had always been so noble, so powerful. She admired and loved him, they all did. Years of lessons at his knee, of being introduced to magic and ritual at his side, and learning their honored family history… She cringed at the thought of disappointing him. Narcissa wished with all her heart that she could just give herself to his leadership full-heartedly and embrace the joy at finding him here, but the threat that grew rapidly day-by-day in Bellatrix’s womb drove her forward. The idea of betraying her father made her hands shake and her chest feel too tight, but her love for her children was stronger.

But perhaps… if she were clever enough, subtle enough… she could tie them all together, forge an alliance that would save them all. For a brief moment, Narcissa closed her eyes and asked Circe, goddess of Magic, to bless her. Then she turned her attention to her sister. Bella was rocking slightly back and forth, humming gently, arms wrapped around her middle.

“Bella,” she said, tone gentle. “You told me the Dark Lord is young and powerful. He may not remember his glorious days during his rise to power.”

Bellatrix stopped rocking and fixed Narcissa with an intense look.

Narcissa stared back impassively. She had long ago mastered weathering such scrutiny. “Tell me everything. Spare no details. I will record it in my report for our Lord,” she suggested, all the while plotting to subtly highlight the fact that as great and powerful as Lord Voldemort had been, he’d also been out of control, unproductive, and insane. She would not fail! She had to guide the new Dark Lord in her favor… in Draco and Harry’s favor. “How did it come about that you received the Dark Mark?” she asked innocently. “We never did speak of it.” Her voice softened and she reached up to gently touch one of Bella’s curls. “I always felt… responsible… because I was not here to assist you.”

Bellatrix turned back to face the window, silently requesting that Narcissa keep brushing her hair. “Sometimes… I blamed you,” she answered quietly. “You made it look so easy. Marring the Pureblood husband. Becoming the Lady of a House. Mother did her best, but I was always falling short.”

Narcissa’s expression remained neutral as she began to brush her sister’s hair, but a surge of emotion nearly choked her. She knew what failure would have earned her at their mother’s hand and internally cringed. Bella had betrayed her, stolen her precious child, condemned him to a life of slavery and abuse, but she was also a broken thing and still her little sister. The conflict of those two realities tormented Narcissa terribly.

Bellatrix’s voice grew light and manic once more, drawing Narcissa out of her thoughts. “Mother worked with me after I was pulled out of Hogwarts while you finished your last year. To prepare me for a husband and steep me in our culture, to make sure I would not abandon it as Andromeda did. Then once you were married, she went in search of a suitable husband for me.” Bella turned to stare at her sister with wide eyes. “She settled on the Lestrange brothers. At first they were both interested and they had several interviews with me, but I chose Rodolphus.”

Narcissa was surprised. Rodolphus had the worst reputation, the cruelest personality. She had always assumed he had been their mother’s choice, but Bella had chosen him on her own?

Bellatrix quickly explained. “I know I let you think it was Mother’s idea! I am sorry, Cissa, but no one understood! Over time, I grew to love the Dark magic Mother practiced. It had such an exquisite feel, even when used against me. So rich and powerful. I thrilled in it and learned to cast it in secret. It made me feel so powerful. It was the one thing I could get right! I was so good at it, Cissa!”

“How did that lead you to choosing Roldolphus as a mate?” Narcissa asked calmly, but through
“Rodolphus knew even more Dark spells than Mother. Such beautiful spells,” Bella sighed dreamily as if she was a girl much younger than her thirty-four years. “I asked him to teach me in secret.” She laughed, high and manic. “He was not pleased when I began to cast better and stronger than he. He refused to show me more.” Her expression twisted into fury. “The Year of Courtship was coming to a close. Mother and Father had already signed a betrothal contract and Rodolphus had accepted. He promised to _tame_ me. How dare they think they could take the Dark from me!”

“No one could,” Narcissa agreed softly, knowing that by that point it had been too late to save Bella’s sanity.

Bellatrix grinned. “Yes! You understand!”

“How did you make your way to the Dark Lord?” Narcissa asked, pushing the conversation along. She felt exhausted, weighed down by grief.

Bella spun fully around, hands grasping Narcissa’s face. Her eyes were wild, a dark fire burning in them. “He was Called unexpectedly when we were together. It was fate, Cissa! I grabbed hold of him and traveled with him to his meeting. He punished me severely before I was finally brought before our Lord.” Bellatrix shivered. “Cissa… the magic… I can’t describe the magic…”

She couldn’t imagine being subjected to the Dark Lord’s wrath. Narcissa celebrated the Dark holidays and did not hesitate to participate in Dark rituals, but her gender had saved her from the more death and pain-based spells. The spells that seemed to twist the user as much as it tortured the victim. Bellatrix began to hold too tight, her nails cutting into Narcissa’s skin.

“Our Lord complimented me on my endurance and graced me with the opportunity to prove myself. I was given the day to recover and the next night I was set free show Him why I deserved a place among his Death Eaters.” She began to breathe heavily, lost in the memory. “I was Marked that very night.”

“To be the only female Death Eater is a great honor.” Narcissa just wished it hadn’t been her little sister. She carefully pulled Bella’s hands from her face and held them tightly within her own to keep them from doing anymore damage. “Perhaps we should document this more thoroughly. I could extract the memory, as well as the memories of any meetings or missions. It is important for our Lord to have a perfect understanding of events.” Silently, she added, _And important for me to manipulate them as much as I am able._

“Yes,” Bellatrix hissed, eyes slitted in anticipation. “Yes, go fetch your vials. It will be my legacy to our Lord.”

“A great legacy indeed,” Narcissa murmured the praise and rose gracefully. “I shall return momentarily.”

**Chapter end.**

_A/N:_ Again, I apologize for the delay in updating. I hope all of you will stick with me as I work through this challenging time.
Belated Gifts

A/N: Thank you guys for all the feedback and support!!! I have a ton of good ideas thanks to everyone!

Warning: Body modification

Belated Gifts

Harry couldn’t sleep. Instead, he watched Draco. The week he’d spent without the blond had been harder than anyone would really understand, but Harry was almost glad for it. He had always known how much Draco did, how hard Draco worked to take care of them, but having an idea of something and knowing it for yourself are two different things. The pressure that hung above them on a daily basis: the war… the expectations - both negative and positive - of everyone around them… the sheer number of people who were a threat to them… It was more than anyone could withstand.

But Draco… Draco managed to not only withstand the complicated currents whirling around them, he made those currents work in their favor. He was always watching, always thinking, always ready to press forward and take control. Harry was completely humbled by him. He was just completely in awe of Draco’s strength and brilliance. Harry had stumbled through that week half a person, missing Draco fiercely and barely holding the status-quo. He still had so much farther to go, to be on Draco’s level, to be the powerful support he dreamed of being. But seeing that difference, really seeing it for the first time, it gave Harry a clearer goal to work toward.

So Harry watched Draco sleep. The blond’s whole body was tense instead of relaxed, his brow furrowed and shiny with a sheen of sweat. Harry was in tune with every tight breath Draco took and was very aware that Draco was not the same. Something had affected him - the visions he’d suffered while he’d been in a coma, tested by the Winter God - or the battle with Voldemort - or the confrontation with the rapist in the tower - or the face off with Lucius and Andromeda… or the effect of them all combined… whatever it had been, Draco was now different. Harry wasn’t afraid; Draco would not break, but he was suffering.

Draco’s eyes had gone hard like they had been in the dark, damp Hold. Cold and calculating with none of the exuberance and bright humor that had slowly emerged over the years. There was a… tension… even in the way he touched Harry. Draco was hurt as sure as if he were bleeding right before Harry’s eyes. It made something hot as fire burn deep in Harry’s core and it drove him from beneath Draco’s sheltering arm.

They had pulled from the blankets from the tops of the beds and made a nest in front of the living room fire, but even curled up next to each other, it was cold. Shivering, skin a pale cold white, Harry quietly got dressed in jeans and two layers of sweaters. On his feet, he wore thick socks and his sneakers. He set out a similar outfit for Draco, built up the fire a little bit more to keep Draco warm, and made his way to the kitchen.

The sun had just begun to rise, turning the frosted-over window panes a pale orange-pink, and Harry happily set to making a warm breakfast. Lots of starch and protein with some fruits and sweet cream for desert: comfort food. He had just finished setting the table - the wood surface freshly scrubbed - white napkins folded just so under the silverware - white dishes with the little blue flowers painted along the rims set out - when he noticed Draco leaning in the doorway. A beautiful smile broke out across Harry’s face - completely involuntary upon seeing Draco watching him. He ducked his head and looked up through his fringe and round glasses.
“Good morning, Draco. Breakfast is ready.”

Draco’s face softened just that little bit. He came into the kitchen and took a seat at the table.

“Morning, Harry.”

Harry’s cheeks flushed as he served Draco the food he’d prepared. He was less careful when serving himself, in a hurry to get started. He knew Draco wouldn’t eat unless he did so as well. Harry watched Draco, eyes bright and missing nothing, as they ate.

The sounds of their forks hitting the plates and the snow crunching as it fell off the roof, those soft and reassuring sounds, blended with the smell of eggs and biscuits and bacon. Draco leaned back when he’d eaten his full, eyes half-lidded and underlined with shadows. He was still tired. He’d slept poorly. The memories of the past clung to him and the dark uncertainty of the future coiled even tighter, a smothering weight, but as he watched Harry clean the dishes, warmth began to spread from his center. He began to relax.

Harry cleaned with quick efficiency, dried his hands on the red and white checkered towel, and brought over the sliced fruit, whipped cream, and hot chocolate he’d made for dessert. Draco hummed his approval as Harry set it out before him and Harry flushed with happiness.

“This looks amazing, Harry. Thank you.” Draco speared a halved-strawberry and slid it through the cream. The juice burst in his mouth, sweetened further by the whipped cream. It was delicious! He loved magic. Strawberries in winter; it was amazing! Chewing and swallowing the treat, he cast Harry an attentive look. “You must have been awake for awhile. Did you get enough sleep?”

“Yes, Draco,” Harry reassured. He mimicked the blond, taking a strawberry across the cream and into his mouth. So good!

Draco smiled for the first time that morning. This time he speared a raspberry. It was much tarter than the strawberry, but its tangy flavor was just as good. He watched Harry copy him, taking a raspberry for his next bite. Draco felt his heart beat, slow and steady, a deep note vibrating through his chest. His eyes brightened as heat began to pool in his belly. He’d just thought of a wonderful game. Deliberately, he carefully chose a strawberry again. He dipped it in the cream and slowly licked it off before sliding the red fruit over his lips and into his mouth.

Harry again mimicked Draco, blushing under the blond’s watchful gaze. He took up a strawberry and carefully licked off the cream, his pink tongue stroking the berry, catching up all the sweetness before sliding past his soft lips. The delicious flavor filled his mouth and made his eyelashes flutter. Draco grinned, fierce and full of joy. He speared a pitted black cherry. Slowly, gently, he traced his lips before biting the fruit in half. Red juice ran over his lip and down his chin. He watched, fascinated, as Harry mimicked him once more.

Draco reached out, gently holding Harry’s jaw in his hand, and pulled the boy toward him. Harry got to his feet, green eyes sparkling like pale emeralds, and stood close enough to press against Draco’s side. He bent at the waist, pulled by Draco’s gentle grip. As soon as he was close enough, Draco gave a long, slow lick over Harry’s chin and lips before kissing him deeply. The identical flavors coating their mouths made their tongues slide seamlessly together and Draco moaned deep in his chest.

The kiss broke, their mouths parted with a glistening string of saliva connecting their lips. Harry, breathing deeply, heart pounding hard with excitement - continued the game. He leaned forward and licked the juice from Draco’s chin - just as Draco had done for him. Pressing their lips together, their mouths moved in a second hungry kiss.
With a hum of pure pleasure, Draco pulled Harry into his lap sideways across his thighs. Harry’s arms fell over Draco’s shoulders as Draco sucked firmly on Harry’s tongue. A bolt of electricity shot up Harry’s spine and he moaned helplessly into Draco’s mouth. Fisting Harry’s hair, Draco pulled the boy’s head back so he could see the heavy-lidded green eyes, flushed cheeks, and swollen lips. Harry was so fucking beautiful; it made Draco wild.

“Sit on the table,” he rasped, voice thick with desire.

Harry’s lips parted in a gasp, his pupils dilated. He slid off Draco’s lap and quickly pushed the dishes toward the other side of the table before hopping up and sitting on the edge. Draco slid his hands up Harry’s thighs and up under the sweaters he wore to hook his fingertips over the edge of Harry’s jeans, staring directly into Harry’s eyes. The rising sun fell through the window and made Draco’s hair glow the palest gold. Harry literally lost his breath, his heart clenching at just how beautiful Draco was.

“Lay back,” Draco said, a gentle command.

Harry obeyed, lying down on the table, his heart thudding in his chest. His messy black hair fanned out around his head as he looked up at Draco with an unblinking stare, - desire - pulsing through the bond right into Draco’s center.

Draco hummed again. Standing between Harry’s knees, his long, graceful fingers gripped the bottom hem of Harry’s sweaters and pushed them steadily upward until they bunched under Harry’s arms, the soft bottom edge of his pink nipples just visible. Draco grinned and pinched those soft nubs before rolling his fingers. Harry gave a gasp, his eyes going wide before falling closed. His back arched, pressing his chest into Draco’s hands as a soft, long moan spilled from his lips.

Draco watched, eyes a predatory silver, as Harry began to sweat, his stomach muscles contracting at the sharp sting of Draco’s fingers. Gasping softly, Harry looked into Draco’s face and blushed hotly at the desire he found there. His small hands grasped the edge of the table, holding on tightly, as the blond alternated between painful pinches and twists as Draco rolled his thumb and forefinger around the swelling nipple.

As Harry gasped and twitched beneath him, Draco began to breathe faster. His eyes never left Harry’s face, drinking in the boy’s expressions. Harry was open-mouthed with desire, his brow furrowed with pain, eyes blown-wide as he gasped and moaned, and still Harry never stopped pressing up into Draco’s hands. Not even when the two little nubs become almost twice as fat and hot against Draco’s fingertips.

“You know… I didn’t get to give you my Yule present yet,” Draco murmured in an almost-whisper. He stared down at his boy whose face was red with tears gathering in his jewel-bright eyes. “Do you want it now?”

Harry gave a half-strangled shout as Draco released him, the pain almost sharper than when Draco had been playing with him. Blinking his eyes clear, he stared up in wonder. “Yes. Please,” he whispered tearfully, filled with - guilty pleasure.

Hair falling into his eyes, Draco gave a fierce, free grin. “Hold tight to the table. Don’t move. I’ll be right back.”

Harry obediently tightened his hold on the edge of the table. His head fell back with a soft thump, his body went limp. Slowly he caught his breath, sweat cooling on his skin. His nipples burned like fire, throbbing with each hard beat of his heart. Anticipation built until he was nearly squirming. What had Draco gotten him? He at once knew he didn’t deserve whatever it was and that it gave Draco
pleasure to give him things so he should want it. The contrasting emotions set him on edge. His stomach filled with anxious butterflies and he gave a soft whimper.

“Shhh,” Draco soothed, coming to stand between Harry’s legs once more. He’d hooked his hair behind his ears, a wide smile stretching across his face. Harry felt his queasiness ease. Draco was happy and that made Harry happy.

Draco lifted a wide flat box into Harry’s view. “It’s for you,” he explained, staring intently into Harry’s eyes. “But it’s also for me.”

Harry relaxed completely. “Okay,” he answered breathlessly. If the gift was for Draco as well, then he could accept it without guilt. His eyes dropped from Draco’s to look at the box. It wasn’t wrapped, made from a golden-brown wood, pine maybe.

Draco gave a soft laugh. He lowered his head, drawing Harry’s eyes back to his own. “Don’t move,” he reminded.

Harry almost nodded but stopped. He wasn’t supposed to move. “Yes, Draco.”

Draco’s expression turned smug, eyes half-lidded. “Good boy.”

Harry blushed at the praise. He watched in interest as Draco set the wooden box on his bare stomach; it wasn’t heavy. With obvious care, Draco lifted the lid away and set it aside. Harry couldn’t see inside without lifting his head, so he watched Draco’s expression instead. He had never seen Draco look like this before. He didn’t have a word for it, but it made him really excited.

Draco lifted something as small as a knut from the box, but instead of bronze it was a gleaming white. He held it out at the perfect distance so that Harry could see it clearly. “Isn’t it beautiful?” he purred. “I had it made just for you.”

It was platinum. Harry had been trained by Narcissa to recognize most precious stones and metals. It was a tiny snake with perfectly etched, tiny scales that could only be done by magic. The snake was folded in half, its body creating a relaxed loop before the tail coiled back around the neck, just under the head. In its mouth, a tiny black ball was held between four tiny fangs. Draco titled the little snake, letting the sunlight play across its subtle body. The stone almost seemed to absorb the light, having almost no shine.

“Black tourmaline,” Harry recognized, eyes flashing to Draco’s. It wasn’t the most expensive stone out there, but it was a powerful one. It had amazing protective qualities if charged correctly.

“Very good, Harry.” Draco gave a happy smile, eyes practically dancing with excitement. He bent and laid a gentle kiss to Harry’s lips. Standing back up, he looked at the tiny snake he’d bought. He tilted it again in the sunlight, admiring the shine of the platinum. “Do you like him?”

“Yes,” Harry answered softly. “I love him. He’s beautiful.”

Draco’s eyes fell back to Harry’s. “Will you wear him for me?”

Harry looked at the snake again, feeling tingly and warm knowing that Draco had chosen it, that Draco wanted him to wear it. “Yes.”

“You don’t even know where I want you to wear it.” The snake disappeared from view as Draco placed both hands on either side of Harry’s chest and leaned down so that they stared each other right in the eyes. “It will hurt, Harry, but it will be fun afterward. I think you’ll like it, but you have to want it, and not just because you think I want you to want it.”
Harry stared up at Draco wide-eyed at the suddenly very serious tone in Draco’s voice. The blond’s smile was completely gone, replaced with an intense look of concentration.

“I’m going to pierce your nipple with a needle,” the blond explained solemnly. “It will hurt. You’ll even bleed a bit. Then I’m going to activate the charm on the snake so that it slithers through the hole left by the needle before resuming its position. Then I’m going to do it again to the other nipple. It’ll probably hurt more because you’ll be more sensitive. Afterwards, they’ll hurt for a week or so. At first, you won’t be used to it and they’ll get caught on your clothes when you put your shirt on or take it off. It’ll sting so bad you’ll want to cry.”

Harry was breathing hard as he imagined what Draco was describing. He wasn’t so naïve that he didn’t know what piercings were, but he was totally caught off guard by Draco wanting to pierce his nipples. He hadn’t even gotten his ears pierced yet!

“I can always poke a hole in your collar. Let you wear them from there until you’re ready,” Draco offered without even a hint that it would be disappointing. “They would look almost as good against the black of your collar as they will the pink of your nipples.”

“Wh…” Harry had to swallow before he could continue. “What will you do with them… if you put them in?”

Draco gave a slow smile, eyes piercing in their intensity. “I’d tug on them with my teeth and fingers… I’d also be able to make them heat up or get cold. It’ll feel intense, but amazing… and I’d get to listen to you gasp and moan as I played with them…” He leaned his head down and captured Harry’s mouth in a slow, deep kiss. When he pulled away, Harry was blushing a hot red. “But I can wait, Harry. We can put them on your collar until you’re ready. You have to be really sure before I put them in.”

“I am!” Harry cried out and blushed even hotter if that was possible, but he managed to hold Draco’s eyes, his own filled with nervous determination. “I want them. I want you to be able to do that. Make them hot and cold.” Merlin! The thought that Draco could make him feel things with a simple command made his head spin! “I want to,” he confessed, eyes bright with both nerves and honest desire. “I want them.”

Draco smiled softly, pushing up and standing again. “I thought you would.” He reached for something inside the box and pulled out a small potion vial as big as a thimble and a thick needle. He held Harry’s wide-eyed gaze and asked again, “Are you really, really sure, Harry?”

Voice soft yet firm, Harry answered, “Yes, Draco. Please. I want your present.”

Draco gave Harry a soft smile full of love and set the tools and jewelry back into the box. Harry watched with bated breath as even the box was set aside, next to his hip. With a warm hum, Draco slid his fingers down Harry’s chest and stomach. Harry’s fair skin rose in bumps in the wake of the gentle caress. A simple twist of Draco’s fingers and the button of Harry’s jeans came undone. Harry gave a soft gasp even as Draco’s hum grew louder, a pleased sound resonating deep in his chest.

Harry was half-hard already, swollen and stiff along his lower belly. Draco bent and licked a hot trail from base to tip that quickly grew cold in the frigid air. Harry’s gasp was louder this time as he came to full stiffness, his fingers blanching white around the edge of the table.

Draco looked up along the plane of Harry’s body, his lips resting gently against the head of the boy’s cock. Harry’s nipples looked taller and fatter from this perspective and Draco hummed again, swirling his hot tongue around the leaking head. Lifting away, Draco bent over the boy’s slender torso and latched on to his right nipple, sucking it hard into his mouth.
Harry gave a cry, his back arching. The pain/pleasure sparking along his every nerve made him twitch and almost tumble over that magical peak.

* Hold it, Harry. Don’t cum. Not until I say, * Draco ordered, tone low and seductive, even as he gave another hard suck.

Harry whimpered, panting as if he were drowning. His whole body felt on fire. His thighs trembled. His limbs shook. The tip of his penis grew damp, orgasm a breath away, but he bit down, clenching his jaw, and held on as Draco ordered. With a wet smack, Draco released the boy’s tender chest. Harry gave a whole body shiver as icy air crashed down where burning heat had a moment ago enveloped him.

Draco erected strong Occlumency shields to protect his mind from the sensations flooding the bond. He could feel Harry’s magic, an intangible wind that rose in intermittent gusts with the rise of Harry’s climax, searching for the piece that always completed it. Draco resisted, keeping a firm grasp on clarity. This was important. He could injure Harry if he wasn’t careful.

Lifting the needle once more in hand, Draco bent close to Harry’s chest, close to the glistening and swollen nipple that had a moment ago rested between his lips. “Hold your breath,” he ordered with perfect calm.

Harry sucked in a huge gulp of air and held it. He couldn’t stop trembling, or the tears that streaked his face, or the fast and hard pounding of his heart, but he held as still as he could. He couldn’t see much with his head flat against the table. Just the bottom rim of his black frames and a partial profile of Draco’s face. The table creaked under his tight grip. The room took on a vibration in the silence, anticipation - excitement - fear. Then white-hot pain speared through his chest.

With laser focus that was nearly inhuman, Draco very carefully pushed the needle smoothly through Harry’s flesh. He’d practiced only once before. On firm strawberries not quite ripe. Harry’s nipple gave slightly better than the fruit, but the soft resistance was almost exactly the same. Draco straightened and eyed the needle. It sat perfectly horizontal in the direct center of the nub. He nodded, pleased.

“Okay. Breathe.”

Harry let out a loud, strangled cry of pain with his air. He squeezed his eyes tightly closed as tears fell in streams down his cheeks. He tried to ride out the pain, knowing it wouldn’t last forever, but it felt like half his chest was on fire and flayed, not just the little nub.

Draco made a soft sound and bent to lick and suck the tip of Harry’s still hard cock in comfort. * Such a good boy. Looks so good already. Gonna be beautiful, gonna be perfect… * he murmured soothingly into Harry’s mind.

Harry gave soft cries and gasps, head rocking side-to-side, flexing his stomach as the searing, throbbing pain in his chest was calmed by the warm sucking pleasure of Draco’s soft mouth around his cock. Just when he began to ride the waves of pleasure and pain toward the climax, Draco’s mouth came off him with a wet pop and he bent forward to suck in Harry’s needle-free nipple. Harry started to cry in earnest, hips rocking against the cold air.

Draco came off Harry’s chest and cupped the boy’s tear-wet cheeks. “We can stop, Harry,” he offered compassionately. His eyes were a warm, molten silver. “It’s okay to stop,” he whispered honestly, kissing Harry’s lips again and again. “Love you. You’re so perfect, Harry. So good for me.”
“No,” Harry gasped wetly, tears his voice. “No. I want it. I do. Draco… please…”

Draco kissed him one last time before straightening. He took up the second needle and looked deep into Harry’s eyes. “Hold your breath.”

Harry whimpered. His heart felt like it was jumping and skipping through his chest. It took a few shaky tries, but he obeyed. Chest and groin exposed to the air, his sweaters bunched under his pits while still covering his arms, he lay trembling and small before Draco’s strength and power, but he also felt as large as the world: Draco’s world.

Having Draco’s complete and focused attention was almost a physical sensation. Like being wrapped in live wire. Colors, smells, and sounds, his own body… they were never as sharp as these moments. Suddenly everything was dialed up to one hundred. He was never as alive, never as awake… He was pure energy completely under Draco’s control… It was so much! Almost too much! His body felt like it was going to shake apart, screams of ecstasy and howls of agony trembled on the edge of his lips…

With a smooth push, the second needle pierced through Harry’s skin. Harry gave a raw scream as fireworks and earthquakes erupted down every nerve, setting him on fire as if his entire body had been speared. His eyes rolled back in his head, whole body spasming as he splattered his stomach with cum.

Draco gave a low moan, unable to block the bond completely, and quickly pressed Harry’s shoulders down, preventing him from hurting himself or shifting the needles that still pierced his flesh. Draco was panting, eyes burning crystals as he watched Harry ride out the overwhelming waves of sensation. Harry’s body went limp, his galloping heart slowed to merely fast. Glazed, pupil-blown eyes fluttered open. His mouth hung slack just that little bit, allowing drool to trickle down one cheek, his head tilting slightly to one side.

“Good boy… Hard part’s over,” Draco praised. He stroked Harry’s wild hair from his sweat-damp face and admired the mess Harry had made. He’d nearly shot cum up to his nipples! Draco’s lips twitched into a brief grin. Then falling more serious, he reached in for the first ring. He quickly swabbed the platinum with the potion from the thimble, disinfecting it. It also contained a slight numbing agent. “Ready for the last part?”

Harry felt as if he were floating. Everything had soft edges. His whole body throbbed and sang. “Draco…” he breathed, the name filling his soul with peace. “Draco…”

Draco bent to lightly kiss Harry’s forehead. “I’ve got you,” he promised. Straightening, he held the tiny snake in his palm. With perfect focus, he whispered, “Lumen terebramus acuto.”

The tip of the tail uncoiled from around the base of the snake’s head. The metal body of the serpent undulated and gave soft thrashing motions, searching for the hole it was designed to fill. With his right hand, Draco slid the needle from Harry’s flesh and held the little snake closer with his left. Harry moaned at the pain even as out of it as he was.

The snake tail touched the bleeding hole and slithered inside. Harry gave a choked cry, his body going rigid, arching off the table as if he were being electrocuted. In a smooth trust, the tail pushed through Harry’s newly pierced skin, pulling a scream from the boy. Smeared with blood, the white-silver tail looped back again around the base of its head, creating a slightly oval circle.

Amazed, Draco took up the swab with the potion and gently wiped away the tiny trails of blood that rolled down Harry’s skin. God, it was more beautiful than he had even imagined! Harry laying limp, moaning and blissed out, hair a black halo around his head. The silver of the ring glistening in the
light with every rise and fall of Harry’s chest. Draco bent down and took the tender nipple in his mouth, tonguing the ring and flipping it up and down a few times.

Harry gasped, back arching again. Arrows of heat and light pierced his core with every soft suck and flip of the new ring. His cock grew stiff. Panting, writhing, moaning, gasping, Harry was a complete mess as he surrendered himself completely to Draco’s sweet torment. Draco had to reach between his legs and press down hard, trying to push back the unrelenting arousal that was trying to overcome his mind. He lifted away from Harry’s chest, a string of glittering saliva connecting them briefly before breaking.

“Last one.” Draco’s voice was rough and raw, which only set Harry more on edge.

Harry’s legs spread wider. His hands no longer gripped the table, instead lying loose, palm up, in limp surrender.

“God, Harry…” Draco pressed his thighs together painfully, trying to keep his mind clear. He quickly cleaned the second ring and whispered the activation words. The snake writhed and gently thrashed, looking for its new home.

Panting, pupils dilated, dick hard as hell, Draco pinched the little snake head, holding it tightly. His breath caught as the little tail pushed through the hole left by the needle. Trickle of blood slid down Harry’s chest. Draco held his breath, pulling the tail out only to let it wiggle back in. Harry gave a cry, tossing his head back as hips beginning to rock up helplessly. He was sobbing, but on his lips were wordless pleas for more. Draco slowly thrust the ring through and then slid it slowly back out. The snake began to undulate harder, rocking and bouncing Harry’s nipple back and forth as it thrashed.

“Ahhh!” Harry arched with a scream, nearly coming undone for a second time.

About to blow his load, Draco let the snake go. It settled in place, the tail coiling around the base of its head. He roughly yanked Harry’s pants down past the boy’s knees and lifted Harry’s legs with one hand while undoing his own pants with the other. Pressing Harry’s thighs together, Draco shifted the boy’s legs up to his chest and slightly to the side. The bunched up jeans around Harry’s calves and ankles caught and rubbed up against his tender nipple and Harry gave a wild cry, eyes wide.

“Draco!”

Draco had eyes only for the seal of Harry’s thighs and thrust into that soft channel desperately. In less than minute, the wave was crashing down and Draco gave a fierce growl, bending to viciously suck Harry’s neglected nipple into his mouth. Harry arched with a scream, arms wrapping around Draco’s shoulders and neck, and came all over his stomach for a second time. Draco followed him over the edge, yelling his triumph into Harry’s chest. Thunder and lightening streaked across their souls, pouring energy through their bodies. Their magic crashed together in a huge wave, roaring as it filled with room with an avalanche of power.

Panting, Draco slowly slid from Harry’s body and let the boy’s legs fall. The colors of the room seemed to vibrate, a ringing filled his ears. Grinning, Draco stared at Harry’s cum-soaked stomach. He pressed his hand into the sticky mess and slid it around further, coating the boy’s shivering skin. Harry was completely gone. Lost amidst the stars, twitching in ecstasy, he was completely incoherent. Draco gave a hum of satisfaction and took up the needle once more. Their magic filled the room with an electric power, crackling just beyond hearing range. Draco reach for that power as he pricked his finger, a bead of blood swelling up.
“Protect,” he ordered, his whole being resonating with the command. “Protect.”

He touched first one snake and then the next. The red of Draco’s blood, slowly at first and then faster, was absorbed into the turmaline balls held in each snake’s mouth. The absolute black transformed into the deepest, darkest of reds.

“Protect,” he whispered again, leaning close and pushing his will down into the rings, pulling hard on the magic emanating from them in a supernova of power. “Protect!”

The snake-rings began to glow softly and then blindingly bright. Draco flinched away, covering his eyes. When he could see again, the rings lay innocently against Harry’s chest, but Draco could feel their power, could feel the connection to his own blood that rested in their cores. He gave a fierce grin and gently caressed one. The vision of Harry unconscious, chest bruised and swollen from some bastard raping him in his sleep finally shattered. No one would touch Harry like that again and live to tell the tale.

Draco lovingly rearranged Harry’s clothes. He hummed gently, pulling Harry into his arms, encouraging the boy to cling. Harry, semi-conscious, wrapped his legs around Draco’s waist and held tight to the blond’s shoulders, tucking his damp face against Draco’s neck. They were nearly the same size, Harry only a few inches shorter, so it was awkward, but Draco managed to carry him to their nest of blankets before the fire.

Half-formed words of love and reassurance spilled from Draco’s lips as Harry’s - love bliss - rippled warmly through his core. They lay there, entangled, for hours, drifting in and out of sleep, warm and content. It wasn’t until Draco’s stomach grumbled hungrily that Harry stirred to full awareness. “Sorry,” Draco said softly, kissing Harry’s lips.

Harry giggled, still high from endorphins. “I’ll make us sandwiches.” He pulled away and had to fight the blankets before getting to his feet. His nipples tingled where his sweater rubbed and snagged against the rings. Eyes wide in wonder, he touched the metal through the soft wool.

Draco gave a fierce grin, watching as Harry explored the new sensation. He sat on the floor, back against the couch, and linked his fingers behind his head. “Lift your sweater. Let’s see them.”

Harry, cheeks hot, pulled his sweaters up. Dried cum and a little blood flaked his skin, but his nipples were completely healed although different. The rings held them erect. Harry touched one ring and shivered when it made his nerves dance. Under Draco’s intent stare, he softly flipped the snakes up and down and carefully pushed them back and forth through the small holes.

Draco watched, deeply aroused, as Harry played with his new jewelry. Harry was a gorgeous image: messy hair falling into his face, eyes wide and fluttering behind his glasses, bottom lip held between his teeth. Harry stood with his lean, messy stomach on display, his jeans sitting low on his hips, the black collar visible over the low neck of the sweaters. Draco felt heat pool deep in his core, a hungry, possessive growl filling him with the urge to bite.

“Feels good,” Harry confessed, shivering at the sensation of his nipples being stimulated and tugged on by the metal. He was in awe over the fact that this was his chest.

“God, Harry,” Draco growled, holding perfectly still even though he wanted to pounce. Harry still felt raw through he bond; the boy didn’t need any more rough play right now. “Go fix lunch before I eat you.”

Harry blushed bright red and pulled his sweaters back down. “Yes, Draco,” he said, voice a breathy whisper, before hurrying into the kitchen, a smile tugging his lips.
Draco let his arms fall and flopped onto his stomach, grinning.

Remus was staggering once more as he made his way through Hogsmeade for the second time that day. The potions Pomfrey had given him had worn off. He needed to get off his feet; he need a good meal and about two days of sleep to let his body heal. Instead, he forced himself to walk quicker. *Please be there, please be there,* repeated like a mantra through his mind. It was bitterly cold, the skin of his face and hands were numb, his breath billowing before him in a cloud. The idea that the boys may be on the streets, alone, abandoned after all the trauma they had suffered, was enough to make him want to howl in rage.

The quaint cottages and stores began to thin out and Remus turned down a rough lane that led up into the foothills and his lone cabin. It had started to snow, the clouds heavy enough that the last few hours of daylight were being smothered. Holding his hand before his eyes, his breath caught in painful hope. Was that a light flickering in the front window?

Catching his foot on the uneven ground, Remus tumbled down. Pain lanced through him and he let out an involuntary scream. For several minutes, he lay writhing in pain until something warm wrapped around him, filling him with the most intense feeling of rightness that he’d ever felt. Remus lay trembling, hardly daring to breathe for fear of stopping the warmth. It coated his bones in caramel, strung his muscles with liquid light, and as it eventually began to dim and die out, Remus gave a faint cry at the loss.

Shuddering, he slowly became aware of the fact that he was curled in a fetal position on the rough ground, snow crunching around him. Rolling onto his back, he blinked tears from his eyes and stared up in wonder at the two small faces hovering over him. One was etched in worry, the other was carefully blank and neutral. “Draco!” He sat up with surprising quickness, completely free from pain, and wrapped his arms around the boy's shoulders, pulling him into a hug. “Thank Merlin you’re here!” He turned joyful eyes to Harry. “Harry!” He pulled the smaller boy into his arms as well and gave him a quick squeeze before releasing him. Looking back toward the blond, he said, “I have so much to tell you.”

Draco, disgruntled, shook his shoulders to settle his jacket back in place. “Come inside. It’s freezing.”

Remus quickly got to his feet and stood there in wonder. The pain in his legs was completely gone! This was beyond any spell or potion. He stared at the boys in question.

“Come on,” Draco said again, annoyed. He turned and headed back toward the house. The front door was hanging open. They hadn’t shut it in their mad dash outside when they’d heard Remus scream. “Harry, cook us something. Remus, get this damn house warm.”

Remus and Harry immediately set to their tasks. In minutes, something delicious and warm was heating on the stove and Remus had cast enough spells that the house no longer felt like the inside of a freezer. With a sigh, Remus settled into the armchair next to the fire while Draco took his customary position on the love seat. He cast Remus a cool look, lips turned down in the beginnings of a frown.

Remus cleared his throat, shifting nervously under the boy’s disapproving gaze. “I did as you instructed. I visited a club. There was a lot that I didn’t know; you were right about that. And I’ve come to an answer. The truth is, I still don’t understand this relationship with Harry. And I don’t think it’s okay for children to have sex. But you and Harry are a unique case. You’re not normal children. You’ve survived too much, experienced too much. But more than that, I trust you. You
wouldn’t hurt Harry. And its undeniable that your relationship has given you both strength and comfort. So I can honestly accept you being with each other even if I still don’t really understand why it helps you.”

Remus took a deep breath, and when Draco sat patient, he continued. “The fact is, my inner wolf has recognized you as its Alpha. I’ve been unconsciously following your lead for years. There is only human ignorance standing in my way of admitting what’s already true.”

This was it. He was terrified but he also felt incredibly liberated as he closed his eyes and gave himself over to his instincts. He would not be mocked here. He would not be derided or feared. He was safe in front of his Alpha. Releasing his breath, Remus opened his eyes and they were a warm golden color not found in human beings. He slid from the chair and got to his knees, his butt resting on his heels. He curled his back slightly forward in order to place his hands flat to the floor and tilted his head to expose the jugular of his throat. Finally, he cast his eyes slightly to the side of the boy on the love seat, respectfully not making eye contact but keeping Draco in his peripheral. He could almost feel phantom ears twitching backward, a bushy tail slowly thumping against the ground behind him.

“I’m yours,” Remus vowed, voice guttural, almost inhuman, as he put what he felt into words for the first time.

Draco stared at the man kneeling on the ground before him. He was completely surprised. He hadn’t expected Remus to come to a decision so quickly or to be so honest even when he did, but the submissive pose made Draco’s shoulders relax and tension drain out of his frame. He hopped lightly to his feet and closed the distance between them. Remus sank a few inches lower, bending his elbows and tilting his head still further. Draco placed his hand on the man’s exposed throat, answering the body language, and held firmly. It wasn’t enough to hinder Remus’s breathing, but it was enough pressure so that the man could feel it.

“Good,” Draco said lowly, accepting. He released his hold and stepped back.

Remus lifted his head, a soppy grin on his face, and sat back on his heels. Euphoria washed through him in waves. He was overwhelmed with the urge to prove himself, to please Draco and apologize for being difficult, apologize for not being there the way he should have been. “I have something to show you. Something you’ll want to see,” he offered, voice vibrating with an excitement barely held in check.

Draco shook his head lightly, putting up a hand in a ‘wait’ gesture. “After we eat. Healing you cost Harry a lot of energy.”

Remus’s excitement was immediately doused. His head hung low.

Draco gave a reassuring smile and softly ran his hand over Remus’s hair as he walked by. “Come on. It’ll be finished soon.”

Harry had fried some steaks and baked some potatoes. For greens, he’d sautéed asparagus in butter and garlic. Three tall glasses of milk sat by each plate, serving as their beverage. The boys had eaten a late lunch not too long ago and had spent the early evening reading by the fire until Remus’s scream had shattered the peace, so Draco wasn’t very hungry. He picked at the food, smiling in approval as both Harry and Remus scarfed down two servings and had two glasses of milk each. Bellies distended, the two leaned back with big sighs.

“So what did you want to show me?” Draco asked curiously.
Remus straightened, some of his earlier excitement returning. “It’s a surprise.” He looked at his watch. “Up for a trip to London? If we leave now, we’ll just catch the Leaky Cauldron’s floo hours.”

Harry looked curiously to Draco, awaiting his answer.

Draco lifted an eyebrow, intrigued. Remus was on thin ice. He’d been distant for years. He’d also been in denial about their relationship and only just now had come to some sort of understanding. So Draco was very curious. Whatever this was, Remus was clearly excited to show him. Exit enough to have them go out at night despite the freezing temperatures.

“What about Harry?”

Remus’s enthusiasm dimmed some. He cast Harry a regretful glance. “It might be best if you see it first.” He still didn’t know if Draco would welcome Liam into their lives. Not with a war already starting and Liam having no magic to protect himself with.

Draco nodded, accepting Remus’s judgement, even more curious. He stood and, completely unselfconsciously, pulled Harry into a sweet kiss. “Why don’t you clean up in here and put the bedding back on the beds. The rooms are warm enough to sleep in. I know you’re exhausted, so go to sleep early. I’ll be back before you wake up in the morning.”

“Yes, Draco,” Harry agreed easily. He turned in Draco’s embrace and gave Remus a warm smile. “Good night, Remus.”

“Good night, Harry,” the man answered softly, affection shining in his eyes. No other kid Harry’s age would have accepted being left behind so easily.

Draco gave Harry one last kiss on the cheek before heading out. He grabbed his jacket, mittens, and hat, pulling them on in preparation of the storm. Remus had followed him, but he merely grabbed his jacket and a scarf. As a werewolf, he tended to run hot and wasn’t as bothered by the cold. It took a good fifteen minutes of crunching through ankle deep, freshly fallen snow to reach the Hog’s Head. The Three Broomsticks was already closed, but the more shady establishment was open twenty-four hours. Draco would have been frozen through if it weren’t for Remus casting a warming charm on his shoes, pants, and jacket.

They arrived in the Leaky Cauldron just as the bar keep, Tom, was about to put out the fire for the night. He was friendly enough and soon they were out on the streets of Muggle London. It was a little warmer than Scotland and it wasn’t snowing, but it was still cold enough to have Draco hunching down into his jacket anyway.

“I’ve been to a club before,” Draco said conversationally, wondering if that was what Remus wanted to show him.

Remus looked down at him with a mysterious smile. He was brimming with nervous energy. Fortunately for him, he didn’t have long to wait before the taxi he’d called from a payphone arrived. They climbed into the back and Remus gave the address.

They didn’t drive long, only about twenty minutes or so. Their destination was still in London. Draco watched street lamps and a few cars pass by. The tall brick and stone buildings that lined the streets, some hundreds of years old, seemed so mysterious in the dark, cold night. Some had dark windows, others blazed with warm yellow light. Stores popped up almost at random between residential houses.

Slowly the buildings and streets turned ominous. Draco spotted graffiti on the walls and more trash
on the sides of the streets. More bars and convince stores. The taxi pulled to a stop in front of an especially sketchy place. There were two men on the stoop leading up to the building’s entrance. One was leaning against the fencing that lined the stairs, the other sat on the steps. They wore baggy clothes that could hide any number of weapons and watched closely as Draco and Remus got out of the car.

“Nice place,” Draco drawled.

One of the thugs had locked eyes with him and he held the pathetic glare unimpressed. They were almost to the stairs before the thug finally looked away. Draco cast a glance up at Remus. In this lighting, with one street light flickering and the other out completely, the scars on Remus’s face were stark and terrifying. Draco didn’t even notice them most of the time, he was so used to them, but Remus must look intimidating to the two thugs on the stairs. The idiots certainly didn’t try anything as Remus and Draco walked past. Draco smirked a little at that.

The front door opened to a poorly lit foyer with a staircase going up in a square pattern. Beyond that was a narrow hallway lined with doors. The smell of sour urine was overwhelming. Looking up, Draco counted four floors. He could hear a baby crying, the sounds of a TV turned way too loud, a group of people laughing. Draco followed Remus to the stairs, increasingly curious. He was completely baffled. Why would Remus bring him to a place like this? Clearly it was to meet someone, but who could be so interesting or important that they’d come all the way over here at night, leaving Harry behind? One thing was certain, neither the Malfoys nor Tonkses would have anything to do with a place like this, so he could rule out a crazy attempt to get them to reconcile or something.

The smell was better and it was slightly quieter on the second floor. The hallway was long with at least ten doors on either side, but Remus stopped and knocked on the first door about ten feet from the stairs. The numbers 201 were place in the center, at an adult male’s eye level, and directly above a peephole. The numbers were tarnished and almost black in places, but Draco noticed the door was solid and in good condition by the sound Remus’s knuckles made when he’d rapped.

It only took about thirty seconds before the sound of the deadbolt flipping and a door chain rattling reached their ears. Remus took a step to the side, clearing the doorway. Wary of a threat, Draco moved to follow him, but Remus put a hand on his shoulder, stopping him. Immediately, blood rushed hot through Draco’s veins. The door opened, casting a square of clear light into the hall and over Draco who stood vulnerable in the doorway. Eyes flashing, teeth bared in a threatening almost-smile, Draco took in the man who’d opened the door.

Smell - leather and something unidentifiable that nonetheless sank into Draco’s bones, unstringing his muscles. Sight - tall, lean, dark hair, light eyes, rugged. Draco’s heart was pumping. Tears stung his eyes before his conscious brain could comprehend what was happening. Expression - the man was grinning, pure joy illuminating his face. Brother, grief, love… home…

“Liam,” Draco breathed, completely in shock.

“Draco.” Liam’s voice was filled with triumph, his oh-so-familiar face only changed slightly by time.

Liam dropped to his knees and Draco flung himself forward, his body reacting and moving while his brain still struggled to grasp what was happening. Liam’s strong arms wrapped around him even while Draco flung his arms around the man’s neck. The smell of leather, and shampoo, and Liam, hit Draco like a blow and he began to sob. Deep, loud sobs that were more reminiscent of Harry than Draco. The long years of grief he’d kept hidden, the stress of doing it all on his own, the life and death battles, the torment of shredding his mind to cleanse it of Voldemort’s spell… all the pain came
pouring out of him, because for the first time in months, he felt safe - truly safe.

Liam’s joy morphed into worry. He pulled Draco even tighter against his chest, cradled the boy’s head into his shoulder. He couldn’t get over how much bigger and older Draco looked, but the heartbroken sobs took all of his attention. He rocked back onto his heels, pulling Draco with him, and stood up. Draco instinctively wrapped his long legs around Liam’s waist and clung even tighter, his cries growing even louder as Liam swayed from side-to-side, comforting and sheltering all at once.

Remus, tears in his eyes, stepped inside and shut the door behind him as Liam carried Draco to the couch and sat down. Remus glanced away from them and lingered by the front door, giving them privacy. There was a little kitchenette to his right. The yellowing-tiles were faded from age but clean. The cabinets were plywood painted white. The refrigerator had rounded edges, the heavy kind that was at least fifteen years old. There was a gas stove with two burners, no microwave. A single stainless steel sink sat next to the stove.

The kitchen was separated from the living room by a waist-high counter. It was small with a single, smudged window. Remus could see a brick building close enough to touch through the cloudy glass. There was a busted up TV on a table across from the couch. The couch was brown leather. It looked worn but in good repair. Two mismatching nightstands had been placed on either end. There were two doors on the wall the TV had been set against. One was cracked open and Remus could see tile. He guessed that it was a bathroom. The other door was shut, most likely Liam’s bedroom.

Draco’s cries had quieted and morphed into laughter. He pulled away from Liam and rubbed at his face with his jacket sleeve. “What the hell you doin’ here?” he demanded, grinning. He was still on Liam’s lap, facing the man and straddling his thighs.

“I came for ya,” Liam answered with a grin. “Told ya I would.”

Draco laughed again and slid to the side, sitting next to Liam on the couch. He held tightly to the man’s arm, unconsciously afraid he would disappear again if he let go. With wide, pink-rimmed eyes from crying, Draco looked from Liam to Remus and back again. “How is this possible. Tell me everything!”

Liam leaned back into the couch, butt sliding to the edge of the seat, and sort of sprawled bonelessly. His grin morphed into a smirk, even as his eyes fell to half-mast lazily. The image was so familiar, Draco felt his heart twist painfully. “Well, after we said goodbye…”

- “Fuck you, assholes!” Liam screamed hatefully at the men and women that came toward him. “Fuck you and yer laws! It ain’t right takin’ families apart! It ain’t fucking right!” But as Draco had predicted, no matter how Liam struggled, he felt himself being yanked brutally down into unconsciousness. Knew he’d lost something so goddamn precious he’d never be the same whether he remembered or not. No more “happy” birthday pancakes and morning cartoons with two small bodies on the floor giggling and whispering while he drank coffee. Or pillow fights or small bodies pressed against his side. No more tiny hands in his. Or clear gray eyes piercing him to the core. Or soft green ones filled with the sweetest damn love. No more cheering at little-league baseball games or helping with homework. No more watching Harry try and figure out how to cook the food they ate out at restaurants or Draco’s endless questions about the world. “Please… no…” he begged, barely a whisper, because he was already gone… -

- “Woke up in a filthy alley like some drunk. Didn’t know where the fuck I was and this woman told me to get outta town and never come back or she’d do the job right…”

- Hot pain as a hand collided with his face, bringing the spinning world into focus. A girl his age,
chewing and snapping bright pink gum. She was crouched next to him wearing strange clothes. “You listening to me? I didn’t wipe your memory. You still remember the boys, right?” Liam’s breath caught and he stared wide-eyed. He remembered it all! Tears seared his cheeks. He opened his mouth to thank her, but she was already talking. “If I see you around again, I’ll fix that permanently,” she said, suddenly looking cold and threatening. “Not a lot of people would do what you did, so I’m going to give you this one chance. Leave America. Go to England if you want, that’s where you might find the boys, but leave America and don’t come back. And don’t tell anyone about magic.” She leaned close and Liam pressed back away from her, honestly frightened. It looked like there was actual fire burning deep inside her pupils. Holly hell! “If you tell anyone, I’ll find you. I’ll find you and I’ll kill you. Got it?” Liam nodded helplessly and she was gone. Like literally poof and gone. Liam scrambled to his feet and ran like hell… -

“I found the girls at our safe house. Mob wasn’t too happy with me and burned down the club. The girls didn’t remember going to that basement, but they remembered you guys fine.” He shot Draco a warm smile. “Didn’t have to ask. They said they was comin’ with me. We laid low ’til we could get some fake passports. Then we got the hell outta dodge. Good timing, too. The feds put away most of the big bosses. Mob was in shambles. People getting arrested left and right and squealing just to get their time reduced. Mob’s officially broken over there. We flew inta’ London, and let me tell you, it was a long ass flight. Got through customs and then just disappeared into the city. Been working under the table since we got here. Got in good with the clubs and such. Spread ourselves out a bit. Figured you’d show up there eventually. Was our best hope anyway.”

Draco leaned forward, letting his forehead rest against Liam’s shoulder. “It was a good plan.”

“This guy found a club Jess was workin’. It was an event night. Booze and shows, not so much crowd participation. Hundreds of people, almost triple the size of the normal crowd, but this guy stood out like a sore thumb. I told her to look for a guy with scars puckering his cheeks, you’d be surprised how many guys we’ve interrogated, but when I saw him sittiin’ there with Jess, I knew right away. Recognized him immediately. Knew I’d found you.” Liam wrapped his arm around Draco’s shoulders and held him close. “He told me about some war? That you might not be able to see me yet. Wanna tell me about it?”

Draco gave a long sigh and just rested against Liam for a minute. His mind was beginning to race. He’d finally come to grips that this was happening, that it was real, and the consequences began to play out before him. He pulled away from Liam’s side to be able to look into his face. Liam came out of his slouch and turned to face Draco attentively, expression serious. Remus took a seat on the floor unobtrusively, back to the half-wall that blocked off the kitchen.

“Ten years ago, Harry’s parents were killed by this evil wizard. He’s extremely powerful and totally insane…” Draco began and told the story - about Voldemort and his broken soul, about Horcruxes, about the diary. Described Pandora’s experiments with Harry’s clones and the mountain of Harry’s broken bodies. Told him about his mother, Narcissa, going after her sister to try and stop Voldemort from being resurrected.

His story jumped all over the place, one event connecting to another. He told about the discrimination he faced at Hogwarts because of his last name, the bullying even though he was in the most popular House. He even retold the story Harry had told him about the time Draco had missed while he’d been in a coma. Almost in a trance, he described the battle over the stone, Remus’s horrible injuries, and Harry’s terror, and how they’d all almost died. Draco told him about the Mind Arts and Snape. What he’d discovered about Harry’s mom being altered by a powerful spell. Described in brutal detail his vision quest to free his mind of Voldemort’s influence.

Told about the rapist in Gryffindor Tower and that he had been the Weasley’s pet all along, a human
sicko pretending to be an animal. Draco watched Remus carefully as he finally said the name of the rat and explained how Harry’s godfather had been framed. That he was innocent and had been locked up in the magical world’s worst prison for the last ten years.

“Peter… no… It can’t be…” Remus felt completely numb. As if he were a ghost standing in a strange muggle apartment. Maybe he was dreaming. Everything seemed so unreal. “Sirius… betrayed… no… you’re wrong…”

“Go ask the Headmaster,” Draco said tiredly. He was utterly exhausted and scrubbed at his face. He’d been talking for going on two hours. His throat hurt, his voice was raspy. “He can confirm it was Peter. Has his body still and everything. I killed the fucker.”

Remus stood rooted to the spot for a long minute just staring at Draco as if he were an alien. Then he turned and bolted out the door.

Liam stood without saying anything and went to the door, shutting and locking it. He turned back to the couch and saw again the image of a tired seven-year-old trying so hard to be strong. He couldn’t help smiling. “Crash on my couch for a couple o’hours. We’ll talk about what this means for us when you wake up.”

Liam went to the kitchen and got Draco some water and then went and fetched some blankets. Draco accepted both, drinking the water down and then snuggling into the blanket as he stretched out on the couch. Liam sank to the floor, putting his back to the couch. Draco let his arm fall down over Liam’s chest, making the man smile. He held gently to Draco’s wrist, determined to convince his bossy little brother that it would be okay to stay connected. Truth was, Liam would risk his life no question in order to keep his family together. The trick was to convince Draco that his life wouldn’t be in danger in the first place.

Chapter end.

A/N: Yay! The reunion scene! I worked so hard on it! :D

I’ll be glad for any feedback - both for the Harry/Draco scene and the reunion! Sorry it is taking so long for me to update. At least the chapters are longer, right? Expect the next update around Halloween. See ya!
Winter Woods and Gods

Winter Woods and Gods

Molly was dreaming, gripped by a nightmare…

The sound of a Howler hissing open took her attention from the pots simmering on the stove. “Mr. and Mrs. Weasley. I apologize for contacting you at this hour. You are needed at Hogwarts. It is an emergency.” Molly dropped her spoon with a gasp, adrenaline hitting her system. Arthur got up from the table and quickly went to the floo to contact Xeno. Molly was already moving. She called Ginny and Timmy in from the garden. Snow-covered, red-cheeked and happy, the children grew quiet and worried as they were hustled to the floo.

“Daddy? Where’re we goin’?” Ginny asked, looking up at her father.

“You’re going to stay at Mr. Lovegood’s for a little while, sweetie. Mummy and I are going to take care of something at the school. Don’t you worry. We’ll be back before you know it.”

“What they do now?” Ginny asked with a roll of her eyes.

Molly said nothing, holding her youngest, Septimus, closer to her chest. There was something in Professor McGongall’s voice. It set her heart beating hard and fast, sending cold terror curling through her gut.

“We’ll find out soon. Come on now.”

He reached for Septimus and, reluctantly, Molly handed the boy to Arthur and watched him floo the children to their neighbor’s. While he was gone, Molly rushed to the kitchen to stop the cooking. Arthur called her from the living room and she rushed to his side, flooing together to the Headmaster’s office. The grief on Dumbledore’s face made her go completely cold as he sat them down in front of his desk. Very carefully, Dumbledore told them of the vile offender who had hurt their Ron and the mental distress he was evidencing. But that was not even all.

She sat completely frozen as she listened to him tell her that her boys had been made hostages when the criminal went on the run. They had even witnessed the man’s brutal death. She could hardly understand the words the Headmaster spoke, the only thing coming clear was that her children were all in the Infirmary and needed her…

Molly rushed to her son’s side. She refused to look at the Headmaster. Her children were silent, subdued, and Ron… Oh, her little boy… He looked haunted. His eyes were bruised from lack of sleep. His lips chapped. His face pale. She clutched him close and refused to let go. They had just gotten the kids settled at home when Arthur asked her, “Where are you going?”

“I need to speak to Draco,” she answered, monotone, a letter clutched in her fist.

She threw the floo powder down and traveled to the Tonks’. Oh god, the cold way that poor boy spoke of the horror that had happened to the boys in the Tower. The photos he placed in her hands… of the twins and Ron… and then telling her… two years ago… Percy had been abused for months! That Draco had tried his best to save him! Had saved him. But he hadn’t thought to save anyone else. What had the boy been thinking?! Playing with such dangerous magic?! He could have killed Percy! Draco should have told someone, anyone!, what was happening! But he was just a boy himself. Someone else deserved her rage more…
She found herself standing in the Headmaster’s office. She demanded the rest of the photos of Ron… and, goddess help her, there were so many!… Looking up from the disgusting photos, she stared at the man who was responsible… and rage exploded from her core… The walls seemed to bend away from her terrible anger… She flung the Headmaster to the ground. Beat him against the stone floor. Metal shrieked. Books tore. Wood shattered. The phoenix sang and sang, but she couldn’t hear it over the scream of her terrible rage.

“How dare you! They were supposed to be safe here! How long have children been abused in these walls, Dumbledore! How long would it have continued! My boys! Oh my boys! Look what you’ve done to my boys!”

… Molly jerked awake, panting. The memory of that day ran on a loop through her mind - awake or sleeping. She was stuck there.

“Did you sleep at all?”

She sat up to see her husband coming around the bed to sit next to her. The room was dark, the curtains pulled over the windows. The children were quiet and there was nothing left to clean, so Arthur had told her to take a nap while he watched over things. She turned away from him, remembering the argument between them.

“Molly…” He sighed as if burdened with some terrible weight.

“I said no, Arthur.”

Arthur lost his temper. He quickly cast a Silencing Ward around them. “It’s his OWL year, Molly. He’s worked hard and deserves to see the results of that.”

She sat up in a flash, eyes burning. “They are not going back to Hogwarts. That’s final.”

“He will.”

Molly gaped at her husband. “Excuse me?”

“Percy will finish out the school year.” Arthur stood, feet planted and stared his wife down. “I am the Head of this Household, and I have decided that Percy will be returning to Hogwarts when the break is over.”

“Arthur!” she gasped horrified.

He grabbed her by the shoulders, almost shaking her. “I know, Molly! I’m just as furious as you! But he wants to go back! Refusing him that is like clipping his wings. It’s like telling him he’s wounded and then making it so! He feels strong enough. He wants it. He’s going!” Seeing his wife’s tears, he gentled his tone. “We failed him once, Molly, by allowing that animal into our home. I will not fail him a second time. We can discuss what we’ll do for his education after he finishes out the year, but he is going back and getting his OWLs.”

Molly yanked away from her husband. “He can take the tests independently. He doesn’t need to go back to that school!”

“He won’t be as prepared!” Arthur yelled back. “We’ve discussed this. He told us what he wanted! He had good, sound reasons for wanting to go back!”

“He’s a boy! He doesn’t know what’s best!” she argued passionately.
“We can’t let this cripple us or the boys,” Arthur screamed desperately. “We can’t keep him locked in the Burrow!”

“I’m crippling my boys, then, is that it? Looks to me like I’m the only one willing to protect them!” She glared in cold fury at the man who was supposed to be her partner. She threw the blankets off and climbed stiffly from the bed. “Well, I see you’ve made your decision.”

“Molly… please…” Arthur whispered brokenly.

Molly turned her back and refused to speak to him.

…

The siblings were instantly aware of the tension between their parents even though both Molly and Arthur tried to hide it. It was a little obvious when they refused to look at each other let alone speak to each other, so Charlie, Bill, and the twins devised a plan. Bill would keep Ginny and Timmy occupied and also keep a lookout for their parents while the twins and Charlie cornered Percy and Ron. It was clear that the core of the debate centered around those two, and it was also clear that they knew more about what was going on than the rest of them.

Charlie arranged it by bullying his brothers into a hike. It was the one thing Ginny and Tim wouldn’t want to join in on. Bill casually offered to stay behind, saying he didn’t feel like going out. Instead, he coaxed Ginny and Tim into a snowball fight in the yard.

“I really don’t want to go hiking, Charlie,” Ron grumbled. It was after lunch. The sky was cold and cloudy, the sun weak. His breath billowed before him with every breath and, even with his knitted red hat pulled low, his nose and cheeks were cold. He hunched his shoulders into the scarf he wore and glared at the twins. “And since when do you like hiking?”

“We like it sometimes,” they said together, grinning, walking arm-in-arm. And that was true enough. They were unpredictable like that.

Ron cast a glance at Percy. His brother’s eyes were hard to read behind his glasses, but he definitely didn’t look any happier about this than Ron did.

“Fresh air is good for you,” Charlie boasted. He wasn’t much taller than Percy and was much shorter than Bill. A bit stocky, broad of shoulder with a fair bit of muscle, he looked twice as wide as normal wearing several layers of sweaters and a bulky jacket. He didn’t bother with a hat or mittens, but he had a scarf tossed loosely around his neck.

His hair was tied back in a ponytail at the back of his head, turned more orange than red from being in the sun so much. His face was permanently sunburnt across his cheeks and nose, it seemed, and he was so freckled that he almost looked tanned. (Of all the siblings, Charlie had the most freckles, Ron had the second most, then Percy, then Bill, while the twins, Ginny, and Timmy hardly had any at all.)

Ron had always looked up to Charlie a bit more than Bill. Bill was more serious, more like Percy. Charlie was more fun-loving and was more willing to play with them, but Ron really, really, wasn’t in the mood today. “Yeah, sure. Maybe when it’s not freezing your lungs solid,” he grumbled, lagging behind.

He didn’t want to deal with this shite right now. The threat of not going back to Hogwarts loomed over him like an executioner’s axe. Percy made the most compelling argument to go back, it being his Fifth-Year, but Ron and the twins had been shut down hard when they’d argued. And his parents
were fighting. It felt like it was all his fault, but he didn’t know what to do about any of it.

Truth was, Ron was conflicted. Hogwarts wasn’t what he’d thought it would be, that was for sure. Classes were interesting and Quidditch was great, but he’d drifted away from Harry and Draco and fought a lot with that annoying Longbottom-Pleasant girl. He made some real good friends in Dean and Seamus, but they were still so new… and everything with the bullying and… Scabbers…

“Okay. We’re here.”

Ron looked up to see they were at their little hang-out down by the small lake by their house. It wasn’t nearly far enough to be considered a “hike” by Charlie’s standards. If Ginny and Tim had known they were heading here, they would have definitely wanted to come. The lake had iced over weeks ago and was solid enough to skate on. This was looking more and more like a set up.

Ron glared at his older brothers suspiciously as the twins settled on their favorite fallen log and Charlie took a seat on a tree stump. With a grin, Charlie cast warming charms on all of them and gestured to Percy and Ron’s places in the make-shift circle.

“Well, sit down.”

“What are we doing here?” Ron demanded, arms crossed and glaring.

“What? You got something better to do?” Charlie’s smile faded and he gave his little brother a firm look. “Sit, Ron. We have to talk.” He cast a look up at Percy. “You, too, Perce.”

“What is this?” Ron demanded again. He refused to sit down.

“We know you don’t trust us,” Fred began, usually solemn.

“We don’t always do right by you,” George agreed with a firm nod.

Together they said, “But we’re brothers and we want to help you.”

“Help me?” Ron was completely surprised.

“Please, Ron. Percy.” Charlie stood and reached out both hands to his younger brothers. They were scarred and blistered from his work, but they looked strong and sturdy. He had blue eyes. Like Ron and Tim. Like their father. “You gotta tell us what’s going on. We’re brothers. Nothing you say here will be used against you. We swear it.”

“You know what happened,” Ron snarled defensively. He took a step back as panic slammed into his system. He’d been trying so hard not to think about it. Tried so bloody hard!

Percy looked at his little brother. Really looked at him. Ron still wasn’t sleeping. Not regularly at any rate. Where before he’d been loud and bold, he’d become so withdrawn. He was always scowling. Guilt sat as heavy as lead in Percy’s gut. For the first time in years, Percy cast Charlie a desperate look. Maybe Charlie was right. Maybe this could help?

Charlie met Percy’s gaze and it was so steady and straight-forward that it gave Percy courage. Ron was only eleven. He couldn’t be asked to do this alone. Decided, he reached for Ron’s hand and held it tight. It felt soft and muffled through their mittens, but he held fast with a solid grip. Ron stared at him wide-eyed, a look of betrayal on his face… until Percy began to speak. And then he realized that Percy wasn’t going to tattle on him. In fact, he wasn’t going to speak about Ron at all.

“I didn’t know it was Scabbers,” Percy began, voice harsh with pain in spite of how strong he was
trying to be. His brothers listened in dead silence, not daring to interrupt. “But someone would h-hurt me... at night... in the T-Tower.” He swallowed hard. He couldn’t look at them, so he dropped his eyes to the ground. His hand gripped Ron’s almost painfully tight. “H-he’d... get on top of me... he’d d-do things to me... It hurt so bad... I-I was so s-scared...”

Charlie got to his feet and came to stand close to Percy’s side. He didn’t know if it was okay to touch him, but he wanted more than anything to protect him. With growing horror, he realized what his brother’s words meant... Percy - serious, responsible Percy - his little brother... had been raped...

“I couldn’t p-prove it,” Percy continued, oblivious now of his brothers around him. He was caught up in a past that still haunted him if he let it. “There were no marks in the morning. W-when I tried to tell the n-nurse something h-hurt me at night, she didn’t understand, told me I must have been dreaming. Gave me Dreamless Sleep. I... I thought I was going crazy... I didn’t know who to tell or how.” Percy was breathing faster now, panic and pain setting in. “I pulled into myself. Withdrew from everybody. I wanted to die...”

Charlie couldn’t take it anymore and grabbed Percy in a tight hug. Ron wrapped his arms around Percy, too, even as Fred and George came up behind him to join in.

Percy relaxed into their hold. His voice steadied. “We met Draco that Yule... I don't know how, but he knew something was wrong with me. He... He promised to protect me... He combined his magic with Harry’s somehow and put a protection on me.” Percy pulled away from the group hug and dropped Ron’s hand. Turning his back, he lifted his sweaters and jacket to show his lower back.

Charlie, Fred, George, and Ron stared at the red snake curled up on Percy’s skin.

“Wicked,” the twins said together. They reached out to touch it, but Percy quickly covered the mark and turned back around, cheeks burning red.

“The protection worked. The man never hurt me again.” His hands curled into fists as his eyes met Ron's. He tried to hold it back, but he couldn’t stop his eyes from filling with tears. “I don’t know why I never thought that he could hurt someone else. I am so, so sorry, Ron. I should have been smarter! I should have protected you...”

“It’s not your fault.” The words were spoken with absolute certainty.

Percy stared wide-eyed at his little brother.

“It’s not your fault and it’s not Draco’s,” Ron declared, angry again, scowling fiercely. “You had no way of knowing it was Scabbers! None of us suspected! You did nothing wrong!”

Percy could hardly believe it. Ron was forgiving him! Ron was being the strong one as Percy stood there, tears streaking his face, shaking like a leaf. Percy leaned into Charlie gratefully when his older brother put his arm around him again. He had no idea what to think. He felt emptied out, beaten. Ron stood there, defiant and angry. He stood with his fists clenched, George on one side and Fred on the other, and faced Percy and Charlie.

“I don’t remember anything like that happening to me, you know. I just keep having this nightmare,” he spat hatefully. “It won’t fucking leave me alone!”

“What’s it about?” Fred asked weakly. They were only thirteen. This was all more than they could really take in, but they knew they couldn’t stop now. George reached behind Ron’s back to grip Fred’s forearm in support.

Ron spun to face the wide-eyed twins. Something about seeing their lost expressions when they were
the ones to fucking drag him out here and demand answers made him so mad he could hardly think!
“You want to know?” he growled, eyes glittering malevolently. “I’m sinking into the Black Lake
and the giant squid has me. It’s got me all wrapped up and I can’t fucking breathe. There’s fucking
tentacles holding my mouth open so far that my jaw tears off my face! Do you know how bad that
HURTS?! I try to get away, to swim to the surface, but I never make it…”

Ron was shaking so hard he almost couldn’t keep his feet. Spitting like a feral cat, he practically
snarled in their faces. “Do you know what it feels like to be so desperate for air that your chest caves
in and your eyes feels like they’re going to pop out of your head?! I do! And It. Won’t. Fucking.
Leave. Me. Alone! What the hell can you do for that? HUH?” he screamed, all the rage and pain and
confusion pouring out of him like poison. “Just leave me the fuck alone so maybe I can forget what it
feels like to die for one bloody minute!”

Seeing their horror-struck faces staring back at him, Ron broke and ran. He ran until his lungs burned
like fire in his chest. Ran until his heart felt like it was going to explode. The feeling of tentacles were
wrapped all around his body, and Ron sprinted even faster, trying to escape that deadly, ghostly
touch. He lost his hat. He lost a mitten. He ran and fell, tumbling hard to the rough ground, tearing
his palm and slamming against a tree. He couldn’t breathe!

True, blind panic set in. He thrashed wildly, scratching at his own throat, his mouth hanging
desperately open. Scrabbling to his feet, swaying, vision going dark, Ron ran a few more feet, trying
to get away, trying to survive, before unconsciousness snapped cruelly closed over his mind.

…

Charlie, Percy, Fred, and George stood stunned by Ron’s horrific words for a long minute. It was
long enough for Ron to disappear into the trees. Charlie snapped out of it and took off after his little
brother. Fred and George were on his heels, but Percy wasn’t the athletic type. He stumbled and
tripped as he chased after everyone until he lost sight of them all.

Panting, hand against a tree for balance, Percy stared into the shadowed wood. Clouds were
gathering thicker, threatening snow. Darkness was falling all around them. How did Ron get so far
away? Percy frowned and rubbed his glasses off on his sweater under his jacket. His hands were
shaking and he honestly couldn’t say if it was because of the cold or that horrible conversation. He
felt sick, knowing how much Ron remembered from that night. Merlin! Tears blurred his eyes again
and suddenly he had no strength at all. He put his back to the tree and sank down.

How the hell could he be there for Ron when he was so damn lost himself? The urge to see Draco,
to hear his voice, hit him so hard that he almost cried out his name. Fifteen years old and crying for
an eleven-year-old to help him… Disgusted with himself, Percy curled up at the base of the tree and
cried.

…

Shit! Charlie cursed himself out in his head. This was a stupid plan! He took them out in the woods
to talk about deep, horrific shit and didn’t expect them to run away? He should have put up a barrier.
Or tagged them with a beacon spell just in case. Shit!

“RON!” he bellowed, hands cupped around his mouth. “RON! WHERE ARE YOU?”

The woods stood silent around him, growing darker by the minute. The temperature was dropping,
too. Charlie spun around and saw Fred and George moving some bit away from him. If he listened
closely, he could hear them calling for their brother.
“FRED! GEORGE! GET PERCY AND GO BACK TO THE HOUSE! GET DAD AND BILL!”

One of the twins tossed their hand in the air to indicate they had heard and then they were quickly out of sight.

“Shit,” he said again, this time out loud, before striding deeper into the woods. “RON! DAMN IT, ANSWER ME! RON!”

…

Darkness closed in around them quickly, the sun defeated by the darkening clouds. Within the hour, snow began to fall. The Weasley clan - Molly, Bill, Charlie, Arthur, Amos Diggory, Mr. Fawcett, and Xenophilius Lovegood spread out in the sparse wood that bordered the Weasley’s marsh.

They were having no luck with magic. Point Me only told them the direction of North. The vial of blood Molly kept of each of the children hadn’t been renewed in a while due to Ron being away at school, so it was dry and old. It gave weak results, just a faint tugging in a general direction. Molly pointed the way and the men fanned out along her sides.

The land wasn’t flat, lifting and dropping in hills, so it was hard to see farther than a dozen yards in front of them. The temperature dropped dangerously. The snow came down heavier, faster, until you couldn’t see the person standing five feet away from you, and still the calls, muffled and eerie, continued:

“RON! … Ronald! … Ron!”

…

Ron woke in a daze. He couldn’t feel his body at all. He felt covered with a heavy blanket. He stared dumbly into the darkness, felt the falling snow on his cheek, on his eyelashes. He blinked slowly. He wasn’t afraid. He was calm. Maybe for the first time in weeks… No, his whole life. A deep calm serenity. His thoughts came slow, slower. He thought of Percy, of the annoying twins. Thought of Ginny and Tim. Charlie and Bill. He thought of baseball; Draco and Harry. Just soft acknowledgements. Nothing heavy or hard. Just an ‘I know you’.

He thought of Hogwarts, the towers and classes and his friends. He thought of Quidditch and flying. He thought of his parents… Warm food… Christmas presents… His eyes fluttered closed again, a small smile touching his numb lips… His thoughts slowing into a deadly sleep.

…

“We have to find him!” Molly screamed to Arthur on her right. She couldn’t see him at all, but had to believe he was still there. “RON!” She tripped over a tree root and slid halfway down a hill. The snow was nearly blinding her now. She thrust her arms out and, between the darkness and the blizzard, she couldn’t just barely see her hands. The Lumos spell only made it worse, bouncing off the snow right into her eyes, making her field of vision even shorter, so she trudged onward in the dark.

“RON!” She clutched the small vial of blood and tried to focus. Her breath roared in her ears. The snow muffled everything, even her magic. “RON!” The tiniest tug against her nearly numb fingers, small enough to make her paranoid that it was just her imagination, but she had to follow. Had to.

A black figure. Fingers like bare-tree branches. Mouth a black pit darker than night. She screamed. Yellow eyes glared at her. It flew right into her face.
"LUMOS MAXIMUS!"

The spell exploded above her head, a white sun cutting through every shadow, holding the night at bay. A high, inhuman shriek. She collapsed to her knees, hands slamming over her ears. She was screaming in pain instead of terror now, but she couldn’t even hear it.

Light beaming down onto a small mound in the snow, at the base of a tree. Where the creature had been hovering, its thin, stick-like fingers crawling. Molly lunged forward and felt the ice-cold skin of her child.

“RON! I found him! I found Ron! He’s here! HERE!” she hollered helplessly, pulling him into her arms even as her spell began to fade, the dark and snow crashing back in around her. “WE’RE HERE!”

xXxXxXx

As Ron was found in the dark woods and Draco fell soundly asleep safe on Liam’s couch, Remus was getting out of a cab in front of the Leaky Cauldron. The pub was closed for the night, the fire put out, but Remus could still edge down the alley and get to the entrance to Diagon. From there, Remus practically ran to Knockturn Alley and into a seedy, all-night establishment that had a fire burning.

The man behind the counter charged an exorbitant amount to use the floo, but Remus hardly cared. He practically flung the money at the man and leapt into the green flames, calling the emergency floo password for the Headmaster’s office. Remus knew it would set off all types of alarms, but he could hardly think. His heart was beating, beating, beating in his chest… Peter and Sirius and Azkaban… He staggered and fell clumsily to his knees, coughing soot from his throat. Dumbledore’s apartment door flung open with a bang. The ancient wizard stood with his snow-white hair and beard loose, falling messily around his face. He was tugging a magenta sleep-robe closer about his body.

“Remus?” he called from the top of the stairs. He was already moving down them with surprising agility for a man his age. “What is it, my boy? An attack?”

Remus pushed up to his feet and met Dumbledore at the bottom of the stairs, grabbing the old man by the arms in desperation. “Is it true? Do you have him?” he practically screamed in Dumbledore’s face. “Peter! Do you have Peter!”

The alarm in the old man’s face drained away to be replaced by exhaustion and sorrow. “Yes. Yes, I have him.”

Remus shook the old Headmaster. “Tell me it isn’t true! Tell me Sirius hasn’t been locked away all these years for NOTHING!” He hardly gave Dumbledore the chance to speak, continuing right on. “Why didn’t you do anything? Why didn’t you help him?! Sirius, it was Sirius we sent away. How could we do it? How could we do it?!”

Dumbledore took a step back, pulling Remus with him and guiding the distraught younger man to sit on the steps with him. Remus was shaking now. He’d lost all strength and sat heavily, tears falling freely down his grief-stricken face. His hands fell away from Dumbledore’s shoulders, uselessly hanging by his sides. Dumbledore reached forward and wrapped an arm around Remus’s shoulders. Surprisingly, Remus allowed it, desperate for comfort.

“You remember the panic, the fear and paranoia; it was a dark time. Voldemort’s attacks grew bolder, more frequent. It was no longer political targets. They appeared random. The attack on the hospital… whole families murdered, their bodies displayed… People hardly left their houses in terror
of being killed. The Ministry was on the brink of collapse and then…” Dumbledore’s voice was soft, struck with grief. Tears slid soundlessly down his face. “He attacked the Potters… The nightmare was over. Remus, they were celebrating in the streets, Muggle and magical streets alike. Fireworks. Hysteria. People demanded proof the Death Eaters had been captured for good or they’d riot and finish the job Voldemort had started. It was chaos. Everything balanced on a knife’s edge of joy and rage… Emergency trials were held. Dozens scheduled in a day. The newspaper was printing like mad. The evidence against Sirius…”

Remus moaned deep in his throat.

Dumbledore’s arm tightened around him. “Sirius was out of his mind with grief, perhaps. He wouldn’t stop laughing and screaming that it was his fault. And all those dead Muggles, with him the only one on the scene. You can’t know how terribly it pained me to see one of my favorite students brought so low. Perhaps that is why I missed the clues that Sirius was innocent. I was too emotionally involved. Whatever the reason, I will forever regret that day, Remus.”

Hoarse, voice ravaged by terrible emotion, Remus said, “Favorite? He was your favorite?” He yanked away from the old man, jerking out from under his arm, but his hand caught Dumbledore by the wrist. Rage, pure unbridled rage, made him see red. As if his eyes had filled with blood, he looked through a film of deep red. “What does your favor give anyone except ruin and death?” he growled harshly.

Adrenaline and fury, and his body began to shift just a little bit, his monster coming to the surface, called by his bloodlust. His nails hardened, piercing the old man’s forearm where he gripped him tightly. His teeth grew that little bit sharper. And his eyes… the iris grew, overtaking the white, brightening to wolf-yellow. “All of your favorite students… used up… left broken or discarded or dead…”

Dumbledore’s heart raced in his chest as true mortal terror crashed through him. His fear hit the air, sharp and acrid. Remus’s pupils dilated, he leaned forward, baring sharpened teeth in a death-head grin.

“I think the problem is you!”

“I do not bear this guilt alone!” Dumbledore snapped, shaking. “Where were you, Remus, when your friends needed you?”

Remus felt the words like a blow. He fell back from the Headmaster and scrambled to his feet, panting. Putting distance between them, he walked stiffly to the window, turning his back on the old man. Guilt and rage battled in his chest. Tears streaked his face. His head hung. He wrapped his arms around his chest, gasping for every breath, and tried not to fall apart.

As the minutes passed, Dumbledore felt his fear bleed away and he regretted lashing out at his young pupil. “There was nothing you could have done,” he told him sadly. “Not in that situation, but we can fix it. Sirius won’t stay long in Azkaban.”

Remus choked on a sob. “He’s already stayed too long.” Wiping his face, he tried to get himself under control. “You have a way to free him? The Minister won’t want to admit Sirius was innocent all along.”

“If the Minister won’t hold a re-trial in light of new evidence, then we will simply break Sirius free,” Dumbledore stated resolutely.

Pained beyond measure, Remus turned around. His features were human once more. “When?”
Dumbledore looked squarely into Remus’s eyes and vowed, “Before summer is out, Sirius will be home.”

“That’s months from now!” Remus cried, alarmed.

“I have already called in some old Order members. They will visit Sirius twice a day in shifts. They’ve spoken to him. Sirius knows his time there is coming to an end, and he is holding up remarkably well. Apparently his dog form has saved him from the worst effects of the prison.” Dumbledore’s gripped the railing on the stairs and pulled himself to his feet. His voice turned hard and commanding. “I want him out as much as you do, Remus, but if we can do it legally, it would be for the best. Sirius deserves his freedom, not to be shut away in hiding for the rest of his life.”

Remus had to admit Dumbledore was right. “I want a shift.”

Dumbledore smiled, painfully proud. He knew how hard it would be for Remus to go to that place and see his last remaining pack member locked up so cruelly. “Of course, my boy. I will contact you with the day and time.”

Remus pulled his shoulders back, lifted his chin. “I want to see Peter.”

Dumbledore frowned.

Remus did not back down. “I never got to see any of their bodies. Not James or Peter or Sirius. I got a copy of the newspaper and came rushing back, but it was too late. They had all disappeared. I was orphaned and betrayed and alone. I need to see the body this time, Headmaster. Please.”

“I will have to summon Severus.” Dumbledore made his way to the fireplace. Remus was gestured to the chair in front of the Headmaster’s desk. His nerves were still shaken; his heart still beat wildly.

As Dumbledore spoke into the fire, Remus looked around. The office had been cleaned and set to rights. The only evidence left of the damage and destruction were a few broken devices on the shelf. One spinning thing had a melted arm and stood still and dead; another palm-sized square had spiderweb cracks all over it; a few books had torn or singed bindings, but overall the office looked as it always did ever since he was a young child.

The outside window was dark and cold. Snow had stopped falling. In its place, deep darkness pressed in around them, bringing to mind the cold, still darkness of death. The few candles lit and flickering to give them light seemed suddenly a fragile barrier between them and the darkness pressing against the glass. Remus shivered.

Severus stepped free of the fire. He looked as he always did, wearing black professor robes, sallow skin that didn’t see enough sunlight, large, hooked nose, and dark piercing eyes. In one hand, he held a rectangular box. Runes were etched into it and they seemed to twist and wiggle out of the corner of Remus’s eyes. A sick feeling settled in his gut.

The three of them were silent. Remus had come to stand with them in the center of the room without remembering how he got there. It seemed as if he were in a dream, flickering like the candles. Severus bent and put the box on the floor in the center of their huddle. A single tap of his wand and it expanded, revealing the truth; it was a crude coffin. It seemed the size for a teenager and Remus shivered again in foreboding, but Peter had always been the shortest of them.

Dumbledore swung his wand, pale as bone in the dim light of the room. The lid lifted away and the smell of death poured out. Remus took a half-step back, but forced himself to stand still. Eyes watering, he stared into the coffin.
Peter’s head rested on his shoulders only coincidentally to fit the shape of the box, for there was a jagged, bloody line where his head had been torn clean from his body. His hair was straggly and faded, thinning and balding at the top. His eyes stared blindly, a color Remus had never seen before, faded and washed out. His skin seemed waxen and saggy.

Remus gagged, his hand coming up to cover his mouth. It seemed a poor replica of the friend, the brother Remus had grown up alongside, lay before him. A terrible, frightening doll. Yet the weight of the body at his feet, the dead stare of those eyes was too terrible to deny. Peter lay dead in that box. Remus turned with a choked cry. He tried to remind himself that Peter had betrayed them, had framed Sirius and doomed him to suffer a fate worse than death… but too many years of grieving for his friend lay behind him and all he could feel was a terrible sadness, a loss that went soul deep.

“How did he do it?” Severus hissed. He had Remus by the upper arm. They stood halfway down the corridor outside of Dumbledore’s office in the darkest point between two flickering torches, casting them both in shadows. “I know he changed Lily. Tell me how.”

Remus blinked dumbly. It was as if the man spoke another language. He had no idea what he was saying.

Severus snarled and slammed Remus up against the stone wall hard enough to make Remus’s eyes rattle in his skull. “Are you listening, Lupin?”

Remus gave a weak snarl, but, yes, now he was listening. “Get your hands off me,” he said lowly, threat growing in his voice.

Severus’s hands spasmed around Remus’s jacket. The rage in his face bled away to reveal deep, abiding pain. “Please. Lupin. I’m begging you. I need to… I need to know… if there was any way I could have saved her… I have to know…”

Remus felt his anger drain away. Severus was close enough to kiss. He smelled of potions and tears. He could hear the man’s heart pounding, beating helplessly in its cage, inches from his own. Without trying to pull away, Remus scrubbed a hand over his face. “I’m sorry, Severus…”

Severus shook his head, his greasy hair falling to curtain his expression. “Just answer me. How did he do it?”

“How do you know it was Peter?” Remus’s voice caught on his friend’s name, pain bleeding around the constants and vowels.

“I was there… when Draco confronted Pettigrew.” In Severus’s mouth, the name burned the ear with acidic hatred. “He confessed. Now tell me! What did he do to her? You must have a clue somewhere in there, Lupin!”

Remus stared at Severus, heart in his throat, as what Severus was suggesting really hit him. Peter… Peter had done that to Lily? It seemed impossible, but it seemed just as impossible for Peter to have betrayed James and framed Sirius. To have raped kids in Gryffindor Tower… Molly’s kids… Merlin! It was as if Remus could understand the words, but he couldn’t truly grasp what they meant. He was still in shock over it all.

“I don’t know, Severus! I don’t know anything!” he whispered harshly, panting and going into a panic once more.

“You useless…” Severus bit off the rest of his curse. His hands tightened on Remus’s shoulders, clutching him like claws.
Remus stared wide-eyed like a frightened rabbit staring down the jaws of a killer.

“There is a way…” Severus’s voice dropped, low and compelling. He leaned even closer, his shadow falling over Remus completely. “Lupin… There is a way for us to finally know the truth.” Severus’s ink dark eyes bore into him. He was taller than Remus by a few inches but in that moment it felt like he towered over him by feet. “A ritual… We can finally know, Lupin… Please…”

Remus could only nod helplessly. His voice stollen by an invisible hand grasping his throat. He was shaking, terrified of what they might find, but he was equally determined to know. Just as it was with Severus, a question haunted him. It weighed him down, chains of burning fire coiling tighter with every breath…

Could he have stopped all this?

Deep down in the dungeons… deeper than the Slytherin common room and classrooms… not on any map - even the Marauder’s Map - there lay a powerful and sacred space. A ritual room created by the Founders of the school for Deep magics.

They traveled there by the clear, white light glowing on the tip of Severus’s wand. The cold light shifted with every step, casting their shadows on the corridor’s walls. Large and monstrous, they were terrible figures stalking them and kept flickering in at the corner of Remus’s perception, making him start and whip his head around. The shadows seemed to laugh at him.

Shivering, Remus wrapped his arms around himself. There was no protection from the bite of winter here. Severus’s breath came blooming from his lips, a cloud that reappeared just as it was about to fade into nothing. Remus’s own breath was much shallower and faster, less visible, but Severus was driven, focused, he didn’t flinch and cower like the man at his back.

White light finally fell upon a door. Blood red in appearance, it had a shine as if it were made out of a huge piece of ruby. The light sparked and shifted ominously inside the door’s depths. The ghosts of all who dared to enter trapped inside forever.

“Severus…” Remus whispered, balking. “Maybe we should…”

Severus whipped around to face him. Madness sparked in his eyes. His tone became manipulative. “How will you explain your cowardice to Black? Does he not deserve answers? Does he not deserve to know why he suffered for so long?”

Remus shuddered and fell silent as Severus spun triumphantly and pushed open the blood-red door.

Pitch black darkness enveloped them. The light from Severus’s wand didn’t seem to penetrate more than a few inches. There were marks and carvings on the floor, the lines of a pentagram, scored into solid stone. With an eerie groan, the door slid shut behind them. Remus shook as deep red light emanated from it, cast over the floor and their bodies in slow, undulating waves, giving the illusion they were under water, drowning in blood.

“Get it together,” Severus spat. Shadows made his eyes seem like dark holes, his mouth a frightening snarl. “Come stand to the North.”

Remus was too spooked to move. Even his wolf-side felt low to the ground, tail between his legs. So he stood frozen and watched with wide, unblinking eyes as Severus removed something from his pocket. Remus’s breath caught in his lungs. A vice snapped closed around his chest and throat. The make-shift coffin appeared in the center of the circle before the kneeling Severus. As if in slow
motion, Remus watched as the man pulled the lid off and exposed its terrible burden to the room.

“No,” Remus groaned, voice a croak. Tears streaked his face as he stared at the mutilated and aged visage of his long-lost brother.

Severus cut off his view as he swooped down on him, hands claws on Remus’s shoulders once more. “This man betrayed you. He killed your beloved family. He murdered Lily long before the Dark Lord raised his wand. He raped several little boys in the Tower and stole their memories to protect himself. He is a vile piece of trash and you will help me unravel what he has done.”

Remus gagged, tears streaming down his face. He yanked away from Severus’s painful grip. He wanted to howl his denial. Peter - sweet Peter - the tagalong - the blushing, nervous one - the smallest and softest of them - No, not Peter - He wouldn’t! He couldn’t!

But just as vividly he remembered the beautiful Lily Evans, who burned with passion and determination to succeed - changed into a simpering, love-sick girl. His imagination conjured Sirius devastated, emaciated, surrounded by demons, screaming in torment. Then an image of Dumbledore battered, his office trashed, Molly Weasley to blame after she took her boys home - the same energetic boys Remus had come to know over day-visits and celebrations. And a growl rose up in his throat. He was still shaking like a leaf, but he placed his feet on either side of the Northern point of the pentagram.

Severus bared his teeth in a fierce smile and moved to the South of the circle, between the two bottom points of the pentagram. He lifted his arms, his robe sleeves creating wings of black shadows that seemed to rise above him ominously. Remus mimicked him, whimpers strangling in his throat. His eyes dropped to Peter. To those dead staring eyes… the gruesome torn edges of his neck…

Remus’s heart banged like a war drum. What the hell was this ritual? Was Severus going to bring Peter back? Make him talk? He almost stepped out of the circle - imaging the horrific rattling sound of Peter’s voice, the gurgle through his severed throat - but magic glued his feet to the floor… His eyes flashed up to Severus in horror, but it was too late to stop what was happening…

Severus’s magic blazed from him, shooting along the lines of the pentagram. Deep indigo - verging on purple - the lines began to glow with the essence of the wizard’s core magic. Voice terrible in its raw passion, Severus Called.

“I call upon the Five Sacred Elements!”

Eyes glittering with obsession and mystical power, Severus spat water - breathed out in a long exhale - crouched, gathering up a bit of dust and gravel to toss before him - held his hands cupped before him and fire, hot and pure, burning blue-white, erupted and blazed brilliantly before getting sucked down into the lines of the pentagram. For the final element, Spirit, he slashed his palms. (Remus, panting in terror, stared in horror - Where had the knife come from!?) The blade glowed red from the light of the ruby door. Blood sprayed the air, a fan of almost-black. Remus cringed at the sound of blood splattering against the stone.

“I stand before All, as a humble Seeker of Justice! To right a wrong and to embrace a Truth yet hidden! By the magic granted to me, by the power of the Four Sacred Points and Five Sacred Elements, I summon the eyes and ears of five deities!”

“lăsați trecutul să intre în prezent”

Remus wanted to slam his hand over his ears. Severus’s voice grew thunderous and distorted. He sank to his his knees, mouth open in a silent scream.
“Three brides of death and decay! Morana - The Morrigan - The Erinyes!

Oh god, Remus couldn’t breathe… The names reverberated with the power to destroy the world. Five deities? Five! Surely one would be enough for this madness!

“praeteritum in hoc glorietur”

“Two Lords of darkness! The Horned God of the Dark Wilds and Dis Pater, eternal Judge of Broken Oaths and the Ruler of the Underworld!”

Remus was on all fours, head hanging, sweat running down his body in rivers. Lightening shrieked and tore apart the very air. The earth trembled and cracked open, splintering the very core of the planet. Peter’s body rattled in its box - the sound of a skeleton dancing. And still Severus stood, arms outstretched, spidery hands bleeding rain, eyes glowing with madness.

“cunoscut adevărul mors”

“I call upon the Five to turn Your eyes to Peter Pettigrew! Torn brutally from life, neck severed by the jaws of Vengeance! His Truth stolen from the living!”

Remus was flat on his belly, hands scrabbling uselessly for purchase. A terrible ringing took up in his ears and he couldn’t even shake his head to clear it. His cheek scraped against stone; the force pressing against his back pinned his head to the floor.

“I call first upon the merciful Morana - Goddess of Death and Rebirth - wrap us in Your sheltering arms so that we may be reborn from this terrible knowledge beyond the grave.”

“ut verius loquar să fie”

Remus felt his lungs expand that little bit more, as if a thin buffer had been placed between him and the nightmare ritual. He nearly cried in relief, and he pressed back up onto all fours. Lifting his head, he saw Peter’s headless body jerking and shaking, his head eerily still and staring blindly. And across the terrible corpse, Severus stood, hair and robes snapping wildly about his form.

“I call upon The Erinyes - spirits of Vengeance and Fate - carry the Truth forward so the many cries for Vengeance against Peter Pettigrew can be silenced for once and all!”

“prin moarte”

Terrible spirits - mouths open in dark voids - eyes just as terribly empty and bottomless - flew around them, a tornado of death and madness. Claws of silver drenched in blood scrabbled at the circle, pulled painfully at his hair, scratched his legs, threatened to pull him into the dark. Remus clawed at the floor, trying to hold on.

“I call upon The Horned God! God of the Wilds and Darkness! Allow this Cursed Child of the Moon to be a vessel of this circle!”

“meus ad te veniat”

Remus reared back on his knees, up off his hands, nails cracked and bleeding. His mouth opened to scream a denial when he suddenly felt a weight on his head. It was an enormous hand that could shatter his skull as easy as cradle it… And suddenly he could no longer move as something too vast to comprehend took complete control of his body.

The shadow of two enormous horns rose from his head and speared the darkness. The weight of
them was enough to snap his neck had the God not already taken possession of his mortal body. And still Severus pressed on…

“I call upon The Morrigan - Goddess of Death to carry Peter Pettigrew’s soul so that his memories may return!”

“să treacă adevărul”

From a great distance, Remus saw. Saw Peter’s eyes clear of death and blink. Awareness flooded into those once-dead orbs and there was such terror in Peter’s expression that it warped his features into something monstrous…

“I call upon Dis Pater, the Terrible Judge of Broken Oaths, to release Peter Pettigrew’s voice unto the living! So that his betrayal can be known!”

“vero et pertransiet”

Something grabbed hold of Remus’s neck. A long hand… No! A massive tongue. It encircled his neck three times, wet - throbbing - hot. The Rage that emanated from that touch, the soul-cutting Truth captured within the appendage, would have shattered Remus’s sanity instantly, but the buffer of Morana and the Horned God protected him from complete annihilation. Still, he felt like his flesh and skeleton were strung with razor wire curling tighter and tighter…

Remus, arms limp, head titled back, eyes glowing with the dark green of the Horned God, huge horns rising from his skull, opened his mouth inhumanly wide, his throat slightly elongated and wrapped in what looked like cut and bleeding intestines… and the gods and goddess spoke through him:

“ASK YOUR QUESTION, SUMMONER!”

The boom of the Voice that escaped Remus’s too-wide mouth literally distorted the air. The Circle warped and waved, the crude coffin shattered into bits of dust and wood slivers. Severus fell to his knees. Blood oozed from his ears. His body would have been shattered into pieces if it weren’t for Morana’s protective hands. Peter’s head gaped like a suffocating fish. His eyes rolled wildly, spittle and blood flecked his swollen lips.

“Peter Pettigrew, tell me of your guilt!” Severus screamed, voice ragged with rage and grief and the desperate desire to finally know.

He stared as Peter’s animated head stilled. The terror distorting his features melted away. His eyes came to rest on Severus, pleading for Severus to listen and understand. From across the circle, Peter’s voice came from Remus’s lips, but Severus never once took his eyes from the severed head lying in the center of the circle.

“Fifth Year… after Sirius tricked you into going to the Shack… They didn’t know I was there. I watched from the cracked door. I was too scared to go in… James was so angry! I- I’ve never seen him so angry… Said he didn’t even know Sirius if he could use our best friend to murder someone… Sirius fell to his knees… He was crying, begging for James to forgive him… swore he never meant for you to die, just be afraid, just make you run, make you leave them alone, always following, always nipping at their heels, Sirius wasn’t thinking…”

Peter’s expression was one of desperation.

“James wouldn’t listen… He accused Sirius of going back to the Dark, of keeping secrets… Sirius…
He looked shattered. He screamed at James not to say that. He was crying so hard! Reaching out for James… Swore he wasn’t going to the Dark… but James grabbed him. Shook him. Told Sirius he either told him the truth now or they would never speak again… So Sirius g-grabbed him… he k-kissed James… Said he was in love with him… that he tried to fight it, but he couldn’t help it… that was his secret… Sirius knew it was disgusting and wrong, but he l-loved him so much… w-wanted James as his…”

Disgust and horror crossed his features, and a painful confusion.

“I ran… but I knew I had to help them… I had to make them better… Sirius… Sirius was sick… and James… I could see it… He loved Sirius like a brother… He didn’t want to hurt him… He forgave him… He was going to get corrupted, too, if I didn’t do something! So I… I wrote to the Black Family… I told them… Told them about Sirius… and James… Sirius was disowned, but they wouldn’t stand for Sirius disgracing their name further… They told me about a ritual… A blood ritual… If I made Lily love James, he’d be saved from Sirius’s corruption… then Sirius, if he knew for sure James would not love him like that, maybe he would get better, too!”

Hope, dumb blind hope.

“I - I brewed Amortentia and… and took James’s blood when he was sleeping… then I… I cast Imperio and made Lily follow me into the Shack… Lord Black was waiting for me… He put her to sleep and began the ritual to bind the potion to her heart… used Jame’s blood to seal it… At first… James was so happy… Sirius was upset, but I knew it was just his sickness. He’d get better once he saw the way it was meant to be! … But Lily… She was so different after the spell… and everyone figured it out… I was so scared they would know it was me… Remus told me, Remus who was always so kind to everyone, that the person should go to Azkaban! … I was just trying to help!”

That Peter had the gall to sound and look betrayed when he was the one to betray them all made Severus clench his fists in rage.

“Then the war got worse and… and everything was going so wrong… Sirius was so being so reckless, fighting for the Order… and James was so different, so serious and unhappy… and then the Dark Lord got the werewolves… and Remus left us…”

Fear, pure and simple. Selfish fear.

“Then James… He found out what happened to Lily… He never stopped looking… never stopped trying to break the spell… He discovered some signature of the Black’s… Told me he was going to confront them and make them tell him everything…”

Peter’s head was crying, filled with a grief he had no right to feel.

“I… James made me Secret Keeper… Sirius was too reckless… Always in the line of fire… The chances of him getting captured, interrogated… So I… I had to! Or James was going to find out it was me! You should have seen the look on his face when he promised to destroy whoever had done this to Lily… So I went to the D-Dark L-Lord… I told him where the Potters were hiding… It wasn’t like James was even happy! And Lily… Well…”

Severus would have lunged at the dead bastard, fingers aching to claw the bastard’s eyes out, but the ritual held him in place.

“Sirius knew I was Secret Keeper… He came for me… So I had to get rid of him… I knew he never got better… He never stopped wanting James like that… So he deserved to be in Azkaban anyway!… I set it up so he would take the fall… I mean, everyone knew how close Sirius and James were. They
never even questioned it... But I knew... Knew I couldn’t ever show my face again... No one could
know what I’d done. No one would understand! They’d send me to Azkaban! ... So I found a good,
Pure family... I found the Weasleys...”

Peter never looked more rat-like, all shifting eyes filled with a crude cunning.

“...I was a good pet to Percy. I looked after him and comforted him when his brothers were too much.
For five years things were okay... but Hogwarts... going back to Hogwarts was... amazing... at
first... The first year back I visited all the places we used to explore. It was like I was close to
everyone and everything was good, but... going back to the Burrow as a pet once more during
summer... It was nearly unbearable... I missed it so badly... being a student and magic and freedom!
I missed it! Missed being human... It wasn’t fair! I was just trying to help everyone! I was just
protecting myself!”

Righteous rage mixed with guilt.

“...It was an accident at first... during Percy’s Second-year... I was in the showers getting water and
these Seventh-Year girls came in... They were... naked! and so pretty! I hadn’t seen anything like it
except for crude Muggle magazines... I felt... gods, I felt so alive as I watched them talk and bathe...
I was so scared, though... Of coming out... of getting caught... I just... I just wanted some
freedom...”

A look of helpless need sufficed his face with a sick light.

“...I tried to go up the stairs to the dorm rooms... Just to look!... but I couldn’t... The stairs wouldn’t
let me pass... I was afraid someone would notice, so I never tried it again... I just stuck to the
bathrooms... and I would t-touch myself afterward... It was really good for awhile... and it wasn’t
like it hurt them! They didn’t even know I was there! And it gave me so much pleasure... but it wasn’t
enough... when we came back for Percy’s Third-year, I woke up once, in my human form, rutting
against the air... and it felt so good... and I realized... in the dark... on his stomach... P-Percy didn’t
look that different from a girl...”

Lust blazed in the evil bastard’s dilated eyes, his dead-grey cheeks taking on a feverish red hue.

“A-At first, I just... rutted against his body in the dark after I spelled everyone asleep... I left it dark
so I could pretend he was a girl... and gods! the feel of his warm skin against me... It was so much
better than touching myself and watching the girls! It felt... I really can’t put it in words... so then I
began to rut on top of him... he’d cry so sweetly. So soft. He hardly even fought. He lay still and
begged so sweet!... I- I started to leave the lamp burning... and then I slipped between his ass cheeks,
and shit! That was even better... especially if I got him wet down there... so warm... so sweet... And
then... And then... I put it in... I mean! It wasn’t right I never got to know another body like this! I
gave up having a wife and kids to save Sirius and look how it turned out! And I was so good to P-
Percy for so long! ... And I was careful! So careful! I resisted and made sure not to put it all the way
in. I didn’t want to hurt him! So I fisted the base of my cock and just rocked a bit... and sweet lord it
was good... I- I never felt anything like it... I couldn’t get enough! I mean, I felt bad he was so upset
about it, but he would get over it. And sometimes I was certain he felt good, too!”

Rage blasted across his face. True hatred distorting his features.

“But then HE had to ruin EVERYTHING! The ONE thing I took for myself. My ONE selfishness!
He had to take that away from me! I couldn’t touch Percy after that. I tried to find someone else, but
I had to be even more careful. I had to get off with just their thighs and hands while they slept. But it
wasn’t the SAME! It wasn’t good enough... Percy was so sweet, so soft. So tight!...”
Like a distorted picture of a child, glee lit up Pettigrew’s face.

“But that bastard slipped up! He left his precious pet alone and… oh god… It was better than I ever imagined… God, god, his throat… as good as Percy’s ass… Harry was so pretty… his chest and waist and ass… Just like a girl! … He was meant for me! Meant to be mine! I created him! He would never have been born if it wasn’t for ME!”

The fanatical belief drained away into a look of horror.

“But… god, god, I nearly killed Ron… It just got out of hand… oh my god, he almost DIED! I hurt him… I didn’t mean to, but I hurt him… I-I stopped… I swear I stopped… I wasn’t going to touch any of them again… but… b-but I knew… knew it was too late… I waited… I guess I just hoped I was wrong… How could they know it was me?! … But I knew… as soon as I felt that cold rage fill the Tower… I knew… and I ran for it… found my boys… took them as hostages just in case… I was almost free! God! His eyes! His EYES! He was going to kill me! He was going to KILL ME!”

Peter’s face contorted into a look of perfect terror, and his life slowly bled away. Color and awareness drained away like water rushing down a drain. His eyes clouded over, taking on the stare of a dead fish. His face went waxy and still.

Shaken, sick, Severus looked across the circle to see the slick thing wrapping around Remus’s throat slowly unwind and disappear once more into the darkness. Terrible eyes of green fire stared at him from Remus’s face. The shadows of two massive horns still crowned his head. The Erinyes came shrieking between them, crashed down into the corpse of Peter Pettigrew. The body jerked three times as if shot before going heavy and dead once more.

“Summoner, Payment is Due.”

Severus shivered, but he sank to his knees in supplication. “I am Yours, my Lord.”

The Horned God stared down at the mortal wizard, an eternal flame burning in his eyes.

“MORANA Deemed You Worthy and Demands No Payment… The ERINYES Know Your Fate and Are Satisfied… DIS PATER Gave You Truth in Return for You Never Being Able to Break Your Word Henceforth… The MORRIGAN Will Ask a Price of You in a Moment When Life Hovers over the Edge of Death.”

Severus said nothing, accepting the price of the ritual without flinching.

“As for My Price…” The Horned God took a step in his mortal shell. The ground shook and trembled. Another step, and it was light as feather, the whisper of a wild-thing escaping a predator.

“You Will CURE my Children of Moon Madness. You Will Not Simply Suppress the Beast as You’ve so Cleverly Learned to Do. You Will Make Them WHOLE. Do You Understand Me, Summoner?”

“Yes, my Lord,” Severus answered evenly, even though inside he quailed at the impossible task.

“You Will Do This, Summoner, Before Five Winters Pass. Should You Fail, You Will Become the Prey of My Hunt.”

Bile burned up Severus’s throat. Unable to speak, he managed to nod his head to indicate he understood.

The Horned God flung his head back and HOWLED. It seemed hundreds and thousands of animals screamed with him, all of Nature baying with their God. Severus screamed in agony, the sound too
much for his body and soul to endure. He collapsed, blackness snapping closed around his mind…

Chapter end.

HAPPY HALLOWEEN!!!

If you have some time, give me some feedback! What do you think so far and what do you want to see more of?
Dancing on New Year's Eve

A/N: Warning: Mature! Draco and Harry reconnect physically.

Dancing on New Year’s Eve

Draco felt like he was waking from a deep coma. His whole body felt heavy; his mind felt slow. For a long minute, he didn’t recognize where he was, but when Liam stepped into view from the tiny kitchen, memory hit him like a train. He unfurled from his curled position on the couch and sat up, rubbing a hand through his hair and stretching. The weak sunlight filtering in from the window gave him no clue how late it was beyond the fact that it was the next day.

“What time’s it?” he asked, voice raspy from sleep.

“Almost ten. Slept nearly twelve hours,” Liam answered. He leaned his hip against the half-wall, arms crossed over his chest. His blue eyes were bright and happy, mouth quirked up in a smile. He looked comfortable, barefoot and wearing jeans and a black sweater. “Made some breakfast. Go wash up. We’ll finish our talk.”

Draco grunted acknowledgment and did as was suggested. He came out less than ten minutes later. Liam had put two plates of steaming food on the small table pushed into the corner of the living room. As Draco chose the chair that had a good view of the door, he sent a thought to Harry.

*Sorry I wasn’t there when you woke up. I’ll be home soon. Love you.*

-love excited determination-

Draco shook his head, bemused. He’d been feeling Harry’s hyper emotions since he woke up. He had no idea what was causing them, but Harry wasn’t upset so Draco didn’t feel like he had to rush back. He had time.

Liam was watching him thoughtfully from the other side of the table. His eyebrow arched when he saw that he finally had Draco’s attention. “You okay?” he asked, genuinely concerned. “I know it’s a lot. Me being back.” He couldn’t get over how much older Draco was. On the cusp of being a teenager even! Draco and Harry had been eerily mature for eight-year-olds, but to see Draco so much physically older, it was both rewarding and hard to comprehend. In his mind, they had remained the little kids he'd grown to love so deeply.

Draco nodded and took a bite of scrambled egg. “It is, but it’s not just you.”

Tapping his fork against his plate, making it click, Liam said seriously. “Yeah. Well. You always got a safe place with me and the girls.”

Draco said nothing at first. He took a few more bites of the eggs and then picked up a piece of bacon. “I know what you’re hoping, but…”

“But there’s a magical world out there and I got shit for protection against that,” Liam filled in, acknowledging Draco’s fears. “I know.” He pointed his fork at the kid, eye contact clear and direct just the way Draco’s always was. “But I also got stuff goin’ for me, too. Like the fact there’s millions of Muggles and I can hide in a pretty damn big hay stack. Also, it seems to me from your stories, these fuckers don’t know how to defend themselves against Muggle tech. Things have been advancing pretty quick. Guns and drugs and weapons. Shit. With a little planning, I wouldn’t be nearly as defenseless as I seem.”
Draco scowled at his brother, the food completely forgotten.

Liam lowered the fork and shook his head. “I’m not looking to fight these fuckers, Draco. I’m just saying I got ta protect myself from my world as much as do from magic assholes. The world’s never been kind to thugs like me. I’m an illegal here and I walk some dark roads, but that might come in handy for you, too. You know?”

Draco sighed again, relaxing. He hooked one side of his hair behind his ear. “Yeah. Maybe.”

They spent the rest of their meal in quiet contemplation. Once they were finished, Liam collected their dishes and padded over to the sink. He washed his hands, but he left the dishes for now. He wouldn’t waste a single minute he had with his little brother.

“How old are you now?”

Liam was drying his hands on a dishcloth and titled his head curiously. “Twenty-five in two weeks. Why?”

“For walking ‘dark roads’, you don’t look much different,” Draco mused. He hadn’t left the small table. His fingers were linked, palms facing down, with his chin resting on them.

Liam smirked, eyes squinting. “I’m just that good.” Expression sobering, he lifted his sweater and turned to the side so Draco could see the gun at the small of his back. “I’m careful. Really careful. So I haven’t gotten too banged up yet. I’ve been pretty good at knowin’ my limits and not pushin’ past them.”

He very wisely did not mention that the most lasting damage he’d ever taken was when he’d busted people up trying to find Draco and Harry when they’d been taken. He had a long thin scar from a knife on his thigh. Sometimes it grew tight and painful to walk. When that happened, he had to work in some lotion. He’d also been grazed by a bullet along his ribs. If he hadn’t moved just at that moment, he’d’ve been shot dead.

Draco got to his feet. “I’m going to think about this, but really the war isn’t going to heat up for a little while yet. Voldemort is still a shade and it costs him to possess people. Besides…Truth is… We might actually need you soon.”

“That guardian you were telling me about?” Liam asked quietly, worried.

“Yeah.” Draco sat on the couch and began to pull on his sneakers. “She’s finally admitting that she knows I’m with Harry and she’s not happy.” He sighed, letting a straight sheet of white-blond hair hide his expression. “My fault really. Lost my temper and flung it in her face. I know she’ll try something to split us up, so we might have to disappear for a while.” Shaking it off, Draco got up and moved toward the door, grabbing his jacket from the counter. “Anyway, it might be a few days before I figure out a plan. I’ll let you know what I decide.”

Everything in Liam wanted to draw this out. Maybe offer to take the kid wherever he needed to go to draw out their time together, but in the end he bit his tongue and said nothing. The more he tried to hold on to Draco, the more the kid would pull away. They loved each other. Nothing would change that. They were family. But they were also different people now. They had experienced things without each other. It was going to take time to fit back together like before. Liam had to offer no resistance and be very careful to show no weakness if he wanted Draco to keep coming around.

“I’d say be careful, but I know you always are,” he said lightly, even as his heart felt like it was being squeezed by a fist. He pulled Draco into a hug, impressed he didn’t have to bend in half to do
it like he used to. Draco was almost as tall as his shoulders now! Letting Draco go, he went to the kitchen. He pulled out a silver key tied on a long shoelace from a drawer. “Here. To the apartment. If you ever stop by and I’m out.”

Draco accepted the key and shoved it into his jacket pocket. “Thanks, Liam.” He looked up at the older man, his eyes bright with emotion.

Liam smiled and side-hugged him one more time. “See you around.”

Surprisingly, Draco turned into the embrace this time and hugged him back, his thin arms coming up around Liam’s lean waist.

Liam bit his lip to keep his eyes from watering. After a minute, Draco pulled away. Liam let the boy go and even took a step back. He offered a half wave. “I’ll get the girls caught up. Unless you don’t want me to?”

Draco shrugged. “Nah. They should know.”

Liam nodded, hands sliding casually into his jeans pockets to hide the slight shake in his fingers. “Cool.” He kept his posture relaxed.

Draco realized he was stalling and forced himself to turn away from his brother. He felt a strong sense of déjà vu as he undid all the bolts and chains on the door. Stepping into the hallway, he shut the door behind him. He hadn’t gone more than three steps when he heard Liam doing up all the bolts again behind him, and Draco laughed. It was just like four and a half years ago in New York!

…

It took almost two hours to get back to Remus’s cottage by himself and Draco had thought and re-thought letting Liam back into their lives. For one, it was dangerous! Draco and Harry were big fucking targets in the Wizarding world. They were fighting a fucking war! It wasn’t time to play ‘Family’, but maybe Liam really could help them out? Andromeda could really fuck things up for them legally, and if that happened, they really would need a place to run.

Besides, if things got dangerous, they could cut their ties to Liam again. Sure, it would hurt to say goodbye, but they’d know Liam and the girls were out there waiting for them this time. It wouldn’t be like the heart-shattering goodbye from before. Then again he also vividly remembered Brendon getting his head blown open right in front of him. Imagining Liam getting shot in the head made him want to push Liam out for good. It was a fucking mess, that’s what it was!

So by the time he was walking up the path to the cottage, Draco’s jaw ached from him gritting his teeth so much and he wasn’t sure what the hell he should do. He hated that feeling! It was agony to be in a state of uncertainty. He knew this decision was a big one, because if they did screw up and Liam got killed, it would destroy a part of them that would never recover.

Maybe he’d do some divination to get a sense of the result of either choice? Either way, he had to relax! He didn’t have to decide right now, and he didn’t want Harry to sense anything had changed. Harry was close to the breaking point, too, and Draco would have to be careful with him for a little while. Rubbing his cold hands together to try and get some warmth back into his fingers, he stomped his feet on the mat outside the door. It probably wasn’t very useful. There was several inches of snow built up on top of it.

* Harry, I’m back, * he called mentally as he swung the door open, only to stop in the doorway in shock.
Draco’s consciousness was dimly aware of the background setting: the inside of the house dim and shadowed; all the curtains pulled closed - soft golden light flickering; hundreds of candles covering all the available surfaces - the furniture pushed against the walls to open the center of the room - but the majority of his attention was caught by Harry.

_Holy shit_, Draco thought dumbly. He took a numb step forward and let the door swing shut behind him. It cast the room into quiet intimacy as the light of day was shut out.

Harry stood before him without his glasses in a gorgeous white gown. Lace covered the entire piece, delicate and extraordinarily intricate. The boy’s eyes were lowered, his head bowed slightly forward with a crown of small white blossoms of baby’s breath woven throughout the glossy black locks. His hair had been tamed into glossy waves, the tips curling cutely. His lips had been darkened to a reddish-pink. A lace, long-sleeved shirt cast delicate white patterns over his smooth bare skin, covering his arms, neck, and chest. Draco’s throat tightened at seeing Harry’s pretty pink nipples through the delicate pattern and the flash of white-silver of the new rings.

Just below Harry’s chest, hugging his bottom ribs, the top of a ribbed-corset started. White with more lacing covering the surface, it pulled Harry’s thin waist in tight, emphasizing the swell of his hips. The skirt fell in a white sheet to the floor. Lace curled over its surface as if snowflakes had landed delicately onto the silk and never melted.

There was a subtle slit in the front of the beautiful skirt. It parted as Harry sank into a deep and graceful curtsy. One of the boy’s hands spread out to his side, palm down, the other rose and reached toward Draco, palm up, in supplication. The boy’s head bowed even deeper, revealing the back of his neck. The white lacing looked exquisite against the black collar.

As the skirt parted, Draco could see the boy’s beautiful, slender legs and white, silk stockings that rose to just above the knees. On his feet were high-heeled, white ankle-boots that Draco had never seen before and short, white shorts that just barely covered an inch and a half of Harry’s thighs, leaving the rest of that gorgeous flesh bare to Draco’s eyes.

_Holy SHIT!_ Draco thought again. His heart was beating slow but hard in his chest, and he knew he was blushing like crazy. Harry was absolutely breathtaking! All tiny-waisted with slender arms and legs that were touched with the beginnings of lean muscle. He was gorgeous! The line between boy and girl blurred perfectly until Harry was neither and both. He was _perfect_ the way only Art could be.

Draco stepped forward as if in a daze. “God… _Harry_…” he breathed. He slid his hand under the hand upraised to him and leaned down to kiss the boy’s bare palm. He could feel Harry shiver where his lips touched soft skin - _love happy submission_. Tugging gently, Draco said soft and low, “Stand for me.”

Harry rose gracefully to his feet, coming out of the curtsy. They were eye-to-eye, Harry’s heels putting him at Draco’s taller height. Harry kept his head bowed slightly forward, but he peered through his lashes, letting the blond catch sight of beautiful pale green.

Draco squeezed the hand he still held before letting go. “Give me a turn, then,” he requested, taking a step back and pulling off his jacket. He also stepped on his heels to take off his wet, muddy shoes. Catching the sneakers on his toes, he kicked them backward. They hit the door with a thump. Draco hardly noticed. He couldn’t take his eyes off of Harry.

Harry blushed prettily and slowly turned, revealing the slight train on the back of the skirt. There was
no mistaking what he was wearing: a wedding dress. Something about that idea made something hot and triumphant burn in Draco’s center. He stepped forward as Harry faced him once more and gently touched the black collar through the lace and stroked the sliver rings pierced through the boy’s nipples. They were his marks, his claims, and Harry looked even more beautiful wearing them.

“I’m yours,” Harry voiced sweetly - love submission desire.

Draco looked deeply into Harry’s naked green eyes. He slid his arm around the narrow waist and pulled Harry toward him and into a deep kiss. Licking into the heat of Harry’s mouth, Draco claimed every inch. Harry practically melted against him, his body molding to Draco’s contours. The kiss ended slowly, their lips lingering, their breath becoming one as they stared into each other’s eyes. Draco’s free hand came up to caress Harry’s cheek with the back of his knuckles.

“You’re so beautiful,” he whispered, desire resonating in his voice. He always knew they’d be together forever, that Harry was his and he was Harry’s, but seeing him in white, almost unbearably beautiful, Draco knew how to put it in words. He knew exactly what he wanted.

Bringing Harry’s hands up between them, Draco kissed the boy’s fingers. He stared intently into soft green eyes and spoke with utter confidence, trying to brand the words into Harry’s mind. “One day, Harry, you’ll wear this dress or one like it in front of the world. And everyone will understand what you are to me. What we are to each other. And I’ll marry you. I’ll take you as my bride. And the world will know you’re mine and no one else’s.”

Harry gasped - surprise DESIRE nervousness. He hadn’t expected Draco to say something like that! Marry him?! It made Harry’s heart beat fast and his cheeks burn bright red. “Draco!” he gasped again, his heart was racing. It felt like he couldn’t catch his breath. All he could see was a vision of standing beside Draco with everyone watching and Draco kissing him, calling him Wife the way Lucius called Narcissa. Half-laughing, half-crying, overwhelmed by the idea, Harry wrapped his arms around Draco in a tight hug.

Draco smiled, tears in his eyes, happy and free, and held him tightly. “You’re mine, Harry. You’re the only one who can stand beside me and be mine. You’re the only one I could ever marry,” he repeated.

- JOY desire surprise - “Draco…” Harry pulled his head back far enough to look into the blond’s face. He had never thought he could be that for anyone, but… But now that Draco had said it, he wanted it more than anything in the world!

He remembered sitting with Pansy on the banks of the lake, watching as Draco, Vince, and Greg raced their horses. Pansy and he had been talking about marriage, and Harry had tried to think of who could partner Draco and be his wife, but he hadn’t been able to. Now he knew why… After everything that had happened in the last month, Harry had finally begun realized that he wasn’t the only one who needed things. Draco did, too. And he’d realized that no one else really took care of Draco right. It was Harry’s job! Draco needed him.

- LOVE devotion - Harry boldly raised his hand to cup Draco’s cheek. He looked directly into those bright grey eyes, and Draco held his breath, amazed at the gesture. Voice resonating with newfound strength, Harry made a promise. “I love you more than anything, Draco. And I’m going to be your partner. I’m going to stand by you and help make sure we’re safe. And one day I’m going to help you build a home that no one can kick us out of! It’ll be just ours! Just you and me. And we can be happy there. Like before. Like with Liam. And only those close to you will be welcome there.”

It was Draco’s turn to gasp softly, his hands tightening reflexively on the boy’s hips. “Harry!”
Harry ducked his head - *determination* *LOVE* *nervousness*. He stared at the space where Draco’s heart beat under his sweater. “You’ve been taking care of me all this time, but I haven’t stood by you the same.” He looked up again, hoping Draco understood. “I know I’m not as strong as you or as smart, but I’ll start helping you more than I have been. I’m going to get stronger. You said so. And you always keep your promises, so… So you can lean on me, too, Draco. I’ll… I’ll take care of you,” he promised fiercely. “I’ll be *worthy* of being your b-bride!”

Tears spilled over Draco’s cheeks and he quickly buried his face against Harry’s neck and shoulder to hide them. He had never seen Harry so confident, to actually admit he could get strong, that he could be worthy of *anything*, let alone being his bride. It felt like his heart was being squeezed in a vice, he was so proud!

Harry was growing up. His boy had faced things alone, had fought for his life and Draco’s, had seen Draco barely holding on, so he’d lost some of his child-like innocence that Draco had been trying to preserve for as long as possible. But even though it was a little sad, it also nearly brought Draco to his knees in gratitude. This strength… this declaration of love and support… It was so unexpected! He loved this boy so damn much it felt like he was dying!

Harry ran his hands through Draco’s hair and swayed slightly from side to side, rocking him - *LOVE* *worry*. “You’ll help me be your partner, right, Draco? You’ll help me take care of you, too? I… I don’t know how… but I *want* to. I really want to, Draco.”

Draco huffed a watery laugh and pulled back to cup Harry’s face. “Shhh,” he soothed, rubbing his thumbs over Harry’s deeply-blushing cheeks. “I already promised, haven’t I? I’m going to make you glorious! You’ll be my right hand. My partner.” He leaned his forehead against Harry’s. His eyes closed and he breathed the last against Harry’s sweet lips. “My wife.”

Harry flung his arms up and around Draco’s shoulders. “Draco!” He couldn’t stop blushing. His heart pounded a mile a minute - *excitement* *nerves* *JOY*. “What about the bloodline? The Malfoy name?” he asked, but not as a protest. He was just still shocked by this idea and not sure how it would work.

Draco shrugged. He had never really cared about either. Harry never could quite grasp that. “We’ll figure it out together. Right?”

Harry nodded. “I…” He cringed as his *nervousness* spiked, but then he squared his shoulders and let the *determination* take over. He looked directly into Draco’s eyes and told him, “I owled Lucius.”

Draco was surprised. Tilting his head curiously, he asked softly, “Why?”

“Because of Andromeda. She might try and split us up, right?” Harry’s expression became surprisingly fierce. “I wanted Lucius to know. In case we need his assistance to stop anything legal from going through. I would have contacted Narcissa, but she’s been missing and Lucius has the legal authority as Head of Household anyway.”

Harry took a deep breath, realizing he was babbling due to nerves. Looking into Draco’s eyes, he told him the truth. “I wanted to help you. I didn’t want you to have to do it all by yourself anymore. I thought if I helped, you wouldn’t have to worry about it as much.” His bravado wavered, overrun by *anxiety*. He whispered, fear in his eyes, “Did I do the right thing?”

Draco felt his center turn to goo. He crushed Harry to his chest in a hug. “That was really thoughtful,” he rasped. Pulling back, he firmly cupped the sides of Harry’s face. Draco kissed his lips once, twice, three times until Harry’s tension drained away under his touch. “Thank you. That was so smart.”
Harry grinned - relief pride - and hung from Draco’s shoulders, accepting the sweet kisses happily.

“You also did a great job setting all this up.” Draco looked again at the living room. It had to have been a lot of work for Harry to do by himself.

The furniture was heavy and there had to be at least a hundred candles burning softly around them. And the dress! Draco felt the ribbon of the corset, fingers running down until the small of the boy’s back where it was tied in a bow. He couldn’t imagine how Harry had gotten it on alone. Overwhelmed with a surge of love for the boy in his arms, he set his lips to Harry’s, so the boy could feel him speak as much as hear him.

“You look amazing, Harry. So beautiful. Like a bride already.”

Harry’s heart skipped a beat, fluttering. It made his head spin, dizzy. “I wanted to do something special for you,” he answered softly, speaking against Draco’s mouth. LOVE JOY - burned like sunlight through the bond. “It’s New Years Eve and we missed Yule. You said seeing me dressed up was like a gift, so…”

“Oh. It is…” Draco finally pulled away and took a step back just so he could really see his boy again. “It really is.”

Harry’s cheeks were almost cherry-red and, unprompted, he did another slow turn. His hips swayed with every step, the nipple rings glinting in the fire-light. His full skirt whispered along the floor. “I also made something to eat. I didn’t know if you’d be hungry. I can warm it up for you anytime.”

Draco smiled at that. Harry was always thinking, always taking care of him. “Thank you, but I want to look at you right now more than anything else.” He stood barefoot in a dark green sweater and jeans. The candlelight shone on his blond hair, turning it a pale yellow color, his angular features softened. He reached his hand forward. “I’m a bit underdressed, but…Dance with me.”

Surprising Draco, Harry moved to the side instead of taking the offered hand. It was then that Draco noticed the gramophone sitting in the shadowed corner there. Curious, he watched as Harry lifted the arm and set the needle to the record. Loud, energetic orchestra music poured into the room for nearly ten seconds before softening into something more sweet: it was Tchaikovsky’s Sleeping Beauty Waltz, Draco’s favorite. Draco laughed and offered his hand again. This time Harry rested his on top, smiling widely.

Draco pulled Harry close with a hand gripping the boy’s thin waist. Traditionally there should be some space between them to allow the dancers room to move, but when Draco and Harry looked into each other’s eyes, they become so connected that they didn’t need that buffer. Harry pressed right up against Draco where he belonged and they moved about the living room floor in perfect synchronization.

Harry followed Draco’s every step easily with no anxiety. He didn’t think, didn’t try to anticipate. He just let himself flow with the blond’s movements with perfect trust. Draco spun him and led him through fast skipping steps during the more upbeat segments. When the softer, famous refrain came, Draco pulled their bodies close into the gliding steps of a waltz.

Draco grinned, cheeks pink, while Harry’s dress twirled softly around their legs. The music rose and fell, one-two-three, one-two-three… Then, laughing, they spun and skipped as the rhythm quickened once more. Again and again, until the song came to it’s end.

Harry ended up in a deep dip with one of Draco’s arms holding him up, cradling his lower back. Draco’s other hand rested over Harry’s sternum. They were both breathing fast, and Draco slid his
hand over the lace covering Harry’s chest, up Harry’s throat, and over his jaw. Harry stared into his eyes, smiling sweetly.

“Just like riding a bike,” Draco said, eyes bright and happy. He was breathing hard. “Feels like just yesterday Narcissa insisted we take an hour of dance a day!”

Harry giggled, held in the dip still. “Like a butterfly, Harry! You’re a bird in flight, Draco!” he said with a cheeky grin. She’d said that at least once in nearly every dance class.

Laughing, Draco brushed his thumb over Harry’s darkened lips just as the next waltz began to play: The Merry Widow. It was a slower dance, more romantic. Draco’s hand slid around the ribbed corset to pull Harry upright. He stepped forward until Harry was pressed flush against his chest and hips, and then they began to move slowly across the floor.

Harry sighed, surrendering, head tilting back and away. Heart pumping, Draco leaned forward to press kisses along the boy’s offered jaw and down his lace-covered throat. His breath made the lace damp and warm. Harry shivered in longing, eyes going heavy, his lips parting.

Draco took a sudden step back, feeling light as a feather with joy spreading soft-feathered wings through his chest. Holding Harry away from him, he twirled the boy. Harry laughed as he came center again, his hand slipping up to cup the back of Draco’s neck, fingertips sinking into the soft blond hair. Draco made Harry take several steps backward, pressing their bodies together again before returning to the sliding side-steps.

They danced, arms lifting and reaching, bodies twirling around each other, bodies held strong and stable even as they swayed and moved gracefully in circles around the floor. When their eyes locked, a powerful connection moved between them. It made Harry’s cheeks flush and Draco’s heart jump. Just under six minuets later, the song came to its end.

“Remember dancing in the ballroom right next to the wall of mirrors last summer?” Draco asked softly, resting, holding Harry loosely in his arms. “You looked so beautiful in that emerald gown.”

Harry smiled. “The skirt had so many layers! I felt like I was wearing a massive cloud!”

The third song began to play and Draco laughed: The Blue Danube. It was the first song they’d learned to waltz to, its beat so clear and precise, but they had come a long way from their first dance lesson. Draco cradled Harry’s back and slid him across the floor on his heels. Harry kicked upward, revealing his long leg as Draco dipped him back. Draco couldn’t help trailing his fingers down Harry’s thigh as he pulled Harry back upright. Together, they skipped across the floor with little hops and twirls, the candles flickering and dancing with them.

They waltzed until they were breathless with laughter and flushed in the face. Draco finally spun them to a stop and Harry’s arms came up around the blond’s shoulders. They stared into each other’s eyes as their lips touched in a warm kiss.

The ballroom music faded into the background as Draco’s hand slid down to cup Harry’s butt, the other pulling the bow undone at the base of the corset, his fingers quickly working the ribbon loose. Harry rested his forehead against Draco’s shoulder, heart beginning to race in excitement.

Once the corset was loosened enough, Draco undid the buttons of the skirt. Stepping back, he watched both fall to the floor. Harry stood before him in the see-through lace shirt, short shorts, stockings, and heels. Heart pulsing hard in his throat, Draco whispered a single word, “Glacies.”

Harry gasped, chest arching toward Draco as his nipple rings grew ice cold. “Draco!” - surprise
Draco grinned and offered his hand.

Harry took it, breathing heavily.

Draco pulled Harry into a few steps of a waltz before dipping him, putting the boy’s chest on display. He eagerly fingered the ice-cold jewelry, delighted that it had worked. Harry’s nipples were already stiffly erect from the icy metal. Smirking, Draco put his lips over one of the hard nubs, sucking the cold ring into his mouth. Harry cried out sweetly, clutching at Draco’s shoulders.

Draco lifted away, letting Harry come up out of the dip. He looked down Harry’s trembling body, hand briefly caressing the dragon tattoo that arched sensually, eyes closed, tail stiff under the lacing of the shirt. His fingers slid over Harry’s legs. Eyes burning with lust, he pressed his hands flat against the inside of Harry’s knees to keep them open and whispered, “Ignis.”

Harry’s eyes flew wide. His back arched dramatically as his rings seemed to catch fire. It hurt! Especially switching from ice cold to burning hot so quickly. He clawed into the couch and grit his teeth, resisting the instinct to tear the painful rings from his body.

Draco leaned forward and touched his tongue to a ring. It was hot! Not hot enough to actually burn, but it was close. Harry’s chest heaved with desperate breaths, and Draco licked the tender nubs, soothing them even as tears began to spill down Harry’s cheeks. Draco growled, pupils blown with lust, and moved back down between Harry’s legs. He gripped Harry’s knees and bent to nuzzle a bare thigh. “Glacis.”

Harry gave a cry as the painful burn was doused with freezing cold. His body began trembling, overstimulated.

Draco grinned. He reached forward to caress the stiff bulge in Harry’s tight shorts. “You okay, Harry?”

“Ungh,” Harry groaned. He folded forward, careful to keep his legs open and not resist Draco’s hands. He caressed the blond’s face. “Draco…” His voice quivered as much as his legs. “You always… make me feel so much… let me… make you feel good, too… please…”

Harry’s fingers trembled against Draco’s cheeks, the soft touch somehow pleading. Surprised, Draco released Harry’s thighs and gave a tight nod. Trembling, Harry pulled Draco up on the couch next to him. Suddenly they became aware of the music in the background - a symphonic crescendo.

Harry gave Draco a warm smile - anticipation need - and climbed shakily to his feet. Draco watched, curious, as his boy moved to the corner and picked up a second record. It was a special one that Draco hadn’t heard before. In fact, Harry had found it among Lucius’s collection last summer and had taken it. He hadn’t known then that he’d need it, but something had made him want it. Now he was glad that he had. A single word was written on it in beautiful calligraphy: Seduction. He set it on the gramophone. A sultry violin began playing, slow and rhythmic. Deep notes resonated with rising high notes only to slide down back into the low melody. Harry turned back to the blond.

A smile curled Draco’s lips, even as a single eyebrow lifted in surprise. His arms were outstretched
along the back of the couch, his thighs loosely parted. Chin-length white-blond hair framed his face, slightly tousled from Harry’s fingers. He reminded Harry so much of a cat - relaxed and loose, yet ready to pounce - anticipation desire.

Harry approached with deliberate, slow steps, his hips swaying to the slow beat. The lace shirt was tucked into his shorts, which rode low on his hips. Draco’s eyes fastened to the sexy dip of Harry’s hip bones as the boy rocked his hips. Harry bent a knee, dragging one ankle up the calf of the other, dancing his fingers over his thighs, down over the silk stockings, past his knee and back up to bare skin. Draco’s breathing deepened. He watched, mesmerized.

Harry planted his feet and rolled his stomach and torso just as the violin gave a trill. The rings had faded back to room temperature, but his nipples still throbbed from the spells used on them. Harry touched them briefly through the lace and gasped softly. Draco bit his lower lip, heat pulsing through his core.

Eyes locked on the blond, Harry sank down as a drum began to pick up speed and volume, thighs pressed together as he sat back on his heels. He brought his hands down from his chest to rest on his silk-covered knees. Very slowly, he pressed his legs opened. His palms slid up his thighs until his hands rested on the crease where thigh met hip.

Draco swallowed hard, the music becoming hypnotic, thrumming under his skin. He stared, feeling almost like he was dreaming, as Harry rose gracefully back to his feet. The boy took a slow step forward - desire pleasure - and then another, until he was right between Draco’s parted knees. He bent at the waist, butt sticking out, and dragged his hands down Draco’s chest… stomach.. over his thighs…

Draco’s knees instinctively closed on Harry’s legs to hold the boy there. Harry’s hips rocked side-to-side to the music still throbbing in the background. Eyes burning, shivering with need, Harry slipped his hands up under the hem of Draco’s sweater and up the blond’s taut stomach and chest, skin on skin.

Draco groaned, eyes fluttering closed, and cupped Harry’s slender hips. “God, Harry… How? When?”

Harry was nearly panting - need LOVE. He shook his head. “Don’t know… Just feel it… Want you… Wanna make you feel good… Do you like it?” he asked breathlessly.

“Yes,” Draco answered in a groan. Needing to taste his boy, he leaned forward to lay hungry kisses over Harry’s stomach.

Harry tossed his head back, moaning, there were more violins now, high and singing. Looking back down on Draco, he gasped out a few words. “Tell me…” Merlin, he was so hard it almost hurt! He was shaking now. “Draco… tell me how… to make you feel good…”

“Mmmm…” Draco pulled his head back, thumbing Harry’s hip bones. Eyes glittering silver, feeling a physical need to touch, claim, devour, he nonetheless forced himself to let Harry’s sweet hips go. Drums beat a quickening tempo, making it even harder to let go, but this was too fun to end. He wanted to see more of this new side of Harry. Harry was taking them somewhere new and it was thrilling.

“You got this…” he encouraged. He reached back to grip the back of the couch again to keep from reaching out. “Doing so good… Keep making me feel good… Come on, Harry…”

Harry felt dizzy. Blood rushed to his face and down between his legs. He groaned and pressed his
palm down against himself, rocking his hips into his hand. The motion made Draco gasp and that set Harry’s blood on fire, so he stood between Draco’s legs and let his hips rock forward and back, openly thrusting against his palm.

“Fuck,” Draco groaned deep in his chest. “That feel good, Harry?”

“Ahh! Y-yes, Draco, yes, it feels good,” Harry babbled, red-faced, eyes a bright, feverish green.

“Glacis,” Draco growled predatorily.

Harry’s hands abandoned his cock to fly up to his chest, pressing on the ice-cold rings, back arching. Once the initial shock faded, Harry stepped back, out from between Draco’s legs. Still pressing on his rings, he sank to his knees. Holding Draco’s gaze, panting, he let his hands fall away from the cold metal and leaned backward, putting his hands down behind him. Draco felt a red haze settle over his vision, his ears went deaf to everything except his own pounding heartbeat. The front of Harry’s body was now on display, offered to his eyes. He slid his gaze up Harry’s slender thighs, over his shorts that bulged slightly from Harry’s arousal, up his lean, lace-covered stomach and chest, up his neck to his flushed lips and cheeks, the dilated pupils.

Harry rolled his hips up and down to the rhythm of the throbbing music, chest - stomach - hips creating a sensual wave, knees shamelessly spread. Draco’s hand came down to press between his legs, his jeans way too damn tight. Shit, it hurt! He wanted Harry so fucking bad. He felt nearly breathless with awe as he watched Harry undulate on the floor in front of him. Almost viciously, he undid his jeans and yanked his zipper down to grip himself. He curled his fingers around his dick and worked his hand up and down with slow, hard jerks, his eyes burning silver as they watched Harry’s dance.

Harry felt a roaring - hunger - at the sight of Draco touching himself. His mouth literally watered. He came off his hands and crawled forward in a daze. He slid his hands up Draco’s thighs, tongue messily wetting his lips as he stared at the proof of Draco’s desire. He couldn’t speak. His throat too tight, his mind overwhelmed with need. Glancing up into silver heavy-lidded eyes, Harry begged with a low whimper, hands scratching gently at the crook of Draco’s thighs.

“Oh, god,” Draco groaned, closing his eyes and fisting himself brutally tight. “Shit. What the hell, Harry. I mean, seriously, what the hell…”

Opening his eyes, Draco took control. He couldn’t wait a second longer. Impatient, he grabbed Harry by the hair, crushing some of the small white flowers, and yanked his head forward, pressing Harry’s damp, swollen lips against his dick. His voice came out a rasped growl. “Get it really wet. Come on.”

- shock PLEASURE excitement - Harry took Draco into his mouth. The head had flushed red with need and the tip was already flavored with salty-bitterness.

Harry gasped, drool falling from his mouth to drip down Draco’s shaft. Dazed stupid with lust, he slid his tongue down Draco’s hot skin until it glistened in the candlelight. Panting like an animal, he clawed at Draco’s jean-covered thighs as he held his mouth wantonly open, drool dripping from his hungry mouth. It took all he had to remember Draco’s order and not slurp it back into his mouth just to swallow the added flavor of Draco’s pleasure. Groaning and whimpering, he lapped messily at the shaft and head, soaking Draco’s balls and jeans in the process.

More than wet enough, trembling on the edge of release, Draco yanked Harry’s head off him and literally shuddered to see Harry practically hang limp from his hand, the boy’s mouth gaping open, tongue writhing, and chin soaked with spit.
“Turn around,” he growled, heart thundering, music pounding, all violin madness.

Harry’s senses were consumed by the flavor of Draco, and he sucked and licked at his own mouth, hungry whimpers falling from his lips. Draco groaned and pushed him, forcibly turning him on his knees so that Harry faced away from him. Draco was standing now, stiff cock hanging out and dripping. He pushed on Harry’s shoulder until the boy was on all fours, still making wet slurping sounds that drove Draco mad!

“Ignis!” he growled, panting.

Harry slammed his chest down, keeping his hips up, as he instinctively tried to push the heat out by dragging his nipples roughly over the rug. A desperate cry of pain/pleasure escaped him. Draco dropped to his knees and leaned forward, holding Harry’s head down even as he used his legs to close the boy’s bare thighs around his wet dick. He began to trust. Hard.

Harry whined and gasped, panting like crazy, tears beading on his lashes and spilling to the floor. “…draco draco draco…” he chanted, nearly incoherent. He stared blindly, whole body rocking with the force of Draco’s hips, his cheek dragging on the floor.

He could feel it. Their magic coiling and twining, the room throbbing, the music becoming a living, breathing thing, wrapping around them, punching into their bodies. Harry arched back into Draco’s thrusts, pressing his chest even harder against the floor, his nipples on fire! He’d never felt so beautiful, so needed, so fucking good… It was coming!… Harry clawed at the rug, a scream building on his lips even as his body began to shake apart.

Draco began to lose it. Sweat slid down his face, salting his lips. He gripped Harry’s hips tight enough to bruise as words spilled from him. “Yes, god, Harry, fuck yes! That’s it! God so fucking beautiful. Mine! Mine, Harry. Fuck! LOVE YOU LOVE YOU LOVE YOU LOVE YOU LOVE YOU!”

The furniture rattled and slid across the floor. The curtains tore, spilling cold daylight into their blinded eyes. The candles flared and sizzled like sparklers. The music wailed, sounding tortured and euphoric. Draco arched violently, hips slamming hard against Harry’s ass. At the same moment, Harry thrust backward, back bowing dramatically as his head came off the floor and a scream of mindless pleasure flew from his lips.

…

As the static in his mind slowly cleared, Draco realized he was sprawled on top of Harry, panting heavily against the back of his boy’s neck. Harry was half-conscious, breaths coming in hiccuping whimpers. Draco slid to the side so the boy could breathe easier. He hummed and clumsily stroked Harry’s sweat-damp hair until he quieted.

It took several minutes before their trembling eased and their bodies stilled. Draco reached between them and tucked himself back into his pants. He slipped his hand between Harry’s thighs and fingered the wet mess between them. He chuckled, voice raspy.

Harry blushed at that, body still buzzing and sparking. “Love you…” he whispered.

“Love you.” Draco answered. He was grinning stupidly, eyes sparkling. Sitting up, he offered his hands. “I don’t know where that came from, but you were gorgeous, Harry.”

Harry rolled onto his side and took the offered help, letting Draco pull him into a sitting position. The flowers had mostly fallen from his hair, which was now messy and tangled, no longer tamed into cute waves. There was a mark on Harry’s cheek, red from a friction burn from the rug.
Draco pressed his first two fingers into Harry’s mouth and let the boy suck on them for a minute before sliding them over the redness. He held Harry’s eyes, telling him with a look what he wanted. The mark disappeared a little more with each pass of Draco’s fingers. Draco grinned happily, pulling Harry into a wet, open-mouthed kiss. Harry was breathless by the time Draco pulled back.

“Let’s get you out of these clothes and into a bath.”

Harry’s eyes lit up with - hope - unknowingly giving killer puppy eyes. “Will you take one with me?”

Draco kissed the boy’s nose. “Sure,” he said easily. “Whatever you want.”

Harry flung his arms around Draco’s neck and kissed him. Draco laughed into Harry’s mouth, holding him tight. He was never, ever going to let this boy go.

After several long kisses, they stumbled into the bathroom and helped each other strip out of their clothes. Draco fingered the bruises on Harry’s hipbones, placed there by his punishing grip from earlier, and Harry shivered in pleasure. Draco decided to let those stay.

Harry drew the bath while Draco teased and tickled him. The tub was a huge claw-footed thing that could easily hold an adult male, so they could sit in it together without feeling crowded at all. Eventually they both sank up to their chests in warm water. Playfulness evaporating, replaced by a deep calm, Draco pulled Harry into his lap, his back to Draco’s chest. Practically purring, he rested his chin on Harry’s shoulder, running the cloth over every inch of the boy’s slender body. Harry melted against him, eyes closed, humming - contentment love peace.

They sat in silence, just breathing together. Draco released the cloth when he was certain Harry was clean and Harry happily switched places with him. Gratitude happiness - suffused the bond as Harry poured shampoo into his hands and scratched gently along Draco’s scalp. Draco closed his eyes in perfect pleasure, enjoying the boy’s loving touch.

“What’d you cook?” he asked lazily.

“Baked chicken and roasted vegetables,” Harry answered, rinsing the silky blond hair with his hands. “It keeps well and is easy to warm up.”

“Sounds good.” Draco turned and faced him, draping his legs over the boy’s. He cupped Harry’s face, water dripping down his cheeks. Pressing their foreheads together, he said softly, “I love you, Harry.”

Harry’s cheeks flushed, his eyes looking down shyly - joy LOVE - before looking up into warm grey once more. “I love you,” he answered. Sliding his hands up Draco’s forearms under the water, Harry leaned in to kiss him softly.

Mouths parting with gentle sighs, Draco asked quietly, “What’s your New Year’s resolution?” His hands settled at Harry’s waist, holding gently, thumbs stroking.

Harry reached up, his hand breaking the surface to run through Draco’s hair, slicking the wet strands back. “I wanna learn to duel and fight better. Get stronger.”

Draco quirked a half-smile at that answer. “Not a bad idea.”

“What about you?” Harry asked curiously, head tilting cutely.
Draco had so much he wanted to accomplish that he didn’t really know what to say. Eventually he said, “Rule the world?”

Harry laughed. “Maybe not this year.” But then he grew serious - determination LOVE. “One day,” he promised quietly.

Draco grinned and hugged the boy, sending water sloshing around the tub. “Yeah?” He bit Harry’s earlobe playfully, tugging once before letting go. “And will you be beside me?”

Harry smiled, eyes bright - excitement LOVE. “Whatever you want, Draco.”

Draco grinned. “In that case, you’ll be my everything.” He kissed Harry’s cheek and wrapped his arms around the slightly smaller boy. “Just like you are now.” Then he launched another tickle attack, feeling playful again.

Harry burst into peals of laughter, water flying everywhere as he flailed.

Their play lasted until the water grew too cold for them to sit in it. Harry was still smiling and breathing hard from their short battle as they stood dripping wet on the already soaked bath rug.

Watching his boy try and use towels to soak up all the water on the floor, the bruises on his hips darkening to dark purple, Draco suddenly made his decision. “Harry… I want to take you somewhere tomorrow.” He hadn’t been sure before, but he was now. Harry had grown. He was stronger. They could handle the situation with Liam and the girls together, whatever happened in the end.


“You’ll see.” Draco gave a slow, sly smile. “It’s a surprise.”

Chapter end
Confrontations and Acceptance

A/N: There will be an important note at the end of the chapter. Please take a look!

Confrontations and Acceptance

Remus hadn’t woken until more than twelve hours after the ritual Severus had performed… The ritual Severus had used him in. He was on Severus’s couch. In his private room. And he was so disoriented that for a wild moment he thought he’d dreamed it all up. But Remus knew deep in his bones that he hadn’t. His body felt simultaneously like he was going to burst with energy and like he’d been run over by a bus and could sleep for a weak. The contrast made him jittery and skittish, and he’d fled. He practically ran all the way back to Hogsmeade. He didn’t see Severus, didn’t speak to him or confront him. Remus couldn’t face the man after what they’d done, what they’d learned, what Severus had manipulated him into without warning or consent.

He was breathing hard. His graying, sandy-blond hair was windblown and sticking up in places. His eyes were wide, his pupils small. The deep scaring on his cheeks stood out vividly against his pale face. Feeling completely dissociative, Remus practically staggered through the front door of his cottage. The sun had set. It was dark, but it was not that late; the sun set early during winter. He stared dumbly, the door still wide open behind him. He had to blink several times before he really understood what he was looking at in the dim confines of his home.

There was a fire cheerfully dancing in the hearth, but the room looked destroyed. The curtains were tangled and torn. The furniture looked like it had been shoved around. One armchair was completely on its back. A lamp he’d bought at a thrift store in London and had loved was shattered on the ground. A puddle of white lace and silk, and was that a corset?, had been abandoned in the middle of the floor. A few inches away from where the clothes lay discarded, there was a stain of something white and crusty on the rug. The air was thick with the smell of sweat and something else that he refused to acknowledge.

Adrenaline dumped into his veins making him shake even harder. Where were the boys? Were they attacked? Kidnapped? Remus ran down the hall, heading toward the boys’ bedroom and splashed through a puddle of water that had spilled over into the hallway from the bathroom. He glanced inside, bracing his hands on either side of the doorway to keep his feet only to see more water on the floor and several sopping wet towels doing a piss-poor job of soaking it all up. The tub had been drained at least.

Confused, panicked, Remus pushed off from the doorway and continued toward the bedroom. He didn’t think to knock, just swung the door open. Draco and Harry’s arms were wrapped around each other as they kissed. They were dressed in jeans and sweaters; their hair was wet. They pulled apart to see who had entered. Draco had a curious look on his face, completely unashamed. Harry looked worried, his hand coming up to push his glasses higher up his nose, but he was not worried because they were caught or because the house was destroyed. No, he was worried because Remus most likely looked crazed.

Remus’s heart was pounding, rage and relief swamped his brain with chemicals. Tears burned down his face. He couldn’t catch his breath, but he heard as if from a long tunnel his own voice, barking in his ear. “What do you think you’re doing?! The place is a disaster!”

Draco turned his attention away from Remus. He smoothed his hands through Harry’s hair and kissed his lips chastely. “Go warm us up something to eat. We’ll be along in a minute.”
“Yes, Draco,” Harry answered, obedient as always. Peace shone in his bright green eyes and it made Remus want to howl with jealousy.

Draco held Remus’s wild stare with a cold, hard look. Remus shivered. “Oh, and don’t clean anything up. Remus will do that.” Remus stared at the young blond, his teeth bared in a smile that was anything but. Draco’s lips pulled into a dangerous smirk.

“Yes, Draco,” Harry said again and slipped right by Remus without acknowledging the man.

Draco hadn’t moved. Just stood there staring Remus down. Remus was trembling, his whole body quaking. He just couldn’t think. He was shattered. It was all just too much and a whimper escaped him, his emotions whiplashing from anger to terror.

Draco spoke a single word, voice like steel despite it being so young. “Kneel.”

Remus instantly sank to his knees, but a growl escaped him, his teeth bared. Some small rational part of his mind was shocked. What the hell was he doing? He was completely out of control!

Draco walked over, completely unafraid of Remus’s wild growling and show of teeth. Before Remus knew what he was going to do, Draco grabbed him by the hair and yanked him forward so hard that he went sprawling on his belly, pain radiating from his scalp. The pain shocked Remus out of his panicked state like ice water thrown over his head. A sneakered foot pressed on the back of his neck and pinned him to the floor. Then Draco was leaning forward, putting more weight on his neck and suddenly Remus couldn’t breathe at all.

“The house can be fixed with a few simple spells,” Draco’s voice came from above him, quiet yet firm. “So tell me what’s really got you so upset.”

Remus gasped as Draco took enough weight off his foot to let him breathe and speak, but the threat remained. Draco could cut off his air at any point. Strangely, he found that thought soothing. “Peter did it,” he said on a cough, spit soaking into the rug under his cheek. “He did all of it.” And suddenly Remus was sobbing, hands clawing into the floor. “We only found out because S-Severus… He made a deal with an Old God. To l-learn the truth. Now he has to break the w-werewolf curse, but it’s impossible, so many have tried! He only has f-five years to live before the Horned God comes for him!”

“What did you find out?” Draco asked, voice hard. He could feel how badly Remus was shaking from where he had his foot on the man’s neck. Alarm ran down his spine, his attention sharpened. “Tell me.”

Feeling the command deep in his core, Remus was helpless to disobey. “P-Peter found out that S-Sirius was in l-love with J-James, so he helped Lord Black s-spell L-Lily. Used a B-Blood Ritual and Amortentia. Then the w-war got s-serious. I r-ran away. J-James figured out who h-hurt Lily. And P-Peter sold him to V-Voldemort to save his own s-skin. Framed S-Sirius.” Remus gasped, tears soaking his face. “Put S-Sirius in A-Azkaban! With D-Dementors! For ten years - oh god he’s been in there ten years! P-Peter didn’t even feel bad! Thought Sirius d-deserved it for still being in love with J-James, even after James married L-Lily.”

For several long minutes Remus lay limp and helpless, sobbing. The pressure against his neck lifted, but before he could panic, he felt Draco sit on his back, right over his shoulder blades. The boy braced his feet on either side of Remus’s head and began to stroke his hand through his hair. Remus whimpered at the gentle touch. He’d denied himself the comfort of human touch for so many years that it almost hurt to receive it now.
“I attacked Dumbledore,” Remus remembered, voice hoarse. He should be horrified. He’d honestly tired to kill the man. His rage had been so great that his monster had come out even without the moon! But he felt no regret, only a deep betrayal. “I was right fucking there! Looking for you! He could have told me the truth then! Explained it to me! But he let me walk out of there, not saying a word! Always manipulating me! WHY? He saved me! Gave me an education, protected me. I TRUSTED HIM! We all trusted him! Would’ve done anything for him! So why? Why couldn’t he save us? James! Sirius! Peter! I’m sorry! I’m so sorry!” Mind swimming, completely overwhelmed, Remus broke down completely. “I’m sorry, please! Please! Don’t leave me! I’m sorry!”

“Shhh,” Draco soothed, sensing Remus had no idea where he was or even what year he was. “I’ve got you. You’ve been good. So good. Such a good boy.”

The man beneath him gave a pained whine, going limp, his hysterical cries dissolving into broken weeping. Draco just sat there, comforting Remus with his weight, pinning him and holding him secure while he continued to pet his hair. It didn’t take long for the man to tumble into an exhausted sleep.

Draco sighed, his hand stilling but remaining in Remus’s thick, coarse hair. All this pain and suffering because, what? Sirius Black was gay? Narcissa had warned him, but Draco hadn’t understood just how deep the taboo against homosexuality ran in the Wizarding world. Dread crawled up his throat to choke him.

He and Harry were still minors. They didn’t have the right to make choices about their future or their bodies… or even their hearts. Basic rights were afforded them, but beyond that children were owned by their parents. And he’d just lashed out at Andromeda. He’d been pushed too far by the woman’s overbearing, judgmental attitude and had used his relationship with Harry as a weapon against her. Oh, it had gotten her to back off, all right, but now he and Harry were in danger. Draco was doubly glad Harry had already warned Lucius. He’d have to talk to the man soon.

And that pissed Draco off further because Lucius had placed his own desires over Draco and Harry’s safety. He’d been unforgivably careless by keeping Bellatrix locked up so close to them for eight months before they went off to Hogwarts. Granted, they had only been at the manor four of those eight months, but that was still too much time! Things could have gone so wrong and Harry would have been in danger. It had only been luck that they had already left when things had gone wrong. Even worse, Lucius had toed the line of betrayal and risked his own death by not telling Draco about the diary with Voldemort’s fucking soul inside it! He really fucking hoped Narcissa was alright. Not only because they needed to stop the soul piece in the diary, but because she had become one of their biggest allies.

Draco carefully stood and stepped over the unconscious man on the floor. Remus was falling apart. It was expected, but it was still inconvenient. Although, to be fair, Remus had no legal way of helping them even if he hadn’t had a breakdown. He wasn’t their guardian, and if his condition became known, he’d be less than useless, likely locked away in a prison disguised as a hospital. For the safety of the public, of course. A deep, disgusted sneer crossed Draco’s face. What utter and complete bullshit. Remus was only dangerous one night a year. The same couldn’t be said of wizards and witches the government fully supported. They didn’t care about citizens’ safety; they only cared about keeping their own precious lives unbothered.

And just like that, the distant, shadowy threat of society snapped into focus and became a target for Draco to destroy. He always knew it would come to this. Because of the views society held and what Draco and Harry were, but he had hoped they could stay unnoticed until they were of age, when their status as minors couldn’t be wielded as a weapon against them.
Draco stood in the kitchen doorway and watched Harry set the last dishes on the table. The boy looked up with a smile. His black hair was still damp, his face bright with happiness. Harry was still slender and lean, but he’d come so far since they’d met in the dark Hold. Draco’s chest still burned with Harry’s promise of becoming a partner who Draco could lean on, his promise of becoming his *wife*, and Draco smiled back, the impulse to protect this boy who he loved so damn much burning stronger.

Draco wasn’t about to let the world tear Harry apart to keep their pathetic peace. Soon the people would be forced to abandon their beloved illusions about their fucking ‘normal’ lives. Because Voldemort *was* coming back. In fact, it was possible even more than one of the fuckers was coming. And Draco would have no qualms letting the whole Wizarding world collapse if it was a threat to Harry. The public would have to accept all that they were or Draco wasn’t going to lift a finger to save them. He was going to have to change his war strategy completely now. He’d have to raise defenses and keep Harry safe, but he would no longer attempt to end the war before it began. Now the Wizarding world would have to *earn* the right to be saved.

“Draco?” Harry’s happiness dimmed with worry, sensing something wasn’t right.

Draco shook his head, trying to clear it of dark thoughts. “Looks good.” He crossed to the table and sat, pulling Harry into the chair beside him. “After we eat, I’m going to go visit Lucius. You stay and look after Remus. He’s in a bad place right now.”

Harry nodded solemnly. “Yes, Draco.”

Draco smiled and brushed the back of his fingers down Harry’s soft cheek. “Come on. Don’t be so worried. I’ve got this handled. And tomorrow when we wake up, I’ve got a surprise for you.”

Harry peeked over at Draco - *curious* - “A surprise?”

“Yes.” Draco gave a happy grin, he couldn’t wait to see Harry’s reaction! “It’s New Year’s Day tomorrow. You gave me such a great gift. It’s only right I give you one, too.”

Harry touched his nipple rings through his sweater, heat rising in his cheeks. “You already gave me a gift.”

Draco waved that away, sticking his nose slightly in the air in a mimicry of Lucius at his most pompous. “That was your Yule gift. This will be for New Year.”

Harry smiled - *happy LOVE* - glad to see Draco’s playfulness returning. “Thank you, Draco,” he said with soft sincerity.

Draco leaned over to kiss Harry’s cheek. When he pulled away, he took Harry’s hand in his, resting them both on the table between their plates. He lifted his fork with the other hand and said, “Eat, Harry.”

Harry gave a big smile and did as he was told, happily watching as Draco ate the meal he’d cooked.

…

Draco walked calmly through the halls of Malfoy Manor. His way was lit by lamps glowing with anchored, low-powered Lumoses that were fed by the wards. The white marble and antique furniture, the paintings and sculptures, the vases of flowers… It all looked even more elegant and high class illuminated by the soft, clear light of the lamps than it did in daylight. Draco had lived in this manor every other month for the last two years, but it still felt like he was walking inside a magazine or through a movie set.
It was beautiful, that was undeniable, but it didn’t feel like home. Of course, his near constant conflict with Lucius probably didn’t help, or the fact that living in this house was more like attending a Pureblood bootcamp. Etiquette, blood-lines, history, riding, fencing, calligraphy, languages, religion: They had spent their hours here near constantly at lessons. That’s not to say it was all bad. They had some good moments, too. Especially on the holidays. Narcissa had always gone out of her way to make holidays special for them, but a few holidays out of the year weren’t enough to make this place a home.

The manor was quieter than normal. There was a stillness in the air and Draco trailed his fingertips thoughtfully along the wall, his body swaying gracefully with his slow steps. Maybe it was because he’d just been forced to relive most of his memories or the fact that he’d realized their enemy was more than just Voldemort but also society itself, either way he had a new perspective on Malfoy Manor. He didn’t suddenly want to take up the mantle of Malfoy Heir, but he could see how useful being a Malfoy would prove to be in this fight. The problem was his parents just didn’t understand that no matter what they did that becoming who they wanted was too confining. He just couldn’t do it.

Draco had spent the first years of his life at an orphanage. It had been rundown and there hadn’t been enough adults to children. He hadn’t gotten the attention he needed, and the kids were always fighting over toys and food, but Draco had felt a part of something there. It had been home. He would never forget the feeling, while watching the orphanage burn not long after his sixth birthday, of terrible certainty and utter grief that his whole world was gone forever.

He’d spent the next four months in a pedo’s closet getting molested until his venomous power had finally come awake the first time he’d been raped. He’d been sold to the Hold master after that, and for a year, he’d been a slave. It had been a dark and terrible existence that exceeded even those first few months of being broken. He’d been physically abused and on the verge of death dozens of times. Bones had been broken, his blood had been spilled, he’d faced torturous mind games, and had been emotionally degraded and made into an animal. And then… Harry had come to him and sunlight had broken into his bleak existence.

Harry, god Harry, the boy had crashed into his life, bringing sweetness and love - real fucking love - and it had broken something in Draco, broken and fixed something at the same time. For three months, he’d planned while Harry had recovered some strength. When they were ready, Draco had murdered the man who had enslaved them both and they’d escaped. Escaped to a man who was much like Draco. An alpha, a dom, a man who lived on the border of acceptable society and the criminal underground, but by taking in escaped slaves, Brendon had overstepped his authority and he was murdered for it.

That could have very easily been the end of Draco and Harry. It nearly had been. If the thugs hadn’t stopped to play with them, if they had dragged them back to slavery and separated them… Draco shuddered to think about it. Fortunately, that wasn’t how it went. Fate had given him a window to escape and he’d taken it. Draco had killed them all. He’d taken Harry and run to the streets, but two seven-and-a-half-year-olds, who were runaway slaves no less, could not survive alone, so he’d gone to a Boss for protection.

That’s where he’d met Liam, Brendon’s younger brother. They had spent only nine months with Liam, but those months spent living in New York with him were the closest he and Harry had ever come to having a true home. He and Harry had had their first real birthday party with Liam when they had turned eight. They had gone to movies, restaurants, museums, and theme parks. They had hung out at home and watched tv together. They had laughed and cried together. They had loved each other.
And it had all come crashing to an end when Remus had come for them, and then the Scourers, and then Britain and the Wizarding world, and finally landing in this crazy agreement where for the last two years they bounced from Malfoy Manor to the Tonkses every other month. Only to then be sent to Hogwarts to live ten months out of the year. So yeah. He could see how this manor might have been home in some alternate dimension where he hadn’t been stolen as a baby. But he had. So this place was nothing more than a tool to use to force society to bend to his will.

Draco was determined to make Harry’s promise come true. They would build themselves a home that they decided on and had no demands or impossible expectations attached. A home they couldn’t be kicked out of and where only those they allowed to enter would be welcome. There would be no more judgement or secrets or jumping around from house to house. They would be officially married and have ultimate authority over themselves and their lives. They’d be free. It was for that dream that Draco was here now, walking the halls of Malfoy Manor once more. Despite wanting to leave this place and his parents behind forever, Draco had no choice but use the platform they afforded if he was ever going to make Harry’s dream a reality.

Tucking his white-blond hair behind his ears and steeling himself for the difficult verbal war ahead of him, he pressed open Lucius’s office door only to come to an abrupt stop and stare around with wide eyes. The bookcases and furniture were gone except for a single long table and a chair that had been placed in the center of the room. Papers were pinned to the walls almost covering every inch. Some looked like pages torn straight from books. Others were covered in Lucius’s handwritten notes. Books lay carelessly discarded around the floor. There were more on the table, all open to random pages.

Lucius stood with his back to the door, still unaware of Draco’s presence. He wore an undershirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbow. It wasn’t even tucked in to his slacks. His blond hair was pulled back into a low ponytail that fell down to the center of his back. His fingers were ink-stained and he muttered to himself as he bent low over the desk.

Draco moved along the wall of the room, stepping carefully around books as he did so, until he could see Lucius’s profile. The man looked pale, his eyes feverish with dark circles underneath. Draco suspected Lucius had been taking too many potions. Dilated grey eyes snapped up to meet his and Draco lifted an eyebrow, crossing his arms over his chest.

Lucius straightened, his back giving a quiet pop. For a long second, he didn’t react to Draco’s presence. Then he smoothed his hands against his pant legs and gave a cool smile. “I’m making some progress in understanding how to manipulate a Horcrux. I still haven’t discovered a way to remove it from Harry’s core, but I’m close.”

“Narcissa is still not back?” Draco asked softly, expression tensing with worry. She would never have let Lucius get this bad.

Lucius’s eyes narrowed dangerously. “You assume too much. There is a chance she will never return.”

Draco was shocked by this. “You would divorce her?”

“I would be widowed by her,” Lucius snarled, hands curling into fists. “She was already injured when she went about her mad quest. She thinks she can control her sister, she always has, but she won’t see Bellatrix for the viper she is and so will always fail.”

Draco frowned. “She was injured? By what?”

Lucius stared his son straight in the eyes and said, “By me.”
Draco felt his magic stir in response, the deadly energy of his core beginning to snake through his veins.

“You think you’re ready to play these games, but you are still too young.” Dismissing the arrogant boy, Lucius turned his attention back to the ancient tomes spread out before him.

Draco strode forward and slammed his hands down on the books, leaning forward threateningly. “What did you do?”

“I’m sorry. I did not realize you cared.” Lucius gave a darkly amused grin and casually turned a page of a book.

Draco stepped around the table and boldly shut the book his father was reading. He forced his voice and expression to be calm. He couldn’t rise to the man’s bait. “Lucius. Please. Explain the situation. I need to know if I’m going to make successful plans.”

Lucius stared coldly at his son. “As I said, I stripped her of her connection to the wards. To prevent Bellatrix from having access again. When Narcissa recovered, she guessed where her sister would flee. After all, as a legally dead escaped convict, the only place Bellatrix would be protected is her Family home. The house used to belong to her aunt and uncle, but with the deaths and disinheritance of the main line, her father had been made Lord Black. That means Bellatrix would be accepted and protected there. However, Narcissa knew her sister would be suspicious should she show up, so she concocted a plan. Narcissa thought she could play on her sister’s sympathies, make Bellatrix lower her guard, by arriving beaten and in disgrace. She would make it appear as if she had nowhere else to turn after being exiled from House Malfoy.”

Draco frowned. “You beat her,” he said carefully. “To make it appear like she had a falling out with you. In order to get closer to Bellatrix.”

Lucius suddenly swiped his arm across the table sending parchment and books flying to the floor. In a rage, he snarled, “She spelled me to think Bellatrix stood before me… So Narcissa got her way… I attacked her. And now I cannot tell if she is well or not because I have blocked her access to the wards and also to me.” Silver eyes flashed as he met his son’s guarded stare. “She is risking her life. To protect you! And still you stand there casting judgment and disregarding what it means to be a family.”

“Lucius…” Draco bit back the sharp things he could say and closed his eyes, taking a deep breath. He had come knowing he’d have to compromise. He’d need the Malfoy name and the political power that came with it if he was going to challenge society. Draco would never take up the title of Malfoy Heir the way Lucius wanted, but they did not have to be at war, either.

Draco stepped closer and placed himself within arm’s reach of his father. He ignored the way Lucius’s eyes narrowed in suspicion and spoke as calmly as he could. “I had no idea you both went that far to protect me and Harry. I am deeply grateful.” He lowered his chin to look up at his father through his lashes the way he had seen Harry do so many times before. He held the humble pose for a long second before lifting his face to meet Lucius’s shocked stare once more. “I’m worried about her, but Narcissa is strong. She’s cunning and shrewd. A beating, one she asked for, is not going to slow her down. She will use it as she planned and get Bellatrix right where she wants her. You know this; you’re just tired. You need to take a break, Lucius.”

Lucius stared at his son in abject shock. A break? When Potter’s body contained a piece of the Dark Lord’s very soul?

“Harry is fine at the moment,” Draco said firmly, knowing what Lucius was thinking. He boldly
reached out to grab Lucius by the wrist and tugged the man toward the door. “We need the Horcrux out of him as soon as possible, but I wouldn’t be able to trust anything you came up with in this state anyway. Come on. When’s the last time you ate? Slept?”

Lucius said nothing as he followed his son to the private dining room. The elves were only too happy to supply them with a light meal. Draco chose to sit directly next to him, as if wanting to be close, but Lucius was not fooled for a second. Draco would only be this accommodating if he wanted something. So Lucius waited and watched, wondering when Draco would reveal his true motive.

Draco had endured Lucius’s narrow-eyed stare long enough. He set his fork down sharply next to his plate and flashed Lucius a glare. “Look. We want different things. I’m not denying that, but we still need each other. We have to figure out a way to make this work. For both of us.” He tilted his head, deciding to get to the point. “Did you get Harry’s letter?”

“Yes.” Lucius sat straighter. Andromeda seemed so insignificant to him that he had forgotten about it. So that was why Draco was here. His lips curled in amusement: Draco needed his protection. He wondered what he could get from the boy in return. “He wrote that she is now aware of your relationship with Potter.” Lucius lifted an eyebrow, derision in his eyes. “How careless of you.”

Draco accepted the jab. He deserved it. “It doesn’t matter. It just speeds up my plans a bit.”

Lucius frowned. What plans?

Draco gave a chilling smile. “So, Lucius. Remus told me she will petition you for sole custody of Harry in return for relinquishing all rights to me.” He leaned his cheek against his hand, elbow propped up on the table. “You could agree, of course, and officially become the enemy. Or we can try and work together as I am suggesting. What will you do?”

Lucius actually laughed. “That threat has lost all its power, I’m afraid. I gave up believing you would work with me long ago, Draco. I will suffer no loss in approving the change in guardianship rights since you already treat me as the enemy and always have.”

“That’s where you’re wrong.” Draco tensed, his hands gripping the table edge tightly. His mind raced to think of words that could salvage this situation. “I’ve kept you at a distance, yes, but believe it or not I have respected the fact that we are family to the best of my ability. You’ve asked a lot of me from the moment you discovered I was back. I may not have given you everything, but I’ve played along.” Temper flashed through his eyes. “If you think it’s been hard for you, it’s been even harder for me. So don’t you dare sit there and act like I’ve been unreasonable, Lucius, because you haven’t seen anything yet.” Draco pushed to his feet, his chair dragging loudly against the floor. “If you would just give up on controlling me, we could do such great things together.”

Lucius sneered. “Your plans only give you what you want, Draco. They do nothing for me in return.”

“Really?” Draco tilted his head with mock innocence. “Because last I checked I had backed Dumbledore into a corner and demanded his resignation. I seem to recall you wanting him out of the school for a few years now.”

Lucius’s hands curled into fists as he tried to hide his shock.

Draco continued, pretending like he hadn’t noticed. “I mean, being on the Board of Governors is a pretty big deal. I would think you’d have a pretty big say in who would be elected as the next Headmaster. You might even get someone in position to help you further the policies Dumbledore
has managed to block up to this point.”

“You didn’t do that for me,” Lucius said darkly, glaring at his presumptuous son.

Draco shrugged, letting the fake-innocent look fall from his features. “I could have used the leverage I had to blackmail Dumbledore into doing whatever I wanted, but I saw this as an opportunity for the Malfoy family to advance and acted on it.” Grey eyes met grey eyes. “So I didn’t do it for you personally maybe, but I did act in favor of the Malfoy name instead of personal power. That’s the truth.”

Lucius sucked in a breath. He wasn’t sure if he could believe the manipulative boy, but… Hope burned in his chest regardless. “I have already contacted my lawyers. They will prepare several stratagems to counter whatever move Andromeda makes. I have also begun to look for a way to free Sirius Black, Harry’s godfather. Custody should revert to Black upon his release should we need it. Also, the safe house Bellatrix resides in would also revert back to Black’s control. I am waiting to hear from Narcissa before making such a move in case it disrupts a strategy she has in place.”

Draco was super curious to know how Lucius knew Sirius was innocent when Draco hadn’t told him about the Scabbers/Pettigrew fiasco, but now wasn’t the time to ask about it. “Good. That’s good.” His shoulders relaxed a bit. “We’re currently staying with Remus in Hogsmeade, but I’m considering disappearing for awhile into Muggle London.”

Lucius tapped his fingers along the table. “That could be good. We can make the case that Andromeda drove you to run away. That is grounds for abuse and could strip her of her guardianship rights, awarding Harry’s full custody to us. However, that might push her to publicly explain why she drove you away.” He shot Draco a sharp look. “I do not advise coming out about your relationship with Harry so soon. You are both still minors.”

“I know,” Draco answered tightly. He hated the fact he had to hide it, hated it more than anyone would ever understand, but he wasn’t dumb. The Ministry would have them separated if they found out. “Remus knows where we are, so if you need us to come back, let him know.”

Lucius inclined his head.

“Get some sleep, Lucius. We are going to need you sharp.”

Lucius’s expression became shaded with annoyance as he answered, “Do not worry, Draco. I am perfectly alert.”

“Good.” Draco actually gave him a smile. “Keep me updated and I’ll do the same for you.”

Harry sat on the floor of his and Draco’s bedroom next to Remus. He drew his knees close to his chest as he considered the man. Remus was asleep on the floor, sprawled on his belly, head turned to the side. Dried tear tracks could still be seen on his face and there was an aura of pain around him. Harry softly stroked Remus’s hair, wondering what he could do to help. Draco had told him to take care of him. Harry wasn’t exactly sure how, but before he could get too nervous about it, Remus woke up. Pale brown eyes blinked slowly as Remus rolled from his stomach onto his back. Harry pulled his hand back and hugged his legs. As he considered how to go about this, he rested his cheek against his knees, watching Remus from behind his black-framed glasses and a screening curtain of messy black hair. Remus was clearly avoiding his gaze. He sat up, turning his face away and running his hand through his grey-streaked hair.
“Are you hurt?” Harry asked, breaking the awkward silence.

“No. I’m fine,” Remus answered, but his face was still turned away so Harry couldn’t see his expression.

“It’s okay to cry,” Harry stated with sudden boldness. He uncurled from around his legs and got to his feet. Walking around Remus, he planted himself in front of the older man. “If you’re upset or hurt, you need to tell us. I’m right here, so stop hiding. Let me help you.”

Remus stared up at the boy in shock. He was utterly taken aback by Harry’s almost sharp tone of voice. “Yes. You’re right.” Letting his head fall forward, he closed his eyes and honestly took a look inside his own head. “I’m angry. I’m angry that I couldn’t help the people who mattered so very much to me. I’ve hated Sirius all this time and he was innocent! I was so very, very wrong, and because of that, he’s been hurting and alone. I abandoned him!” His hands curled into fists at his sides as he began to shake. Anger coiled hot and sharp through his core. “I’m angry at Dumbledore for not saving us and for manipulating me. I’m angry at Severus for nearly killing us just to gain information that doesn’t change a bloody thing! And I’m sad. I miss my family. I miss them so bloody much, but they’re gone, and I’m terrified I’ll let you and Draco down the way I let them down.” Tears began to cut down his cheeks, wetting his thighs as they dripped from his face. Voice tight and hoarse from pain, he confessed, “I hate myself. Because all I still want to do is run away. I haven’t changed at all. I’m still a useless, bloody coward.”

Harry stared down at the man with wide eyes. He’d never seen Remus so raw and exposed. Remus always held himself slightly at a distance. As if a thin veil stood between him and the world. Harry hadn’t expected such an outpouring, but Draco had made it clear: take care of Remus. Draco had only ever told him to take care of one other person before and that was Liam. Nodding to himself, Harry took a step forward and firmly grabbed Remus by the hair. Not enough to hurt, but enough to get his attention. Harry crouched down and stared intently into Remus’s golden brown eyes.

“I don’t know what can make any of it right, Remus, but I do know one thing.” His eyes almost seemed to burn with an inner fire. “Draco’s got you. He’ll keep you on the right path. He won’t let you run away.” His hand tightened a slight bit. Enough to make Remus wince. “So you don’t have to worry so much. You’re Draco’s now. Right?”

Remus stared at Harry in utter shock. His heart beat hard and fast in his throat. The tightness at his scalp sent shivers down his spine, and then… Harry put his hand on the front of his throat. It made everything in him go still and his eyes brighten to true gold. He felt himself teeter between shoving the boy away and exposing his throat in acceptance. This wasn’t his Alpha, but… Harry was Draco’s more than anyone else was. The instincts that held such a strong hold over his soul took center stage and he didn’t know which way he’d fall.

Harry, unaware of the tension or possible danger he was in, innocently said, “Maybe you need a collar.”

Remus’s eyes flashed to Harry’s throat and the worn black leather that encircled it. For the first time, he understood what that strip of leather truly meant. It was belonging and protection. It was a visible cry of Mine! and Taken! More importantly, it was Draco’s claim, real and weighty, and Remus suddenly felt a soul-deep longing to have exactly that. He’d fought against his instincts, questioned Draco, privately disapproved of the relationship Draco had with Harry, and held himself apart. A simple verbal acceptance seemed so unstable, so untrustworthy. Something physical really would make Remus feel accepted and forgiven.

Harry gave him a sweet smile, gentling the hand in Remus’s hair and turning it into a caress as he let his other hand fall away from his throat. “I’ll ask him, okay?”
Remus blushed a hot burning red. He couldn’t speak. Completely overwhelmed by the unexpectedly strong reaction he had to the idea of being collared! Eyes dulling to a light brown once more, he was honestly shocked by the whole idea, but it was too late to dissuade Harry. The boy was already moving out of the room and asking which spells would help clean the house.

“Sorry it got messy,” Harry apologized looking up at Remus as the man followed him into the living room.

Remus just shook his head, cheeks still stained with embarrassment. His lips curled with a wry smile. “You guys are actually very neat kids. I rarely see you making a mess, so I think you can be forgiven this once.”

Harry listened carefully as Remus taught him the cleaning and drying spells they’d need to set everything right. It took him a few tries, but Harry eventually got them working. He didn’t use a spell on the skirt and corset, however, too afraid of damaging them. Remus opened his mouth to ask if the dress was Harry’s, but he already knew the answer as much as his brain tried to resist the knowledge, so he ended up asking nothing at all.

Draco flooed back just as they finished putting the house back to rights. Harry ran to meet him, a big smile on his face. Remus practically slunk into the room after the boy, his face burning red. Harry wouldn’t really tell Draco he needed a collar, would he? But Harry did just that. Sharp grey eyes and curious green pinned him in place and Remus began to tremble with conflicted impulses. He opened his mouth to deny any such thing, but his throat was too tight to make a sound.

“I see.” Draco stepped closer to the man who had only just recently pledged himself to him. Remus’s submission should have been enough, but he still felt hesitant, not sure he could trust Remus to stay the course and not run away again.

Remus could sense his Alpha’s hesitation and his fragile calm shattered. He couldn’t tell up from down anymore! Anger and self-hate were nearly choking him! Draco was the only stable ground in sight, and the threat of that disappearing made him begin to hyperventilate. Remus sank to his knees, a whine rising from deep in his chest as he stared at Draco with wide, begging eyes. He couldn’t breathe!

Draco kept this eyes on Remus even as he pulled Harry close and whispered something in his ear. Harry nodded and slipped past, leaving the room. Draco crouched and gently stroked Remus’s tight throat with his fingertips. It made Remus shiver, but with every pass of Draco’s hand, he could breathe a little easier.

Truth was Draco couldn’t understand Remus’s pain. He had never felt a grief that made wish so badly to go back in time. Draco had always faced forward. The closest Draco could come to understanding that kind of regret was when he had very foolishly put himself in Quirrell’s path, arrogantly thinking he was the equal to a malicious and experienced Dark wizard. It had nearly cost him his mind. That one decision had led to Harry suffering greatly, to Harry being left alone and vulnerable for almost a week. Because of that, Harry had faced their dangerous and powerful enemy without Draco! It was a miracle that it had ended as well as it had, honestly. It had literally taken a gods’ intervention, but the regret he felt over stupidly putting himself at risk like that only made him even more focused on the future, not look back the way Remus did.

“Look,” Draco started, trying to sound sympathetic but knowing some impatience was bleeding through his voice. “You can’t get it back. What you lost. The past. It’s gone. Forever.”

Remus closed his eyes and bit his lips, swallowing the broken sound that wanted to escape. Why was this so hard? It had been ten years! Of course he knew they weren’t coming back! Of course he
Draco sighed. “You belong to me now.” Harry returned and he handed Draco a cord with a pendant. Draco accepted it and turned his attention back to Remus. “Even if James, Sirius, and Petter came back, you are not the same. They would not be the same. Remus, there is no going back. Instead, you need to look forward. Look at where you stand now. You’re stronger than you were then. You’re not a helpless and lost teenager anymore. You’ve embraced your power and your spirit is more whole.”

Remus sucked in a breath as the words struck deep inside him. He felt something go around his neck and opened his eyes, looking down. There was a thin black leather cord and on the end of it was a white gold dragon with the wings outstretched. The cord was attached to each wing tip. The body of the dragon hung low, its belly exposed, a bright yellow gold. The head was beautifully crafted, mouth open in a silent roar. The tail dipped down in a sinuous curve, like a sloppy S.

Harry, standing next to Draco and looking down at Remus with a gentle and compassionate look, pulled up his sweater enough for Remus to see the white dragon with bright green eyes tattooed on his side, directly above his hip. It was nearly the same color as the white-gold dragon that now rested over Remus’s sternum.

Remus’s heart thundered in his chest. His eyes burned like fire. A strange wheezing sound escaped him with every quick, patting breath. All the panic, the grief, was washed away by hope… disbelief… expectation… It hurt nearly as badly, but it felt cleaner, more powerful.

“You wanted to be a part of us.” Grey eyes caught and held his wide-eyed look. The boy’s voice dropped, became threatening. “There’s no going back. You belong to me now, Remus. Not to them. So stop looking back!”

A wave of emotion rose up and squeezed Remus’s throat so tightly it was as if Draco had collared him after all. “Draco,” he wheezed, helpless. His chest felt so tight, like it was going to collapse any minute. Tears burned his cheeks, adrenaline pumped through his veins.

Draco smiled, all teeth and danger. “I know it won’t be easy.” He crouched down so he was inches away from Remus’s face. He gripped the dragon in his hand and squeezed hard enough to let the gold pierce the skin of his palm.

The smell of Draco’s blood made Remus’s eyes go solidly gold and he whimpered.

Draco spoke softly and yet his voice was hard as steel. “I think you have to face what happened, really face it, to let it go completely. So I’m ordering you to go to Azkaban. Go there and see your old pack-mate. But not just because you owe him. You are going to go there and evaluate his condition because he could prove useful to this pack. He’s Harry’s rightful guardian and Andromeda has become a problem. It’s going to be the hardest thing you ever had to do, Remus. You’re going to want to roll over and grovel. You’re going to want to recreate the past, but I want you to remember this.” Draco twisted his hand so that the cord tightened around the man’s throat. “I want you to remember you don’t belong to him anymore. You belong to me!”

Eyes going silver, Draco forced Remus to look him in the eye by slipping his free hand into the man’s hair and shaking him lightly. Remus broke out in a sweat and he snarled, trying to keep his head lower. Alarm sparked along his nerves. He was not trying to challenge Draco! The energy around the boy was so dominating that the mere thought of challenging the Alpha made his bladder want to release. The color silver filled his mind completely, and then Draco leaned forward. The Alpha’s teeth closed on the slope where Remus’s neck met his shoulder and bit down hard enough that Remus’s skin threatened to break. Remus went completely limp, mouth hanging open, pupils
blown wide. His life was Draco’s completely! Draco could kill him in that moment and Remus would have accepted it without qualm. Remus was his…

Draco released the bite and sat back on his heels. Remus had collapsed onto his side on the floor. His eyes were glazed; he was hardly coherent. Draco smiled softly at the total surrender and rubbed his still bleeding hand over the black cord, letting the leather soak up the red liquid. It would hold the scent and hopefully remind Remus who he belonged to when he went on his mission.

As he did this, Draco glanced up at his boy. Harry was standing at his side, watching attentively, ready to help at a moment’s notice. Harry had been absolutely correct in what Remus had needed, and he’d done the right thing by telling Draco. He’d also picked the exact pendant Draco had wanted. Over the years, they had accumulated quite bit of jewelry, but neither Draco nor Harry cared to wear much of it. This particular piece had been gifted to Draco by Narcissa. She wouldn’t mind Draco using it to secure a tighter allegiance with an ally.

“Good job, Harry,” Draco said softly.

Harry smiled brightly at the praise.

Chapter end.

A/N: Something had been bothering me for awhile about the story/character development. I realized that I didn’t like that 4 years had elapsed between the end of Chains and the start of Defiance. I feel like Harry and Draco would have been further along on their path of progress than we’ve seen in Defiance. It was just too much time “off-screen”. So I went back and adjusted there starting ages by 2 years. That means only 2 years take place between Chains and Defiance. Here is a brief look at the new timeline. Honestly not much changed except their ages.

1986: 6 year old Draco’s orphanage burns down / abducted / 4 months with pedophile / sold to Raymond and placed in the Hold

1987: 7 year old Harry is sold and meets Draco in the Hold / they bond / escape / meet Brendon / Brendon dies, Draco saves them from being enslaved again / meet Liam

1988: the boys turn 8 years old / Remus finds them / Scourers / fairies / return to Wiz World.

1989: boys turn 9 years old with the Malfoy’s / meet Tonkses / Samhain fairy ring, Andromeda and Molly get pregnant / boys meet 13 year old Percy during Yule break, realize he’s been abused, and marks him

[In the altered timeline, Peter spends the first two years at Hogwarts satisfied with just spying on the girls and getting a taste for freedom. It isn’t until Percy’s 3rd year that he snaps and crosses the line, molesting and raping Percy. I really like that Percy is older in this scenario when Draco claims him. It feels more “right” that he’s 13 and not 11.]

1990: May 1st: Andromeda gives birth to Denebola Regina Tonks (Dee) and Molly gives birth to Septimus (Tim/Timmy) Weasley.

[I thought it wasn’t realistic that Andromeda stays ignorant of the boys relationship for 4 years, but it makes more sense this way if she spent most of the time before the boys go to Hogwarts pregnant and then taking care of an infant.]

1990: July the Loretta’s Law is passed to “protect” Muggleborns.
1991: May - Defiance starts with Beltane and Dee/Tim’s 1st bday.

I really hope this doesn’t annoy anyone too terribly. I’ve gone back and corrected/altered the story to match this new timeline. It really made more sense to me to make this change. It hasn’t altered the plot at all except for the fact that they haven’t been “free” for quite as long and they are still dealing with their trauma. And honestly, they were just too young to be cognitively as developed as they were in Chains. I know they are still advanced even with moving their ages up 2 years, but the gap is a little less staggering.

I’m open to hearing what you think about this change or about this chapter. Please feel free to comment and I will do my best to get back with you.
Lost and Found Brothers

Lost and Found Brothers

- January 1st -

Draco could hardly sleep. It had been a long day, but the anticipation of bringing Harry to Liam had kept him awake. Therefore, it was barely past dawn when Draco flung the covers off and kissed Harry until the boy was giggling and blinking sleepy green eyes open.

“Time for your surprise. Get dressed,” Draco ordered, trying his best to keep a straight face.

Draco dressed quickly and went to prod Remus out of bed. The man was emotionally exhausted, but he got up easily enough. Draco smiled every time Remus unconsciously gripped the dragon pendant resting against his chest. A quick breakfast of toast and tea and they were on their way. It took them just over an hour to find a floo that was open (many people had stayed up late and drank to excess the night before, so most places were closed until noon). Once they were in London, the traffic was sparse, but they did eventually find a taxi. The boys stepped out in front of Liam’s old, rundown apartment building. Remus didn’t follow them.

“I trust you’ll be fine on your own,” Remus said with a smile.

Draco nodded and shut the door. Remus rolled the window down and Draco leaned in to press his hand over the dragon pendant. Looking into Remus’s golden brown eyes, he gave a quiet order. “Be strong.”

Remus nodded. His eyes were dark with shadows, his expression tense, but he gave a strong nod and held Draco’s eyes.

It was the best Draco could do for the man. The rest would be up to Remus. Turning away from the taxi, Draco took Harry’s hand and went up the steps to the entrance. Harry hadn’t asked any questions, but his - patience curiosity - danced between them.

Dressed warm for the weather, Harry had a red knit hat that pushed his black locks down over his forehead and around his face. He wore a dark blue wool coat, a thick maroon sweater, and a dark gray scarf. His slacks were black, as were his boots. Black-framed glasses obscured the rare green of his eyes and his nose and cheeks were pink, as were his lips which were reddened from being slightly chapped. Draco, on the other hand, had forgone the scarf and hat. His only concessions to the biting cold was a black wool coat and a dark blue sweater. He refused the slacks and heavy leather boots. Instead, he wore his usual jeans and Converse sneakers.

Their breath clouded before their faces, even when they were inside the building. It was old and not well insulated. A draft blew over them from the stairs and out the front door before they could get it shut behind them. The building was much quieter than the first time Draco had come, but the sour smell was still the same. Draco tugged on Harry’s hand as he led him to the stairs.

“Come on,” he said shortly, trying to hide the excitement in his voice.

Harry wondered where they were and what the surprise could be. They were in Muggle London. Maybe they were secretly meeting up with Tonks? They hadn’t seen her since late June when she left home for Auror training. Or maybe Draco had been one step ahead of Harry as usual and had already bought them their own place. If that was the case, Harry was going to work hard to make it
comfortable and beautiful for Draco.

Harry was pulled from his thoughts as they reached the second landing and Draco came to a stop in front of one of the apartment doors. The blond took out his wand and confidently cast the unlocking charm. Harry tilted his head curiously as he heard multiple locks click open and even the sound of a chain rattling. His heart rate picked up as Draco flashed him a look of barely suppressed excitement, mouth curled in a grin, his grey eyes practically sparkling. The door opened under Draco’s hand and they slipped inside.

They stepped into a small apartment. Harry looked around as Draco shut and locked the door behind him. They stepped directly into a small living room that held a couch and a tv on a stand, as well as a small table with two wooden chairs pushed against the far wall. A small galley kitchen was directly to the left while there were two doors on the right. One was open, and in the dark confines, Harry could just make out white tile, suggesting it was a bathroom. The second door was closed.

It was warmer in the apartment than in the hall but just barely. Draco took off his coat and tossed it on the couch. A jerk of his head told Harry that Draco wanted him to have a seat, so Harry moved to the couch and sat down. As Draco disappeared into the bedroom, shutting the door behind him, Harry pulled Draco’s coat into his lap and draped it over the arm of the sofa.

Meanwhile, Draco had just braced his weight on Liam’s bed and covered the man’s mouth with his hand. The room was dark, curtains pulled tight over the single, tiny window, so Draco had used his wand to create a low-powered Lumos. The small room contained only one dresser and the bed, and there was still little room to move around. As soon as Draco’s skin came in contact with Liam’s face, Liam’s eyes flashed open and he had a gun pointed at Draco’s head. Draco gave a smirk as Liam quickly dropped the gun and shoved him irritably away, but his annoyance didn’t last long. He grinned as Draco put a hand to his lips and jerked his head toward the door.

In the living room, while he waited, Harry took off his hat and put it in his coat pocket. Then he took off the coat, folded it, and laid it on top of Draco’s. He left his scarf wrapped loosely around his neck. He was more sensitive to the cold than Draco was. Harry was pulled from his thoughts as the bedroom door opened, but it wasn’t Draco standing in the doorway. Harry got to his feet, heart suddenly thundering in his chest. A dark-haired man in his early twenties stood in thick black socks, flannel pants, and a worn and faded grey sweater. Sleep-mussed wavy black hair, bright blue eyes, and a smile that was achingly familiar…

“Liam…” Harry said breathlessly. “Liam!”

Then they were running toward each other, Liam laughing and Harry still shocked out of his mind. They crashed together and Liam lifted Harry off his feet, spinning him around once. “Harry! Damn, it’s good to see you!”

Harry was placed back on his feet and he turned to see Draco standing smugly at his side, grey eyes dancing. Harry flung his arms around Draco’s neck and kissed him soundly on the lips - **LOVE GRATITUDE JOY!** “Thank you, Draco,” he said thickly, tears burning his eyes as their kiss ended.

“Happy New Year, Harry,” Draco said gently, cupping Harry’s flushed face.

Liam knelt and pulled them both into another hug. “It’s been too damn long. Come on. Let’s celebrate!”

It was just like before. They laughed and talked, watched a movie on tv, ordered Chinese food for an early lunch, played Sorry! and Clue, and then ordered pizza for dinner. It had been three years since they’d seen Liam and yet it felt like they had never been separated at all. There was none of the
awkwardness Draco would have expected. It was like coming home.

The sun was sinking and Harry was cleaning up after their dinner, putting the leftover pizza away, when there was a knock on the door. Liam smoothly rose from the floor where he’d been leaning back against the couch and padded quietly over to the door. His hand was under his sweater at the small of his back as he bent to look out the peephole.

“How’s Draco?” he called, voice low so that it couldn’t be heard by those on the other side of the door. He’d moved into the doorway of the bedroom, just in case they needed to duck out of sight.

Harry immediately stopped what he was doing and moved quickly to Draco’s side. Draco nudged him into the darkness of the bedroom so that he was already safely out of sight.

Without looking back at the boys, Liam began to unlock the bolts on the door and unlatch the safety chain. Two women walked inside. Like all those years ago, Drey entered first, wearing black leather pants, a white t-shirt, and a leather jacket. She looked just the same as the last time Draco had seen her: thin, black hair that was half-tangled and fell loose down her back, sharp hazel green-grey eyes, and a small mouth. She wore no makeup. Jess followed her in. She was Japanese and wore her thick black hair pulled up into a bun. She had on tailored black pants and a pink sweater that looked expensive. She also had on a white scarf and black gloves. Her almond-shaped eyes had been lined with black and had a hint smoky eyeshadow and her lips were a soft pink to match her sweater. Both of them gave Draco warm smiles as soon as their eyes found him. Liam leaned back against the door as he watched the reunion.

“How’s Draco… How are you?” Jess asked politely, her soft voice wavering slightly with emotion.

Draco’s blank mask cracked as he smiled. “We’re fine.” He stepped into the living room to meet them, Harry coming out of the shadows, following Draco into the room.

Jess smiled widely and ran her hand affectionately over Draco’s hair before dropping to her knees to sweep Harry into a hug. Drey stood at her side. The silver chain around her neck with the small padlock still rested over her sternum. A rare smile softened the hard angles of her face as Draco lifted a fist to lightly punch her arm.

“How’re you liking London?” he asked.

Drey gave a snort. “People are people.” She shrugged and then offered, “The food sucks.”

Draco laughed. “You get used to it.”

“I can cook something American for you,” Harry offered as Jess released him and got back to her feet.

“That would be lovely.” Jess gave Harry an approving smile. “Tomorrow. You can come see where Drey and I stay and make us dinner.”

“Sure,” Draco agreed, although he was curious why they didn’t all share a place. He cast Liam a curious look.

Liam gave him a shrug.

Draco turned his attention to the women. Harry had them sitting on the couch and was offering to make them warm drinks. Draco smiled and turned one of the table chairs around, straddling it and sitting backward. The back was low enough that he could comfortably rest his arms across the back of it.
“So you guys work in clubs?” he asked curiously.

“Now that we’ve found you we can cut back and work the places we actually like,” Jess answered, eyes bright and intelligent.

Draco frowned thoughtfully. “You’re here illegally, so you can’t own your own place, right?”

“Actually, only Drey and Liam are illegals. I used my real passport to travel, but, regardless, there’s a gang boss in the city, an unofficial dom. He’s not in our community, but there’s no real difference. He is what he is.” Jess gave a graceful shrug. “Drey and I don’t mind working for him. He understands our situation and we claimed one of his people as our own. Last Christmas we made our Triad official. When you come over tomorrow, you’ll meet him. He’s a bit of a handful, but we love him. He’s still in Ryder’s gang, actually. A lieutenant. Ryder’s owns the club we prefer to work. It’s not BDSM, just a normal nightclub. He owns quite a few other things in the city, as well. He’ll be pleased we’re finally going to take him up on the offer of a more permanent position.”

Harry had returned and handed them their chosen drink choices of tea or cocoa. He knelt comfortably on the floor next to Draco’s chair, leaning lightly against Draco’s leg as he sipped his own drink.

“I see.” Draco shot Liam a look. “What about you?”

Liam was leaning comfortably against the wall next to the couch as they talked, but his eyes were shadowed. Draco could see that he was deliberating about what to say, and he also saw the exact moment Liam chose to be honest. “I’ve lost the taste for mob life. I try to stay out of it as much as possible, but I help Jess when she asks. I’ve been focused mostly on finding you and working in as many BDSM clubs and stores as possible.”

“He’s been fronting as a dom.” Drey gave a soft snort, eyes predatory as they always were. “Cover wouldn’t have lasted much longer.” She was the second most dominate person in the room, Jess coming in a close third.

Liam’s cheeks pinked with embarrassment. Truth was he was on the submissive end, even if he wouldn’t admit it. He gave a mutinous shrug. “Whatever. I’m perfectly happy not having to jump through all those hoops just to get laid or have a girlfriend. It’s so fucking complicated.”

Jess’s glossy lips slid into an amused smile before growing more serious. “Drey’s right. You can’t stay in the BDSM community, not without genuinely adopting the lifestyle. Legitimate places won’t hire you under the table. Not with the risk of getting in trouble with the law. I’ve told you. Ryder doesn’t deal in child slavery, Liam. You really should throw in with us.”

“You can’t know that for certain,” Liam countered, glaring and crossing his arms.

Draco felt warm inside as he realized why Liam had turned against the criminal underground. He was taking a stand for Draco and Harry, for what they’d gone through. “Liam.”

Liam looked Draco’s way and his blush darkened. “I just don’t support that kind of stuff. I won’t be part of kids gettin’ hurt.”

“Jess would know by now if he were lying,” Drey said darkly, warning clear in her tone. She was not happy with Liam’s lack of trust. “She’s already helping to manage the cash flow. You can’t hide something that big. Money tells all.”

“Liam doesn’t have to do anything he doesn’t want,” Draco stated firmly, ending the argument. “Harry and I have access to a lot of money. We’ll work something out. Especially if we’re going to
crash with him for a while.”

Liam, mouth open to protest getting financial help from the boys, lit up with excitement and said instead, “You’re staying?”

Draco grinned. “For as long as we can. A week minimum. Maybe longer.”

Harry’s arms snaked around Draco’s leg and gave it a quick hug - *joy excitement gratitude*.

Jess drew Draco’s gaze. “While you’re here, I’d like to check in with you regarding your relationship with Harry.”

Draco instantly tensed, his hand dropping to rest on Harry’s head, his fingers tangling in the boy’s messy hair. “What about it?”

“I just want to make sure everything’s healthy on both ends,” Jess said evenly, her dark eyes meeting his directly. “You’re about to hit puberty and that will make the relationship shift. I just want to make sure you’re prepared and that you know how to prepare Harry. There’s no need for you guys to figure everything out by yourselves using trial and error when I have information that could help you.”

Draco didn’t commit to this one way or another. He turned his attention to Liam instead. “I want you to teach us how to fight. Guns. Knives. Fists. The works.” His gaze swept the girls, including them as he filled them in. “The magical world is on the edge of a war. We got in a fight with a badass wizard who’s targeting us already. Almost killed us. I managed to slit his throat before he killed me, but it was a close thing.”

Jess’s eyes widened in shock while Drey’s narrowed, clear bloodlust rising in them. Drey was the most violent of the three. She thrilled in spilling blood in a way that even Draco didn’t. In fact, her favored weapon of choice was a vicious short whip.

“Of course we’ll help,” Jess promised while Drey gave a nod.

“You should just stay the fuck out of the magical world and stay with us,” Liam tried to say it calmly, but anger bled through his voice. How dare those fuckers steal his brothers away just to put them in the middle of a war! They were eleven for fuck’s sake!

“It’s complicated. I already told you that,” Draco reminded.

Jess looked curious, but Draco shook his head. He told her, “No. The fewer who know the better.”

She wanted to protest, but the hard look Draco shot her told her it was pointless. She relented. “Very well.” She got to her feet, Drey rising as well. “I’m glad that we found you, and we’d be pleased to help you learn to fight. Can we expect you tomorrow for dinner?”

“We’ll be there. What time?” Liam asked after getting a nod from Draco.

Jess looked to Harry. “We typically eat at five before heading into work. How long will you need to prepare the meal?”

Harry thought about it, already excited about the prospect of cooking for everyone. “I can do a lot of the prep work here and bring it over. Maybe an hour?”

“Very well.” Jess gave him a warm smile. “We’ll see you at four.”
“Four,” Draco echoed in agreement.

Drey flashed Draco a final grin, already anticipating his lessons, and followed Jess to the door. Liam walked them out and locked up behind them. He came back with a tired sigh and sank down onto the couch. Harry got up and sat down next to him, giggling.

“Girls,” Liam told the little boy conspiratorially and draped an arm over Harry’s shoulders. “Am I right or am I right?”

Draco came to sit on Harry’s other side. He put his back to the arm of the couch and tucked his feet under Harry’s thigh. “What’s their boy like?”

Liam chuckled. “Not a boy, that’s for sure. He’s got to be thirty at least. He’s tough, dangerous, and secretive. I’m actually pretty surprised they work together. He doesn’t seem all that submissive to me.” Liam shrugged. “But they clearly love each other, the three of them. It was intense at first. They were like cats measuring each other up. I thought for sure he and Drey would get into it and kill each other, but I guess they got it on instead.”

Draco thought this was interesting. If he had to picture Jess and Drey married to someone, it would have been to someone submissive like Harry. But thinking about it, they were really attached to each other and they were both very dominant, so maybe they didn’t need a lot of submission in a partner. Then again the triad would be really unbalanced if all three partners were doms. That meant this guy had to be submissive, at least in the relationship if not with outsiders, if it were going to work long term.

“What’s his name? No one’s said,” Harry pointed out.

“Kyle,” Liam answered. “He’s pretty dangerous like I said. People don’t use his name lightly. Anything happens to Ryder, Kyle would take over. They’re pretty unstoppable, Kyle and the girls. Honestly, I’m surprised Ryder doesn’t turn against them and try an’ take’em out since they could threaten his power.”

Draco was even more surprised. “Is he safe to be around?”

“Oh yeah,” Liam gave a grin. “Well, for us anyway.” Running his hands over his shoulder-length hair, he then leaned forward and braced his elbows on his knees. His expression grew more serious. “It’s like this. Kyle had a girl, before we came here. She was killed, with their son, in some dispute. Drive by, I think. The boy was just a few years old from what I understand. Kyle went off the rails. Went up the ranks. Made a name for himself. Then we showed up. Like I said, it was intense at first. From the minute they all met, I wasn’t sure which way it’d go, but it’s clear he’d do anything for them now. They’re a package deal nowadays.” Liam grinned again. “You should see’em. Even when they’re in a club all spread out, it’s like they know where each other are at all times. Like they’re synchronized. Makes you want to believe in fate.” He ruffled Harry’s hair playfully, making the little boy smile happily. “Shit. Findin’ you guys again is like fate, too. You all’re conspiring to make a believer outta me.”

Harry leaned more into Liam’s side while Draco smiled warmly at them both.

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It was childish, but as Remus sat in the small boat that was the only way to reach the island of Azkaban, he clutched his dragon pendant in a tight fist. The cold seemed to deepen the closer they got to the black, towering structure. It looked like it rose straight from the sea. As tall as a Muggle skyscraper, pitch black with sides as smooth and featureless as glass except without the shine. It had
only three sides. From above it looked like a perfect triangle with a dark gaping center. Dementors
could be seen even this far away flying in and out of the walls, up and down the building, a swarm
of evil bees guarding their nest. But it wasn't honey dripping from the walls. Centuries of
concentrated human suffering and despair saturated the air and could be felt a mile away.

Azkaban had no human guards. No one could stand being on the island for more than an hour. The
Dementors were the jailers. They supplied the prisoners with food and saw to their care. (Whoever
could say that with a straight face was sick inside.) Everyone knew, of course, how terrifying this
place was, how horrible. With a bitter wave of anger, Remus had only one thought: Everyone knew
jack shit. This place was beyond evil, beyond nightmares, beyond words. It struck at the very core of
your mind, your soul. And human beings were sent here by the will of the people. Remus shuddered
with revulsion. He had never hated his country more than he did in that moment.

“I ask myself that every time I have to see this place.”

Remus looked through bleary eyes and rasped, “What?”

The Auror who had been assigned to escort Remus and make sure the Dementors didn’t try to keep
him (just that idea was enough to haunt Remus for the rest of his life) was staring up at the black
monolith that was swallowing all life and light. “How can a place such as this exist,” the man said
quietly.

The boat came around the nightmare prison and an old dock came into view. The Auror tied the boat
off and they made their way down the wooden planks and onto the island itself. Cold seemed to rise
up out of the very ground and suck all the heat from their bodies. A small cemetery was set to the
side. There were a few headstones, but less than the number of prisoners Remus knew had to have
died here. Feeling horribly sick, his brain tried to guess where all the other bodies had gone.

“Might be best to let it out,” the Auror said matter-of-factly.

Remus shot him a confused look.

“Most people puke. Best get it out while we’re out here.”

Remus shook his head.

There were no windows or lights inside the prison, and the lumoses that their wands produced were
weak and unstable. Still, it was enough to see a few feet into the cold cells. Remus could make out
the floors covered in dirty straw. A faint stench of piss and shit filled the corridors. Remus knew it
would have been overpowering had it not been close to freezing. The cold suppressed the worst of
the smell.

Most of the cells were empty. A few held desiccated mummies. With a sick, numb horror, Remus
figured the Dementors hadn’t gotten around to moving those bodies to the cemetery yet. Then they
came upon a cell with a living person inside. A woman sat in the far corner barely alive. Her age
indeterminate, she was beyond filthy and stared passed them with a look of deep depression. She
didn’t acknowledge their presence. She was utterly broken, the shadow of death already upon her. A
Dementor floated through the outside wall just as they were passing. He saw it feed, sucking at the
little bit that remained of her. She didn’t even flinch, her body limp and heavy.

The horror was too much and Remus’s consciousness fuzzed until they were standing in front of a
cell and he had no idea how far they’d gone or how much time had passed since entering. There was
the faint sound of sobbing coming from those caged along the corridor. It was the light, Remus
intuited. The light pained them as weak as it was. It reminded them of all they had lost, reminded
them how much they were suffering.

Shaking and on the verge of sobs, Remus stared into the cell they had stopped in front of. It appeared empty at first until the hay shifted and a terribly thin dog with filthy, matted fur lifted its head. Remus staggered forward and clutched at the bars. “Sirius…” he practically moaned.

The dog slowly shifted, morphed, a naked human appeared in its place, and Sirius Black with hair falling in tangled, filthy locks stared out at him from a gaunt, pale face. A voice that wasn’t recognizable, scraped raw as it was, said painfully, “Re-mus?”

“Siri…” It was all he could seem to say. A prayer, a plea.

Sirius reached out toward him. He was too far away. Remus slid his arm through the bars of the cell and reached as far as he could. Their fingers just barely touched. As soon as their skin made contact, Sirius shuddered and gave a broken cry. “Re-mus! My… friend…” He crawled forward like a broken thing and pressed up against the bars into Remus’s embrace. He huddled there as they both cried, clutching at the back of Remus’s jacket with hands that had filthy nails several inches long.

“I’m so sorry,” Remus said again and again into his brother’s filthy hair.

“Pettigrew killed them. The rat… Gotta find the rat…” Sirius muttered, almost a chant. “I’m going to find the rat, Remus…I’m going to kill him…”

The intensity of that promise held madness in its depths. Remus opened his mouth to tell him that Pettigrew was already dead, but the Auror tugged him away from Sirius and the cage, shaking his head. “It keeps him focused. Without it, he’d be completely lost in here,” the man whispered in Remus’s ear.

“I’m going to get you out,” Remus vowed, tears streaking his face. He held tightly to Sirius’s hand still wrapped around the bar of the cell. “I’ll get you out, Sirius.”

Sirius suddenly burst into insane laughter. He staggered back from the bars of his cage, howling. It set off the others on the floor and they began to laugh and scream. The Auror grabbed Remus hard by the arm and began to pull him away. Remus broke down into tears as Sirius’s hysterical laughter turned into gut-wrenching sobs.

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Hours later, Remus found himself tucked into an armchair by a blazing fire, a mug of hot chocolate in his hands. A blanket was tucked around his shoulders and the light from the flames glinted off the white gold of the dragon pendant that rest against his chest. He was in the Headmaster’s office. Dumbledore sat next to him, looking just as old and defeated as the last time he had come.

“I don’t understand why that place still stands,” Remus said softly, still cold from the inside out. “You’re Chief Warlock and Supreme Mugwump. Surely…”

“Azkaban is too accepted by society,” Dumbledore answered gravely. “The only prison in the world to remain unassailable. Not a single escape or breakout.”

Remus lifted a hand from the warm mug to clutch the blanket tighter around him. His voice was dark when he replied, “It should be mandatory that everyone visit once. To know what they are supporting.”

“The sad truth is, people who have been hurt often want those who have caused that pain to suffer greater still. Telling the world how awful that place is has only made it more popular to those crying
out for justice.”

Remus felt such terrible pain and rage. Humans were so despicable. “We cannot wait until summer to win Sirius free. We cannot.”

“I am working as fast as I can,” Dumbledore promised. “I have gained enough support to call for a trial to bring Sirius before the Wizengamot. On the fourth of January, in three days hence, he will be moved to the holding cells in the Ministry. Sirius will receive basic care and a mental health assessment. On the sixth, he will stand trial. I will hold Peter’s body in reserve and only reveal it if absolutely necessary.” Dumbledore gave Remus a very pointed look. “We do not want Peter’s murder to be looked into too closely.”

Remus felt sick at the word murder. In the eyes of the world, Draco would be named a criminal. If they ever found out that Peter wasn’t even Draco’s first kill... The chill of Azkaban rose over Remus again and he shivered hard. He would do whatever it took to keep Draco away from that horrific place.

“I will speak to Lucius,” Dumbledore continued, stroking his beard and staring thoughtfully into the fire. “If Sirius had the support of the Noble Houses, his chances would be better.”

Remus gave a single nod. He understood the unspoken request. It was his job to speak to Draco about it.

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- January 2nd -

Liam woke to the sound of a polite knock on the door. He was on his feet, gun in hand, almost before the sound of the last knock faded away. Silently padding over to the door, Liam checked the peephole. It was the man with the scarred face. Liam didn’t remember his name. He was so goddamn tempted to ignore the bastard, but he knew the man would just knock again and louder, likely waking the boys - if they weren’t already awake.

Undoing the chain and unlocking the two deadbolts, Liam opened the door. He leaned his shoulder against the doorframe, blocking most of the man’s view and making it clear he wasn’t invited in. “Yes?” he asked as neutrally as he could.

“I’m here to see Draco,” the man said softly in a voice as polite as his knock.

“Mmm.” Liam acknowledged the words, but he didn’t move. His dark blue eyes were remote and unimpressed. “Whatcha need?” The man didn’t answer. He stared at Liam quietly and, for an unsettling second, Liam had the sense that he was poking a sleeping bear. “The boys aren’t up yet. We didn’t get ta bed ‘til kinda late,” he finally said into the silence.

The man inclined his head in acknowledgement. “May I wait inside?” he asked quietly, but there was an edge there that Liam simultaneously wanted to test, but also had the sense he shouldn’t.

Liam purposefully waited another long second before finally moving out of the doorway. The man slipped past him and quietly took a seat at the table. Liam secured the door and did his best to ignore him. He started some coffee and prepared some breakfast ingredients, but he didn’t start cooking. It wouldn’t take long to whip up some food and he wanted it fresh and warm when the boys got up.

Liam took a seat on the couch and turned the tv on. For the next hour and a half, they pretended to watch the news, but were really sizing each other up. Draco stepped out of the bedroom a step before Harry. The boys were holding hands. Harry’s hair was adorably mused from sleep, but they were
both alert. Good.

“Remus,” Draco greeted.

Remus. That was the man’s name. Liam wouldn’t forget it this time.

“I have information,” Remus said in his apparently normal tone of voice, which meant soft and polite.

Draco nodded. “Harry. Help Liam with breakfast.” He pulled Harry forward past him toward the kitchen.

At Harry’s predictable reply of, “Yes, Draco,” Liam got up and followed him to the kitchen. He would still hear what Draco and this Remus talked about, however. Unless they resorted to whispering or disappeared into the bedroom. He really hoped that didn’t happen. He didn’t want to be shut out. Liam didn’t expect it when Draco climbed up to sit on the table, sitting directly next to and facing Remus, who had kept his seat at the table. They were intimately close and Liam felt the angry sting of jealousy. He glared down at the eggs he was whipping in the bowl in preparation of scrambling them.

“It was bad,” Remus’s soft voice just barely reached him. “Putting Sirius aside, I’ve never been to a place as horrific as that. It’s inhumane in the extreme. Everyone knows it is a terrible place, but no one realizes just how horrific the reality is. Draco, it shouldn’t exist. There are no human guards. It’s run by inhuman dark creatures that feed off of human pain and suffering. They’re called Dementors. Because they render people insane. I don’t care how bad the crime. That place is evil.”

“Sirius?” Liam heard Draco ask carefully.

Remus’s polite facade crumbled. His voice was low and clearly pained. Liam couldn’t make out what he said so he bent to look under the high cupboard through the space over the counter to see. Draco had placed his hand atop Remus’s graying sandy hair. The man’s head was bowed, his shoulders curled in. Shit. Whatever this was, whoever this Sirius was, it was bad news.

“Liam,” Draco called without turning his head.

Liam jerked, a blush staining his face, caught eavesdropping.

Draco looked over at him. “Can I have paper and a pen?”

Liam dried his hands and opened the junk drawer, pulling out a yellow pad and a pen. He left Harry to finish the cooking as took the two items to the blond. He stood, arms crossed, as he watched Draco write a note. He couldn’t read it, but he could see that Draco’s handwriting was beautiful and loopy. For some reason it really hit him that Draco and Harry had been taken in by a wealthy family. It made him feel so disconnected and he shifted his weight uncomfortably.

Draco tore the page from the top of the pad and handed it to Remus. “Take that to Lucius,” he said. “He’ll help you.”

Remus took the paper, giving a little nod. He stood.

Liam backed up to give him room, glad he was finally leaving. He didn’t say a word to the other man as he saw him out, and he made sure to lock the door behind him. Breakfast was ready at that point and he helped Harry carry it to the table. Draco had taken the chair Remus had vacated.

“Everything alright?” Liam asked as he took a seat on the stool he had brought over from the kitchen
counter. He gave Harry the other chair. The boy settled into it unwillingly, having lost the argument to sit on the stool.

Draco shrugged. “About as well as I expected. It’s no surprise the magical world is as filthy as the muggle one.” His grey eyes caught Liam’s and were dark with bitter knowledge. “It’d take more than magic to fix the human soul.”

Liam had nothing to say to that. The kid was right. Despite most of the population living in willful ignorance, what some people did to others was beyond horrific. There was a surprising number of pitiful human beings being kept in disgusting conditions. And not many people would go out of their way to stop it.

“Do you still want to go to the girls’ place later?” Liam asked, trying to change the subject.

Harry looked over at Draco in interest, his black bangs falling across his forehead.

Draco gave him a warm smile. “Yeah. We got nothin’ better to do.”

Harry grinned. “Can we go shopping? For dinner ingredients?”

Liam chuckled. “Sure.”

Harry began to eat much quicker in his excitement and Draco and Liam shared a grin.

Chapter end.
A/N: Happy Birthday, Babyvfan! Sorry this is late! I added the Drarry scene just for you. The original draft didn’t have it in there. :P

Becoming Family

On the way to Jess and Drey’s place, Liam pointed out the club that the girls preferred to work. The club’s name was Diesel. Apparently Ryder was big into cars and racing. If you wanted in on a street race in London, you had to go through his people. It didn’t look special from the outside: dirty brick front, one of the many old, crowded buildings on the street with only a simple neon sign to indicate what it was. This Ryder-person didn’t need to flaunt his power. That told Draco that he was actually legit and not some stupid asshole who only thought he was something.

The apartment was only one block and a grassy park down from the club. It was in easy walking distance, which was good because parking was worse than New York. Not that it mattered. Liam didn’t own a car, so they’d taken public transport. The weather was cold, but the sun was shining, turning the snow into sleet, so they decided to walk instead of calling a cab.

“This is it,” Liam said as they came up to the front stoop of Jess and Drey’s apartment building. It was a much nicer building than the one Liam was staying in.

Draco squeezed Harry’s hand. His other hand held a plastic bag of groceries. Harry carried one as well while Liam had three bags. The boys followed Liam up the front steps. A golden speaker stood by the door and Liam had to punch in the girls’ number. Drey was home and she buzzed them in.

The foyer was nice, reminding Draco of a café. It had love seats and couches strategically placed around coffee tables. A few people were reading on the couches or working on the four, bulky desktop computers that were placed on a long table against the far wall. The floor was carpeted, but it looked new. Colorful yet tasteful rugs had been placed in the high-traffic areas to preserve the carpet’s condition. The elevators, there were two, had gold-colored doors and were positioned next to a hallway that led to first floor apartments. Liam pressed the button for the fifth floor.

It was higher than Draco preferred. When they stepped off, Draco counted three other doors; the girls’ apartment was one of four units on the floor. Drey stood in the doorway of one of the middle apartments, arms crossed casually as she leaned against the doorframe. She gave them a sharp smile and disappeared inside. They followed her in, Liam shutting the door behind them.

The living room walls were painted a soft, sage-grey but a huge red flower had been painted in simple lines to cover one half of the wall. A grey fuzzy rug sat covering the majority of the floor. White, pale green, and earthen-brown dishes could be seen on the open shelves, as well as clear jars and vials of seasonings and a few potted green plants and orchids set on the windowsill of a small square window. There was an island counter set off from the cabinets at an angle with two bar stools on the living room side. As for the floor, pearl-colored tiles transitioned to dark hardwood as the room flowed into the living room.

The living room walls were painted a soft, sage-grey but a huge red flower had been painted in simple lines to cover one half of the wall. A grey fuzzy rug sat covering the majority of the floor. There was a low coffee table. Pale green and white floor pillows had been set around it. More of them had been placed against the living room wall. The couch was also a pale green and was
positioned at an angle to half-face the kitchen.

There were pale wood shelves staggered along one wall. The lowest level sat only a few inches off the floor; the tallest was only a foot below the ceiling. On them, there were small potted plants, but there were also a few pictures in wooden frames. Hanging on the final wall sat what looked like a contract written in calligraphy on parchment. It’s frame was large and ornate, made from wood as dark as the floor. Draco could make out Jess and Drey’s signatures at the bottom and had to assume the third signature was the man they had committed to.

“Take your shoes off,” Drey instructed. She herself was barefoot in soft leather pants and a dark burgundy sweater. Her long black hair fell loose around her shoulders and face.

Liam was already used to this request and had his shoes lined up neatly by the front door on the red rubber mat placed there for that reason. He gathered the bags of groceries and took them to the kitchen to set them on the counter as the boys copied his example. “Harry’s making a steak dinner with an apple pie for desert. Sound good?”

“Sounds good,” she answered easily. She crossed the room with easy grace and took a seat on the couch. Her body was loose and relaxed, hazel moss-grey eyes half-lidded, reminding Draco of a panther at rest.

“Do you like your string beans sautéed with butter and almonds or do you prefer garlic and hot peppers?” Harry asked as he joined Liam in the kitchen, organizing his ingredients. “And mashed or baked potato?”

“Spicy. Mashed,” Drey answered easily, not moving from her half-reclined position.

“If you’re tired, you can rest. We’ll let you know when it’s done,” Draco said with an amused smirk, coming to sit next to her.

“I’m fine.” She stared at him in interest before leaning forward. Her long hair fell over her shoulder as she reached for something on the low shelf under the coffee table. It was a deck of cards. Lips pulling into a mischievous smile, she asked, “Care for a game of poker? I believe the score is 56 to 55.”

Draco laughed, eyes twinkling. “Sure.” He got up and got one of the floor cushions that were set against the wall and placed it by the table. He sat on it cross-legged and tucked his hair behind his ears. “What’re we putting on the table?”

Drey sat gracefully across from him, not bothering with a cushion, and leaned back against the couch. “Fifteen minute foot massage each foot.”

Draco smirked. Grey eyes met pale hazel. “Deal the cards.”

Drey's expression became predatory as she shuffled with expert dexterity and slid seven cards across the table toward him.

Liam looked over at Harry who was marinating the steaks. “Has he kept up his skills?”

Harry nodded. “We taught our friend Tonks how to play, so we play with her a lot.”

Liam leaned closer, putting his mouth near the boy’s ear. “Does he still cheat?”

Harry giggled, pushing his glasses higher up his nose, and whispered back, “Only when he has to.”
Liam laughed.

Drey ended up winning the first hand, making the score 57-55. Draco accepted his defeat with an annoyed wrinkle of his nose, but he gave her the won foot massage without complaint. However, he made a comeback in the following two hands, tying the score 57-57. He won one of Drey’s knives (thin as a butter knife but twice as long; it was deadly sharp on both sides and came with a thin black sheath) and a secret that Liam didn’t know. Liam protested that he wasn’t playing from the kitchen on that one, but Drey leaned over and whispered in Draco’s ear for almost two minutes. The small lock that she always wore on a chain hung in the air between them. Draco’s expression didn’t even flicker, but Harry could tell that whatever she had said had amused him.

Before they could start a fourth hand, Jess and Kyle arrived. He was tall, very tall, definitely over six-feet, and lean. Dirty blond hair that was neither blond nor brown was cut short along the sides and back, but his bangs were thick and long, parted down the middle and framing his face to his chin. Large, dark brown eyes under thick brown eyebrows. Sharp angular features, sharp cheekbones, long face, sharp pointed chin. No facial hair. He wore a baggy, canvas, grungy white jacket with huge white pockets and what looked like dozens of safety pins scattered here and there across it’s surface. He wore a black turtleneck underneath and jeans that were neither tight nor baggy. Black combat boots were on his feet.

He came through the door first, Jess a half-step behind him and a little to the side. Sweeping the room with his eyes, his attention settled on Liam and Harry first, closest to him in the kitchen. Liam turned to face him, but not directly. He kept his body semi-facing the counter where he was cutting something. His shoulders dropped subconsciously, elongating his neck. Liam gave him a cheerful greeting, but made no attempt to approach him or go back to what he was doing until Kyle acknowledged him with a casual yet controlled, “Hey, Liam. Nice to see you.” A nearly invisible tension ran out from Liam then and he relaxed completely, turning back to his task. Harry meanwhile stood still. He’d turned around to look at those who had entered, but now he stood tense, staring at Draco, seeking instruction.

Jess stepped forward, gesturing to the living room area. “Let me introduce you to Draco,” she offered with a smile. She seemed calm, but if you knew her well, you could see the eager light in her eyes.

Kyle came forward, passing the kitchen and Harry, yet Harry didn’t return to his task. He kept his unblinking eyes on Draco, waiting for some cue. Liam was beginning to suspect something was wrong. He was frowning at Harry and was beginning to turn toward the group in the living room.

Draco watched Kyle approach. He walked with perfect, understated confidence. A type of strut that was completely natural. He stared Draco down and his eyebrows went up when Draco neither stood nor blinked nor dropped his shoulders that little bit. Instead, Draco stared back, evaluating, understanding, but he was also breaking out in a sweat.

Draco didn’t even realize he’d crushed the cards in his hands. Or that his breathing had quickened. Or the fact that Drey was glaring (her way of expressing worry). Or that Jess had stopped halfway to them, eyes wide in worry. She reached out and touched Kyle’s arm - not grabbing but asking - and Kyle took one more step before coming to a stop. No, Draco’s eyes had glazed over caught in a flashback he couldn’t control or postpone because of Snape’s potion. This was the sacrifice he’d made to guarantee no one would be able to touch his mind again…

Draco’s heart beat hard and fast, pumping adrenaline through his veins and stealing his breath. He was in a different apartment. Smaller and naked. A coffee table at his back. Mere inches from him a pudgy, short Italian sat on the couch. Harry - vulnerable and small - covered at the end of the table. Behind them, men - violent, hungry men - shifted and leered. Only six days from slavery, Draco had
still mostly been numb and hard. Now, reliving that moment, he felt all the alarm and horror he hadn’t then.

Brendon, the man who had saved them from freezing to death on the street, sat next to the mafia man. Liam’s older brother, he had dark brown hair to Liam’s black, but the dark blue eyes were the same rare color. They were sharp and predatory, fixed on the threat, not even looking at Draco. Brendon wasn’t afraid or even concerned. He was calculating and confident that he would come out on top. Even with a gun pointed at his head. Draco - heart racing, drenched in sweat, death and agony racing toward him - kept still and empty as his chin was held by hard fingers and his face was tilted this way and that.

“Bel ragazzo,” the killer exclaimed. The gun never wavered once, still held an inch from Brendon’s temple. “I can see why Raymond would hold onto you, bambino, and why this feccia Gambino would steal you.”

“I did not steal him, Luongo,” Brendon denied calmly. “The boy escaped. A few days later he called me begging for shelter.” He gave a dangerous smile of his own. “Finder’s keepers.”

The gun whipped down and slammed into Brendon's head, sending the man sideways with blood dripping from his hairline. Besides his arm, Luongo had hardly moved. He was still smiling, but now his eyes were on Brendon as the other man sat up.

“I’ve always hated you, Irish cagna. Thinking you’re bigger than you are,” he said cheerfully before turning back to Draco. “It is good news to hear, that you understand begging. Let’s hear it, schiavo. Let’s hear some begging.”

He released Draco’s face finally by giving it a shove. Draco shifted his shoulders and slid to his knees in front of the men. It trapped him between them and the coffee table. He put his wrist together and held his hands over his head as he curled over his thighs. His palms faced up, supplicating.

“Please,” he said softly, voice empty. “Please.”

“Bellissimo,” Luongo cried happily. Draco couldn’t see him with his face down by his knees, but he could feel it in his core as the man’s evil eyes slid to Harry. “And this one. Does he beg?”

Draco’s stomach dropped and churned with terror. Harry! Have to protect Harry! But HOW?! How would he be able to save him from these monsters? He was almost eight, weak and small from the nearly two years he’d been kept in the cargo hold of a yacht as a slave.

“He’s stupid, master,” Draco offered, voice still soft to hide the hateful hiss that wanted to slip out. “Can’t talk. Doesn’t understand most things.”

Luongo’s leg lifted and Draco braced for what he knew was coming. The man stomped down on his neck and shoulders. Draco was slammed flat, his jaw immediately throbbing from where it hit the floor. He could feel blood from where he bit his lip. He returned to the curled over position, hands together and open, without a sound as his neck and shoulders began to burn from the blow.

“Did I speak to you, schiavo? You’ve forgotten your place,” Luongo growled. Then toward Harry, “You! Strip! Schiavo don’t wear clothes!”

Harry hadn’t moved an inch from his cowering, silent position at the end of the table — fear anxiety trust – He had no idea what was coming, what faced them at the hands of these disgusting pigs. And Draco had no way to shield him. Helpless, desperate to survive, Draco knelt down at the bastard’s feet. He didn’t feel it then, this sickening surge of nausea on the edge of vomiting because back then
survival was all that mattered.

Luongo laughed. “All this for defective product, O'Shae. Although the bel ragazzo is well trained.”

A leather Italian shoe toed Draco's head.

“This is a matter for the Commission,” Brendon said coldly, eyes unblinking and predatory. “The Families cannot afford a street war between Gambino and Lucchese with the Feds sniffing around.”

BANG!

– TERROR –

Draco watched in horror, Harry’s terror ripping him apart, as blood splatter covered the wall - oh god! - the slump of Brendon’s now lifeless body, deformed face and head, organs and brains and everything you weren’t supposed to see in real life. Alive then dead. Bang! Fast with no take-backs. Repulsed, horrified, sick with fear for Harry, Draco was powerless, and it shook him to the core.

As he was dragged downstairs, they seemed to distort and waver. Reality warped into Hell: a room of agony and fear and degradation. Where Harry - his everything! his light! - was bent over and face-fucked on one end and raped on the other - where Draco was whipped bloody - and Brendon’s mutilated head and dead eyes watched over it all. Draco grit his teeth and growled as he endured agony of the whipping, and watched Harry raped in front of him, and stared at Brendon’s corpse. Tears soaking his face, his heart beating near out of his chest, Draco threw his head back and screamed...

Harry moved as soon as he heard Draco begin to breathe fast and shallow. He dropped to his knees next to the blond, talking to him, promising him that they were safe. Draco seemed to curl in on himself; he knelt in a slaves pose, chest curled over his thighs, arms held up, palms and wrists exposed. He was hyperventilating, blond hair plastered to his skull with sweat. Harry’s head snapped up as motion caught his eye. Voice never once wavering from the soft reassurances, he glared murder at the man who’d taken another step closer.

Kyle lifted both eyebrows, surprised at the little kid’s ferocity. He’d seemed so soft while standing in the kitchen.

Harry got to his feet and placed himself directly between Draco and Kyle. His expression and body language screamed aggression and challenge, but his voice remained soft. “I know this is your place, but please leave. I have to take care of Draco.”

Behind Harry, Draco gave a sudden scream. It was a sound full of pain, terror, and rage. They all cringed.

Liam was affected the most. Tears burning his eyes, he actually grabbed Kyle’s arm and pulled. “Just give us half-an-hour. We’ll finish dinner and we’ll eat.”

Kyle let himself be pulled, but his eyes were narrowed and locked on Harry.


Drey stormed past the boys and out the door, muttering something dark and dangerous under her breath. Jess followed her with Kyle at her side. Then they were all gone. It was just Harry and Liam watching Draco sob and shake.

Harry wanted to hold him and wrap him up safe, but he knew better. Any physical contact while Draco was this far gone would only enhance the flashback. Instead, he knelt beside him and held out
his hands a few inches above Draco’s quivering body. He closed his eyes and a rush of LOVE filled him. His entire focus was caught up on one single prerogative: help Draco! He pushed all the love toward his hands, out and down.

Liam watched, breath caught in his throat, heart pounding, as pale gold light - like sunbeams - fell from Harry’s outstretched hands and bathed Draco’s head and shoulders. Liam gave a soft gasp. It was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. Draco shuddered and then he turned his head to vomit all over the floor. The rancid smell made Liam gag, but he was more focused on the fact that Draco was quieting. The animal sounds of pain escaping Draco’s tortured throat had subsided at last.

Liam smiled and looked to Harry, but the boy looked pale, his face twisted with intense concentration. Sweat dewed on his upper lip and wet his temples. The sunbeams flickered as if a shadow passed over them and then faded. Harry toppled forward, onto Draco, and wrapped the blond in his arms.

“It’s okay, Draco. We’re safe. We’re okay,” he promised, voice warm and soft and full of unconditional love.

Draco blinked glazed eyes and turned, returning Harry’s warm hug. He sat up and the boys’ mouths came together without any effort, as naturally as two pieces sliding together. They sat there, in each other’s arms, leaning on each other equally, and kissed with a deep and quiet passion. Slowly, color returned to Harry’s face and Draco’s shaking eased. Their lips parted and the two boys rested their foreheads together, not yet ready to be separated.

Liam, feeling humbled, reached out to gently smooth Draco’s damp hair back behind his ear. “What triggered it?”

Voice quiet and subdued, Draco closed his eyes, keeping his head against Harry’s. “Maybe because it’s that time of year… Maybe because he reminded me of Brendon… I remembered the day he fucking died.”

Liam closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Brendon had been murdered four years ago on January 28th. When he’d first met Kyle, he’d also been painfully reminded of his older brother. He hadn’t thought what that would do to Draco or Harry, who had witnessed his brother’s murder and had been badly tortured afterward. Guilt burned like acid; he could have prevented this if he’d only talked to Draco! But it was too late now, and Draco needed him to be strong. So, straightening his spine, Liam flashed a reassuring smile.

“Come on. Let’s get you on the couch,” he said and helped Draco lay on the couch.

Harry quickly wet a washrag from the bathroom with cool water and placed it on Draco’s forehead and eyes. He then set about cleaning up the vomit. Dinner was mostly done, so Liam went about taking things off the heat and adding garnishes as quietly as possible. By the time those tasks were done, Draco was sitting up and Harry helped him to the bathroom. The door shut behind them.

…

The bathroom was larger than they expected and odd. It was done in cream and pale brown tile. All the fixtures were brass. Near the door was a beautiful counter with a sink centered in it with a large mirror that covered the top half of that entire wall. There were bottles and soaps and hand towels arranged on top. Inside the doorless cabinets underneath were stacked a dozen fluffy white towels.

The toilet, strangely enough, sat inside a closet with its own door. Against the far wall there was a four inch lip that started from one wall and ran to the opposite wall. Half of that space was blocked
by a pane of glass, enclosing the shower. A large shower head came off the wall and hung directly above, pointing down. Past the lip but on the side of the shower with no glass sat a strange tub. It was tall, as tall as Harry’s chest, and only half as long as a normal tub. Harry would have to bend his knees slightly to sit in it, but he’d barely be able to look over the lip if he did.

Not speaking, Draco turned the facet on hot in the sink and they rinsed their mouths with the mouthwash sitting on the counter. Their eyes caught each other’s in the mirror every few moments filled with a warm understanding that required no words. Fingers damp he turned and faced Draco, lovingly running his fingers through his blond hair. Draco closed his eyes on a sigh, resting his body weight against Harry.

Humming, filled with a - happy love - Harry dampened a cloth and ran it gently over Draco’s face in swipes until Draco’s arms came around his waist and he rested his head on Harry’s shoulder. Harry leaned against the counter to balance Draco’s weight and held him close, raining kisses on his hair and gently massaging the tense muscles of the blond’s neck. Tipping his head back, Harry let out a soft moan as Draco’s lips and tongue began to slowly, softly, work at his throat.

Hands snaked up the back of Harry’s sweater, and as Draco pressed his body fully into Harry’s, they slid up the boy’s warm back until he could grip Harry’s shoulders, pinning him in place. Trembling, tears beading on his lashes from so much emotion, Harry’s fingers brushed the hem of Draco’s pants, fingering that forbidden line until Draco licked a warm, wet path up his throat to hiss in his ear, “yessss”.

Bitting his lower lip almost hard enough to bleed, Harry worked his hands between their bodies and maneuvered Draco’s jeans open. Harry’s panting breath filled the steam-laden air as he worked them down Draco’s lean hips. At the feel of Draco’s silk-soft shaft pushing hard against his hips, Harry gave another gasp and scrambled to get his own pants open and down.

Finally, they were together, skin against skin, and it blew Harry’s pupils wide with - desire need love. Draco bit softly down on the rounded slope where Harry’s neck met shoulder and began to rock his hips, thrusting against Harry at an almost torturous pace. Harry trembled, gasping and moaning, in Draco’s arms. Fortunately the still running facet masked much of the noise.

“Love you, Draco, love you… love you…” Harry babbled breathlessly, cheeks flushed, eyes hazed. His fingers tangled in Draco’s hair searching for purchase as he was slowly overwhelmed with sensation.

Draco lifted his head and pressed his mouth hungrily to his boy’s, swallowing his words of love and praise. Their tongues writhed together, their lips glistened with spit, and Draco’s hips began to undulate harder, pushing Harry against the counter until he knew there would be bruises. He could feel Harry’s excitement and pleasure building, pulsing through the bond and filling Draco from the inside out, even as his pleasure built low and hot in his groin as he continued to thrust against Harry’s soft, willing body.

Pace slow and controlled, a hint of violence and passion slipped through with the force of Draco’s thrusts, until he freed a hand from the almost painful grip he had on Harry’s shoulders and swiped Harry’s glasses from his face. They clattered to the floor even as Draco fist Harry’s hair and forced green eyes to meet his own.

The wave crashed down, causing Harry’s red, swollen lips to fall open in a wanton cry and Draco’s face to twist with the ecstasy of it all, but they never broke eye contact. Staring deeply into each other, Draco slammed his hips forward a few more times as cum slicked their stomachs and caught on their sweaters. Tears streaking their faces, beginning to shake, they sank to their knees on the floor, panting and gasping and twitching.
Harry was crying softly, whole body hot and shaky. Little shocks of pleasure shot along his nerves, making him shudder. As the euphoria bled away, his lower back - where his hips had hit the counter with Draco’s every thrust - and his shoulders - where Draco had gripped, holding him in place - were hot and painfully throbbing. It sent another thrill through him to know with certainty that he would be wearing Draco’s marks. Dizzy with pleasure, he grabbed the still damp cloth he’d used to wipe Draco’s face and began to clean their clothes and skin.

Draco sat sideways with his shoulder propped against the cabinet, eyes half-lidded as he watched Harry clean up the mess. Lazily, he reached forward to caress his fingers over Harry’s still blushing cheek. Harry leaned into the touch, lips curled into a peaceful smile.

* Love you, * he whispered softly into Harry’s mind. * Love you. *

Meanwhile, drying his hands on a kitchen towel, Liam went to the front door and peered out. Kyle was sitting in the hallway, knees bent casually and his forearms resting on his knees. He titled his head curiously as the door opened. An unlit cigarette hung from his lips.

“Dinner’s ready. The boys went into the bathroom to wash up,” Liam offered. He came out into the hallway so that they could see each other more easily.

“What’s the story?” Kyle asked. His dark eyes pinned Liam in place. “You guys haven’t said much of anything about these kids. It’s about time I heard that tale.”

Liam shifted nervously and forced a smile. “Where’re the girls?”

Kyle answered, but his frowning expression made it clear he wouldn’t let Liam stall for long. “Jess went to buy something and Drey went to pick a fight.” He got to his feet and crossed his arms, staring Liam down. “You going to explain?”

Liam sighed and ran his hands through his hair, pulling it loose from the tie. He didn’t want him thinking Draco was crazy or something, so he said, “They were slaves of the mafia in New York. Draco longer than Harry. It was bad for him. My brother helped ‘em get out, but not a week later he got shot in the head right in front of them. Remember when I told you that you reminded me of my brother. Well, that and the cold weather triggered the memory of his death. It don’t happen often, but sometimes that past steals Draco away.”

Kyle palmed his cigarette, his body language relaxing. “I know about flashbacks.” It was a statement of understanding, of forgiveness. “I’ll try and be more careful around him.”

Liam thanked him as he followed the man back into the apartment, but thought to add, “Draco’s really tough. I doubt you’ll trigger him again.”

Kyle gave a nod to indicate that he heard and went to the fridge to grab a beer. Pouring it into a glass, he helped Liam finish setting the table. Once everything was ready, Liam and Kyle sat waiting. Ten minutes went by and the sink continued to run in the bathroom. Liam was about to get up and knock on the door, just to check on them, when Drey and Jess returned.

Jess held a bouquet of flowers and a plastic bag with a tub of vanilla ice cream (for the apple pie Harry had made). Drey had a bruised and swollen cheek; she took a frozen bag of peas out of the freezer and held it to her face as if it were the most normal thing in the world. Jess and Kyle spoke
quietly, likely about the boys, and Liam went to the bathroom to fetch them.

Just as he was about to knock, the door opened. Harry’s cheeks were pink with a blush and both boys’ lips were kiss swollen and their hair damp from being finger-combed with wet fingers, but at least their clothes were all in place. Liam sighed and told them dinner was ready.

“The flowers are pretty.” Harry complimented right away as Jess set them in a vase on the coffee table.

“Thank you.” She sat at the table with a small smile. Her eyes darted to Draco for a moment before returning to Harry. “I hope you are feeling better.”

“Yes,” Harry answered simply and smiled. “Can I serve you?” Harry remained standing so that he could dish out the spicy, sautéed green beans and the mashed potatoes. He let everyone pick their own steak. Once everyone had food and was seated, they began to eat.

“What’s this school of your like?” Liam wanted to know.

Draco and Harry took turns talking about how there were houses and a yearly competition to see which could earn the most points in the year in both classes and their sport. They left out all mention of magic and tried not to use proper names, but explained how the kids were separated by personality traits and the green house was for the “bad” kids.

“Typical,” was Drey’s only comment. She had the worst opinion of humans in general, so such a flawed system didn’t surprise her in the slightest.

“Has there been no mention of reform?” Jess wanted to know. “There has been a lot of research that supports grouping kids based on their academic ability for classes, but I doubt segregating them so openly into house teams is beneficial in the long run. There could be a very easy solution that wouldn’t require them to redo the system completely. Simply require an equal number of each house in all extracurricular activities. You mentioned this sport they play. Instead of house teams, they should be mixed.”

“That sounds like a good idea!” Harry agreed excitedly. “Then they’d get to know each other and maybe wouldn’t hate Slytherin so much.”

Liam cast Harry a smile. “That’d be good.”

“The kids really love the system, though,” Draco denied. He poked at his potatoes thoughtfully. “They get really into house pride and define each other by their colors and banners. They would resist any integration plan.”

Drey laughed. “Who cares?”

Jess gave her partner a smile and translated for the boys. “Kids should do what they’re told or there will be consequences.”

Draco lifted his eyebrow at that. “Really?”

“Traditionally speaking,” she stated and speared some green beans. Her almond-shaped eyes studied him across the table. “Of course, not all children are children. How have you been faring on that front?”

Draco gave a snort. “I do pretty well. My birth family is old money, so I’m not treated like the typical child.”
“But it makes a lot of people at school not like Draco,” Harry added mournfully. “Since it’s widely believed his dad fought on the bad guy’s side in the war and only got off because of his name. We were sorted into the school house for the heroes and warriors, so they especially bully Draco. And the bad house thinks Draco’s a traitor for going into the red house, so…”

“Jesus,” Liam spat, furious on his brother’s behalf. He practically flung his fork down.

“Can’t you switch to a more neutral house?” Kyle wanted to know. It was the first time he’d spoken during dinner.

Draco turned to face him perfectly easily and answered. “It’s tricky because each house is based on certain personality types and I refuse to be separated from Harry. Since our personalities are so different, the red house is the only one where we could both believably be placed together. Truly I should be in the green house and Harry in yellow, but…” He gave a shrug.

“I see.” Kyle handed Harry his mostly empty plate as the boy began to clear the table.

Changing the subject, Draco gestured at both Kyle and the girls with a lazy gesture. “Tell me how this came about.”

Jess and Kyle shared a thoughtful glance, but it was Drey who spoke. “We fit each other,” she said with a shrug.

Jess smiled and covered Kyle’s hand with her own. “That’s true. We know a triad is notoriously hard to maintain, but it happened naturally. It’s been no burden so far.”

Kyle gave a lopsided smile. “Once things fell into place, there was no other way to be.”

As Harry began setting out small salads to help clear their palate for desert, Draco thought about that. He still wasn’t sure how a relationship with three very dominant people would work out, but clearly it had and they felt very strongly for one another. It must have been very delicate, especially in the beginning, but time would make it easier as their boundaries were discovered.

“So are you going to finally work at Diesel?” Kyle asked Liam and ate a cherry tomato. “I know the girls would prefer it.”

“I don’t know what I’m going to do yet,” Liam hedged, eyebrows beetled. He had hated it when Brendon tried to tell him what to do and he still hated it when the girls and Kyle butted in his business.

“We’re going to stay with Liam for awhile,” Harry cut in smoothly. He had always excelled at the lessons with Narcissa on conversational diplomacy. “It might take some time for us to settle in.”

“In that rundown place?” Kyle asked. His tone wasn’t judgmental. He was simply seeking information. “It’s a one bedroom, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Jess answered. Her expression brightened. “If we can’t work together, we can at least be neighbors. This whole floor is ours. We like our privacy, so why don’t you move into the unit at the end of the hall? There will be two empty apartments between us. That should suit all of us nicely.”

“We’re at the club a lot,” Kyle agreed. “And if it’s still too intrusive, you can find a new place. You’ll have to do that anyway if the boys are going to live with you.”

Liam wanted to turn them down. He knew full well living closer to them would get them more involved, but Draco had already said he wanted lessons from Drey and Jess and his shitty apartment
really was tiny. Plus, he didn’t want to take money from Draco and Harry; it wasn’t like he had a lot put away. So he set his pride aside and gave a shrug. “Sure. If the boys want to.”

Draco gave a nod. “Sounds good.”

Harry beamed happily. “I’ll get the pie!”

Chapter end.
The Starting Line

A/N: Sorry for the delay in updates. I will do my best to get them out faster.

The Starting Line

- January 3rd, 1992 -

“What do you mean the boys aren’t here?” Andromeda stood stiff and forbidding in the receiving parlor of Malfoy Manor. She wore a black skirt with a deep green sweater under a coat. Her hair was up in a tight bun. She had never looked more stern. As she aged, she looked more and more like her mother, a formidable woman indeed.

Lucius stood before her, leaning on his cane, a severe frown tightening his features. It did not matter how formidable she was; he would always be stronger. His eyes were icy as he stared her down. Voice tense with dislike, he said coldly, “It was my understanding that Draco had decided to take Harry to you. Was this not the case?”

Andromeda looked utterly shocked for a long second as realization set in. Worry crept in at the edges of her expression and voice. “We had a disagreement. I had assumed he returned here.”

Lucius snapped up his cane, holding it in a dangerous fist. Eyes narrowed dangerously, he called, “Dobby!”

The little elf appeared in an instant, cowering at the coldly furious expression on his master’s face.

“Find my son and ward. Return when you have their location.” The elf disappeared and Lucius pinned Andromeda in place with a sharp look. “When was this… dispute?”

“A few days ago,” Andromeda admitted softly.

“You had better hope the boys are safe and not stubbornly trying to survive on their own in London in the dead of winter.” Lucius took a step toward her, making her back-step unconsciously. “What was this disagreement about, Andromeda?”

The reminder of why she’d come made her straighten her back. Light hazel eyes hardened once more, her chin rose. “I would like to discuss it with the boys, or perhaps my sister.”

“My wife is unavailable and the boys are missing.” Almost purring, Lucius prowled closer. “You have already proven yourself neglectful. Will you really add to your offense by keeping silent?”

Andromeda turned her body with his motion so that she was always facing the dangerous wizard before her. Her hand tensed, ready to draw her wand from her forearm sheath. “We are in no condition to discuss something of such importance. Let us wait to hear the elf’s news.” Her head cocked. “Where is my sister, Lucius?”

“That’s really none of your concern, Andromeda,” Lucius said almost sweetly, but his mouth curled in a cruel smile.

The sudden pop of Dobby’s return broke their stare-off. The elf wrung his ears, but he stated clearly, “Master, the boys be with Mr. Lupin, sir.”

Lucius gave a cool smile. “You may go.”
Dobby quickly disappeared.

Looking relieved, Andromeda straightened her shoulders. “If you insist on doing this now, Lucius, then I suggest we move this to the parlor.”

Lucius inclined his head and, although the gesture was perfectly polite and proper, there was an edge of mockery in the movement that set Andromeda’s teeth on edge. She detested this man. She hated everything he stood for. In her opinion, he was not capable of one ounce of warmth or goodness. What was the point of power if it was only used to destroy? A man like Lucius would never understand that question. She felt uneasy that she would be talking about such a delicate and discomforting topic with him, but the magical contract made him one of the boys’ guardians and that left her with no choice. She sat stiffly, taking the beautiful love seat in the peach and cream parlor as hers. She straightened her back and lifted her chin, ready to do battle.

Lucius sat across from her, poised in his dark day robes, platinum blond hair neatly tied back and falling forward over one shoulder. One ankle rested on his knee, his cane leaning casually against his chair, and his pale, long-fingered hands resting on his lap. He sat in the delicate armchair as if it were a throne and she a lowly subject presenting a minor complaint about his kingdom. It was almost funny. Once he heard what she had to say, he would no longer look so poised.

She suddenly remembered how absolutely set against this course of action Ted had been. Her marriage had never been so turbulent, but she couldn’t stand by and do nothing when there was a chance she could alter the disastrous course those boys were taking. How could she live with herself if she did that?

Lucius watched, almost bored, as Andromeda gathered her thoughts. Her coat had been removed and folded gracefully over the arm of the love seat. She sat, wider of hips and larger of breast than her sister, but with an identical dignity. They shared the same thin wrists and long necks. The same angle of their features. And a flash of brutal memory overcame Lucius. Of swinging back to strike Bellatrix one last time, rage slowly boiling away to exhaustion with each blow he delivered, and seeing the image of that hated bitch melt into his pale and fragile wife…

Lucius had nearly fainted! He’d literally staggered sideways and vomited in absolute horror. Only the sound of Narcissa’s muffled weeping had brought him back from that black, cold edge. She had refused his help. Not out of anger but out of necessity. As soon as she could stand on her own, she had left him to enter enemy territory. To protect her sons. To correct his mistake. He had never been more in awe of Narcissa. Andromeda, for all their similarities, was nothing compared to her.

“I do not have all day,” he prompted sharply. He set his foot down and leaned forward, suddenly sick of this woman.

Andromeda let out a tight breath and began. “It has come to my attention that the boys may have developed an… affection for each other.”

Lucius lifted a single, elegant brow. “Affection?”

Andromeda swallowed thickly, tears threatening in her eyes. Her hands clenched over her knees, gripping the material of her skirt. How in the world would she explain this? “They’ve always been private. Secretive,” she began delicately. She looked just past Lucius’s head, staring into her memories. “I... A few years ago, I caught Harry trying on Nymphadora’s dress... And they’ve always been so affectionate with each other... I always brushed it aside, told myself they were just close, they’d been through so much, they were just little boys, surely.” Her eyes finally met Lucius’s and they were hard and determined. “Inside my heart, I knew something was off. That it was not the love brothers, even twins, shared. The boys…” She closed her eyes and took a breath before opening
them again and saying clearly, “They are acting as lovers.”

Lucius’s narrowed his eyes dangerously, but he said nothing. He would let her have her say. Still, she must have sensed his growing tension for her chin went up and her eyes burned with inner fire.

“Draco all but told me to my face that they were engaging in promiscuous acts behind their locked door,” Andromeda admitted. Why wasn’t he saying something? Her heart thumped in her chest. Her palms were slick with nervous sweat. “Something must be done to save those boys from acting so inappropriately. Clearly their past has scarred them more than we knew. It is our jobs to correct this damage, Lucius. I propose we separate them. Not permanently. They can still see each other, but Harry should reside with me while Draco remains with you.”

Lucius exhaled carefully. Two and a half years ago, when his stolen son had miraculously returned to him, he would have accepted instantly and been grateful for Andromeda’s understanding. One year ago, when he had discovered just how dangerous Potter truly was, the boy’s very soul corrupted, he would have leapt at the chance, despite knowing it would earn him Draco’s hatred. Even one month ago, he would have agreed and conspired with Andromeda to arrange it so that the boys would have no choice but to comply. But now...

Lucius remembered Draco, just turned nine, with his head tilted back and his cupid-bow lips pressed flat. He had stared up at Lucius through intense silver eyes and said, “Look. I’m not gonna pretend I know what you're feelin’. I get that you lost your kid and want him back, but I'm not your kid. I lived a completely different life. I have my own ideas that aren't yours. That's not my fault, and it's not your fault from the sound of things, but that's the way it is. I don't want ya thinkin' that I've been brainwashed or somethin' by Dumbledore. I'm not with him, either. I'm with Harry, and Harry's with me. We're on no one's side but each other's.”

Draco had laid his cards on the table the very first day they had met, and still Lucius had not truly understood.

Lucius had watched Draco’s disinterested reaction to the grandeur of Malfoy Manor and the rich history that came with it. However, Potter with his big green eyes, glasses, messy hair, and damnable black collar had thrown himself into the lessons, always respectful and obedient as a Pureblood son should be. Potter, with his awe and sincere devotion, had pulled Draco along with him, and yet Draco had never once lost sight of that original declaration:

“I'm with Harry, and Harry's with me. We're on no one's side but each other’s.”

The one lesson Potter had failed utterly: training horses. In Lucius’s eyes, the boy was too submissive, too soft-hearted. It was a weakness. As Lucius’s father had done- and his father before him and his father before him on until the beginning - Lucius had tried to eradicate that weakness. Green eyes glazed, Potter had crumpled into a ball, sobbing, and Draco had intervened.

Voice cold as ice, his son had declared, “We’re done.” And without looking or confirming Potter’s position, he had crouched and grabbed a handful of Potter’s hair. The sobbing had cut off instantly, turning into nearly incoherent apologies.

“If he doesn't learn how to be firm, Draco, society will eat him up!” Lucius had berated him, almost blind with fury at Draco’s defiance. “I’m not trying to hurt the boy! I'm trying to prepare him!”

Draco had released Harry and stood, taking a threatening step forward. Once again the hard-eyed child from the Headmaster’s office had returned. He had stood toe-to-toe with Lucius, barely half Lucius’s height with eyes gone silver. When he had spoken, he hadn't yelled or raged. He had been icy calm, resolute. “Don't tell me what Harry needs, Lucius. Harry's mine, and I say he's done.”
Lucius had mistaken Potter for weak because he had weaknesses. He had seen Draco as the protector of a lost cause that would only take more and more from his son, giving nothing back, but Lucius had very quickly seen how wrong that was.

Draco’s near catatonic form had been crumpled behind Potter’s slender body, the boy’s arms outstretched in a shielding gesture. The pressure of powerful magic hung in the air and Potter’s green eyes literally glowed behind his glasses. His expression had been even more terrifying than Draco’s could be, almost inhuman, especially coming from a normally docile and sweet child, and Lucius had watched, horrified, as black smoke spilled from Potter’s open mouth.

The smoke had solidified into a huge black snake with a dark green pattern going down it's back. Ten feet long and a good four inches wide, it had been one of the largest snakes Lucius had ever seen. The drag of the snake's scales on the bathroom tile had made the hair on the back of his neck and arms rise. The snake's head had lifted, waist high, with jaws opening to reveal long fangs. The snake would have killed them all had Lucius made even a single mistake in that moment.

Behind the deadly monster, Potter had stared at the snake, expression coldly determined, and had begun to hiss like a snake himself. Lucius had never felt so terrified as he had then, the sound bringing back the years he’d knelt at the Dark Lord’s feet, and claws of ice had gripped his lungs. From that moment on, he had never underestimated Potter again.

He did continue to underestimate their bond, however. He had worked in secret trying to find ways to sever it. He had found none. In fact, the more he had studied, the more certain he had become it could not be done, but even that had not led to him accepting the bond.

Not even when he saw them dance, moving as one in a way he had never seen before. Even he was awed by them. And, yes, he had witnessed last year’s Yule rendezvous. He had seen Potter wearing a deep green ball gown, hair tamed into near curls, lips and eyes accentuated with makeup. Had he not known Potter’s gender, he would never have doubted he was a little girl. Even Lucius had admitted, even if only to himself, that they were a beautiful sight, and he had said nothing about the photographs Narcissa kept hidden away.

He had not accepted it even when he watched Draco and Potter fence, fierce and bold, a unit even when acting as each other’s opponents.

Not when he saw them flying or riding bareback synchronized.

All of that and more had eaten slowly at his resistance, but the lessons he’d been taught about the repulsive act of two boys coming together as lovers were entrenched. What had finally broken through the last of his denial and his refusal to truly understand was the boys actions at Hogwarts…

With painful clarity, he remembered Draco sitting vigil, injured and exhausted but no less dangerous, over an unconscious Potter who had been flung down some stairs. Lucius had known good and well that he’d need to take no action for revenge, the look in his son’s eyes had told him Draco would pay back Potter’s spilled blood three times over. And as distressed as he was that his son was facing such opposition, he had never been so proud…

It was watching Potter flying during a Quidditch match with remarkable speed and skill, pushing himself past his limits, and knowing it was all for Draco - to impress him and earn his praise. Then watching the boy nearly flung off his broom and Draco, fierce and intelligent, flinging up the banner, protecting his partner, allowing Potter to take his rightful victory…

It was seeing Potter coming out of the Winter storm dressed in a wedding gown, standing strong when Lucius had expected him to collapse.
It was when he listened to Dumbledore’s report of Potter, a child of eleven years, willingly going into a battle even hardened adults would have hesitated to enter all because Draco had ordered it done. And then hearing that Draco had saved Potter at the last minute by brutally and yet cleanly removing the threat…

It was that exact moment Lucius had felt the wall crumble into dust in his mind and had seen with new eyes the truth of the love between Draco and Potter. In their actions, he had seen Narcissa, and so was able to finally recognize their bond for what it was. It went way beyond gender. Beyond age. Forged in sacrifice and blood, but also in trust and a deep, true joy. It was in that exact moment that he could see the reflection of his deep abiding love shining from their eyes.

Narcissa - who unflinchingly performed a powerful, sacrificial ritual to find their son. The son born from their union.

Narcissa - slender and beautiful, long hair falling over her pale skin, looking up at him with eyes as blue as the sky, as she first recounted the stories long forgotten by the world of a sacred bond: Dominus et delicae. She spoke of those stories several times over the years, always at night, often when she was wrapped in his arms and Lucius could not escape her words.

Narcissa - eyes shining with pure love as she watched the boys dance in private.

Narcissa - taking Potter by the hand and leading him gently down the path of the Wife. The pride in her eyes when he excelled and thrived. He had taken to those duties as if born for them, and Lucius could so clearly see the future Narcissa envisioned.

Narcissa - disappointment and loneliness in her beautiful eyes every time he had been unable to believe with her. Still, she had never given up trying to reach him. Not once.

Narcissa - beaten and bloody and unrepentant. There was no hesitation in her as she went back to the House of her childhood. Willing to fight for that future she saw. Willing to die for it.

Lucius had never not loved Narcissa. He had simply become so entangled in his own fears and desires that he had not realized he had turned his back on that love. By shutting Narcissa out, by dismissing her input, he had unintentionally chosen to fight alone, and in so doing had abandoned her to do the same.

Looking back, Lucius realized they should have struggled together and clashed until they were able to stand on the same ground once again, side-by-side. He loved her deeply, so deeply and completely that only a blessed few would be able to understand. And yet Lucius knew Draco and Harry would be able to understand such a love. Yes, he could admit it now, the same unwavering bond burned between the boys. The way Lucius and Narcissa were meant to be, so to Draco and Harry were meant to be.

And here sat Andromeda, her voice the voice of the fears and doubts that had ruled him even just a month ago. Instead of a thick rug and elegant coffee table, he saw the long stretch of bloody terrain of terrible mistakes that sat between them. Terrain that she had not yet crossed in order to get to where he sat now. And he almost had sympathy for her.

Was it possible to bridge that gap? Was it possible for her to break free of those entrenched lessons of childhood, the fears and doubts, and to find faith without having to walk that bloody road with her own two feet? Was it even worth the effort of trying? In a few weeks time, Lucius expected their custody contract to be dissolved and a new one formed in its place with Black as the co-guardian of the boys.
Lucius, seeing the resemblance of his wife’s features in her face, stood slowly to his feet. His expression of disdain faded to be replaced by frank honesty. “I doubt you will understand what I am about to tell you, but I find myself desiring to say it regardless.”

Andromeda shot to her feet to meet him head on. She twitched her wrist so that her wand dropped into her hand, and braced herself against his wrath that she would level such a profane accusation against his son and Heir. Arguments to convince him of her sincerity already began marshaling behind her lips.

“I will start with this.” Lucius set his cane centered before him and placed both hands over the snakehead. His feet and stance were planted so firmly it was as if he was rooted to the spot and would never be moved. “I have been aware of the boys’ unorthodox relationship from day one when Draco demanded unequivocally to share the same room and bed as Harry.”

Andromeda’s mouth fell open in utter shock, mind wiped empty as all her arguments were blown away.

“I was raised to detest same-sex unions as you were. I still do not believe they are acceptable.” He raised his hand to forestall the outburst of relief he could see blooming across her features. “However.” He set his hand back down over the head of his cane and stared at her intently. “I have since come to accept that the boys are outside that rule.”

Andromeda sat heavily on the couch. She felt completely numb. Lucius Malfoy of all people, the staunchest, most conservative Purebloodist, was implying that he accepted the boys as lovers? It was unfathomable!

“I will say one final point and then I will ask you to leave.” Lucius snapped his cane up into one hand, eyes burning silver with an inner fire. “I appeal to your sensibility as a witch. You are Pagan and I suggest you remember it! You are no ignorant Muggle nor were you raised shackled by puritanical Christian law. You have felt great and wondrous Power moving through the world around us! A Power greater than us.” Passion rose in his voice. “Draco and Harry are bound by such a Power. Their minds and souls, their magic, are connected in a way we cannot possibly understand. Try to imagine it, Andromeda. Their bond is such that a physical relationship is almost superfluous! To impose on them the same expectations that we would on those who do not possess such a rare and magical bond would be to act against our Faith.”

Tears rolled silently down Andromeda’s cheeks, but she was not weeping. In fact, she seemed completely oblivious of their existence as she stared up at him, an expression of almost incomprehension on her face.

Lucius lowered his voice, his eyelids falling to half-mast to lessen the impact of his silver gaze. “Consider, Andromeda, they may yet find themselves attracted to females and will welcome one or two into their circle. As strange and untraditional as that may be, we must remember our true Faith. We are beholden not to society or even tradition, but to a Power far more mysterious and awesome than mundane social norms. I have spoken with Draco. He has assured me that he understands his duty as the Malfoy Heir. Harry, as well, has shown nothing except respect toward our history and has evidenced true faith in our Ways. I have been given no reason to believe they will fail in their duty as Heirs to their Noble Pureblood lines. I have, therefore, come to believe their relationship sacrosanct, and I assure you my wife shares my beliefs on this matter.”

Turning with a snap of his robes, he put his back to her and to her weaknesses that uncomfortably mirrored his own. He had done his best. For Narcissa. He owed Andromeda nothing more. “What you come to believe is your own accord. I trust you will see yourself out,” he said coolly and strode from the room, allowing her no response.
Draco, Harry, and Liam had spent all day moving the little Liam owned into the new apartment. It had a very similar floor plan to the apartment that Drey and Jess owned: open kitchen that flowed into a living room, a spacious bath, and two bedrooms. Thank god for the elevator. Even with it, Draco felt bone tired. Harry looked tired as well, although his - contentment - glowed warmly between them. They were still over the moon about being reunited with Liam.

“Good night,” Liam called from the couch as Draco took Harry by the hand and led him to bed. It was a bit early, but they could both use a good night’s rest.

“Good night, Liam. I love you,” Harry answered, sincere and sweet, looking over his shoulder, a smile tugging at his lips.

Liam gave him an answering smile.

Draco closed their door and crawled into bed. They were borrowing Liam’s spare sheets and a comforter from Jess at the moment. They could go shopping for their own stuff later.

Harry hummed softly and tucked his head comfortably on the blond’s shoulder. He rubbed Draco’s arm slowly. “Love you, Draco,” he whispered.

“Love you, Harry,” he answered back, barely above a whisper. Exhaustion pulled him under.

… Sound hit the air, deep and powerful, with repetitive booms. Draco covered his ears and staggered away from the wall. Slowly he realized it was barking. Eyes wide, he tried to estimate how big the dogs had to be to make a sound like that. What the hell? Was that even possible?

He took another look around the corner to see a massive grey paw fill the entire doorway with claws, black and deadly. Quirrell staggered back, casting a fire spell that made the paw yank back, but the barking continued even after Quirrell slammed the door shut.

Draco’s heart thundered in his chest as he tried to focus on what was in front of him. Harry’s - terror - sent adrenaline zinging through his system. * Harry! * he mentally called, an instinctive reaction as his boy’s fear cut through him. He’d take one more look, try and figure out what that bastard was doing and then he’d go after Harry.

Draco pushed his head around the corner one last time only to see Quirrell standing inches away staring directly down at him. A demented smile twisted the man’s face. The smell of garlic wrapped around him, hitting Draco’s senses like a punch. How the hell had the man gotten so close without Draco smelling him sooner?! Draco’s eyes went wide in horror.

“Well, well, well…” Low and menacing, Quirrell spoke without a single stutter. A faint red glow seemed to come from his eyes. “Finally caught the rat that’s always scurrying around, following me, watching me. Thought you were clever, did you, boy? You’re going to wish you had left well enough alone…”

Draco bared his teeth, backing up and giving himself some room. His magic coiled tightly, waking up from deep in his core. His panic began creeping in as he realized: *Harry needs me; I’m in deep shit!*

“What are you going to do, Professor?” he drawled, heart pounding as his vision went crystal clear, his body and mind primed for battle. He hadn’t been looking for a confrontation, not so soon, but like hell he’d back down now.
- and interposed on the memory another ran simultaneously over the first: Brendon, sharp-eyed, confident even with a gun to his head -

Eyes glinting silver, Draco’s voice dripped with mocking disdain, “Kill or hurt a student? I’m Draco Malfoy! The whole world knows my name. Something happens to me, your cover’s blown.” He snapped his fingers. “Just like that.”

- just like Brendon, threatening his would-be killer, buying time, trying to control the situation -

Quirrell laughed, high and insane. The sound was so foreign, so inhuman, it literally made Draco feel cold. His heart beat so hard it seemed to pound at the inside of his throat. He clinched his fists, trying to steady his screaming nerves.

“Tell me something!” Draco demanded, stalling. He dug his nails into his palm, cutting deeply, getting his blood flowing. “Who’re you talking to when you’re all alone? I’m betting Voldemort. Do you do it through a mirror? Something else? Well, I’ll just bet Dumbledore will love going through your things to find out, traitor. And he’ll just love to hear about how you’re always creeping around this corridor. Finally found a way to get the door open, huh? Fat lot of good it did you,” he finished with a sneer.

- BANG! -

As Quirrell snarled and lunged forward, Draco felt his arms get yanked viciously backward before he could fling the blood. Ice speared his insides and, with terrible understanding, Draco realized he should have run as soon as he saw Quirrell so close. His stupid instincts had led him to hold his ground instead. Terror opened up a pit in his stomach. He was helpless.

- Brendon’s body toppling even as blood, hot and metallic sprayed the wall. -

Shit, god no, not again…“Fuck,” Draco gasped, staring in horror as Quirrell’s face seemed to blur for a second. A monstrous mouth, wide and gaping, blazing red eyes… Draco bit back a whimper and flinched back, his arms hitting the wall hard.

Quirrell stood over Draco, his expression cold, eyes burning red, and cast an agony spell. “You’re powerful, boy,” the monster whispered softly, caressing the words almost seductively. “Murderous. Dark. You’ll be a great weapon in my hand.”

Draco went limp, crumpled on his side with his arms bound behind him and blood trickling out of his mouth. His blond hair had long since fallen from behind his ears, fanning across his cheek, darkened and damp with sweat.

- Brendon dead, mutilated, lost to them forever -

“I’m temped to see if Cruico would win a scream from you, but that would leave evidence behind.” Quirrell crouched and gently stroked Draco’s hair, moving it away from his face so he could see it better. “You won’t be telling anyone about this or me, I’m afraid.” He smiled darkly. “But do not fear, I will not forget our time together, Draco Malfoy. I have great plans in store for you and your inborn power.”

A spike of pure agony split Draco’s head open as if it had been brutally cleaved in two. Draco bared his bloody teeth in a vicious grin. He fought the invasion with everything he had, his body going into a full-blown seizure, but he lost…

Draco sat bolt upright, gasping for breath and soaked with sweat. The room was pitch black. Harry was next to him, saying something soft and soothing. Draco sat, arms wrapped tight around his body,
and just shook, teeth chattering.

Quirrell could have killed him then. The bond between Harry and him would have shattered. If Harry survived it, he’d have gone insane. His life would have been forfeited. His gorgeous green eyes, the vibrant sea of his emotions, all would have gone tragically dark. Why? Because Draco thought he was stronger than he was. He thought he could control any situation. Fuck! Brendon had thought the same and he’d ended with his head exploded right in front of them! Just a sack of raw, bloody meat, no different from anyone else! Draco had to get stronger. He had to do better. They had only made it out of that shit-storm because of fucking luck!

Oblivious to Draco’s feverish thoughts, Harry did his best to soothe the blond. It took a good hour before Draco was calm enough to go back to sleep, and Harry lay awake long after, running his hand through Draco’s sweat-damp hair as he continued to hum.

Since Hogwarts, Draco had seemed bitten down and hard, the way he had been when they were still slaves in the Hold, but he’d seemed okay. He wasn’t. The trauma of everything was far from scarred over. Between the flashback and Draco’s night terrors coming back, Harry realized that Draco was far from recovered, and he made a silent vow to himself to do whatever it took to help him.

…

- January 4th -

They didn’t have much food in the new apartment, so cereal was all they could have for breakfast. They didn’t have milk, so Harry had run three doors down to borrow some. Liam chewed thoughtfully. He sat in jeans, boots, and a sweater, hair pulled back at the back of his head, dark blue eyes even darker than normal. He didn’t like Draco’s insistence, but he understood it. Still…

“You sure?” he asked carefully, knowing what Draco would say but still having to ask.

Draco sat with his hair tucked firmly behind his ears, grey eyes bright silver. “Yes.”

Liam nodded and chewed for a minute. “What about Harry?”

Harry froze in place, his attention riveted to the blonde - hope determination.

Draco stirred his cereal, not really seeing it. His expression was so serious it made him look five years older. “I’ve thought about this a lot.” He set his spoon aside and faced Harry directly. “You’re vitally important.” He held up his hand at the instant look of denial on Harry’s face. “You’re vital,” Draco repeated, “because you can heal us when we take damage. If you were to get hurt training, hurt like you got when you were shoved down those fucking stairs, you wouldn’t be able to heal me if I needed it. I could take permanent damage or even die before you came around enough to help me.”

- horror fear - “Draco…” Harry’s voice shook, tears filling his jewel-bright eyes.

Draco gave him a grim little smile. “But I know how badly you want to get stronger. Just like I do.” He took a deep breath. “So I thought it might be better for you to train with Liam while I train with Drey. He can teach you how to wield a gun and maybe some throwing knives. It will let you keep some distance, but also allow you to do damage.” Draco reached over and put his hand over Harry’s where it rested on the table between them. “It’s still dangerous, but it’s the only thing I could think of. Liam can teach you a few hand-to-hand moves, too. In case you’re ever grabbed or something.” His hand tightened almost painfully around Harry’s. “But I want you to stay away from close combat as much as possible. I want you to use magic and guns and whatever you have to to take out the
enemy from a distance.”

“Yes, Draco.” Harry bowed his head as he submitted to Draco’s decision.

“Good.” Draco released him and turned his attention back to Liam. “Well?”

Liam pushed aside his dirty bowl and sighed. Fact was he hated it. Violence was the only way Liam knew. It was a normal part of daily life. He had grown up on the streets of New York from about the boys’ age, but oddly enough thinking about the boys growing up like that set him on edge. He wanted better for them. That meant jack shit, of course. Reality wasn’t one to give you what you wanted.

“I get it. This ain’t America, though. Gun laws are really strict. We’re gonna have to find some place abandoned to practice shootin’.”

Draco nodded. “Start with some hand-to-hand for now. Stay in town because I may need Harry.”

Liam frowned as Harry went pale. They really didn’t like this plan.

Draco continued on, ignoring that. “I’ll talk to Remus. If we could get a portkey that will bring me to him if I need it, you guys could go further out. Or maybe Remus can teach us to Apparate.”

Liam had to say it. “Draco, just because Harry can heal ya, doesn’t mean you should be reckless. The goal is to stay in one piece as much as possible so you can keep on fightin’.”

Draco gave a sharp nod. “I know. I’m not going to hurt myself on purpose. I just want to be extra prepared. Accidents happen, especially since I’m just learning.”

Liam relaxed at hearing that, so did Harry.

Draco stood and came around the table. He was dressed much like Liam - jeans, sweater, sneakers. He bent and kissed Harry’s cheek before stroking his hair. “I’ll see you later tonight. I’ll call if I need you.”

Harry leaned into the caress, eyes closed. Liam smiled. The affection between them was really adorable.

As he passed, Draco set his hand on Liam’s shoulder and gave it a squeeze, and then with a wave, he slipped out the door and went to train with Drey.

Liam really didn’t like it. Drey was skilled, no doubt about it, but she was also a loose canon. She loved fights and blood way more than was good for her or for Draco, but Draco had made his decision. He turned to face Harry, who was watching him with a solemn expression, and forced a smile. “Well, guess that means it’s you and me today.”

“Don’t go easy on me,” Harry said, voice low and serious. He sat straight, confidence and determination practically oozing from him as he held Liam’s eyes. This was not the same timid little boy Liam had once known. “Please, Liam.”

Liam’s smile disappeared and he gave Harry a nod of respect. “Yeah. Alright.” Taking a deep breath, he said, “Let’s do this.”

…

Remus took a deep breath. He ran a hand through his hair. It was much shorter than he usually wore
it, but he had long ago stopped trying to hide the scars that decorated his face. The faint white lines that bisected his right eyebrow and the long one that ran under his eyes and across the bridge of his nose were nothing compared to the deep puckered scars that indented each cheek. The Auror who was his escort stood patiently at his side and did not try to rush him, but it didn’t take more than that breath before Remus was reaching for the door handle and walking through to the room on the other side.

Sirius was bone white. His hair was long and streaked with grey. It had a dull, coarse look, but it still had a natural wave, almost a curl. He’d been scrubbed clean and now wore jeans, boots, and a thick woolen sweater despite the layered heating charms that made the room a warm 80 degrees fahrenheit.

“He hasn’t said much since we brought him to the Ministry early this morning. A few fits of giggles and some weeping, but he’s mostly been quiet. It’s like that with them at first. The shock of not being in that place,” the Auror had told him. “A familiar face might help or he might freak out. Don’t be shocked if he does. It will take time before he’s stable again.”

But the smile that lit up Sirius’s face was the same one Remus remembered from ten years ago. “Moony!” He came off the cot he’d been sitting on, one foot propped up on the thin mattress, and strode across the room to wrap Remus in a tight hug. “My god! You look so old!” he said with a laugh.

Remus smiled and hugged him back just as tightly. The door had been shut behind him, the Auror on the other side to give them some privacy. Remus pulled back and held tight to Sirius’s shoulders. “It is so good to see you,” he said, voice thick with too much emotion. “I missed you, Siri.”

Sirius shrugged him off and paced to what served as the bathroom.

The toilet and sink were set into a little alcove at the back of the room. It was only as big as necessary and it didn’t have a door or curtain so that it could be easily seen from the entrance. There was a small window with artificial sunlight filling the small square panes (they were too deep underground for true sunlight to reach them). And there was the single cot. Remus would only be able to take three or four steps across the width of the room and about the same from the entrance to the toilet. It was small, but it was clean and warm. Most importantly, there were no Dementors.

Sirius filled a small plastic cup with tap water and brought it back to Remus, his smile still in place. “I’d offer you something stronger, but I know how you don’t like to drink. Sit! Tell me all about your travels.”

Remus accepted the cup, still elated to be in Sirius’s presence and that his friend seemed okay. Better than Remus had ever expected. He sat on the cot and took a sip. “I traveled around Europe for most of it. Didn’t cross any big oceans until I went to New York. Stayed in America for about a year before returning.”

“America!” Sirius went to the window and looked out for a second before turning back around and practically flinging himself next to Remus on the cot. He slouched with his back to the wall and brought up his foot to hook it on the edge of the metal frame. “Must’ve had girls all over you, with your sexy British accent. Hear American girls go nuts for that.” He laughed, wild and free.

“Not really.” Remus shook his head, smiling.

Suddenly, Sirius fell silent. His expression became moody. “Thought it was another dream. But you came.” He fingered the thin sheet next to his hip. “How’d you pull this off? How long’s it been?”
Remus felt his heart crash into his stomach. He bent and set the cup on the floor before turning his body to face his friend. “It’s been just over ten years, Sirius.” His voice softened, became gentle. He spoke slowly and watched Sirius carefully. If the information became too much, he’d stop. “Harry and Draco, his bonded twin… They discovered Peter, Sirius. With the new evidence, the Wizengamot has agreed to give you a fair trial.”

Sirius launched himself at his friend. He grabbed Remus violently by his shirt, nearly choking him. “Where is he?! Where?!” he screamed.

Heart thundering in his chest, Remus gripped Sirius’s skeletally thin wrists. “He’s dead! He’s dead, Sirius! He’s dead!”

Sirius flung himself away from Remus and paced the floor. As Remus caught his breath, Sirius mumbled and flung his arms around in wild gestures, almost completely unaware of Remus still in the room. Tears in his eyes, Remus let his friend wear himself out. When Sirius finally began to calm down, he looked at Remus in almost child-like bewilderment.

“James…?”

The question broke Remus’s heart. All he could do was helplessly repeat, “He’s dead.”

Tears fell from Sirius’s eyes. He staggered back, arms wrapped tight around his chest as his back hit the cell wall. There was a knock on the door, warning Remus his hour was up. Remus got to his feet, crying with his friend, and pulled Sirius into a tight hug.

“You are going to get a trial. The truth will come out, Sirius. You are not a Death Eater. You did not betray James to Voldemort. You did not kill Peter.” Remus pulled away to look into Sirius’s pain-filled, pale blue eyes. “You’re going to go free, but you have to keep it together. James is gone, Sirius, but Harry is here. He’s here and he needs a godfather. James’s son needs you. So be strong, Sirius. We’ll be together soon. You hear me? You have to stay strong.”

The door opened and the Auror stood waiting, wand in hand.

Remus forced a big smile onto his face and hugged a silent Sirius tightly one more time. Before he turned, he pulled a photograph out of his pocket. Harry with his thin-framed, oval glasses and messy black hair, sat on the couch in Remus’s cottage. He wore a dark red sweater and slacks. He had a shy smile on his face and he lifted a thin hand to give the camera a small wave. Sirius took the photo and stared at it dumbly.

As Remus followed the Auror out, Sirius said not a word, and the door shut behind them with a terrible finality. Remus felt his hands clench; he had to get Sirius out of this place!

“The Mind Healer assigned to him has been cleared to speak with you,” the Auror informed him.

Remus wiped his face, erasing the path of his tears, and straightened his shoulders. “Yes. Thank you. I appreciate it.”

Remus learned a lot of what he already knew from the Healer. Sirius had always been unusual. He had quick mood swings even as a teen and was famous for his impulsive behavior. Turns out, that saved him while he was in Azkaban. That and the fact he was an Animagus. Apparently his brain was wired to withstand really highs and lows and so was able to bounce back from the effects of the Dementors a little better than others.

They still had a negative effect, Sirius would linger in his lows a lot longer than he would have had he never gone to Azkaban, and his highs won’t be quite so high any more, either, but with treatment
and a little help from potions, he should be able to lead a relatively happy and normal life eventually. Remus had literally wept at the news. Now they just had to make sure Sirius stayed out of that place.

The trial was scheduled for the day after tomorrow on the sixth. Lucius had pledged his support and Dumbledore was working hard on his end, as well. With the Healer’s verdict that recovery was possible, Remus dared to have a little confidence that Sirius would soon be freed.

Chapter end.

Sorry for the delay in updates. I promise to keep trying my best to get chapters out there. That being said, how many of you would be adverse to quickening the story pace and me adding more summary? For example, how many are okay with a summary of Draco and Harry’s training instead of “seeing” it?
The Trial

- January 6th, 1992 -

Remus came for the boys before the sun had fully risen. Today was the day… The day of Sirius’s trial, and Remus’s nerves were on fire. Sirius had become melancholy and unresponsive his last visit as if he were deep in thought. Remus tried to assure him that they’d win, that everyone would make sure of it, but he’d hardly got a reaction. He was about to go fetch the boys himself (what was taking them so long?), but Liam gave him a cold look.

“I’ll check on them.”

The bedroom door was open, so Liam propped himself up in the doorframe, arms crossed loosely. The boys had gotten their own set of sheets by now and furniture. A beautiful hand-quilted cover done in soft pastels and a soft grey-green sage colored cotton sheets were on the bed. They had also painted the walls a pale mint with a white ceiling and white dresser, bed frame, and nightstands. Their wooden magical trunk sat at the foot of the bed. Most of the walls and surfaces of the room were bare, but it was a good start to making the room feel like theirs.

Draco was kneeling on the ground, tying his shoes. Harry stood next to him. They were both dressed in jeans, sneakers and sweaters. It was still hard to wrap his head around the fact that these two kids were from some magical world. But then Draco stood and pulled Harry into a casual kiss that lit the little boy’s eyes up with obvious joy and Liam could believe it better. These two… They were something very special.

“Are you sure you have’ta go to this thing?”

Draco gave him an even look. “Yes. I’m sure. I burned the bridge with Andromeda. It was my mistake. I overreacted and didn’t handle her well.”

“It’s not your fault,” Harry defended, staunchly. His little chin came up, his lips drawing down in a frown. “You were still on edge after everything you’d gone through. She should have been more sensitive.”

Draco stood and ruffled Harry’s already messy hair, making Harry grin. “Regardless. She’s now on a mission to separate and ‘fix’ us. Sirius is our only chance at ending her guardianship rights, and that’s my top priority right now.”

Liam wisely kept the words he so desperately wanted to say to himself. Draco said they needed to go, so they were going. There was nothing he could do. Besides, he was perfectly aware of the fact that he was being irrational. It wasn’t like the boys weren’t coming back.

Harry, always sensitive to the moods of the people around him, gave Liam a hug around the waist. Draco gave him a relaxed wave, and then they were both gone with the scar-faced man. Liam went dejectedly to the kitchen. No way could he go back to sleep. Folding his arms on the counter with a sigh, he watched the coffee percolate.

…

Draco and Harry followed Remus silently; Remus was too anxious to talk and the boys were still waking up. By they time they got to the Leaky Cauldron, more people were moving around and
breakfast was being served at the pub. Draco insisted that they be allowed to eat. The trial wasn’t until noon, after all. Remus bowed his head, but inside it felt like his skin was crawling at the delay. The boys were sensitive to his anxiety and ate fairly quickly with very little talking. A few of the morning patrons pointed and whispered, but none of them dared approach them.

The Daily Prophet had gotten hold of the news of Sirius Black’s trial and had printed an article proclaiming the trial date and time. It was going to be a circus. All the families hurt by Death Eaters in the past were already filling the Ministry lobby, holding signs that read: We Want Justice! All Death Eaters to Azkaban! Even with a pardon, Sirius was going to have a hard time with “public opinion” for awhile.

They flooed to Malfoy Manor a little past eight. Lucius stood in the receiving room to greet them. He was already dressed, wearing a nice suit and over-robe with silver snakes knotted at each side of his neck. His thick blond hair was left unbound and fell free just past his shoulders. His eyes were a bright grey, his expression hard, but he gave a small smile when the boys appeared.

“Good morning. I trust you are well,” he said politely.

“We’re managing,” Draco answered with a wry twist to his lips. Just twelve hours ago he’d had a broken nose and the right side of his face had been swollen black and blue. All of which had been erased by a very pleasurable hour spent with Harry before they fell asleep. “Will Andromeda be attending?” he asked curiously.

“I wrote her that you would be sitting with me today,” Lucius answered easily, holding his son’s gaze. “I doubt she would miss the event, considering it is her favorite cousin, however she will not be bothering us.”

Draco inclined his head. “Thank you.” Lifting his eyes he dared ask, “Any word from Narcissa?”

“None,” was Lucius’s clipped response. He tapped his cane on the floor. “Go and get ready. Dobby will assist you.”

Draco nodded and took Harry’s hand. He called over his shoulder, “Play nice now.”

Lucius sniffed and eyed Remus disdainfully. “I trust you can entertain yourself.”

“Yes, of course,” Remus answered distractedly. He was looking at his watch.

Lucius sighed and turned his back. “Should you need refreshments or a calming draught, Lottie will be at your service. We will depart at eleven on the dot.”

Alone with this thoughts and anxiety, Remus practically collapsed in an armchair. These would be the longest three hours of his life.

…”

This wasn’t their first trial. For the Dursley trial, Draco had chosen to wear black, funeral colors in mourning for the childhood Harry should have had. This time he chose his House color: Malfoy blue. His day coat fell to mid-thigh and had two rows of large silver buttons going down either side of his chest. They held the coat closed on the side and made it seamless down the front so that it looked like all one piece and vaguely resembled a wizarding robe.

(Children under the age of eleven who had not yet learned to work magic did not wear robes except for school, participating in rituals, or very formal occasions.)
The lapels of the coat were wide, folded back away from his sternum revealing the white button-down he wore underneath and his black necktie knotted loosely around the base of his throat. The end of his white sleeves poked out slightly from the coat-sleeve, revealing an inch of white at his wrists. He also wore black slacks and dress shoes, forgoing his beloved sneakers. He looked the part of a young gentleman, much to Lucius’s approval.

Harry chose to wear Potter red again. His day-coat was tighter and more formfitting than Draco’s, hugging his slender frame. It had wide black cuffs and black lapels that opened in a deeper V than Draco’s, revealing more of his white undershirt. He had a thin, red ribbon tied around his neck to hold the white collar of his undershirt closed, incidentally covering the black collar he never took off. He wore shorts that fell just short of the knee and black socks that came up to mid calf. His dress shoes had higher heels than Draco’s, placing them at the same height. Draco did his best to brush and tame Harry’s hair, but it remained thick and wavy, falling over his ears and into his eyes, covering his forehead.

Remus, of no noble standing, wore simple wizarding robes over a nice charcoal grey suit. They were of much higher quality that Remus typically wore, even verging into stylish. However, next to the Malfoys and Harry, he looked plain. Not that it mattered to him or to the boys, but Lucius continued to shoot him disdainful looks.

It was finally time. The grandfather clock in the foyer could be heard chiming the eleventh hour.

Remus flooed first, grateful he was part of the Malfoy entourage and did not have to take the public entrance to the Ministry. The faster he could arrive the better. Draco and Harry flooed next, hand-in-hand as was usual for them. Lucius followed last.

Coming from the floo hallway, the four of them hit a massive crowd of people. Harry stepped closer to Draco’s side and felt the blond’s hand tighten almost painfully around his own. Lucius and Remus did their best to form a shield in front of them, but it was impossible to pass through without being seen. A dozen voices clamored at once, all directed at Harry despite the forbidding and dangerous presence of both Lucius and Draco.

“Harry! Don’t let them free him!” - “He betrayed your parents!” - “He deserves to die!” - “Harry! Get us justice!” - “Harry!”

Draco detested the familiar way these complete strangers called to his boy. Harry owed them nothing; they were nothing. How dare they open their mouth and scream demands! On top of that, they knew jack shit about what was going on. Weren’t they embarrassed, screaming their ignorance on the top of their lungs?

Harry’s face heated and he ducked his head - anxious nervous. Lucius secured them an elevator to themselves and the doors clanged shut on the noise. Immediately, Draco pulled Harry into a tight embrace and whispered in his ear. “Ignore them, Harry. I’m the only one who matters.”

Harry relaxed into his hold, most of his anxiety melting into a warm - trust love.

Draco kissed his cheek before resting his chin on Harry’s shoulder. “Good boy.”

Lucius shifted uncomfortably at the display, but Remus was oblivious. His eyes were glued unblinking to the golden metal doors. They eventually opened and revealed a hallway of black stone. Remus gave a soft intake of breath. “Courtroom Ten?”

“Yes, of course. Were you expecting anything less?” Lucius answered, sneering.
Remus grit his teeth and strode after the other man, leaving Draco and Harry to follow.

The hallway was narrow and made completely of black stone. Torches burned with blue flames and were spaced evenly along the flat, smooth walls. There was a massive grey door at the far end that read: *Department of Mysteries, Enter at Your Own Risk.* Draco avoided looking at it. A few years ago, Pandora had brought him there to show him how dangerous it would be to try and force Voldemort’s soul apart from Harry’s own. It had involved clones of his beloved, all of whom died miserably. Just the thought was enough to make Draco break out into a cold sweat.

Fortunately, they didn’t go toward that horrifying door. Instead, they turned to a door partially hidden by the elevator. Behind it, there was a narrow, spiral staircase made out of the same glossy black stone. It led them to a room that was both thin and wide. The wall across from the stairs was curved away from them, as if they stood outside of a large, circular room. There were chairs along that curved wall for people to sit and wait if necessary and two doors. One was placed center; the second stood to the far right at the end of the curved wall. It was covered in massive iron bands and beyond it were some cells designed to keep in the worst criminals.

Remus practically jogged as he made for the door in the center. Harry’s eyes went wide as they passed through into a large, circular room that was nearly three stories tall. Massive gold-marbled columns with a black base were placed regularly along the sides of the room. Tiered benches were placed around a deep, low stage in the center that was inlaid with a gold and black mandala pattern. But, as imposing as the room itself was, the sheer number of people were even more so.

Two hundred people filled the room, creating a dull murmur, and the stadium-style seats were only one-third full. One section of the stadium seating were set apart from the rest and positioned directly in front of the single chair that sat in the center. Fifty people in plum-colored robes with the silver W embroidered on the breast filled that space. They also wore triangular hats and nearly all of them had silver or white hair. The rest of the benches were filled with officials in black with smaller groups of red-robed people representing the Aurors.

Unlike the Dursley trial where they had sat high up in the back near the door, Lucius led them down to the first row of seats nearly on level with the floor. They were directly to the right of the section of officials and would be able to see Sirius in profile. Harry’s attention was locked on chair where Sirius would soon sit. Chains hung from the arms and legs. The Dursleys had sat in identical chairs. Harry swallowed hard and felt Draco’s hand tighten around his own, so he forced himself to look at something else.

In front of the chair, among the seats for the officials, was a tall podium with two shorter podiums on either side. Dumbledore, in his plum robe, sat before the shorter podium to the right. His hat was tall and pointed. He also had on heavy silver necklaces with runes hanging from them. A white-wood staff was propped against his side.

“Those in the plum robes are the Wizengamot,” Draco explained, knowing Harry needed a distraction. He had learned all of this when they had come for the Durlsey trial, but he doubted Harry had been paying attention to the lesson in government. “Dumbledore is wearing purple because he is Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot. He’s also Supreme Mugwump, which is why he’s wearing those chains of office and has the staff.”

“Plus Headmaster,” Harry murmured quietly. “That’s a lot of jobs.”

Draco snorted.

Lucius’s lips curled up in a smirk. “Very perceptive, Harry. I am concerned about his workload as well.” Then he pointed, playing along with Draco to keep Harry distracted. “There in the grey robes
is the Court Scribe. They are potioned to sharpen their acuity and transcribe their memory onto parchment to be used as the official record of the proceeding.”

“Next to her in white is the Youth Representative.” Draco pointed out the next in the line. “It is always someone in their Seventh-year at Hogwarts, usually the Head Boy or Girl.”

Harry looked. It was a girl. Her cheeks were red and her eyes were clearly bright with excitement.

The door opened and absolute silence descended. The Minister walked down the stairs, crossed the stage, and took his place at the center podium. Behind him, Aurors marched in practically carrying Sirius between them. Harry took a deep breath. Sirius was clean and dressed well, but he was skeletally thin and his pale blue eyes - the same color as Narcissa’s - darted every which way in clear panic. Sirius was very firmly shoved into the chair and the chains snapped to life, binding him tightly. They were sitting close enough that they could see Sirius flinch.

Harry’s heart instantly began beating hard as memories of Petunia screaming under a Silencing spell suddenly invaded his mind, and his stomach gave a painful lurch. He unconsciously shrank in his seat, trying to become small and invisible. Draco wrapped an arm around him and pulled him against his side. The crowd of hundreds became instantly silent as the Minister banged his gavel.

Minister Fudge had only been in office little more than a year, having been elected over Crouch who would have been Minister if his popularity hadn’t dropped with the death of his son in Azkaban. His lack of skill as a father put into question his ability as a Minister. Fudge was a short, chubby man with a square face, but he had an affable smile and knew how to hold the attention of a crowd. He wore dark robes, black or maybe dark green, with a faint pin-stripe. He also wore a knotted neck tie that could just be seen over the collar of his robes. His reddish-blond hair had been combed over to hide his balding.

The Minister’s smile was nowhere to be seen as he gazed down hard at Sirius. “Order! I call the court into session today, the 6th of January, in the year of our Lord 1992. The criminal Sirius Black, disowned from the Noble House of Black, has been charged with the murder of twelve Muggles, a wizard by name of Peter Pettigrew…”

Sirius flinched in his chair as the name was read, but he kept his head low, his hair hiding his expression.

“… second, with grievously breaking the Statute of Secrecy, and third, aiding and abetting a known terrorist You-Know-Who in a time of war,” Fudge concluded. He stared down at the man as he leaned over his podium. “Sirius Black, what do you say to these charges?”

The room held its breath as they waited for Sirius to respond. Remus gave Draco a pleading look. At the blond’s small nod, Remus gently pulled Harry up off his seat to stand next to him. Remus coughed in a strange way that had Sirius’s head coming up and looking over. Harry swallowed hard, his heart beating fast in his chest as the pale blue eyes of his godfather met his from across the short distance for the first time in ten years.

Sirius’s whole face changed. A small but true smile spread across his features. Harry’s heart, still beating fast, fluttered with a type of excitement instead of nervousness. Draco wanted Sirius free, and he was clearly struggling, but seeing Harry had helped him. Harry was helping! All this passed in a split second of realization through Harry’s mind. Straightening his shoulders, Harry reached out his hand and said as clearly as he could, “You can do this, Sirius.”

Desperation, filled Sirius’s features and he lifted his head, sat straight in his chair, and looked up at the people judging him for the first time. In a clear voice, Sirius called out, “I am innocent of these
Immediately the room burst into noise. Harry, knees shaking, quickly took his seat again.

Remus gave him a quick, shaky hug, tears in his eyes. “Thank you, Harry.”

Draco felt near to bursting with pride. He wrapped an arm around Harry’s shoulders and pressed a quick kiss to his temple, smiling. *Good job, Harry,* he whispered into his mind.

Harry gave a wild smile and sat ready for any other opportunities to help again.

Minister Fudge gave a speech about justice and then presented his memories to the court. It was disturbing to see the damage to the street and buildings, but even more so to hear the wails of pain and fear, the broken bodies from the explosion. Sirius looked crazed in the memories, staggering and laughing hysterically. He didn’t fight the Aurors when they arrived, just stood laughing until they spelled him unconscious and portkeyed him away.

Surprisingly, it was Dumbledore who stood next. He came down and placed his hand on Sirius’s shoulder. He spoke of Sirius as a student, a brave young man who defied his family’s darker traditions and was abandoned because of it. He explained how the Potters took Sirius in, how James and he were as close as brothers. Dumbledore finished by admitting that he had given the Potters and a few other families the instructions on how to cast the Fidelius Charm and that James and Lily had told him they would make Sirius their Secret Keeper, but that he did not know for a fact if that plan had been followed through. Beard long and white as his hair, Dumbledore turned gravely to the bound man in the chair. His eyes were dark and solemn as he asked very clearly, “Were you, Sirius Black, the Potters’ Secret Keeper?”

“No.” Sirius’s long hair hid most of his face, but Draco and Harry were close enough to see his cheeks shine with tears. “No. I… I was fighting… Doing my best to trip up the Death Eaters… They thought… James… He…” Sirius made a choking sound and fell silent.

Dumbledore gently touched Sirius’s shoulder. “I understand how difficult this is.” His voice and expression went soft with true compassion. “Can you please continue?”

The chains rattled as Sirius shivered, but he lifted his voice once more. “He thought I might be captured… I was to be a decoy…” He barked a harsh laugh that was laced with tears. “They chose Peter…” True hatred burned in his voice and, as he looked up, his eyes were cold as ice. “*Peter,*” he growled, dark and dangerously. “He *betrayed* us. Betrayed James! That’s why I went after him! I’LL KILL HIM FOR WHAT HE DID!”

The court broke into loud murmurs as Sirius’s scream bounced from the marble walls. Women gave a soft cry in the audience and Draco could see them literally flinch back, but Sirius was not a danger to them. The man seemed to collapse into himself breathing hard as if he’d run a mile. Dumbledore frowned, hand still resting on his student’s shoulder as he scanned the faces of the Wizengamot and spectators. Sirius’s words sounded like a confession.

“Did you kill him?” Dumbledore asked, silencing the crowd.

“No,” Sirius answered, but his voice was too hushed. Many did not hear him.

“Sirius! Did you kill him?” Dumbledore demanded sharply.

Sirius’s head came up, his eyes were tightly closed. “No. No, I didn’t bloody kill him! I was about to. Chased him into that alleyway and right when I thought I had him… There was this explosion. I shielded just in time, but I didn’t see… couldn’t see where he went… Next thing I knew, the Aurors
were on me, and then I was in... in...” He grew furious again. He strained against the chains holding him as he spat up at Dumbledore. “You know where I woke up! Peter’s still out there and I was locked away! James... I need to avenge James! So James can rest in peace!” As quickly as the anger came, it disappeared and Sirius again collapsed in the chair, tears running freely down his face.

“Is there anyone who can verify your claim?” Fudge demanded.

Sirius shook his head. “Peter. No one else.”

“Bring out his wand!” Fudge demanded.

An Auror entered carrying a wandbox. He came to a stop before the podium.

“What was recorded in this wand?” Fudge asked and the crowd held its breath.

“We could not discover the spell history. It is sealed by a blood ritual,” the Auror answered calmly.

The crowd broke into whispers.

“Most Ancient bloodlines have their children seal their wands. It is tradition,” Lucius murmured when Draco cast him a look.

Fudge glared down at the prisoner. “Mr. Black, the court demands you unlock your wand.”

Two Aurors stepped up to stand at either side of Sirius as one of Sirius’s hands was freed and the third Auror handed Sirius his wand. Sirius gave a little gasp and clutched it in a shaking fist.

“The wand, sir!” Fudge snapped.

The Aurors pointed their wands threateningly.

Sirius brought the wand up to his mouth. He whispered something and bit his thumb, smearing it best he could on the wood. It began to glow harshly with red light before flashing to nothing. Sirius was sweating. His shirt stuck to his chest and his hair grew heavy and slick. Sirius’s hand fell almost limply in his lap and the Auror with the box quickly confiscated the wand once more.

“Priori incantatem!” the Auror cast strongly, flicking Sirius’s wand.

A shield charm, powerful and flexible ballooned out of the wand. Dark pain spells followed as well as a few trap spells. A powerful and Dark location spell. Then several healing spells flashed in rapid succession, but by the faint glow, they were unsuccessful. Draco could only assume Sirius had found James and Lily and tried to revive them. There were a few other spells, repair and heating, and the wand went quiet.

“That was the last twenty-four hours of spells,” The Auror announced. “We would have to conduct a ritual to find out the spells that were cast prior to that.”

The crowd was murmuring, disapproval in the tone of their voices, for there had been a lot of Dark spells and Sirius’s wand had been locked. Fudge voiced these suspicions and the fact that Veritaserum was not reliable on Death Eaters.

“He bears no mark,” Dumbledore countered. “Veritaserum would be effective.”

Fudge was tempted to say Sirius wore no mark they could see, but he was wise enough to know how foolish that was. If he put the idea in people’s minds that anyone could be a Death Eater even without a mark, then no one would trust anyone and it would lead to chaos. So Fudge complied and
allowed Sirius to retell his story under Veritaserum.

“Were you the Potters’ Secret Keeper?” Fudge asked coldly.

“No.”

“Did you betray the Potters?”

“Yes.”

As the crowd grew excited, Dumbledore cut in, cutting a look at Fudge. “Did you betray them to Voldemort?”

“No.”

“Please keep your questions specific, Minister,” Dumbledore gently chided.

Fudge, red in the face, asked, “Was Peter Pettigrew the Potters’ Secret Keeper?”

“Yes.”

“Did you kill Peter Pettigrew?”

“No. Not yet.”

“Did you blow up the street in an attempt to kill Peter Pettigrew?”

“No.”

“Were you a Death Eater?” Fudge demanded, displeased with Sirius’s answers.

“No.”

“Would you ever be a Death Eater?”

“No!” Sirius shook his head hard. “James would never forgive me.” He was shaking pretty badly by this point and looked deathly pale.

“Enough,” Dumbledore commanded. He gestured for the Auror to administer the antidote and Sirius went completely limp, head hanging. He looked unconscious. “We have heard the testimony of his innocence. We must set him free.”

“The crowd was talking loudly now, shocked at Dumbledore’s endorsement.

Fudge banged his gavel several times until he could be heard over the heated whispers. “Sirius Black has shown himself well-versed in the Dark Arts, his wand was locked, and it is likely that he has the skill and knowledge to resist Veritaserum. He has also proven himself to be an unregistered
“Animagus! Which is proof of his anti-Ministry views.”

“It was wartime!” Dumbledore countered firmly and loudly, white beard and hair rustling as his magic stirred. He set his staff at an angle to his body, looking very formidable. “Many kept such skills secret as a means of last defense! Sirius was in no position to take advantage of the Animagus Forgiveness Act once the war was won.”

“If Peter Pettigrew was the evil mastermind behind the Potters’ attack and the explosion on the Muggle street, why has he never been seen again? Do not tell me to believe he committed suicide and cast that spell to frame Mr. Black. That theory defies understanding!”

“Why is Fudge resisting so hard?” Draco questioned with a frown.

Lucius bent down to answer. “A pardon will bring great shame upon the Ministry and they will owe Black a great debt.”

“But he’ll go free, right?” Harry asked anxiously. He was holding Remus’s hand. The man’s eyes had gone gold and he was stiff as a board, clearly having to exert full control to keep his seat.

“Yes.” Lucius sat up, lips curled in disdain. “Dumbledore has set his mind to freeing Black, so he will go free. That is his power here.”

Surprised at Lucius’s complete confidence on how this trial would go, Draco looked on with more interest.

Sure enough, Dumbledore brought his staff down causing a roll of thunder to fill the room. The sound stirred Sirius from his faint and he moaned as he lifted his head in utter exhaustion.

“I would like to submit evidence to this court. This evidence was held in trust by me as is within my right as Chief Warlock. I wished to bring this evidence forth during the closed hearing regarding the death that occurred at Hogwarts over Winter Break, but I must now submit it to the will of this public court.”

The doors in the back opened and McGonagall strode in. She walked in like an Auror with the same militant stride that was only enhanced by the deep, red robes she wore. Her hair was done up in a strict bun and her expression was perfectly blank as she presented a strangely-shaped shoebox to Dumbledore.

“Thank you, Deputy Headmistress.”

Dumbledore took the box and, with a spell, floated it to the floor between Sirius and the podium the Minister stood behind. Two other quick spells unshrunk the box to reveal a short coffin and opened the lid. Those sitting higher up could see better in this case and there were cries and gasps from above.

“What is this?” Fudge demanded, voice hushed, face pale.

Sirius’s scream of pure rage and pain cracked through the room. He flung himself violently against the chains, almost frothing at the mouth at the sight of Peter’s body. He looked like a madman.

Dumbledore cast a quick wandless, non-verbal Stupefy that knocked Sirius out cold and stepped forward center-stage. “This is the body of Peter Pettigrew. On the night of December twenty-seventh, Peter Pettigrew returned to Hogwarts to steal something of great power that I was protecting. Professor Quirrell and three others discovered Pettigrew’s presence and acted to stop him. I was not at the school, having come to London on some business. They fought with great bravery
and the result of that battle was the death of Pettigrew as well as Professor Quirrell. Fortunately, the item of power was kept safe out of the hands of Darkness.”

The room exploded in noise, but with a spell Dumbledore was able to still be heard.

“This is proof Pettigrew was not murdered in 1981 and that Sirius Black’s account is the truth. He is innocent of the crimes attributed to him. I ask the Wizengamot to afford this young man a full pardon!”

Fudge banged his gavel and was shouting something at Dumbledore. He looked furious. Even as close as they were sitting, Draco and the others could not hear what was being said. Aurors swooped in and confiscated the body. The upper levels of the stadium were leaking people as they ran to spread the word. Remus was on his feet, trying to go over the railing so he could stand with Sirius, but more Aurors were blocking his way. The Wizengamot, strangely, were the only still and silent people in the room. Those plum-robed elders stood with perfect stillness as they continued to watch the chaos.

At a sharp gesture from Fudge, Dumbledore raised his staff and brought it hard upon the ground. A wave of silence descended. McGongall stood stoically at his back. Those remaining in the room were forced into stillness, their voices sealed. Draco frowned, chafing under the oppressive spell. Harry, holding tightly to Remus’s arm, hardly noticed. He was just glad Remus had stopped pulling against him so hard.

“I call for the vote,” Dumbledore announced gravely.

Fudge looked murderous for a split second before straightening and pulling his features into something resembling neutral. He banged his gavel three times. “Please raise your hand to award a full pardon to one Sirius Black.”

Hands were lifted into the air. Their number was documented.

“Please raise your hands to dismiss a full pardon to one Sirius Black.”

About a dozen hands lifted. Their number was documented.

Fudge banged his gavel one last time. His voice sounded as stiff as a robot’s. “With a majority vote, Sirius Black will be awarded a full pardon by the Ministry of Magic on today, January 6th, in the year of 1992.”

McGonagall quickly levitated Sirius’s unconscious frame and strode from the room. Dumbledore followed her more slowly. Remus was grinning, his hands shaking violently as he leaned on Harry. Lucius cast him a sneer for his emotional display and kept his own expression otherwise coldly blank.

“I think a trip to the Child Services department is in order,” Draco remarked casually, looking up at his father.

Lucius lifted an eyebrow and caught his cane in one hand. His lips curled at the corners just slightly. “I believe you are correct.”

Sirius sat in a small private room in the Hospital Wing at Hogwarts. It was small and had no window, but that was comforting. So much had happened in the last few days. It still felt like a bizarre dream. He stared almost dumbly at the small radio that Dumbledore had left him.
“I think you’ve been left with your thoughts a little too long, my boy. I’ve always found music to be a good distraction.”

It was barely loud enough to hear and yet it was all Sirius could focus on. Silence, the occasional moan or scream, the sound of sobbing, but mostly silence. For so long. It felt almost intrusive to hear the happy singing of Celestina Warbeck. Then there was the door. His eyes kept darting toward it, couldn’t look away. It scratched at him, like nails on a chalkboard. Because the door… It stood open.

Legs shaking, Sirius stood. He took several deep breaths, heart thundering in his chest. He took one step. Then another. It was terrifying, standing in that open doorway. The hallway beyond was lit by flickering torches. It stood empty. No guards. He was hyperventilating now. Sirius gripped the door, his fingers blanching white. Without thinking, he started to swing it closed, but he couldn’t do it. Couldn’t bring himself shut it.

Tears streaking his cheeks, a wild laugh broke free of his chest. *Merlin*, he was terrified of an open door. Terrified to shut it. What the hell was wrong with him?! Taking all the courage he could muster, Sirius flung himself through the door and hit the opposite wall hard with his shoulder, but strangely the pain calmed him down a bit.

Was it true? Dumbledore had told him. About the pardon. About winning the trial. Was he really free? The concept was almost like trying to understand a foreign language. Turning, mouth still stretched in a too-wide grin, tears still falling down his cheeks, Sirius left the small room with the music and open door and made his way through the halls of Hogwarts. No one stopped him. No Dementors or guards pinned him down. Almost in a trance, he found himself in the Entrance Hall.

Shaking, dream-walking, he pushed and the heavy door opened. The smell of cold winter air hit him like a train. A clear expanse of stars and miles of rolling hills. The smell of the lake, of snow, of nature. It was overwhelming. Before he knew what he was doing, he was transforming, taking shelter in his dog form. With a howl that cut straight to the heart, Padfoot bolted across the grounds, snow crunching under his paws, tongue hanging out. He gave another howl and disappeared over the ridge.

“Are you sure we should let him go?” Minerva asked quietly, watching from a window on the second floor. Tears glittered in her eyes while her hands were folded together almost in prayer.

“This is a good sign,” Dumbledore reassured her, smiling gently. “It took an exceedingly large amount of courage to leave that room. I am terribly proud of him that he found that courage and so soon…”

Minerva reached over and put her hand on her friend’s arm. “Albus…”

Dumbledore covered her hand with his own and they stood together, shoulder-to-shoulder, watching the night and perhaps hoping to catch the silhouette of a scrawny black dog running free for the first time in ten years.

…

- January 7th -

Remus had been counseled by Dumbledore to give Sirius some time and space. He was justifiably overwhelmed right now. Still, Remus found himself sitting awake in his kitchen all night unable to sleep. He drank herbal tea and sat staring in the direction of the castle. It was in that time just before dawn, when the sky lightens to a soft blue-grey, when the world and time seems to become perfectly still. The soft crunch of snow where there shouldn’t be sound drew his attention. Rising, Remus
went to the window and saw a black dog against the white snow and ran to the kitchen door, flinging it open.

“Padfoot!” he cried, wild and loud, completely uncaring about the silence of the morning.

The dog’s tongue hung pink from its shaggy mussel. Trotting forward, Padfoot bumped against Remus’s legs and made his way into the house like he owned it. Remus closed the door. Laughing, he followed his friend to the living room where he had plopped down in front of the fire, sprawled on his back with his belly exposed.

“Always shameless about belly rubs,” Remus said with a fond smile.

He sat and obliged his friend for several minutes, scratching and rubbing his wet fur until it was dry and warm. Without warning, Padfoot shifted into his human form. The man who formed sat in a thin, second-hand shirt and pants that the Ministry had given him. So thin and worn, so much older. Hair tangled and dry, broken in places, overly long… But! The smile was the same, full of warmth.

“I wanna see Harry.”

Remus stood. “Of course.” He went to his room to grab some clothes Sirius could borrow. He would burn the rags the Ministry gave his friend. “But we should probably talk about it first.”

“Why?” Sirius accepted the clothes, but he didn’t move to put them on.

“Well…” Remus paused, wondering how he should explain. Unconsciously he rubbed at his deeply scarred cheeks, the marks left by the Muggle exorcists. He, Draco, and Harry had all almost been killed, had suffered beyond description, but in a strange way, it was also the start of Remus’s evolution.

“I don’t think there’s anything I won’t believe. Not after everything,” Sirius said softly and the years in Azkaban showed in his eyes for a brief moment, making him look ancient. “Just tell me.”

Remus ran his hand through his sandy hair and sighed. “You’re right. I’m sorry. Here. Come into the kitchen. I’ll tell you my story while I make breakfast.”

Chapter end.

A/N: Haven’t seen much of the boys lately. I promise we’ll refocus on them starting in the next chapter.
Choosing Love

In a dark, dirty warehouse, two figures slowly circled each other. One was small and fast, but the taller moved with such control and strength there was no question to who would win the fight. Sure enough, the woman with long dark hair slashed a whip forward. The young boy dodged, but it was right in the path of the woman’s kick. The blow landed on his stomach and sent him flying backward.

Draco lay gasping, trying to get his diaphragm working again. He stared up at the wooden beams two stories above him. Bright sunlight broke through in a few places, casting dusty sunbeams to the floor. It was why this place was empty. The leaking got so bad that the goods stored here got damaged.

“You missed another opening.” Drey’s booted feet came to stand a few inches from his side. She looked down at him with a predatory look. “You have to overcome those instincts of yours.”

Draco’s wheezing eased as he was able to finally take in one full breath. “I’m trying,” he protested, glaring.

“You only attack when you see a kill shot. Yes, that’s worked out for you in the past, but not every time. Kill shots are risky, with a low chance of actually working. Often times it’s more strategic to flee or harry your opponent, get them exhausted or careless, and then strike for the kill.”

“I know,” Draco growled, sitting up. She had only lectured him a dozen times about this by now. His body hurt, throbbing and stiff. She was doing exactly what she was telling him to do: wearing him out, getting him stupid tired, so that it would be easy to finish him off. “I only won in the past because they underestimated me. That won’t be the case in the magical world. People are used to thinking of even children as dangerous because of magic.”

“Exactly.” Drey gave him a nod and offered him her hand.

Draco accept it and let her pull him to his feet. Before he was completely stable, she swung her free arm in a hard backhanded slap that Draco only just leaned back enough to dodge. Her nails, filed to a sharp, hard point, scraped along his cheek. This wasn’t some elegant martial arts training. Drey was teaching him how to fight dirty; this was street fighting using the environment and anything else he had at hand as a weapon. More than that, she was trying to reprogram his instincts.

Being a slave had shaped Draco’s psychology more than he would ever really understand, but one of those instincts was to be still, to move as little as possible, conserve energy, hold back and wait for the moment to KILL! But that left him open in a fight like this. It put him on the defense. Sure, he could land a devastating blow with his toxic bite or use his blood to poison the opponent, but a wizard might be ready to counter those things or defend against it.

Draco had to get better at fighting, at finding those openings and taking them even if it wasn’t a kill-shot. He had to switch from an assassin to a brawler. The memory of cowering against that wall, waiting for a chance, as a possessed Quirrell completely overpowered him, tortured him brutally, and eventually twisted his mind while Draco was completely unable to fight back fucking haunted him.

That could never happen again.
Harry stood in the living room of their apartment holding throwing knives that looked like sharply-pointed, lengthened arrow heads with a straight handle and a loop at the end. They were only a few inches longer than Liam’s hand, but Harry was smaller, so they were nearly the length of his forearm.

Liam had set up a thick wooden target on the far wall. The enormous sheet of wood blocked the two small, living room windows, making the room feel smaller and darker, and took up almost the entire wall, but the target, an outline of a man, was drawn in the center in white and red. In fact, it was Liam’s outline. All the points that would kill if Harry landed a knife there were painted red. That meant the entirety of the throat, the eyes, the heart, and the much smaller targets of the arteries on the inside of the thighs and the inside of the armpits were red. It took almost all Harry’s strength to get the throwing knives that far with enough force that they’d stick in the wood. Less than half thunked into the plank and stayed there. Only three had hit inside Liam’s outline, none in the red zones. Harry, dripping sweat and growing tired, didn’t even pause. He kept collecting the knives and throwing, alternating arms, again and again.

Liam watched from the kitchen counter, head resting on his folded arms. He was really impressed even though he knew to expect something like this. Harry didn’t get discouraged. He didn’t complain or slack off. He put his all into every throw, diligently, almost like a machine. This was only the third day and already there was some progress. It was really impressive, actually. Boring, too. Harry didn’t need a coach or encouragement. He just worked away at it on his own until he got it right. Liam sighed and straightened. It was almost time for lunch. He might as well get started on that.

Harry was growing sloppy with exhaustion. He knew he should stop, but he was driven to get better, to get stronger. For Draco. The blond came home battered every night and as much as Harry loved kissing and licking those wounds better, wrapped in each other’s heat and making the air humid until they both reached completion, he also understood that Draco was pulling ahead of him, was growing and changing, and Harry would be left behind if he didn’t keep up.

Sweat stung his eyes and his throw went way wide of the target, the knife clattering to the floor. *One more*, he told himself. Just one more throw with his dominate hand. That had been his left. He was weaker with his left.

Harry took up a knife with his right hand and held it in front of him, aiming the tip. His arm shook, the tip wavered. He bit his lip and pulled his arm back to throw. Just as he was whipping his arm down, a knock sounded on the door behind him. It startled him. His hand slipped. The knife, sharp as hell, sliced along his fingers just above the second joint.

Liam hadn’t realized what had happened, was opening the door after looking out the peephole. Harry stood there, clasping his hands together, blood splattering the floor. It still didn’t hurt and Harry knew that was a bad sign.

Liam knew who was at the door without having ever seen him before. Sirius Black, the man Draco had wanted freed in order to escape Andromeda’s homophobia. He had black hair that was streaked with grey. It was left to hang free around his face, resting on his shoulders. It was curly, almost forming rings. His face and frame were skelletally thin. His features sharp and angular as a fox, similar enough to Draco’s own pointy features to be related somehow. His eyes were a rare ice blue, much lighter than Liam’s own darker blue eyes. His skin was starkly white, but it wasn’t a natural pale color. It was the white of years of captivity.

Sirius wasn’t as tall as Liam, standing a few inches shorter than Liam’s six foot, and he was terribly thin and generally unhealthy, but there was an intensity about his eyes that put Liam on edge.
Remus, the scar-faced man, stood at his side, in the background, almost invisible next to his friend.

“I’m Sirius Black,” the man introduced, voice lilting with a high-class British accent. He was not a baritone. He almost sounded like what Liam would think an elf from fantasy stories would sound like. Almost musical. “I’d like to see Harry.”

Liam frowned, not happy with the fact that Sirius made no mention of Draco. No one got to see Harry without the blond’s permission first. He opened his mouth to say just that when the scar-faced man’s hand lashed out, pushing at the door, trying to open it. Liam reflexively braced his weight to keep the door form moving inward. Furious, he was about to say some choice words when Remus spoke.

“I smell blood.”

Liam released the door and turned instantly to see Harry standing at the edge of the living room, staring at them with wide green eyes behind his glasses. Blood had slicked his forearm and dripped steadily to the floor from where Harry had his hands clamped together.

“I’m sorry,” he said, contrite.

Liam was already tugging him to the kitchen sink, holding his hand over the drain, trying to see the wound and hissed as blood fountained up without the compression. He saw the white of bone. Shit!

Sirius shouldered the Muggle away from Harry and grabbed Harry’s wrist. Remus had already taken position on Harry’s other side. Both of them had their wands ready. They chanted together, in sync as if the ten years apart had never happened. Harry’s flesh began to knit back together. Sirius had less to offer than Remus, his magical reserves low from his captivity, but it was enough to heal the terrible cut. It left him feeling shaky and proud when Harry washed the blood from his hand to reveal smooth skin with only a thin white line across the palm-side of his fingers.

“Thank you,” Harry said, looking up at Sirius.

His face was achingly familiar, the messy hair, the glasses even though the frames were a different shape and black instead of gold. The bright green of his eyes made Sirius ache for a different reason and he tried not to look directly into them. “You’re welcome,” he said, voice faint.

Remus guided them to the living room, swishing his wand to clean the blood. He shook his head at the nicked and slashed wood pinned on the far wall, the outline of a man and the knives on the ground making its purpose clear.

Sirius sat next to Harry on the couch. Remus chose an armchair. Liam, arms crossed, expression forbidding, planted himself at the kitchen divider, leaning his shoulder against it, so that he had a clear view of the room and could draw his gun easily if he needed to.

“Remus has told me the basics,” Sirius said, breaking the silence. Harry looked back at him politely. Tension grew in the room. Sirius’s hands fidgeted in his lap. Suddenly, he burst out, “I just want you to know.” Tear stung his eyes. “How sorry I am. That I couldn’t save your father.” His voice broke on his friend’s name. “James.” He cleared his throat. “I had a lot of time. To think. I left him vulnerable. Because I was weak. Because it hurt. And it got him killed.” He said it agin in a whisper. “I got him killed.” He looked over at Harry and saw James’s features a little thinner but there. He reached out trembling fingers to stroke along a messy lock of Harry’s black hair. “I would understand if you hate me, but I wanted you to know how sorry I am.”

Harry thought about it. First, he knew that Draco wanted Sirius to take guardianship rights, so Harry
couldn’t alienate the man. Second, it would benefit them if Sirius felt sorry and was therefore inclined to please them. Third, it was clear that Sirius felt very strongly about James, his biological father and it would not be a good idea to tell him that Harry didn’t really feel one way or another about his birth family. For one, it could upset Sirius and set him against them or it could negate Sirius’s feelings of being sorry and make him less likely to do stuff for them.

This needed diplomacy, so Harry drew on Narcissa’s teachings. She taught him how to be sensitive to double meanings and consequences. Taught him how to smooth a business relationship for Draco. To support and persuade, to bolster their allies, but also how to threaten and politically or socially demolish their enemies as well. Sirius, with tears in his eyes and hands trembling, needed more smoothing, less threatening.

He gave Sirius a practiced, soft smile, titling his body toward the man, gently touching the back of one hand to indicate sympathy or approval. “We have lost much,” he said gently. ‘We’ to indicate a united front with Draco. An acknowledgment of the loss, not forgiveness; they may still call that debt due. “However, we have been reunited. I’d like to focus on that for now.” Indicate value of the relationship, make the other feel worthy, important. “I assume Remus is taking care of you? Do you have a place to stay? Food? Clothes?” Magnanimous offer both to flaunt their resources, but also to put the other further into their debt.

Sirius reacted just as he should. His head bowed forward in gratitude. Tears streaked his face, but he also sat straighter, preening under the attention, the subtle acknowledgment of his worth to Harry. Harry took back his hand and Sirius wiped at his face.

“Yes. Remus has taken care of me. Thank you. I’ll be fine.” He barked a laugh. “Besides I should be the one trying to take care of you.”

Harry tilted his head, listening carefully to Sirius’s tone of voice. It wasn’t that Sirius was trying to assert control over them by stating their proper roles where Sirius was the authority and Harry the child under his control. There was a resigned edge to his voice, a rueful recognition that he was not in a position to care for a dependent.

“We will take care of each other,” Harry answered diplomatically, allowing Sirius at least an illusion of partial control.

Sirius smiled. “I’d like that.”

Harry smiled back, pleased with himself.

That was when Draco came home. He’d felt Harry’s shock, so he had cut his training short.

Liam practically came to attention as the blond walked through the door, Drey at his back. Draco was limping slightly. His lip was split but was no longer bleeding. He had a bruise already forming along his jaw and his his hair and clothes looked hastily straightened. In short, he looked exactly like a person who had been brawling.

Sirius stared at the little Malfoy, reflectively wanting to sneer, but too off balance to do so. The boy looked so much like Lucius had, but at the same time, he looked completely different. This kid was a tough little bugger. He wasn’t a prissy snob like Lucius. Even his body language and walk were completely different from Lucius. It left Sirius frozen, unsure how to react. This was and this wasn’t what he expected from Remus’s story.

Harry immediately left the couch to greet the blond. Draco reached his hands out and Harry accepted them without hesitation. Sirius stared, mouth dropping open, as Draco pulled Harry into a kiss, arms
sliding around Harry’s back, holding him close. One hand ran up Harry’s spine to tangle in the wild, black hair. Their heads tilted as the kiss deepened. Harry was putty in his hands, completely open and pliant. Sirius even saw a flash of tongue, and his whole body flushed red-hot. His heart pounded in his throat like a terrified rabbit’s.

As his physical reaction vibrated through his being, Sirius’s emotions went nova. Years of pent up love and lust, desire brutally repressed, the madness of it all, and FOR WHAT?! He’d fucking loved James more than he would ever love anything in the whole goddamned world! His whole fucking soul had BURNED with it! And here these two boys were, kissing, their love and passion undeniable, and the world hadn’t bloody ended! No one had bloody imploded! Harry was a sweet fucking kid! He wasn’t some corrupted, depraved thing! SO WHAT WAS THE GODDAMNED POINT OF DENYING HIS FEELINGS?! WHY HAD HE TORTURED HIMSELF SO BLOODY MUCH?! He’d thought he was protecting James, but James had died terribly anyway! Would it truly have been so bad to have been HONEST?

Draco practically purred as Harry gave himself sweetly to the kiss. He didn’t hesitate or question. He followed Draco’s lead perfectly, his pleasure and love wrapping around Draco like warm syrup. He felt his injuries heal a bit. His lips smoothed over. The twinge in his ankle quieting. The hot throbbing of his jaw cooling. He could feel his own power bolster Harry’s, otherwise the cost of such magic would leave Harry weak and burn through his reserves. Draco gently broke the kiss, staring into pupil-blown, green eyes for a second before tugging Harry against his side, facing the room once again.

He wasn’t prepared for the look of utter devastation on Sirius’s face. The man burst into heart breaking sobs, curling in on himself, folding over the arm of the couch. Harry went tense next to him, - worry - strumming through their bond.

Remus crouched and wrapped the broken man into his arms. Tears streaked his face as he looked up at a visibly worried Draco and Harry. “I didn’t know it when we were kids…” Remus bit his lip. “Maybe I should have noticed, but I didn’t.” He closed his eyes and rested his forehead against Sirius hair. The man was still sobbing, the sound broken. Remus’s voice could barely be heard of the terrible sound. “He’s gay. Hid it all our lives. He fell in love with James. Right before Lily was changed, he confessed, begged for forgiveness. James gave it to him, of course. Wormtail overheard. Was afraid James would actually give Sirius a chance romantically, so he potioned Lily and participated in a ritual that warped her heart and soul. After that, James vowed to take care of her. As atonement. And Sirius didn’t press him. Practically exiled himself to protect James from what he thought were evil desires. You know how it ended.”

Draco had known parts of that story, of course, but he hadn’t realized Sirius had felt quite so deeply or bore wounds quite that raw however. He had just wanted to make it clear where they stood. He wouldn’t have another Andromeda.

Draco sighed and released Harry. A look made it clear he wanted Harry to stay back. He approached the still sobbing man. With each step he took, he tried to internalize the story Remus had just shared. Tried to comprehend the pain, the need, the motivation of the man breaking in front of them. Tried to anticipate what Sirius needed.

A hard gesture at Remus had the man reluctantly giving Draco space. Draco reached forward and firmly took hold of Sirius’s hair. There was no resistance. He crouched and lifted Sirius’s head simultaneously. The man stared at him, blind with emotional pain, face a mess. Draco sighed and leaned forward, slotting his mouth over Sirius’s.

He gave it his all. Sensual, overpowering, letting his tongue dominate Sirius’s mouth, he moved their
lips in a passionate kiss. Sirius gasped into Draco’s mouth, hands coming up to push the boy away. Draco let himself be pushed and smiled. Sirius wasn’t crying anymore. He could hear him.

“That boy you once were,” Draco said, voice low and intense. “That boy who was always afraid, always fighting to do the right thing and only getting hurt… That boy is gone, Sirius. He’s gone and he’s never coming back unless you let him.”

Sirius was gasping, heart thundering, hands almost painfully tight on Draco’s slender shoulders. He could hardly comprehend what the boy was saying. His lips were on fire! That had been his first kiss, and it had been more than he could put into words… Shock, pleasure, desire, rejection, grief, love for James, denial - sparked and swirled and churned through his head.

“You have Harry and me now,” Draco’s voice pressed on, growing clearer with every word. Those grey eyes almost forcibly grounded him. “You get to start over, Sirius. And James. James loved you. Otherwise he wouldn’t have forgiven you. Otherwise Peter wouldn’t have been afraid James would actually give you a chance.”

Sirius gasped again, fresh tears welling, but Draco reached up to clasp his damp cheeks between his hands, commanding his attention.

“He loved you as much as you loved him. Even if it wasn’t sexual for him. And now you have a choice, Sirius. You can choose to either take that love with you into your second life. Or you can carry his pain forward and collapse.”

“James…” Sirius whimpered, sobs rising again.

Draco pressed his forehead against Sirius’s. “Listen,” he implored, mouth only a bare inch from Sirius’s, their breath mingling. “No one can choose what part of James to keep alive but you. Only you get to make that choice. Because of the undeniable bond you had together. He even gave you his only son. Sirius, he gave you Harry!”

Draco’s voice hardened, became more of a command, and he pulled away and stood, looking down at the wide-eyed man. “Accept James’s last wish. Let his love live on through you.” He flung his arm back, gesturing at Harry. “Through Harry! Stand tall, Sirius! Stand and let love win for once!”

Sirius felt his heart beating in his throat. He felt hot and cold at the same time, but he felt compelled to stand. He wavered, almost falling back onto his butt until Remus’s steady hand braced him.

He closed his eyes and, as always, James was there, but not the exhausted expression, the grieved face that Sirius saw so often at the end. Or the pared down, determined expression of a man who was burning his own soul up on a hopeless quest. No, Sirius began to see the face he had lost while under the care of Dementors. James young and happy and full of life. So generous and kind and full of humor. Truly gifted with magic. Brilliant at Quidditch. A shining star. He saw the face of true love. And it burned away the grief, the regret and the guilt just as Draco said. It filled him with strength. This was the James he wanted to live on; this was his choice!

Sirius opened his eyes. Fresh tears bathed his face, but this time they felt cleansing instead of like they would drown him. He reached forward and Draco reached for him in return. They clasped hands, their grip strong, tight, real. He gave a nod, his throat too tight, his heart still pounding. It was enough. Draco smiled, and the smile lit up his face, changed it even further from Lucius’s reflection. Then Harry stepped up to Draco’s side. He reached forward and put his hand above theirs, holding them together. His face shone with the same joy that Sirius remembered now in James, and he couldn’t help choking out a tearful laugh.
“Let’s do this,” he rasped, voice hoarse but clear.

The boys nodded in unison and they bounced their hands once, like a cheer, before releasing Sirius and stepping back.

“Why don’t you wash up while I help Liam get lunch on the table,” Harry offered kindly.

Sirius found himself being led away by Remus. He stared at himself in the bathroom mirror, wondering if he was dreaming all this. His hand lifted to touch his lips. “Did that just happen?”

“I have no idea what just happened, but it happened,” Remus answered dryly, his golden-brown eyes rueful. “I hope they didn’t overwhelm you.”

Sirius caught his friend’s eyes in the mirror and said almost numbly, “I think they saved me.” Then heart nearly bursting, he closed his eyes and clung to the newly regained memories of James. Voice a hushed, reverent whisper, he confessed, “Saved James.”

Slowly the euphoria dissipated as he felt Remus wash his face with a damp cloth and something stood out among the rest. He caught Remus’s hand and squeezed, forcing his friend to meet his eyes. “How did you know all that?” he asked, voice tight with anxiety.

Remus stood in his friend’s grip, voice low with confession. “I left it out before. I didn’t want to upset you. But Severus and I performed a ritual.”

Very reluctantly he explained what truths had spilled from Peter’s hateful corpse. Sirius’s grip grew painfully tight, but Remus was used to pain and didn’t even wince. He deserved any pain Sirius wanted to inflict. Remus had been a terrible friend. To James. To Sirius. Even to Peter. Back then, he’d been so caught up in his curse that he hadn’t even noticed his friends struggling with their own burdens.

“And… it doesn’t bother you? You aren’t disgusted?” Sirius demanded, shaking the arm he held so tightly in his grasp.

Remus faced Sirius squarely. “I don’t give a shit, Siri. Truly I don’t. Who you sleep with is your own business. You have the right to privacy. You have the right to your own body. I don’t understand why it matters to everybody. Honestly, I don’t. It has nothing to do with anyone else but you and your partner. It’s not like they even have an excuse like they do with lycanthropy. Because it’s not a danger to them; it’s not like it’s contagious like the bite! Besides… I’ve seen horrible things, Sirius. Experienced horrible things. So have you. We’ve seen true evil and sadism. Love… The world needs all the love it can get, and I don’t see how you thinking someone is beautiful or desirable can be anything offending.”

Sirius stared at Remus in absolute shock. He had never in a million years thought ANYONE would accept him, and in the space of fifteen minutes, he’d seen two boys kiss the living daylights out of each other, been kissed, and had his closest friend tell him it was okay. He stood there completely shocked.

Remus felt tears burn his eyes. He wrapped Sirius in a tight hug. “I’m sorry, Sirius. I had no idea back then. I wish you had told me. I would have told you this then. They’re wrong, Sirius. Dead wrong! They can believe what they want, that’s their right, but they have no right to tell you what you can and can’t do with your own heart and body. It’s none of their bloody business!”

Sirius clutched Remus to him hard as he cried for the millionth time that day.

…
Liam set a salad on the table and looked at Draco with a cocked eyebrow. “Was that really necessary?” Drey had excused herself and Harry was putting the finishing touches on the sandwiches at the sink, so Liam and Draco were alone at the table.

Draco sighed. Harry had fetched him water and the glass was already half-empty. “Can you imagine it, Liam? Let’s say you were told all your life that liking women was wrong. That breasts were gross. That thinking about their curves and legs were disgusting. Told you that you should admire pecks and broad backs. Expected you to like dicks. What if you grew up with everyone you knew liking dicks and that women were okay to be friends with but that’s it. Can you really imagine what that feels like?”

Draco laughed as Liam wrinkled his nose and continued. “Yeah. Nothing they say, nothing you do, will make you any less repulsed by touching another dick besides your own. But if you don’t want to be beaten or rejected or alone, then you’re going to pretend because remember you’re just a kid and kids are stupid like that.”

Liam couldn’t really imagine it past the feeling of it being yucky and no way could he even pretend, but he got where Draco was going with this. “So how does kissing him help?”

Draco shrugged. “Needed to shock him out of that loop. I’ve felt Harry in a spiral. Nothing short of a hard kick to the balls will break the cycle.”

Harry ducked his head, a blush staining his cheeks as he carried over the plate of sandwiches. “You never kicked me.”

Draco grinned. “Nah. Found a better way, didn’t I? Worked for Sirius, too. Besides…” His voice softened, became more serious. “Probably his first kiss in his entire miserable life. ‘Bout time he broke through that self-imposed exile, don’t you think, and allowed himself to feel his own damn sexuality?” His expression became challenging, dangerous. “Don’t forget, Liam, I’m going to change their fucking world. They’ll have to accept Harry and me together or we’ll leave them to deal with their own damn problems. So he might as well start thinking about the fact that he can be open about it.”

Liam felt both hopeful and deeply worried. Hopeful because when the magical world didn’t comply that would mean Draco and Harry would return to him permanently. But worried because he had the feeling Draco actually thought they he a chance to succeed and change the whole damn world. And, really, how realistic was that? Even the real world didn’t accept homosexual pairs. Sure, there were pockets of support and a community of sorts, but mainstream acceptance didn’t exist.

Liam didn’t have time to ask any more careful questions because Sirius, face freshly scrubbed, and Remus had returned. He sighed, resigned to their addition. “We’re going to need a bigger table.”

Chapter end.

A/N: I know it’s a short chapter, but it felt like a good ending point. Hope you enjoyed it! I look forward to any feedback you care to give.

I know it’s not going to be that simple to heal Sirius. He’s still going to struggle and have issues, but I think he’s making some big realizations and some progress toward healing.
Draco stood in the dimness of their bedroom, carefully stripping off his clothes. His muscles pulled painfully. The bruises dotting his torso and thighs hurt with a deep pervading ache, but that was not why a frown sat on his features. Harry was already in the bathroom, getting it ready for Draco, and there was a heaviness in the bond that was growing with every minute that passed, like ice stealing across the surface of a lake.

Draco left his clothes in a pile on the floor and gingerly pulled on his own robe before heading into the bathroom. Harry stood naked by the shower, arm in the spray, adjusting the temperature. His robe was folded carefully on the toilet seat lid and his glasses were set carefully on the counter by the sink. The lead in Draco’s stomach grew to the size of a fist as his boy’s dark head didn’t lift to look at him, instead remaining ducked.

Draco turned the lock on the door and tossed his robe carelessly half into the sink. He stood naked before Harry, head tilted, considering. “Was it the kiss?” he asked. He couldn’t think of anything else that would make Harry feel so on edge, the bond heavy with… was it dread? Shame? Draco couldn’t tell. It was the only thing Draco could think of, but he was completely baffled why it would have upset Harry at all.

Harry looked up in confusion, green eyes bare and bright. “Kiss?”

“That I gave Sirius,” Draco clarified.

Harry’s eyes widened in surprise. Draco knew him - knew him inside and out. Knew his darkness, the truth of his beginning, had known him when he was Freak, had been the one to shape him into something better. And still, despite knowing the depth of Harry’s darkness, Draco had stared straight into Harry’s soul, his eyes burning silver, and promised…

“One day, Harry, you’ll wear this dress or one like it in front of the world. And everyone will understand what you are to me. What we are to each other. And I’ll marry you. I’ll take you as my bride. And the world will know you’re mine and no one else’s…”

That was so much more than Harry had ever expected… To follow Draco, to take care of him, to love him - yes, of course! But for Draco to know who Harry truly was and want him as his bride, a partner beloved and cherished… It made Harry completely breathless just to think about it! Harry would forever more carry those words like fire burning just under his skin …

Compared to all that… It hadn’t even occurred to him to be bothered by Draco kissing Sirius (to comfort the man, or had it been a test?) Either way, it hadn’t bothered Harry at all. So, no… That small kiss wasn’t what was making Harry’s stomach churn.

Harry dropped gracefully to his knees and raised his hand palm up so that Draco could see the evidence of his sin. “I knew I was tired,” he confessed quietly. “But I kept going anyway. I messed up my throw and cut my fingers. Remus and Sirius healed it with a spell.”

Draco frowned and grabbed Harry’s hand, bending to look at it closely. A thin white line that hadn’t been there a few hours before ran across the underside of all four of Harry’s fingers. It looked thickest across the ring and pinky finger. Draco traced the new scar. “How bad was it?”
Harry hung his head, vision filled with the white tile of the bathroom floor. The feel of Draco’s hand holding his sent warmth straight through him. He thrilled in even that small touch, and his guilt deepened because he didn’t deserve it. His knees were already aching, and he relished in it as his rightful punishment. “Too the bone,” he confessed.

“Are you sure they healed you properly?” Draco asked as neutrally as he could, his hand tightening reflexively around Harry’s. He couldn’t look away from that thin white scar.

Harry’s head hung even further. “There’s a little tightness when I close my hand into a fist, but I think it will get better the more I move my fingers around.”

Draco’s eyes finally shifted past Harry’s hand and took in the bowed head and kneeling position of his boy. He considered his next move.

He’d known Harry might hurt himself while practicing with knives, Liam had made sure they both understood the danger, but Draco couldn’t keep Harry locked in a bubble. The boy wouldn’t survive that; he’d self-destruct with self-hatred within weeks! Harry was obsessed with being useful. And with Voldemort’s soul still attached to Harry’s, Draco couldn’t be sure Harry wouldn’t have to fight at some point, anyway. So Harry’s best chance at happiness and survival was to learn how to defend himself.

No, it wasn’t because of the cut that sent ice slicing through Draco’s core. Not really. It was because Harry still too easily dismissed danger to himself. Harry always pushed himself too hard. Always held himself to the impossible standard of perfection, and he always sought punishment when he fell short. Draco knew he couldn’t do much about that, but he could at least drill the importance of physical safety into the boy. Self-sacrifice was never an option! Just the thought of Harry dying to protect him made Draco feel literally sick.

Eyes lidded as he thought it through, Draco continued to run his thumb over the scar. Harry remained perfectly motionless at his feet, head bowed, eyes on the cold tile. Steam was beginning to fill the bathroom, making Draco a pale, indistinct shape in the mirror. The hissing sound of water hitting the shower floor was almost soothing.

“I want you to think about your answer carefully,” Draco said softly, thumb still caressing Harry’s fingers. He waited a minute, to be sure Harry was listening. “Am I mad about the cut?”

Harry bit his lip. His muscles clenched and trembled with the effort of holding perfectly still. Sweat was beginning to dampen his hairline. Was Draco mad about the cut? His mind raced, desperate for the right answer, to not disappoint Draco any further, to redeem himself. Think, Harry, he hissed to himself viciously. Why is Draco mad? He closed his eyes tight and bit his lip harder.

Draco waited patiently. He watched, as the boy begin to tremble, first in his arm from the effort of holding it aloft, then down his torso, and listened to the way Harry began to breathe faster, a hiss between clenched teeth. “Well?” he prompted gently.

Harry released his lip. His voice was faint, trembling with anxiety. “You’re mad… I let myself get hurt?”

Draco crouched, ignoring the bruises blooming on his thigh. His hand reached up, clasping Harry’s wrist firmly to hold the boy’s hand in the air, stretched above Harry’s head. He smiled, soft and sweet, and leaned forward to kiss Harry’s bitten lip, taking it between his own teeth playfully. Harry’s anxiety broke apart with the clean wash of relief.

Draco smiled and pulled back. “Close, Harry. Very close. Good job.” He held Harry’s eyes, waiting
for Harry’s disappointment at a non-perfect answer to ebb before continuing. “I’m mad because you thought about it. You knew you were tired. And you chose to throw it anyway. This wasn’t an unavoidable accident, Harry. Those are going to happen. No, this was different. This was preventable. You could have made a different choice. To take a break. So the right answer is: I’m mad you let yourself get hurt when you could have prevented it.”

Harry was crying now as Draco laid out his transgressions. Draco was right. Absolutely right. “Yes, Draco,” he confessed through his tears. His arm was burning from being held aloft so long. His knees throbbed sharply. He embraced those minor pains. “Sorry, Draco. Sorry.”

“I know you are,” Draco murmured, barely loud enough to be heard. He rose out of the crouch, his thigh screaming, and kissed Harry’s violently trembling fingertips. He released Harry’s wrist and pressed down on the offered hand, signaling for Harry to return it to his side. “What would have happened if Remus wasn’t there to heal it?” he asked, voice matter-of-fact. They both already knew the answer, so he moved past Harry to the shower, stepping under the deliciously warm spray.

“I would’ve had to heal it,” Harry answered, still kneeling, his back to Draco, voice raw. Draco nodded, slicking his wet hair back. “And without me? Without using our bond to amplify your magic?”

Harry cringed. “I would have exhausted myself.”

“So that’s what we’re going to pretend happened. Remus won’t always be there, after all. Stand up. Look at me.”

Harry got stiffly to his feet and obeyed, his gut burning with guilt, his face wet with tears. Draco gave him an understanding smile and reached for him. “We’re going to pretend you’re too tired to heal me because you had to heal yourself without me, so no healing me tonight.”

Harry’s eyes widened in horror, eyes flashing to the darkening bruises littering Draco’s body: thigh, ribs, jaw. Draco lifted an eyebrow. “Did you forget I rely on you to take care of me?”

“No, Draco!” Harry denied hotly. He never forgot that. Expression turning into something almost sly, Draco gave a smile, eyes lidded, and said, “Prove it. But no healing,” he reminded.

Harry moved instantly. He soaped his hands and began to gently massage Draco’s unbruised skin. He couldn’t erase Draco’s pain, but he could still give him pleasure. The warm water soothed his own aching muscles and abused knees, but that was all background noise. His complete focus was on where he touched Draco.

The scent of vanilla filled the humid air as Harry massaged body wash over Draco’s shoulders and arms. Draco’s skin, heavily scarred, was still a beautiful pale white, almost like porcelain, and Harry adored touching every silken inch.

Draco was nearing twelve years old. He was growing taller, his body changing so slowly it was almost unnoticeable, but not to Harry. He noticed the slight widening of his shoulders, the longer fingers, growing feet. The subtle, soft hair just barely beginning to grow under his arms and the few spare, dark blond hairs that had appeared on his balls.
Draco leaned languidly against the warmed tiles as Harry’s fingers loosened the knots he found. *Happy pleasure* - began to break apart the *guilt regret shame* that vibrated down the bond and into Draco, making him relax further. He sank his hand into Harry’s wet hair, gently rubbing at the boy’s scalp. All the stress and fear disappeared. Only Harry existed - Harry and hot water and languid pleasure.

“So good,” he praised, letting his eyes fall closed, listening to the sounds of the warm water and enjoying Harry’s hands on him.

Harry blushed red, heart thudding in his throat. Slowly, he sank to his tender knees to begin working on Draco’s bruised thighs and his leanly-muscled calves. As he stared up at Draco, there was no denying the blond was feeling good, and that sent *pride* - sparkling through his insides. It made him want to earn more of that sweet praise.

Hands sliding down Draco’s calf, Harry carefully lifted the blond’s foot, giving Draco enough time to brace his weight, before Harry placed it in his lap. He began to massage the arch, his thumbs pressing in firmly and rubbing his knuckles under the arch. Draco groaned and, breathlessly, Harry twisted his finger gently between each toe. Draco actually gasped and his member, already half-stiff, began to harden in earnest. Harry’s cheeks grew even hotter; his heart pumped faster.

After massaging Draco’s foot for several minutes, he made sure to rinse the soap off completely before setting it back down and reaching for the other one. His knees ached terribly on the hard floor of the shower, but he hardly noticed. Harry was captivated by the sounds Draco was making, the beauty of his body arching and melting in turns at Harry’s loving touch, and Harry bit back a moan of his own. He dug his knuckles into Draco’s arch and boldly bent forward to suck on the soapy toes.

Draco words fell incoherent from almost slack lips. Harry’s tongue was hot and slick, it lapped at the sensitive skin between his toes sending shivers across his frame. The gentle suction made him gasp and cling to the wall, shocks of pleasure shooting up his nerves. His hips rocked against the air as Harry suddenly sucked hard, going down on his toes, head bobbing, cheeks hollowing. Draco’s dick twitched hard, slapping his lower belly.

“*Fuck,*” he hissed, hands futilely trying to grab onto the slick wall. His leg gave a twitch and he had to pull it away to keep his footing. “Come here,” he growled and stared hungrily into Harry’s dilated eyes. Arousal throbbed between them in waves. “Turn around. Want your thighs.”

Harry obeyed readily, bracing his arms against the wall. Draco quickly soaped up his inner thighs and Harry began to pant. His skin was humming, burning, and he shuddered and went as limp as he could while still keeping his feet. - *Yours - make me yours - let me make you feel good - take care of you - please make me useful - make me yours* - the nearly incoherently begging filled his mind, but it never made it past his lips. He was breathless and flying with endorphins and lust. His heart raced and pounded in his throat. Every touch of Draco’s firm hands as he was maneuvered into the position Draco wanted burned like fire - *want need please YOURS!*

Draco tugged Harry’s hips back and pressed on the boy’s back so that Harry was leaning forward. He had to bend his knees to slot his cock between the boy’s thighs; it was uncomfortable, his bruises hurt, but he was so close it didn't fucking matter. “Cross your ankles,” he growled.

Harry did as he was told, closing his slicked thighs tight around Draco’s hard heat. Then Draco began to move. He bent over Harry’s back, the hot water crashing around them. His hips hit Harry’s ass with a hard smack, the sting immediate. Harry gasped and tried to push back, to hold position and not be flattened by Draco’s force, overwhelmed by Draco’s *pleasure*...
Oh god! Draco! Yes! Yours! I’m yours! - It took all the strength of Harry’s body to stay upright. He thrilled in the effort, his mind blown with the clawing grip of Draco’s hands on his hips, the blond’s guttural grunts and growls in his ear.

It was a dizzying blur of friction between his slicked thighs, the slap of every hard thrust, and the electrifying sound of Draco’s pleasure. Harry flung his head back, arms trembling under the effort of stabilizing their combined weight. The green of his eyes was swallowed by the black of lust. The humid air seemed to gain weight and life, curling around them, electrifying their drenched skin as their magic twined and curled, pulsing.

Draco reached around and gripped the base of Harry’s dick, preventing him from cumming as he careened over the crest of the wave, hot ecstasy exploding through his body. His hips slapped up against Harry’s ass and thighs one last time, stuttering. A crashing roared in his ears. Everything felt so damn good!

Harry bit his lip hard as he actually felt Draco’s cock pulse between his legs, heard the splatter against tile. He would have cum at the sound of Draco’s sharp cry in his ear, but the fist around his cock was too tight. He was owned completely. Draco had complete control of Harry’s body, and it was so fucking glorious Harry’s eyes rolled in his head. He hovered, feeling the echo of Draco’s pleasure, but not quite in the mix of it. He was Draco’s. Only what Draco allowed would be, and it was such utter perfection his brain nearly melted even as his dick felt fit to burst, verging on agony.

Cheek pressed against the tile, Harry panted and waited, helpless and on the fevered edge of his own orgasm. A fear he hadn’t even realized was there, tensed and coiled poisonously inside him, slowly disintegrated. He had lately begun to make decisions, to take the initiative, and it was nothing short of terrifying, but he could relax. Draco was still in control; he still owned Harry. Harry was safe.

As tears of - love gratitude relief - streaked his cheeks, other sensations slowly seeped in past the throbbing in his cock. Harry’s ass felt pleasantly hot, and he became aware of the weight of Draco still draped over his back. The sound of Draco’s breathing evened out until it became lost once more in the sound of the shower, and the painful edge of denied pleasure slipped farther away. Harry groaned as a deep, perfect ache settled in his balls.

Draco slowly peeled himself from Harry’s back and rinsed off in the warm spray. Harry maintained his position - ass out, thighs squeezed together, cheek pressed to the wall - as he hadn’t received a signal that he was allowed to move. He was a fucking gorgeous sight, and Draco was tempted to take a picture:

Slender feet with ankles crossed… The crease of Harry’s thighs pressed tight together, a smear of white cum just under his round, pinked ass cheeks… The slope of his back as he was bent nearly in half… The way his trembling arms splayed across the tile… The lax profile of his face, his cheek pressed against the wall… His wet, black hair obscuring his eyes and falling across his cheeks…

If he wasn’t so drained, Draco would have gotten hard again. Taking in the sight, knowing Harry was his and would always be his, he growled low in his throat. Their magic was still coiled deliciously in the air around them, unfinished, and Draco shivered, enjoying the charged sensation.

Grinning, he smoothed his hand over the curve of Harry’s hip affectionately. “Wash,” he ordered, languid and relaxed.

“Yes, Draco,” Harry answered, voice hoarse, eyes still dilated with arousal, dick still hard against the top of his thigh.

“Good boy,” Draco praised and kissed Harry’s cheek as Harry came off the wall and stood. “You
did so good for me.”

The magic in the air had already begun to dissipate, and Harry realized that the moment in the shower was over. The painful ache in his balls throbbed hotly as Harry remembered he was being punished, remembered why. He watched Draco step out of the shower and limp over to get a towel. The bruises stood out starkly on Draco’s fair skin. They had to hurt, all the more for the workout Draco had just put his body through, and Harry felt a complex tangle of emotion form a lump in his throat.

There was no doubt Draco had wanted it, and the cum still in strings on the tile wall proved that Draco had felt good doing it, but that didn’t change the fact that Draco was hurt and Harry was forbidden from healing him. Because he’d been careless. He hadn’t thought things through. He hadn’t kept his mind on the bigger picture, his bigger purpose.

“I’ll make you my bride.”

Harry was starting to understand what that meant. Together… Married… Bound… And he was starting to understand that it wasn’t something that would happen in some distant, amazing future. Not really. Because… They were already bound, weren’t they? Already together. Harry had known that… Of course he knew that! … but he was starting to understand it in a different way. Harry’s life and Draco’s… They were one and the same. The consequences of his actions would fall on Draco, always, just as the decisions Draco made encompassed Harry, always.

“I’m Draco’s…” he said as he’d said a million times in the past and would say a million times in the future. Slowly, reverently, he added, “And Draco is mine…” He hadn’t said that as often. It was a newer concept, but Harry was beginning to understand what it meant.

“I will make you my bride,” Draco had promised with fiercely sharp silver eyes, but it was a promise that was already in motion, already becoming true. Harry was already halfway down that path and racing toward the fulfillment of that vow.

He stared at the bathroom door, oblivious to the water turning cold, green eyes sparkling and so full of - LOVE - and - AWE - it almost burned through his skin with a force that was hotter and brighter than the sun.

…

Leaning with his back to the door, separated by a bare inch of wood, Draco grinned fiercely and pressed a fist to his chest, trying to contain the emotions thundering through the bond. Blinking tears from his eyes, he whispered, “Yours.” Everything Draco was - everything bright, protective, caring - everything destructive, cruel, and cunning - they were all for Harry. He was Harry’s. And Harry was, “Mine,” Draco rasped, eyes flat silver disks, the word almost a growl in his throat.

Harry was starting to truly get it, and Draco was so fucking proud he could almost howl with laughter. Instead, he forced himself to take a deep breath and push away from the door. Harry was only just beginning to understand. He had come a long way, but he was still overcoming abuse so severe that he still struggled to consider himself human. It didn’t matter, though. Draco would take care of him, just like he’d promised those four years ago in a dark and barren slave hold.

Burning from the inside with Harry’s dawning understanding, Draco buried his face in a pillow. He shifted until he was comfortable and none of his bruises protested too much. He was almost asleep when a slender arm draped softly over his lower back and wet hair tickled the back of his neck as Harry curled against his side.
“I’m sorry, Draco,” Harry whispered. “I won’t forget again. Promise.”

Soft reverent kisses were pressed butterfly soft against his shoulder with - LOVE devotion - and Draco, feeling cherished, sank into a deep, restful sleep. For the first time in days, his sleep was free of nightmares and terror as Harry’s warmth surrounded him.

…

- January 8th -

Harry dreamed of cumming. He dreamed of Draco, skin glistening with sweat. The blond rocked and moaned above him, Harry’s legs cradling his hips. The feel of slick warmth between them, the smell of musk and cum enveloped him. Silver eyes burning.

Harry woke with a gasping cry, hand flying between his legs. Cum was leaking from the tip of his cock, and Harry squeezed the base the way Draco had done the night before. God, it hurt. Whimpering softly, his hips rocked helplessly against the air, body undulating against sheets that clung to his sweaty skin. He was desperate, but even half-asleep and on the verge of a wet dream orgasm he knew he wasn’t allowed, knew he was being punished. Blurry-eyed, he whimpered and looked for Draco.

Soft golden light filtered in through their small window. It fell on Draco’s face and seemed to glow on his pale skin. Blond lashes glinted almost sliver against Draco’s cheeks. His lips were slack in sleep, drool gathered delicately in one corner of his mouth. His breathing was slow and rhythmic, like the ocean tide. He was so beautiful it brought tears to Harry’s eyes.

His fingers trembled as they reached to brush across Draco’s fair cheek, but they stopped just above Draco’s sleep-warmed skin with the absolute certainty that he was not worthy of touching Draco’s perfection. But that didn’t stop his dick from throbbing hotly, aching to be touched, and he quickly clamped down around the base once more. Turning his head, Harry bit his pillow savagely to smother a cry of need.

Slowly the wave of lust faded enough for him to think. Harry blinked tears from his eyes and sat up carefully. He was panting, breath coming harsh and heavy. His movements pulled the blankets down off Draco and Harry’s eyes fastened to the dark bruises that glared darkly on Draco’s pale skin. The sight cooled his head further. He wanted more than anything in the world - more than breathing, more than cumming - to erase those marks.

Harry looked again to the window. It was daytime. Draco had said Harry couldn’t heal him last night. Was his punishment technically over then? Salivating, heart thundering because he knew he was on the edge of disobedience, Harry swallowed a lump of fear and need and crawled forward…

Draco woke with a soft groan, something warm and wet dragging slowly over the crease of his upper thigh and hip, tantalizingly close to his raging hard on. Fluttering his eyes open, he saw early morning light filtering in through their white curtains. “Shit,” he moaned, hand automatically going down toward and landing on Harry’s wild head of hair. Draco’s attention sharpened.

The blankets had been tossed carelessly aside. They were both naked, having fallen into bed right after their shower. The slightly smaller boy was pressed against his side, his bare ass leaning against Draco’s shoulder. A spiky twist of - nervous excitement need - sparked across the bond.

Draco sucked in a sharper breath, his hand tightening on Harry’s hair as the boy’s tongue lapped dangerously close to his balls. Draco was shocked! Harry was always so careful to get permission before touching him - Partly because Draco tended to freak out or have flashbacks if the contact was
unexpected and partly because Harry was still afraid that it wasn’t okay to touch other people.

Harry’s tongue dragged slowly down the crease of his thigh, the boy’s back arching slightly as he moved his head. Draco released Harry’s hair and brought his hand up above his head. Before Harry had a chance to tense or sense what was coming, he brought it down in a smack against the boy’s ass. The angle was wrong. It was more a glancing blow than anything truly painful, but the noise was nice and satisfying. Harry came up off his lap with a choked cry, eyes wide as - *FEAR* - streaked across the bond like lightning.

Draco smirked, still sleepy. Served Harry right. This could have gone totally south if Draco had had a flashback. Harry had taken a risky gamble, but... Draco was okay. In fact, he was more than okay. He gave a purring moan and asked, voice husky with sleep, “Did I tell you to stop?”

“Sorry, Draco,” Harry said in a breathy whisper. Green eyes peered at him over the curve of a shoulder - *RELIEF happy love*. The boy’s cheeks were red hot and Draco could feel the boy’s heart pounding where Harry’s chest rested against his side. Voice soft and pleading, he asked, “Please?”

Draco grinned and lay back against the pillows. “Yeah. Go for it.”

Instantly his cock was surrounded by wet suction. Harry buried him deep, the head of his dick settling in the back of Harry’s throat, cutting off the boy’s air. Gagging, Harry slowly dragged his mouth up before falling down fast and hard.

“Fuck!” Draco yelled, bringing his hand down again. The smack cracked though the air, punctuating Draco’s cry. Harry gagged harder, trying to cry out, but his throat was blocked. He quickly pulled up, panting, face already tear-streaked and red as he coughed.

“You started it,” Draco growled. “And I told you not to stop.” He grabbed a fistful of Harry’s hair and pressed impatiently. Harry’s lips parted, curled inward to shield his teeth and closed around Draco once more. Draco’s eyes fluttered at the feel of wet heat around him.

Harry began trembling as his head sank on Draco’s rigid member, but the - *lust need excitement* - drenching the bond told Draco that Harry was enjoying it. Harry’s powerful arousal ramped up his own. Draco was no longer half-asleep and languid. He was sharp and hungry. He held Harry’s head down as he lifted his hips, thrusting upward. The head of his cock slid past the soft entrance to Harry’s throat and was hugged tightly by the boy’s convulsive swallowing. It sent lightning through Draco’s system, his whole body went taut and he had a need to thrust wildly, but he was on his back, the leverage was all wrong.

Draco let out a hiss and bounced his hips urgently. The spongy head of his cock was sucked in and out of that soft constriction as Harry’s body struggled, and the sensation made his eyes roll and his fist clench hard in Harry’s hair to keep the boy’s head pinned.

Harry came completely undone. His mouth gaped, his body convulsed, his vision went black with suffocation. Each time his body tried to gasp in air, Draco’s bouncing hips pushed his cock past the seal of his throat, filling him completely. And it felt fucking amazing! Only the sharp pain of Draco’s brutal grip on his hair kept him coherent. His face went red and tight, his eyes bulged even as they rolled; it was all too much. With a surge of - *ECSTASY* - he lost all control. It felt like his dick exploded as cum splattered the bedsheets under him.

Draco growled, the bond a storm of electric pleasure as Harry convulsed against his side. Releasing Harry’s head, Draco let his hips fall and spanked Harry’s ass again. Harry gasped and spluttered, spit drooling out to soak Draco’s cock and balls. Harry was completely limp, head pillowed on Draco’s thigh - *NEEDneedNEED* - thundered through the bond as Harry lay completely dazed.
Confused by the lust still saturating the bond, making his mind swim and his blood boil, Draco slid a shaking hand between Harry’s thighs. The boy was still hard as a brick even as he was soaked with cum. Magic coiled and tore at the air. The blankets twisted themselves into knots, the curtains were doing the same. The dresser began to rattle softly. Harry wasn’t done; it was clear he needed more.

Riding high, heart beating a rapid tattoo against his chest, Draco laughed and spanked Harry again - smash! “Well? Keep going,” he growled.

Harry weakly, messily, slurped the head of Draco’s cock back into his mouth. It took a minute, but he was able to brace his hands on Draco’s thighs and lift himself up. His arms shook, his head swam, but his whole body still felt like it was on fire. A needy whine escaped him as he let gravity pull his head downward. His throat clenched at the head of Draco’s dick, but before it could grip the rounded tip, Harry was lifting off again. He was desperately sucking air noisily through his nose. His hand slipped, his muscles weak, and he collapsed, shaking, and sank down further on Draco’s cock than ever before.

“Holy fuck!” Draco’s whole body went tense. His heels dug into the bed as he lifted his hips off the mattress. He brought his hand down with more force - smack! “Like that! Just like that!”

Wide eyed, Harry could feel the collar prevent his throat from expanding and squeeze Draco tighter. Harry froze, glorying in the sensation of Draco owning him completely; owning his life, his breath. He pulled off and desperately sucked in air only to plunge back down and slam Draco deep into his throat where the collar held him clenched around Draco’s length.

Draco was right there, filling him up, and the blond’s wild cries of pleasure, the slap of Draco’s hand against his ass, it spurred him on, made him hold to consciousness even as he was being sucked down into darkness. It felt like he was on fire! He was burning alive and flying apart. Harry’s heart beat so loud it filled his ears with a roar. The musky smell of Draco’s sex and sweat filled his senses. The taste of Draco’s bitter cum coated his mouth and throat.

Just when Harry was about to faint completely, body going limp, Draco screamed “FUCK!” and held him down, thrusting into his throat one last time as he came hard and dirty. Draco yanked Harry’s mouth off dick and the last bit of cum shot out across Harry’s forehead and cheek. Harry dropped on his side, limp and blind, coughing and hacking, gasping helplessly as Draco, gasping himself, got on his knees to loom over Harry.

Draco leaned down and panted over Harry’s face. The boy’s dick was red and hot and swollen in his fist. It looked painful, cum drizzling helplessly from the tip. He squeezed the base brutally before releasing with a growled order, “Cum for me, Harry. Show me how much you liked that.”

Harry’s body constricted painfully as a surge of - LUST pleasure shock - crashed through he bond. Harry’s eyes rolled completely back, his body convulsed, and as his brain exploded, he blacked out just as he felt his cum explode, splattering across his own jaw and cheek.

Draco was amazed! He’d never seen Harry cum so hard, the punch through he bond was so strong Draco was hard again already. And that was the second time Harry had cum. The sheets were practically soaked under them. Panting, dizzy, Draco stared at Harry in amazement. His boy’s face was filthy with both his cum and Harry’s own. His face was flushed prettily, his lips swollen. Draco moaned and almost painfully fisted his own cock. He came in minutes, shooting delicate ribbons of white across Harry’s chest.

Exhausted, Draco collapsed on his back next to his boy. His body was warm and tingly, and he lifted his head to see that all his bruises were gone. “Little brat,” he said roughly, affection thick in his voice. He let his head fall heavily back on the bed as he tried to catch his breath and waited for the
static across the bond to fade and for Harry to regain consciousness.

It took about five minutes. - Contentment pleasure - came into focus like the slow rising of the sun. He turned his head to see Harry’s green eyes flutter open, dazed and still out of it. His face was red and tear-streaked. Cum had dried in his bangs and across both cheeks. Draco shivered, tempted to go another round. He fucking loved Harry messy, but his crotch was pleasantly numb and getting sticky and cold. He grimaced.

Harry blinked dazedly, still incoherent, and Draco felt a warm rush of protective affection. He kissed Harry’s swollen, spit-slicked lips soft as a butterfly’s wing again and again until clarity returned to Harry’s expression.

- LOVE happy pleasure - “Morning, Draco,” he rasped.

Draco snorted. Harry’s voice was fucked, hoarse and raspy. His throat had to be on fire. Draco was about to press his fingers to Harry’s mouth to get the magic healing going, but Harry reached up and touched his throat right above the collar and gave a goofy, blissed out smile.

Draco snorted again. “Fine. You can keep the burn.” He kissed Harry’s nose before sitting up and reaching for the boy still lying bonelessly across the bed. “Come on, beautiful. We both could use a shower.”

Harry’s cheeks turned a darker red.

Draco let him lean on him as they made their way to the bathroom. He hit the light switch and locked the door behind them before tugging a quiet, passive Harry to the bathroom mirror. Gently, Draco took hold of Harry’s jaw, forcing the boy to look at their reflection.

“You are, Harry. You’re beautiful. Fucking look at you.”

Draco leaned forward to lick some cum off Harry’s cheek. It was salty and bitter, but the way it made Harry’s breath catch was so damn worth it. His eyes glinted silver as he caught Harry’s gaze in the mirror. “Gorgeous.” Tears filled Harry’s eyes and Draco wrapped his arm around him. “You look amazing. Fucking sexy as hell. Every time I remember you like this…” His fingers tightened on Harry’s jaw, his voice dropped into a growl, his pupils dilated. “I’m going to want a fresh taste of your cum. You’re beautiful, Harry, and I want you. You hear me?”

“Yes, Draco,” Harry answered in a raspy whisper - LOVE gratitude disbelief. “I love you,” he rasped sweetly, turning to look deep into Draco’s eyes. Harry lifted up slightly on his toes to kiss him. It was soft and sweet, chaste almost, and so full of genuine love that Draco felt his cheeks warm and tears burn his eyes.

Draco wrapped his arms around his boy and held him close. Voice thick, he finally managed to say, “Love you, too, Harry.” Then clearing his throat, Draco gave Harry’s face one last lick before gently pushing the boy toward the shower. “Come on. Let’s get cleaned up.” Then he gave a little laugh, eyes sparkling with humor. “Good thing today’s laundry day. The sheets are worse than we are.”

Harry blushed, head ducking.

Draco pulled him into a quick, open mouthed kiss. “You know I love it,” he said, reassuring the boy and smacked his ass. “Now get into the shower.”

“Yes, Draco,” Harry rasped, smiling, his green eyes bright and happy.

Grinning, Draco stepped in behind him.
Liam was in the kitchen making coffee when the knock came. He left the coffee pot and grabbed a gun from one of the kitchen drawers. Remus and the dark-haired man, Sirius, were standing on the other side. Face blank of emotion, Liam kept the gun loose in his hand as he opened the door.

“A little early, isn’t it?” he asked, dark blue eyes cold and uninviting. He didn’t move from the open doorway.

Sirius’s hopeful expression sharpened into a scowl. “I have news for Harry. Let me in.”

Instead Liam stepped forward, pulling the door shut behind him. “I may not be magical. I may not know what the hell is going on in your world.” He lifted a hand and pushed Sirius back a step. Taller than Sirius by a few inches, he glared down into the man's shocked eyes. “But what I know is that all that magic crap amounts to nothing if the boys fall apart. They’re fucking brilliant, and it’s easy to forget, but they’re just kids.”

“Liam…” Remus began, but Sirius put his hand out to stop him.

“I’m not a threat,” Sirius said levelly. “I only want to help them.”

Liam gave a cold smile. “Yeah. So I’ve heard. That’s all I’ve heard from that one, too.” He cut his chin at Remus standing silent and tense beside Sirius. “But ever since this one appeared, you people have done nothing but take and demand. Well, I’m here to make it clear that needs to stop.” He stepped right up to Sirius, challenging him. “You need to start thinking about what the boys need and honestly putting them first. Like maybe realizing the kids don’t need you dropping in on them first thing in the fucking morning or maybe making a call to let them know you’re coming so they can be prepared. All this shit is stressful as hell, so maybe put some actual effort into making it easier on them.”

“That’s not fair,” Remus cut in, voice forcibly calm. “We all care about the boys…”

“Really.” Liam was furious now. “Care about them. Do you? Because it doesn’t take a genius to know they need stable ground. They need a home. Cause let me tell you, it ain’t a fucking good feeling to be a kid and have no place to truly call your own. To have no safe place to recover and lick your wounds. Moving the boys around every fucking month between the boot camp rich boy house of hell and the almost family that fell apart when the going got tough… Yeah, sounds like a fucking fantastic idea,” he spat sarcastically. “Sounds like everyone got what they wanted.” He glared at Remus in disgust. “Including you who got to be a part-time friend with no real responsibility for their wellbeing.”

Remus paled but he refused to back down. Some of what Liam was accusing him of was true, but it wasn’t that simple. “The law…”

Liam snorted in disgust. “And that right there is the problem. You let stuff stand in your way of doing what is truly right for the boys. I know my brothers. They’re not as steady as they appear. They’re struggling, and who the hell wouldn’t with all this crap about wars and Dark Lords and dealing prejudice and bullying at school. It’s disgusting what you’re putting those boys through!”

“It’s not us,” Remus snapped, lips parting to reveal white teeth. “We didn’t put the boys in this situation.”

“No.” Liam agreed, some of his anger draining away. “Or I would have killed you.” He gave a wry smile, acknowledging reality. “Or tried at least. I know I don’t stand much of a chance, but I would...
still try. Because all this shit might really break those boys. And I can’t bear to see it.” He stepped back toward the door. “And if you fucking cared about them like you say, you would feel the same and fucking respect this space a whole lot more. ‘Cause all this bullshit you keep bringing here, it’s toxic, and it’s poisoning yet another place for them. This is our home.”

Sirius looked close to tears. “Yeah,” he said roughly. “I hear you. I’m sorry. You’re right. I’ve been selfish again.”

“Siri…” Remus protested.

Sirius ignored him. “What do you recommend then?”

Liam relaxed a bit and gave Sirius a nod of acknowledgement. “You got shit to say, call us and we’ll meet you somewhere. Hell, the club’s closed during daylight hours, so we could go there and have privacy whenever you wanted. But if you come here, I don’t want you talking about the war and shit. I don’t want you to bring news or demands unless it truly is a fucking emergency. Let them be kids for a goddamn minute, okay?”

Sirius nodded. “I have an appointment with magical child services in a couple hours. That’s what I came to say. I’m going to push for custody of Harry. It will protect him from Andromeda, although I’m not convinced they need protecting from her. She wasn’t like the rest of my family.”

Liam shrugged. “You do what you gotta do, but don’t get in Draco’s without looking into it real good on your own first, ya hear?”

“I’ll do that.” Sirius held out his hand.

Liam took the hand, but he didn’t shake. He yanked Sirius almost violently forward until they were nose to nose again. “Then here’s the best advice I’ll ever give you. Stop focusing just on Harry or you’re fucking screwed. I’m the second line of defense. Draco is the first. First and last, always. Harry is his priority in ways we can never measure up to. You keep cutting Draco out, even just in your head, and you’ll be the one standing all alone in the end.” Liam released him, a dangerous grin cutting across his features. “Or be buried six feet under. Depends on how bad you fucked up.”

Sirius stared back at him like he didn’t understand.

Liam cut his eyes to Remus. “Really? You’re going to leave him in the dark.”

“I’ve told him,” Remus answered, but it was feeble. He knew Sirius didn’t truly understand. Remus’s old insecurities and fears had prevented him from really explaining what exactly Draco was to Harry because then he’d have to explain what he was to Remus.

Sirius caught the guilty note in Remus’s voice and gave his friend a sharp stare.

Liam didn’t care about the argument. He opened the door and called over his shoulder, “I’ll let the boys know you stopped by,” before shutting it firmly behind him again.

Fortunately, the boys weren’t out of their room yet, but unfortunately his coffee was burning. He set his gun on the counter and quickly pulled the pot off the burner. He turned the ceiling fan on to hopefully get rid of the acrid smell and drank the bitter brew regardless. The boys arrived a few minutes later. They looked flushed and glowing not to mentioned really relaxed, and Liam rolled his eyes.

“Morning,” he said wryly. “Sleep well?”
Draco gave an unrepentant grin. “Morning, Liam.”

“Morning.” Harry rasped, giving a soft smile as he began to bustle around the kitchen preparing breakfast.

Liam frowned. “You comin’ down with a cold?”

“He’ll be fine,” Draco brushed off his brother’s concern. “Have some hot tea and honey.”

“Yes, Draco,” Harry answered obediently. He pulled a mug down and filled it with water before setting it in the microwave.

“Well, if you’re feeling up to it, I was thinking we could take a day off of training.” Liam pulled his hair back into the customary ponytail and flashed the boys a grin. “Up for some ice skating?”

Draco frowned. “But…”

“Drey has club business today and Harry should probably give his hand more time to recover. Remus and Sirius stopped by earlier. Sirius is handling Harry’s custody, so there’s nothing more you can do today.” He gave Draco a steady look. “It’s important to have fun, too, you know? We’ve just found each other again and who knows when you’ll have to go back, so let’s make the most of it.”

The war began to push in around Draco once more. The urgency to run was nearly overwhelming. The memory of his mind being invaded, of nearly breaking completely, of Harry fighting for his life without him, of being raped in his sleep while Draco had been sidelined… His failure was enormous. It choked the breath from his lungs. He had to get stronger; he had to do better! He’d almost lost everything, and he couldn’t afford to make any more mistakes.

Harry felt his heart nearly break as Draco’s expression went blank, his grey eyes dark and haunted, his breath coming quick and shallow. He knelt down at the blond’s feet and waited, not sure how to help. He cast Liam a pleading look from behind his black-framed glasses.

Liam came over and crouched down next to his brothers. He put a gentle hand on Harry’s head. He knew better than to touch Draco. Not when he was on the verge of a flashback. “Draco. Hey.” The blond blinked, his eyes coming into focus. Liam gave him a smile. “Hey. There you are. You’re going to be okay. We’re going to take this one step at a time. But you need a chance to decompress or you’re going to snap. Come on. Come skating. You need a break. Harry needs a break. Yeah?”

Draco sighed and brushed his blond bangs behind his ears. Harry was watching him, concern filling his eyes, waiting for his decision. Liam looked so steady, so calm. Closing his eyes, Draco took a deep breath. Then another. He consciously forced his shoulders to relax and his fists to unclench. He fought to get back that feeling of total peace from that morning, remembered Harry coming undone twice and the feel of the burning pleasure between them. It was fine; he was fine. Opening his eyes, he gave both Harry and Liam a smile. It was a bit strained, but it was real. “You’re right,” he said as lightly as he could. “Let’s go ice skating.”

Liam reached out to gently grip Draco’s shoulder. Pride shone in his eyes. Draco was so goddamn strong it was almost painful. “Alright. Let’s do this.”

**Chapter end.**

*A/N:* Sorry for the delay. This story is far from being abandoned. I hope to return to regular updates soon. Feedback would be appreciated. About where exactly you’d like Sirius to fit in with the group; how you want Andromeda to reconcile with the boys or if you think it’s more realistic that it take
more time; and also how you think Hogwarts would be reordered if Dumbledore did step down.
Sirius broke out in a sweat whenever he was in a loud place or surrounded by a lot of people. He kept his head down and made himself as small as possible, hands in his pockets, shoulders hunched. He knew he was being ridiculous, knew he used to love crowds and being loud, but it was different now. He was different. That was part of the reason he liked to go out so early in the morning or late at night. There were fewer people about. That Liam bloke was right to call him out on it, though. He had no business invading their home without invitation, especially so early.

Sirius ran a shaky hand through his hair. Remus had cut it for him, but he liked it long, so it fell to his shoulders, curling loosely. It had thinned out since he’d been in Azkaban, and there were strands of white threaded throughout. He’d also decided to keep his beard and mustache, but he trimmed them short so they looked neat while still shadowing his jaw line, softening the harsh angles left on him from starvation. He was starting to look human again, and Sirius clung to that image with a death grip.

On the verge of a panic attack by the time they got back to Remus’s cottage, Sirius had made a quick break for the bathroom. He stared into the mirror above the sink basin and let the reflection of the human being that stared back calm him until his breathing deepened and his hands stopped shaking. If visiting the boys in muggle London was going to effect him so, then he had no idea how he was going to handle the trip to the Ministry in less than two hours, but James and Harry were counting on him. He had to get it together.

Wiping his hands and face on the hand towel hanging on the wall, Sirius left the bathroom. He found Remus standing by the fireplace, his back to the room. Sirius grinned. His old friend was hiding. Remus was so different, so much older. It was another thing so disorienting. The man was and he wasn’t the best friend Sirius remembered. It was like waking up in a different reality. When he did things like this, however, this new Remus became painfully familiar - he’d always been so damn shy, always hiding, needing to be coaxed and cajoled.

Sirius forced a grin and pretended to be the person he once was (if he pretended hard enough, he might be him again). “Come on, Moony. It can’t be that bad. It never is with you.” He flung himself on the couch and adopted a lounging pose.

Remus turned. His hair was shorter than his friend had ever wore it, clearly exposing his scarred and aged face. There was grey in his hair as well, but the anxious light brown eyes, the nervous body language, superimposed the brother he had loved over the unfamiliar adult standing before him.

“It’s complicated,” Remus said softly in an undertone. Almost petulantly.

Sirius couldn’t help it. He burst out laughing. Tears instantly streaked his face. Wrapping his arms around his middle, he howled, hardly able to breathe. Remus was instantly there, sitting beside him and rubbing his back, talking to him softly, trying to calm him down.

Sirius bit his lip hard as his laughter took a wild turn into sobs. No! He had to get it together! He flung himself off the couch and went to the front door, flinging it open. The winter air hit him like a slap to the face. It calmed him. After a few deep breaths, he turned back to Remus, leaving the door open behind him, uncaring of the bitter cold that flooded in. He pretended his outburst hadn’t
happened and plopped on the couch next to his old friend.

“Come on, Moony. I’m not exactly dumb as rocks.” He flashed a grin. “You can tell me.”

Remus didn’t look convinced, but he began to speak. “I may have… left a few details out when I explained about the boys.” His posture changed, his gaze became more direct, almost piercing. It set Sirius aback and took the smile from his face. Remus seemed wholly unfamiliar all of a sudden.

“When Draco was kidnapped from the New York orphanage, he was taken by a pedophile. He was kept and molested for some time before being sold to human traffickers. Because his magic defended him, he became unsellable, so the Master of the boat kept Draco on as his personal slave. He tortured Draco physically and mentally. He also raped him frequently. He may not have been able to do it himself, but he used toys and other objects to defile Draco’s body.”

“Merlin’s blood,” Sirius gasped, face pale and horror-stricken. He looked like was going to be sick.

Remus said nothing, looking away and giving Sirius a minute to collect himself. When his friend’s breathing evened out, he turned his eyes to him again and continue the bleak tale. “When the Dursleys sold Harry, it was to the same group. That was how they met. Draco and Harry…” Remus sighed. “They fell in love there. Draco made it his job to protect Harry. He’d been honed into a warrior, allowed no weakness. He was used to making hard decisions and having no one care for him or look out for him, and he took to taking care of Harry like a fish to water.”

“Bloody hell.” Sirius’s hands were shaking again. “Why didn’t you tell me?” When Remus spoke of it before, his story had begun with him finding the boys. He hadn’t really told him much about how the boys got to be in America or their situation there.

Remus didn’t answer directly. His voice became quieter as he continued his explanation. “I told you about the Scourers.” His hand raised to subconsciously brush the puckered scars on his cheek. “And how we recovered in a hidden magical village. I learned a lot about Lycanthropy there. They have a completely different perspective on the curse. Lycans in America… They embrace the wolf. Find a balance. It makes them less dangerous, less bloodthirst…”

Sirius began to grin, true happiness sparkling up from the depths of his soul. Remus had suffered so long. He’d genuinely hated himself. To hear him recognize that he wasn’t a monster… It was the best feeling in the world. He turned and pulled Remus into a hug. “We told you that for years. You were never a monster,” he rasped, so damn happy for his friend.

Remus ducked his head and shrugged uncomfortably. Sirius pulled back, but his hands still warmly held to Remus’s shoulders. Remus steeled his resolve, terrified of losing that acceptance and care. “Well, it also brought the wolf instincts to the surface, even when the moon isn’t full. Some of those instincts…”

Sirius frowned when his friend hesitated. “What are you trying to say?”

“I’m saying…” Remus took a deep breath. His fists clenched on his knees, but he raised his chin in defiance. “My wolf… No…” He met Sirius eyes firmly. “I… I see Draco as my Alpha.”

Sirius didn’t understand. “What do you mean?”

Remus refused to look away from his friend’s eyes. “Draco is my Alpha. He’s the leader of my pack, Sirius. He leads and I follow. Just as Harry does.”

Sirius shook his head, uncomprehending. His hands fell from Remus’s shoulders as he subconsciously leaned away from his friend. “Like Harry does?”
Remus pushed harder. “Harry is completely submissive to Draco. The Dursleys… They convinced him he was a freak, a subhuman monster. They’d scrub their skin raw if they ever touched him or he touched them. He cleaned and groveled and was barely fed. He was kept in a dirty cupboard under the stairs. Sometimes they didn’t let him out for days.”

Thinking about it put the edge of a growl in his voice. Remus coughed to clear his throat. “Draco… Draco made Harry his, and in turn made Harry worth something because in Harry’s eyes Draco is amazing and perfect - powerful and brilliant. Anything of Draco’s had to be worth something, too. It wasn't even until Draco told him that Harry even knew his name. Draco said it was like a vision. He knew Harry’s name, knew something evil was after him, and chose to make Harry his regardless. Harry is Harry because of Draco.”

Sirius was on his feet. He was breathing hard. He didn’t understand why because he still didn’t really understand what Remus was telling him.

Remus stood to face him. He desperately grabbed hold of Sirius’s shoulders and raised his voice to be sure his friend was hearing him. “Harry was one step short of becoming an Obscurus, Sirius, and Draco pulled him free from that while Harry gave Draco something worthwhile to fight for, to protect and love, when all he knew was abuse and hate. That is the foundation of their powerful bond. That is what binds them together.”

“But what does that have to do with you?” Sirius demanded.

Remus’s hands tightened on his friends shoulders. “Draco… Draco overpowered my wolf. I recognize his strength of will. I trust him with my life.”

“So you what? Bow to him? Take his orders?” Sirius asked confused.

“Yes,” Remus answered, calm. “I do. He’s my leader. That doesn’t mean I can’t argue with him or offer my advise. If I need something, Draco would do everything he could to provide it. Just as I would do anything in my power to give him what he needs and to protect both him and Harry. They are my life now. We’re a pack.”

“Have you…” Sirius swallowed, eyes wild. “Have you…?”

Remus gasped, hands flying from Sirius as if burned. “Merlin no! Sirius! I would never! They’re children!” He forced his voice to calm. “Think of Draco as a child king or Lord. There have been plenty of those in history. I’m a part of his court. He has my allegiance, that’s all!”

Sirius had grown up in a fanatical Pureblood House. He had rejected all of his lessons and avoided them as much as possible, but he knew the histories. Allegiance to a Lord, even a child Lord, made a bit more sense to him, but the idea had his skin crawling. Anything that touched on the lessons his family tried to teach him did.

“Okay. So… What?” He sat shakily, unable to keep his feet. “I mean, what does it all mean?”

Remus sat next to him, voice compassionate and kind once more. “Nothing. It just means Draco and Harry are special. And Liam was trying to tell you that. Harry…” His voice softened still further. “Harry and Draco are inseparable. You can’t think of them in isolation. And if you want to have a close relationship with Harry, you’re going to have to get Draco’s approval first. That’s all. Draco’s the protector. He’s not always right. His past has scarred him terribly, so he is overly against authority and doesn’t always seek help when he needs to, but we can’t expect otherwise after the abuse and torture he suffered. Really we can’t. He’s doing his best.”
Sirius stared at Remus as if he had two heads. “He’s your Lord. Draco Malfoy is your Lord.”

Remus sighed. “Sirius, he’s only known Lucius for two and a half years, and that time was spent half with Andromeda, so really he’s only been with Lucius for about a year. In fact, he grew up thinking he was Draco Black. You can’t think of him as a Malfoy. He’s not.”

The image of the small blond flashed to mind. He looked just like Lucius had growing up… and he also didn’t. Draco’s eyes were so much harder, so much more piercing. And that kiss… Sirius’s cheeks went hot and he leapt to his feet, immediately rejecting the memory and the hot, painful tangle of emotions that went with it. “I’m going to make tea!”

Remus watched as his friend practically ran from the room. He was wracked with worry. He knew Sirius was overwhelmed, but what could he do? Remus felt utterly helpless. Helpless to explain in a way Sirius would understand. Helpless to make his friend well. It was a feeling that had consumed his life, but he’d begun to shed that feeling and come into something more confident. Feeling it well up once more made him feel so discouraged. As if he were losing ground that he had fought so hard to gain. It made him sweat, made him want to curl up and hide.

Teeth clenched, Remus lifted his hand to clutch the dragon pendant he never took off. The feeling of it solid in his fist made his heartbeat slow. Remus had a mission: bring Sirius into the pack. He just had to stay focused on that.

…

The Natural History Museum in London had a lawn that had been transformed into an ice rink. An enormous Christmas tree sat in the middle that glittered and sparkled. Dozens of people wrapped up in their winter scarves, thick jackets, and gloves circled the tree on their skates to the sound of pipped in instrumental music. The day was cold and cloudy, but the air was filled with loud voices and laughter.

Liam had learned to skate in New York. He had gone every winter with his brother until they got busy with their adult lives, and he’d always loved it. If his life had been different, he would have asked the parents he never had for lessons or maybe even played hockey.

Right now his hair had been pulled back into a ponytail to keep it out of his eyes and he was grinning as he skated backward. He watched as Draco and Harry leaned on each other, their feet wobbling as they tried to stay upright. Both of the boy were smiling, their cheeks pink, their eyes bright. Harry lost his balance and flopped on his butt, skidding a few feet. Draco toppled down with him.

Skating up to them and sending shaved ice up into their faces playfully, Liam offered them both his hands. “Almost made it a full circuit before falling,” he said with a laugh. “Getting better!”

Draco playfully growled and grabbed one of his hands. “Shut up. You just brought us here so you could show off.” He was especially disgruntled because he had been skating with Narcissa and Lucius before during Yule, but the skates had been charmed to make sure they didn’t fall. Doing it without magic was apparently a whole different story.

Harry grabbed Liam’s other hand. “Sorry.”

Liam shook his head and pulled them back onto their feet. “Would I do somethin’ like that?” he asked and ruffled both their hair simultaneously- Harry’s wild, black mop and Draco’s straight, white strands.
“Maybe if we sped up?” Draco knocked Liam’s hand away reflexively. “Momentum might keep us up.”

“Sure!” Liam skated neatly behind them and put a hand in the center of their backs. “Here we go!”

Harry gave a delighted cry as Liam began to push them faster than they had managed so far on their own.

…

Sirius was pretending again. He was king of the world, free and unstoppable. Of course, the potion that Remus convinced him to take, the one prescribed to him by the healers to help calm his anxiety, probably helped. He also looked the part.

He was wearing Remus’s best suit. The jacket was a muddy brown with cream pen-stripes. Underneath, he wore a burgundy vest with repeating gold fleur-de-lis. Under that, he wore a neutral brown dress shirt with a high collar even when it was folded in half. It also had cream pin-stripes. This was paired with brown slacks and a lighter brown leather shoe. Remus had even given him a golden watch and chain that he wore clipped to his vest. He looked respectable; James would have died laughing!

Sirius shoved away the immediate rush of grief the innocent thought had invoked and plastered on a wide smile. As he strode through the halls of the Ministry, the natural movement of people at work slowed and came to a halt. He was followed by whispers and murmurs, dozens of eyes staring. Sirius expected someone to jump on him or cast a Stupefy and drag him back to prison. His breath became harsh, his grin more fixed and brittle. The only thing that kept him from breaking and running was the fact that Remus walked behind him. His back was guarded.

Before he could truly panic or run back the way he came, Sirius was distracted by arriving at the door to the Department of Wizarding Child Services. He breezed through, pretending with all his might that everything was fine, and was faced with a small receptions desk positioned in the center of a small lobby. Behind it was a honeycomb of about two dozen desks partitioned off from each other by five-foot tall dividers. There was a low hum of dozens of conversations and people moving about with folders and files carried in their arms. Along the wall were cheerful, bright posters. The furniture was comfortable and slightly shabby, nothing like the Auror department. It made Sirius relax.

“Can I help you?” a blond witch with her hair piled in a messy bun asked as she looked up. “Mr. Black! Good morning.”

Sirius’s stiff grin relaxed into a charming smile. “Good morning, love. I’m here about Harry Potter’s guardianship.”

She smiled back. “Of course! Department Head Abbot is taking your case on personally. Please have a seat; she’ll be ready momentarily.” She gestured to the line of chairs pushed up against the side wall. “Can I get you anything while you wait?”

Sirius waved the suggestion away. “No, thanks.” He’d caught sight of a woman waiting, posture perfect. He knew that face - aged though it was. A curly-haired toddler sat in her lap bouncing a stuffed pink monster doll up and down happily. A man sat at her side. He was round and aged, but Sirius thought he recognized him, too.

“Andromeda?” He asked, stopping in front of the seated woman.

She blinked and looked up at him. A huge smile crossed her features. Handing the girl off to the
man, she stood and pulled him into a hug. The Black family had been very against public displays of affection - saw it as a weakness. Feeling Andromeda hold him made Sirius grin - this was one of the reasons why she had always been his favorite.

“Sirius! I’m so glad to see you. So glad!” She squeezed him tighter before pulling back. Tears glittered in her eyes and roughened her voice.

“Me, too, Dromeda,” he said warmly.

“We were very happy to hear you were acquitted,” Ted added as his wife finally released the man.

“Thank you,” Sirius said with a grin. “You’re looking good, Ted.” He looked at the little girl in his lap. “Who’s this then? Can’t be little Dora.”

Andromeda took her daughter back from her husband and rested her on her hip. Lifting the toddler’s hand, she waved it at Sirius. “This is Denebola Regina Tonks. She’s our little miracle.”

Sirius grinned as the girl smiled up at him happily, babbling something incomprehensible. “Greetings, young lady. The pleasure’s all mine,” he said with a winning smile, bowing. The little girl giggled. Sirius straightened and asked happily, “How old is she?”

“She’ll be turning two on the first day of May,” Andromeda answered proudly and kissed her daughter’s cheek.

“I’ve heard you’ve been taking care of Harry,” Sirius said as Andromeda sat, shifting Dee onto her lap. He took the seat next to his cousin. “Thank you for looking out for him.”

Remus sat on Sirius’s other side without saying a word of greeting to the other two. Not that Sirius noticed. Sirius did notice, however, when Andromeda’s expression darkened and Ted sighed. Remus sat tense, ready to intervene. This wasn’t a good place to get into anything too sensitive.

“I did my best,” Andromeda said, voice low with heavy undertones.

Sirius stared at his cousin, surprised at the dramatic change in mood. “Dromeda?”

Ted waved his wand and cast a muffling spell so their conversation would be private. “We’ve had a recent falling out with the boys,” he said softly, explaining.

Remus sat tense, ready to intervene. This wasn’t a good place to get into anything too sensitive.

“I’ve recently begun to question Draco and Harry’s… relationship. I feel it would be better if they spent some time apart… Gained a little perspective…”

When Sirius continued to stare, she added a bit more sharply. “I think they are confusing the bond for other types of feelings. I was hoping to speak to you about this before now, but my owls were returned and I didn’t know where to floo-call you. If you win custody, I’d like you to petition to have Harry and request that the Malfoys take charge of Draco.”

“What does Lucius think about this?” Remus asked when Sirius didn’t answer.

Andromeda looked away anxiously. “He is… confused,” she said stiffly. “Draco is… manipulative. He’s used our pity for him to get his way with Harry, but I don’t think it is healthy or appropriate.” She met Sirius’s eyes. “We’re the adults and it is our job to set boundaries and teach them right from wrong. Draco has run rampant long enough.”
“We disagree,” Ted cut in, surprising everyone, including his wife.

Andromeda knew they didn’t agree on this - they had argued enough about it that it was impossible not to know - but to go against her publicly… She felt her breath catch, a burn of betrayal and hurt searing her chest.

“I understand that the boys have a very unconventional relationship, but they have had an unconventional life.” Ted’s eyes darkened. “To put it mildly.” His gaze shifted to his wife. “I understand why you are struggling with this, I do, but I believe separating them is not the answer.”

Andromeda looked furious. “They are children. And boys at that.”

“Yes, but they’ve been having sex forcibly and violently since the age of six, Dromeda. They’ve been abused and suffered pain we can’t imagine. I understand they are children and by no means do I think children should ever be exposed to sex at such a young age - not when they can’t understand emotionally and physically what is happening to their bodies - but the reality is that Draco and Harry were. There’s no taking back that knowledge.”

“And don’t you think that has warped them?” Andromeda hissed furiously. “They need help, Ted!”

Ted shook his head. “Yes, of course they do, but I don’t think it’s right to judge them for the way they have found to heal from what they have experienced. In fact, it wouldn’t have surprised me if they had hated their bodies and hurt themselves after everything they went through, but instead they are reclaiming their bodies and their sexuality in a positive way through love. That’s a good thing, isn’t it?”

Andromeda gasped. “Ted! How can you say that?”

Ted put his hand on his wife’s knee, expression imploring. “A huge part of what led me to believe this is the fact that the boys have such a deep magical, psychic, and emotional bond. Dromeda, think about it. They are literally bound together as one. They have one magical signature. You can’t tell the difference if Draco has cast a spell on something or Harry. They are linked at a soul-deep level. I’ve known those boys for two years same as you, and I don’t see how you can possibly entertain the notion that Draco would do anything to hurt Harry. Or that Harry would do anything that would hurt Draco.”

“Their perspective is so twisted they don’t know that they are hurting each other!” Andromeda countered furiously, yelling. Dee began to cry, but she ignored that. “That they’re only continuing the abuse they’ve suffered because that is the pattern that was laid out for them!”

Ted took Dee from his wife. Andromeda resisted, but he shot her a sharp glance so uncommon for him that she relented and let Dee go. He kept his voice calm as he gently cradled his crying daughter, but he wasn’t backing down. “They love each other, Dromeda. They are attracted to each other. Perfectly normal eleven-year-old boys are capable of that, I assure you. That doesn’t mean their mind is twisted.”

“Ted!” Andromeda was aghast. “How can you say those desires are normal?”

Sirius flinched beside her and Remus put a supportive hand on his arm.

Ted stared her down. “Draco and Harry have lived long enough with people enforcing their will on their bodies and giving them no choice in what is done to them. We have to take that into consideration.” He raised his hand sharply when Andromeda opened her mouth to say something else. “I’m all for the boys finding a mind healer they can trust and seeing them regularly, but I am
against this idea that they shouldn’t be in love or together.” Almost coldly, he added, “Just because they are both boys. You know how I feel about that prejudice.”

Andromeda looked furious and terribly shocked. They had argued about this and argued about this, but still neither of them could compromise. “I truly don’t understand how you can believe what you are saying. How can you not see how depraved all this is?”

Sirius flinched again. Tears burned his eyes. “What the hell does it matter if you have a penis or breasts?”

Andromeda turned to him, shocked. “What?”

“What does it bloody matter, really?” He hissed, fists clenched on his knees and shaking. “When you die, you don’t take this body with you. Who you are isn’t your legs or your arms or your face. You aren’t defined by your body if you’re crippled or deformed, so why are we so bloody defined by what’s between our legs? It’s just tissue!” Sirius was yelling now, tears streaking his face. “We’re made of energy; we’re made of spirit and will! That’s what makes us who we are! What does that have to do with the shell we’re wearing?”

Sirius was on his feet now with no memory of having stood. Remus had a tight grip on his arm, but Sirius could barely feel it. A lifetime of pain, fear, and self-hatred welled up inside him and was unleashed in a tidal wave of words.

“What does it matter if a few people here and there match up man-to-man and girl-to-girl? We’re all just bloody muscle and skeleton anyway, so it doesn’t fucking matter, does it? At the core, we’re all the same! Male and female didn’t matter for shite in Azkaban let me tell you! Everyone screams and cries and shits and suffers the goddamn same! So what’s the bloody difference in the end, really? Does anyone really have the right to say what happens in someone else’s heart is wrong or right? That some people are better than others? That this person is right, but this one isn’t? Can’t you see how bloody senseless it all is? What the hell does it have to do with you anyway? IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU!”

Andromeda stared at him speechless, mouth falling lax and eyes wide with shock.

“Come on, Siri. Let’s go cool down,” Remus cut in very gently, tugging at Sirius’s arm. With a golden-eyed look at Andromeda, he guided the hyperventilating man to the bathroom.

…

After about three hours, Draco and Harry had officially gotten the hang of ice skating. They were speeding around the ice rink, Liam chasing after them. They took turns sharply and could do sliding stops, sending ice flying. Liam tried to show them some spins, but mostly they were just happy to race along the ice, dodging the slower people, feeling the bitter cold wind on their faces.

They skated until their feet ached and blisters had formed before limping off the ice. Huge grins were spread across all three of their faces. Liam helped Harry take his skates off while Draco got their shoes from the locker that they had rented. He brought them back and let them fall to the grass in a tumble as he plopped down on the bench next to Harry.

“I’m starving,” he said with a groan.

“There’s some food stalls over there.” Liam pointed.

“Thank you,” Harry said sweetly as Liam tugged off the final skate. He quickly grabbed his shoes from the pile, watching Draco. “I can cook if you want.”
“No,” Draco waved away that suggestion. “I love your cooking, but that’ll take too long. Let’s see what the stalls have.”

“If we don’t like anything, there’re restaurants nearby,” Liam said, pulling his shoes on.

Draco nodded and turned his attention to Harry. His whole face shifted, warm affection practically glowing in his grey eyes. “Did you have fun?”

Harry looked up at him with a bright smile. “Yes! Thank you, Draco.”

Draco’s shoulders relaxed. “Me, too.” He leaned forward to place a lingering kiss on Harry’s cheek, his hand coming up to gently stroke along the boy’s jaw.

Liam rolled his eyes, but he couldn’t stop the smile that formed at seeing Harry’s adorable blush. “Come on, lovebirds. Let’s eat!”

... 

Lucius strode into the Child Services Department like a king visiting a vassal provence. He was dressed impeccably, his expression serene, his eyes cold. He stood before the secretary who babbled and stuttered, face red with embarrassment. It was Department Head Abbot who came to her rescue.

“Lord Malfoy. Thank you for coming. If you would walk this way, I have reserved a private room.”

Lucius observed her subtly as he followed her down an adjacent hallway and into a meeting room. She looked like she had aged. The mistake with the Dursleys and learning the details of Harry’s case - it hadn’t been easy. She had none of her usual Hufflepuff warmth and exuberance. She looked tired. A sneer tugged at the corners of his mouth; there was no excuse to display such weakness. Spells, potions, and other little rituals would have concealed all signs of exhaustion. He would know; Lucius had used them himself before he had come.

The meeting room was as shabby as the reception area had been. A battered round table, six padded chairs that did not match, a sideboard with a glass pitcher of water spelled to stay chilled and some glasses for those who grew thirsty. Lucius let a look of derision shade his expression as he entered.

It looked like he was the last to arrive. Andromeda and her husband along with their second child sat on one end. Black and Lupin sat at the other. This was interesting. He lifted an eyebrow minutely. He had expected Black and Andromeda to be slobbering over each other in joy. Perhaps there was some hope for Black yet. However, this did put him in a dilemma. Where to sit? Between Andromeda’s husband and Black or Lupin and Andromeda? He detested either option. Why the hell was the table round to begin with?

“Please have a seat, Lord Malfoy,” Abbot invited, all politeness.

Lucius gave her a look cold as ice before finally sitting in the closet chair, the one between Black and Andromeda’s husband. That forced Abbot to walk around the table and settle in the last chair.

Abbot folded her hands before her on the table and gave them all a small smile. “Thank you all for being here. I want to make it clear that no official ruling regarding the boys’ custody will be made today. Change of custody takes time and needs to go through the proper channels. This meeting is to see if an agreement upon a shared custody can be reached so that I may start the process to get it approved.”

“Is this really necessary?” Black asked. He looked pale and gaunt. It was to be expected, of course. It was the impatience in his tone and demeanor that Lucius approved of. “I’m Harry’s legal godfather. I
don’t see how you can deny me custody of my own godson. I’ve been kept from him long enough as it is, don’t you think?”

A little heavy-handed but overall it was a sound strategy. Lucius only just managed to hold back a smirk.

“Yes…” Abbot looked flushed and she almost squirmed in her chair. “That’s true, but we are required… considering your long term exposure to… We have to be sure you’re…”

“Sane?” Black’s eyes glinted and his smile was predatory. “Is that what you’re trying to say?” He turned to Lupin who looked alert and focused. “What do you think, Remus? Am I sane?”

Lucius was the only one who noticed the subtle kick Lupin gave Black under the table.

“We have to be sure you are capable at this current time of caring for two children,” Abbot said much more diplomatically.

“We understand that you’re only thinking of the best interests of the boys,” Lupin said, calm and reasonable. Lucius tilted his head curiously. Had the vagabond always been so smooth? “Sirius has cleared several mental health checks and has been assigned a mind healer. He has regular appointments scheduled.”

“All of which is definitely a step in the right direction,” Abbot said with a smile, perking up. “I am very glad to hear that you are taking your recovery so seriously, Mr. Black.”

Black opened his mouth, but Lupin again surreptitiously kicked him under the table. Black shut his mouth. Lucius almost snorted.

Abbot cleared her throat, clearly bracing for something uncomfortable. “I understand you were disinherited by your family at the age of sixteen. When your parents died, Lordship of the Noble and Ancient House of Black was transferred to a secondary branch of the family, to your father’s second cousin and your mother’s youngest brother Cygnus Black. That being the case, unless Lord Black reinstates your inheritance and transfers Lordship rights to you…”

“I’m broke, is that what you’re saying?” Sirius asked, looking genuinely confused.

“Mr. Potter is unable to access his vault or fulfill his duties as Lord of the House of Potter until the age of seventeen, so it is not possible to use…” Abbot said carefully.

“I’m not going to touch his money,” Sirius snapped, furious.

“Yes… of course… I was just clarifying the facts.”

“I’m waiting for a settlement from the Ministry to clear. You know, as compensation for being unjustly imprisoned for ten years,” Sirius stated coldly, wielding his words like a weapon.

“Why are we talking about Father like he’s still around? I thought he was presumed dead?” Andromeda suddenly voiced.

Abbot looked surprised. “Oh! I was informed that Lord Black has returned to the wizarding world. It has been officially confirmed. I have the paperwork here if you’d like to see it. He currently resides in the hidden Black Manor.”

Lucius’s fists clenched. As he wasn’t a Black, he had no idea where the manor was, but the comprehension on Black and Andromeda’s faces told him that they knew. And that meant they
knew where Narcissa was. He mentally filed that away to be used later.

“As for the settlement from the Ministry… You are perfectly entitled to compensation, Mr. Black, but it will take some time for that to clear and be processed. In the meantime…”

“I am currently staying with a friend,” Black said carelessly and gestured at Lupin. “I’m also talking to publishers. There have been quite a few offers for me to sell my story. A biography of sorts. So I expect a pretty sizable income soon.”

Abbot went nearly white at hearing that.

Black continued, practically holding a knife to her throat with his words. “It was a very terrifying and confusing time, I’m sure, when I was arrested and wrongfully imprisoned after the downfall of Voldemort. I have a lot of time to make up for, of course. Including raising my dearest friend’s son. It was James Potter’s last wish that I take Harry under my care. I’d be just devastated if the Ministry prevented me from fulfilling his dying wish. I’d be forced to question why the Ministry would do something like that. This isn’t a confusing time, after all. Not like it was then. I’d have to wonder if the Ministry somehow found me lacking in some way. Or maybe had some prejudice against me or even my bloodline.”

Black leaned forward, looking relaxed and causal except for his frostbite eyes. They were identical in every way to Narcissa’s when she was coldly furious. It made Lucius’s heartbeat accelerate. “I’ve been away for a long time, Mrs. Abbot. Does the Ministry now possess anti-Pureblood sentiments that I don’t know about?”

Abbot looked like she was about to faint.

Lucius had the urge to get up and applaud. The Purebloodlines had thinned and been reduced over time, but they were still very powerful. Yes, some families had fallen into disrepair and poverty, but there were still some very respected and influential Purebloods in key positions of power throughout their society, including Lucius. Without their support, the Ministry would be put in a very precarious position.

“Legally I have as much right to retain custody as you do, Sirius,” Andromeda cut in. “That’s why I’m here. When you were unavailable to take up your duty as godfather, guardianship was legally awarded to me. I have performed no act to warrant losing custody. Even if you passed the reasonable…” She emphasized the word to indicate how petty she found his veiled threats, “… mental health, financial, and environment checks, I would still have to sign my guardianship rights over to you.” She lifted her chin, her own eyes cold and challenging. “I’m not sure I’m prepared to do that. I have to do what I feel is right for Harry. That is my obligation as his guardian, and I’m not at all convinced leaving him under your supervision and guidance would be the best thing for him.”

Abbot didn’t look surprised by this. Lucius made an intuitive deduction that Black and Andromeda must have argued about this very thing before his arrival, thus the reason they had been sitting opposite each other. Interesting although not unexpected.

Andromeda stared thoughtfully down at the top of her daughter’s head. “To be honest, I was ready to forfeit my rights to Harry when I arrived here… but after your outburst earlier and the heavy-handed maneuvering I’ve witnessed at this table - when this department is only looking out for what is best for Harry - I don’t think you’d be the right guardian for him.” She looked up and met her cousin’s eyes. “I love you, Sirius. I am very happy you are out of that horrible place, but I don’t think you’re able to put Harry’s needs before your own desires. I refuse to relinquish guardianship rights.”

Lucius braced for an explosion of rage, his hand tightening on his cane, but Black seemed to crumble
instead. Tears streaked his face. He looked utterly betrayed and bewildered. Lupin was quick to brace him. He practically had the gaunt man in a half embrace, his mouth close to Black’s ear, murmuring words they could not hear. Black had done well considering; his lack of follow through expected. It was Lucius’s turn now.

“If Harry’s guardianship is under review, I will hold custody of both boys.” He spoke evenly. It wasn’t a question but a statement of fact.

“The contract…” Andromeda protested, glaring.

“The contract is void while Harry’s guardianship is being contested.” Lucius looked calmly at the still shaken Black. “You are contesting Andromeda’s guardianship, am I correct?”

Black looked at him with wide, uncomprehending eyes.

Lucius took that as agreement and returned his attention to Narcissa’s sister. “Draco and Harry will not be returning to Hogwarts until the Aurors conclude their investigation of the school. In the interim, they will remain with me.”

Andromeda looked ready to murder. “The contract is not void until Sirius wins custody. In the meantime, I am the guardian and we will alternate months as the contract demands. At the end of this month, the boys will reside with me.”

Lucius tilted his head curiously. “The boys have been through a very traumatic experience, Andromeda. Their healer prescribes stability and quiet in order for them to regain their mental balance. It was their choice to stay at the manor. An understandable decision as I understand you and your husband are currently suffering some marital strife. Such a stressful environment would be detrimental to their recovery. Insisting upon it when they have a more stable alternative would make you negligent and unfit as a guardian.” His cool grey eyes shifted to Abbot. “In that case, I believe that would disqualify her from guardianship and Mr. Black would be awarded full custody. Am I correct?”

Abbot just stared at him.

Lucius turned back to Andromeda. A cool smile curled his lips. “I, of course, know none of that will be necessary. Your first priority is the health and wellbeing of the boys, after all. Taking that into consideration, I have decided to offer you and Mr. Black free visitation while the boys are recovering. If you contact my elf, I am sure we can arrange a schedule. I trust this meets with everyone’s approval?”

“What investigation of Hogwarts?” Abbot cut in, looking very disturbed. “I was not informed of this. The boys are not returning to school?”

Lucius inclined his head regally. “Unfortunately I cannot reveal details at this time.” He lifted his head and met her eyes evenly, showing her he had nothing to hide. “The Wizengamot has not chosen to release information to the public as of yet considering the highly sensitive nature of the investigation. I’ve been told there will be a closed hearing to determine any rulings regarding the case. What I can tell you is that after certain violent events at Hogwarts over Yule break, Harry suffered injury and there was at least one death involved.”

Abbot gasped and Lucius knew her niece would be getting an owl as soon as this meeting was adjourned.

“Yes,” he said gravely. “This is no light matter. Our personal healer assures me that switching homes
every four weeks at this juncture would be detrimental to the boys’ mental stability. When the boys were consulted, they expressed their preference to reside at the manor with me and my wife. Andromeda’s home is currently full of tension and conflict, not to mention the home of a demanding and rambunctious toddler. Draco and Harry both felt they would not get the rest they needed there.”

Abbott looked back and forth between Andromeda and her husband. “I understand that this is a very personal question and you may not feel comfortable answering in such a large group, but for the sake of efficiency, and as this pertains to Harry’s guardianship, I feel I have to ask. Is it true you are currently having marital problems?”

Andromeda sat stiffly, cheeks red with anger, her expression blank. She refused to answer, leaving it to Ted who, Hufflepuff that he was, told the truth.

“We are currently in disagreement,” he said in his soft voice. “The children have been present for a few arguments.”

“I see,” Abbott did not look pleased with this admission. “We will have to investigate this further. In the meantime, the contract will be temporarily voided. Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter will reside with Lord and Lady Malfoy. Should Mrs. Tonks be judged the better guardian over Mr. Black, the contract will be reinstated. However, should Mr. Black win custody of Mr. Potter, a new contract will have to be agreed upon.”

“I understand.” Lucius stood and bowed to Abbott. “I thank you for your efforts and understanding in this matter.” He then politely inclined his head to both Black and Andromeda. “Mr. Black. Andromeda. Please contact me with the times and days you would like to see the boys.”

Lupin and Abbott both offered polite farewells, but the others remained silent. He was unbothered by their impolite and boorish behavior. After all, he had achieved what he had come there to achieve. He had secured Draco temporary (possibly even permanent) freedom from Andromeda.

Lips curled in a subtle smile of victory, Lucius decided it was time to pay the Minister a visit. He’d like another update on the investigation of Hogwarts.

Chapter end.

A/N: Not a lot of action, but we see a lot of character development here. Let me know what you think of Sirius, Andromeda, and Lucius!

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