Wolf's Mate

by FictionAficionado

Summary

The hunt for the horcruxes has gone on for years while Voldemort wagers open war to establish his dominion in the wizarding world. When his men capture Harry Potter's best friend, he doesn't think twice before throwing the mudblood to his wolves. However, an unlikely ally emerges in the form of a werewolf. To escape her captors and defeat Voldemort, ever the realist, Hermione can't afford to dwell on the fact that help comes from the creature that raped and impregnated her.
Hermione strained her ears to pick up the conversation taking place in the corner of the dimly lit room. Doing so made it easier for her to ignore the way her bare breasts jiggled with every clumsy step forward, though it did nothing to distract from the wands menacingly pressed against her bare neck and spine. In order to formulate an escape plan, she had to figure out where she was being held and what they planned to do with her. Ever since her capture the previous night, other than insulting her, the Death Eaters had dropped no clues of what was to happen to her. She was prepared to be tortured for information or killed on the spot, yet to her great confusion, neither one of those things had taken place.

As the Death Eaters wore masks at all times- none of the masks known to her- Hermione had also failed to identify any of her captors. Till now that was, for there was no mistaking the hulking form of Greyback as he stood deep in conversation with an unknown male in one corner of the room she had been forced to march into at wandpoint.

"Is that the Mudblood? She smells delicious."

"The Death-Eaters have fed her a fertility and strengthening potion- potent stuff, stronger than the usual, strong enough to make a witch's womb ready for our seed."

"I don't know if there's any truth to that claim but I can tell we're gonna have our hands full tonight keeping the pack in check. The way she smells, every unmated wolf, and some mated ones too, are gonna claw out their own skin for a chance to knot with her."

"That's the point. The Dark Lord wants us to use her to birth a new line of soldiers for his army-"

Hermione's blood ran cold as she recalled the potion her captors had shoved down her throat earlier that day. At the time they had distracted her by stripping off her clothes and inspecting her body for defects. She had not worried about the purpose of the potion as it was clearly not Veritaserum or anything else which could prove potentially dangerous to either Hermione herself or the Order; if anything the colour and odour had resembled a variety of health potions.

"Our Lord sends a gift for his loyal dogs," said one of the five Death Eaters holding their wand aimed at Hermione. His comrades must've found his statement particularly witty as they all snickered despite the soft growls emanating from the other side of the room. Another one of them roughly shoved her forward so she inelegantly landed in a heap on the hard floor.

"Shouldn't a gift be wrapped?" asked the unknown man taking in her naked state as he stepped away from Greyback and stalked towards her.

"Easy Gunnolf, the wizards were probably saving us some time; they know the Mudblood's here so
my wolves can breed her and if she can't get pregnant she'll do as a snack. Fucking or feeding, clothes would be useless either way."

Even though he was talking about her, it was the Death Eaters who shuddered at the sight of Greyback's toothy grin.

"Now, why don't you fellas return to serve at the feet of our Lord? Wouldn't want my wolves showing up and mistaking you for a meal now, would you?"

Hermione would've laughed at the way the Death Eaters scrambled to exit the room if not for the reason they were doing so.

"Gunnolf, go check on the pack- I can sense their excitement over discovering a bitch in heat so close to them. I'll join you in a moment."

Hermione tried to see where the other man, Gunnolf, was headed but couldn't as she felt her head painfully yanked in the other direction, accompanied by a stinging in her scalp. She didn't need to open her eyes to know it was Greyback manhandling her.

"I don't particularly care for Mudbloods, but I hear you're cleverer than others. So listen to me, and listen well. You're going to live here and let my wolves fuck their cubs into you. When you give birth to a litter, we'll give you replenishing potions so you're ready to produce another litter for us. This is your life now. I suggest you quickly get used to it. The wizards said, the potion they gave you will have you nice and wet, so you may actually enjoy this. But if you try to be clever or use magic on us in anyway, we'll skip the potions and fuck you raw while we eat you."

Greyback effortlessly picked up Hermione and tossed her on one of the rickety old beds lined against one wall of the room. Due to the poor lighting she had failed to notice them when she was first brought in. A howl from somewhere in the house sent a shiver up her spine. At first she thought it was caused by fear, but a second howl made her thighs wet with slick. She struggled to keep her wits about her and listen to the words coming out of Greyback's mouth but all she could focus on was the ache in her pussy and the moisture pooling between her thighs. Distracted by it, she didn't even notice Greyback leaving and locking the door behind him. In the haze of her heat, she drew herself up onto her knees- legs spread, back arched to present her cunt. Even with a wand she knew she was no match for the physical strength of a werewolf and now, lying here exposed, wandless and in heat- her scent driving the werewolf into a mating frenzy- she knew the only way for her to survive would be to submit to the wolf's desires.

A different door than the one she used to enter slammed open behind her causing her to freeze, her heart racing in anticipation and fear. The wolf panted, claws clacking on the stone floor as he made his way towards her.

Hermione jumped when a clawed hand grabbed her thigh and wrenched her back. Unceremoniously, the wolf thrust his tapered cock thrust into her slick pussy, wasting no time as he set a hard pace.

Unable to handle the force of the assault, Hermione's elbows gave out. Her chest hit the mattress, causing her nipples to sting as they grazed against the worn-out fabric, though it took only a moment for them to tighten and for pleasure to course though them all the way down to her toes.

She didn't notice the swell at the base of the wolf'scock until it started to catch on her entrance. It forced her passage wider and wider with no regard for the limits of Hermione's body. Hermione was no virgin; Ron had finally recognised she was a girl. However, since both of them were
inexperienced, the one time they did have sex had involved a lot of kissing and petting, with Ron coming almost as soon as he entered her. Desperate to come herself, after their extended foreplay, she had used her fingers to stimulate herself to a climax, something Ron had taken as a personal insult at the time. Even though she had not cared, he had been too embarrassed about his performance to try and repeat it with her again.

Her body wasn't used to the kind of abuse being heaped on it at the moment. As the knot grew too wide to go in, the wolf gave one last vicious thrust of his hips and forced the knot inside Hermione, collapsing on top of her. His hips jerked while he continued to fill her womb to bursting; the knot ensuring every drop of his come lay trapped inside her.

Hermione wept in frustration, bucking her hips to create some friction- her body still flush and aching in need as she hadn't reached completion. The wolf snarled and placed its teeth on her neck. She held still as the wolf drenched her insides with come, causing Hermione to whimper with unfulfilled need.

When the knot finally began to shrink, the wolf pulled out leaving a trail of his semen behind it. His claws on Hermione's thighs forced her backwards- knees hitting the edge of the bed, feet hanging off. The wolf pushed her chest flush to the bed, brought her arse as high up as it would go, and fucked back into her- pulling almost all the way out at the end of every thrust, the tip of his tapered prick bumping against her clit only to be yanked back onto it till he was balls deep again.

Hermione's body lit up with sensation, her cunt grasping after the wolf's cock, desperate to be filled to bursting. She eagerly rubbed her clit, having no need to move otherwise as the wolf's frenzied thrusts gave her all the friction she needed. His knot brushed against something inside her, causing her body to tighten and her back to arch before she came all over the wolf's cock. The wolf's movements grew frantic as he attempted to push his knot all the way into her.

The wolf didn't stop rutting even after he howled his completion. He swivelled his hips so the base of his knot pressing against her clit. Hermione threw her head back as she once again felt her orgasm building up. Without a thought she squeezed her cunt as hard as she could while slowly rubbing circles on her nub. The knot deflated just enough for the wolf to start fucking in and out of her abused cunt- come squirting out around it.

She was so lost to the potion induced need burning through her veins she failed to notice that the moon had set and the wolf had shifted into a man. It didn't register in her mind that instead of the claws biting into her hips, she was being held by hands. Not even when one of those hands reached under her to pull her up, nor when it accidentally brushed against her nipples causing her to shudder.

The werewolf groaned at the way she felt around his cock and reached to play with her sensitive nipples. He grabbed one nipple, twisting and teasing it in a manner that had pleasure shooting down to her core, her muscles clenching at his knot locking them together again. He used both hands to draw her up closer into his lap with her back pressed into his chest and his mouth close to her ear. She could feel his every breath, every grunt tease the sensitive skin of her neck.

He continued to tease her nipples making her shiver in his arms and squeeze his cock which in turn made him shudder.

"Mine." He growled in her ears and pushed her down into the mattress again.

Through the daze of her orgasms she was finally able to discern he was grunting the same word over and over. She whimpered when she realised he wasn't just fucking her, but was laying his claim on her, both as a wolf and as a man. With her hands under her, Hermione could feel her stomach bloating with copious amounts of ejaculate stuffed inside her.
The creature showed no signs of stopping - pausing only to shove her away from the growing wet spot so he wouldn't slip while he fucked her. An exhausted Hermione, for her part, could only lie on her back and allow the werewolf to raise her legs so he could fuck her more deeply, letting out a whine if he pulled his cock out of her.

As it grew brighter outside the length of time they stayed knotted together grew shorter. The werewolf, though, seemed unbothered by it; he fucked her with wild abandon any time the knot shrank enough to allow movement. And stopped only when he was certain he'd bred her.

Before Hermione finally lost consciousness, she thought she heard a familiar voice say, "I'm so sorry, Granger."

Chapter End Notes

It will be a while before I post the next chapter as I wish to finish my ongoing Veelafic first. Meanwhile, I would appreciate if you have any suggestions for a better title for this story- the current one is just a placeholder.

I tend to focus more on the smut in my stories; don't expect much in terms of story or even writing quality and you won't be disappointed.
Chapter 2

Hermione woke up to an unbearable ache between her legs. She was alone in bed. A beam of light filtering in from one of the windows caught in her eyes, blinding her momentarily before she could properly view her surroundings. As far as she could tell, she was still in the same room as last night. Now, in daylight, she could see the entire room more clearly. It was mostly empty, a few beds lined against one wall with a small table nestled against one corner and a large barrel stood in the other corner. The room had a vaulted ceiling with all the windows situated far too high up for her to be able to climb out even if she somehow managed to stack every piece of furniture one on top of the other.

She didn't know where she was being held. The Death Eaters had portkeyed her in, so she didn't get a look at the exteriors, but based on the grey stone surrounding her and what little she had seen of the interiors, she was undoubtedly in an old castle or something similar. And, since Greyback was around, she was most likely in the northern parts of England. In the last few years there were several reports of Greyback and his wolves running wild in the area and creating a new army of werewolf soldiers for the Dark Lord. Since Order members had yet to encounter such an army, they'd mostly just chalked it down to rumours.

Hermione groaned as she rolled over in an attempt to get out of bed. Her entire body feeling sluggish and heavy while her pussy felt raw. She couldn't help but feel disgusted, fighting the urge to throw up, at the sight of the semen and blood dried on her inner thighs. As a female soldier she, along with the rest of the witches in the Order, had prepared herself for the fact that the enemy may violate them in order to break them. Still, none of her training prepared her to deal with being a willing participant in her own rape while she was fucked raw by a beast. Shoving those unhelpful thoughts to the back of her mind, she focused on the room instead.

There were three doors in all, but before giving them a try she thought it wiser to first check the room for any useful objects. She moved to inspect the object closest to her, a table, which plain as it was could not have concealed anything. Propped on the side, it may have made for a decent shield if she wasn't up against wizards and werewolves. Bracing herself against the wall, Hermione walked to the barrel. She found herself feeling grateful when she discovered it contained water. There was also a small basin and a wash cloth placed on the half open lid.

Scooping out some water with the aid of the basin, she sniffed it to make sure it wasn't dosed with anything dangerous before proceeding to drink the water. She was hungry, yes, but more than anything she was thirsty; apart from the potion she was forced to consume, she had not been fed or given anything to drink since she was taken captive nearly two days ago.

Two days ago she and Ginny were out on a mission trying to confirm the possible location of one of Voldemort's horcruxes. They did not know it at the time, but, they essentially walked into a trap. Set by whom, was yet to be determined as the group of Death Eaters appeared equally surprised to encounter Order members, let alone high value targets like Hermione and Ginny.

Ginny, Godric! How could she have been so selfish as to forget about Ginny? Hermione chided herself. She did not see the witch or hear any of her captors mention Ginny, which she hoped meant that the fiery witch managed to make her escape during their melee with the Death Eaters. She would hate it if they both ended up captured, primarily because, knowing Harry, in her absence he was more likely to attempt a rescue plan that would undeniably put his life in jeopardy. She needed to
escape before her best friend did something extremely stupid.

Having sated her thirst she moved on to the task of cleaning herself. She felt so dirty, but her muscles currently lacked the strength needed to climb into the barrel of water like she wanted to. So, she did the next best thing- refilling the basin, plunging the washcloth into the water and using the damp cloth to wipe away all evidence of the previous night from her body, even as she kept having flashbacks of it. Her flesh stung as she rubbed her skin till it was red and raw. When it didn't help her feel any cleaner, she tossed the washcloth aside and returned to exploring the room.

In her state of exhaustion, it took Hermione a great deal of effort to move around and for all her troubles all she managed to find were some rags discarded under one of the beds, which she fashioned into a shift to cover her nudity. She was completely unsuccessful in finding anything she could wield as a weapon.

One by one, Hermione checked each of the doors but found them all locked. She tried to cast wandless unlocking charms, but, unlike Harry, she was never particularly good at those to start with, so now, in her exhausted state, they were wholly useless. Hermione believed her wand wasn't a conduit for her magic, it was an extension of herself; she felt its absence in a way one might miss an absent limb, she thought. As part of their training, Harry had insisted that Order members learn to fight with alternate wands, should their own be destroyed on the battlefield they couldn't afford to waste precious seconds trying to get accustomed to a new wand. Unlike the other members, though, Hermione found she struggled when using a different wand, even ones that had never belonged to anyone. She hoped her captors were only holding on to it, and had not already destroyed her wand.

With nothing else to do, and too tired to try and think of a plan, Hermione figured she may as well rest and recover her strength. Ignoring the bed she woke up in- its smell serving a reminder of what had gone on there- she climbed on top of one of the other empty beds and curling over the mattress she almost instantly fell asleep.

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The wolf watched the witch passed out on the bed. He could tell from her scent that her sleep was the effect of the mysterious new potion she was fed by the Death Eaters and not due to their coupling last night. He remained in an excited state all day long reliving their activities from the previous night in vivid details. When he sniffed at her intimate parts, he was disappointed to discover she had washed his scent off her. He preferred her sweet scent masked by his own as it would turn the others off her.

Running his muzzle up and down her legs, he pushed them far enough apart to let him step between them. She was still asleep when he began to greedily lick at her nether lips trying to prepare her for the invasion. With the fertility potion even now running through her system, it took only a few moments for her to go from bone dry to aroused.

Finding her ready enough, he mounted her, his mouth falling open at the pleasurable sensation of her cunt squeezing his cock. Even though he just entered her, thanks to the build-up all day, already his balls were tingling, ready to release his seed into the fertile womb of the witch beneath them. He continued to fuck her like he was trying to get her up the duff, despite feeling confident she was already carrying his pups. The older wolves had explained that due to their biological differences, it was impossible for a witch to successfully carry wolf pups to term. Even with the new potion, they said it would surely take several couplings for his seed to take root in the witch's womb.

He felt his balls tighten and draw up and out of his sheath, sending bursts of pleasure through him as his knot began to catch on her cunt. He pushed her legs further apart allowing him to reach even deeper inside her. His hips jerked as his knot grew, making it harder and harder to force it past the
tight, welcoming lips of her cunt.

The wolf threw his head back in contentment as he came, his knot rapidly expanding until it was too large to pull out of her. The way her tight channel pulsed around his cock made him come again, but even as his orgasm crashed over him in waves, he made sure to swivel his hips to try to force his seed as deep inside her as it would go.

The ever-constant heat in the pit of his stomach roared back to life as his knot shrank. His cock still out of its sheath remained buried in her. As he felt her stir and slowly grow conscious, he fucked her harder the second time, his grunting timed to the vulgar sounds of their skin smacking together. He pulled her closer so he could fondle her breasts knowing from last night it was something she enjoyed and was immediately rewarded with the sound of her soft sleepy moans of pleasure.

He wondered, as his knot swelled again, if Fenrir would let him continue fucking her once her pregnancy was confirmed. Even though his human self had a complicated history with this witch and misgivings about taking her in such a manner, the wolf didn't care beyond satisfying its physical needs. He could just imagine fucking her after she birthed the litter- his future self sucking her milk fattened tits while he fucked another litter into her. The wolf howled, painting her insides with his seed to the mental image of her constantly swollen with his pups.

He quickly knotted with her a third time, hips stuttering as he realised he was filling her up so much her stomach was bloating. It was a good thing the potion made her strong enough to take his assault even if it left her barely conscious. He pressed himself closer to her and came repeatedly. Even though, the female was not wolf, she smelled and tasted so right to him, he was certain that the next time he was sent to her he would not need a potion to urge him on.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for patiently waiting for me to post an update. Now that I am done with the other fic, I plan to post weekly updates to Wolf’s Mate (the name stays for lack of suggestions).

WARNING: This story has straight-up non-con scenes (not the fluffy role-playing kind). Even though I've added the tags I feel like I need to emphasise this point for anyone who thinks the non-con here will be anything like the kind seen in my other stories.
"How am I getting fat?" Hermione wondered out loud, rubbing her bulging tummy. "All I am given to eat is this horrible gruel." Her nose crinkled in disgust as she raised a spoonful of the offending meal and let it drop back into the bowl. "And, I am barely able to keep down whatever little I eat so I don't understand this," she said, pointing to her exposed tummy.

Hermione wasn't sure if the unseasonal heat wave was of magical origin or a natural phenomenon, but clearly she was the only one affected by the rise in temperature. The last few days she found herself feeling hotter than usual, waking up sweaty in the middle of the night despite it being winter. In order to stay cool, she had taken to wearing minimum clothing and leaving her belly exposed while within her quarters.

_Her quarters!_ Clearly she had been held captive for far too long, she thought, for her to have grown this comfortable with her situation. Then again her captivity was turning out far better than any of them would’ve imagined in the current environment.

In recent years, with so many of the Death Eaters rising to prominent ranks within wizarding society and the Ministry reduced to being a puppet government for Voldemort, the Death Eaters were able to operate openly. In contrast, the Order of the Phoenix had grown weaker in strength and spirit, crippled first by the death of Albus Dumbledore back in her sixth year, and later by the execution of their only spy to have ever successfully breached Voldemort's inner circle, Severus Snape.

Out of concern for their own safety, Order members went into hiding some years ago. Their plan was to first find and destroy every fractured piece of Voldemort's soul, after which Harry could finally confront the evil bastard and put an end to him for good. Unfortunately, they had underestimated Voldemort's cunning; five years of a life spent in hiding later they were still hunting for horcruxes. With a limited number of rapidly dwindling resources, they could no longer afford to engage in open battle with the growing Death Eater army. Forced to operate from the shadows, they occasionally got into skirmishes with lower ranking Death Eaters, but as far as missions went they had only one- search and destroy every one of Voldemort's horcruxes.

In hindsight, Hermione could see that it was a poor long term strategy on their part. Their withdrawal from the public eye made it easier for The Daily Prophet, now nothing but a propaganda machine for Voldemort's cause, to turn public opinion against the Order with their slanted reporting. The Order went from being looked up to as the resistance, to being ignored as some fringe group, and finally feared as a terrorist organisation.

As Voldemort's power and influence within wizarding society grew so did the cruelty of his followers in an effort to decimate the Order. When members were captured, their blood status was used to determine their punishment. Halfbloods were immediately branded as slaves and used for manual tasks otherwise performed by house-elves. The Muggleborns were, almost always, Avadaed on the spot, unless they were prominent figures, well known for opposing Voldemort, then, they were executed publically using Muggle methods. In rare instances, if the Death Eaters believed a Muggleborn to have some value they were spared and branded as a slave instead.

Yet, it was the Pureblood members of the Order who suffered the worst degradation. As Purebloods, they were deemed too superior to be treated as elves so they were used for entertainment instead. Even male members were not spared the violence and humiliation of rape. There were only whispered rumours of what went on during the Death Eater revels, but Hermione had seen her share of dead bodies belonging to Order members or their loved ones to have seen evidence of how the Death Eaters were dehumanising their victims. Hermione considered herself fortunate that as a
Muggleborn, Voldemort had deemed her unworthy to even serve as a cum bucket for one of his Purebloods, choosing instead to throw her to the wolves, quite literally.

Because of her long time relationship with Remus Lupin, first as his student and then fellow member of the Order, Hermione did not harbour the same prejudices against werewolves as some wizards and witches. At the same time she was not naive enough to think that the werewolves holding her captive possessed the same gentle spirit and noble qualities as her former Defence professor. Yet, to her great astonishment the werewolves were treating her far better than anything she could've hoped for. Yes, she was raped by a creature during her first couple of days in this place, but she had not been brutalised or injured in any way. She was thankful for the potion they fed her that not only made her compliant during the act, but also left her memories of those times far too hazy to be traumatised by reliving them in the aftermath. She knew she would most likely have ended up dead or wishing she was if she had fought or resisted in any way- which she would have, were it not for the potion in her system.

She couldn't clearly recall all that had taken place during her first few days in Bleidd Castle, the name of the place she was being held at, as she later came to discover. Hermione knew she was raped more than once by a large white wolf, but, trying to remember the details was like trying to piece together the fragments from a dream after you've woken up. The first clear memory she had of the place was of her being visited by a group of werewolves who inspected her in a manner which, while odd, was in no way threatening. At the conclusion of the meeting she was moved to her current quarters, for which she was grateful; the new room had an attached lavatory so she wasn't forced to do her business in one corner having to then live with the sight and stench of her own waste.

Wolves couldn't reproduce with humans; this was basic biology everyone was aware of. Tonks conceiving and having Remus's child was an exception, not the rule- made possible due to Tonks' unique ability, as a metamorphmagus, to transform herself into any being at will. Hermione assumed her captors must've finally figured out the pointlessness of trying to get a wolf to impregnate her or maybe she was far too sick or weak for the task because she wasn't visited by the wolf again. Instead, they fed her a constant diet of health potions and gruel. In general they treated her less like a prisoner and more like a high value hostage- most likely intending to exploit her connection to Harry sometime in the future, she thought. Hermione was left her to her own devices in her room, where the worst thing she suffered was boredom, hence her latest weak attempt at making conversation with the omega in her room.

"I wish you'd say something, it's not like you'll be slipping me any vital information by chatting about how bloated I look." She attempted to make the omega smile by puffing out her cheeks.

Turning her back on Hermione's antics, the omega went about the task of collecting her dirty laundry and replacing it with fresh ones. This was a part of Hermione's new routine. Every day some female omega came into her room to give her a clean set of clothes, her potions and her meals. The werewolves in Bleidd Castle were ferocious looking beings even in their human form; they were nothing like Remus. But, this particular omega had been to her room a few times before; she looked like a teenager, definitely younger than the other werewolves, with a friendlier looking face. And Hermione was really bored, while she appreciated the view there was only so much time she could spend staring out the window and admiring the unchanging scenery.

"Okay fine, can you at least tell me if your name is Zoey?" asked Hermione, dropping the spoon into the- now empty- bowl and standing up. "I heard the others call you that."

The omega looked up at Hermione wide-eyed in panic. Hermione would've laughed out loud, except, she was suddenly overcome with the distinct urge to vomit. Rushing to the lavatory she made
it in time to throw up the gruel she had finished eating only minutes ago. The omega must've heard her retching and followed her into the bathroom because she stood there simply staring at Hermione in indecision.

"Ugh!" Hermione groaned. "I think I'm sick. I have to be! I'm hot all the time. I can't stop throwing up whatever I eat." She was being cranky and whiny, she knew, but couldn't stop herself none the same.

She raised herself from her position on the floor and washed her mouth in the sink. She made it a point to splash water on her face as well as the back of her neck, not caring that she was getting her shirt wet in the process. She felt so hot and the cold water felt divine against her skin.

"Come on," said the omega. "Let's go for a walk. Fresh air may do you some good."

The werewolves allowed Hermione the freedom to walk around the inner bailey of the castle at least once every day for exercise. Even though she was always accompanied by at least one werewolf, and the stone wall running the perimeter served to remind her of her captivity, it was by far the highlight of her day. Being outside not only provided her respite from the tediousness of being stuck in her room with nothing to do, but, being outside also meant she got to satisfy her curiosity by observing the other residents of the castle as they went about their daily business.

She smiled in gratitude to the omega, who responded by turning around and walking away from her. Well, thought Hermione ignoring the snub and eagerly following the omega out, she would at least get to leave her quarters for a second time in the same day.

Minutes later, they were navigating the corridors that led to the bailey when she sensed Malfoy watching her, again. With the exception of Greyback, Malfoy's was the only other recognisable face in the castle. Hermione had not seen him since their Hogwarts days, so it would be an understatement to say she was shocked to see the Pureblood heir of the Malfoy family, blood supremacist and all around bigot, living in close quarters with werewolves. Unlike her, Malfoy clearly was no captive and as far as she had seen there were no other Death Eaters within Bleidd Castle; it made Hermione wonder about what kind of mission Malfoy could've been assigned that he would be required to stay in the werewolves' stronghold.

There was something distinctly different about Malfoy now, not just the fact that he was a full grown man. His overall demeanour was altered from before. For one, his face didn't twist into the familiar sneer he had reserved for Hermione and her friends throughout their school years. Secondly he was behaving with far more maturity than she had come to expect of him. While she was caught off guard the first time she spotted his unmistakable platinum hair, he was clearly aware of her presence in the castle for he went about his business like it was perfectly normal to find her living in Bleidd Castle. He didn't try to attack her or goad her into a fight or even call her a Mudblood as he was so fond of doing in the past.

Lastly, and strangest of all, there was the staring. Anytime she noticed Malfoy, she'd catch him staring at her. Hermione didn't know if it was deliberately so, but, no matter the time of day, Malfoy was never too far from her anytime she left her room. While he made no attempt to approach her or talk to her, and in general avoided eye contact with her, inexplicably, she'd feel like his eyes were tracking her every move. Based on their past, the only expressions Hermione thought she could recognise on his face were of anger and disgust. She couldn't read all these new emotions flashing across Malfoy's face when he looked at her. There were times the look he gave her was so intense she'd feel overcome by a deep desire to bare her neck to him. More than anything else it was this odd impulse that left her feeling unsettled over his presence at Bleidd.

Hermione tried to stick close to Zoey and ignore the way Malfoy's eyes were glued to her exposed
belly. In her eagerness to leave her room she had forgotten to fix herself first; suddenly aware now, her fingers itched to unknot her shirt and hide her belly from his unnerving gaze. Fighting the urge, she marched on ahead with a huff and a tilt of her chin, doing her best to ignore the blond. She’d be damned, Hermione told herself, if she gave the git the satisfaction of thinking he could intimidate her in this manner.
Hermione stood still, doing her best to maintain an uninterested expression on her face, ignoring the monster standing in the dungeon cell with her. Not even an hour ago she was enjoying an afternoon nap in her room, and then suddenly she was shaken awake and rushed out of the room by one of the female werewolves, who urged her to hurry along. When they reached their destination, the castle dungeon, she was still given no explanation as she was made to sit on the floor of a cell before being locked in. Overwhelmed by the stench of blood and feculence thick in the air, Hermione remained frozen in place, wondering about the sudden turn of events.

She could not have been in there more than a couple of minutes before the cell door was flung open and Voldemort himself walked in. He looked pleased as he took in her position on the floor as well as her dismal surroundings. Well, she thought standing up, she couldn't fight him but she wasn't going to sit there in the filth and let him look down on her.

"So, do you like what I've done?" Voldemort asked with a smile, his nose-less face looking more disturbing than usual- the poor lighting in the cell didn't do him any favours either. He made a great show of rolling a vial of potion between his fingers. Hermione squinted to get a better look. It looked familiar, she thought, though, definitely not one of the potions she studied in school. "Ah, but you probably have no idea what I'm talking about, right?" he asked in a condescending tone. "It's my solution to the low birth rates and shrinking Pureblood population."

From the, what Hermione could only describe as smug, look on Voldemort's face she had a growing sense of foreboding over whatever it was he had accomplished. She wasn't even aware there was a problem with the birth rate. They were living in a period of great strife- if not outright war- it was only natural that their numbers would be dwindling. She doubted many people were feeling up to the task of having children while worrying about their survival.

"The Purebloods were already a small group and a declining growth rate is grounds for concern we may soon cease to exist altogether." Hermione repressed a snort at Voldemort continuing his pretence of being a Pureblood when, thanks to a brilliant effort on Luna's part, most of England had read the story of Tom Riddle. Perceptive witch that she was, Luna believed the Order needed to do something to counter the anti-Order propaganda being dished out by the Prophet. At great personal risk Luna, along with a handful of others, effectively hijacked control of The Daily Prophet for long enough to print Riddle's story and mail it to the Prophet's readership using the paper's own owl post service. Even though the Prophet printed out a special edition the very same day decrying the story and calling it yet another act of terrorism by the rogue group, The Order of the Phoenix, the damage was done. The Order was successful in making many people question Voldemort's authority to lead the Pureblood cause, if not question the ideology of blood supremacy itself.

"It was always the prime motivation for the policy of tolerance adopted by the Ministry and others for so long. Instead of focusing on growing our numbers by improving the birth rate, they threw open the doors to our world, allowing an influx of inferior creatures like your kind. But, what did we gain from this assimilation, apart from an erosion of our culture?" asked Voldemort dramatically. "The consequence of sanctioning this invasion of our society by magic-stealing beings like yourself was Purebloods producing even fewer children and more squibs."

Although her Muggle education was limited to her pre-Hogwarts years and an odd class or two during school breaks, Hermione knew enough about genetics to see how the practice of inbreeding...
followed by the Purebloods would have lead to problems due to their limited genetic diversity. It made more sense to expand the gene pool by introducing new bloodlines. It explained why many in wizarding society superficially accepted Muggleborns even if they were secretly prejudiced against them— it was a matter of their survival. Of course, Voldemort ignored the actual problem of inbreeding, choosing to scapegoat the Muggleborns instead.

"Naturally, I went to the heart of the matter. I’ve had one of my most loyal followers work tirelessly for years to create a potion to improve fertility and ensure successful births. Too bad he didn't live long enough to see the improvements I made to his potion."

Hermione didn’t miss Voldemort’s taunting reference to Severus. When the old Potionmaster's secret was found out, Voldemort made quite the example out of him for the rest of the Death Eaters— if his mutilated corpse was anything to go by. The Order received a deadly blow that day, each member understanding the significance of losing their only man on the inside. While there were those who admired Severus for being one of the best potioneers of their times, and others who respected the man for the dangerous, albeit crucial, role he played as a spy for the Order, yet it was Harry who was most affected by the death of their former Potions professor. Harry, who had come to see Severus as a hero after learning of all of his sacrifices— thanks to a pensieve and several vials of Albus Dumbledore's memories— felt deeply the loss of yet another decent soul in the fight against Voldemort. Despite his surly nature, Hermione believed Severus to be a good man at his core, genuinely wishing to bring an end to Voldemort's reign. It made her heart ache knowing Voldemort had in all likelihood corrupted whatever it was Severus created.

"With this potion, I can begin the production of the next generation of my soldiers ready to conquer the world for me. You and the rest of your little group of friends in the Order fail to grasp the concept of immortality. You don't realise that as an immortal I have all the time in the world. I could do nothing and still emerge victorious. I just need to wait till each one of you insignificant insects dies and that will be the end of the resistance," Voldemort, maliciously hissed out the words. "But, long after you all are gone, I'll still remain here. I'll remain here, for eternity. Unlike you, I am not racing against the clock to make my vision a reality. Be it ten months or ten years from now, I will rule the world."

No, that wasn't possible. Hermione knew if Harry were here he'd valiantly shout, so long as there were tyrants like Voldemort there would always be those who would resist. But she lacked her best friend's optimism. Hermione knew her history well enough to remember that humans were adept at wilfully ignoring evil. Just as the Germans pretended to be unaware of the atrocities committed by the Nazis, so too would society turn a blind eye to Voldemort's evil agenda while his ever growing army would ensure the normalisation of his oppressive regime. She feared that with his plans gaining critical mass, if the Order failed to turn the tide quickly in their favour Voldemort would succeed in his grandiose ambitions.

"However, let no one say that the Dark Lord is not generous. Not only did I spare your worthless life, Mudblood, I chose you to be the first to test my incredible potion. You should feel honoured to know it was I, Lord Voldemort, who made your filthy womb fit to carry the seed of my follower."

The sinister and knowing manner in which he stared at her belly told Hermione all she needed to know. Sick with the realisation, and not just pregnancy hormones, she threw up right there, hoping there was enough projectile to land some on Voldemort.

Merlin! Her chest heaved as the information sunk in. She was pregnant.

"I knew just those watery meals couldn't be responsible for this," said Hermione, pointing to her
stomach. "Did you know?" She asked Zoey, who had arrived immediately after Voldemort's hasty departure, to walk Hermione back to her usual quarters.

"Of course, you knew... You all knew," Hermione said out loud, realising for the first time the reason the werewolves were treating her as well as they were.

Pregnant.

She felt the need to repeat the word over and over in her head till she was convinced this was truly happening. She was pregnant. Because of Voldemort, and his Death Eaters and werewolves, she was going to become a mother.

Godric, save me! She cried out, though in her panicked state the words didn't escape her lips.

She wasn't ready to be a mother. There was a war. Maybe after this was all over, she could think about starting a family. Not now. Not when Harry still needed her. She needed to get back to the Order, not become a mother.

How was she ever going to convince Ron to reconsider a relationship with her if she had someone else's child? She wanted another shot with Ron once the damned war was over; she did not want to have someone else's child. Especially since the father of said child had raped her.

The father... It had to be the white wolf, right? Hermione asked herself. She didn't remember being visited by anyone other than the big white wolf. While she may have, possibly, been raped by others she didn't recall anyone other than the big white wolf.

So, who was the white wolf? Walking back to her quarters she watched the faces of every male she passed by, wondering which of them could be the father of her child. As usual, Malfoy was around, watching her, only he looked... concerned? For... her?

Questions began to rush through her head all at once. Why would Malfoy feel concern for her? What was Malfoy even doing here?! Why was he living with the werewolves like he was one of them, unless...

No!

Of course, Malfoy was one of the werewolves. He had to be! In all her time at Bleidd Castle, which had to be well over a month now, the werewolves didn't bristle at his presence like they did with her or any other outsider or visiting Death Eater. Malfoy was a werewolf- that's why he was so large now. It wasn't just because he grew up; he was a werewolf. She turned her head to get a better look at him only to find him staring right back at her, and for the first time, looking into his eyes, she thought she recognised one of his usually indecipherable expressions.

Remorse.

From somewhere within her, she felt the memory of words heard whispered to her in a dream bubble to the surface

I'm so sorry, Granger.

Malfoy was a wolf! And his hair, his hair was the same shade as the fur of the wolf. Gods, she was going to be sick again, she thought. Leaning against the wall for support, she dry heaved, nothing left in her stomach to throw up.

I'm so sorry, Granger. The voice had sounded familiar, but, she was too drugged to recognise it
Malfoy was the wolf. Malfoy had raped her. Draco Malfoy had turned into a wolf and raped her. And now, now she was pregnant, carrying his child.

Hermione grew dizzy with everything her brain was registering all at once. She squeezed her eyes tightly shut and focused on steadying her erratic breathing; she couldn't though, not when she could still feel his eyes on her.

Why wasn't he taunting her? Why wasn't he boasting about how he'd got the worst kind of revenge on her? Could it be that he regretted his actions?

I'm so sorry, Granger, the wolf-turned-man had whispered to her after he was done- she remembered now.

But, why was he always there, following her, watching her? Why did he look at her with such intensity at times? Merlin, she could feel his gaze burning the back of her neck making her itch with the need to pull down the neckline of her blouse and expose her neck to him.

I need to get away from him, she thought dreading what she may end up doing if she was around him much longer.

Overtaking Zoey, she rushed back to her quarters and ran straight into the bathroom to douse herself with cold water.

Chapter End Notes

Dropped this one early (since I did make you wait a long time for chapter 2), but I'll stick to a chapter a week going forward.

I appreciate the kudos as well as the reviews. You all figured out what Hermione's problem was long before she did, but, don't think that makes our heroine stupid- poor thing is suffering from 'baby brain'. :p
Draco's eyes glazed over in pleasure, oblivious to who his partner was. Lost as he was in the moment, all he knew was how fantastic her cunt felt squeezing his wolf cock. She was so wet, so eager for him. Truthfully, though, he didn't really want her. He had hoped to be with someone else, he was even willing to fight the rest of the wolves for it, like he had last time, but Fenrir gave him no choice in the matter.

"I got a treat for you, lad," Fenrir had said to Draco, referring to the whimpering female shackled to the wall by a chain. "Bit this one just for you - thought you deserved something special this time since you did so well last month. You'll be her first in this form," he told Draco excitedly.

The scent of the blood starting to dry around the fresh bite wound- Fenrir had not even bothered to try healing- excited Draco more than the female itself. But, thanks to the potion he was given earlier, the tapered tip of Draco's wolf cock was already peeking out when the female finished her very painful looking transformation under the light of the full moon.

"Gave her a spot of the Fero potion before, I did. She'll be nice and moist for you, don't you worry about that." The words were barely uttered by Fenrir and, almost on cue, the scent of her arousal permeated the air making Draco's cock slide further out with every breath he took.

The wolf howled at the sight of the female voluntarily rising on her haunches and presenting her glistening cunt to him. Even if she may later hate Draco for whatever she would feel driven to do now, he thought it was a small mercy Fenrir had fed her the fertility potion at all- her lust was probably the only thing helping her withstand the excruciating pain of the bite as well as her first transformation.

"Go on, Draco. Fuck this bitch; put your pups in her," Fenrir had ordered. Resisting the alpha's order wasn't easy during the best of times and the potion he was given took away any impulse control, reducing him to an animal acting only on instinct, one of which was following the alpha's command.

Just like every other bitch Fenrir made him fuck during the full moon, this one also didn't smell right-not like her. Simply acting on a potion induced instinct to fuck, both, wolf and man, whined with frustration when he knotted with the female under him, knowing his seed wouldn't take with this one either- same as all the other bitches he was made to fuck. Quite different from the way it was with her.

News of the capture of Potter's Mudblood and her imminent arrival at Bleidd Castle had meant nothing to Draco. Having suffered the ignominy of being turned into a werewolf and cast out of his family, he was no longer considered one of the Purebloods, so why would he care for their cause one way or another? No, he was a werewolf now, free from the crushing expectations that came with being the heir of the illustrious Malfoy family.

Consigned to oblivion, as a wolf he found true acceptance and a sense of community within his pack- people he would've previously considered unsuitable company- than he had ever found in wizarding society and Draco found he liked life outside the spotlight. The night Hermione Granger was brought to Bleidd Castle Draco had no intention of going anywhere near her, let alone knotting with her. However after overhearing how she was to be used in the latest of the Dark Lord's perverted experiments, Draco believed he ought to help her.
Despite whatever assurances may have been offered to the pack, humans and wolves couldn't mate and produce offspring. A human wouldn't even survive sex with a *were* in wolf form- the wolf seeing the human as food, not someone to fuck. It would be impossible for a wandless witch to fend off a whole pack of wolves, made extra randy thanks to the new fertility potion Fenrir now insisted on them using during the full moons- the idea was to make the wolves lustful enough to willingly breed with any creature put before them.

The way Draco saw it, Granger was essentially being set up to be savagely raped and eaten by the pack. Even if they had been on opposing sides, Draco had gone to school with Hermione Granger. She wasn't just some faceless stranger, he knew her! He couldn't sit by and do nothing. Far too many people had suffered in the past due to his cowardly actions- behaviour once deemed respectable by the snake he used to be- someone who prioritised self-preservation- was unacceptable to the wolf he was now- someone who couldn't abide any display of weakness. Perhaps in giving Granger a fighting chance at survival, thought Draco, he could taste a tiny crumb of redemption.

But it wasn't just concern for Granger's welfare that forced him to act that night. With the rise of the Dark Lord, wizarding society in England instead of improving- the way they had believed it would- had turned into some sort of dystopian shithole Draco was very glad to no longer be a part of. Ever since he was cast out and turned into a werewolf, nearly two years ago now, Draco had taken up residence in Bleidd Castle. He liked how life there remained largely untainted by the Dark Lord's rule. Located in the northern countryside of England, Bleidd Castle and the surrounding lands were a kingdom unto themselves where the werewolves lived by their own code of conduct. But then, out of the blue, things began to change.

Roughly five months ago, small groups of Death Eaters began to frequently show up at the castle with even an occasional visit from the Dark Lord himself. No longer a part of Voldemort's inner circle, it took Draco some time to discover they were running potion trials on werewolves in the dungeons of Bleidd Castle. There was the odd attempt to induce transformations outside of lunar influence, but most of the testing revolved around fertility. It was well known that werewolves didn't reproduce the way every other creature did- lycanthropy could only be passed on through the bite of a werewolf. Any children they conceived were either entirely human or pure wolves, with only a fraction of the conceptions ending up in births since female *weres* almost always miscarried when their bodies shifted from one form to the other during the full moon. Although the pack was unhappy with the goings-on at the castle, the promise of progeny- more than any fear of the Dark Lord- helped purchase their compliance.

Thanks to Fenrir's ties to the Dark Lord, pack members were already serving as soldiers in the Noseless One's army, but despite their association the pack had never been included in the Death Eater revels or asked to join them in their displays of sadism. In his time as a Death Eater he had seen enough to know that indulging one's worst impulses was a slippery slope leading to the destruction of one's soul. Draco wished to ensure the pack never crossed that line.

Brawling, especially during the full moon when werewolves were particularly violent, was fairly common among their kind. Even though its primary purpose was to test their strength against each other to determine their ranking within the hierarchy of the pack, it served other purposes too. It helped them stay fit, expend excessive aggression, settle disagreements and decide winners when competing for the same thing.

When Draco first started trading blows with his wolf brothers that night it wasn't because he was competing to be the one who got to mate with Granger. No, his plan was to fight off the larger, more stronger wolves capable of easily overpowering her. He believed it was unfair to take advantage of a wandless witch. Whatever fault he may have found with her, he respected her abilities enough to think she deserved to be bested in a fair duel. Ultimately wolves respected strength- they weren't
petty like humans when defeated- and the Hermione Granger he remembered could pack a mean punch. Draco was confident she could hold her own against one of the smaller wolves. For his plan to work all he needed to do was concede to the weakest wolf, after he was done beating the rest of the competition.

Unfortunately, as Draco discovered, the road to Hades is paved with good intentions. Sometime during the fighting- which Draco was winning, having successfully forced most of the interested wolves into submission- the direction of the wind changed, bringing with it the most tantalising scent he had ever sniffed, as wolf or man. The scent teased his senses, calling him, demanding he claim what was rightfully his, just waiting to be taken. Taken over by his lupine instinct to breed, he ripped up the rest of the wolves still standing in his way in his eagerness to reach the owner of that scent. The closer he got to her the more eager he grew, her sweet scent, both, exciting and soothing him with promise of the children she would bear him. The wolf howled a warning, heard by all, inside the castle and out, no one was to dare interrupt him once he got started.

Thinking about the way he had fucked her- as he had taken to referring to Hermione in his head - both, that night and the next, it was a testament to the efficacy of the Fero potion that not only had she survived such an intense mating, more extraordinarily, she was pregnant. As much as Draco felt disgusted with himself for what he had done to her it didn't in any way dampen his desire for her any time he recalled their coupling. Merlin, she had submitted to him so beautifully each time, he was desperate to find out what it would feel like to have it for real without any potions compromising their will.

As he wistfully stared out the large windows towards the part of the castle he knew she lay soundly asleep in, Draco once again wished he was with her instead. The longer he stared the more he thought he could almost taste the alluring aroma that hung heavy in the air surrounding her. His only consolation for leaving her alone was that no other wolf would dare approach her while she carried his seed.

Unbeknownst to her, he watched over her every day. While her pregnancy made her precious to the pack, she was still an outsider and their prisoner to boot. It was Draco, whose offspring she carried, who used whatever influence he had within the pack to ensure she had sanitary living conditions and warm meals. He also saw to it that her interactions were limited to the more docile female omegas so she would feel less threatened and more at ease with her captivity.

But for all he did for her, Draco did not yet dare to talk to her. His wolf whined, protesting the self-enforced distance, unable to comprehend that she needed time to accept what had happened to her and would need even more time to accept him in any way. They didn't have the best history to start with, and with Draco forcing his child on her, he expected her to at least want to keep her distance if not outright kill him.

Of course, thinking of her made his cock grow hard once more. Draco imagined he was thrusting into the dripping channel of the witch whose belly was already heavy with his child, not the newly turned were Fenrir had ordered him to fuck. He closed his eyes, trying to immerse himself further into his fantasy, but the smell- which was completely wrong- made it hard for him to enjoy her tight wet pussy. Prior to becoming a werewolf, Draco would've had no complaints about the female he was fucking- she was a fit blonde, with round tits and arse, any warm blooded wizard would have been happy to bed. As a wolf his priorities were different; sex was part of the drive to procreate and his seed wasn't meant to be wasted. The smell from this female told him she couldn't give him children.

For hours after moonrise, fuelled by the lust potion, Draco continued to enthusiastically fuck the female, who was part of his pack now- even if he couldn't form a mate-bond with her he could
already sense the pack-bond forming— till he felt he'd satisfied the alpha's command. He pitied the new were; once the potion wore out she would not only have to cope with the fact that her previous life and relations were lost to her when Fenrir bit her, but also come to terms with what Draco had done to her. He knew from personal experience how unsettling it was to be free of the effects of the potion and realise one had engaged in non-consensual sex. He also knew from experience that even if Fenrir neglected his duties as her sire and the pack's alpha, the pack itself would take care of her and help her adjust to life as a were.

Having executed the alpha's order to a satisfactory degree, Draco was finally able to uncouple himself from the female and go seek help. He left the latest addition to their pack in the care of their mediwitch, Cora, and some of the older females, so they could tend to her injuries after they shifted at dawn. Eventually the pack would huddle around their newest member and welcome her to the fold, but for now they would give her the time and space she needed to come to terms with all that had transpired.

It was close to sunrise when Draco joined other members of the pack for one last run in the woods surrounding Bleidd Castle; they playfully chased each other around and engaged in a friendly brawl before changing back into their human selves. The transformations themselves were treated as a test of power, higher ranking pack members needing lesser time than the weaker ones. Among them only the alpha possessed the ability to instantly transform at will, full moon or not. It was an ability, like every other bestowed by nature, to equip the alpha for his role as guardian of the pack.

Fenrir was missing again— which didn't surprise Draco, Greyback was absolutely pants when it came to his duties as alpha— so it fell to Gunnolf, one of the betas and second in command, to watch over the pack's transformations, guiding the younger ones and assisting their weaker members.

Transformations completed, while everyone else staggered to the nearby communal area, where they usually slept huddled together after the full moon, Draco excused himself and with great effort dragged his exhausted body to the section of the castle housing her. It was only after he reached his usual post outside Hermione's quarters that he slumped against the wall and slid down to the floor where he eventually fell asleep listening through the wall to the faint sound of her soothing heartbeat.

Chapter End Notes

Glad to see so many getting into this story (if your kudos and reviews are anything to go by). I plan to play around with some popular werewolf tropes so there will be smut but not necessarily in every chapter— I hope the story itself can compensate for that fault. :D
"Is this normal? This can't be normal." Hermione pointed to her stomach, the skin stretched taut over a bulge the size of a watermelon. "It's barely two months; my stomach can't be this huge."

Zoey didn't say anything, she never engaged in idle chatter, but after spending time with the girl nearly every day Hermione thought she could accurately read the young girl's expressions.

"I suppose if there was anything unusual or alarming you lot would've done something about it," Hermione thought out loud.

One moment she was fine, going about her daily one-sided conversation with Zoey, and the next she was crouched low, grabbing her side as an intense pain shot through her stomach.

"Hermione? What is it?" Zoey asked in concern. "What's happening?"

Hermione could only shake her head in response. She was unable to breathe, let alone speak, as the pain radiated from her stomach to the rest of her body. By the time the painful spasm passed she lay on the ground, on her side, gasping for air.

She heard Zoey scamper out of the room and shout, "Something's wrong." Hermione tried to get up but more pain ripped through her so she lay prone on the floor, holding her belly instead.

From her position on the stone floor the rapidly approaching footsteps sounded like thunder. She opened her eyes, blinking away the tears gathered, to focus on the person kneeling on the floor beside her.

"What is it, Granger? Did you hurt yourself?" asked Malfoy.

She shook her head, struggling to even suck in air through the sharp pain she was experiencing.

"Can you show me where it hurts?"

She groaned, clutching her stomach tighter in an attempt to ease the painful pressure she could feel building up inside.

"Don't just stand there gawking, Zoey," barked Malfoy. "Go fetch Cora already."

Later, once the pain subsided, Hermione would be shocked at what followed. At the time, however, she was in too much agony to comment on Malfoy's unusual behaviour.

He slipped his hands under her shoulders, gently eased her head into his lap and began to stroke her back in a soothing manner.

"Try to relax," he told her. "You probably just pulled a muscle. The mediwitch will be here soon and we'll know what's happening. Till then, just focus on my breathing, okay?" He inhaled deeply through his nose and noisily exhaled through his mouth.

Hermione nodded and copied him. Screwing her eyes tightly shut, Hermione focused on taking deep breaths in sync with Malfoy. When the pain reduced to a dull throb Hermione opened her eyes only to find herself staring into Malfoy's.
Having never been this close to him before, it was the first time she paid attention to his eyes; shades of grey like wisps of smoke swirling in the air, concealing more than they revealed, she wondered what kind of hidden depths the owner of such eyes may possess. She found herself growing curious about this man she once never would've thought capable of comforting anyone, least of all her.

He continued to stroke her back with one hand, as he held her in place in his lap with the other, never breaking eye contact.

"I want you to know how sorry I am." The words were whispered so softly she almost didn't hear them.

She stared at him in confusion.

"I was given a potion, Granger. I had no control, I... I couldn't stop myself," he explained. "We may have been rivals at school and I know I objected to your presence at Hogwarts, but I have never wanted to hurt you like that. I would never willingly hurt any woman like that."

Hermione blinked a few times and once more squeezed her eyes shut, this time in a desperate attempt to tune his words out.

For a moment she forgot. For a moment she felt safe in his arms. For the briefest of moments she felt cared for. Why did he have to ruin it by reminding her? Why did he have to talk about it at all?

She didn't like to think about it. She didn't want to think about her rape; conflicting thoughts about that night made her feel like a mess. The Death Eaters took away her will by giving her a potion, so whatever transpired was rape. Yet, even knowing that her actions were the outcome of the potion she was filled with a deep sense of shame when she recalled how willing she was that night and the amount of pleasure she had experienced as the wolf filled her with his seed.

But the shame didn't come from the memory, the source of her shame was the way her breath hitched and her pulse raced with excitement anytime she recalled the memory. It was all too confusing and Hermione didn't dare analyse any of it till she was back home, safe with Harry, Ron and the rest of her Order family. Once she felt safe again, she would work on processing what Voldemort and his followers had done to her. Till then she needed to pretend like the circumstances of her pregnancy were completely normal.

Hermione didn't want Malfoy's apologies, which did nothing except remind her of what had happened. She spent the last week avoiding looking his way because she didn't want him to say or do anything to confirm her suspicion that he was the creature who bred her. Yet despite her efforts, here he was, confessing to it all the same.

His confession didn't console her, far from it; it was upsetting to hear that he was just as helpless as her. It was unfair that she didn't get to hate him for what he did to her, but how could she, if he himself was a victim? For the first time seeing clearly the miserable situation she found herself in she began to weep silently, the tears leaking out of the corner of her eyes in spite of her attempt to hold them in.

"Please don't cry," he pleaded softly, brushing away her tears with the pads of his fingers.

Such gentleness from the man who had raped her broke something inside her. Hermione felt a flood of, hitherto suppressed, feelings related to her forced pregnancy rush through her, causing her to break into sobs and cry inconsolably.

Malfoy lifted her and settled her in his lap so she was resting against his chest with her head tucked
under his chin. Probably sensing her need to express the grief she had kept bottled up so far, he did not speak another word, wrapping his arms around her in a hug, he silently rocked her back and forth as one would an upset child.

By the time the mediwitch finally arrived Hermione was feeling a lot calmer. While she would need time to process what Malfoy had told her, based on his demeanour she didn't doubt the sincerity of his words.

"Finally!" Malfoy exclaimed to the woman who entered the room, unannounced, with Zoey following closely on her heels.

From her position, curled up as she was within the circle of Malfoy's arms, she could only imagine the sight they made- confirmed by the nearly comical way Zoey's eyes widened when she spotted them- yet no one commented on it, with Malfoy himself acting like it was perfectly normal for him to be sitting on the floor hugging a prisoner.

"I was beginning to wonder if I was going to have to come fetch you myself," he spoke in an exasperated manner, but made no attempt to move her out of his arms.

Going by the stuttered response that followed he must've been looking at Zoey when he spoke.

"I- I'm so sorry, I couldn't find her. She-she wasn't in her r-room."

"That's enough, Draco. Stop terrorising my omega and tell me what's wrong," said the older woman. She appeared to be far more advanced in years, but her looks and manner were so like Molly Weasley Hermione instantly felt at ease in her presence.

Ignoring the other two, Malfoy leaned in to whisper in her ear, "The mediwitch is here, Granger. You okay to move to the bed so she can take a proper look at you?" At her nod, he finally let go of her.

Feeling drained both physically and emotionally, Hermione was unsteady on her feet and needed to lean against him for support as she walked to the bed and lay down for her examination.

"I found her curled on the floor, holding her belly, Cora," Malfoy informed the mediwitch. "She looked like she was in agony. The pain continued for a few more minutes after I got here before it finally stopped."

"Alright, let's take a look at your stomach, Hermione," the witch said, addressing her directly. She waited patiently as Hermione, with shaky hands, undid the fastening on the waistband of her skirt and moved, both, her blouse and skirt sufficiently out of the way to expose her stomach.

The mediwitch started off by prodding and feeling Hermione's belly using her bare hands after which she drew out her wand and cast, what Hermione recognised to be, a variety of diagnostic spells. Hermione looked at the witch's wand with envy and longing, it was so long since she'd held one herself and nearly as long since she'd even seen one- if the werewolves made use of their wands it was definitely not within her sight.

"Everything is okay. Both, mother and the babies are okay," the mediwitch declared with a smile.

"Babies? As in more than one baby?" Hermione asked in bewilderment.

The mediwitch nodded.

"Really?" asked Malfoy. To Hermione, his expression looked like one of wonder and awe at the
news, instead of the more fitting reaction of shock she herself was experiencing.

"You can listen to their heartbeats if you like and confirm it yourself."

Both, Draco and the mediwitch looked to her expectantly, but Hermione, who was struggling to
digest the news that she was carrying more than one child, didn't care to ask what it was they wanted
of her.

"How many babies exactly?" she asked, suddenly worried she was going to pop out a litter. "And,
what was that gods-awful pain twisting my insides? I thought I was dying" -she gave the witch a
pleading look- "I'd really like for someone to explain just what's going on in my body."

"I apologise for that. I suppose it is rather unprofessional of me, but in my defence everything about
this situation is so unique I'm a little off-kilter," explained the mediwitch. "Well, let's start by getting
the preliminaries out of the way."

While Cora settled herself in the only chair in the room, Malfoy continued to stand at Hermione's
bedside, and Zoey stood at the entrance of the room looking like she couldn't decide if she ought to
stay or leave.

"First of all, I'm Coraline Beckett, but the pack just calls me Cora. I used to be a healer before I was
turned, but thanks to the superior immunity as well as healing abilities werewolves possess I've been
out of practice for decades now. These days, I'm no more than a mediwitch... As a healer my
specialisation was obstetrics, but with werewolf pregnancies being as rare and tragic as they are, I
can't recall the last time I had a pregnant woman in my care, let alone a case like yours. I don't know
if your knowledge of werewolves is considerable enough" - Hermione thought she heard Malfoy
snort, but ignored him for the woman talking - "to appreciate how remarkable your pregnancy is."

The near giddy tone in the mediwitch's voice rankled Hermione.

"Considering all werewolves were formerly witches or wizards, one would think that these two
beings would be able to mate and successfully produce offspring. But, with a few rare exceptions, it
has been observed that copulation between witches and weres- in wizard or wolf form- does not
result in conception. Despite our similarities there exist some physiological differences between our
kinds preventing fertilisation. A shame, really, as it would be easier for witches to carry their
pregnancies to term since they don't turn during the full moon, unlike weres, whose bodies transform,
and in the process rip apart the child in their womb, at the first sign of the full moon.

"Of course, this isn't to say it's any easier for weres to produce children when mating with their own
kind. We believe Luna only blesses true mates with children, but since not every were is fortunate
enough to have a predestined mate they manage to meet in their lifetime, we rarely have children-
human or wolf."

Despite her reputation as an intellectually curious person, Hermione wasn't interested in listening to
the insight she may have, under different circumstances, found fascinating. Impatient as she was for
answers related to her own condition Hermione found herself growing annoyed with Cora,
something the mediwitch must've finally picked up on.

"I'm not trying to avoid answering your question, Hermione. With your circumstances being as
unusual as they are, I need you to understand that while you can trust me to know my job there may
be things that surprise both of us along the way. Now, to answer your question," she said, pausing
dramatically before she continued, "You're carrying two babies. Considering you're not a were you
shouldn't even be pregnant, let alone carrying twins!"
"Guess you can thank Voldemort and his potion for that," Hermione ground out between clenched teeth. Cora may mean well, thought Hermione, but Cora's exuberance in light of Hermione's unfortunate circumstances was really grating at her nerves.

"Yes," replied Cora in a more sober tone, "I understand this isn't an ideal situation for you; however, for us, this is nothing short of a miracle. Not every wolf has a true mate, so there are many who can never have children. Lycanthropes cannot reproduce naturally; the only way we can increase the numbers of our kind is by infecting witches and wizards with lycanthropy through our bite. The process is violent and painful in more than just the physical sense- a newly turned werewolf is both feared and shunned by their more human relatives. Imagine having an alternative, a way to avoid all that senseless pain and suffering..."

"If you were looking to avoid senseless pain and suffering you really chose the wrong master to serve."

Both Cora and Draco winced visibly at her choice of words. Well, the truth was rarely palatable, she thought.

"We are wolves, we follow our Alpha alone." Cora's voice was frosty now, the friendliness from earlier all gone. "We serve no master."

"Well, Greyback is little more than Voldemort's pet, so whether you serve him or your Dark Lord, it's a distinction without a difference."

She realised she was uncharacteristically brash in her speech- though she knew Harry would've approved- but, she was absolutely knackered, and all out of patience to put up with the thestral dung Cora was spouting as justification for the complicity of the werewolves in the crimes committed by Voldemort and his followers.

Cora leaned forward in her seat and baring her teeth at Hermione let out a low growl. The move prompted Malfoy to stalk up to Cora and stand before her in a way that would've blocked Hermione from Cora's line of sight. His back was to Hermione, but his wide stance and the visible tension in his body made him look threatening even if she wasn't the one being stared down by him.

"Oh, you can just stuff that display of dominance or direct it where it belongs- I'm not the one out of line, pup. You know I wouldn't hurt her." Cora's tone suggested she was deeply offended by Malfoy's move and whatever it implied. "She may not be one of us, but, she carries your blood- as far as I'm concerned it makes her pack. And if that wasn't enough, she's also my patient now; I would never hurt a patient, no matter how rude."

Hermione made a sound like she was ready to protest but Malfoy turned and gave her a look so quelling the words died in her mouth. "Granger," he said stepping aside so he no longer stood between the two witches but was close enough to a seated Cora he could loom over her menacingly, "inquisitive witch that you are, no doubt you're bursting with all sorts of questions. Wouldn't you rather ask Cora for answers than waste time antagonising her?"

While Hermione didn't like being scolded, she was unable to deny the soundness of his reasoning. Looking away from the others she thought about where she ought to begin and decided to start with the simpler questions.

"So when will the babies be born? It's usually nine months for werewolves too, right?"

"About that, I meant to discuss this with you, but then we got a little distracted." Cora looked less confident when she spoke now. "I can't tell if this is just something random, or an intended side
effect of the version of Fero you were given, but... the pregnancy appears to be in an accelerated state."

"What do you mean?" asked Malfoy

Cora ignored his interruption and continued to address Hermione. "The gestation period is nine months for our kind, same as all humans. But, during your check-up I observed the pups looked far more developed than they should at this stage in the pregnancy. It's really hard for me to commit to a date, since I don't possess all the facts, but one thing is certain, the pups will definitely be here in less than six months."

Merlin, thought Hermione, instantly recalling her conversation with Voldemort, the bastard had figured out a way to not only make his new army but he may have also worked out a way to reduce the time it took to create it.

"Are you sure," asked Malfoy, "I mean, isn't it possible that the pups are just large?"

There was that word again, Hermione noted mentally - pups.

"Why do you keep referring to the babies as pups? Does that mean I'm going to give birth to..." her question trailed off, unwilling to give voice to her fears.

"No, no, you're not having wolf cubs," Cora reassured her, "It's just a term we use for our young- be they children or newly turned weres with little self-control. Isn't that right, pup?" she asked Malfoy. Cora's eyes twinkled with mirth when Malfoy's reaction was to stand up straighter- he looked like he was trying to make himself appear larger- and glare at her.

"Shows just how young you are if you think that kind of macho posturing will make me fall in line, pup."

"I'd be a fool to even consider such a thing, Cora," said Malfoy with a shake of his head, looking genuinely amused. "Now, can you stop taking the piss out of me in the presence of an omega"- he inclined his head in the direction of Zoey, whom everyone seemed to have forgotten about till that moment- "and tell me why you believe the pups are developing quicker than normal?"

"You've grown far too serious since you earned your beta stripes, pup," said Cora with a sigh, "but I understand you're equally eager for answers."

Cora looked towards Hermione before she began her explanation. "I doubt you remember this, but I visited you when we first confirmed you were pregnant. I know the exact date the pups were conceived and yet when I used the diagnostic spell, it confirmed your pregnancy as being nearly four months along."

Four months ago she was still living in relative safety with her friends, thought Hermione. She could not have possible been pregnant back then. Looking at Cora, Hermione thought there was still something she was withholding from her. "What is it? What are you not telling me?" she asked Cora.

"The pain you experienced earlier, it was probably due to your body trying to accommodate a sudden growth spurt in the pups. I believe you'll experience more of those moments till you're due for delivery," Cora looked like she was cautiously picking her words, "...more and progressively worse moments, depending on how rapidly the pups grow."

News that the agonising pain from before wasn't to be an isolated event made Hermione despondent. Nearly four years ago, Hermione, Harry- back then the Death Eaters weren't as powerful and the Order still thought it was okay for him to be out in the field- and a small group of Order members
had broken into the Lestrange vault at Gringott's to steal Hufflepuff's cup, an item later confirmed as one of Voldemort's horcruxes. The mission, though successful in its objective, didn't go quite as planned.

Alerted to the break-in, a group of Death Eaters surrounded the bank forcing the Order members back into the subterranean region- from where they ultimately made a daring escape on the back of the Gringott's dragon. Among the group of Death Eaters they fought that day was Voldemort's insane sidekick, Bellatrix Lestrange. Cackling like the maniac she was, the witch chased after them, throwing her favourite curse willy-nilly indifferent to whether her own side caught friendly fire. Hermione was in the process of mounting the dragon when she was hit by a stray crucio. The spell could not have lasted two minutes, but Hermione held firmly it was the worst pain she'd ever experienced... until today. Recalling the excruciating pain she'd experienced before Malfoy showed up, she thought there was no way she'd survive regular episodes of the same.

Her dismay must've shown because Cora's expression turned more compassionate. "As a witch you may be physically weaker than us, and I imagine the pregnancy has you feeling drained and out of sorts, but you have a strong magical core, Hermione- I believe you have it in you to survive this."

The sincerity coming through in Cora's words helped reassure Hermione, somewhat.

"Now, as far as the pain goes, I can't risk giving you any pain potions, but we can work towards making your body stronger so you're able to cope better with the rapid changes taking place within you." Cora now spoke in that no nonsense tone one usually associated with people in her profession. "On my way here, Zoey mentioned that you've been experiencing nausea and throwing up a lot -"

"You've been throwing up?" Malfoy asked Hermione, then turned to glare at Zoey, "And why is this the first I'm hearing of it?" his voice was low but threatening all the same.

"Well, it's normal, isn't it? Nothing unusual about a pregnant woman being sick," Zoey explained, nervously shifting her weight from one foot to another.

"Are you a Healer now to decide what is normal or not?"

Hermione grew worried for Zoey, Malfoy looked ready to leap across the room and tear her throat out.

"N-no, n-no, Sir," Zoey whimpered and fell to her knees lowering her head and keeping her eyes on the ground as she spoke. "I'm sor-sorry, Sir. I didn't think it mattered; she's just a prisoner."

If Hermione was shocked to see Malfoy angered by Zoey's statement, she was stunned by how swiftly the old mediwitch moved to step between the two before Malfoy could say or do anything.

"You daft girl," Cora rebuked Zoey, "even if you don't understand how important Hermione is to the pack, you should know the importance of following orders. Another incident like this and next time I won't stand between you and the discipline you so rightfully deserve."

Zoey appeared to visibly shrink at Cora's admonishment. She looked like she dare not risk the wrath of the other two weres in the room by opening her mouth, opting instead to nod in acknowledgement of the warning she was issued before letting her head hang further in shame.

"If we'd known sooner, we could have saved you some discomfort," said Cora, having turned to face Hermione once more. "It's not uncommon for the sense of taste to change during the course of a pregnancy; I'll have our potioneer whip up a couple of variants of the health potion so we can settle on one more agreeable to your system in its current state. I'll also ask the cook to send you meals you
may actually enjoy eating so your body isn't expelling much needed nutrients. You may be a prisoner, Hermione, but you're also carrying the future of the pack, I believe we can get some more exceptions made for you," said Cora, giving Malfoy a brief but pointed look, to which he responded with a subtle nod. The exchange made Hermione wonder exactly what kind of exceptions were being made for her.

"If there's nothing else, I shall take your leave," said Cora edging towards the door.

Hermione uttered a mumbled, "Thank you," feeling rather overwhelmed by the consideration the witch had shown her in light of her own rude behaviour earlier. The last few weeks she felt all over the place where her emotions were concerned- going from angry to sad, sad to irritated and then from irritated to giddy, all in the blink of an eye.

Hermione looked at Malfoy expecting him to take his leave as well, but he remained rooted like he was waiting for something.

Hermione looked from Malfoy to Cora for an explanation, who in turn responded with a chuckle upon observing both, Malfoy's stance as well as the baffled look Hermione wore.

"He wants to confirm for himself that his pups are okay," Cora explained. At her continued look of confusion the medwitch added, "Just let him put his head to your belly so he can hear their hearts beating and put his mind at ease."

"Is that possible, so soon?" Hermione asked bewildered with everything she was learning.

"Absolutely. Plus wolves have excellent hearing so Draco should be able to hear them just fine if he presses his ear to your belly."

"Is that okay with you, Granger?" Malfoy asked her, looking like he fully expected her to refuse.

"Uh, I guess?" said Hermione, feeling unsure but seeing no harm in doing so. Later that night, as she lay in bed waiting for sleep to come, it would occur to Hermione that at no point that day did she feel uneasy over the prospect of Malfoy, the man who by his own admission had played a role in her rape, touching her.

"Thank you," said Malfoy, sitting at the edge of the bed and leaning forward to press his ear to her stomach.

Cora turned to briefly watch the couple as she quietly made her exit from the room, dragging a clueless Zoey with her. They were an odd pair, thought Cora, but believed there had to be something between Draco and Hermione for Luna to have blessed them so generously. She was an old were, though not quite an elder, and as such many would likely dismiss her beliefs as superstitions but she thought there was a greater magic at work when it came to Hermione's pregnancy than whatever the Fero potion was capable of producing.

It would benefit their pups and ultimately the pack, if Hermione and Draco formed a bond. With both having sworn allegiance to different sides in the war, she wasn't sure how the relationship would work out, but those were concerns for later. For now she would focus on giving the odd couple the space and time needed for the delicate magic of the mate-bond to weave its spell on them.

Draco allowed his head to hover over Hermione's distended abdomen and made eye contact with
her, silently seeking confirmation she was truly okay with what he was about to do. He patiently held still as he awaited her go-ahead. Even his wolf- who was constantly demanding he seek her out and knot with her once more- was happy to sit back quietly, as if recognising that the smallest mistake on their part could scare her away for good.

At a nod from her he pressed his ear flat against her skin and held his breath. Having observed the twitch in her fingers, he was surprised she didn't shove him away like he was expecting her to.

Sighing in relief, Draco closed his eyes and tried to ignore the familiar rhythm of Hermione's heartbeat and focused instead on two new sets of heartbeats. As he tried to commit to memory the two new rhythms, Draco found something bubble within him he suspected was love for his unborn pups. His pups, he was listening to his pups' hearts beating. He couldn't help the smile that formed on his face at the thought.

"What is it?"

The whispered question drew his attention to her. He opened his eyes and took in the sheepish look on her face- she probably thought she was intruding but was too curious to resist asking. This lovely creature had no idea what a precious gift she had given him, thought Draco to himself.

"I can hear them. It's amazing," he replied. His words though lacking in eloquence were accompanied by a tone that betrayed the reverence he felt in that moment. Afraid he may get carried away by and do something foolish, undoing what little progress he made with her today, Draco decided it was best he leave immediately.

With great reluctance he moved to leave, stopping at the door only briefly to look at her. "Thank you for this," he said and left hoping she would sense that he was thankful to her for more than just letting him listen to his babies' heartbeats.

Chapter End Notes

Wow! Thanks for all the kudos, it's really encouraging - as are your comments. I swear this story had a lot more smut when I'd only written the more *interesting* scenes. Now that I've gotten around to writing the bits in between, I feel I may have made some false promises early on. Let me know if you feel like the story is starting to drag or delving into pointless arcs...
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At first, both were uncertain about how to proceed, but each, for their own reason, knew they would need to cultivate a relationship with the other. What began with casual nods and nervous smiles, slowly progressed to greetings and comments about the weather, till in a matter of weeks he went from being the guard who followed her, to her companion in her stroll around the bailey.

In the beginning he stuck to his habit of maintaining a certain amount of distance from her, but with each smile directed his way he felt emboldened to move a little closer. As his certainty over her acceptance of his presence increased, proportionately did the physical space between them decrease. Where once not even their shadows caressed, now they walked side by side talking of everything and nothing in particular- though, each was intelligent enough to steer clear of sensitive subjects that could cause their budding relationship to wither and die on the vine. So for all they conversed neither really spoke of the things that really mattered.

Till Draco began accompanying her, Hermione had grown lonely in more than just the physical sense. Ever since her introduction to the wizarding world, Hermione was accustomed to always having people around her- whether it was the girls dormitory at Hogwarts or the different Order safe houses she lived in since she was forced to quit school. While she may have liked being by herself when researching something or simply reading for pleasure, as a general rule, she didn't enjoy solitude. Months of being left alone behind enemy lines, in her room at Bleidd Castle, with nothing to do to pass her time, and her daily interactions limited to Zoey- who was about as responsive as a plank- made Hermione desperate for some form of companionship. Even if Draco didn't speak much, making Hermione carry the weight of the conversation, she didn't mind; thanks to Zoey, she had grown rather skilled at holding one-sided conversations. Besides, she was naturally inclined to prattle when nervous, and the heated looks he gave her when he thought she wouldn't notice, ensured she was sufficiently on edge to maintain an incessant stream of chatter.

It took Hermione some time to recognise the sexual tension between them for what it was, but when she did, the realisation hit her like a ton of bricks. One of the unpleasant side effects of the pregnancy, apart from the excessive vomiting, was the high libido she found herself stuck with. Thinking of the intense stares directed at her by a certain blond only made matters worse, especially now that she had started to notice what a fine specimen of masculinity he was, in strictly physical terms. It certainly didn't help her keep her lustful thoughts in check when she could recall just how pleasurable sex with him could be. Though, extraordinarily, it had taken something as innocuous as a smile for her to find out she was attracted to him.

Watching Draco smile was an odd phenomenon for Hermione, who couldn't recall a single time she'd seen him smile genuinely in all their years at school. With his harsh colouring and frosty demeanour it was easy to forget that Draco Malfoy was a good looking wizard. But, something about his smile transformed his face- almost as much as lycanthropy did during the full moon- going from posh and contemptuous to open and accessible. While it wasn't an infectious smile like Ron's, or even endearing as Harry's, Draco's smile made Hermione notice the man himself.

To her people usually appeared as the sum of their actions- a man like Lucius Malfoy who was evil enough to give a little girl a cursed diary was ugly, while a noble elf like Dobby, who sacrificed his life helping Harry, Luna and Neville escape captivity, was beautiful. Confronted with a new version of Draco Malfoy, for the first time, Hermione found herself painting a picture of a man based solely
on shallow appearances, and to her great shame she discovered she was attracted to what she saw.

Hermione observed that while he didn't talk much, Draco would find excuses to touch her. Hermione pretended not to notice since the touches were fairly innocent anyway- his fingers brushing against hers, a hand offered in support lingering for longer than necessary, fingers grazing her neck while tucking away a stray curl. Hermione wasn't called the brightest witch for nothing; she could see what was happening- his werewolf instincts were making him more protective of her since she was carrying his children. And while he was turning out to be a far more pleasant companion than she could've imagined, she was still a prisoner and he a Death Eater, however disgraced.

She didn't know how Draco had ended up there- whether he was punished for turning into a werewolf or punished by being turned into a werewolf- but, undoubtedly, he would've been disgraced; the people on his side of the war weren't exactly known for their tolerant attitude towards anyone not completely Pure. To Hermione, Draco's situation made him the best candidate for an ally since he was already predisposed to protecting her. She recognised the need to encourage whatever was naturally developing between them so she could exploit it in the future to orchestrate her escape.

In the beginning she was indifferent to him, but once aware of the sexual tension between them, it was hard for her hormonally charged body not to react with arousal to the hungry looks he gave her. She doubted he was aware of his effect on her but didn't think he would object to her lascivious thoughts involving him. However, it wasn't the thrill that shot through her when he'd give her a predatory grin that was the cause for her concern, no, it was the tiny flutter she felt in her chest when he'd flash a crooked smile at her that made the brightest witch worry she may not escape captivity without succumbing to Stockholm syndrome first.

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Watching Hermione smile wasn't a novelty, in and of itself, for Draco. During their many years at school together, there were several occasions where he got to witness her smile, whether it was out of happiness from spending time with her friends, as an encouragement to classmates struggling with their studies, or in self-satisfaction when she earned points for her house. But for all the many times he saw her smile he was never the recipient of one of those smiles, until now.

Hermione Granger wasn't as blessed in the looks department as she was in the brains, but that wasn't to say she wasn't beautiful in her own right. Despite possessing plain brown eyes and plain brown hair- that Draco had once described as being muddy like her blood- he wasn't immune to their appeal. Shining with intelligence and a hint of mischief, he found her eyes captivating, and her unruly hair beckoned to be fisted in his hands as he made her submit. Her face, usually hidden by her bushy hair, had an ageless beauty that glowed unaided by glamour spells despite the toll the pregnancy was taking on her body. And while she didn't possess the kind of lusty curves desirable to most wizards, the graceful curve of her swan-like neck was enough to inspire lust in both Draco and his wolf.

There were other qualities Hermione Granger embodied that, both, wizard and wolf could appreciate. She was intelligent to a degree most would find intimidating. She was brave, not lacking in either physical or moral courage. She was loyal to a fault- a trait he had always assigned high value to. And despite her slender built, which would be considered fragile by the pack's standards, Draco knew there was an underlying strength to the witch that went beyond bone and sinew, even beyond magic, to the very core of her spirit that had his wolf panting after her. All these qualities he now found so attractive in her were ones she'd always possessed, but blinded by prejudice he would've gone through life thinking of her as nothing more than jumped-up Mudblood Granger if lycanthropy had not caused the scales to drop from his eyes, letting him finally, truly, see her.
Draco wasn't sure where they currently stood in their relationship. They weren't strangers, and with her carrying his children they couldn't be enemies anymore, but they weren't exactly friends either. They were friendly with each other, but even though he spent time with her nearly every day, he didn't know what she really thought of him. That said, he didn't need a legilimens spell to know that, at least physically, she desired him. When she was aroused her lustful thoughts were clearly written all over her face anytime she looked his way.

He knew she was a capable liar, having witnessed her lie convincingly to Umbridge before delivering her to the Centaurs- that was back when they were kids, before they were forged by the flames of war. He took it as a positive sign that she wasn't bothering to mask her lust from him, but he was hesitant to act on the unspoken invitation. As pleasant as their interactions were Draco wasn't foolish enough to have forgotten that she was a prisoner; attempts to play nice and form a bond with any of her jailers could simply be a matter of survival as far as she was concerned. So on days she smelled particularly aroused he made sure to keep his distance from her lest he succumb to the temptation.

It didn't bother Draco that she was most likely trying to manipulate him- anyone would do the same in her place- he was relieved to get the chance to show her the man he had turned into and let her see for herself that he was capable of caring for her. For the most part he respected her space, never entering her room except for that time when she'd nearly passed out from the painful spasms of the twins growth spurt, but with his eager wolf constantly hounding him, he couldn't resist touching her altogether- it gave him some confidence that even though she was aware of his subtle touches she never told him off or even commented on it.

Draco treated Hermione with the same patience and care he would've once shown towards a complicated potion, while he waited for her to come around. They were living in times of great strife, belonging to opposite factions didn't make things any easier, but whatever the outcome of the war, they were now bound together by their unborn babies, their lives and futures forever entwined, whether she realised it or not.

"-could've sworn I saw Potter's Mudblood pass by."

"That's her all right. The Dark Lord has special plans for her."

"I've seen her. Looks like she's carrying Potter's bastard, isn't she? That should force the rat out of hiding."

"Not Potter, would you believe it's the wolves that knocked her up."

"Utter rot, mate! Unless she's a werewolf, there's no way that's possible."

"Got that right, Lucas. She may be an animal like the rest of her kind, but she's not one of these mutts."

"Careful Rhys, they've got some sharp ears."

"They wouldn't dare touch one of us Black Cloaks."

"Maybe, but we're in their territory and outnumbered. Try to keep your stupidity in check."

"Whatever. Point is there's no way a wolf got her up the duff."

"Oi! Are you two blind or just stupid? Haven't you been paying attention to what goes on in the
dungeons?"

"Yeah, but that's different, innit? I mean, they're all werewolves."

"Sure. But you know they're not just experimenting with wolves. They've got other sites with other creatures as well. Heard they've even got giants..."

"I thought those were just rumours. Are you saying you-know-who is trying to mix some of these beasts to create something new?"

"Not something new. Maybe just something better?"

"Still sounds farfetched to me."

"Yeah, and it's not like we've seen anything come off it either."

"Waste of time, if anyone bothered to ask me."

"Well no one did, so you can shut up, Mitch. I'd rather be here than on some overseas mission."

"But we're missing all the action, Nick. I mean we could be out there exterminating Mudbloods, making some galleons."

"How you've survived this long being as stupid as you are, I haven't a clue. And how many times do I have to tell you to stop calling me Nick, you low class piece of -"

"Put your wand away, Nicholas. Mitch may be a bit touched in the head but he's still one of us and that makes him an elite in this world."

"What's with all of you gangin' up on me? I've spoken nothin' but the truth!"

"You don't seriously believe everything you read in the Prophet?"

"Whaddya mean?"

"Can't you tell the difference between news and propaganda, you twit?"

"How aboutchu speak plainly so I have a clue whatchu on about 'fore you go callin' me names?"

"Sheldon and Nicholas are saying that only a fool would believe all the propaganda that's been published about our missions overseas."

"It still don't make sense to me. Are you sayin' we haven't nearly taken over the Bulgarian Ministry?"

"Far from it. We've received quite the walloping in both our campaigns to overthrow their government."

"Bollocks!"

"It's true, mate. My brother was part of the push they made a coupla months ago. He said it was brutal- a carnage, he called it. We ended up injuring so many of our own side -- They'd be foolish to make another attempt anytime soon."

"Come on fellas, you're tryna put one over on me, eh? Bulgaria's nothin' compared to England, we'd have taken over easy."
"We're saying, it's all lies about us winning in Bulgaria... or anywhere else for that matter. It's just something to keep our morale up and the public cowed down -- Don't want them getting any ideas."

"Yes. We didn't have to fight an all out war in England so it was easier- probably why Lords Nott and Malfoy imagined they could make a direct play for Bulgaria."

"You know the tests going on here relates to their loss there, right?"

"In what way?"

"The wolves are stronger and make for great cannon fodder in the battlefield, but they have a special kind of magic, some kind of telepathic bond with their kind that helps them sense each other even in a crowd."

"Yes, I've heard of it. It's why they never accidentally kill one of their own in battle."

"See, the Bulgarians have an advantage over us- they're quite militaristic, with a majority of their witches and wizards part of the militia, they don't have the same struggles in battle that we do."

"And, they have the home ground advantage."

"Yes, that too. So, the Dark Lord wants to harness the magic of the wolves to get us the same advantages as the wolves. Basically, they're trying to weaponise some aspects of lycanthropy."

"Merlin and Morgana! Is that why they were sawing through that one's skull... to study it? I was so grateful to have not been picked to do the job I didn't bother to ask why."

"Don't know about you, Mitch and Gary, but I'm more than a little relieved to know there's a point to the things we've been doing in the dungeons. I was under the impression it was simply a few bored senior Death Eaters trying to amuse themselves- you'll know what I'm talking about if you were invited to any of the recent revels... It gets... creepy."

"The revels are less fun now, more shock and gore."

"I know what you mean. Call me simple, but I long for the days when a revel meant shagging a fit Halfblood and using an imperio to make the ugly ones do silly things for laughs."

"That was some funny shite back then. Nowadays it's all fuck-them-up-the-arse and string-them-by-the-intestines."

"As much as I'd like to stick around here listening to you dummies get a clue, duty beckons. Clifford, Sheldon and I need to get to the portkey point before Parkinson arrives."

"What's Parkinson doing here? I've never known him to visit Bleidd."

"Not Lord Parkinson. Got an owl from his daughter saying she's coming over."

"I didn't know she was a Death Eater."

"Well then, add that to the list of important things you don't know."

"Why is she important in any way?"

"For starters, she's one of the Sacred Twenty-Eight-"

"That's a real Pureblood princess right there."
"- and if that isn't enough, she's also one of the original Junior Death Eaters."

"Joined right after Malfoy's and Nott's boys, didn't she?"

"That's right. But daddy Parkinson packed her off to the Americas soon after she finished school."

"So how come she's back now?"

"That should be obvious, I'd think. England's pretty stable now compared to some years ago. We pretty much control everything and the resistance is good as dead. Come to think of it, with the exception of Potter's Mudblood, I can't remember the last we came across any members of the Order."

"You must've missed the revel that took place in Godric's Hollow then... That one was a real beauty-
"

"Forget the revel. I wanna hear more 'bout the Parkinson-"

"Our current state of affairs has nothing to do with her return, you dimwits. It's because of the order."

"What Order? They've been nearly beaten out of existence."

"What? No, not The Order of the Phoenix. I realise we're insulated here to a certain degree, and the Daily Prophet is no longer a reliable source of news, but surely you have other sources to keep yourselves apprised of the goings on in our society?! I was referring to you-know-who's latest order asking Purebloods to marry and have kids."

"I heard about it, just didn't bother with the implications. It's not like I have any prospects, do I?"

"Same here. With Pureblood women being as scarce as they are I doubt any of them will want to settle for a poor Black Cloak like me. And since it's illegal to have a child with a Half-blood, I don't see any reason to concern myself with the new law."

"So, Sheldon, you think Parkinson's back in England to marry?"

"Seems more likely that her father wanted her to return to arrange a union with one of the old wizarding families of England."

"So why is she coming to Bleidd?"

"Her owl didn't state her purpose. I imagine she's just doing a tour of all the strongholds."

"Heh! Wonder how she'll take the news that her old pal was the one to knock up the Mudblood."

"Which pal?"

"The Malfoy brat."

"Thought you said it was one of the wolves that put a bun in her oven?"

"He's right, mate. Malfoy's lad is one of them now."

"You don't say! But he's like -- I mean, isn't he royalty or somethin', being a Malfoy and all?"

"I believe they'd rather keep it quiet where the general public is concerned out of consideration for Lord Malfoy's high standing, but the Dark Lord had the younger Malfoy punished by having one of
the werewolves bite him. They expected him to die, weak thing that he was, but apparently he surprised everyone by surviving."

"Sounds like a porky pie to me."

"My father is close friends with Walden Macnair, who was present when this took place. I have no reason to doubt the word of either of those men."

"Hang on. Do you mean to tell me that the big bloke usually keeping guard over Potter's Mudblood, who looks so much like Lucius Malfoy, is actually Lord Malfoy's son?"

"That's the one."

"Blimey!"

"You can say that again. I had no idea either."

"Made a werewolf and then made to breed a Mudblood..."

"That is one long fall from grace, boyo."

"That's a lesson, right there. Best not give the bosses any reason to get mad at us."

"Agreed. If they could that to someone with such high ranking -"

"- can't imagine what they'd do to one of us."

"Absolutely. Keep your mouth shut and follow orders."

"Come on, we really do need to get going now if we don't want to be late."

***

Hermione drew her knees closer to her body, sitting absolutely still on the stone floor, despite knowing she was concealed from the view of both, the group of Death Eaters departing, as well as the ones still chatting out on the balcony. There was also no risk of them bumping into her when they left as the entryway connected to a corridor that would lead them to a different wing of the castle, away from where Hermione currently sat in a crouch below one of the large windows looking out on the balcony.

With the departure of the more intelligent three from the group the discourse had reduced to nothing but useless banter. She hoped they would all leave before Zoey returned and observed Hermione's position in relation to the group of chatty Death Eaters; she was confident that after the reprimand from Cora, Zoey was very likely reporting everything related to Hermione.

This wasn't Hermione's first attempt to listen in on a conversation taking place around the castle, so when on her way to the courtyard she happened to catch a glimpse of a group of six to eight Death Eaters talking outside it was easy enough for her to pull the old trick on Zoey. The old trick basically involved pretending to be too tired or sick to move, then making Zoey go and fetch her something—water, potion, extra clothing—so she could eavesdrop on whoever was talking. While simple, it was easy to execute for two reasons: Zoey believed Hermione was weak, and Zoey feared the consequences to her own health if something happened to Hermione on her watch. Were it Malfoy accompanying her today it would never have worked as he would not have left her alone if he believed she was feeling poorly. Instead he would have picked her up and marched straight to the mediwitch.
Now even though Hermione has a sound routine to divert Zoey when she had an opportunity to spy on the other inhabitants of the castle, nothing had come of it so far. The werewolves always sensed her presence and moved away and the few Death Eaters she'd spied on did little more than confirm that they were only getting more sadistic in their ways as they felt emboldened to openly practice their bigotry. In comparison, the bounty of information she'd unearthed in a single conversation today, felt like hitting the jackpot, making up for all previous disappointments; to say it had been enlightening would be putting it mildly. She would need time to assign context to everything she had heard in order to properly process it all, but the one piece of information that stood out above the rest was the news that Voldemort's armies had failed abroad. It gave her the hope she desperately needed to believe that they may win after all.

While the Order spent the last few years focused on finding and destroying the horcruxes, the Death Eaters had strengthened their hold over wizarding England, altering it in ways that it would take years after Voldemort's fall to reverse the damage and truly reclaim their society once more. Due to limited resources they were unable to keep the Death Eaters in check, who were rapidly growing their numbers to a point where there was mounting concern that even if they managed to defeat Voldemort, the Death Eaters would still emerge victorious in the war.

Ever since Voldemort's minions wrangled control of the Ministry, overseas travel was strictly controlled and closely monitored, making it impossible for members of the Order to slip past the lines and look for allies in other wizarding communities. Unfortunately, as Hermione discovered today, like so many others, they too had bought into Voldemort's propaganda about his successes abroad. Order leadership had discussed the matter at length before concluding that they would be risking exposure if they attempted to reach out to their counterparts outside of Britain, and in vain too, as no one was likely to help if the rest of the world was also engaged in a fight for survival with no resources to spare.

However, if they were all lies then it was possible for the Order to get help from outside- provided they could offer their prospective allies an incentive to do so. Hardened by the struggle and strife of the last five or so years of her life since Hogwarts, Hermione was no longer the bright-eyed witch who believed that people could be convinced to do the right thing simply because it was the right thing to do; the Order would need to come up with the right incentive to convince others to join them in their fight.

Well, she thought, at least the one benefit of being a captive was all the free time she had to think. Surely she'd figure out a way to put to use everything she'd learnt today.

"You filthy whore!"

Though her cheek stung, she instinctively thrust an arm out in time to keep her head from cracking against the floor while the other wrapped protectively around the bulge of her stomach. It was the unexpectedness of the slap, more than its force, that caused her to lose her balance and fall.

"Not only did you trick my Draco into fucking your slaggy cunt, but you went and got yourself pregnant," shrieked Pansy Parkinson.

Hermione blinked in amazement, "You think I wanted any of this?"

"Who cares what a Mudblood whore like you wants. I have no intention of letting some two knut slapper replace me as the next Lady Malfoy just because she managed to get herself knocked up with Draco's babies," Pansy cried out.
"So, abort them," Hermione said tonelessly.

She always knew Parkinson had a blind spot when it came to Malfoy, she just never realised how large it was. It would take a tremendous amount of denial for any woman to believe Hermione to be the aggressor in this situation. It also struck her as odd that Parkinson seemed to think she could become the next Lady Malfoy by hitching her wagon to Malfoy. Was it possible she had not heard about Malfoy's condition? Hermione might've laughed at the absurdity of the situation if she didn't also find it pathetic.

Parkinson drew her wand and pointed it at Hermione's abdomen; from the speculative look in her eyes as they narrowed in focus on her, Hermione thought Parkinson was most likely making a mental run-through of her limited inventory of spells to figure out which one would most suit her purpose.

"Pans, what do you think you're doing?" asked Malfoy, sauntering in like he was still the Slytherin Prince at Hogwarts. He didn't fool Hermione; she'd seen how the Death Eaters now treated him. To his credit, Malfoy never reacted to any of the taunts or jeers the Death Eaters threw his way- he appeared to have developed a thick skin, in more ways than one, since turning into a werewolf.

"Oh Drakie-poo," cooed Pansy flying to Malfoy and throwing her arms around his neck. For his part, Malfoy stood rigidly, pulling his head back before she could assault his lips.

"Pansy, what are you doing here?" he asked again, looking every bit peeved, as he dragged her hands away from his neck.

"I came to see you, silly," Parkinson said, pushing her chest out suggestively. "I went to Malfoy Manor soon as I returned to England. I didn't realise how much I'd missed the place till I stepped into the Manor- felt like I'd returned home. I was so excitedly looking forward to being reunited with you, but you weren't around," she whined. "Like you, Lucius was away on a mission, but Narcissa was at home. We had such a lovely time talking about my stay in America. You know, I really believe I impressed your mother with how sophisticated I've become now. More than once she said to me, 'Pansy, darling, you must tell me this story another time,' and I got the sense she was expecting that she and I would be spending a lot of time in the near future."

Hermione stared at Parkinson and wondered if perhaps the witch had taken one too many falls from the broom for her to not realise how delusional she sounded.

"So mother told you I could be found here?"

"Well, not immediately. She was oddly tight-lipped about your mission and whereabouts. But you know how persistent I can be when I want something, darling- no one can refuse me for too long," said Parkinson flashing him a smug smile.

"I decided to pay you a surprise visit today but I got held up by the stupid Black Cloaks who thought I'd care to know their business here- bored me to death for twenty minutes with all kinds of reports. Then one of them mentions you, tells me all about what the Mudblood did to you. Oh Draco! My poor darling, how terrible it's been for you; tricked and taken advantage of by this muddy skank. I can't imagine how you've suffered. But, don't worry, I'm here now. Together, we'll fix this mess."

Hermione felt certain Malfoy was just as amused as she was by Parkinson's version of the events that had transpired between them.

Without caring that Hermione was in the room, Pansy tore off her robes, revealing a completely naked body beneath.
"I'm here for you, my love. Take me; fuck your beautiful babies into me."

Pansy may have a pug-face, thought Hermione, but the stunning built of her body certainly justified the level of confidence she possessed to stand starkers before them. Malfoy didn't look impressed. He reacted by swatting away Pansy's hand as it reached for his genitals.

"Pans, does your father know you're visiting me?"

Pansy shook her head. "No, daddy doesn't know. I thought I'd give him a surprise when the two of us showed up together, engaged," said Pansy clapping her hands in delight.

"Has no one updated you on my current status?"

"I may have been out of England but I followed the society papers closely. I know you're not married or even engaged yet. You've been waiting for me all this time just as I -"

"So, I take it no one told you I'm a werewolf now?"

"Wer-wer-werewolf?!" Parkinson stuttered, clearly in shock.

"Pansy, it looks like you've been labouring under a few delusions. As your friend let me clear some of them for you." Malfoy spoke calmly, with the kind of no nonsense undertone to his voice that made one sit up and pay attention.

"First of all, I'm no longer the Malfoy heir. Second, Hermione is not a skank. Lastly, and this one's the most important one," Malfoy body language abruptly changed from friendly to threatening, "if I ever even hear about you pointing your wand to threaten my unborn children again, I will forget we were ever friends."

He gave her a couple of moments to allow his words to sink in.

"Nod, if you understand, Pans."

Parkinson nodded, threw a dirty look in Hermione's direction, then picked up her discarded robes and, without even bothering to get dressed first, walked out proudly with her head held high.

"I apologise for my negligence- Pansy should not have been able to reach you. I'm sorry you had to listen to her insult you like that."

Hermione looked away from Parkinson's retreating figure to Malfoy who was suddenly standing in front of her. Considering he had yet to apologise for any of his loathsome behaviour towards her during their Hogwarts years, which was far worse than Parkinson's just now, it felt surreal to hear him apologise for Parkinson's ridiculous display. Add to that the fact she was currently his prisoner, someone he had technically raped and gotten pregnant, his reason for apologising struck her as downright silly.

She shrugged. This hardly mattered, she thought and made to move past him, but, stopped when he put his hand on her arm.

"Did you mean it... about aborting the babies?" His voice sounded odd, like the thought pained him.

"Would it be that surprising if I did?" she countered. What did he expect, that she would welcome being pregnant with twins with her former bully who now on top of being a Death Eater was also a werewolf?
"No. No, I suppose not. It's just, I thought -- See, I didn't think you'd ever consider doing such a thing."

Instead of the anger she had expected there was a vulnerability in his voice that shattered her defences.

"No, of course I wouldn't," she sighed. "I'm just so all over the place with the pregnancy and Parkinson really pissed me off with her accusations."

She gingerly touched her cheek and winced at how much the slap still stung. From the way Malfoy glared angrily at her cheek she was pretty sure she was sporting a bruise by now.

"Did she do that you?" he demanded.

He looked mad enough to commit murder. Hermione, worried about what he would do, merely nodded.

"By Salazar, I'm going to-"

She grabbed his hand.

"No, wait. Stop."

He looked down at her hand holding him back. It was the first time she was touching him on her own. It was a little thing, but it excited his wolf.

Merlin, thought Hermione, watching the hungry look that flashed across his face- it made her insides feel funny. She again cursed the pregnancy hormones that left her feeling randy at the oddest of moments but she didn't move her hand away.

"I think you've already made your point. I doubt she'll bother me again," she said and grinned when she recalled Parkinson's failed attempt at seduction.

Malfoy was probably too upset over her injury to realise why she was grinning. He raised a questioning eyebrow at her, looking at her like he thought she'd gone mad. Her grin widened in mischief before she threw her arms around his neck and pulled him closer in an imitation of what Pansy had done earlier.

"Oooh, Drakie Poo, I've missed you. Please take me now!" Hermione screeched before bursting into a fit of giggles. It took her a few minutes to notice he wasn't laughing with her, but was watching her curiously while holding her by the waist.

Suddenly her arms around his neck felt awkward.

"I know you're only joking, but I should warn you about the effect it has on me to hear you say such things," said Malfoy looking about as serious as a heart attack. "You know," he lowered his voice to a seductive whisper forcing her to lean in to hear him clearly. "I can help with those cravings you have. You probably don't realise it, but even standing outside I can smell you when you do. You can come to me anytime you like. I'm here, I won't ever turn you away and I'm not asking for anything in return."

Hermione licked her lips, tempted by what he was offering even as she was embarrassed he could smell her during the times she was feeling randy.

"You don't have to say anything. Just know I'm here, I'll take care of you, Granger," he promised,
"You and the pups, both," he assured with a light caress to her baby bump.

Chapter End Notes

Reading your comments on the last chapter made me so pleased with myself, I'm amazed I could stop myself rereading them long enough to finish this chapter. Thank you!
Draco was fast asleep when he was jolted awake by the unpleasant sensation of someone on top of him, desperately trying to ride his deflated cock. He didn't need to open his eyes to know it wasn't moonrise yet, or that the female stroking his cock was one of the pack's omegas. He rudely shoved her off of him and got out of bed, his cock hanging limp, completely uninterested in the naked woman lying sprawled on her arse in his bed.

"Are you to be my moon mate, tonight?" he asked in annoyance.

"Yes, Sir" - she spread her legs, pussy lips held open with her thumb and forefinger - "Please fill my womb with your seed, Sir." Draco took in the obscene invitation, uninterested. He would've preferred to shove her out of his room, but that wasn't an option, thanks to Fenrir.

In less than an hour the moon would be out and he would feel the compulsion to act on the alpha's order. Fenrir had specifically commanded that he was to release his seed into any bitch presented to him at the full moon. Draco wasn't singled out by Greyback; male or female, every unmated beta in the pack- with the exception of Cora and a few others like her who lost their mates in the Pack Wars- was expected to mate during the full moon. Sometimes they got to choose their moon mate, sometimes it was chosen for them. This was their way even before the Dark Lord began to interfere in pack business. Were believed that mating before Luna brought forth her blessings in the form of offspring. The select few conceptions that took place in their kind happened when they mated at the time of the full moon when her presence was felt the strongest on earth.

"Dammit, Moira! The moon isn't even out yet, why the fuck would you already take the potion?!" he demanded in exasperation, taking in the way she was shivering with need.

"I was eager to please you, Sir," she replied, moving to get up from the bed.

"Stay where you are," he ordered. "I'm going to need some time to get ready for you."

Ogling his still flaccid cock, she licked her lips suggestively. "Allow me to assist you, Sir."

The offer only irritated Draco further. Even after working and fighting his way to the position of beta, Fenrir was in the habit of treating him like a pup when he wasn't treating him like a fool. His resentment of Draco's past life as the Malfoy heir ran so deep he still sought to find ways to put him down, in spite of Draco being pack now. It didn't matter how attractive or seductive an omega may be considered by human standards, Draco recognised the insult intended behind always getting paired with an omega.

Werewolves strictly followed a social hierarchy to maintain order in the pack. This hierarchy helped establish who made the decision, who mated with whom, even who ate first. They believed Luna looked favourably on a match of equals, so alphas mated with alphas, or in the absence of another alpha, the strongest beta in the pack. Betas mated with betas, and omegas didn't mate since omegas were either their young or their weakest members. While there were no restrictions on who they could have sex with for the rest of the month, the social order was so instinctual, omegas vied for the attention of betas because even an omega did not find another omega sexually appealing.

"Just stay on the bed and play with yourself while I get myself ready," he ordered brusquely and
walked over to the window.

Of course, that she was an omega wasn't his sole objection to the naked female currently stuffing two, three fingers into her pussy in an attempt to pleasure herself— that was simply adding insult to the injury that he wasn't going to get to mate with her. He threw the curtains open and looked to the other side of the castle, to the little window in the distance he recognised as part of her bedroom. He imagined at the time she was probably keeping herself busy rereading one of the select few books he was able to give her.

He felt at ease knowing Hermione would be safe tonight even without him there. Before heading to bed this afternoon, he made sure to ward her room with repelling spells that would prevent anyone other than him entering or leaving. With the number of Black Cloaks and Death Eaters in residence, he wanted to ensure no one was able to barge in on her, like Pansy had, while the pack was busy with the full moon. Her physical safety seen to, he worried for Hermione in other ways, especially in light of his conversation with Cora this morning.

"Is Hermione okay?" he asked anxious over Cora's unscheduled visit. "Is it because of the full moon? Are you worried the babies will try to shift?"

She shook her head and smiled reassuringly at him. "No cause for panic, pup. I was only checking on her since I was here. As far as the babies go, you know we have yet to confirm that she's indeed carrying lycans. So far they appear to be normal babies, Draco."

"Yes, but -"

"And, even if they are lycans, the whole point of letting them do those experiments on us was to allow us the ability to reproduce in a manner similar to other magical creatures, like the Veela and part Veelas. If the babies carry lycanthropy, it won't be triggered till they enter adolescence. You don't have to worry about them shapeshifting in vitro."

Early on, Cora had tried explaining to the betas of the pack the significance of some of the procedures they were to undergo and their impact on the pack's future. But her talk of 'gene manipulation' and 'virus latency' had sounded like nothing more than mumbo-jumbo to them.

"Cora, knowing what little I do of the things done in the dungeons, I trust the information I'm given on this matter even lesser than I understand any of it. But, I trust you, and if you believe there is no cause for alarm, I'll go with that."

"I never said there was no cause for alarm, pup. While Hermione is definitely on the mend since I changed her potions and diet, she is still underweight and malnourished. I suspect her mental health is affecting her pregnancy. Each time I've visited her, I've noticed her mood switch from restless to listless in an instant. I'm not sure if it's caused by idleness, isolation, or both, but she needs something to help her cope."

"I've noticed it too, but I don't know what else to do. I gave her what few books I could find in the castle, but, there's only so long a book can make you forget you're a prisoner."

"Well, you're not doing her mental state any favours by exploiting her loneliness to get closer to her. He opened his mouth to object to her characterisation of his friendly overtures but kept quiet since she raised her hand indicating she wasn't done yet. "Draco, I've seen you with her. I know you care for her beyond what her womb has to offer. But you can have no future together if she only turns to you out of desperation."

It may have been the sympathetic tone to her harsh words which made him ask, "What would you
"House her with the prisoner Fenrir is bringing here this week. I know of your reservations, but I believe it will do Hermione good to have a real friend at her side. Plus, they're both pregnant; Hermione will have someone to commiserate with."

"If you know of my reservations, you'll know the risk in keeping them together. You have an idea of what they do to blood-traitors; can you imagine the state the other prisoner's in by now? If we put them together Hermione will end up hating me, thinking I'm no different than my father."

"Or," said Cora, giving his shoulder a reassuring squeeze, "she sees proof of just how different you are."

"Please, Sir. Please fuck me," begged the omega, interrupting Draco's thoughts and drawing his attention back to the female in his bed.

Picking up the robes he wore earlier that day, Draco reached into the pocket to pull out a pair of Hermione's knickers he had borrowed from her dirty laundry on its way to the wash. Holding the item of clothing against his nose he inhaled deeply, using his other hand to palm his cock while thinking of Hermione. The scent of her arousal still lingering on the undergarment made him wonder if she thought of him when she fingered herself to a climax. He desperately wanted to believe she fantasised about him, the way he did about her.

His cock now hard enough to perform the task, Draco walked to the bed, grabbed a hold of the female's legs and flipped her over. Far too aroused to care about his manhandling, she pressed her breasts to the bed and raised her hips as far in the air as they could go as she presented herself to him. With her slender built and brunette locks, it was easier to imagine he was holding her hips, sliding into her wet heat, sheathing his cock to the hilt inside her. But even in human form the omega's scent made him feel sick, predictably so, which was why he had the foresight to steal one of Hermione's undergarments to aid him in his assignment.

The previous night, in the midst of his briefing with Gunnolf, Fenrir had marched in and handed his second-in-command a parchment with the names of some of the pack members.

"No Fero for any of the lads on the list, okay?" he instructed.

Even without looking at the writing on the sheet Draco, like Gunnolf, knew Fenrir wasn't its author, but, past experience taught them not to press the alpha for answers concerning his activities with the Death Eaters.

"The Dark Lord's got some business for me, so I won't be around. You'll be running the show tomorrow," he told Gunnolf.

The head beta raised a brow at that, "Again?"

"My-my, thought you liked playing alpha. Isn't that what you were doing before you joined me?"

Gunnolf's indignation at the alpha's taunt was palpable, but to his credit he grit his teeth and bore it. Before the Pack Wars, Gunnolf was being groomed to be the next alpha of his pack- it was why he did a far better job filling in as alpha than Fenrir himself. It was said that when Greyback challenged and defeated Gunnolf's alpha in the most barbaric manner imaginable, it became clear that Gunnolf would be no match for the diabolical alpha. It was also clear that the pack would be lost subsequent to his death as they would never bond with a bloodthirsty monster like Fenrir. Hoping his presence would facilitate the assimilation of his pack into Greyback's, Gunnolf sacrificed
his honour for the wellbeing of the pack by offering his submission that night.

Fenrir's smug smile at the restraint exercised by Gunnolf made Draco once again thank his stars that the cruel alpha was not his sire. He felt sorry for the ones turned by Greyback because he didn't care for anyone but himself.

"Be sure to have the betas set up a magical barrier- stop these foolish Black Cloaks from stumbling in on the festivities and getting themselves eaten."

"Why do we care if they end up dead? They ought to know their boundaries when they're in our territory," declared Gunnolf, arms crossed over his broad chest.

"Well, I don't care bout those shits. But, I do care what You-Know-Who may do if any of His men turn up dead."

"And, why would he concern himself with the fate of foolish Black Cloaks who do not even carry his mark?"

Draco sighed and shook his head. Turned as a young child, and raised all his life in a pack of werewolves, Gunnolf had little exposure to humans and didn't truly understand the nature of human bigotry. He didn't understand that in Lord Voldemort's world, even if the Black Cloaks were considered unworthy of receiving the Dark Mark, a privilege reserved solely for his Death Eaters, they were still higher up the hierarchy than any werewolf would ever be in the eyes of the Dark Lord.

Having caught Draco's reaction, Fenrir pointed to him as he addressed Gunnolf. "Ha! I'll let the Malfoy pup handle this one. Now, I've got other business to see to, but pop by later and I'll tell you who I want paired as moon mates tomorrow."

After Fenrir left Draco saw that his name was on the list of males who were not to be given the potion the following night. This wouldn't affect the other werewolves as their sex drive increased at the time of the full moon, but it would be a problem for Draco. As keen as he was about Hermione, he didn't expect to get a rise out of his cock for anyone other than her. This would clearly be a hurdle to overcome if he was to follow the alpha's order.

Obeying the alpha's command gave one a general sense of calm and wellbeing not all that different from executing an order while imperiused. Ignoring an alpha's order caused constant unease and unrest in the werewolf followed by intense pain. While it was possible for someone other than the caster to end the imperius curse, the only way to throw off an alpha's command was to break the bond with the alpha, which in turn would result in a loss of the pack bonds as well. At that stage, you may as well be a rogue, an outcast. He still remembered the way Oskar, his sire, had first explained what it meant to be an outcast.

"Being an outcast is the worst punishment for one of our kind, pup. Doesn't matter if you leave, get kicked out, or are simply lost, once out of the pack you become a lone wolf, an outcast. As social creatures our minds cannot cope with the loss of the bonds- we slowly go mad.

"Our nature compels us to seek others, to create a substitute for what we would have naturally found with the pack. But this is impossible to do as humans do not accept our kind. A wolf who has lost his mind grows more feral, he envies pack members for having what he cannot. In his jealous rage the mad wolf will lash out and attack our weakest members, thus making him a threat- a threat we then bear the responsibility to eliminate."

Draco's own experience reflected the truth of Oskar's words. He could still recall those early days of
madness when he first woke up—no bonds, his body in agony from the numerous bites he'd received, his mind a maelstrom of hurt and rage. But once he accepted Fenrir as his alpha, the bonds fell into place and the storm within him subsided, replaced by calm and a sense of purpose.

Even without the compulsion to do the alpha's bidding, Draco saw the wisdom in keeping his head down and doing as he was told. He was afraid disobedience would earn him a one way portkey, away from Hermione, to die in some hopeless Death Eater mission... or worse, put his unborn pups in the crosshairs of the spiteful alpha.

Mindful of what was at stake, he held Hermione's knickers to his face and deeply inhaled her intoxicating scent, hoping it would see him through his unpleasant task. Eyes closed, he brought forth the memory of her reaction to his offer to help with her cravings. Recalling the blush on her cheeks and the heat in her eyes, he smiled. It was a strain on his patience to wait for her to make the next move when she smelled as delicious as she did. He bit his lip on a moan as the bitch below him thrust back onto his cock. He held still, letting her do all the work as he slipped in and out of her eager cunt.

It was nearly time. Draco needed to release his seed inside the omega after moonrise—thus carrying out Fenrir's order—while concentrating on delaying his shift so his penis remained human and knot-free during sex. He held on to the omega's hips as she gradually and painfully transformed into her wolf. As agonising as it looked, he suspected it would be far worse for her if he turned and his wolf found himself knotted with a bitch he didn't want. Resisting the urge to slip his skin he continued to thrust harder and faster into her till he could feel himself about ready to erupt. Having completed her transformation, the bitch whined and thrashed against him. In her wolf form, her channel was tighter and squeezed his cock in a way that made his eyes roll back in pleasure and finally release his seed into her.

He could feel her cunt greedily wring his cock of every last drop of cum as he pulled out of her just in time for his, relatively quick, transformation. From the way her smell sickened him, he knew his seed was wasted on this female too, but at least he had done the alpha's bidding. He could walk away now, and have one of the other unmated males attend to the omega, who would continue to remain painfully aroused till the potion wore off.

Draco's wolf was restless, eager to go and check on Hermione despite assurances of her safety. He talked his wolf into looking for Oskar, hoping that spending time with his sire would sufficiently distract him from seeking Hermione out.

It wasn't hard to spot Oskar as he sat solitary, basking in the moonlight, in a clearing in the woods—the regal looking grey wolf with the distinct white streak running down his back would have been easy enough to spot even in a pack of grey wolves. The former alpha usually kept to himself during the full moon, never participating in any of the sexual activities—some said this was because Oskar once had a true mate who died some years ago. Draco never pried into his sire's past to confirm if there was any truth to the rumour.

Having caught Oskar's attention, Draco dropped on his haunches and lowered his head as a sign of respect as he waited for Oskar to approach him. He held still while Oskar first circled, then sniffed him. He bristled and let out an angry snarl when he caught the scent on his privates. Draco knew Oskar's wolf well enough to know his sire was offended on his behalf. He was angry that Greyback had once again paired Draco with an omega.

Oskar's circumstances for joining Greyback's pack were not dissimilar to Gunnolf's, except where Gunnolf had been too young to step into the shoes of alpha, Oskar had already hung up his boots, having long retired from his role as alpha when the Pack Wars broke out. As an elder of his pack, he
chose to stay with them and offer them counsel, but he didn't approve of Fenrir as alpha.

Done with his inspection, Oskar bumped his muzzle into Draco's flank, and then turned his head to look over his shoulder. When he took off in a dash, it became clear he meant for Draco to chase him. His sire, most likely sensing his restlessness, had decided an exhausting run through the woods was the best cure for Draco's mood. They playfully nipped at each other's heels while they took turns chasing each other. Though old, Oskar was fast enough in his wolf form to give Draco a decent workout.

In his two years with the pack Draco had many occasions to wonder how different his life would have been if his own father had been more like Oskar when it came to their interactions. One thing was certain, he would never have volunteered to get that ugly stain on his arm if he had not been so desperate for Lucius' approval.

When Oskar eventually grew too tired to continue, they joined the other wolves in feeding and brawling. Enjoyable as it was, Draco's heart wasn't in it and Oskar must've noticed. Probably guessing the source of his distraction, he bumped hard into Draco's shoulder and nodded towards the castle, giving Draco a shove in the rear. It was clear his sire had grown tired of his moping and wanted him to go and check on Hermione and the pups like he really wanted to.

Once outside Hermione's room, Draco listened to make sure she was asleep before he pushed the door open with his paws and entered. The wards on the room allowed him entry, but would have violently repelled anyone else and alerted Draco of the attempt. Inside, as expected, she lay soundly asleep on the bed. He slowly made his way towards her, stepping as lightly as possible to soften the clacking sound produced by his claws on the stone floor.

As he drew nearer he noticed the movement behind her eyelids that suggested she was dreaming. He also noticed the bags under her eyes and how thin she was now compared to the times he knotted with her. The wolf was disappointed in himself for not taking better care of his witch, but otherwise satisfied she was doing okay. He tried to rein in his excitement as he moved his muzzle to where her stomach was located beneath the bedcovers. Placing his ear flat against the surface he listened for proof that his pups were doing fine. Their heartbeats were louder now than the only other time he had listened to them- the sound made his wolf's heart swell with pride. Even inside their mother's womb he could sense the magic in them and the spirit of the noble wolf.

At that very moment Hermione moved in her sleep and made a whimpering sound. The movement must have caused her legs to part as Draco suddenly caught the strong scent of her arousal. He cursed mentally, realising he needed to get out of there before his wolf got any ideas.

Draco explained to his wolf that if Hermione woke up to find him in there, she would be upset enough not to let him near her or his pups ever again. Just as Draco was beginning to think he had succeeded in convincing his wolf, Hermione moaned in her sleep. The sound coupled with the growing scent of her arousal caused his wolf to revert to the creature he was. Ignoring his human side, the wolf approached the bed. Grabbing the covers between his teeth he forcefully pulled them off her, then threw his head back and howled.

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Hermione sat up with a start. She was in the midst of a very pleasant dream when she was suddenly awakened by a noise. She felt a blast of cold air on her bare legs and reached for the covers hoping to nod right off and return to her lovely dream. She froze mid-action, finally noticing the large white wolf not far from her bed. She knew who it was immediately, but didn't feel vulnerable like she should have upon finding herself trapped in a room with a beast. Instead she observed him with a great deal of curiosity.
Her gaze washed over him as she tried to commit to memory details she missed during their past encounters. This would be the first time she would get a proper look at Draco in his wolf form, as it was the first time she would be clear headed enough to do so. He was a surprisingly large wolf-large than any dog she had ever seen- his body covered in a coat of white fur which, though thick in appearance, did not conceal the definition of the muscles rippling beneath.

She opened her mouth, only, instead of screaming in terror she licked her lips; her mouth felt dry, too dry, as she saw the unmistakable heat in his grey eyes. From the tip of his pricked up ears pulled back slightly, to the sharp claws on his paws, he looked every bit the deadly predator he was in this form, yet his eyes wonderfully retained their human quality. Even if she had never seen his wolf before, she would know it was him from the same feverishly hungry look he gave her in his human form. It became clear to her why the wolf was there, what he wanted as he stood watching her. Her heart raced, but it wasn't from the fear of being eaten alive; watching him stalk up to the bed and lift himself up so he now stood almost between her feet, made her pussy weep in anticipation of being devoured by him in other ways.

He sniffed in the direction between her legs and the harsh sound of inhalation made her afraid she may have misunderstood his intent. She slowly began to close her legs and adjust her shift so her legs were covered. The wolf growled, in disapproval, she suspected. He continued to growl- low at first but gradually building into a rumble- till finally she parted her legs once more, spreading them wider than they were earlier, in compensation. This appeared to pacify him as his growling subsided.

The wolf walked to the head of the bed and gave her a nudge on her shoulder. She realised he was urging her to move farther back, so she did. Propped up on her elbows, she watched him move close to her feet and push against her foot. Understanding what he wanted, she raised her foot, only to flinch and instantly pull it away when she felt his wet muzzle against the inside of her ankle. His response was a warning growl. She shook her head. "It tickles," she explained breathily, unaware if he was able to understand words in his wolf form. Remus made it a point to cloister himself during the full moon so- with the exception of the incident in her third year- she had no interaction with his wolf.

Hermione questioned her sanity for even thinking about letting the wolf near her, but she was so godsdamned frustrated sexually, her condition exacerbated by the constant sexual tension simmering between Draco and her. She was desperate for release, yet, despite his offer to help, felt far too embarrassed to simply come out and ask him to lend her a hand. But, he was here now and she didn't need words to express her needs. That he was in his wolf form made it easier, if anything, as her only interactions with his wolf were of a sexual nature.

The wolf nipped at the inside of her knee playfully, probably annoyed with her distracted state and wishing to draw her attention back to him. When they made eye contact again he rubbed his tongue over the small hurt. Hermione gasped, surprised such an inconspicuous spot on her body could be so arousing. She gasped again when his fur brushed against her inner thigh, and stopped breathing altogether when his muzzle nudged her shift out of the way so she felt his breath on her wet sex- her panties the only barrier between her most vulnerable part and his sharp looking teeth. She remained frozen, daring not to even lower her head to the bed, as his eyes held hers captive.

He ran his muzzle along the length of her thighs and stopped at her hips. With surprising dexterity he used one of his claws to slice through her panties and cast them aside so she was able to feel his wet nose pushing against her bare flesh. She let out a strangled moan at the sensation of his smooth tongue pressed flat against her skin, licking her from the juncture of her thighs to her mons and pushing against her nether lips; he was doing a thorough job of licking her quim.
Hermione dropped back flat on the bed, finding it took much to both look at the magnificent beast and feel what his mouth was capable of. Then suddenly, he stopped. Raising herself on her elbows once more, she opened her eyes and looked at him in confusion as he just stood there, nostrils flared, intensely staring at her till she couldn't take it anymore and silently mouthed a single word.

*Please,* she begged him.

He bent his head over her privates, tongue poking out to caress and stroke her clit. Hermione gasped, head thrown back, eyes closed at the almost unbearable intensity of the sensation caused by the wolf's long, thick tongue teasing her clit when her body was already so aroused, so sensitive— it was like nothing she had ever experienced.

The alien sensation of his thick wolf tongue finally entering her made Hermione jerk on the bed like her limbs were taut strings being plucked all at once. She moaned loudly, fisting the sheets as Draco feasted on her. Lost in the sensation, she couldn't tell what was his tongue, whiskers, or mouth. Sitting on his haunches, he used his forelimbs to pin her legs in place, leaving her open to him as he sucked on her clit, tongued it, and repeatedly thrust into her cunt.

She felt like thrashing about but his weight on her legs prevented her from moving. Her hands abandoned fisting the sheets to play with her nipples instead. She slid one hand up her stomach to reach for a nipple, rolling the nub, she moaned as she felt it harden under her touch. This was a familiar routine for her, one she'd perfected over the last few weeks trying to keep her crazy libido in check.

"Oh gods... oh yes, oh... yes!" moaned Hermione. This was so much better than playing with herself, she thought, so much better than anything she remembered experiencing.

Hermione's head whipped back and forth as he used his mouth and tongue to drive Hermione closer to the edge. So when he abruptly stopped once more, she responded with a guttural cry of frustration.

She found him staring at her hands playing with her nipples over her clothes. From the impatient way he tugged on her shift, she sensed he wanted her naked. So close to her orgasm, desperate to have his mouth back on her pussy, she helped him. Hastily clutching the edge of the offending garment, she pulled it off and tossed it aside. She took the howl he let out to mean he was pleased with her actions.

The wolf walked up her body, paws placed on either side so she was trapped between his legs. She felt her pussy gush and release more of her juices when she realised it was his erect cock sitting heavy on her stomach.

The wolf didn't seem to care for his own needs at the time, his gaze focused on her dark nipples. Her body buckled when she felt one of his sharp claws tease a puckered bud. She couldn't imagine the kind of control it took him to execute such a move, his claws looked sharp enough to slice off her nipple with a simple flick of the wrist.

His head dropped low over her chest; his long tongue first traced the outline of her breast, sharp teeth dangerously close to her flesh, and then proceeded to lap at her nipples. She fell back flat against the bed, moaning. *Merlin,* it felt so good! Desperate for more, she reached for him, burying her hands in his incredibly thick and soft fur. Her fingers clutched at his head holding him against her chest as he took turns lapping at both her nipples in a way that eased the ache but left her wanting more. The wolf had other ideas, though. Shaking her hands off his head, he moved back to his previous spot between her legs, cock dragging along her stomach.

Hermione's nipples, now covered in the wolf's saliva, hardened painfully as they made contact with the cold night air. She whined at the loss of his mouth from her nipples but groaned in ecstasy as he wasted no time burying his muzzle in her quim and letting his tongue invade her moist canal once
more. The steady motion of that thick appendage, moving in and out, made her eyes roll back in her head. She could feel his tongue curled inside her while his muzzle bumped against her clit. She could hear herself being penetrated, and between lapping drags and low growls, a pressure began to build. Small shocks of pleasure made Hermione's back arch on the bed and excitingly thrust her hips towards him as the beast eagerly fucked her with his mouth. Soon the sensations grew too strong to bear and with a small scream Hermione exploded. Somewhere through the haze of her orgasm she heard him noisily lap at the resultant juices of her climax; she didn't know it then, but later, the memory of that erotic sound would often taunt her when she'd try to pleasure herself.

Gasping and shaking, it took Hermione some time to catch her breath and settle down. She felt so relaxed and sated in the moment, she was just about ready to fall asleep. She sat up, unsure if he expected her to return the favour in some way. He saw her looking at his cock and repositioned himself so it was no longer visible to her, then gave her a long lick over the side of her face. She squealed, pushing his face away, but letting her fingers linger in his fur.

Hermione gave him a lazy smile as she ran her fingers through the fur along his flank and sighed in contentment. Without any thought she wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him. "Thank you, Draco," she said to him while continuing to smile. She didn't bother getting dressed again. Reaching for the covers, she stretched out on the bed and pulled them over her. Leaving a wolf sized gap for him to crawl in next to her, she held up one end of the cover in invitation. She didn't know why she did it, except, it felt wrong to kick him out of bed after he had helped her release all that tension build up inside her.

The wolf stood in place, appearing undecided. She couldn't claim any expertise when it came to lupine facial expressions, but she sensed he was conflicted. She was pleased with his decision, when minutes later he was settled against her. Dropping the bedcover over them, she snuggled into his warmth and let sleep take her.

She woke up a few hours after sunrise, disappointed to find herself alone in bed and a cold spot where Draco had lain earlier.

Chapter End Notes

So finally some smut, but a lot of other stuff too. Hope I've managed to hold your attention.

Reading the comments I thought I would clear up some things.

Pansy- I wasn't trying to portray her as an airhead, just too infatuated with the idea of becoming the next Mrs Malfoy. More importantly I wanted to show how clueless she is of how bad things are in England because she has been away for so long.

Also Draco and the werewolves know they're being used- Draco does mention in Chap 5 that they serve as soldiers in the Death Eater army. And they know there are other more sinister experiments being conducted, but it is an acceptable trade off for them to develop the ability to reproduce.
Chapter 9

"I would wish Luna's blessings upon you, except you seem to have already been blessed" -Oskar smiled while adding- "doubly so."

"Cora told you then?" Of course, thought Draco, he should've known better than to expect she would keep the news to herself.

For the majority of Cora's life Oskar had been her pack's alpha. The new alpha as well as several of their betas, including Cora's mate, were defeated and killed during the Pack Wars. Even though she accepted Fenrir as her alpha, the old loyalties remained.

"If it's any consolation I am the only other person who knows."

Draco had hoped to be the one to tell Oskar his news once things between Hermione and him were more settled, but he wasn't angry with Cora for going around his back. Not when he had benefitted so much from her loyalty to Oskar. Cora treated Draco the same way she would any true born son of Oskar. For all she liked to tease him, the woman was quite protective of him.

"When you dashed off last night, I thought you were only going to check on your pups and come right back. I didn't think you were going to spend the night with the witch."

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Come now, Draco, even if I wasn't your sire- insensitive to your heightened emotions; or if I were a blind man unable to see the silly grin plastered on your face; I'd still possess the nose of a were, I'd smell the witch on you."

Draco was glad his skin lacked the ability to blush, or he would've turned red to the very tips of his ears. His sire wasn't quite done, though.

"Not just me, I'm sure every male in the pack would recognise her scent. Remember it all too well from the night she was brought here- heady stuff."

The snarl out of Draco's mouth was pure reflex. Once conscious of his actions, he immediately stopped and apologised to Oskar.

"Relax, pup. You'll have no competition from me. I've had no interest in breeding or bed sport since I lost my mate, but it doesn't mean I don't notice things."

Draco said nothing. He used to be better at hiding his emotions, but pack life had softened him to some extent. After they beat the snobbery out of him, they helped him realise how pointless it was to fake emotions with members of his pack. But with the increasing visits from the Death Eaters and his growing feelings for Hermione perhaps it was time to relearn those old lessons Lucius had once taught him.

"Draco, I hope you haven't completely lost the cunning of the snake after you found your wolf."

"What do you mean?" He asked Oskar.
"Your brothers may keep their distance now, but as the time for the birth of your pups draws close they will attempt to woo her or find other ways to ensure they get to be the next one to knot with the fertile witch who can bear them children. You know Fenrir has promised the entire pack their turn with -"

Draco was unable to hold back the growl those words produced. He was aware of course; he was present when Fenrir made the announcement to the pack.

"It worked! The Dark Lord took worthless filth and made it fit to carry our children. It's true, the Mudblood's pregnant. So, serve me, your alpha, well and I'll make sure each of you gets the chance to fuck their pups into her."

Shortly after the announcement, Fenrir had gifted Draco with a freshly bit female as his 'treat' for getting the 'Mudblood' pregnant. The only reason the alpha had not put a stop to Draco's interactions with Hermione was because he had no inkling of his beta's true feelings; Fenrir still thought of Draco as Lucius Malfoy's spoilt brat who would, presumably, be disgusted with having anything to do with a Muggleborn.

"As far as the pack is concerned, she's not one of us. She's just a vessel we've been gifted to produce our children."

"But, that's not what you think?" he asked hesitantly, uncertain if Oskar would understand or consider his thoughts treason against the pack.

"No," he answered with certainty, "I don't think Hermione will be able to conceive someone else's child just like I don't believe you'll be able to impregnate any other female."

His wolf whined in agreement. It had told him the same all the times he mated with the other females that were not Hermione.

"We live in times when lycanthropy is no more than an infection, when once Lycans were a species. In these modern times most shifters do not even have the fortune of living in a pack, let alone receiving the guidance of an Elder who can teach them our forgotten history. Do you remember the stories I told you?"

Draco nodded. Of course, he remembered. Once Draco got accustomed to pack life, Oskar had felt it necessary Draco familiarise himself with their myths and legends, or 'history' as Oskar referred to it. On numerous occasions he had the opportunity to listen to Oskar tell the pups of the pack the story of their creation.

"Long before any wizard walked the earth, blessed Luna created a perfect blend of man and creature, for she so favoured both she could not choose one over the other. She gave her creations one soul with a dual nature that existed harmoniously within a single body capable of shifting to reflect the duality within. Each breed was given one alpha to lead and protect them in place of Luna.

"Over time while the other breeds quickly went extinct, it was only the werewolf who was able to adapt and exist as Luna intended. An age came and went by, and the werewolves lived on- strong individually, as a pack they were far too strong to be defeated by any natural predator. That changed with the appearance of wizardkind.

"Unfortunately for us, the first few interactions wizards had with our kind were limited to outcasts, who in their maddened state lost touch with their human side and craved human flesh as compensation. But the things wizards truly feared about us hold true for all our kind, even today: They fear our ability to wield magic without a conduit. Our bonds fortify our minds so we are
immune to any kind of mind controlling or altering spell a wizard can cast. And, our bodies are naturally strong enough to bounce off most curses without the use of a defence spell.

"Their fear led to the wizards developing curses which first rendered us incapable of reproducing children who bore our dual nature, to eventually being incapable of producing children at all. Our elders cried out to Luna, who in her mercy promised that if we lived by her rules and mated under her light we would have children who were either wizard or wolf so our children escaped persecution. Luna has kept her promise, but over the centuries Lycanthropes went from being a thriving species to nothing but a disease. As the winners, the wizards wiped traces of us from the earth nearly as much as they did from history."

To Draco, Oskar's tale sounded just as fantastic as any bedtime story his mother had read to him from The Tales of Beedle the Bard. While fun to listen to, they could hardly be considered to hold any kind of historical accuracy. It was true that the winners of a war altered history. And it was also likely that when wizards appeared on the scene they were a predatory species that led to the extinction of some other species. But, he couldn't imagine them doing so through curses that affected progeny. His knowledge of the Dark Arts was rather extensive, but he had yet to come across a curse having the ability Oskar described. Then again, he had never once imagined the possibility of something as foul as a horcrux existing, even so he now knew just how real such a thing was after he failed to protect one of the cursed pieces of the Dark Lord's soul.

Realising Oskar was still waiting for a response Draco nodded.

"If these experiments of the Dark one are successful, he won't be creating anything new, simply returning to us an ability we once possessed. But children will always only be born to those blessed by Luna. It is why out of all the females and males who have taken the potion till now, only your witch was able to conceive children. I believe the moon goddess favours your union."

"What are you saying, Oskar? What about the pack?"

"You wear your mask well, pup, but I can sense your feelings for the witch. Win her heart, bond with her. The pack will leave her alone in recognition of your claim."

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Oskar watched Draco leave and wondered if it was yet too soon to tell him about the prophecy, even though he had already fulfilled most of his role in it. The former alpha never imagined he would live to see the prophecy come to pass and thanked Luna for her blessings and fulfilling the promise made to his kind so long ago.

No, thought Oskar, he would heed the centaurs warning that one is more likely to fulfil the undesirable parts of a prophecy while attempting to circumvent it. Hermione was the key and he'd given the pup a nudge in the right direction. He would just have to wait and watch their destinies unfold.

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"Do you know her personally?" asked Gunnolf. They were discussing arrangements for the prisoner Fenrir was going to bring here later this week.

"No, not personally," replied Draco. He'd only seen her across the Great Hall at Hogwarts. There had never been any cause for them to interact in the past.

"Well, as far as orders go we've got to make sure she and the baby stays alive. We also need to keep
her presence here a secret. No one other than the pack needs to know she's been moved here."

"So, we're keeping it from the Black Cloaks and the Death Eaters?"

"Yes. It's best that way. Fenrir says after the celebration at Godric's hollow quite a few of them grew fixated with her. They took to visiting her even after she was given to your father. While they made sure there was no room for doubt as to the paternity of the child, they found other ways to use her. Lord Malfoy was concerned she'd miscarry or die if she continued to suffer their attentions."

"Ah! I wondered why Lucius would want to move her from Chateau Lestrange to Bleidd Castle of all places," stated Draco.

"What do you mean?" asked Gunnolf, clueless still to the way the minds of the Death Eaters worked.

"Let's just say the old guard is either too scared or too prejudiced to enter werewolf territory unless their Master orders them to do so."

"I don't get it. We work with them. They know what we're capable of, how can they believe the things about us they do?"

Draco chuckled at Gunnolf's bewilderment, "Take my word for it, we're better off if they don't want to associate with us."

"But it isn't just that. Their strategies in battle do not account for our true strengths. We can do so much more!"

"Do you really want to help the Death Eaters win in their cause?" asked Draco, making sure to keep the alarm out of his voice. It had never occurred to Draco that Gunnolf may be sympathetic to the Dark side.

"It's not about the cause, it's about winning. If I'm going to send pack members on a mission, I want to do whatever achieves the best outcome with the least amount of damage to the pack."

Of course, realised Draco, he should have known Gunnolf wouldn't care for the politics involved. For the head beta everything boiled down to executing an order while seeing to the safety of members of the pack. Draco knew from experience how misguided it was to think that way. He himself had helped the Dark Lord's cause in order to protect his mother and himself, but his actions had ultimately led to so much of pain and suffering being brought about in their world starting with the death of his Headmaster and leading to the fall of Hogwarts. Was it worth it, was a question he often asked himself and he didn't have half the scruples Gunnolf did.

Gunnolf mistaking the reason for his silence asked, "Are you okay with this move, Draco? I try to keep out of matters that don't concern me, but you're my second, so I need to know you're okay. I can always have one of the other betas handle the arrangements."

Was he okay knowing that soon he would be tasked with protecting the woman that carried his father's unborn heir?

Sure. He knew Lucius well enough to know he wasn't moving her here out of concern for her safety or the wellbeing of his unborn heir. His father's actions, as usual, were motivated by his desire not to fail his Master in the task he was assigned. Although, to be fair to Lucius - and speaking from personal experience- the Dark Lord was not in the habit of showing mercy to those who failed him.

Draco waved his hand in dismissal. "I'm okay, but that wouldn't matter anyway as I have my own orders from Lucius; he's tasked me with her security."
Gunnolf raised his brows in response. Handsome though he was the effect was nearly comical on his face.

"I received an owl a few nights ago. I was reminded that even if I was no longer the heir I still bore a duty towards my family."

After being cast aside as he was, the missive from Lucius reminding him of his duties as a Malfoy felt like a mockery. Draco no longer referred to the man as father- the word made him feel too raw, too filled with hurt and disappointment to care for its use. When his pups came Draco planned to be more like Oskar or Severus, the men who had treated him the way a father rightly ought to.

"Come on," said Gunnolf standing up, "we've got a few minutes to spare and I feel a few rounds of grappling and throwing punches would do us both some good right now."

Draco spent the day feeling restless. He was eager to go see Hermione, but as Cora advised, he wanted to give her some space. And as Oskar had reminded him it wasn't just his future at stake. Without the protection of a mate-bond she would be considered fair game by the pack's males. He could keep fighting for her, like he did the first time, but, for how long? No, the best option was to court her as best as he could in their current situation and bond with her.

He was sorely tempted, though, to go to her and repeat the actions of the previous night, this time in his human form. Of all the ways he imagined things progressing between them, he never expected to be accepted in his wolf form first. Even more shocking was the invitation to sleep beside her- he suspected she surprised herself as well in that.

As wonderful as it felt to have her peacefully sleeping snuggled into his side and feel her naked bum pressing against his human cock after he transformed back, he made sure to leave her bed at sunrise. He was glad his wolf was too sated to pester him about the cowardly way he left her bed, but he was afraid- afraid he'd see bright eyes clouded with regret, afraid she would reject the man where she accepted the wolf. It had felt easier to leave with doubts, than to face the likelihood of rejection.

He kept his distance from Hermione the first day and the next but by the third day he could no longer stand the constant feeling of being on edge and went to her quarters in time for her daily walk. Draco didn't know what he expected to happen when he saw her again, but he wasn't expecting her to greet him and fall into their usual discourse as if things were no different now than they were three days ago. Her failure to acknowledge what transpired between them made him bristle internally. Did she imagine it didn't count since he was in his wolf form at the time, he wondered.

To add to his state of agitation Hermione kept brushing against him as they walked, licking her lips mid-sentence, playing with the ends of her hair and worst of all, baring her neck like a complete tease; it may all have been done subconsciously on her part, but it was testing his resolution to wait for her to make the next move. Draco could smell her desire, but instead of simply asking for the fucking she was clearly in need of, to his astonishment, Hermione Granger was playing coy. It was hard to follow her monologue on the convention-defying thirteenth use of dragon's blood when all he wanted to do was shove her against the wall, rip off her panties, then sink his cock into her moist cunt and pound away till her throat grew sore from screeching his name.

Draco was trying, really trying to be a sensitive wizard, but the creature side of him couldn't let her think she could get away with such insolence consequence-free. He let out a low growl, not that different from the one he used with her in his wolf form and was rewarded with the sight of her nipples visibly tightening in response. Even though her womb was already heavy with pups, her responses were like a bitch in heat. Aroused. Helpless. Submissive.
Grabbing her by the hips, Draco walked Hermione backwards till he had her pressed against the wall of an alcove, away from prying eyes. With his palms placed flat against the wall on either side of her head, he had her caged in but free to move if she wanted to.

"You have me feeling very conflicted," he began to explain. "Here I've been trying my damndest to give you your space and wait for you to come to me, and nothing," he said, staring down at her. "But, then, my wolf turns up in the middle of the night and" -he lowered his voice- "you're surprisingly responsive."

He paused, jaw clenched in his effort to resist the urge to nibble on the skin of her lovely neck she was unwittingly offering at the moment.

"I don't know if you'd rather have me wait till you ask or if you want me to simply give you what you need," he couldn't resist thrusting his pelvis against her so she could feel his erection against her hip, making her whimper softly.

"Guess your Gryffindor courage does fail you sometimes, Granger," he stated before grabbing a fistful of her hair, pulling hard enough to yank her head forward but not enough to hurt. His lips practically grazed her ear when he next spoke. "I've decided to take your silence as a yes. If you want me to stop, now is the time to say so." He looked her challengingly in the eye half of him hell-bent on asserting his dominance while the other was afraid he'd lose control and go too far.

He knew he wasn't getting any verbal consent from her when the only reaction his statement drew was a fluttering of her eyelids and her mouth falling open on a silent gasp.

"Alright. Spread your legs, Granger," he ordered, maintaining a firm grip on her hair. "Yeah, that's it. Good girl," he praised. "Now raise your skirt for me."

From the way her eyes darted around he understood her hesitation. "Go on, no one can see you. It's just me." With his assurance, she continued to do as told. "Now, touch yourself. I want to see if you're wet enough."

While she snuck her fingers into her panties to touch herself, he raised the index and middle finger of the hand not holding her hair to her mouth. "Here, lick this for me, will you?" She wrapped her lips around his fingers, sliding them up and down in a manner that gave a wizard ideas.

"Yeah, just like that," he moaned, grinding his erection into her hip imagining it was his cock she was paying such attention to. "Show me your fingers. Show me how wet you are." He demanded.

When she lifted her fingers to show how slick they were with her juices, he gave them a flick of his tongue, so she could see him taste her. His eyes remained focused on her face, studying her responses as he removed his fingers from her mouth and walked them slowly down her rounded belly and towards the vee of her thighs. She appeared to have lowered her panties for easier access as he didn't encounter any waistband like he'd expected. When he rested his hand on her mound he felt her hips buck in eagerness.

His fingers tapped on her clit while he nibbed at her earlobe and sucked on the tender piece of flesh. Hermione moaned, spreading her legs further apart, but instead of giving her what she wanted Draco continued to tap on her clit till she was positively soaking. Again she bucked her hips, trying to force his fingers to slide to where she needed them, but failed since Draco stood to her side pinning her to the wall at an odd angle that gave her no purchase.

Hermione's continued struggle to move his fingers to where she wanted them made him nip at her jaw. "Not before I think you're ready, witch." He told her.
Continuing to tap on her clit with one finger, he pinched the piece of flesh between two fingers sliding them back and forth till they were completely slick with her honey. Only when he sensed her whole body tense with arousal did he finally let his fingers slide further down and push inside her. He didn't ease into her a finger at a time; instead he thrust two fingers at once in an attempt to stretch her out. He felt her pussy walls cling to his fingers, and once again wished it was his cock instead. By now he was aware he was humping against her hip like some untried virgin, but it was better than nothing, and definitely better than scaring her off by trying to fuck her senseless like he really wanted to.

Draco buried his face in the space between her neck and shoulder inhaling her scent as he pumped his fingers into her. He nipped at her delicate collar bones, more pronounced because of all the weight she'd lost. He felt terrible when he remembered Cora's suspicions related to Hermione's health and made a mental note to take her advice on the matter. He grew distracted when he heard her moan loudly and felt her hand squeeze between their bodies to palm his cock over his clothes.

"Fuck!" he cried out, taken aback by the bold move after the timidity she had displayed so far. Not keen on spilling in his pants, Draco let go of her hair and pulled her hand away from his cock. Instead, he took turns guiding each of her hands to play with each of her nipples. His free hand he wrapped around her waist, holding her close, while the other hand pumped his fingers inside her faster still. Soon as he sensed her at the edge of her climax, he stilled his fingers inside her to push a third finger in, making her nearly breathless with how stuffed she felt.

"Too much," she mouthed, fingers letting go of her nipples and seeking purchase on his shoulders instead.

"That's it," he encouraged, feeling her hips move to accommodate him, "take me in." He moved to stand before her now, his cock pushing against the swell of her belly while his fingers continued to lazily fuck her, stretching her in the process.

"You like it now, don't you? Being stretched?" he moaned against her neck, running his tongue along the length of it. "Enjoy my fingers in your cunny, fucking you? It's so much better than doing it yourself, right?" he asked nipping at her earlobe once more. "But as good as it feels, I promise it'll be better when I have my cock inside you. Would you like that, Granger, my cock stretching you instead of my fingers?" Her hips buckling coupled with the broken whimper that escaped her lips gave him his answer.

He continued to sniff and lick her skin, not getting enough of Hermione's scent or taste. Just as her fingers dug into his shoulders and she threw her head back, on the brink of her orgasm, his thumb flicked her clit till she shattered in release.

Draco lowered his head and pressed his lips to hers in time to capture her moans as she climaxed around his fingers. The kiss started as a chaste brush of his lips against hers as she ground her pubis against his palm in an effort to prolong her orgasm. He gently sucked on her upper lip, while she was still trying to catch her breath, letting his tongue trace her cupid's bow. He teased her lower lip by lightly tugging the fleshy centre with his teeth, before licking it with his tongue. As he continued to kiss her, he felt her grow less distracted by her orgasm and more engaged, her hands abandoning his shoulders to hold his face. When his tongue finally slipped into her mouth to taste her, she reciprocated by sucking on the organ and even biting at the tip with a degree of aggression that made him pull back and give her a questioning look. It wasn't anger that he found, her eyes were lit with mischief as she raised herself on her toes and pulled his mouth back to hers. He drew his fingers out of her snatch and used both hands to hold her waist.

The kiss they shared wasn't rushed or heated; it was merely an exploration, each trying to learn how
the other liked to be kissed. The nearly studious manner in which she went about it would've unnerved Draco if he wasn't distracted by the delightful way her lips moved against his. Too late he remembered he was supposed to be asserting his dominance over her, instead he had ended up putty in her small hands as they fluttered from his hair to his jaw, from his chest to his cheek. He was never going to forget this, the first time he was kissed by Hermione Granger.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your kudos and comments- love hearing your thoughts.

For those following the story, my posting schedule will most likely become a little erratic over the coming weeks/ months, but I'll try not to go more than a fortnight between updates.
"So?" asked Draco, wanting to hear Cora's verdict after her official examination of the new prisoner. "In terms of physical health, she's doing fine," said Cora. Draco thought she was done, but after a brief pause she resumed speaking. "Beauty like hers is a curse in these dark times," she said, her voice heavily tinged with pity. "They used her repeatedly, and, if the build up of scar tissues I saw is any kind of indication, quite brutally." Draco didn't miss the way she shuddered when she spoke. "It's clear they attempted to heal her afterwards, they just didn't leave her alone long enough for the healing process to complete."

Draco didn't need to hear the specifics from Cora. As one of the branded, there were numerous Revels that had demanded his attendance in the past where he had a front row seat to what was considered entertainment by so many Death Eaters. If he had not already begun to question the rightfulness of their cause before, he certainly did after attending any one of those depraved events. But back then things were still relatively tame compared to now, without fear of reprisal there were no longer any restraints on the Death Eaters inhumane acts.

"Here," said Draco, giving her the scroll he held in his hand. "It came in today's owl post. He's listed the things she was treated for in the last month alone."

Cora skimmed the text quickly, the look of horror on her face increasing as she read each detail. Her reaction surprised Draco considering how much she knew about the atrocities committed against their own kind in the dungeons.

"But this is so senseless... Why would they do such a thing?" - Ah, thought Draco, it wasn't so much what was done but the fact that it served no purpose that upset Cora more than anything else - "Who are these monsters?" she asked with a shaky breath.

Draco knew it was a rhetorical question, but attempted to answer anyway- it was better if Cora knew what they were dealing with. "Well, seeing as how Lucius chose to hide her here of all places, my guess is they're high ranking Death Eaters, part of the inner circle most likely." At Cora's questioning glance he added, "Only a member of equal rank would dare touch something belonging to the Malfoys without their consent." The only exception, as Draco knew all too well, was unless they were acting under orders from the Dark Lord.

It was the protection offered by their evil overlord's command that lend lesser wizards, like his former housemates Flint and Pucey, the audacity to bind Draco and throw him in a pit of werewolves during the full moon. When the Dark Lord had effectively sentenced him to death or a life as good as, Draco had quickly realised how friendless he truly was with Severus gone. His father had stood to the side, trying to look as inconspicuous as possible lest the sins of the son be visited upon the father. His mother looked devastated and poised to speak in his defence but was temporarily petrified by the Dark Lord himself, while his crazy Aunt Bella had gleefully tossed a crucio at Draco making it that much easier for others to overpower him.

"Whatever your father's reasons" -Cora's voice drew him out of his grim musing- "keeping her here will do her a world of good. The males of the pack won't take any interest in a pregnant human even if they go into a rut. And, I hear our guests have not been alerted to her presence."
He nodded. As much as the Death Eaters thought they ran the place, at Bleidd Castle they only saw what the pack and Fenrir allowed them to see.

"Are you okay with her being here? She's carrying your father's heir, surely-"

"Two years ago, I may have felt differently. As things stand today, I pity her." Unbelievable though it sounded, it was true. Draco knew Lucius well enough to see the man didn't care for the woman or the child in her womb. Lucius Malfoy was tasked with producing a proper heir by his Lord and he was afraid someone would break the toy he was gifted, for that express purpose, before he was able to do so.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Draco," she said, shiny eyes reflecting the pride she felt at his words as she gave his arm a squeeze. He looked away feeling unsettled; moments like these only reminded him of just how much he missed his own mother.

"Have you given some thought to moving her in with Hermione?" she asked him a little later.

"Yes. I'm going to tell Hermione. Let her decide."

"I came, as soon as I heard," said Draco rushing towards Hermione while she was taking a stroll in the courtyard. These days she had little supervision when they let her out for her walk. Either they trusted her to remain compliant or considered her harmless. She took advantage of this new found liberty by trying to discreetly explore the areas along her daily path without raising any alarms. Every vantage point she could gain access to she used to develop a mental map of the castle, paying close attention to the activity of the birds and other small animals on the grounds surrounding Bleidd to narrow down spots where the magical barrier might be most susceptible. Hermione strongly believed in being prepared, so she made sure she memorised the quickest and least guarded paths through the castle and out should she ever find an opportunity to escape. The destination of today's amble was a tall tower, the entry to which, though unguarded, was always sealed anytime she tried to access it. Nonetheless, each time Hermione passed that way she would give the door a try as the looming tower promised an unimpeded view of the adjoining lands. Startled by Draco's sudden appearance, Hermione nearly jumped out of her skin. She hoped he had not noticed her attention in the tower ahead.

"They said you had another one of those spasms while I was away. Are you okay?" he asked.

"Yes," said Hermione with a dismissive wave of her hand; she had one of those episodes yesterday, but Draco was only hearing about it now. She wondered what had taken him away from Bleidd for a whole day; as far as she could tell, he had not left the castle since her arrival there.

"I called for you but an old man arrived instead." And what a peculiar old man he had been. He had long grey hair with a distinct white streak that looked like it ran all the way down his back. His bearings were regal and graceful despite his stooped frame and casual clothes. His clear blue eyes had twinkled in a manner so similar to her old headmaster, it made Hermione stop to wonder what kind of deadly secrets this man may carry to his grave.

"Did he say or do anything?" asked Draco. From his tone it would seem he knew just who she was talking about.

"Nothing alarming, he said you were away and asked me to remain calm. Then, he placed his hands on my belly" -it still struck her odd that she had felt no apprehension over a strange man touching her uninvited- "and spoke in some European language, Norwegian, or Swedish perhaps?" Noticing his
body grow tense, she quickly explained. "It wasn't anything bad. Soon after he spoke the pain subsided. This may sound crazy, but I got the feeling he somehow told the babies to behave." Things like that were unheard of, but so was a wolf impregnating a witch.

"That's Oskar, my sire," he explained.

Curious.

Hermione had presumed Fenrir to be the culprit. The old man who had visited her, Oskar, didn't strike her as the kind of unhinged individual who went around biting and infecting people with lycanthropy on a whim. As curious as she was to learn more about the story there, there were other questions she wanted to ask of him.

"You know, I never see any of you use your wands. Don't you miss magic?"

He appeared to contemplate answering her question before he spoke.

"Elves don't use wands either, do they?"

Hermione watched him dumbstruck as the meaning of his words sank in.

"You're able to perform wandless magic!"

"Not all of it, just the more basic day-to-day spells."

But, Remus always uses a wand.

"I think you'll find our old professor is an exception in many ways," said Draco, having correctly guessed her thoughts. "I can't say if Lupin's abilities didn't develop because he hasn't accepted his nature or lived in a pack, or, if he's simply concealing his abilities around others. All I can say for certain is that I had little, if any, success casting spells without a wand till I bonded with Fenrir and the pack. Now, performing wandless and nonverbal magic feels about as complex as casting a lumos in third year."

Hermione thought to ask Draco where he kept his wand, or any of the wands for that matter. In their current world, the only wandmakers alive had either escaped to safety overseas or gone into hiding with the Order, leaving Voldemort's minions in short supply of wands. Consequently, they began recycling confiscated wands- no longer able to afford the luxury of crushing their enemy by destroying their wand- which was why Hermione was certain her dear ten and three quarters of vine wood with a dragon heartstring still lay intact somewhere. If the werewolves had no use for their wands, it wouldn't be farfetched to assume the Death Eaters had claimed them too. If she could get Draco to disclose the location of his wand, she may figure out where hers ended up too. However, before she could start her subtle enquiries he dropped a bombshell on her.

"There's something I need to talk to you about."

"Oh yeah?" Hermione tried to sound casual despite the ominous tone of his words.

"It's about," he started, then stopped, then opened his mouth looking like he was going to say something only to slam it shut again. He seemed mildly agitated as ran his long fingers through his hair. It was a bit longer and unkempt now than he wore it at school, but, it made him look far more appealing, in her opinion, than the well groomed version of himself. Twice since the night of the full moon, Draco had helped relieve Hermione's sexual frustration, and both times she had enjoyed tugging on his hair, relishing the feel of the silken strands between her fingers.
"Well, perhaps I should give you a little background first," said Draco, interrupting her thoughts before they took on a more lascivious tone.

"Okay," she said, recognising his need to get something off his chest.

"You may have deduced from my current circumstances that my position in my family has been altered dramatically since my change." She nodded in acknowledgment. "But, I doubt you've given much thought to the impact my change has had on my family. See, my status as a werewolf means I'm not Pure enough to be the Malfoy heir. Lucius Malfoy has a sacred duty to uphold our family traditions; he must produce a proper heir. But, my mother..." After a brief pause he began again, "My mother..." only to go silent once more. Though his face remained a blank mask, Hermione suspected he was feeling emotional.

He took a few minutes to compose himself before attempting to articulate his thoughts once more. "See, after me, my parents conceived another child. Unfortunately the baby, my sister, was stillborn. There were complications due to which my mother cannot have any more children. I suppose it's why she's always doted on me so much." Draco fell silent once more, but, the distant look in his eyes along with the way one corner of his mouth turned up gave Hermione the impression he was lost in some fond memory so she waited till he was ready to continue.

His eyes finally resting on Hermione, Draco appeared to remember where he was. He shook his head and resumed his account. "You may find this hard to believe, based on what you know of Lucius, but he loves my mother. So much, he'd never consider leaving her or taking another woman, but he also cannot ignore his duty." He paused again, this time his expression more pensive.

"Excuse my seemingly disjointed thoughts. I'm trying to decide what facts are relevant... or even facts at all. There's so much disinformation out there, and with my lack of standing with the Death Eaters, I can't know for certain what is true and what is propaganda. The thing I do know is that the number of Pureblood women of childbearing years is startlingly low. Low enough it is now forbidden to execute any fertile Pure women, whatever their crime. Instead the Dark Lord has taken to rewarding his most loyal servants by gifting them Pureblood female prisoners to breed."

So she wasn't the only one, thought Hermione. While Voldemort may have found her too dirty for the Death Eaters apparently they were other women out there in a situation similar to hers.

"Quite recently, my father was given just such a prisoner- a Pureblood witch, he could breed to beget a Pure child... She now carries my father's heir."

Ah, so that's what this's about, thought Hermione, Draco was probably upset and looking to vent over being replaced so easily. It had not skipped her attention that Draco didn't refer to Lucius as father anymore. However, as conflicted as she was when it came to her thoughts and feelings where Draco was concerned, did she at all feel bad for his loss of status as the Malfoy heir?

Not really.

While Draco was different now, as the Malfoy heir he had shown himself to be a gullible, easily misled, bigot who for quite some time was happy to adopt his Pure family's genocidal ideologies. If there was anyone Hermione felt any compassion towards it was for the poor woman forced to carry his father's child. Finding it hard to feign sympathy, she avoided eye contact by staring at the ground and nodded.

"My father decided to move the prisoner since her presence upset my mother. I imagine she didn't like seeing proof of her husband's infidelity or the reminder of her own inability to have children. It probably didn't help that the woman is the same age my sister would be, had she lived."
Under different circumstances Hermione might have felt pity for a woman in Narcissa's situation, but at the moment she felt none, not when she remembered Luna's descriptions of how the woman had only cared about her precious carpet being ruined by the bloody mess Bellatrix was making while she tortured Neville, a boy the same age as her son, with the cruciatus curse. If not for Dobby's sacrifice in helping Harry and the rest escape captivity in Malfoy Manor, they were certain Neville would have ended up in the same state as his parents. Even now, Narcissa stood by while some innocent suffered at the hands of her husband.

"This particular witch belongs to one of the Sacred Twenty-Eight families," continued Draco, unaware of Hermione's thoughts. "She possesses a unique beauty the Death Eaters find appealing, despite her blood-traitor status." Hermione racked her brains but couldn't think of any Sacred Twenty-Eight Pureblood snob she would describe as a 'unique beauty', certainly not one sympathetic enough to the Order's cause to have earned a blood-traitor status. "Even though the others are supposed to wait their turn and not touch her till she gave birth to my father's heir, on several occasions they forced themselves on her."

His words made Hermione selfishly ponder her own future and what would become of her after she gave birth to Draco's babies. What was it Greyback had said to her the first night? Something about using her to breed litter after litter till she could no more. She shuddered, but Draco, caught up in his tale, failed to notice.

"People who know the location of Bleidd Castle have certain ideas about werewolves, so they don't come here unless on a mission from the Dark Lord. For those reasons Lucius decided to move his prisoner here, he thinks this place can serve as a safe haven for his future heir. As a Malfoy, he expects me to do my duty to my kin and keep a watchful eye over the witch."

Hermione was taken aback at the venom in Draco's voice. As a young boy he was always so proud and boastful when speaking of his family, his father in particular. She couldn't imagine how much they must've disappointed him to bring about such a drastic change.

"There is a point to telling you all of this," he said and turned to look her in the eye as he spoke. "I want you to understand- I think it's important for you to understand her circumstances if you are to live with her." He ran his fingers through his hair, yanking on the strands in his aggravated state.

"Live with her?" she asked, puzzled by his words.

"Yes, I thought you may like having some company."

That was a non sequitur, thought Hermione. What did she have to do with this woman? Though, he did have a point, she would like some company and if the woman was a prisoner, it was very likely she had done something to piss off either the Death Eaters or Voldemort himself. Hermione could picture herself getting along just fine with such a person.

She nodded.

"I don't want to upset you, but I believe you should know what to expect when you see this person. So I'm going to give you whatever information I've gathered, based on what others have told me, including Cora's inspection of the prisoner."

All at once Hermione grew aware of the red flags that kept popping in her head as Draco got things off his chest. She couldn't tell what it was yet, but she sensed this other prisoner was significant in some other way.

"You probably have some idea what takes place during the Revels?" He waited for her nod before
he continued, "Well, Lucius' prisoner, is connected to the Order. After she was captured, they held a huge revel in Godric's Hollow. They made a public spectacle of her rape hoping to draw out members of the Order." Alarm bells went off in her head, the significance of Godric's Hollow not lost on Hermione. But she didn't know of any captured Order member being raped there, which meant this took place after her own capture.

"She was given to Lucius shortly after the event at Godric's Hollow. She was placed in a magical sleep for nearly a month to treat her initial injuries." Hermione felt a chill run down her spine imagining the kind of torture the poor soul must have endured to need so much time to recover in the magical realm where bones could be made to regrow overnight.

"Because of how much it upset my mother, Lucius moved his prisoner to Chateau Lestrange as soon as the pregnancy was confirmed." Order members were well acquainted with the history and habits of members of Voldemort's inner circle, so Hermione knew Draco was referring to the country-seat of the Lestrange brothers, Rodolphus and Rabastan. "I hear some of the higher ranking Death Eaters grew obsessed with the witch after the revel at Godric's Hollow. Since Lucius didn't reside at the chateau, they took advantage of his absence to repeatedly rape and abuse her. Cora says they were careful with her face, but the rest of her..."

Hermione struggled to repress the terror the half-painted picture evoked in her. Was this the fate she escaped when was given to the wolves, she asked herself, or, was it a fate only delayed till Draco was done with her?

"I wanted to prepare you, give you an idea of what to expect. I don't want you hurting yourself from the shock of finding her so altered."

Draco kept dropping hints Hermione personally knew the mystery witch- someone who was a member of the Sacred Twenty-Eight with close ties to the Order, a unique beauty who was a little younger than Draco and raped publically in Godric's Hollow of all places... Merlin! How could it have taken her this long to figure it out?!!

"Ginny!" she gasped. Draco looked at her, compassion in his eyes, as he nodded.

"No," she said shaking her head, all of a sudden finding it too hard to breathe. She felt Draco arms support her as he walked them towards the stone bench near the base of the tall tower and made her sit.

"But she escaped!" Hermione was certain Ginny had slipped away during her duel with the Death Eaters.

He shook his head.

"The two of you were captured the same night, from the same spot. They made a big deal about it- special edition of the Prophet, special news broadcast over the radio. While Death Eaters no longer see the Order as any kind of threat to them, the capture of two of its high ranking members- especially ones directly connected to Potter- was celebrated as a huge victory. There was quite the build-up before Godric's Hollow. I suspect they only gave you to us because they had her as bait for Potter." Though unspoken, she caught the implication, if Ginny had not been captured, or if Hermione had been left with the Death Eaters, she too would have faced a similar, or worse, fate.

One thought kept nagging away at Hermione, if the Death Eaters had turned Ginny's rape into a publicised event, surely news would've reached the Order. Surely some of the Order members would've attempted a rescue, definitely one of the Weasleys, or even...
"Harry?" she asked grief stricken. Unable to fathom what it meant if Harry had taken the bait and got himself caught. Her chest constricted at the idea of anything happening to Harry- he represented the living hope that they would defeat Voldemort someday.

"Potter never showed up. As far as I know, no one from the Order showed up."

Hermione inhaled sharply, trying to figure out what it meant that none of the Weasleys had attempted a rescue.

"I'm sure now, more than ever, you're eager to escape from here," said Draco, with uncharacteristic tenderness. "But, Hermione" - she looked up, startled, she didn't think he ever addressed her by her given name before- "right now Bleidd Castle may be the safest place for you to be." She was ready to protest but then realised he did have a point. She couldn't imagine what kind of adversity would have prevented the Order from attempting a rescue of Ginny. Even if Hermione managed to escape and find the Order, she would only serve as a liability in her pregnant state. She also worried they wouldn't treat her babies too kindly once they discovered the identity of their father. Lastly, she had yet to narrow down a list of potential suspects for who could be the traitor amongst them- the one who had led Ginny and her into the trap to start with.

She could stay here and gather intelligence till it was time for her to give birth. Once the babies were born she and Ginny could plan their escape. While she hated the idea of abandoning her children, it would be for the best. Based on what she'd come to learn, the werewolves would welcome her babies and she had no doubt Draco would make an excellent father. Thinking of the grim options before her, and Ginny's current state, Hermione sagged in defeat, only to find herself propped against Draco's sturdy chest. She let out a sigh at the feel of his arms wrapping around her reassuringly, the tightness in her chest eased by his gesture. How strange, thought Hermione, was this new world they lived in where Draco Malfoy had become her source of comfort and strength.

Chapter End Notes

I'm currently involved in a new business venture where after hours of staring at various excel sheets, sales presentations and hiring challenges, writing this fic is proving to be a wonderful, if distracting, counterbalance. But really it is your encouraging words that are driving me right now (as I've mentioned before, I'm not an aspiring writer). So thank you for your kudos and comments.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

I've tried to limit graphic descriptions of non-con in this chapter, but some may still find it upsetting to read. So be warned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Hermione retched into the toilet; distantly she could hear Ginny doing the same. After a few moments, she waddled—her belly too big now to walk normally— to Ginny's bed. Still in her first trimester, Ginny's health had improved a great deal in the last month since her arrival at Bleidd castle, but the poorly executed healing spells her tormentors would hastily apply each time they were done with her, though lifesaving had maimed her for life. Seeing Ginny for the first time since the night they were captured had shocked Hermione even after Draco had told her what to expect.

Hermione watched in disbelief as a spectre bearing a resemblance to Ginny Weasley hobbled into the room. This impersonator possessed none of the redhead's radiance or liveliness as she stood with her shoulders stooped, hands meekly clasped in front of her, head bowed down and eyes trained on the floor. Even her signature red hair was missing, shorn to the point one could see the patches of previously burnt and poorly healed skin of her scalp.

"Ginny," she called out softly, afraid the littlest thing could destroy this frail creature before her. The spectre looked up, and if Hermione had found her appearance shocking before what she saw in the other woman's face absolutely horrified her. Gone was the light from the witch's eyes that reflected her fiery nature so brilliantly and had caused many a wizard to trip over himself to gain her attention. In its stead was this dead-eyed gaze, watching without really seeing anything. Hermione grew aware of the reedy quality of the other witch's breathing but couldn't tell if it was the result of a damaged lung or an injured voice box. It would have to be the latter, thought Hermione, going by the three lines on her neck—clearly the handiwork of someone practicing their precision with casting a diffindo.

Hermione wanted nothing more in the moment than to hug her friend who looked like she'd been through far too much for any person to endure in several lifetimes. But Draco had passed on Cora's warning that Ginny didn't respond well to being touched so she remained at arm's length. The other witch continued to stare at her for several minutes without showing any signs of recognition so Hermione thought to give it another try.

"Gin, it's me, Hermione. Remember, your bushy-haired friend you've wasted copious amounts of your own personal rations of Sleekeasy to help catch Ron's attention?" Hermione attempted to sound cheery and smile at her friend but it was hard to pull off while her eyes were misty with unshed tears.

Ginny continued to stare at her but Hermione thought she saw something flicker in those dull eyes as Ginny slowly blinked. She opened her mouth to speak, but no sound came out at first, and when it did it was hoarse, most likely from lack of use. "Hermione?" she asked in a whisper, as if afraid the dream would fade if she spoke too loud.

Eyes welling up with tears, Hermione nodded. She longed to hug the other witch so much, her arms
felt like they physically hurt from restraining herself.

"You're real?"

"Yeah, Gin, it's me, alright."

"Oh thank Merlin!" Ginny cried out and flung her arms around Hermione. "I knew I'd be rescued. I knew you wouldn't abandon me. Where are my brothers?" she asked looking around, "Where's-"

Hermione's heart broke for Ginny; she didn't know how to explain that they weren't rescued.

"Why are you alone? And you're so... pregnant? What's going-" She must've finally realised their plight.

"There's no one else, is there?" she asked. Hermione shook her head. "You didn't escape that night, did you?" She shook her head again. Ginny walked to the closest wall leaning against it for support. "Curse all the gods! We're still prisoners, aren't we?" she asked, but she wasn't looking at Hermione to see her response. Ginny slid down the wall, put her head between her knees and began to sob inconsolably. Hermione rushed to her friend, put her arms around her and held her as the other woman cried her heart out. Hermione didn't know what to say, she thought she was prepared for the worst. She thought she would know just how to console Ginny when they met, but despite everything she had been told, she wasn't prepared to see Ginny Weasley, one of the most strong willed witches she had ever known to be this broken.

Having no words of consolation she simply rocked her friend till she eventually fell asleep on the spot out of exhaustion.

Hermione followed the sound of her friend retching to find her bent over a bucket conveniently placed at her bedside. As she watched Ginny dry heave, she knew from personal experience that her stomach must be cramping. Settling herself on Ginny's bed, Hermione reached out for her. The other woman pushed away the bucket, took a deep breath and accepted her friend's silent offer to hold her. As Hermione wrapped her arms around Ginny, she watched her close her eyes and sigh into her arms.

"You a'right, Ginny?" Hermione's voice was hoarse.

Ginny grunted in response. "You?"

"Fantastic," said Hermione, curling her body around Ginny's and wiping a fleck of spittle or bile from the corner of her mouth. "I just hate the constant puking," she said. "Worst part of being pregnant."

"There is no worst part," said Ginny. "The whole thing's the worst part."

Hermione clenched her jaw and mentally cursed her thoughtlessness, again. Nearly a month of sharing quarters and she still kept footing her put in it. When commiserating with Ginny about her pregnancy woes she often forgot that while Ginny's pregnancy had also been forced upon her by a Malfoy that is where all similarity between their circumstances ended. Hermione blamed Voldemort for her forced pregnancy- what happened to her was rape, but she didn't think of Draco as her rapist. Furthermore, as upset as she was to have her choices stolen from her, in the days before Ginny's arrival Hermione had come to terms with her pregnancy. While she disliked certain aspects of it she bore no resentment towards the babies growing inside her and didn't think of them as a product of rape. How very, very different from Ginny's nightmarish ordeal.
"They left me down in the dark dungeons," said Ginny, speaking of her experience with the Malfoys, "because Narcissa didn't care to see her husband's whore flaunted about her precious Manor. The master's whore' is how she had their elves address me as if I wasn't being held against my will to be defiled by her husband. If not for her, I'm sure after Lucius got me pregnant he would've simply ignored me, left forgotten in my cell till it was time for me to deliver his precious 'heir'. If not for Lady Malfoy feeling so offended by my presence in some rotten, stinking corner of her mansion, I would never have been shoved into the hell that was Chateau Lestrange."

From the way she shuddered, it was clear to Hermione Ginny was remembering some of her worst moments. She tried to wrap an arm around her friend to comfort her but Ginny shrugged it off, shaking her head. "Don't," she warned Hermione, "just I need to finish first. I want it out of me. I need to say it."

Hermione nodded, not knowing what she was meant to say. Ginny nodded back before she continued.

"Chateau Lestrange was... It was not good. I was used by different people in different ways, in life-altering ways," she said looking at her right leg. "But, it didn't matter by then, not really. Because, I was already broken. Sometime during my time in the Malfoy dungeons I was reduced from Ginny Weasley, someone who was loved and cherished by her parents and six brothers, to a hole. You see, of all the people who violated me, Lucius Malfoy was the gentlest of them all. But what he did-the way he treated me..." Ginny trailed off, her voice choked with emotion, but from the stubborn tilt of her chin and the way she clenched her jaw, Hermione could tell her friend was unwilling to cry.

"He was the worst," said Ginny once she was able to continue. "Every night he'd come down to the damp dungeons of his fancy Manor. There was no reason why any corner of such a fancy Manor would be damp, except of course as proof of the cruelty of the Malfoys. They must've known what it does to their prisoners to sit in one of those dark cells, where you can't even tell if it is day or night, surrounded by the scent of rot, with nothing for company but the noise made by drops of water hitting the stone floor. That sound, that awful sound that reminded me I was alone, that made me question if I was even still living as I simply lay there every day till it was time for Lucius to arrive and use me as the hole I had become.

"He had a routine, it was always the same. Even before he entered my dank cell, he'd cast a silencio at me. While the others enjoyed hearing me scream, Lucius had no need for my voice- a hole doesn't need a voice. He'd use a binding spell to keep me on my fours like some animal waiting to be bred before pouring some kind of potion down my throat. He'd get behind me and vanish my clothes only once he was ready to violate me. He never looked me in the face. I doubt he ever saw me at all. I was nothing to him, just some chore he was given to do. He'd stick his prick inside me and thrust with all the passion one may feel while reciting arithmancy tables. He'd pump into me till he climaxed and dash off soon after. But, not before making sure I was spelled to remain in the same position for the next hour, arse sticking up in the air so his seed didn't slip out.

"He stuck to this routine every night till the pregnancy was confirmed. But in all those times he never once looked me in the eye or ever uttered a word to me. He didn't care that the potions he fed me left me feeling so aroused I'd end up with torn muscles from my attempts to break free of my binding and touch myself, or how despite the silencio I'd beg him to touch me, to fuck me properly, to give me some kind of relief. I'd cry to the point where my throat would be sore for days... But he never saw any of those things. I was just some cumbucket he had been ordered to fill. While the others took delight in my torment, I never felt more helpless or less like a human than the times Lucius forced me to endure his indifference."

The sound of the door creaking open drew Hermione's attention back to the present and Draco
presence in the doorway. The creaking sound, a recent addition, was Draco's idea. He thought Ginny would benefit from a system that served to alert them to anyone entering their quarters. At first Hermione had thought it unnecessary, but after being reunited with Ginny, she came to appreciate Draco's thoughtfulness. The first few nights Ginny refused to sleep at all, insisting on keeping watch lest the Death Eaters catch them off-guard while they slept. When exhaustion finally caught up she refused to use the bed, preferring to sleep in the corner of the room in a sitting position, facing the door. She was always on edge, and more than once ended up nearly catatonic from the shock of having Hermione absentmindedly approach Ginny without alerting her of her presence first.

"Is this what it's like for everyone?" Hermione had asked Draco. She wanted desperately to believe that Ginny's case was an anomaly, that this wasn't what happened with all the prisoners.

"They knew about Potter's relationship with her, so they may have made it a little more public hoping to goad him into doing something foolish. But, they were probably nicer to her; she's a Pureblood witch of fertile age after all." Hermione was quick to catch on to what was left unsaid, though, she couldn't imagine how anything could be worse than what Ginny had already experienced.

"A sea of black cloaks and silver masks," said Hermione, repeating Ginny's words to describe what took place at Godric's Hollow, "and every one of them using their own unique brand of torture to ensure they were 'serviced' by the Chosen One's fiancée." Hermione took a deep breath as she struggled to compose herself. She felt some of the tension leave her body at the feel of Draco's hand drawing soothing circles over her back, an action he wasn't even consciously doing, she noted. Maybe it was Stockholm syndrome, but she found herself feeling grateful to have him there. Whatever their future, she could tell she would miss him, this version of him, if he wasn't a part of her life in some way.

Draco stood in the doorway while Ginny stared in a different direction, clenching and unclenching her hands at her sides. Conscious of Ginny's discomfort with his presence, Draco never entered the room. He would usually leave upon announcing his arrival to wait for Hermione in the passageway outside. However, today, he continued to remain in the doorway. He glanced back, then took a deep breath before he spoke. "I'm sorry, for everything that's happened to you." He didn't need to say her name; it was clear which of the two witches he was addressing.

Ever since her conversation with Draco a couple of days ago where she shared with him details of how Ginny had been treated by members of his family, she could tell he was troubled by their actions, even if he was no longer considered one of them.

"Stop," Ginny said. "You're just like them; don't pretend like you're any better. We get that we're your prisoners, but stop trying to act like you're a friend when you're just like daddy."

Draco's mouth pressed into a thin line. He looked at Hermione and tilted his head to the side, "I'll wait for you outside." Without waiting for a response he turned and stormed out.

Ginny's hostility, though justified, was making things uncomfortable between them, not so much between Hermione and Draco as it was between Hermione and Ginny herself. She refused to see that Hermione's situation was different, or that Draco was nothing like Lucius Malfoy or any of the other Death Eaters who raped and tortured her. Ginny believed the blond was simply a different type of sadist who enjoyed making his victims complicit in their own torture.

Hermione didn't blame Ginny for not seeing Draco for himself, he looked so very much like Lucius Malfoy it was hard to look at him and not see his father or think of the cruelty of the Malfoys. She herself had unfairly lashed out at Draco on more than one occasion.
"As if Godric's Hollow wasn't bad enough, that bastard figured out a way to make it worse!"
Hermione told Draco. "Because she's Sacred Twenty-Eight, something the Weasleys have never
given two hoots about, Voldemort thought she’d make an excellent broodmare for his Death Eaters.
As the Dark Lord's most loyal follower, your father got to be the first to use her to get an heir for
himself. He raped her every night till she got pregnant, and only moved her to Chateau Lestrange
because your mother didn't want her husband's whore in her house." Hermione's tone was biting as
she practically spat the words at Draco.

He visibly flinched in response and even then, she was aware she was being unfair to Draco, but she
was just so angry on Ginny's behalf she didn't care to restrain herself. So it spoke volumes about the
kind of man he was now, that instead of losing his temper or saying something hurtful, either
behaviour justifiable, he always stoically tolerated the things she said, understanding her need to
vent.

"He's just like them, Hermione," said Ginny, watching Hermione get up off the bed to go meet
Draco. Hermione only nodded in response, tired of trying to explain why that wasn't true without
causing Ginny offence in some way. In the past month, Hermione had come to discover that she
could no longer share her thoughts and feelings with her friend like she once did. Ginny made
Hermione feel like an accomplice to the Death Eaters who hurt Ginny anytime she spoke of Draco in
a positive light. She made Hermione think she was cheating on Ron, even though their brief
relationship had fizzled out a while back. She made her feel guilty about the fact that she wasn't
able bodied, that she wasn't violated by several different people. She doubted Ginny meant to do any
of those things, but the pregnancy already left Hermione feeling exhausted and having to constantly
watch what she said or did around Ginny was an added strain.

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Upon exiting her quarters, Hermione spotted Draco leaning casually against the wall outside, his
entire profile illuminated by a stray sunbeam in the dark passageway. An apt metaphor, thought
Hermione, since Draco was beginning to feel like the only tether to her sanity these days. Each day
they spent more time together now, with her feeling closer to him- he was the only one who could
understand where she was coming from anymore. She no longer saw him as just a means to escape.
And the attraction between them wasn't just about sexual relief, though there was a whole lot of that
going on as well.

"Fuck Merlin, you're killing me Hermione." She enjoyed watching him moan as she slowly took him
inside her. Sensing her need when she came out of her room he immediately took her to a corner of
the castle they could be together unobserved. Once at their destination, she wasted no time in
pushing him down flat on the bed and releasing his cock from the confines of his trousers. There was
no hesitation in her movements, over the past few weeks Hermione had several opportunities to
become intimately acquainted with his organ.

"Let me use my fingers instead," he offered once more, his plea falling on deaf ears. With her
pregnancy having advanced to the extent it had, he constantly worried about hurting her or the babies
during sex, though it was clear to her he was desperate to give her the good hard fuck she needed.
But, climbing on top of him and riding his cock wasn't just about the sex, it was also about the
control it gave her, if only in some brief and limited way, in a world she otherwise had none. No, she
preferred it this way- here, with him, like this, it was the one time Hermione felt in charge of her own
self. She could feel the burn in her thighs from holding herself suspended above his cock, but the
physical pain was worth the mental satisfaction she received knowing she had him at her mercy.

Hermione lowered herself on his cock but stopped before she could sheath him completely. She
raised and lowered herself again, just enough to tease the head of his cock. As much as he wanted to
put her on her back and fuck her till she squealed for mercy, as he liked to tell her, she knew he wouldn't; she knew he'd let her have this. Hermione marvelled at the muscles beneath her palms as she braced herself against his chest, continuing to shallow fuck him till her legs gave way and she couldn't hold herself up any more.

One look from her was all Draco needed to understand what she needed and act accordingly. He held her by the hips and raised her slightly in a sheer display of strength before proceeding to thrust with abandon from under. She merely held on, gazing into his eyes, lost in beauty of the expressions she saw fleeting across his face as he fucked her.

"Just wait till our pups are born, Granger," he told her. "I'll give you a real fucking then," he swore.

Hermione let out a whimper as she felt him grow harder inside her. She sensed he was going to climax; she was close too but not quite done yet. She scratched his chest, making him growl, before reaching for the headboard. She clutched the headboard, using it for leverage as she attempted to move herself while enjoying his thrusts from below.

"Salazar's balls, witch. Take it easy," he scolded while continuing to furiously fuck her from below, "I'll give you what you need." And the way he looked at her Hermione thought he was referring to something more than just an amazing orgasm.

Later, as she lay sated on top of him she felt his fingers absentmindedly trace a distinct pattern on her skin. When she asked him what it was he looked at her sheepishly before admitting it was a rune. Much later that night, alone in her bed, Hermione suddenly remembered an interesting piece of information about the rune Draco traced on her skin that day and smiled. That rune was also a marker for his name.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for the support. It's been a crazy week, so I'm proud I was still able to get this chapter done in time- I just needed to say that to SOMEONE since writing fics is my secret shame and I can't share this with any one I know.
What's that infernal racket outside!

Draco clutched a pillow and dragged it over his head in an attempt to drown out the sound of the bird chirping outside. His wand had yet to sound off his daily wake-up alarm, but already he knew he planned to silence it and go right back to sleep. For some reason every muscle in his body hurt and he wasn't planning to get up till he began to feel more like himself again. While adjusting his body into a position that didn't hurt as much the sheet covering him moved, the cool air on his bare buttocks alerting him to his nude state. That wasn't right. With his home overrun with Death Eaters and Black Cloaks, plus the Dark Lord's fondness for trying to catch his followers off-guard, it served him well to always be prepared, which meant sleeping fully dressed. Draco shot up in bed, his nudity making him feel extremely vulnerable.

Draco rubbed his eyes a few times, the light felt too bright for the time of day. His heart raced when he realised he wasn't in his luxurious bedroom in Malfoy Manor. Instead of the rich furnishings he was accustomed to, this room was practically Spartan in comparison even if it was of a decent size. Nearly everything around him, the walls, ceiling, bed, even a chair, appeared to have been carved out of stone. His eyes went to one of the few pieces of wooden furniture, a wooden chest at the foot of the bed, with some men's clothes neatly piled on top of it. As eager as he was to cover himself, he couldn't stand the idea of wearing some stranger's clothing.

Once he was done draping himself in the bed sheet Draco tried to figure out how he came to be wherever he was right now. His head and body hurt in that horrible way suggesting he had imbibed way too much firewhiskey at some point and then been dared into performing some life-threatening stunt. Except, that couldn't be right. While such behaviour may have been normal for him in his carefree Hogwarts days it would be highly uncharacteristic of him now. With the constant threat of death looming over his head as well as his family's it seemed unwise to tempt the fates with such displays of foolishness.

The more Draco pondered over what may have happened to him the more his head blanked out. He could feel his being reach out to something elusive out there and return empty handed. This happened a few times till he could feel his heart ache from the emptiness that filled him.

A knock on the door, followed by a creaking sound as it was pushed open put him instantly on guard. The man who walked in was a stranger Draco was sure he was seeing for the first time, but there was something familiar about him.

"How are you feeling?" asked the old man, his voice possessing a hypnotic quality to it that put Draco at ease despite his Slytherin instinct to mistrust all.

Though he had enough experience with the Imperius curse to know he wasn't under it at the moment, whatever the other man was doing to him felt so similar to the unforgivable Draco began to internally panic while doing his best to maintain his facade of aloofness on the outside.

"This can be difficult," said the strange old man as he moved towards the chair in the corner of the room. His speech and gait gave him away as nobility even if the style of his robes was common. The man settled himself into the chair and looked to Draco. "Why don't you have a seat?" he said, signalling for Draco to sit on the bed.
Not quite a compulsion, Draco felt a desire to do as the man said. It made him continue to feel uneasy with whatever was going on. Who was this man? Where was he? And why the hell was he moving to sit on the bed as the man suggested, were just some of the questions swirling through Draco's head at the time.

"Calm down, pup." The firm tone used made Draco want to obey the command. "I'll explain it all to you soon. Just try to relax first -- your body's still healing. I don't want you getting too excited and hurting yourself once more."

*Once more?* Draco blinked in confusion wondering what the man was referring to but finding himself relaxing nonetheless. He couldn't understand what was going on, but he realised that ever since the man entered the room that overwhelming sense of emptiness inside him had dulled to some extent. Part of him wanted to beg the other man to let him go, or at the very least hug his knees for comfort but he felt another, new and unfamiliar, part of him scoff at the idea of displaying such weakness.

"We mean you no harm," assured the grey haired man, the look in his clear blue eyes further enforcing the sincerity of his words. "Close your eyes." The smoothly delivered command was hard to ignore, but without knowledge of what was to come Draco couldn't honour his request. He sighed and shook his head.

"You're a strong one," the man observed out loud before narrowing his eyes on Draco and repeating the order. "Close your eyes."

The way his lids snapped shut had to be the work of magic, Draco decided, just some type he was unfamiliar with. He knew he was acting out of his own choice, but something about the man was making him want to do as he said.

"What's the last thing you remember before you woke up?"

Draco was unable to recall anything except for a vague sense of pain and chaos. He shook his head.

"Do you remember meeting me two days ago?"

*Two days ago?* Draco was sure he would've remembered such a distinct looking person should they have crossed paths before. But, while he could not recollect any previous meeting between them he couldn't shake off that feeling of familiarity either.

"You were badly injured. No one thought you would live, but you did. Though you weren't too happy about it when you woke up two days ago and realised what had happened to you."

As much as Draco would normally turn his nose up at anyone lacking the finesse to avoid speaking bluntly he found in this moment it was exactly what he needed. "And what exactly has happened to me?" he demanded impatiently.

"Lycanthropy."

Although the man spoke at length thereafter the only thing Draco recalled of the conversation was that single word, *lycanthropy*. As he pondered all the ways in which his life was now fucked, Draco finally began to piece together the chain of events that had led him to that point.

*Fuckin' Crabbe and the out of control fiendfyre... The destruction of the diadem they were meant to protect... Potter and Weasley escaping because he didn't cast the killing curse... A distraught Goyle unfairly blaming Draco for Crabbe's death... The Dark Lord's wrath over the destruction of his horcrux... Aunt Bella mocking him for his inability to cast the killing curse... Death Eaters binding*
him and bringing him to Bleidd Castle... Greyback... The full moon... Wolves... Werewolves... Pain, so much pain... Jeers and laughter from the spectators... Death. Being bathed by the silver light of the moon... Rebirth. A soothing voice addressing him, "You're a werewolf now, Draco Malfoy. As upsetting as you may find the notion now, I want you to know- being a wolf is an honour. The moon goddess must have shined down on you. Welcome to the pack."

"I believe you've recovered at least some of your memories then?" asked the old man. Draco blinked a couple of times before his mind could refocus on the present and the man before him. The grey hair and white streak looked remarkably similar to one of the wolves that bit him.

"You were there that night." He told the man and received a nod in reply.

"I am Oskar, your sire- I was responsible for turning you that night."

Remembering the number of wolves that attacked him that night, Draco doubted they could know who infected him.

"We share a bond, not quite as strong as one you share with the alpha but it's there."

"The alpha?" he asked, confused what Oskar meant.

"Fenrir, he's the leader of our pack and your alpha."

"Fenrir isn't my sire then?" He wondered why that was since Fenrir never refrained from blood sport.

"No, because of your heritage Fenrir and the Dark Lord were worried about what kind of powers you may end up possessing if you were bitten by an alpha, so they chose the weakest members of the pack to attack you that night."

Draco nodded in acknowledgment though he didn't really understand what difference it made which werewolf infected you.

"There isn't time for details now, just the basics before Fenrir arrives. We have a hierarchy and everyone has a role to play. Each pack is run by an alpha, the strongest member of the pack, with betas handling supervisory or administrative roles, and finally omegas, who form the common citizenry within the pack."

"The alpha bonds with each member before they can be a part of a pack. You accepted Fenrir as your alpha when you woke up two nights ago, which is why you're more coherent this time. But, for whatever reason, Fenrir is resentful of you and may still choose to challenge you to a match. So, as your sire I feel obliged to offer you some advice. If you value your life, submit to the alpha and, however tempting the prospect, never let him see the full extent of your strength."

Without warning she turned to the side of the bed and emptied the contents of her stomach.

"Ugh, can't believe it's happening again," grunted Hermione as she felt another bout of sickness come on.

Hermione took off her shift and used the garment to wipe the corners of her mouth before tossing it aside and putting on a clean garment. When she turned to Ginny she found her staring at her stomach.

"Cora says it won't be long now," Hermione told Ginny with a smile while rubbing her belly.
"You know this'll keep happening, right? I want it out of me," said Ginny, eyeing the slight swell of her own stomach, "but, what would even be the point? Soon as we give birth we'll be given to someone else. It's never going to get better." She clenched her teeth, the features of her face twisting into something ugly as she ground out her words. "None of this was supposed to happen. You know I'm not ambitious like you, Hermione- no grand plans to change the world. I was going to get married, have children with Harry. Maybe if we survived the war, I would've liked to try out for some professional quidditch team, that's about it." She shook her head and hugged her knees to her chest. "And look at me now- nothing but a hole. They won't stop once this baby is out. They'll just do it all over again, and again for as long as they can." Ginny buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"Shhh." Hermione brushed the hair out of Ginny's face. "We'll get out of here. I'm sure I'll figure something out," she said, trying to sound more convincing than she really felt.

"Considering they took our wands, I don't see how."

"Come on, Ginny. We're in this together now. So, we'll escape or die trying together, yeah?"

Ginny let out a soft sob in response crawling over to where Hermione sat, arms open, waiting for her. Hermione hugged Ginny, tucking her head under her chin. Hermione wondered if she had made a mistake not acting on Cora's advice. Two days ago, Cora expressed her concern for Ginny's mental health, suggesting that it would be better for the younger witch to have her own quarters separate from Hermione. Her worry was that despite the recent progress made by Ginny in terms of physical recovery, watching the rapid progression of Hermione's pregnancy was affecting her enough to be the cause of the multiple anxiety attacks she had suffered in the last few weeks.

"I wish they'd just die, Hermione," whispered Ginny - her head pressed close enough to Hermione's stomach to feel the twins moving inside- "It's the only way we can have a future with the men we love."

Hermione disagreed. She knew Harry well enough to know he loved Ginny so much, he'd be grateful to simply have her back alive. As far as Hermione herself was concerned, though she knew Ginny meant Ron, that wasn't who she was thinking about when she thought about returning to a man she loved. Hermione remained silent, quietly sighing as she continued to brush Ginny's hair with one hand.

While Hermione sat with one arm protectively wrapped around her own belly upon listening to Ginny's wish for their babies' deaths, Draco had stood outside listening to their conversation from the other side of the wall thanks to his werewolf sense of hearing. She had no way of knowing that Draco had heard her silence and quietly walked away believing she shared Ginny's views.

Pain. Burning, searing pain running through his whole body was the only thing he was aware of as his mind slowly drifted to consciousness. Draco lay on his stomach, left eye busted and swollen, lip split, and the ground beneath his right cheek. It was too much of an effort to even breathe. He tried to remember what had happened, how he'd ended up like this, but his brain couldn't focus on anything but the pain. Draco slowly blinked his eyes open, trying to make sense of his surroundings, but his vision remained a blur. He tried to push himself up from the ground, but his hand remained limply on the ground. He tried to roll over and instantly regretted it, the movement making him conscious of the hurt in other parts of his body. He would've screamed from the pain, except his throat felt too raw so all that left his lips was a whimper. He was growing frustrated with his inability to do anything and made one last stubborn attempt to stand. He clenched his teeth and drew his knees forward and shoulders closer to pull his body into a crouch but failed, though he did manage to stretch the skin on
his back so it stung like it was set on fire.

Is that where he was, still trapped in the Room of Hidden Things with the fiendfyre? No, no that couldn't be. He remembered escaping it. Yes, he did escape it, but the diadem... The diadem, it was important, relevant somehow to why he was where he was now.

He tried to focus his mind, to recollect just what happened, but there was only chaos.

*Alone.*

He felt lost and alone in a way that felt a thousand times worse than sixth year.

*Failure.*

He had failed again. But with what? He had fixed the vanishing cabinet. How did he fail?

He heard growling somewhere in the distance, but didn't care, focused as he was on the laughter. They were laughing at him, at his pain. But, was it happening now, or was it only a memory, he couldn't tell. Why was no one helping him?

*Die, die, die.*

They had chanted it, he remembered, or maybe it was him? He couldn't be sure. Did he want to die? Did he do this to himself? He couldn't hold on to any one thought as all he felt was pain- pain in his body from the injuries, pain in his head from his unanswered questions, pain in his heart from the overwhelming feeling of loneliness. The pain engulfed him slowly like a fire till at last he could take it no more and lost consciousness. His last thought before he passed out was a single question. *Was it me that just growled?*

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Draco sat up in his bed panting, his body broken into a sweat. It was a dream, he reminded himself, it was only a dream. He wasn't alone anymore. He had a pack. He rubbed at his chest to ease the pangs he felt anytime he recalled those agonising moments between the time he was turned and the time he accepted the bonds. Why did he have that dream now, he wondered. He had not suffered that nightmare since those early months spent trying to adjust to pack life.

Without bothering to put on his clothes he walked to the table and used his wand to pour himself a glass of water. He stood in front of his window and watched the moon; he sighed, marvelling its beauty. Moments like these one could almost believe that there may be some truth to the legends Oskar told him about their kind. Did Luna truly favour them?

"*Being a wolf is an honour. The moon goddess must have shined down on you.*"

Thinking about those lines uttered by Oskar in all earnestness when Draco first gained consciousness still send a shiver up Draco's spine. He remembered lying broken on the grounds of Bleidd Castle after the werewolves were done ripping into him at Fenrir's command. Yet, through the agonising pain he had felt the moonlight caress and fill him with a sense of peace.

Draco looked towards Hermione's window in the distance and sighed. He may not have Hermione- as he believed he did before accidentally overhearing her conversation with Ginny Weasley- but his pups still grew within her and would be born any day now. He wore a stoic grin as he reminded himself that with a pack and his pups, he would never be alone again.
Once more Hermione awoke with her body engulfed in pain.

"Hermione?"

She heard someone call out her name. She lifted her head to see who it was but everything hurt too much to move. She knew what was happening of course and wished someone would go get Draco. Something was up with the blond recently. She barely saw him the last few days and when she did he appeared more withdrawn than what was normal between them now. Though he spoke as little as he usually did, Hermione had sensed a change in him she didn't like one bit.

With great difficulty she opened her eyes and looked sideways to see the flowing red hair of Ginny Weasley as she bent over her in concern.

"Hermione, you okay?"

"Gin." she said simply as she tried to offer her a smile of reassurance.

The pain in her belly grew and she felt hot and cold at the same time. Hermione curled in on herself.

"Draco," Hermione grunted when the pain had dulled a little.

"Is, something's wrong with—oh!"

She let out a soft sob in answer and felt Ginny climb into the bed beside her and stroke her back. Hermione shook her head. She needed Draco, and Cora. But Ginny didn't look like she was going to move as she held on to Hermione shushing her and crying. She regretted not taking Cora's advice. She really couldn't handle Ginny breaking apart right now. Not when she really needed her to go and fetch help. From the way Ginny clung to Hermione, it felt more like she was seeking comfort than offering it. Hermione realised she would have to go get help herself or risk losing her babies.

Hermione forced herself to her feet, supporting her belly with her hands, ignoring the trembling form of Ginny Weasley in her bed who, lost in whatever nightmare, was completely oblivious to her attempt to go call for help. Hermione slowly made her way out of the room leaning heavily against the wall for support hoping to find someone familiar that could go get Draco for her. She struggled to breathe as she felt another contraction.

"Behave, for your mama," she whispered to her pups- now accustomed to hearing others call them so, in the past couple of weeks she too had taken to referring to them as pups. She touched her belly in the way she remembered Draco or even Oskar doing on occasions she experienced spasms from their growth spurts and hoped they would listen to her too. "Please try to stay put till I get your father," she pleaded.

The contractions came to a sudden stop, making Hermione's eyes well up with the realisation that she wasn't just some incubator to them, she was their mother and they were her babies. However they came to be, and however inconvenient the timing of it all she was inextricably linked to them for life.

She'd barely stumbled out of her quarters when she spotted Draco sleeping on a pallet outside as if he'd been keeping guard. He awoke with a start when she called out to him and if she wasn't in so much pain she would've giggled at how Draco's hair looked at the moment. His hair, which usually was so well behaved, looked like it had been in a battle with a kneazle, and lost.

"What is it? Is it time?" he asked, sounding mildly panicked.

She grunted out a yes and then doubled over from the pain of the contraction.
"Okay, okay. Deep breaths, Granger," he reminded her while helping her walk back inside and settling her.

They made their way to her bed with Draco supporting most of Hermione's weight along the way. They barely made it to the bed when the next contraction hit her. Her body twisted awkwardly as she tried to support her belly to ease the pain and her waters broke.

"Salazar's salty nutsack!" cursed Draco. "Ah, you wait here while I go get Cora. Um- don't go anywhere. "

He instantly shrunk back at the murderous glare she shot him.

"Okay, yes. Stupid statement. I'll be back," he mumbled before dashing out.

Hermione tried to stay calm and focus on her breathing while she waited for Draco to return.

Soon enough Draco returned with Cora following closely behind. He held her hand and stroked her belly trying not to wince anytime she crushed his hand when she felt a particularly painful contraction.

"Why don't you massage her stomach, it should help a little?" Cora suggested to Draco as she went about casting spells to clean and prepare the area for the birth. She then set out a host of healing potions she could potentially need during the process. Everything about Hermione’s pregnancy was so unusual and unique, Cora, unsure of what to expect, had chosen to err on the side of caution.

Cora parted Hermione's legs and encouraged Draco to keep up with his massage as it was helping distract the witch. When it was time, with encouragement from both Draco and Cora, Hermione grit her teeth together and pushed. Hermione felt like she was being ripped as she pushed out the first of the pups. It wasn't long before they were two healthy babies nestled against Hermione.

Draco nuzzled against Hermione's cheek as he looked in awe at their pups.

"Thank you," was all he managed to say before he got choked up. Feeling just as overwhelmed as Draco and exhausted by the deliveries, Hermione could only manage a weak smile in response.

Chapter End Notes

I'm pretty sure there's a whole bunch of mistakes. Sorry.
Hermione lay exhausted on the bed after the birth of her twins. She could barely keep her eyes open as Cora instructed one of the omega females to wash and clean the new mother. By now Hermione had spent enough time observing the werewolves at Bleidd she was certain she could tell who fell where in the pack hierarchy. The omegas were easier to spot by their generally submissive behaviour; they lacked confidence, walked around with their eyes cast down and addressed the betas with titles of respect. When the omega rubbed Hermione's tender flesh a little too harshly causing her to yelp in pain, Draco let out a low growl of warning which left the omega quaking in fear but did funny things to Hermione's insides. It wasn't the first time she noticed that, unlike the other men and women at Bleidd, she didn't respond to any show of aggression on Draco's part with fear. Though she wasn't the kind of person who revelled in needless violence, quite strangely she often felt the distinct urge to bite Draco during such moments. Even as exhausted as she was now, far from being afraid of him, or even annoyed with his behaviour, she only felt desire. It didn't help that he was currently looming over everyone in the room like he was Hades himself, while expertly holding the twins, one in each hand, carefully against his chest like they were the most precious thing on Earth.

As the omega went about completing her task, more carefully this time, Cora approached Hermione, health replenishing potion in hand, which she held to Hermione's lips in a signal for her to drink. No sooner had she swallowed the potion Hermione found herself nodding off for some much needed rest.

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It felt like she'd only just drifted off when Hermione was woken up the sound of a baby crying. As her eyelids fluttered open Hermione was able to see Draco struggling to pacify the little monster in his arms. The baby continued with its energetic bawling till it was red in the face.

"They're hungry, we need to try and feed them," said Cora, drawing Hermione's attention to herself and the child peacefully nestled in her arms.

"She's completely wiped out, let her rest a while," replied Draco, he was so focused on trying to calm the baby in his arms he did not notice Hermione was already awake.

"Nursing within the first hour of birth is good for the mother too," explained Cora as she went about swapping the babe in her arms for the howling infant in Draco's. "This one's got quite the pair of lungs on him," she said, seeking to calm the child in her arms by rocking him. "Besides, Hermione's already awake."

Draco immediately turned towards Hermione, a look of deep concern in his eyes.

"Hey, how are you?" he asked cautiously. There was something strange about his tone, distant somehow. She feebly nodded in response, lacking the energy to muster up a response or even object to Cora's manhandling as she went about moving Hermione's shift to expose her breast to the crying baby at her side.

Hermione could feel Draco staring at them intensely but there was something different about this look than the heated ones he usually gave her; he was scrutinising her. His entire body exuded tension, like he was expecting to have to leap to action at any moment. But his attention wasn't
focused on any potential threat, as suggested by his posture, just her. She could feel the same
distance between them that she sensed in the past few days, but she was too tired to start any kind of
discussion about it right now.

The baby lying beside her didn't stop wailing till Cora directed its mouth to Hermione's nipple. It
shocked Hermione to see how quickly the baby grew quiet once it latched on to a nipple just as she
was surprised by the sensation of her milk letting down when her child greedily suckled at her breast.
Having watched Tonks and Fleur nursing their children on a couple of occasions, Hermione thought
she knew what to expect from this part of motherhood- it had seemed simple enough. She winced in
pain, not prepared for how much it hurt to have a baby suck on her nipple. As her son fed from her
Hermione could feel tears sting her eyes, but she choked them back. She wasn't sure which of the
two things were making her emotional- the pain from nursing or the unreal feeling that she was now
a mother of not one but two sons.

"Why don't you try a different position?" asked Cora, most likely having seen her grimace more than
once, "Nursing a child shouldn't be painful."

Hermione did as Cora suggested, with great effort she sat up and took the baby in her arms to nurse it
from the new position. It felt a lot better than the previous one and she was just beginning to get used
to the sensation of a child suckling at her teat when she felt Cora push her other son against her other
breast. As Hermione limply sat there, tits out, a child attached to each nipple, instead of the deep
satisfaction she expected to feel while feeding her sons she felt like nothing more than some cow
getting milked. Physically and mentally drained by this point, she felt disconnected from everything
around her. The eager sucking motion the twins were making with their mouths signalled they
weren't done yet, but there was no milk left. Her nipples were cracked, her breasts felt sore and her
sons looked upset, both now crying, over the lack of milk.

Hermione wasn't sure when she started crying, only realising she had tears running down her cheek
when her vision grew blurry. It made no sense for her to be this upset by the discomfort caused by
nursing when she'd endured both physical and mental torture in the past. She couldn't make sense of
the feelings of failure and inadequacy that overwhelmed her listening to the cries of her sons as they
were taken from her without passably satisfying their hunger. She didn't care, she told herself; she
wasn't supposed to care about this or them. It would make no sense for her to begin to care about any
of these things when she planned to leave them behind and make her escape with Ginny. There was
a war going on, and she was a witch- a soldier- not a cow; she had bigger and better things to worry
about than crying hungry infants.

She could feel Cora's judgemental gaze, and even Draco was looking at her as if he found her
lacking somehow. Hermione told herself she couldn't care less about what any of them thought of
her. Soon as Cora moved the babies away from her, Hermione pulled the covers over herself and
rolled to her side so her back was to Draco and Cora. She closed her eyes and willed her thoughts
away from this place and the unrealistic expectations people had from her. Before she lost
consciousness to sleep there was just one question that lay heavy on her mind.

\textit{Who is Hermione Granger?}

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Hermione's eyelids felt heavy as she drifted to consciousness. She could hear the sound of a child
crying but couldn't even gather the energy needed to blink, let alone look around to see where the
sound was coming from. Through half opened eyes she watched the back of a woman walking away
from her bed. From the way her breasts felt, she guessed her sons must've just finished another round
of feeding. When the unknown woman finally walked out of her line of vision she could see Draco
sitting slumped in a chair with one of their sons peacefully asleep on his chest, his attention focused on his other son in the arms of the woman standing far too close to Draco for Hermione's liking. She couldn't help the pang of envy she felt watching the other woman expertly rock her son to sleep.

When Hermione opened her eyes next, she saw some woman and Draco huddled over a bassinet. She could hear the sounds her sons were making but couldn't see them. Her head felt heavy like she'd spent the last hundred years asleep, yet her body felt like she'd rested for all of five minutes. When she closed and opened her eyes she saw Draco's back as he left the room bassinet in hand. She wanted to chase after Draco and demand he tell her where they were going and why he was taking her sons away. With tears rolling down her face, she realised she lacked the strength needed to even call out after them. There was no one now, they had all left her alone and she didn't even have Ginny by her side she realised just before losing consciousness.

Hermione woke up feeling a lot better physically but everything else felt off. She found herself lying alone on her bed; her pups were gone and so was Draco. She grew further alarmed when a quick glance around revealed she wasn't on her bed or even her room anymore. This was a strange new place. But where? And where were Draco and her babies? She began to worry something untoward had taken place. Then she remembered seeing Draco take their babies and leave and her heart hurt from the grief the memory produced.

Hermione tried to sit up, to go look for them, but some kind of magical binding prevented her from moving. She opened her mouth to scream from the physical pain her heartache was causing, but no sound came out. She felt an invisible power begin to force her legs apart and wedge itself between them, but as hard as she tried she was unable to move her head enough to see who or what it was. She tried to use her hands to shove the thing away only to discover they were bound as well.

Soundlessly she screamed, calling out to Draco in vain. Frustrated with the feeling of helplessness plaguing her since the birth of her twins, she began to grow angry instead. As her rage build she felt something within her let loose. Suddenly, Hermione could once again feel her magic, which lay dormant within her the past several months, swell and build inside her till it flowed free within her veins like molten lava burning her up from the inside. The next time she opened her mouth to scream instead of a sound it was her magic that burst out of her, uncontrolled and unstoppable, blasting everything around her.

Hermione sat up with a start, panting and found herself surrounded by the firm flesh and comforting scent of Draco.

"Shh," he cooed into her hair, "it was just a dream. I'm right here."

She looked up at his face and couldn't believe the relief she experienced to find him here right now. She flung her arms around his neck and clung to him, comforted by the sound of his heart beating as she pressed her cheek against his chest. So great was her relief at finding Draco she didn't even think to ask him how he knew about her dream.

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Draco wasn't sure what was happening but he sensed Hermione's distress even though he knew she would be asleep thanks to the health replenishing potions Cora had insisted he feed her every two hours. During the shorter than normal course of her pregnancy, her body had been forced to endure far more pain than natural. Now that the twins were born, Cora had explained, Hermione would
need to be put on a course of healing and strengthening potions to ensure a full recovery. He was already on his way back to Hermione's room after his meeting with Fenrir when he somehow sensed her reaching for him. He couldn't explain how but he was able to sense her loneliness and despair at not finding him. Draco ran all the way to her so he arrived just moments before she awoke from her dream. Ever since Hermione went into labour, Draco had so little sleep he wasn't sure if he had imagined it but just for a brief second before she woke up Hermione's entire body appeared to have been wrapped in an ethereal glow.

But, Draco had no time to dwell on such things, not when there were more pressing matters occupying his thoughts. As much as it pleased him to have Hermione cling to him, soon as she calmed down Draco fed her the last dose of the healing potion. Over the course of the week, Draco had religiously followed Cora's instructions, personally seeing to it that Hermione was fed the doses at regular intervals and making sure the babies nursed from Hermione without interrupting her rest. He kept close watch over Hermione and their pups, not leaving their side the entire time; that was till now, when he was summoned by Fenrir.

Fenrir was away at the time the pups were born but news of their birth had reached him in whichever part of the world he was wreaking havoc on behalf of the Dark Lord. Within two days of receiving the news Fenrir had triumphantly returned to check on the latest additions to his pack. From his subsequent meeting with Fenrir, Draco gathered the alpha had not rushed back home, but had stopped by the Parkinson Estate where the Dark Lord was currently in residence. Though he made no contribution go it, it was a matter of great pride for Fenrir that of all the fertility trials conducted and the multiple experiments at cross-breeding species, the only one to be declared a complete success involved someone from Fenrir's pack. Not only had a werewolf mated with a witch in wolf form and got her pregnant, the witch had given birth to not one but two pups and in only six months. Hoping to earn the Dark Lord's favour Fenrir had gone to see the Dark Lord and deliver news of the success of his experiment in person. Draco felt uneasy; he sensed that the giddy excitement shown by Fenrir would not bode well for Hermione or their sons.

In the few days before the birth of their sons, Draco had made an effort to keep his distance from Hermione. He knew she was hell bent on escaping and after listening to her conversation with Ginny Weasley, he began to believe he was mistaken in thinking they could have a future together. While he didn't think Hermione was capable of hurting any innocent, let alone her own sons, he doubted the same could be said of Ginny Weasley, who seemed completely broken at this point- nothing like her former self. As a precaution, Draco decided it would be best if the pups were kept with the pack, away from Hermione and Ginny, lest the babies end up a casualty any escape attempt on their part. Now, though he could sense that the witch did have feelings for him, after his meeting with Fenrir, Draco felt certain that the pups would remain safer with the pack. Considering how important children were to his kind, he was confident the pack would do anything to protect his pups, going as far as defying their alpha's order should the need arise. Even Hermione would stand a better chance at defending herself if she didn't have to worry about the pups too. Still, soon as Hermione's health recovered he planned to give her some training to make sure she never found herself in a position where she was defenceless or vulnerable again. He was also going to do his best to get his wand back for her so she stood a real chance to make it out of Bleidd alive.

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Hermione watched Cora check on the babies from the corner of her eye while Zoey went about tidying the room. Ginny was not to be seen, so she assumed they had moved her elsewhere. She reminded herself to check with Draco or Cora on Ginny's whereabouts later.

Draco hovered over the babies protectively; the tension in his body remained even after Zoey left the room. It occurred to Hermione she had been so out of it during her last few interactions with her
babies, she could not describe her own sons.

"Can I see them?" she asked no one in particular while looking at the bassinet shielding her sons from her view.

Draco looked at Cora, sharing some sort of silent communication with her which resulted in Cora nodding at him and quietly leaving the room. Draco reached into the bassinet and picked up the quieter one of their two sons. While the other looked an angry shade of red from having just bawled his eyes out before his father finally managed to get him to be quiet, this one was pink faced and looked like a little piglet wrapped up in blankets in his father's arms.

Hermione sat up and reached for her son. "Oh, you look like a Wilbur to me," she cooed taking the little bundle into her arms.

"Wilbur?" asked Draco in confusion.

"Yes. I think the name suits him perfectly. Doesn't he remind you of Wilbur in Charlotte's Web?" she asked.

"Charlotte's Web?"

"Ah, yes. Well, you probably never heard of it. It's a Muggle children's book about a wise and gentle spider, Charlotte, who decides to save Wilbur, a pig, from ending up as breakfast meat. I loved watching the animated movie as a child. And this little cutie looks just like Wilbur," she insisted gently stroking one of his chubby cheeks with her index finger.

"Granger, if I've understood you correctly, did you just name our son after a pig?" he asked, picking up their other son and approaching Hermione.

"Not just any pig, he's some pig."

"I can tell from your expression that's supposed to mean something but it's still a bunch of nonsense to me. Now what made you think you could name our pups?" he asked settling himself on the bed beside her. He was pleased to feel her immediately lean against him with their son nestled in her arms so they each held one of their sons side by side.

She gave him an apologetic look. "I'm sorry; did you already have some name in mind?"

Caught off guard, Draco remained silent. Yes, he had eagerly looked forward to the birth of his children but had given little thought to more practical things like names.

"Not really, but surely we're both clever enough to come up with something better than Wilbur. What does it even mean?"

"Resolute, brilliant."

Draco didn't want to immediately admit it but he liked the sound of that. And to be fair, his son with no hair and a chubby body that was pink all over did look more piglet than human currently. He stared at his other son, this one, unlike his brother, was more prone to crying fits and was consequently still sporting the same angry shade of red he did half an hour earlier which gave Draco an idea.

"Well in that case, this one's going to be Mars... or Martinus?"

"Ah, I see what you mean... How about Martin instead?"
"Martin? Do our children really need to have such common names?"

"Well, not everyone's conceited enough to name their child something as pretentious as Draco."

"That's rich, coming from someone with a name like Hermione."

Hermione knew he had her there. Her parents did deliberately choose a name others had difficulty pronouncing to show off how clever they were.

"I know this'll sound silly, but I can't help hoping that maybe if our sons had regular names they may end up having some kind of regular life."

Draco tried to ignore the warm feeling he got in his chest listening to Hermione refer to their pups as theirs, choosing instead to think about what she had proposed.

"I would really like our sons to have a regular life. Though, one only needs to look at Potter to see that having a regular name is no guarantee for a regular sort of life."

Draco put his arm around her shoulder and at the feel of her burrowing into his side felt the tension finally leave his body. Maybe it was just the exhaustion that was making her behave this way but he couldn't deny how good it felt to go back to how things were between them till around a fortnight ago.

"Well, we'll just have to make sure we stay alive to watch over them so Wilbur and Martin don't suffer Harry's fate."

Draco stared ahead of him and smiled. "Wilbur and Martin... Not sure which is more surreal, that I'm a father now and responsible for these two lives, or that our sons have names like Wilbur and Martin."

"It has to be the former. Can't believe we made two human beings," she whispered in awe. Draco simply nodded feeling equally overwhelmed by the realisation.

Chapter End Notes

I tried but couldn't stick to my posting schedule. Things will remain erratic for a while but I'll try not to keep a gap of more than two weeks between chapters. So, this chapter wasn't part of the story as I first imagined it. This came out of the comments posted to chapter 12- I did not expect readers to be this curious about the babies, and thought I may as well tackle Hermione's experience as a new and unprepared mother while I'm at it. Martin & Wilbur are the names of real life twins of reader ofthemoon, so not a peep about how the names don't suit Dramione/HP world baby name themes. Ofthemoon, thank you for offering the use of the names of your children in this fic. I hope you're not disappointed by the result.
Fatherhood was different than Draco imagined. For one, being a father was a lot harder than he ever thought it would be. The first week after Wilbur and Martin were born, with Hermione asleep most of the time thanks to the reviving potions she was fed, it fell to Draco—with occasional help from the pack’s females—to take care of the pups. There were moments during that first week where the pups were fed, clean and peacefully asleep beside their mother, and Draco would look at his new family, his eyes moist, thinking he had to be the luckiest man alive. At other moments he’d feel like crying from sheer frustration and helplessness when despite all his attempts to get them to settle down his sons would continue to cry till they were both red in the face.

Then there was the constant worry. He had not anticipated this aspect of becoming a parent. When the pups weren’t around he was constantly worried about their safety. Sometimes Draco would be lying asleep in bed when he’d wake up in a state of panic worried something had happened to his pups or they needed something but he wasn’t around to help them. When they were in front of him he worried about failing them. Since he became a werewolf Draco had found himself to be the most self-assured he’d ever been in his life. But fatherhood had turned him to the same vulnerable teen he was during his Hogwarts years who frequently thought that somehow he’d fallen short of expectations. Back then, as a Pureblood Malfoy heir his father had expected him to prove his superiority over the Halfbloods and Mudbloods. Yet, no matter how hard he applied himself, he continued to be bested by Potter at quidditch and Hermione in academics, throughout their time at school together. After six days of next to no sleep and constant feelings of inadequacy Draco had a little meltdown where he simply sat there crying worried that he would fail his sons like he had his father.

Looking lovingly down at her son as he fed from her breast, Hermione didn’t notice the door open and Draco enter to watch, transfixed what a mother’s love truly was. While he himself was handling parenthood by fluctuating between moments of joy, laughter, panic and secretly shed tears, he thought Hermione had taken to it brilliantly, like she did all things apparently. She was ever calm and patient and, by the gods, she was so beautiful, he thought, watching her cuddle both their sons in her arms and attempting to sing a lullaby even if she couldn’t hold a tune. The idea of her someday leaving him, leaving them, broke his heart a little, but, it was a reality he needed to embrace.

Seeing Hermione and the pups together, Draco understood the significance of a family. Members of his pack were a great help, of course. There was always someone available to watch the twins—Draco suspected some even traded favours for an opportunity to mind Wilbur and Martin. Children were a type of novelty for the werewolves, none of them having sired any since they were turned and very few having children from before, there were barely any who had experience with child-rearing. However, what the pack members lacked in experience they made up for with sheer enthusiasm. Their actions confirming Draco was correct to believe the pack would take good care of his pups.

Regardless of how much better the pack was to him, since becoming a father, Draco’s thoughts still drifted to his former family. He was certain Lucius would’ve been informed about the arrival of the twins, so he was surprised, and also a little disappointed, that his mother had yet to come see him or even send him an owl; word of his children’s birth would surely have reached her by now. Already proud of Wilbur and Martin, Draco was eager to show them off to his mother, especially since she often spoke of how much she looked forward to becoming a grandmother some day. He didn’t have the same expectations of Lucius. Draco knew his father well enough to know that with all his
prejudices, no matter how miraculous their birth, for Lucius the twins would be nothing more than half-breeds.

Draco stretched out on the bed so the twins lay between him and Hermione. He looked at Wilbur, all bundled up still, and Martin, with one hand sticking out of the swaddling cloth, and smiled at the picture they made side by side. He stroked Wilbur's round chin and Martin chubby hand, and sighed with contentment. He could not imagine either of his sons ever doing anything so grave that would make him abandon them the way Lucius had abandoned him. As exhausting as caring for the twins could be, he would willingly die first before he let anyone bring harm to them.

Like so many times before, these stray thoughts involving his father led to comparisons with the other man who had sired him.

How different would life have been if his sire was someone as cruel as Fenrir or uncaring as Lucius? However burdensome the alpha's commands, Draco knew he didn't feel them half as strongly as those who were also unfortunate enough to have Greyback as their sire. How lucky then for Draco that his sire was Oskar, one of the oldest members of the pack, an Elder and a former alpha. Draco had learnt much about werewolves and their ways because of Oskar, who like a father watched over him and helped him transition into the man he was today.

In many ways Oskar was not too different from Lucius Malfoy- both were regal men whose actions were governed by a set of principles they valued. They both demanded excellence from those they called family, neither gave him any quarter. Their differences shone through in how they tackled Draco's successes and failures. Where his father rewarded him with nods of approval, Oskar did not shy away from physical expressions like hugs and thumps to the back to show the pride he felt over Draco's accomplishments. When he failed, instead of the disappointment he saw reflected in his father's eyes or the humiliation he received at his hands, Oskar encouraged him to do better by helping him overcome his weaknesses to achieve success next time.

Draco knew Oskar expected him to mate with Hermione as a means to protect her but Draco could see that she could have no real future here. So long as Fenrir ran the pack and the Dark Lord ran the world outside, Hermione would not be safe. Though it hurt him to think about it, it was clear to him in the long term her best shot was at Potter's side. And if Potter was still anything like he was in his school days, he was most likely struggling without his brainy friend at his side.

"You're his sire, did you sense he'd be the one?" asked Cora biting the head off the chocolate frog in her hand. She never particular cared for Honeydukes' treats otherwise, but in times of stress there was something deeply satisfying about decapitating the confections. This was not, however, a practice she indulged in front of anyone except her former alpha.

Oskar shook his head in response. "I sensed his magic was strong, if conflicted somehow, but I never thought he'd be the one... As much as I have faith in the legends, I never imagined I'd be alive to see any of these things come to pass."

Cora sighed and pushed away the pile of headless frogs. Seeing them made her feel sick, which was ironic considering the kind of experiments she had impassively witnessed the Death Eaters perform on their kind.

"I never believed in any of it," she said, and seeing the way Oskar's brows rose at the statement quickly added, "I mean, I believed it was an interpretation of events that may have transpired, but I never thought the legends were literally true. I believe the moon influences us but I never believed it was really Luna guiding us."
"If I'm hearing you correctly, Cora, it sounds like you're admitting to have never really believed in magic," said Oskar looking very amused.

"I know what it sounds like. Of course I believe in magic, but for me Lycanthropy was always nothing more than an interesting disease. Now, with the birth of the pups and the fulfilment of the promise, I find myself looking at it all differently. Do you have any idea what it means to question your existence at my age?"

Oskar patiently listened to Cora till she was done, then he smiled at her. "You may not be my child, but you never really let go of your bond with me as your alpha. I know the burden you carry, Cora. I know how you've had to stand by and see strangers harm weres because you believed ultimately it would help our people."

Cora closed her eyes and recalled that wretched feeling of doing nothing. While pack-bonds weren't as strong as the alpha or mate bonds, they were rather hard to ignore from two feet away, which was often the distance she was required to maintain during those torture sessions that passed off as fertility experiments by the Dark Lord and his underlings on the werewolves.

"-I also know how overwhelmed you feel realising there are greater forces at play here."

"What am I supposed to do? I don't know what role I'm meant to play. I've only ever done what I believed to be best, not what the fates may desire of me. I..."

Oskar stood up and slowly made his way to Cora; he may be more nimble in his wolf form, but he felt every one of the years he'd lived in his human one. He placed a reassuring hand on Cora's shoulders and felt her lean in. As pack creatures they were physically beings and gestures like pats and hugs went a long way with their kind. He offered her a hand signalling she stand and then embraced her like he would've any upset child. Cora quietly cried against his chest as she tried to ease the guilt she carried for her own complicity. It should've been Fenrir comforting her, as her current alpha the bond would be great enough that even a kind word would serve to soothe his pack members. Unfortunately, Fenrir was terrible as an alpha.

There were times of course when it benefited them that Fenrir was such an apathetic leader. Fenrir didn't wish for Draco to be powerful as a werewolf and so he ordered those he believed to be the weakest members of his pack to attack the Malfoy heir. Fortunately for Draco, Greyback's lack of knowledge when it came to the individual histories of the members of his pack meant he had allowed an Elder to be the one to sire Draco. If not for such an oversight on Fenrir's part, Draco would've been sired by someone weak and then who knows if he could've succeeded in impregnating someone as powerful as Hermione. Helpless though she may appear since her arrival at Bleidd, the one time he laid his hands on her Oskar sensed a great and powerful beast lying asleep within her. It was safe to say the Muggleborn witch's ancestry wasn't quite strictly limited to Muggles as she believed it to be.

Cora had calmed down by now, so Oskar stepped away from her. She was furiously rubbing at her eyes and face to hide evidence of her meltdown. Out of respect for her privacy Oskar looked away and out the window instead, his eyes settling on the fated pair resting under a tree with their sons sprawled on their chests. This serene picture which represented the future of his people soothed his old wolf knowing he had played a role in making something so incredible possible.

Having noticed the direction of Oskar's gaze Cora moved closer to take a look at what had caught his attention.

"Fenrir is a fool, but he isn't that great a fool either; it's hard to see them together and fail to see the bond developing there. He'll soon figure out what's going on between the two of them and put a stop
"He needs to be around long enough for that," responded Oskar and then turned away from the idyllic scene, "Besides, he takes no interest in the habits of pack members to pay such attention to them.

"I'd say that's true of others, but different when it comes to Draco. The alpha was already envious of the status the pup previously held as the Malfoy heir, which only became worse when Draco ended up being the only creature to show any kind of success with any version of the fero potion till date... I know Fenrir has secretly participated in some of the tests. I don't have access to any of the specifics but I'm certain we would've heard if he had fathered any children... I saw how he reacted to news of Hermione's pregnancy, which is why I never told him she was carrying twins... Soon as he notices Draco's elevated status in the pack over the birth of the twins he'll do something to either, ruin Draco's standing or raise himself higher."

Oskar responded with a raise of his brow.

"Yes, I know how ridiculous it sounds to suggest an alpha would envy the status of someone in his pack, but this is Fenrir we're talking about. Apart from brute force, what else does the man possess that qualifies him as an alpha?"

Even as a pup Oskar would not have questioned why Luna would choose to bless so dark a creature, as Fenrir Greyback, with such powers as she did. Oskar himself was sired by an Elder who taught him everything he knew about their kind, but even before that he was raised to believe it was not one's place to question who the fates chose to use as their instruments. Despite his faults, or even because of them, Fenrir had without a doubt played a part in the existence of the young family outside.

"Do not dismiss your current alpha so easily," said Oskar quietly. "He may not be the sharpest knife, but he singlehandedly waged, and won the Pack Wars. Something one doesn't achieve by brute force alone."

When the wizard known as the Dark Lord commanded Fenrir to build him an army, the alpha went on a murderous rampage biting and turning people willy-nilly. However, lacking any real leadership skills, instead of a pack Fenrir had ended up with a bunch of rogue werewolves. Upon realising his mistake Fenrir went for the second best way to make a large and powerful pack- by taking over existing werewolf packs. Thus began the Pack Wars of Great Britain, wherein Greyback systematically killed the alphas of all the smaller packs scattered throughout Great Britain till he had consolidated them into one large pack that called the grounds of Bleidd Castle its home. Such was their reign in the region that no one even recalled what the place was called before they had renamed it as Bleidd, the local name for 'wolf', Castle.

"He is not my alpha," Cora spoke through gritted teeth. "That monster took my mate from me. He took my alpha from me. I only accepted his alpha bond because I didn't want to end up an outcast."

Sadly this was true of far too many members of their pack, thought Oskar. The various groups leftover from the packs destroyed by Greyback only accepted Fenrir as their alpha and thus bonded with him because the alternative- ending up an outcast- was far worse to contemplate. And yet, while the pack may not have benefitted from his leadership style, older members swore that the insane wolf living inside Fenrir had quietened a great deal due to the stability offered by the new pack.

"You could still end up one, should the alpha hear you speak in this manner. You should be more careful," he patiently told her.
"I am always careful around others. It isn't me you ought to worry about right now. Fenrir will notice the respect Draco gets from the pack for having sired two children and then he will want that for himself; coveting is Fenrir's way. And with Hermione being the only witch to fall pregnant after mating with a wolf..."

Cora didn't need to complete that statement; he shared her fears as well, but he was also hopeful that Draco and Hermione were fully bonded before they needed to worry about Fenrir.

"I know you're hoping they bond soon, but..." Cora trailed off and went to sit at the desk again with the heap of abandoned headless frogs sitting on top of it. One at a time she ripped open the few unopened packets left and tore off the heads of the rest of the frogs too, feeling just a little less frustrated with each chocolate frog head she tore apart and spat out. She resumed speaking only once she was done with every last one of them. "She is far too stubborn and focused on the war outside to understand what is happening under her nose. It doesn't help that the only friend she has here hates the Malfoys far too much to see the difference between Draco and his father, let alone point it out to Hermione."

"It should be different now with the children here."

"I've spent some time with her; she is loyal only to Harry Potter and the cause to defeat the Dark Lord. The pregnancy weakened both her and her magic, but once she's recovered I don't expect her to stick around long enough to bond with the pup."

"You believe she'll escape?"

"I believe she'll make a foolish attempt at it which will earn her a punishment from either Fenrir or the Dark Lord himself. There's nothing Draco will be able to do to protect her then. Our only hope is for Gunnolf to become alpha-"

At this point Oskar abruptly cut her off. "You know I agree with your assessment that Gunnolf would serve the pack far better as alpha, but Fenrir would never willingly abdicate and Gunnolf wouldn't stand a chance against the alpha in a fight. Besides, defeating Fenrir would hardly be the end of it. The pack is large right now, larger than any pack ought to be, and we do not know where each one's loyalties lie. Lastly, we cannot know how the Dark one and his followers will react to Fenrir's defeat. With threats both from the inside and out, one misstep on our part could result in a slaughter." He paused long enough to make sure Cora understood what was at stake.

Neither of them said the words but they both shared the same thought: We need allies.

Fenrir was suspicious, the thought had half of Draco panicking over the prospect of getting into the alpha's crosshairs while the other half remained calm in the knowledge he could deal with him if necessary. Draco was certain Fenrir must have an inkling of the bond forming between him and Hermione, and it wasn't just because the alpha commanded him to fuck an omega yet again during the full moon- no that was just Greyback acting like a petty arsehole because he was jealous of Draco's popularity in the pack. Draco thought something was off because he was suddenly being assigned tasks that kept him busy and away from Hermione all the time. Since the pups mostly lived with him and the pack, Draco could freely see them any time he liked, but was unable to spend a tenth of the time with Hermione and the pups, together, as he would've liked.

With a month passed under Fenrir's watchful presence, another full moon and the prospect of yet another moon mate who wasn't going to be Hermione, Draco felt sick. He was able to skip the festivities for the last full moon since Fenrir was called away at the last moment giving him no time to
plan the moon mates. Draco had taken advantage by letting his wolf spend time with his pups. Though unafraid herself, Hermione was initially fearful on behalf of the children, but she ended up surprised by how careful his wolf was with the infants. However, this full moon, with Fenrir around, things were going to be very different, realised Draco, recalling his conversation with the head beta just a few hours ago.

"What the hell, Gunnolf!"

"I know... I get it Draco. I'll try to talk him-"

"It makes me sick. I could barely handle being with the omegas before Hermione and the pups. And now, the very thought of knotting with someone else-"

"Makes you sick to the stomach, quite literally. Yes, I noticed."

"So there's no way it skipped the alpha's attention, still he torments me with these commands. I need to be with Hermione. How is she supposed to manage the boys by herself for one whole night? You know what a handful they can be, and if we're all out, engaging in the festivities, who'll be there to help her?"

"What about that friend of hers? Cora said she's been doing a lot better since getting her own separate quarters."

"Ginny Weasley? Hermione avoids being alone with her when the twins are around."

"She still talking about hurting the pups?"

Draco shook his head. "Hermione's just playing it safe, thank goodness! I don't need one more thing to worry about right now. Now what's going on with my schedule, all these silly chores he has me running...? Is he deliberately trying to keep me away from the main Castle?"

"Looks like it. If you mate with Hermione Granger, she'll be of no use to the other wolves in the pack."

"It's not the pack's interest in Hermione that concerns me."

"What do you mean?"

"You know Fenrir's been sniffing around Hermione."

"What're you talking about?"

"He keeps 'running into her' when she leaves her room. He's been uncharacteristically pleasant; went so far as to say he hoped she liked the room he had her moved to after the delivery."

"Ha! Must've looked like a fool trying to take credit for that. We're lucky Cora's really good at lying to Fenrir or he would've had our hides for moving her when we did."

"You're missing the point here. I think Fenrir is trying to woo Hermione."

Even a fool could deduce that it wasn't the fero potion but Hermione who was special and with Greyback being childless it was safe to figure out his intentions for her. Draco reminded himself he didn't feel threatened that Greyback, an alpha, was interested in his witch. So what if he couldn't offer her the protection Greyback could as leader of the pack? So what if he didn't have anything to offer her other than himself? Hermione wouldn't care for those things. The fly in the ointment,
thought Draco, was that he wasn't really sure where he stood with Hermione anymore.

After the birth of Martin and Wilbur, she changed. Without the pregnancy taxing her system she seemed much sharper and more like someone who held the title of being the brightest witch of her age. Physically, motherhood had been rather kind to Hermione, filling her out so she wasn't quite all skin and bones she was in the months before she gave birth. He could only imagine how good it would feel to grab her hips now, but he refused to act on it. Without the raging hormones of her pregnancy, she was no longer walking around aroused, so, unlike before, he no longer had an excuse to grab her without explicit invitation. He couldn't assume she wanted to resume physical relations with him just because it was what he wanted. Merlin, she already wanted to escape, he didn't need to give her one more reason to do so.

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Hermione was enjoying sitting under the shade of the tree with the twins in a bassinet beside her. She didn't notice Fenrir creep up to her and stand there watching her till he snapped his fingers making her head jerk up in attention. Such was the magic of the alpha that even though Wilbur and Martin were still infants they sensed their leader and opened their sleep heavy lids to stare at Fenrir. Without bothering to ask, Fenrir picked Martin, who appeared to be more awake than his brother, and held him in his arms for a few moments.

"Hello, little pup," he cooed. "I missed you." Hermione watched nervously as Fenrir held her son. Based on the last few surprise visits she received from Greyback, Hermione didn't consider him a threat to her safety, if anything he made her uneasy due to how friendly he was acting ever since she gave birth. Hermione was nervous right now because, though Greyback outwardly doted on them, she suspected he actually resented her sons.

Martin cooed and flailed his arms about as if he meant to grab a hold on Fenrir's face as he rubbed his face in the alpha's neck.

"Aw, li'l pup. I wish I was your da... Maybe someday I could be, huh? Depends on your mother, I'd say." Fenrir said, laughing at Martin's obvious fascination. Being pack, the pups appeared to be aware of their connection to the alpha.

During the course of their last few encounters, Hermione discovered Greyback had an odd sense of humour. However, she could not shake off the feeling he was far more serious about the things he said as a joke than he let on. Hermione nervously looked around hoping Draco would arrive and help ease the awkwardness of the situation.

"Expecting the Malfoy pup, are you?" Fenrir's quiet question was barely audible. "Thought you were clever, but you're like every other dumb bitch, aren't you? The fero potion makes my wolves go in a rut- they'll fuck any wet hole put before them. Malfoy's done with you, moved on he has," Greyback taunted. "And while he's fucking and breeding other bitches, you're sat here like a fool thinking you were special in some way," he declared with a menacing sneer. Greyback abruptly walked away leaving Hermione wondering if there was any truth to his statement.

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Hermione stood staring out the window watching the water of the lake outside with longing. The weather was getting warmer and while she wasn't particularly hot, she thought it may feel nice to just be outside.

She was startled by the sound of someone clearing their throat immediately behind her. She knew who it was from how close he stood behind her. She'd only have to lean back a little and she could
be nestled against his chest. Since the birth of the twins she couldn't tell if he'd lost interest in her physically or if it was something else but for some reason no matter how close he was there was always just that little bit of distance between them. And frankly she was growing tired of it.

"Fenrir's out today, so I'm free to do as I please."

His next words made her think he may have been watching her a while before he approached.

"Oskar's minding the boys. I thought it may be nice for us to go for a swim."

"That's nice," Hermione said, then turned around and wrapped her arms around his waist. "I've missed you," she said and felt all of the tension ease out of his shoulders, his eyes fluttering shut.

"Me too," Draco whispered into her neck as he nuzzled her.

"Fenrir said you were going to be busy for a while. He said you'd be too busy fu-fucking other bitches and breeding them." She didn't ask for any of this, yet she couldn't help the hurt she felt at the idea of Draco being with anyone else the way he was with her.

Draco sighed. "He's ordered me to impregnate the pack's females. We're given potions to induce heat; I'm expected to knot with whoever I'm paired with." He kissed her shoulder. Just holding her like this soothed his entire being. "My wolf hates it, I want you." He gently tipped her chin upwards so he could look into her eyes. "You can feel it, right?"

She nodded.

"I didn't realise it at the time- that first time we were together... I was just acting on instinct when I initiated the mate bond."

She remembered; some part of her had known even back then there was no going back from this when he'd claimed her as both man and beast.

"Fenrir must know it though, and he's deliberately keeping me away from you. He knows I can only sire children with you, but he's still making me fuck others to torment me."

"I think Greyback wants me as his mate."

She wasn't surprised when Draco's hold on her tightened and his whole body tensed. She was expecting him to react poorly when he discovered Fenrir's intentions, but he needed to know what was going on.

"The kind of questions he asks and the way he talks about you, I think he's threatened by you. It clearly bothers him that you have children when he doesn't, even though he's an alpha." Hermione spoke slowly and in a low voice. "More than once he's mentioned how powerful and fertile I've proven to be, also, how lucky any witch would be to mate with an alpha."

Hermione noticed he was growling while she spoke about Fenrir and the colour of his eyes changed from their usual grey to the amber shade his eyes took on when he transformed. Though minor, this change struck Hermione as odd since Draco had informed her pack members were unable to transform in any way during anytime other than the full moon. From the way his nostrils flared and his hands flexed and relaxed their hold on her hips, she knew he was trying to rein in his temper. She needed him calm and in control of his senses so they could get ahead of this potential problem.

Hermione took his face between the palms of her hand and looked him in the eyes. "I don't want him," she said, pulling his face closer to her and angled her head so their lips were nearly touching.
"I want you," she said breathily.

She watched his eyes change back to their usual colour, though more of a stormy grey right then.

He sniffed at her; curled his fingers around her wrists and pulled her hands away from his face.

Eyes narrowed at her, he asked, "Have you been given any potion today?"

She knew why he asked. He could probably smell her arousal and, considering what happened in the past, was suspicious it may be potion-induced.

She shook her head.

"He's waiting for the full moon. Wouldn't make sense to put me in heat and leave me around so many unmated werewolves." Cora was the one to help Hermione arrive at that conclusion by pointing out Fenrir's interest in Hermione as a mate and that a full moon was needed to seal a mate bond.

"So, you'd pick me, a new wolf, a beta, over an alpha?"

Instead of answering she pressed herself against him and gave his lips a teasing swipe with her tongue. She found the sound he made to be rather satisfying.

"Granger," he whined stepping away from her. "You smell way too delicious for me to be satisfied with just some snogging. Even without your heat, your scent makes me want to crawl out of my skin and meld myself to you. It makes me want to fuck you senseless and stay knotted with you till your belly is heavy with my children again."

He needed her to understand just exactly what it meant to be with him; it wasn't going to be like any sweet romance she might've imagined happening with Weasley.

She gulped, understanding what he meant. But, what choice did she really have here? He was her best hope of surviving this place and if that wasn't a good enough reason there was also the fact that she was in love with him.

"Come," he said pulling her along after him, "let's go for a swim now. You can tell me your decision later."

They waded through the shallow depths of the cool water, splashing about and just frolicking. Draco couldn't remember the last time he felt so light-hearted. Hermione's normally wild hair hung in limp curls plastered to her skin, the ends covering her breasts though he'd catch teasing glimpses of the rosy tips of her nipples when she moved. Merlin, he couldn't get enough of her he thought as he grabbed her by the waist and ignoring her shrieks of laughter tossed her over his shoulders and walked out of the water.

"Put me down, you brute," she said, but any attempt at sounding stern was ruined by the giggle that followed.

He spanked her hard on her bottom, continuing to walk on.

"Quiet, witch or I'll toss you into the water."

"You wouldn't dare," she said.
"And why might that be?"

"You'd never risk hurting me."

She said it so casually and without thought as if he'd never had a part in her personal pain and humiliation. He swallowed the lump in his throat, his heart heavy with the weight of the faith she had in him and fear he may not live up to it.

Chapter End Notes

AN I: So i believe there may be some slight confusion over Hermione's behaviour. She did suffer from postpartum depression but thanks to magic (the healing potions) the entire post pregnancy recovery period is sped up so she's set to rights in only a week. With the exception of the last scene (where she feels her magic again) the rest are actual scenes taking place- which she only catches glimpses of as she drifts in and out of consciousness.

AN II: Thank you all for your patience (and support). I missed writing this story. I hope the next gap between chapters isn't as long.
Hermione ran forward and lunged at Draco catching him off guard. Draco rolled over on his side and came up growling. He circled Hermione, stalked her aggressively, ran at her and slid on the packed dirt to easily topple her so she landed on her back. Showing no hesitation Draco jumped on top of her and opened his jaws to bare his teeth to her. With his large hands weighing down on her shoulders, Draco had Hermione pinned to the ground.

On her part Hermione simply lay there panting out of breath. Her whole body hurt. The first time he suggested giving her a work out she didn't think he meant it quite as literally as this. Now with more than a dozen of these training sessions under her belt and the only marks adorning her body the result of injuries she sustained when she wasn't quick enough to block a spell or a blow, Hermione was beginning to agree with Cora's assessment that Draco was acting like a fool.

"I've heard a great deal about your intelligence, I'd like to see some evidence of it."

Hermione couldn't help but bristle at her words. She knew Cora looked out for her, but the mediwitch had a knack for annoying her with the way she phrased things sometimes. So, instead of asking her what she meant, Hermione silently waited for Cora to explain herself- a tactic she had picked up from Draco.

"A sensible witch, I'd imagine, would be panicking over the prospect of someone like Fenrir courting her. Either you aren't as clever as people credit you to be, or you don't object to mating with Fenrir."

Hermione felt like someone stunned her with a Stupefy to her head. The frequency of her recent encounters with Fenrir after being ignored all these months made her keenly aware that their meetings were staged, no matter how natural he tried to make them appear. But, she had attributed his sudden interest in her to have something to do with her being an Order member, not as a personal interest in her. Hermione had questions, but Cora wasn't quite done yet.

"It's not just Fenrir, most males in the pack want to mate with you because they think you've got some kind of magical womb that makes it possible for you to mate with werewolves."

"I thought your kind believed only true mates are blessed with children."

"Well, lycanthropy may boost our immunity but it does not make us immune to stupidity. Especially since we have an alpha who spouts such nonsense," she declared with a roll of her eyes. "It doesn't matter what the rest of us believe, what matters is that Fenrir believes that the Dark Lord performed some kind of miracle which makes it possible for you to breed with werewolves. He's also managed to convince quite a few members of the pack of this, promising each of them a turn with you, once he's done of course."

Hermione blanched visibly as she imagined what this meant for her.

"Now I've bought you some time by playing on Fenrir's insecurities. I suggested he'll lose face before the pack should he fail to get you pregnant, so he should do all he can to have the odds in his favour... He's not going to bother you this full moon, I've started him on a three month course of fertility and virility potions- 'to ensure success and avoid any potential embarrassment' was how I
worded it. But, bear in mind, patience isn't the alpha's strong suit so I can't predict when he may decide to ignore my advice and go ahead with his plan to mate with you."

Motherhood had made her complacent, realised Hermione. She had allowed herself to get caught up in being a real mother to Wilbur and Martin forgetting all about her decision to leave them behind and escape. She was going to have to fast track her plans to make up for lost time.

"What do you think your options are? How do you think you can be in a position that best serves your goals?"

Once again, Hermione chose to remain silent and wait for Cora to elaborate.

"Realise it or not, we all expect you to try and escape- we've been on the lookout for it. So you can be certain you're never making it out of here on your own."

Up until that moment Hermione thought she had played well the role of a compliant prisoner. From the way she went about her day as freely as she pleased she was under the impression they had stopped keeping tabs on her, but if what Cora said was true then getting away would be that much more difficult she realised and felt the panic build within her. On the outside, however, Hermione did her best to portray a calm facade.

"From all the people here, there's just one person who would be willing to help you escape. But, do you know he could help you in other ways too?"

"How?" asked Hermione eagerly, her curiosity piqued to the point she could no longer maintain the pretence of indifference.

"If you are mated with Draco- as in complete the mate bond- none of the weres would be interested in you, Fenrir included."

"But what would that mean for us?"

"Nothing different than what it is already. Whether you see it or not, there already exists a bond between the two of you- and I'm not referring to Martin and Wilbur."

"And how do we complete this bond?"

"Mark and claim each other during mating... though it would need to take place during the full moon for the bond to be sealed."

"Mark? ...in what way?"

"In our wolf form each of us has a unique bite mark that can help identify us. A wolf will bite their mate to mark them."

"And this would be enough to keep the others away?"

"It wouldn't hurt if you also fell pregnant from the mating."

"So why has Draco never suggested this?"

She knew Draco both desired her and cared about her welfare, so why would he hesitate? He could've completed the bond during any one of those times they were together during her pregnancy.

"Because the pup is a fool. He thinks the only two choices before you are to escape from Bleidd or to bond with him."
"But you think I can do both?"

Cora shook her head. "Come the full moon these men will try to breed you and when their seed won't take, their wolves will tear you apart. You are human after all, beyond your reproductive abilities their wolves will simply think of you as prey. I doubt you'll survive mating with any of the other werewolves to even manage to attempt an escape."

"By Salazar!" exclaimed Draco loud enough to snap Hermione's attention back to him. He lifted his weight off Hermione by removing his hands from her shoulders and moving backwards to sit on his haunches. "We're going to have to build your endurance. Barely fifteen minutes in and you're already wiped out."

Hermione blinked at the man before her. In what world did he imagine a wandless witch standing a chance against a bunch of highly motivated werewolves, no matter how fast she moved or how much longer she managed to stay on her feet than her opponents?

He was clearly deluded and it was time to take things into her own hands. Ever since her milk had come in her usually modestly sized breasts were suddenly a rather prominent feature on her chest. Hermione raised herself only to lean back on her elbows, her chest sticking out in invitation. She flashed him what she hoped was a seductive come hither smile.

"Come on," he scolded, swiftly getting to his feet and pulling her up, "you should always get back on your feet as quickly as you can. Because you are smaller than your opponent you have a better chance fighting on your feet than wrestling on the ground."

Hermione watched him raise his hands and motion to her that she needed to keep her guard up. Merlin, how could he be this dense and not realise what it was she was trying to do? She had already expressed her desire to be with him. Even if Cora had managed to buy them some time his strategy to simply work on improving her defence techniques was an extremely stupid one.

Watching Draco prepare to launch at her for yet another painful round of being thrown around, Hermione cried out in frustration while holding her hand out in front of her.

Draco felt himself blasted back and land on his arse. "What in Hades!" he cursed in surprise. "Did you manage to cast wandlessly?"

"Felt more like accidental magic to me," replied Hermione quietly. She stood still, as if petrified, staring at her hand still stretched out in front of her, stunned by what just happened.

Draco got up off the ground and dusted the seat of his pants. "It wasn't strong. Just caught me off guard," he explained while walking back to her. "Do you think you could do it again?"

Hermione shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know," she said to no one in particular.

Not since attending Hogwarts did she have an outburst like this. Till she held her wand for the first time, Hermione never knew that the tingling sensation she sometimes felt in the tips of her fingers was her magic trying to get out. Possessing an even-temper, an acute sense of fairness, and an insatiable thirst for knowledge meant that Hermione was the very model of a well behaved child. However, the few times she did throw a tantrum they were pretty spectacular. Ignorant about the existence of magic as well as her own abilities, in every instance Hermione had vented her frustration unwittingly with a blast of wild magic. Back then, both Hermione and her parents assumed she had destroyed the objects around her in a fit of rage and blanked out about it once she had calmed down. Today was the first time Hermione became aware that those outbursts were simply her raw magic being unleashed.
"Well, if you can perform wandless magic, you may have no need for this after all," declared Draco with a smirk plastered on his face.

Still in a daze, it took Hermione a few seconds to register what was the object he was waving in front of her face. When she did realise what it was he held, she gasped.

"Professor Dumbledore's wand!"

Draco winced visibly at the pained sound Hermione made. Of course she would remember the original owner of the wand, even if it had momentarily slipped his mind.

Sometime after graduating from Hogwarts, Draco's own hawthorn wand was destroyed in a skirmish with the Centaurs. By then the wandmakers had taken a stand against the Dark Lord and as such new wands were hard to come by. Draco, however, had no need for a new one as he still possessed his late headmaster's wand- his one reward for his actions in the Battle of the Astronomy Tower even if he did fail in his task to kill the great Dumbledore. In the years that followed, as tricky as it was, Draco grew accustomed enough to the fifteen inch wand he came to think of it as his own even if he felt it demanded a level of magic beyond his capabilities.

"I'm here with you and you're this caring, amazing guy... It's so easy to forget that you are also that guy," whispered Hermione. She paused, covering her mouth with her hands. Her eyes, overflowing with tears, remained glued to the wand. "You're Draco Malfoy, a man I have children with, but you're also Draco Malfoy, the boy who started the war."

Draco discovered in that moment that despite becoming a werewolf, the old coward within him still lived. Confronted by Hermione's accusation, he didn't know what to say, so he slipped the wand back into his robes and left.

When by late evening the next day Draco didn't turn up for their daily training session, Hermione asked the omega keeping guard outside to get him for her. To his credit he did show up and from the way his face was hardened, she could tell he was expecting to be put through the wringer.

She had spent the rest of the previous day as well as the entire night thinking over everything that had taken place in the last ten or so years of her life since she first discovered about Hogwarts, trying to assign some kind of context to everything. She spent a great deal of her time trying to imagine what those ten years would've been like from Draco's perspective. There were questions she wanted him to answer, but she recognised that it didn't change the way she felt about him today.

Hermione smiled at him and ran her hands up his chest feeling the hard muscle under his robes. Unlike the other werewolves at Bleidd, Draco still appeared to cling to his old ways and wore robes which, though well-worn, had a refined quality one would expect of any person with the last name Malfoy.

"You're overdressed," she observed simply. "I'd like to feel your bare skin."

Draco stared at her, befuddled; clearly he had not expected things to take this direction. He grabbed her elbows and kept her at arm's length from himself, sniffed at her and instantly pulled back, probably shocked by how aroused she smelled.

"Did someone new deliver your food today?"

She shook her head, knowing why he asked. Zoey alone was tasked with delivering all of Hermione's meals to ensure she wasn't slipped something without her knowledge. It was a little
ironic that he should worry about her, given the titbit she had learnt from Fenrir this morning.

"Our healer says a witch can't get pregnant while she's still nursing, but I say it's nonsense, is what it is."

Hermione cursed herself for forgetting to shut her door. She wished she could cover herself from Fenrir's leer but Martin wasn't done feeding yet. Fenrir strutted over to her bed and sat down beside her, clueless as always of how uncomfortable he made her feel. He picked up Wilbur, who began crying from being rudely woken from his nap.

"Oi, noisy buggers, aren't they?" observed Fenrir, looking genuinely surprised that something so little could have so hearty a cry. "Haven't heard a lil' one cry like this 'cept for the times I would eat them."

Hermione was horror-struck by the reminder of his true nature from Fenrir himself, but from the casual manner in which it was said and his subsequent attempts to calm Wilbur by rocking him, it was clear Greyback was completely oblivious to the impact his statement made on her.

"You're a good mother, you know. I've heard a lot about how clever you are and you've given us no bother so far, which means you're smart enough, far as I'm concerned. You can definitely do better than the Malfoy pup though. I know he keeps coming around to see you, and till now you probably thought you had no choice. I mean, it's easier when you just go along with these things, right? But, you don't need to anymore. You've got options, far better options, if you know what I mean -- you don't have to put up with Malfoy anymore."

Despite Fenrir's attempt to come off as sympathetic Hermione only found herself unease growing with every statement he uttered.

"I'm tied up for a bit- important pack business. Won't be around to mate during the next two full moons either. But don't you worry," Fenrir reassured her with a smile, "I've ordered cook to give Malfoy contraceptives with his food so, you know, he can't get you in trouble even if he tries."

It may have been due to his status as an alpha or simply the way Fenrir was, but he was delusional enough to believe that the things he said would win favour with Hermione when all they did was make her question both, his sanity and his humanity. Unsettling though his visit had been, Fenrir helped make a couple of things clear- Hermione wasn't willing to be with just about anyone as a means of survival. And, she needed to take a more direct approach with Draco as she was running out of time.

"Since you've forgotten all about it I want to remind you about my answer. Yes, my answer is yes, I want to be with you, Draco."

"You say yes now, but do you understand what it means? I'm just a beta. I have nothing to my name, not even my name. If we bond, it's not a temporary thing. You won't ever be able to get away from me. Even if you escape, even if the war ends and your side emerges victorious, you'll still be bound to me," he warned.

She ignored his words, opting instead to work on the row of buttons that ran down the front of his robes.

"Did you know," she began as soon as she'd managed to expose some of the skin at his throat.

"-that-" she pressed a soft kiss to his throat.

"- Fenrir's been putting-" another button opened and another soft kiss, this time lower.
"- contraceptives-" she continued to expose his pale skin, kissing every bit exposed.

"- in your food?"

From the look on his face, clearly he didn't know.

"He's afraid you'll get me pregnant again, before he has a chance to." Hermione told him.

He was growling again. One of these days she was really going to have to get this whole seduction business figured out, she thought.

"You're worried about Fenrir. Is that why you're okay with this?" he asked, gesturing between them.

He was smart to ask that, she had asked herself the same question.

"We already have Wilbur and Martin. Even if they're also being raised by the pack, we are already linked together by our sons. But that's not the only reason I want to be with you, Draco. And, right now," she paused to slide the straps of her shift down her shoulders and shimmy out of it all together, "I'd like to be with you without the haze of the potion or my belly heavy and uncomfortable."

"Witch!" He groaned, falling to his knees and sticking his nose into the apex of her thighs. Draco inhaled her scent and rubbed his face in her arousal. He wasted no time as he used his broad tongue to lap up her juices. She was so sweet, according to his wolf and even if he couldn't get her pregnant today he could still enjoy her willing flesh.

She held on to him by his hair, yanking on it to try and get him closer. He responded by encouraging her to ride his face. He would proudly walk out of here, the envy of every other wolf when they smelled him covered in her scent. His witch was moaning and writhing against his face drowning him in her juices even as he greedily lapped away. She had not been this wet even with the potion; it made his wolf howl in pride within him. He had chosen her, and she had chosen him right back.

Draco used his tongue to penetrate her passage. He speared his tongue in and out of her pussy the way his cock was dying to do; nose bumping against her clit. She was going to come apart any moment now and he wanted to feel her climax around his cock. Without stopping fucking her with his tongue he easily slipped off his robes. Before Hermione could register what was happening he stood up and hooked one of her legs around his hip. Taking his cock in one hand he slowly thrust into her.

The sensation of being suddenly full of his hard cock made Hermione come with a long hiss. When he sensed the end of her climax, Draco wrapped both her legs around his waist and walked her to the bed on the other side of the room, his dick still sheathed within her. Placing her down on the edge of the bed, her legs still around him, he began drilling his cock in and out of her. The position allowed him to drive into her, leaving her no option but to take him in to the hilt. Hermione swore she could feel his cock nudging at the mouth of her cervix he felt so deep inside her.

He plucked at her sensitive nipples causing them to harden into points and leak droplets of milk. The sight of her milk, a reminder she had borne his children and was fertile enough to give him more, made his hips snap forward more furiously, eager to release his seed in her despite knowing the contraceptive would prevent it from taking hold.

He pushed his arms beneath her shoulder blades and raised her so she was pressed against his chest and could nuzzle her neck. He licked along the pulse point at her neck and suckled it gently till he could almost taste her blood rushing beneath the surface.

"Draco, Draco, Draco." Hermione chanted in his ear as she felt her entire self tingle from their magic
reaching out to each other eager to complete their bond. She nuzzled and licked his neck in the way he'd done to her, feeling him shudder she took it further by nipping at it.

"Yours," Draco moaned over and over as she continued to tease the sensitive spot. From what Cora had told her she knew he would have to bite her in his wolf form to be marked as his, but she was curious to see how he'd react if she bit him in a similar manner.

"Mine," she announced and bit down hard.

Draco howled in ecstasy as he felt her teeth break skin and sink into his flesh; he managed to force himself all the way in just in time to shoot his release into her. Regretting that it wasn't possible to knot with her in his human form, Draco desperately ground himself against her such that the base of his penis stimulated her clit. He didn't have to keep it up for long before he felt her inner walls clenching around his dick milking it of every last drop of come.

He lay on her heavily in the aftermath, waiting for their breathing to even out. He sensed in her the same feeling of contentment he himself was experiencing right then. They hadn't completed the mate bonds- they'd need the full moon for that- but their magic had caressed each other and acknowledged the other as their mate.

Eventually noticing she was struggling to breathe beneath his weight, he picked her up and moved to a more comfortable position on the bed, arranging her on his chest once he stretched out. A few minutes later Draco nearly purred in self-satisfaction when Hermione drifted off to sleep utterly sated in his arms.

Draco gave some thought to the things he learnt that day from the curly haired witch gently snoring on top of him. Even though she said she wanted him and was choosing him, he knew it wasn't much of a choice for her- he was just the lesser of two evils. He wasn't foolish enough to think that getting her pregnant against her will would've endeared him to her any more than his actions towards her throughout their school years and during the current war would have.

Yet, he felt hopeful.

He knew his witch possessed a kind and generous spirit who didn't abandon anything or anyone she decided to dedicate herself to. Despite their past and unconventional beginnings, he knew if she completed the mate bonds with him she would do her best to make things work out between them.

Naturally, it all depended on how the war progressed and its outcome. He knew enough about her to know she would always find ways to resist the Dark Lord's regime. As a Muggleborn, she would always be considered as a lesser being in a world ruled by Lord Voldemort. Of course, as a werewolf the same applied to him now. His family though wizarding aristocracy and loyal followers of the Dark Lord, Draco was considered no better than a mongrel crup trained to carry out their orders.

In the time following his turning Draco experienced firsthand the prejudices by his side towards anyone they didn't consider pure. Low ranking Death Eaters who once had not dared to look upon the Malfoy heir, felt emboldened enough now to mock him and order him around. On his part, even though he was partly a creature now he didn't find himself to be a lesser wizard in any way than he was earlier- if anything lycanthropy gave him physical strength he previously lacked despite his tall frame as well as magical prowess that let him cast nearly all the basic spells wandlessly. In light of his recent experiences, he couldn't imagine how much worse it must've been for someone as brilliant as Hermione to hear anyone tell her she was worthless because of her Muggle heritage; no wonder she had always seemed so determined to prove herself all the time.
Draco doubted things would ever be the same for him again. His parents had pretty much severed ties with him, but on the few occasions they did see him they looked at him with such disappointment in their eyes. He knew them well enough to know the look meant they saw him as a failure for turning into a werewolf; as if he'd been given a choice. The Dark Lord in his infinite wisdom had decided the best punishment for a wizard who was unable to kill was to turn him into a murderous beast with bloodlust. But of course, that had turned out to be yet another lie he was raised to believe was true.

Upon his turning Draco quickly discovered that while werewolves did succumb to their animal instincts during the full moon, those instincts usually fell into one of three categories—feed, fuck, fight. As pack creatures they preferred the company of their kind during their transformation, so the fighting was usually between wolves of the pack trying to establish a pecking order by displaying their strength. Wolves that went on murderous rampages were usually lone wolves raging due to their inability to be part of a pack or like Greyback, with an inclination towards sadism that had nothing to do with their lupine natures.

In the new world order prejudice had become the basis of law; all creatures and beings not considered pure were subjugated and forced to serve their Pureblood masters. As bad as he felt at the plight of others, the true horror of their collective actions did not dawn upon him till he finally saw Voldemort's vision come to fruition. He had fantasised about a world where Purebloods ruled over all when he allowed himself to be branded with that hideous Dark Mark. But sheltered and indoctrinated as he was in Pureblood beliefs, Draco could not have anticipated the atrocities the Death Eaters would commit in their quest for purification. Long before Hermione's arrival, even before being turned into a werewolf, Draco had decided he didn't fit in the cruel society the Dark Lord was creating. It was why despite his fall from grace Draco found happiness at Bleidd as it offered a respite from the ugly world outside. But with Hermione as his mate there would be no hiding away from the ugliness. What else was he to do then?

The Dark Lord was as good as immortal since he could bring himself back even if he was killed. The Death Eaters had wealth, power and political influence, unlike the Light side. On the plus side, a majority of British wizarding society was either neutral or like him unhappy with the changes made to their society. In terms of actual numbers the Death Eaters and Black Cloaks were still in the minority. Based on his conversations with Cora as well as the things he picked up from the talks of the visiting Death Eaters the Dark Lord's experiments into building himself some kind of hybrid part wizard-part creature soldiers had yielded zero results so far.

Draco absentmindedly rubbed circles on Hermione's back enjoying the feel of her bare skin under his fingers. He smiled as he heard her softly sigh in her sleep and thought how nice it would be to live in a world where he and Hermione could always just be like this together and raise their pups with the pack without fearing for their safety. He'd seen enough violence and death in the years following the return of the Dark Lord to last several lifetimes. But as much as he longed for peace Draco knew he had not earned it yet.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for continuing to support this fic. I really do appreciate each one of you taking the time to leave a comment, even if I don't reply to them individually.

Also, and I feel like I need to mention this as Draco isn't knotting with Hermione in the last scene, and it's because unlike the canid species, human penises do not have a knot.
In human form it would take a seriously freaky dick to knot with a woman's vagina. (I say this as a straight woman) Male genitalia is ugly enough already! No need to warp it further with a bulbous knot and then try to sell that as something sexy.

(I'm sick this week, which make me meaner than usual. So it was either this AN or a lengthy scene between Fenrir and Hermione with him going on about all the raping that takes place in the animal kingdom and lamenting over the fact that witches don't have smart vaginas like zebras or corkscrew vaginas like ducks to prevent an unwanted pregnancy.)
Hermione watched Ginny finally asleep on the narrow cot she was provided. She made it a point to visit the witch alone for a few hours every day as she suspected it was the only time the younger witch managed to sleep at all. Ginny had made significant recovery under Cora's watchful eye. With the exception of her limp and the scars on her neck- the result of a cursed blade, not a Diffindo as originally presumed- at least physically Ginny was back to her old self. Even the bald patches on her head had finally begun to sprout hair so she was slowly beginning to look more and more like herself. Unfortunately the same could not be said about her personality.

It was hard to figure out Ginny's triggers, she could go from vacant-eyed absent to inconsolably weeping in a split second. There were also moments where she could be incredibly cruel with her words. But those moments were usually reserved for her, thought Hermione, recalling one such incident from a few weeks before the twins were born.

"So what? What does that matter?" Ginny asked. "It doesn't change what he did, Hermione. I can't believe you let him fuck you again."

"He couldn't really help it, Gin, just like I couldn't help feeling aroused," Hermione said. "It was this new fertility potion- makes you mad with lust. He was just acting on instinct when he did what he did."

"I don't know how you could stand to even look at him after he raped you," Ginny said. "He was just as much of a victim as I was," Hermione said. "Besides, if not him it would've been someone else. Riddle intended me as a plaything for Fenrir's pack- our fates were sealed the minute we were caught. At least with Draco..." Hermione paused trying to think of a way to explain her complicated relationship with Draco without further upsetting Ginny. "I just don't want to blame him for things when he's the one trying to help. It's not fair to him."

"It's not exactly fair to us, either, Hermione," Ginny said hugging herself. "He's no innocent. He's in this situation because of his own choices. He willingly took the Dark Mark and let Death Eaters into Hogwarts. He may not have killed Dumbledore himself but he sure helped make it possible."

"It all seems so long ago now to me, that it hardly seems to matter. I just want to make it through this." Hermione slumped in her bed, rubbing her hands over her face. "I don't want to argue. I'm tired and my stomach hurts."

"Well, you should've thought about that before going to your Death Eater lover for a shag in your condition like some cheap slag," Ginny said as she lay down in her bed, facing away from Hermione.

Hermione opened her mouth to say something. Shut it with a sigh and stretched out on her bed hoping to get some sleep.

Sadly, there were far more conversations with Ginny in that vein than any other since their reunion. Things only improved after Ginny was given her own room and Hermione gave birth. As she no longer witnessed Hermione's comings and goings with Draco and with Hermione no longer sporting a pregnant belly that served as a reminder of her transgressions, Ginny finally stopped lashing out at
her friend and using taunts like *Death Eater slut* when talking to her.

Unfortunately, despite all this progress Hermione was unable to have a single productive conversation with Ginny. As fragile as her state of mind was, the only subject they could discuss without running the risk of upsetting Ginny was talking about happier times at Hogwarts. Reminders of her family, Harry, or even the Order often resulted in an anxiety attack if not a complete breakdown. It was despair— that much was clear to Hermione; Ginny had given up on ever making it back to her loved ones.

As sympathetic as Hermione was to Ginny's plight, her inability to answer her questions was turning out to be a real problem. While they remained captive it was only Ginny who could help her answer the question bugging her for a while now: *Who was the traitor in the Order?*

For over three months the Order kept a close watch on high ranking Ministry bureaucrat, Dolores Umbridge. All of Hermione's research suggested that the locket worn by their old Defence teacher was the very same Slytherin family heirloom that was later made into a horcrux by Voldemort. In recent years every photograph of Umbridge published in the Daily Prophet showed her wearing the locket, but no one had thought to investigate it assuming it was just another fake just like the one they retrieved from the inferi infested cave some years ago. After all, there was no reason why Umbridge, a Halfblood and mid-level Death Eater, should have possession of such a valuable artefact.

Hermione only began to suspect Umbridge's locket was real when reading one of the Prophet's latest propaganda pieces praising the works of Dolores Umbridge, Minister for Cultural Preservation, for her untiring work towards helping rid their world of the Muggle scourge. While Umbridge had always been sadistic and fond of abusing her authority there appeared to have been a distinct shift in her personality in recent years amplifying her cruelty to new and unprecedented levels. It was Umbridge who provided the Death Eaters the means to commit genocide by establishing the Muggleborn Registration Commission. Umbridge worked to weaken the powers of the Improper Use of Magic Office so that the practice of Dark Magic became acceptable and the torturing and killing of Muggles only a petty infraction. And most recently, it was Umbridge who decided that instead of an invitation letter to Hogwarts Muggleborn children and their families receive an Avada on their eleventh birthdays.

Looking at Umbridge's biography and the picture of her wearing the locket, Hermione decided to dig through old copies of the Prophet to check if Umbridge had always worn it and found that the locket began appearing in photographs right around the time she started making the first of her policy changes at the Ministry. Hermione then dug up her old notes from the time they interrogated Mundungus Fletcher on the whereabouts of the locket and noticed that Umbridge only began sporting her locket some months after Mundungus lost possession of the horcrux. Inebriated as he was at the time of its confiscation, Mundungus was unable to provide the Order with a name or even an accurate description of the person who took the locket from him. He only made one statement worth noting at the time, *"Looked like a regular Ministry toady, 'cept this one had a Dark Mark on its arm."

They had assumed the individual was male and since it was a Death Eater they presumed the locket must have made its way back to Voldemort. Looking at all the pieces of information before her she realised there was a good chance Umbridge did possess the genuine locket just as there was a chance that Umbridge was deliberately making a show of wearing a copy of the locket to set a trap for the Order. However, considering the witch had been wearing the locket for years now the latter seemed unlikely.

With no other leads to pursue, they had voted in favour of going after Umbridge's locket. Hermione, Ron and Bill were working on a plan to break into Umbridge's home, which would be less guarded
than the Ministry, while the Death Eaters and Black Cloaks were busy with their Samhain Revels. However less than a month before the day they were to execute their plan the Order received intelligence that hinted the cursed locket was hidden somewhere in the ruins of the old Riddle House.

Security around the ruins of Riddle House was lax as it was only guarded by a few Black Cloaks posted there to discourage curious tourists from poking around for clues that may substantiate the claims published by the Order about Voldemort's true origins. It was hard to believe that Voldemort would choose to acknowledge his Muggle roots by hiding his horcrux there so Hermione had opted to stay focused on Umbridge. But there were a few Order members who thought the ruins were worth looking into. Of the Order members posted at their safe house the only ones not assigned to any duty at the time were Ginny Weasley and Padma Patil. It was decided that the two would go on a quick reconnaissance mission to check if the place tested positive for high levels of Dark Magic.

Unlike Ginny, Hermione was a last minute addition to the mission. Restless from only being assigned to research and planning for over a year, Hermione thought a night out would do her some good. Hours before they were due to leave Hermione asked Ginny if she could tag along, which the younger witch promptly agreed to. Their objective for the night was simple enough there was no need for any briefing or preparation.

When Hermione arrived outside the wards of the safe house at the appointed time to only find Ginny waiting there for her she didn't think to question Padma's absence. Things were awkward between them ever since Padma started dating Ron a few months ago. Like Hermione, Ginny too hoped that Ron and Hermione would eventually work out their differences and be together, so both witches refused to acknowledge that Ron and Padma were in a relationship. At the time Hermione assumed Padma had simply dropped out once she heard she would be stuck with both Ginny and Hermione for the night.

That fateful October night, under the cover of darkness, both witches were able to easily apparate to their desired location, a short walk from the Riddle House. A quickly cast Homenum Revelio confirmed there were no humans at the ruins, it was followed by a few other spells to test for wards. They proceeded only after confirming it was safe to do so. Once there Ginny cast a spell to test for Dark Magic while Hermione barely began to cast a revealing spell - on the odd chance the locket was there and wasn't well hidden - when suddenly they sensed a change in the air surrounding them signalling that Anti-Apparition wards had gone up.

Sensing danger both witches ran towards the edge of the wards only to run into a group of Death Eaters who looked surprised to see them soon as they recognised who they were. Taking in the food and wine lying around as well as the number of Death Eaters present, clearly they had gathered there for some event and weren't expecting to have any sort of run in with the order, still, with the numbers in their favour they succeeded in subduing both witches.

It was only later when Hermione recalled the events of that night that it dawned on her how the wards weren't triggered till Ginny cast a spell. It was almost as if Ginny's magical signature set off the wards that herded them in the direction of the waiting group of Death Eaters. If true, it meant that Ginny was definitely the intended target that night.

But, why would anyone in the Order want to help Ginny get captured, who stood to gain from it? Was Padma's absence that night just her good fortune or was she involved in some way? What was the source of the intelligence that directed them to the ruins that night? How was the message relayed to them? Who all among them would have known their schedules and known Ginny would be assigned for the mission that night? Hermione had many such questions and since Ginny was assigned to the mission, she would know the details that could help answer Hermione's questions.
However, with Ginny's fragile state it didn't seem likely to happen. Ginny needed help to cope with her experience, to move past it. She was going to be no use till she recovered from her trauma. And with the kind of desperate situation they were stuck in, Hermione wondered if it warranted resorting to desperate measures.

Hermione had long shown a proficiency in performing memory charms, having gone as far as erasing herself completely from her parents' memories when she first heard the drums of war beat. Over the years she had plenty of occasions to perfect her technique, so now it was only a matter of minutes for her to locate and, extract or erase specific memories without arousing any suspicions. Having seen the effects of her captivity at Malfoy Manor and Chateau Lestrange, Hermione was considering erasing that entire period from Ginny's memory as she was certain there was nothing in there that Ginny would want to remember. Of course she would first extract memories of the atrocities perpetrated against Ginny should there ever come a time her assailants stood trial for their crimes.

Altering Ginny's memories was not an option Hermione could have considered before. But since it looked like Draco intended for her to have Professor Dumbledore's wand she could easily perform the necessary magic. She just couldn't decide if it would really be in Ginny's best interest to leave a blank hole in her head for all those months she was held captive.

The biggest snag in the plan was the pregnancy. Because of the pregnancy Ginny would suspect she had been raped and then would she not feel worse when she failed to recall the details? Would she not consider Hermione tampering with her memories to be a violation in itself no matter her reasons for doing so?

She wished to confer with someone else, but Cora couldn't be relied upon for help in matters not concerning the pack and while Draco could be objective, she knew Ginny would hate her for making such a crucial decision about her based on a discussion with a Malfoy. Hermione looked at Ginny fast asleep and wished there was a way for her to talk her friend and get her opinion on the course of action she was considering taking.

Fenrir rarely visited now, confirming that he wasn't really attracted to her beyond her reproductive abilities. Since he couldn't mate with Hermione till he was done with Cora's potion regimen his attempts to woo Hermione stopped altogether. She imagined he would start again at the end of three months when he was done with the potions or important pack business as he called it, she remembered with a snort. He also stopped keeping a close eye on Draco. Maybe Fenrir had taken measures to ensure Hermione couldn't get pregnant till he was ready for her or was simply too cocky to imagine she wouldn't wait for him, whatever his reasons, Fenrir was no longer dictating Draco's daily schedule or finding excuses to see Hermione every day. And the pair welcomed this change.

They spend a lot of their time training, with Draco even handing her Professor Dumbledore's wand for a few of their training sessions. The wand was an odd fit- though it was far more effective as a conduit for her magic than any wand not her own, something still didn't feel right about the wand.

Most of their training sessions were spent with Draco trying to get Hermione to cast wandlessly again. But, no matter how much he fought her, beat her or in general tried to frustrate her during training she was unable to produce a wandless magical blast. Hermione preferred the use of a wand, the idea of trying to channel something she had little to no control over scared her. Draco remained optimistic, he believed with enough training she would figure out how to manipulate her emotional state to unleash her raw magic at will.

Of course, training wasn't the only physical thing the couple did during their time alone together.
One hand maintained a bruising grip on Hermione's hip while the other pinned her wrists above her head to the wall, his balls slapping against her arse with every frantic thrust. Without Hermione's bulging stomach and impending labour to worry about, Draco fucked like the beast the moon turned him into.

Longing to touch him, Hermione whined in frustration and wriggled about trying to free her hands from his steely grip, but trapped as she was against the wall her struggles only left her soaked in the milk dribbling from her breasts.

Draco pulled out and quickly spun her around. He grabbed her legs, jerking them up and around his hips. Wasting no time he immediately fucked right back into her. Eyes shut, head thrown back, and mouth hanging open he enjoyed the way her pussy squeezed the head of his cock every time he thrust into her. Upon opening his eyes, his attention was immediately drawn to the mouth-watering sight made by Hermione's breasts as they glistened with milk and sweat in the light of the moon. Leaning forward he wrapped his mouth around a teat, and gave it a hard suck.

Hermione cried out, arching away from the wall. Her fingers tangled in Draco's hair. Her clit throbbed, painfully sensitive after being brought to orgasm so many times already. She shuddered as Draco sucked again, milk rushing out, then whined in protest when he pulled away to watch milk bead at the tip of her nipple.

Draco lapped the milk up and fucked harder into Hermione. This was nearly perfect he thought as he came inside her with one last snap of his hips.

This was nearly perfect, was the thought echoed in Hermione's head as she collapsed panting against the wall, but she knew how to make it better even if it wasn't a full moon tonight. She stretched out her neck, submissively baring it to Draco in an unspoken invitation.

Even in the throes of his orgasm, Draco did not miss the gesture. Leaning forward he licked spot he wished to mark before sinking his teeth in.

Hermione hissed from the unexpected pleasure that came with the bite. She wrapped her arms and legs around him trying to pull him further into her. For one brief second she swore it felt like he'd sprouted fur over his back.

Draco groaned in pleasure as he felt Hermione tighten around his cock. For a brief second after he bit into her, he felt his wolf come forward to claim his witch, something she welcomed by drawing him in further. His wolf howled in satisfaction that this way he was able to mark her without completely changing her, but Draco, torn between feeling an overwhelming desire to fill her belly with his pups once more and saddened by the knowledge that it would be a while before he was able to do so, failed to register what he said. He slumped heavily against Hermione for a moment weak kneed from the powerful orgasm he just experienced. He took a few seconds to recover then carried Hermione over to the bed. The pack was watching the twins tonight and Draco recalled he still had a promise to keep. Sometime before the birth of their boys Draco had promised to give his witch a thorough fucking which he fully intended to deliver on tonight. The witch wasn't going to be able to walk for the next few weeks, he thought with smug satisfaction, without feeling just how thorough he'd been with her tonight.

Hermione stood hidden in an alcove in the courtyard listening to a rather interesting conversation taking place among a group of unknown werewolves. Recently it felt like her hearing was sharper
than usual; she knew she wasn't imagining it as the group stood at a distance sheltered by a cluster of trees. She must've been standing downwind from them as they weren't alerted to her presence.

"I don't get why only the Malfoy brat gets to breed her. A witch capable of carrying wolf pups to term is a rare find... We should all get to share her."

"Yeah, I'd like a go at her -- You can bet she wouldn't even need that bloody potion... I'd give her so many children."

There was a mix of sounds of laughter and scoffing noises.

"But isn't it true that only true mates can have children?"

"Someone's been spending time with Oskar's pack."

"So it isn't true, sir?"

"Can't say, pup... Never been part of a pack before."

"Well, the only children that survived in my old pack were born to true mates. We had mated pairs who managed to conceive, but their babies usually died during the shift."

"Ye had wee ones in yer ole pack?"

"Not really. The babies born were human so we send them away for their safety. We were a fairly new pack, didn't have any Elder to guide us like some of the old European packs. We barely knew what we were doing as werewolves, just moving around, trying to satisfy our instincts but not get killed for it."

"That's what life was like for most of us, brother. It's why we never wanted children. It felt too cruel to inflict such a life on them."

"Aye, 'tis na leef fur a bairn."

"Exactly! After the kind of life I've led, it feels like a blessing to hold the twins... I'd love to have my own pups soon."

"Well, you'll need to wait your turn as Fenrir plans on having her first."

"Is it true he's never sired any pups in all this time?"

"I don't think I care for your tone. Remember your place, omega."

"Forgive me, sir. It's just that Draco's already sired twins and from the look of things he's likely to get the witch up the duff again."

"Once again, you ought to watch your tone. If the alpha hears such talk he'll have you on your back with his jaws wrapped around your neck."

"The pup does have a point though, Logan. Fenrir's neglected his pack in favour of service to the Dark Lord while Draco favours us by bringing new blood into the pack."

"You forget, Arnold, it was the alpha's service to the Dark Lord that earned him the witch who brings new life to the pack."

"Which brings us to the point I was making earlier... about how we all need to get our turn with her-"
"You men speak as if Draco didn't land each of you on your arses to earn the right to breed her the first time," said an older sounding man, ending his words with a snort.

"It really was something, right? I'm mated so I wasn't involved that night, but just watching him rip his way through the competition- phew- made my wolf shudder and want to yield to him even without a fight."

There were sounds of agreement from several voices.

"Think he could be an alpha?"

A chorus of disagreeing sounds this time.

"He's too young to say really."

"No way!"

"He had one good night. Never seen him fight like that before... or since. One good night doesn't make you an alpha."

There was an assortment of assenting voices this time.

"Anyone of you that thinks you stand a chance with that witch, has lost his mind. Doesn't matter what the alpha's promised, there's no way Draco's letting anyone within sniffing distance of her. Far as I can tell, he's bonded with her."

"Bollocks. If he's bonded with her how come he's been rutting with a different moon mate these past full moons- What? What's with that look?"

"That's on the alpha- commanded Draco to rut with the omegas."

"Think about it, you fool. Why would a beta willingly fuck an omega?"

The question was followed by a chorus of agreeing noises.

"I heard Draco was given no choice. Lanie was complaining about how he threw up soon as they were done knotting."

"Mnhmm. Wonder why Fenrir's mad at Draco this time. It's pretty clear from the way he acts around the witch he's bonded with her, so to force him to rut with someone else..."

"I may be a pup but even I know that's a cruel thing to do to a wolf."

"Arnold, you really need to do a better job of keeping these pups in line. They can't be questioning their alpha's actions in this manner!"

"Come on, Logan, Mitchell has a valid question-"

"Whatever he's mad about, you can be sure it's got nothing to do with pack business. I mean, when was the last time the alpha punished anyone for doing something bad to the pack?"

"I don't care for your tone or whatever it is you're implying. We volunteered for the experiments. We knew what to expect... Besides, I don't get how anyone can complain when we have two beautiful boys as a result of those experiments?"

"But do we know for sure if the boys were born because of the experiments or because Draco and
Hermione are true mates?"

"Let's say all that thestral dung about true mates is real. If not for the experiments the twins would be regular humans, not lycans."


The statement caused several different people in the group to speak up at once so it was hard to tell if the voices agreed or disagreed.

Finally one voice rang out louder than the rest. "We don't know if they're lycans. We won't know till they're in their teens."

"Really? Tell me something Arnold; you had children in your old pack, right? Did they smell like pack or prey to you?"

The question resulted in another chaotic buzz of conversations till the voice that asked the question spoke again.

"You all know what I mean. Our wolves recognise the twins as pack. Our wolves will never pose a threat to Wilbur and Martin because we see them as one of us. Now, why do you think that is?"

"I thought it was because they were Draco's pups."

"It has to be because of Draco's scent. I mean, my wolf also recognises the witch as pack now. I figured it had to be because of Draco's scent masking their own."

"You're right. Her scent doesn't bother me like it used to. I figured it had something to do with her smelling like the twins."

"The only reason for her scent to not bother us is if she's bonded with the pack, which would only happen if she's bonded with someone from the pack as she's still human."

"So they really have bonded then, eh?"

"Can't be. Don't you think Fenrir would've gotten wind of it if that was the case? Would Fenrir be making all those plans for her if she's already bonded with someone else?"

"Yes, if we feel the pack bond, Fenrir would definitely feel the alpha bond with her."

"Unless..."

"What?"

"No!"

"No way!"

"Oh shite!"

"What? What is it?"

"He doesn't know because there's no alpha bond."

"That's not possible. With the mate bond, the alpha bond would also fall into place."

"So if Fenrir doesn't know but we all recognise her as pack, that can only mean..."
"Fucken hell!"
"What does that mean?"
"Another alpha."
"Sounds like trouble to me."
"Aye."

"Look, I think this is all a bunch of nonsense-"

"Do not repeat this discussion. If the alpha catches wind..."

"She's bonded with a different alpha."

"Let's talk to Gunnolf. Surely he knows something that'll explain what's going on."

"Do you think it's someone in the pack?"

"We're making a mistake. Clearly we must be. How can there be another alpha?"

"Screw that. I'm gonna find Oskar. That old dog always seems to know what's going on."

"Shut up! Don't breathe a word of this to anyone."

From that point it became harder to track the conversation as they resorted to hushed whispers. Clearly the werewolves were spooked by the idea that there may be another alpha in their midst. She was thankful for whatever she did manage to hear as it offered her helpful insight into her situation. She would need to speak with Draco and even Oskar to help clear some things up but it sounded like she and Draco had managed to bond together and their sons were a new breed of lycanthropes.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your comments, kudos and a special thanks to those who wished me good health.

As I write this fic, I find myself deviating a great deal from the original plot line, consequently I’ve had to abandon so many scenes that don’t fit into the current story. It’s getting both annoying and confusing... On the plus side the story isn’t turning out as horribly dark and depressing as originally planned (though I can’t say if that’s a good thing).

 Posting schedule continues to remain erratic, though it can’t be helped.
"I know we're supposed to be pack creatures, but at the rate Fenrir's been turning people recently it's beginning to get too crowded around here."

Draco handed Gunnolf a couple of pieces of parchment which Gunnolf began to peruse immediately.

"He says it's to make up for our losses- be it the result of the Dark Lord's missions or the Dark Lord's experiments. As alpha he hasn't grieved for any of their deaths. To him we're all replaceable. I see you've reassigned quarters," he said pointing to the names on one of the pieces of parchment, "you've got most omegas sharing quarters with- they're all pups, aren't they?"

Draco nodded.

"With this many new *weres* in the pack I thought it would help them transition better if each of them was paired with someone more experienced. The omegas come across as less threatening and they're happy they get to be useful to the pack. I'd like to test this arrangement out," Draco stated decisively.

"Well, you do have an instinct for these things so I'm willing to give it a try. But if it ends up making no difference we need to go back to housing all the newly turned *weres* in the dormitory near Cora's quarters."

"Of course... I also wanted to talk to you about building extra housing. I was thinking the parcel of land on the South East limit of the castle lands would be ideal." Draco picked up the parchment with the map of their territory and pointed to the area referenced. "The woods bordering the land are really thick at this point so we're not going likely to get any visitors accidentally dropping by. Plus the stream-"

"Having pack members housed outside, away from the rest of us?" asked Gunnolf looking up at Draco. He shoved the piece of parchment back to Draco. "No, I refuse to allow it. Our pack bonds are strained enough as it is, they wouldn't sustain the added stress of living separately."

"What do you mean?"

"Our pack is too big! I realise you don't know anything of pack life outside of your experience here, but, this" -he picked up the fat file on his desk which held every pack member's profile- "is not normal. Doesn't matter how organised the pack or powerful the alpha, a pack should never be larger than a hundred members."

"Why's that?"

"The pack bond, obviously. It's a huge strain to care for so many people. The pack bonds grow weaker from the strain on them- which in our case in a blessing and a curse, I suppose. We're unable to feel the agony of the ones being tortured right here, on our grounds, but we're also unable to blindly trust that each member has our back."

"What do you normally do when your numbers grow?"

"Pack usually splits. The one groomed to be the next alpha takes with them whoever wishes to join
them and forms a new pack. This is the basis for pack alliances since neighbouring packs typically comprise of former pack members."

"Wait, I thought an alpha's powers are innate?"

"Yes, there are alphas who get their powers from their sire. But there are also those who acquire their powers by defeating an existing alpha. Lastly, there are alphas who gained their powers from the pack- the pack's acceptance of them as their leader helps them ascend to their powers. Of course this can only happen if the current alpha doesn't challenge the ascension."

It did not make sense to Draco before, but, upon recalling pack gossip related to Gunnolf he realised the beta was due to ascend to alpha status before Fenrir murdered his previous alpha.

"Argh," Draco shrieked and collapsed to the ground holding his left forearm.

"What in Hades!" Gunnolf stood up and rushed to where Draco lay on the ground.

"My Dark Mark," he managed between gasps for breath. With help from the other man he stood up once he felt the pain subside and wiped the tears from his eyes. "The Dark Lord's summoning his Death Eaters. He's angry. Haven't felt my mark hurt this way in years, and not once since I accepted Fenrir's bond."

"Something big is going on," said Gunnolf returning to his seat at the desk now that Draco seemed okay. "Fenrir left this morning looking gleeful while our guests looked on edge- heard more than a couple of them grumbling about Harry Potter being at it again."

"If the Dark Lord is upset- especially if Harry Potter is involved- the Death Eaters have good reason to be nervous."

"Why would his followers be nervous?"

"The Dark Lord has quite the temper. He cares little for who gets caught in the crossfire when he's venting his rage. It's even worse if he thinks you're responsible in any way."

"Is that what happened with you?" asked Gunnolf quietly.

Draco shook his head.

"I let Harry Potter get away."

"**The** Harry Potter? Undesirable number one?"

"Yes. I couldn't kill him."

Without skipping a beat Gunnolf asked, "But, did you want to?"

Draco was pleasantly surprised that instead of assuming the worst of him, Gunnolf had chosen to ask such a question.

"I used to think I did," he replied, then sat down heavily in a chair across from Gunnolf without bothering to ask for permission first. "I was so stupid. I used to think war would be an exciting adventure. I used to think it would be extremely satisfying to get rid of my enemies with a flick of my wand..."

He remembered all those times in school he resented the presence of the Non-Purebloods, how he wished he could just do away with the Mudbloods and Halfbloods. Back when the use of any
Unforgivable was a punishable offence he used to lament the narrow mindedness of wizards like Dumbledore, who he believed were holding back the progress of their kind. But then the Dark Lord and his followers moved into Malfoy Manor and Draco witnessed firsthand the curses and their effects; he finally understood then just why they were considered unforgivable. By the time the practice of the Unforgivables became part of their seventh year curriculum Draco knew what a true fool he had been.

"I used to think that way about being a werewolf," said Gunnolf interrupting his thoughts. The head beta stood up and went to the window behind his chair to stare at the rolling hills in the distance.

"In my old pack we didn't turn children till we completed adolescence. The pack did such a good job of sheltering us children from the challenges of being a werewolf that I grew resentful- I thought they were denying me these incredible powers. I was barely fifteen when I broke free of the enchantments protecting me during the full moon. A couple of the other children, my friends, saw me and followed suit.

"We rushed towards the pack during the peak of the full moon- we were so excited to join our families in the festivities. We were such fools... The wolves didn't recognise our scent as pack; we were just food to them. It was sheer luck and my alpha's timely intervention that I was only turned and not slaughtered that night. My friends though, they weren't as lucky."

Draco watched Gunnolf's large hands clutch the window sill hard enough to make his knuckles go white. Though he couldn't see the other man's face it was obvious Gunnolf was struggling to compose himself. When he was finally able to do so, he turned to face Draco, settling himself against the window sill.

"By the time I experienced my first turn I had learnt two very important lessons. I understood that my actions could have consequences for others. And I finally understood why we were made to wait till we were adults before we were turned."

Draco listened to Gunnolf and couldn't help seeing the similarities between them. They were both men haunted by the foolish acts of their adolescence. At least the adults tried to shelter Gunnolf. The same couldn't be said for the adults in his life, with the exception of one individual.

*Draco, Draco, you are not a killer.*

"Dumbledore tried to show me I was wrong, but it was too late by then. I had already set myself on a path."

"But, you didn't kill Harry Potter when you had the chance to?"

"I couldn't kill anyone- didn't matter how many chances I was given."

"You've never told the pack why you were punished. You let Fenrir spread his lies about you."

"It was no lie. I was punished for my cowardice."

"Not being able to kill doesn't make you a coward, Draco."

Draco left from his meeting with Gunnolf feeling a kinship with the man that went beyond pack bonds. As far as Draco was concerned Gunnolf was one of the bravest men he had ever known and to hear him say he wasn't a coward meant a great deal to Draco. By the time he picked up the twins and reached Hermione's quarters he was in a fairly good mood even if he was a little unsettled from
feeling his Dark Mark burn earlier.

"Hey," she said when she heard the door creak open. She walked up to him and took Martin from his arms. "I need to talk to you -- Oskar too, if possible."

"What is it?" asked Draco concerned by her tone.

"I overheard some of the werewolves talking and I need some answers." She paused to take a deep breath. Looking at him with her expressive brown eyes and with her tone greatly softened she added, "To be honest, I have lots of questions I'd like answers to, Draco."

He nodded in understanding. They had danced around certain topics for a while now, but perhaps it was time they spoke plainly.

Hermione visibly sagged in relief at his nod. She settled herself into an armchair and proceeded to open her blouse so she could nurse Martin- always the impatient one he was usually fed first. While her son peacefully fed from her she turned her eyes towards Draco who was sitting on the bed nearby.

"What do they mean when they say our sons are lycans?"

Draco was taken aback by the question. Of everything he thought she would want answers about this was not what he had in mind.

"It's nothing. Our sons are normal babies. We won't know if they are really lycans till they're in their teens."

Hermione shook her head and relayed to Draco what she overheard the man called Logan say about the boys.

Draco inhaled sharply when she was done. Merlin, as much as he wanted children he didn't really want them to bear his curse.

"Draco, what does it mean if they are lycans?" Hermione called out softly, prodding him for an answer.

"It means they're werewolves."

"But, how is that possible?" asked Hermione cutting him off. "They didn't transform during the full moon."

"It's because of the experiments... The Dark Lord wanted an army of werewolves who could shift at will like the Lycans of legends. The pack agreed to participate in the experiments as we were promised the ability to have children in exchange. We knew the Dark Lord had developed a potion that improved fertility in wizards- we were told that with a little testing and tweaking the same could be done for our kind."

Draco recalled how simple the solution had seemed back then. But Oskar had always insisted that werewolves were creatures of fate- Luna was the one who decided for them, not some dark wizard, even if he was immortal now.

"We lost many members to those early trials... Eventually, they realised they were unable to induce transformations. The nature of the experiments changed then. It became all about the next generation. They gave us strange treatments meant to change us in a way that although any children we have would be lycanthropes they would only come into their heritage at puberty- quite like part-Veelas.
With the exception of Cora, who's trained as a Healer, the rest of us didn't really understand most of what was being done to us. In the end we assumed it was another failure like the rest of the experiments."

Finally done feeding Martin appeared to be falling asleep. Draco took him from Hermione's arms and handed her Wilbur. He walked around the room with his son balanced on his arm, gently patting his back to make him burp. Draco cherished these domestic moments with his little family- they made it so easy to forget about the world outside.

"So our sons are werewolves," said Hermione letting out a deep sigh. She looked weary as she leaned back in the chair. "This world, the way it is, you understand it isn't fit for our children, right?"

Draco stopped his pacing to face her and nodded once.

"We need to stop Vol-" Hermione stopped herself just before she could finish saying the taboo name. "We need to stop Riddle. And Harry's the only one who can do it."

"And you need to be at Harry's side."

He didn't mean to sound petty but it bothered him that she still put Saint Potter first, even if he understood her reasons for doing so.

"Well, yes," she said in a matter-of-fact voice, confused with his sudden change in demeanour.

Done with burping his son, Draco began to gently rock him to sleep.

"You want to leave," he said in a toneless voice.

"I want this war over. And I don't think that's going to happen by people sitting idly by and going about their lives like everything is normal." She closed her eyes and recited the words her parents used to say to her to explain why evil existed in the world. "Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing."

"He's not a man anymore, Hermione. He's an immortal. There's no point in killing him if he can just brings himself back."

"That is the lie he'd like everyone to believe," said Hermione with a vigorous shake of her head. "I heard you were there trying to protect Ravenclaw's Diadem before it was destroyed by the fiendfyre, can I assume it means you know what a horcrux is?"

Draco was tempted to forget years of etiquette lessons and utter a loud snort in response. Instead, he replied with a simple, "Yes."

"But do you know he only has a limited number of them? His tainted soul has been fractured to the extent he cannot create any new horcruxes."

Draco looked on in surprise.

"Based on the Order's collective research over the years, we have confirmed that there were just seven horcruxes made, of which four have already been successfully destroyed."

Draco was stunned. All this time they had dismissed the Order as being as good as dead while the Order had kept busy finding ways to get rid of the Dark Lord for good. It would make sense for the Dark Lord to react the way he did to news of the destruction of his diadem horcrux if he was unable to create any more horcruxes. Remembering the Dark Lord's reaction back then reminded Draco of
the way his Dark Mark had burned a few hours ago.

"I suspect there may be some trouble headed our way. Earlier today my Dark Mark began to burn in a way that indicated he was mad. I have yet to find out what it was about, but this morning the Death Eaters in residence were heard grumbling about Potter being active again."

"What was it, what did they say?" asked Hermione eager for any news on Harry and the Order.

"I've shared with you what I know. As a rule in general it's never good news when he's angry over something Potter's done. I fear if Potter is really involved he may think of using you and Ginny to lash out at Potter. Here," he said, extending to her Albus Dumbledore's old wand. "You should keep it hidden on you. Not that they can get to you here, but it'll put my mind at ease knowing you're armed."

Wilbur looked like he was done feeding so Hermione moved him to rest against her shoulder. She took the wand from Draco and accioed one of the bed sheets which she transfigured into a wand holster for herself. With another wave of her new wand the holster adhered itself to her arm and yet another wave turned it invisible. She then holstered the wand and moved on to the task of burping her son.

"Thank you for the wand, but you know I can never really be safe here. I'm going to have to leave soon," she told him while pacing the room and patting her son on his back.

"I know. It's not like you chose to be here."

Hermione walked up to the bed and sat beside him.

"I didn't choose to be here, but I do choose to be with you," she said and rested her head against his shoulder.

It never ceased to amaze him how far these little gestures from her went towards calming him. Draco swallowed the lump in his throat and nodded in acknowledgement.

"Draco, do you still believe in the Pureblood cause?" She assumed he didn't. She trusted that the man she had fallen in love with was someone who had moved on from his old prejudices, but she still needed to ask. They needed to have a clear discussion on exactly where they stood and how far were they willing to go for their causes.

He shook his head, looked at Hermione and then at Wilbur drooling as he lay there draped over his mother's shoulder. "How could I when I see examples of just why it's wrong?" He pressed one soft kiss to his son's head and another to Hermione's. "We were wrong. I was wrong. I figured it out long ago, even before I was turned. I just... I don't know what to do, Hermione. Fenrir leads the pack, but he sides with the Dark Lord's cause. But, I can't abandon the pack as I'd most likely go mad and end up being a danger to you and the pups."

"You and the pups belong here, but my place is at Harry's side." Feeling Draco's body go rigid beside her she quickly added, "Just until Riddle falls and the war is won, my place is at Harry's side."

Looking up at him she noticed his face was blank and his mouth had hardened into a tight line.

"The war won't be won with the fall of the Dark Lord. The Death Eaters control Great Britain- they may have failed elsewhere, but they have a stranglehold on this country. And with them, we wouldn't just be fighting people, we'd be battling ideologies. It won't be as simple as winning a physical war, defeating them will require years of civil war."
"Then we just keep fighting. As Professor Dumbledore often said, though evil can never be eradicated it can be kept at bay if we fight it again and again." She moved to lay Wilbur down to sleep on the bed, beside his brother, before turning around to face Draco. "It chills me to contemplate the long-term consequences of allowing this evil regime to continue unchecked. What kind of world will our sons inherit if the Death Eaters aren't stopped when they commit mass atrocities? Draco, we've both seen enough evidence these past few years to know their bloodlust won't be satisfied by getting rid of the Muggleborns... If our sons are truly werewolves, how long before some bigot goes from questioning their right to be a part of society to questioning their right to exist at all?"

"Granger," he snapped at her, "I'm not arguing against the idea of fighting Death Eaters. I'm arguing against being separated from you for as long as is needed to win this gods-damned-war."

She looked at him in wide-eyed surprise. She was sure he would need a lot more convincing. Before she could get over her shock he continued.

"You want to fight to change the world? Okay, but let's figure out a way to do it together, because I don't think I'll survive being away from you for too long."

Lost for words Hermione simply climbed into his lap and hugged him.

"Yours," she said affectionately, stroking the mark she had left on his shoulder as her claim on him.

"Yours," he replied, his chin resting on her head.

They stayed like that for some time enjoying the closeness knowing the time for them to separate was drawing near.

Hermione was the first to break the silence when she quietly said to him, "Some of the werewolves think we've already bonded. I think they're right." She chose to save all her questions regarding the different bonds she heard mentioned for Oskar as he was likely to provide her with better answers on the subject than Draco.

Draco thought about Hermione's declaration and acceded that, while he would need to bite her in his wolf form to turn her and have her fully bonded with him, she was correct about the existence of a bond between them. It had started with their very first coupling and had grown stronger over the months as their relationship progressed.

"I don't want to complete the bond till you return. If you're turned now you won't be able to leave. Werewolves are pack creatures; we go mad without a pack. As strong as you are mentally, even you would need time to adjust to living without a pack. It would make you extremely vulnerable to be that unstable while you're on the run."

She nodded not knowing what to say. She'd heard him talk about the pack and their way of living before but there was still so much she needed to learn and understand.

"I'm going to help you escape, but just you. I know you plan to take Ginny Weasley with you, but that witch is going to end up being a noose around your neck. In her current state she'll only be a liability."

Though Draco's words sounded cruel, she understood his intent, even if she didn't agree with him.

"I can't leave her behind. I don't know what'll happen to her if--"

"What'll happen to her? Nothing, for as long as she's here. We'll protect her- we've been tasked to protect her and her child. She's safe with us, but if you take her along she's bound to get both of you
"I have a fix. There's something I've been thinking of doing that may help Ginny... I'm just-"

"Whatever it is you're thinking of doing, do it. Either fix her or leave her behind. I won't help you escape till I can be sure you'll safely make your way back to the Order. Speaking of the Order, I'm going to credit your side with having the basic sense to have relocated to an unknown location and changed all their existing plans and strategies when they got news of your capture?"

She nodded. "It is standard protocol."

"We guessed as much, which is why after a point the interrogations really became more about torturing the prisoners than trying to extract any useful information out of them."

He spoke of such a horrid thing in such a casual manner it reminded Hermione that not long ago he was on the other side. As sobering as the thought was it didn't cause her trust in him to waver.

"Do you have any secure means of re-establishing contact with the Order once you're out?"

She nodded once again.

"Good. You're going to be out there on your own, a fugitive, till you find or they take you to their new location. It's the part that leaves me feeling most apprehensive."

"I'll have the wand you gave me, Draco," she reminded him, snuggling against his chest knowing how much he liked it when she did.

"Yes. Yes, of course," he replied absentmindedly.

"Still, if it'll help put your mind at ease we can increase the duration of our training sessions."

"That would definitely help."

"Or, we can get someone to watch the boys so you can shag me senseless to make up for all the time we won't be together?" she said grinding her crotch against his.

"Witch!" he groaned in response, giving her hair a harsh tug as punishment for her teasing.

"Or maybe you don't have the patience for all that and are ready to simply bend me over that chair and take me till I'm shrieking your name."

"I'm going to bend you over the chair and spank you, you tease."

She laughed and halted her grinding to grab a hold of his face instead. She looked into his eyes and hoped he understood just how much she was going to miss him even if she didn't want to say the words for fear he wouldn't let her go.

Hermione tenderly traced the lines of his pale and pointy face with her hands and watched with fascination as his eyes fluttered shut when she ran her thumb along his lips. He really was beautiful and he was hers, she thought before pressing her lips to his.

Chapter End Notes
Don't get used to the weekly posting, I'm not always going to be able to get it done in time, but as I've mentioned before I'll do my best to make sure there's never more than a fortnight's gap between chapters. Why? Because I'm afraid I'll forget where I'm going with this story if I keep away too long. :D
"Hermione wishes to speak with you," Draco informed Oskar on being admitted into his room. "She overheard some of the pack members talking about the twins." Draco then recounted the conversation as relayed to him by Hermione. It turned out Oskar was already aware of the matter discussed; as per usual, Oskar was on top of pack gossip.

"A few came to me for counsel last night," he offered by way of explanation. "Is that all she heard?"

"There may have been some talk about us having bonded- which isn't possible as my wolf hasn't claimed her, yet."

"But the wizard has, presumably." Oskar gave Draco a knowing look. "Considering our keen sense of hearing and smell, she would have needed to maintain a substantial distance to avoid detection. It would require wolf like hearing to eavesdrop at such a distance. I wonder how she came to develop such superior hearing."

Draco ignored Oskar's teasing words and moved on to what he was dying to ask of his sire.

"Lycans! Cora said the pups were normal boys and now I hear they may be lycans. What does this mean, Oskar?" Before Oskar could reply Draco jumped to his feet. "I should get Cora, she probably knows something and she won't lie if you're the one asking."

"Wait, Draco. Settle down."

For the first time in a long time Draco felt what sounded like a command from his sire and he felt his body instinctively respond to it.

"There's something I need to share with you," he said ominously and waited for Draco to be seated before he continued. "When I told you the story of our creation and extinction, I left out some parts of it. You see wizards alone were not responsible for our predicament. In the beginning there were many Were breeds, each one believing themselves the favourite of the Moon Goddess and wishing that others would concede to their superiority. They upset the harmony in their dual natures when they chose to indulge in their baser instincts. What started as petty jealousy and power struggles between the were groups eventually led to prolonged wars that wiped out entire breeds. Saddened by the acts of her children Luna turned her back on us."

"Between the constant warring among the weres and the attacks from their natural enemies all other breeds, except for werewolves, died out over time. Possessing innate strength, stealth, intelligence and magic, the werewolves were able to adapt and survive, till they came in contact with wizardkind."

"The ancient ones underestimated their enemy; it was already too late when the true purpose of the wizards’ curses became apparent to them. Unable to bear children and hunted by wizards, they faced certain extinction. The Elders gathered together and cried out in distress to Luna, who either out of an abiding love for her creation or mercy at our plight made us a promise. She said if we embraced our dual natures and coupled with our true mate under the light of the full moon she would give us children who although from us, would be unlike us. Born free from our affliction, our children would escape persecution as they would be born either entirely wizard or entirely wolf."

"Okay, so you didn't mention a detail or two, but I believe I'm familiar with this tale for the most part.
Besides, this doesn't address any of my quest-

"Patience, my child. I'm getting to it. And you need to pay close attention as it is very relevant to the answers you seek."

Draco nodded in acknowledgement, giving Oskar his full attention.

"The Fates had dealt us a lethal blow but Luna reassured the Elders she would intervene on our behalf and made another promise. Her promise- a prophecy, once well known to all werewolves- now only remembered by the Elders.

"Born from false love, a false god bearing false promises shall emerge ushering in an age of turmoil filled with suffering for both wizards and were. A descendant of the ones who first cursed us will unknowingly deliver the Goddess' blessings to us.

"A fated pair of unlikely lovers - a woman with great magic, yet despised by her kind, and a powerful were, damned by those who once revered him; joined by force, their union shall bear the fruit that carries the Moon Goddess' blessing to save our kind. Their issue, born free from **the curse**, shall possess a body and soul with the harmony in their dual natures restored."

Draco accioed a self inking quill and a piece of parchment lying on the table; he made Oskar repeat the words so he could write them down and study them properly.

"This part sounds a lot like the Dark Lord, doesn't it?" asked Draco when he finished writing the first half. "He's got people believing he's some kind of god who's defeated death when he is in fact still a mortal. Plus for all his talk of blood purity and ethnic cleansing he is most likely a Halfblood. The Order published something a while back claiming his mother used Amortentia to make his Muggle father fall in love with her. Of course, it was immediately refuted as nothing but lies being spread to turn public support against the Dark Lord and his agenda, but I always suspected it to be true. It didn't feel like the Order's style to publish slander and it especially didn't make sense for them to risk their lives the way they did only to publish outright lies... So, the Dark Lord's going to help restore our heritage?"

"It's funny how people can wait for ages for something to happen and not even realise when it does."

"What do you mean?"

"Note the second half," advised Oskar before repeating the rest of the prophecy.

Draco read and re-read the lines to himself before looking up at Oskar.

"I still don't see how any of this relates to my question about the twins?"

"...Because the prophecy is about the twins, Draco. The blessing we have long awaited was delivered to us the day they were born." Oskar's eyes appeared shiny as he made the declaration.

"I still don't understand," Draco replied continuing to stare at Oskar in confusion.

"Luna has blessed your sons, Draco. They won't suffer from lycanthropy the way we have. They are Lycans," he stated with awe, "blessed with the ability to shift at will, **and** have children, same as every other species."

"You think the prophecy is about **my** sons?!!" Draco was glad he was sitting as Oskar's words finally began to penetrate the fog surrounding his mind.
"Mudblood, that's the derogatory term the wizards call her despite her abilities, right? And you... practically a Pureblood prince till you were damned to the existence of a werewolf by your own people. The two of you are mates but you would most likely never have gotten together if not for the actions of your Dark Lord... I've tried to remind the pack time and time again, we are creatures of fate. Children will only be born to true mates as promised by Luna. And if the Dark one is successful in his experiments, he won't be creating anything new, only restoring our heritage."

Draco nearly laughed out loud at the irony behind the Dark Lord fulfilling one prophecy while trying to escape the fulfilment of another. But there was another thought niggling at his mind as he pondered the words of the prophecy.

...the fruit that carries the Moon Goddess' blessing to save our kind.

While Oskar's explanation was reassuring, Draco believed it did not bode well for his sons to be the subject of a prophecy, if Potter's life was anything to go by.

"I'm assuming this is a translation" -Draco tapped the words on the sheet, he waited for a nod from Oskar to continue- "so, there could be an alternative interpretation?"

"The Elder, who was my sire and my teacher, informed me that while the translation lacks the poetry of the original it is entirely accurate in its message."

"Okay. So how are the twins meant to save our kind?"

For the first time, in all the time he had known his sire, Oskar appeared uncertain about what he had to say. "I'm not sure... Your sons are Lycans, of that we can be certain, and they are the key to the salvation of our people. How? I don't know. There was never any consensus on the outcome. Some, like me, took the words to mean that the fated pair will produce children who will start a new line of werewolves possessing the abilities of the ancient ones. Other Elders insisted that the birth of the prophesised children would destroy the curse, freeing all of us from its effects. While still others argued the children would possess secret knowledge of how the curse could be destroyed so every werewolf came to possess the same abilities as them. I realise my words must not inspire much confidence at the moment, but bear in mind it's been well over twenty years since I last spoke with another Elder, and back then neither one of us expected to live long enough to see the prophecy fulfilled."

Draco raised a brow and shook his head. "I think you should share this with Hermione. She's good with research; she's also got some experience when it comes to decoding prophecies. But, more importantly, she'll want to know since it concerns our sons."

He tapped the parchment and made a copy for Hermione, rolled up both sheets, handing one to Oskar and tucking the second into his robes so he could read it again later.

"Draco, before you came here, I planned to come speak with you. Our guests have been acting rather suspiciously today- something has happened."

"Yes, Gunnolf shared the same concern. The Dark Lord's angry about something- my mark began to burn earlier today for the first time in a really long time." Draco rubbed his forearm still experiencing the phantom sensation of the burn.

"They're scared and being unusually tight-lipped about it. It's making me uneasy."

Draco knew that Oskar had his network of spies within the pack who kept him abreast of the goings on within the castle be it the werewolves, the Death Eaters or the Black Cloaks. He may have retired
from his position as alpha but his old habits remained.

"Well then, perhaps we need to employ a more direct approach to shaking the information out of
them," said Draco with a smirk. "I think I'll take Gunnolf along to make it look more official," he
thought out loud in a cheery tone. "Meanwhile, will you go speak with Hermione? Tell her what
you've told me, answer her questions. Please?"

Oskar agreed to Draco's request. Knowing what he did about the pack's concerns, he was certain
Hermione had more questions for him than she'd let on.

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After his talk with Oskar, Draco was even more determined to discover what was going on with the
Dark Lord's followers. Though the Death Eaters were gone the Black Cloaks, who weren't
considered nearly important enough to be included in the Dark Lord's gatherings, would still be
around and likely to spill the beans given the right motivation.

Draco met with Gunnolf and together they headed towards the North-East section of the castle keep.
It was well known that the series of balconies in that part of the castle was favoured by both, the
Death Eaters as well as the Black Cloaks. The place was easy to access from the dungeons and
offered a stunning view of the land but the main attraction of the place for the bigots was its distance
from the areas commonly occupied by the werewolves.

As Draco and Gunnolf spoke to one Black Cloak after another, pressing them for information on
what they knew, both betas were filled with a growing sense of foreboding. Draco knew then it was
time for some drastic measures if he wanted to stay ahead of the problem.

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"I hear congratulations are in order." At the look of confusion from Hermione, Oskar explained.
"Well, it was my conclusion that the only way for you to have suddenly developed wolf like hearing
was if you were bitten by a werewolf. And it's hardly a mystery who that werewolf might possibly
be. What remains a mystery is why you two haven't completed the bond."

"The bond, no, all the different bonds- it's what I wanted to talk to you about. I don't really
understand what you mean when you and the rest of the werewolves talk about all these bonds."

"You didn't mention this to Draco." It wasn't a question.

She shook her head, "I thought you would be able to shed more light on the subject as you were an
alpha once," explained Hermione, and then proceeded to share with Oskar the parts of the overheard
conversation she withheld from Draco. "They were panicking in a way that made it clear there was
something odd about the bonds where I was concerned," she said in conclusion.

"Pack bonds are usually formed when you accept the alpha of the pack as your alpha- the alpha bond
precedes the pack bond. But, you can also form a pack bond through a mate bond. This happens
when your mate belongs to a different pack and you already have an alpha. In such cases you end up
bonding with your mate's pack as well, though this bond is far weaker. The thing to keep in mind is
that the alpha is the pack and there is no pack without the alpha. Whether you choose to accept the
alpha bond or not, you cannot bond with a pack or any member of the pack without its alpha
becoming aware of the existence of that bond- you can bond with an alpha without your mate
knowing about it, but not the other way around."

"So Fenrir knows about me and Draco?"
"It's possible, but my experience with Fenrir makes it difficult for me to imagine he knows and hasn't punished Draco for attempting to bond with you. A situation like this is unusual. It's almost as if the pack has bonded with another alpha."

Hermione opened her mouth more than once looking like she was going to speak but didn't say anything. It was clear to Oskar she was struggling to articulate whatever was on her mind. A few more seconds of confusion passed before she finally appeared to settle on a question.

"Is Draco an alpha?"

Oskar looked at her curiously. "Why would you ask that?"

"I'll confess that before Bleidd my knowledge of werewolves was limited to information found in wizarding texts. I now know a great deal more thanks to Draco and Cora, but there's still a lot I don't know. Excuse me if I'm mistaken, but, it is my understanding that pack members cannot transform at will. Only an alpha is capable of transformation without the full moon."

"Have you seen Draco transform?"

"Yes. No. I mean, not completely. I'm not sure."

"What did you see?"

"I've seen his eyes change, it was brief but his eyes went from their usual grey to amber. And I've felt him sprout fur, again very briefly... Even when he bit me, his teeth didn't feel like human teeth."

"Is there any chance you could be mistaken about these things?" Oskar wasn't being dismissive even if his question came across as such.

"The instances I mentioned were so brief, there is a possibility I could be mistaken, but I do have one distinct memory of a time when I'm certain he was transformed." She hesitated, mortified over the prospect of having to share intimate details with a man old enough to be her great-grandfather.

"My memory of the first few days of captivity is foggy, especially the first day. The potion the Death Eaters fed me was either too strong for me or I was given something else that affected my memory, I don't recall the specifics of what happened to me the first night, however, I do know there was a full moon out that night. Yet, I remember being, ah, *visited* again by Draco's wolf the following night. And I know he was in his wolf form because you see we were... erm... *locked* together for a really long time and I could feel his fur and his claws as he, well, you know..." Hermione trailed off in embarrassment.

Oskar looked pensive as he pondered over the information she provided. "Sounds like you have good reason to think he's an alpha. Since he was sired by me I knew Draco would be very powerful, but I'm so old and weak now and it's been so long since I was an alpha, I didn't consider the possibility of those abilities passing on. Have you discussed this with Draco?"

"I doubt he's even aware it's happening when it does. I asked him about it indirectly once. He was telling me about the pack and something about transformations. I asked him if there was ever anyone who managed to transform into their wolf in the absence of a full moon. He said, as alpha only Fenrir was able to perform such a feat..."

Hermione went quiet as if considering something. "Oskar, is it possible I've accepted Draco as my alpha?"

"If, as you say, Draco is displaying signs of being an alpha, it is possible though it's not something I
considered before. I have my own theory on what is going on." Oskar looked as if he were scrutinising the woman before him. "Tell me, Hermione, what do you know of your own heritage?"

"Mine?" asked Hermione. Being one of the most hunted Mudbloods her heritage was so well known the question amused her greatly, nevertheless, she provided him with an earnest response. "I'm Muggleborn, only Muggles on both sides of my family. In school there were some who insisted I must have a squib ancestor but I've found nothing in my ancestry to support such a theory."

"Then either your research was incomplete, or you were misinformed. You can be sure you had ancestors who were not Muggles."

The flabbergasted expression she sported made him soften his tone.

"I hear you're like Cora, don't put much stock in the science of divination. Still, may I share with you a lesser known prophecy concerning our kind?"

The non sequitur furthering her state of bewilderment, Hermione replied with a hesitant, "Okay?"

"Long after we were cursed to our current state by the wizards, there existed a werewolf renowned for her ability to divine the future as written in the stars. She foretold of the arrival of a Promised One, an Alpha of incomparable power who would become the Alpha of all alphas. The actions of those who followed the false god would awaken a formidable beast with unrivalled authority who would be a catalyst in the creation of a powerful alliance which would rid the world of a great scourge, ushering in a time of peace and cooperation between the Beings of the world."

Hermione remained silent for some time but when it looked like he wasn't going to offer any explanation she spoke. "What does that have to do with-" she began, but stopped abruptly to stare at Oskar in shock as she caught on to what he was trying to tell her. "You can't possibly think that's me."

"No? Why not?"

"Does any of this sound like me- alpha of alphas, formidable beast! I'm not even a were-" Hermione stopped herself as another piece of the puzzle slid into place. She gasped. "You think I'm the other alpha, don't you? You think the reason Greyback hasn't sensed my bond with Draco or other members of the pack is because you think I am an alpha?"

"Correct," remarked Oskar, looking impressed at how quickly she had put it together. "I have a justifiable reason for my belief. Do you recall the time I visited you before the pups were born? When I laid my hands on you my wolf trembled. I've lived a long life, Hermione... been in countless fights over the years, yet my wolf has never backed down or submitted to anyone. The one and only time I yielded, it was as a symbolic gesture to my successor when I stepped down as alpha. But that time I touched you- for the first time I felt my wolf cower in fear."

"Why has Draco never mentioned it then?"

"I doubt he realises it. As your mate, the extent of your power would inspire pride not fear in his wolf. Now before you ask me any other questions, may I interrupt to ask you a few of my own?"

Hermione politely agreed. "What would you like to know?"

"Why have you not completely bonded with Draco as yet? You two clearly care for each other, so why the delay? I know Draco protects you a great deal so you may not know how bad things could be, but surely you're aware of what the alternative is for you here?"
Oskar’s tone was gentle enough that despite the bluntness of his words Hermione didn’t bristle at the question. She was still thinking of how to answer him without giving away her plan to escape when her thoughts were interrupted by a loud sigh.

“You still plan to escape then.” Oskar looked past Hermione at the twins asleep on the bed.

Hermione remained silent unwilling to confirm or deny Oskar’s statement.

"Here," he said, giving her the parchment handed to him by Draco.

"What's this?" she asked even as her eyes quickly scanned the text before her.

"Well, it is a prophecy about your sons."

Once more Hermione stared at Oskar in disbelief before re-reading the words on the parchment.

"Has Draco ever told you about any of our legends?"

She nodded. "Just a little something about how werewolves were first created and then cursed by wizards so they lost the ability to reproduce."

"Close enough. This prophecy talks about the people and events that lead to the breaking of the curse so werewolves can once again possess the abilities of the mythical Lycans." For a second time that evening Oskar spoke about their legends and why he believed the prophecy was about Hermione, Draco and their children.

Hermione reflected on Oskar's words within the context of the prophecy she held in her hands.

"A descendant of the ones who first cursed us will unknowingly deliver the Goddess' blessings to us. The false god, Tom Riddle will deliver the blessing. After listening to your account I first thought that the blessing refers to the boys, since werewolves consider children a blessing from Luna, but that doesn't fit with this line, *their union shall bear the fruit that carries the Moon Goddess' blessing to save our kind*, where the children are referred to as the fruit and the blessing is something they carry...." She twisted at the waist to look at the boys asleep behind her. "They carry the cure?" she whispered feeling awestruck at the realisation. She looked at Oskar. "In what way do they carry the cure? How are they meant to save-"

Hermione was interrupted by Draco bursting into the room. Noticing Oskar's presence he adjusted his posture to appear more relaxed.

"Oskar, can you please take the twins and return to pack quarters? There's an urgent matter I need to discuss with Hermione in private."

Regardless of the calm facade Draco was attempting to project, Oskar sensed Draco's concern for his family as he carefully moved the twins from the bed to the bassinet. Without asking any questions Oskar took the precious cargo from Draco’s hands and left the room, but not before giving Draco a look that said he expected a full explanation later.

The door was barely closed behind Oskar when Draco turned to Hermione and blurted, "It's time for you to go."

Hermione was startled at the abruptness of Draco's words. "What do you mean? What's happened?"

"The reason he's angry- no, raging mad- is because he discovered that Potter stole something very precious to him and destroyed it. I think we can safely assume what the object must be for him to be
furious enough to summon all his Death Eaters. I doubt the Dark Lord cares particularly for jewellery in and of itself."

"...Jewellery? Do you know what it was?"

"The Black Cloaks I spoke with mentioned a locket. Now, the only other time I've known of the Dark Lord foaming at the mouth over a piece of lost jewellery was when it had contained a piece of his own debauched soul; I'm assuming this piece shares a similar distinction."

"Slytherin's locket, it's Slytherin's locket! They did it," she declared excitedly, bouncing up and down in place while simultaneously tearing up. "By Godric, they finally did it."

"Just two more to go then, right?"

She nodded enthusiastically then flung herself at Draco, arms thrown around his neck in a fierce hold as she pulled his face down, in level with her own, and peppered it with kisses.

As much as Draco was enjoying the feel of her body pressed against him as well as the joy radiating from her they didn't have time for such things, not anymore. With great regret he pulled her arms away from him.

"You and Ginny are the only prisoners we have that are related to Potter or the Order in any way. You need to get away before that noseless bastard comes for you. Do you have my wand on you?"

In response, Hermione tapped at her arm to show where the wand remained hidden from sight.

"Good. Give me a twenty minute head start then make your way towards the castle bailey. Do you know the southern corridor that leads to the kitchens?" - She nodded- "Look for the stairs at the end of the corridor. At the bottom you'll pass a portrait, it hides a passage which leads to an unused stall in the stables outside the castle. I've taken down the protection wards so a simple Alohomora should reveal the hidden doorway. Inside you'll find a parcel with some essentials I've left for you- robes, potions, food and a portkey. Be sure to change your clothes while you're in there. The robes belonged to one of the Black Cloaks so her scent should help to some extent in masking yours from the trackers. There are a few pitfalls and dead-ends along the way, but you can easily avoid them by always sticking to the path on your left. At a relaxed pace it should take you no more than twenty minutes to reach the other end of the tunnel. That's longer than it would take if you used any of the known castle exits, but since only a handful of us know of the existence of this passage you won't run into anyone on your way out.

"Once out, be prepared to cast a Silencio at the horses in the adjoining stalls. Some of them possess a nervous disposition so you're likely to startle them when you exit the hidden passage. The portkey point is south of the stables. It's the best spot to cross the magical barrier without raising an alarm as they'll assume it's just one of the Dark Lord's followers leaving. I'll steer pack members clear of that part of the castle grounds, but I have no control on the movements of the rest. Any loud noise is likely to attract attention and make them want to investigate.

"Head south of the stable- there's a cluster of tall English Oak trees you can use as a marker for which way is south. Keep going south well beyond the trees then listen for the sound of the stream. Move towards the sound till you see the shimmer of the magical barrier. Upon crossing don't apparate immediately- our trackers will be able to follow the trace of your magic. Instead, walk towards the stream till you see a slab of stone that looks like an altar, it's the portkey point. The portkey I've left you belonged to a Death Eater. Ever since they started monitoring portkey travel I began collecting official portkeys issued to careless Death Eaters who don't even realise it when their stuff goes missing- I've quite a collection now. This one will take you to a busy town in Dover with
scant Death Eater presence. Once there you can safely apparate to a destination of your choice without fear of being tracked."

"Ginny," Hermione cried out soon as Draco was done making her repeat his instructions back to him. "I can't leave her behind," she firmly stated then rushed out of her quarters without waiting for a response.

"Gods damn it, Granger!" Draco cried in frustration upon seeing her sprint out of the room. As much as he wanted to run after her, he didn't. Watching her run off messed with his own instincts, that were demanding he chase her down and make her submit so she would never think of leaving him. He could just see it now - him pushing her down on all fours and fucking her right there in the corridor till he emptied the contents of his balls into her. Fuck, the very thought of it excited him but he couldn't put her at risk by causing any delays.

Draco waited for a few minutes to calm himself before going after Hermione. He was barely out the door when an out of breath omega came to a halt before him.

"Message from the beta, sir."

As head beta, most of the omegas simply referred to Gunnolf as 'the beta' out of respect for his position.

"Yes, go on Lou."

"There was a floo call, sir. The alpha's returning with some company. The beta said you should wrap up your business quickly and be there when the alpha arrives as he was asking for you."

Draco thanked the omega for the message and went after Hermione. When he caught up to her he found her standing a few feet away from Ginny's bed looking uncertain. Ginny, who lay on the bed with her back turned to them, appeared to be asleep.

"That witch is going to get you captured or killed," he declared forcefully.

"No," said Hermione with a vigorous shake of her head, "I'm going to fix her first. I'm going to obliviate her. It'll be safe to take her with me if she doesn't remember anything that's happened."

Her statement made Draco give pause. Memory charms were tricky, it didn't matter how good you were with them there was always a potential for things to go horribly wrong. In general memory charms were avoided unless one cared more about protecting one's secrets than worrying about the prospect of causing permanent brain damage to the person one was casting the spell on. Regardless of the challenges with execution, they were undoubtedly effective. If Ginny Weasley was obliviated of her traumatic memories she wouldn't be a liability to Hermione, he realised and begrudgingly nodded in agreement.

"Okay. What do you need from me?"

"Nothing. Just, let me do this by myself... How long before we leave?" she asked, her eyes still locked on Ginny.

"I'll need twenty minutes to clear the way for you."

"I'd like to say goodbye to the boys."

"I'm sorry, we don't have time."
His answer made her turn and look at him. Hermione closed her eyes and let out a shaky breath before nodding. She understood.

"Fenrir is headed back so don't take more than twenty minutes for whatever you plan to do with her," he said pointing to Ginny's sleeping form. "If it takes longer or anything goes wrong, just leave. I promise we'll take care of her."

"Where will I see you?"

"I'll have to keep the others occupied." He swallowed the lump in his throat, finding it too hard to tell her this was goodbye. She seemed to be similarly affected. Her mouth was a tight line and her eyes watery before she nodded again.

"Once you're safely back with the Order, send an owl addressed to Gunnolf Olsen. Our mail isn't monitored but don't risk your safety by writing anything that will give you away as the sender. Make it an order confirmation letter for a batch of cauldrons- I'll know it's you and that you're okay."

He looked at her, for what could be the last time for a very long time, drinking in his fill of her while she did the same. From the way her hands twitched at her sides she was clearly fighting the urge to touch him just as he was resisting her.

"I will come back to you," Hermione promised, her voice laced with steely determination.

Draco found it hard to say anything so he nodded and turned around. If he didn't leave now he was very likely to grab her and never let go.

"Twenty minutes, then you need to make a run for it," he called out as he walked away. "The Death Eaters could be arriving at any minute now."

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Hermione stared at the spot Draco stood in long after he was gone. She didn't think it would hurt so much to watch him walk away, but it did. It was bad enough she was leaving them behind, but not even getting to say goodbye to her sons and to Draco... she felt like there was a vice around her heart slowly crushing it. She rubbed at her chest in an attempt to ease the pain and took several deep breaths. Now was not the time to lose her composure and turn into a blubbering mess.

She walked up to Ginny pulling her wand out of its holster and positioning the tip against Ginny temple. She closed her eyes in preparation and was about to say the spell when she felt the wand jerked out of her hand followed by a hard shove that had her stumbling backwards.

"I can't believe you were going to obliviate me!" Ginny's expression was a mix of hurt, disgust and fury as she stepped off the bed with the wand pointed threateningly at Hermione. "You'll go to such lengths to please your Death Eater lover, even betraying your own side? Well, let's see how you like it when the tables are turned."

There was no time to move out of the way or even think as Ginny cast an angry Stupefy. Hermione instinctively raised her hands hoping to cast a wandless Protego but failed. It proved to be unnecessary anyhow as the spell backfired on Ginny, the wand forcefully surging out of her hands and into Hermione's while her body was flung back where it crashed against the wall with a sickening sound before landing as a crumpled heap on the floor. Her body appeared lifeless lying on the ground. There was now a rapidly growing spot of blood under her, indicating injuries that could lead to her dying from blood loss if left unattended for too long.

Hermione began casting every diagnostic spell she could think of, followed by every healing spell
she knew in an attempt to heal whatever was broken, but couldn't get the bleeding to stop. Afraid that her friend would end up dead before her eyes, Hermione cast a patronus informing Cora of the accident and begging her to save Ginny.

She realised there was no way she could take Ginny with her now, and it would help no one to stick around when she finally had a chance to escape. Hermione holstered her wand and ran out of the room. As quietly and as quickly as possible she made her way to the portrait concealing the secret passage. Given that the Death Eaters and werewolves would be alerted once they saw her patronus dashing about the castle, she knew she was running against the clock.

Inside the secret passage Hermione found a satchel containing the items Draco left her. She quickly changed into the dirty robes as instructed and then, using her new wand to light her path, ran all the way to the exit. Unnerved by what happened to Ginny and in her rush to escape, she forgot about the horses and managed to give them a fright when she burst out of the stall. Rather than wasting precious time to stop and deal with the noisy creatures she kept running, the muscles in her legs were starting to burn but she kept running till she was past the magical barrier.

Hermione gave out a cry of relief as the stone slab marking the portkey point finally came into sight. Her fingers barely grazed the portkey in the satchel she held when something large slammed into her and knocked her to the ground, also knocking the wind out of her in the process.

Lying on the ground, dazed, exhausted and breathless, Hermione looked up to see a large figure looming above her blocking her view of everything else. As the figure drew nearer and the features appeared in focus, she realised she was staring into the smiling face of Fenrir Greyback, who grabbed her hand and placed it on an object in his hand before muttering something under his breath. She had no time to register what was happening when she was overwhelmed by the nauseating sensation in her gut which signalled she was being portkeyed away.

Chapter End Notes

Yet another unplanned chapter. I gathered from the comments that there's some confusion between canon, this fic and other fanfics with Dramione/ Werewolf themes, so this chapter was my way of clearing things up. Of course, as you read the chapter you'll realise most of it is information that's been provided in bits and pieces throughout the fic. I realise this repetition of details is a bit tedious to read despite my attempt to make it interesting (and it's also resulted in Hermione having what feels like the longest day ever).

At the time of posting this chapter Wolf's Mate has 1022 kudos, which is insane. Thank you, everyone!

(Of course now all I'm thinking about is how to make this cliche of a story worth those thousand plus kudos. Argh!)
Draco took a quick look at the roster to check which pack members were assigned duties in the vicinity of the stable and portkey point. Rather than arousing suspicion by clearing all the weres in the area, his plan was to simply keep anyone capable of posing a risk to Hermione out of her path and preferably under his watchful eye within the main castle. Once the potential threats were identified, as replacements in their respective duties for the remainder of the day, he sent out some of their weakest omegas with orders for the ones being replaced to return to the main castle building for an impromptu training session. With the amount of pent up energy the weres usually carried around it wasn't unusual for more senior betas to call for a training or sparring session when the mood so struck them.

Draco was aware that he could be endangering the lives of the pack's pups by setting them so close to Hermione's path but his wolf didn't seem particularly bothered by what would be seen as putting his mate before his pack. He knew his witch well enough to know that beyond defending herself she wouldn't seek to cause any kind of permanent or irreversible damage to pack members. At the same time he wasn't sure if pack members would show her the same consideration should they end up duelling her.

He waited in the front hall of the main castle for the arrival of the pack members he had handpicked for today's training session. One end of the hall opened into a small yard filled with packed dirt, the place was commonly used as a training ground. Slowly the members filtered in looking excited at the prospect of sparring with Draco. The full moon was only a few days away so they were all a little on edge. Draco got them started off with some warm up drills and they were just beginning to pair up for the fights when they were interrupted.

"So the rumours are true I see."

Draco turned to look in the direction of the voice and was surprised to see standing there his old friend Theodore Nott. No, not friend exactly, Draco corrected himself; as a wealthy Pureblood elite himself, Theo had been one of the few people his age of an equal status and therefore a suitable companion. Still, there were times he had thought of Theo as a friend. Theo used to be carefree and chatty kid, back before his mother had mysteriously ended up dead. Theo changed dramatically afterwards; he became more reserved with his speech and more observant of his surroundings. It made Theo a very good judge of character, and because he possessed such an even temperament his was often the only voice of reason in Draco's life during their years at Hogwarts. Then Draco took the Dark Mark and their relationship was forever altered. For a long time he believed jealousy to be the source of their fallout- that Theo had wished the enviable distinction of being the youngest Death Eater. But seeing him now, the first time in all the years since he was turned, Draco wondered if perhaps he had been wrong about Theo too.

"Theo," Draco acknowledged with a simple nod, "it's been a while."

"Yes, it has, hasn't it?" asked Theo, studying Draco. "I heard you were here and you'd taken quite well to your new status," he said delicately, careful not to cause offence, "but I didn't believe it. You've changed." He said conclusively once he was done scrutinising Draco.

Having grown up around Theo, Draco was able to read him far better than any other person including his father. He could be mistaken but Draco sensed the other man almost looked at him with
admiration. Draco dusted himself off and put on his robes before joining Theo outside in the front hall. "So, what brings you to Wolf Castle, Theo?" Draco feigned ignorance even though he suspected they were here for Hermione.

"Why do any of us come here?" Theo said with a small shrug. It was well known that the Death Eaters didn't like interacting with the werewolves and they only came to Bleidd when commanded by the Dark Lord. "The Dark Lord probably didn't think that dimwit Greyback could manage a simple game of fetch. I've been tasked with escorting two of the prisoners back to headquarters."

Ironically, the Ministry was what the Death Eaters used as headquarters these days.

"And which prisoners would that be?" asked Draco nonchalantly.

"Potter's girlfriend and his Mudblood..." He went quiet as if contemplating something. "Oh, but now they both mean something to you too. One of them is carrying the Malfoy heir while the other, I hear, is carrying your spawn."

Draco knew Theo well enough to know he was deliberately goading him to gain some insight into Draco's feelings, most likely. He didn't care for these type of games anymore, instead of reacting he began to walk away motioning for Theo to follow him.

He decided to take Theo to Ginny's room first, certain Hermione was long gone but wanting to delay the discovery as much as possible. Draco wondered where Fenrir was right now. He was expected to arrive with some guests so he must have arrived with Theo's party, but obviously he had abandoned them at some point. The alpha never paid much deference to the Death Eaters, however, knowing that Theo was here on orders from the Dark Lord himself, it was very strange that Fenrir had not bothered to at least assign them a beta to guide them to the prisoners.

"How did you enjoy your roll in the mud, Draco? Can't imagine it was any good. Granger was always such a frail little thing- far too much brains, not enough tits."

Theo wasn't even being subtle now, but Draco refused to react. His wolf may have bristled at the comments about his mate, but Draco knew the best way to deal with Theo.

"You've changed," he said echoing Theo's line from before, "You were never the type to notice tits before, Theo."

"I don't like tits, doesn't mean I don't notice them. And as I recall you used to be rather fond of Pansy for the sake of her tits alone."

He could expect this kind of talk from Blaise but it was very strange to hear Theo speak in such a manner. How did Theo stand to gain from whatever information he would gather from Draco's reaction to his provocative words?

"Does all this talk of tits mean you've taken a wife now?" Draco tried to shift the focus on Theo while he tried to figure out Theo's endgame. "I heard the Dark Lord passed some kind of decree requiring all Purebloods of fertile years to marry and breed."

Theo let out a chortle. "One of the benefits of my station is that some amount of consideration was offered for my proclivities, giving me a reprieve from that law- not like there are enough Pureblood women to go around anyway. Naturally, since I'm unable to provide an heir the duty has fallen to father's broad and far more capable shoulders. " There was that familiar old bitterness that always crept into Theo's voice anytime he spoke about his father. "Hmm, even in your state of disgrace we have something in common- a disappointment to our families it has fallen to our fathers to produce
Theosophus Nott was a cold and hard man in a way that made Lucius Malfoy look like a Hufflepuff in contrast. While it was never confirmed, they all suspected he was responsible for the death of Theo's mother, who he had, very likely, killed before Theo's eyes. Draco couldn't imagine there being a Pureblood woman out there familiar with the Nott family history who would be willing to marry the old Death Eater despite his wealth and power.

"Lord Nott has been given a slave as well?"

Theo chuckled, though Draco failed to see the source of his amusement.

"No. He's been given a proper wife. Unlike Lucius, my father is, well was single."

Nott Senior didn't strike him as a man who would be willing to ever again take on the hassle of a wife. Draco always assumed he would one day force Theo to bed a woman to ensure the continuation of the Nott family line.

"So who is the lucky woman?"

"This is the part which is so amusing. Not amusing because she's married to father, but amusing because it makes her my step-mother."

Draco kept walking and only turned his head to raise a questioning brow at Theo.

"Pansy," replied Theo.

"Pansy?"

"Yes. With you out of the picture the only wizard Lord Parkinson could deem suitable enough for his little princess was my father."

"Fuck!" exclaimed Draco. He may not have shared Pansy's feelings- in fact he knew he had acted like a heel when he took advantage of her feelings for him to engage in some snogging and lusty groping while they were at school- and even though he was still angry with her for raising her hand on Hermione, a small part of him still cared for her as a friend. He couldn't imagine how creepy it must be for Pansy to be married to Theo's father knowing what they knew about the man.

"Why did she agree? I mean, how did Lord Parkinson even convince her to agree?" While Pansy could be a little vacuous, she was also incredibly stubborn and well versed in manipulating her father into doing her bidding.

"It's not like she was given a choice in the matter, Draco. One thing that is pretty consistent in this brave new world is that none of us really have a choice about what we do anymore."

Theo's voice had taken on that quiet reflective tone of the Theo he remembered from his Hogwarts days. Here was a man speaking the plain and unvarnished truth. In any other individual he would call it a slip up, but from someone as intelligent and guarded as Theo it had to mean something. He saw a weariness in his old friend's eyes he had failed to notice earlier. He wondered if, like him, Theo too was feeling overwhelmed by the reality of the world they had helped create.

They were more than halfway to Ginny Weasley's quarters when Draco stopped two omegas rushing past him.

"Selene, Adrian, slow down," he ordered. "What's happened?"
"Message for the Beta, sir. We have one prisoner missing and the other's been severely injured, sir."

Draco tried to appear calm even though he was struggling to breathe at the news that his mate may very likely be hurt.

"Has Cora been informed?"

"Yes, sir. She's tending to the prisoner. We were told to inform the Beta the prisoner's lost a lot of blood and looks like she'll die if."

At this point Draco gave up all pretence and cut off the omega.

"Where, where is she?" he demanded. They pointed him towards Ginny's quarters and Draco took off running without caring to explain anything to a very confused looking Theo.

He was running so fast he thought his heart was going to burst out of his chest at any moment now. Gods damn it! She wasn't supposed to get hurt. He asked her to go without Ginny Weasley, but she didn't listen and now it looked like the witch had hurt Hermione and left her behind.

When he arrived at the scene he was shocked to see a pool of what he thought was his mate's blood and Cora bent over a small female form. His vision grew blurry from the tears freely flowing down his cheeks and his grief was so great even his wolf failed to notice the absence of his mate's scent.

Cora worked frantically, waving her wand, muttering one incantation after another while she clumsily grabbed at the different potion bottles, struggling to uncork them efficiently and pour them in the correct order down the witch's throat. Though trained to be a healer, Cora had been out of practice for so long she really was no better than a mediwitch in this situation.

It took Draco several moments to gather the courage to approach them, but once he got closer he fell to his knees in sheer relief upon seeing it was not his mate lying half dead on the ground. "Merlin!" he moaned out loud, but Cora was too focused on her task to pay him any attention. She escaped, he told himself. If Ginny was here, it meant Hermione was the one who had escaped and it was the only thing that mattered, as far as Draco was concerned.

"Get off your arse and lend me a hand here," Cora barked when he continued to stay on his knees uselessly staring at them.

Draco moved quickly, following Cora's directions and assisting her as needed. At times he joined her in casting spells, at others, he prepared the necessary potions. Even though he was doing little more than measuring and mixing the different potions in the combinations Cora demanded, working with potions after so many years managed to have a calming effect on him despite the grisly scene around them.

At some point, out of the corner of his eye, he saw Theo and a few of the Death Eaters gathered outside the room, shortly joined by Gunnolf and some pack members. No one entered the room or disturbed them in any way apart from handing Draco the additional items requested by Cora. While he concentrated on the task at hand he was still able to catch bits and pieces of conversation drifting in from the corridor outside, though the voices were far too muffled by the walls for him to recognise with certainty the identity of any of the voices except for Gunnolf's.

"We saw a patronus floating past us," said one of the voices.

"Scared the living daylight out of me, some weird looking animal," said another voice.

"We figured it was one of the two Order members. Not like there's anyone else here who can do that
"Well, the other witch's really of no concern to us, is she?"

"What did you find?" There was no mistaking the authority in this voice; it was Gunnolf.

"Hermione wasn't in her chambers, but that's not unusual-"

"She likes to spend time outside with either the pups or Draco."

"-So, we decided to check on the redhead-"

"That one's always in her room."

"-and we found her lying there, like that, in the middle of this pool of blood."

"Made me so hungry- I've never been around human blood like that."

"Cora got here almost the same time we did-"

"Not sure who called her."

"-Serafina said we ought to split up-"

"Selene and Adrian went to get you while Serafina and I went to look for Hermione."

"We checked the courtyard-"

"Hermione seems to favour that spot."

"-and the rest of the places she visits -- Couldn't find her anywhere. We even went to pack quarters-"

"Though she's never stepped foot in there... far as I know."

"We thought to check on the twins."

"Found them with Oskar."

"...but, no sign of Hermione."

"Any idea on the whereabouts of the alpha?" asked Gunnolf.

"He arrived with the Death Eaters, sir."

The conversation paused and then continued in whispers far too faint to make out before stopping altogether. A few minutes later Draco heard voices again, but, from the other side of the corridor.

"Greyback? Yes, we arrived together by portkey" -the condescending tone and posh accent could only belong to Theo- "but then we heard the horses going crazy and he took off without bothering to give us an explanation. He hasn't returned so far and Draco's too busy patching up one of the prisoners I was meant to collect, while I'm growing tired of waiting for someone to explain what's going on."

"That is exactly what we're trying to figure out. Please wait till the healer is done and then we may
have some answers." The authoritative tone employed by Gunnolf made it clear he would brook no argument on the subject.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I believe I have something to report..." said one of the omegas in a meek voice, practically shaking with nerves from suddenly being the centre of everyone's attention.

"I was sent to patrol the barrier near the portkey point this evening, sir... I saw the alpha arrive with the Death Eaters but he came back a short while later... alone. He told me to return to the castle. He said- he said to tell you we'd be going Mud-blood hunting tonight... I'm sorry for the delay, sir... it took me some time to come find you here."

"Interesting... Does this mean you're missing a prisoner?" asked Theo.

"Hermione isn't a prisoner!" Draco heard one of the voices declare but it was soon followed by shushing sounds which were silenced once Gunnolf began to speak.

"Why don't you wait in my office, enjoy what little hospitality we have to offer, till we have some definite answers for you? Hermione's most likely spending time in pack quarters with her sons. If she is one of the prisoners you seek, I will have my men go and collect her for you."

Draco was surprised that Gunnolf had managed to lie so easily. He sounded convincing enough and from the sound of footsteps moving away it appeared he may have managed to fool Theo.

Ginny's condition appeared to be more stable now, the bleeding had finally stopped and her heart was beating normally. Cora could finally catch a breath so Draco used the opportunity to ask her what happened.

"Hermione, she did this." -Draco looked at her in disbelief- "She sent me a patronus saying there was an accident while they were duelling. Hermione was crying, she said she didn't mean to do it, but Ginny was bleeding to death in her room. She begged me to come and save Ginny."

Cora spoke in a low volume, clearly not wanting the others to hear their conversation, but she was seething in a way Draco had never seen before.

"Does this look like something caused by an accident?" she bit out between clenched teeth. "I didn't think she could go to such lengths to escape. To do something like this to her own friend -"

Draco remained quiet. He found it hard to believe that Hermione would be capable of such violence, yet evidence to the contrary lay before him. After he realised that the injured woman was not his mate, and his initial shock had worn off, he noticed that the only blood he could smell in the room belonged to Ginny Weasley. He tried to imagine various scenarios which would lead to Hermione responding with such uncharacteristic violence. Draco knew she planned to obliviate Ginny, but couldn't think of a single instance where a poorly executed memory charm left the kind of physical damage seen here. Paying close attention to the room it looked like Ginny had been blasted off her feet and slammed against the wall with tremendous force. He considered the possibility that Hermione may have experienced a burst of accidental magic, except this one looked far too powerful and directed at a specific target to qualify as an accident. It was a mystery they were unlikely to solve till Ginzy was awake or sufficiently recovered to have someone perform legilimency on her.

"- As if this poor woman hasn't suffered enough... And, she lost her baby! I know Ginzy didn't care for her child, but you understand what this means, right? They're going to want her back and they'll put her through hell once more to get her pregnant again."

Draco had several thoughts rush through his head all at once. First and foremost was concern for his
mate. He hoped Hermione had made it safely out because he couldn't imagine what they would do to her once Lucius discovered she was responsible for the death of his heir. He stared at Ginny's belly not knowing what he was meant to feel about the premature death of his half-sibling, but, he did feel concern for Ginny knowing his father would once more force himself on her if only to get her pregnant with his heir. Under these circumstances how was he going to keep his promise to Hermione to keep Ginny safe? But, if Hermione was the one responsible for doing this to Ginny would she still expect him to keep his promise?

"You're culpable too," Cora hissed at Draco. "There's no way she suddenly mastered wandless spell casting, which means someone gave her a wand. And the only person foolish enough to think helping her escape would be a good idea, here, is you! You know what the world has become out there, but instead of bonding with her and keeping her safe, you chose to arm her and let her loose without any thought to the consequences. You've not only put her life at risk you've left all of us vulnerable. What do you think they'll do to us when they realise someone in the pack armed one of the prisoners with a wand?"

Draco remained quiet, trying to think of how he could clean up this mess. He had planned Hermione's escape in a way that didn't leave behind any clues on how it was done. But thanks to this incident with Ginny Weasley there was no hiding his involvement. Cora was right though, this was no longer just about Hermione and him, and unless he could quickly figure something out the pack would have to pay the price for his and Hermione's actions.

*TRIGGER WARNING*

Exhausted from her run and nauseated from the portkey travel, when they finally arrived at their destination Hermione would have fallen to the ground if not for Fenrir holding her tightly against his body. She took a moment to catch her breath and tried to calm herself by focusing on anything other than Fenrir. The landscape surrounding her looked foreign in comparison to anything she had seen before, was the predominant thought in her head as her gaze settled upon the sprawling mountains in the distance, the tops of which disappeared into the clouds leaving them partially hidden. When they left Bleidd it was late evening, yet here the dark sky and twinkling stars hinted at a time of night far later than anywhere in Great Britain.

Meanwhile Fenrir remained nearly motionless beside her, only moving his head to look around as if trying to find his bearings in a relatively unfamiliar place. He held both her wrists trapped in one hand and her satchel and wand in the other. For whatever reason, this wand had chosen Hermione as its master- it was the only explanation her brain could conjure for the way the wand had responded to Ginny before leaping into her own hand. Despite Oskar's theory about Hermione being the alpha of alphas, Fenrir was undeniably stronger than her physically- something she found hard to ignore when she felt like the bones in her wrists were being ground to dust from the force being exerted on them. And unlike her, as a werewolf he didn't need a conduit to cast spells. Getting the wand back or getting Fenrir to use it on her appeared to be her best options for escape.

With precious seconds to act, she remembered the words often shouted at her by Draco during their training sessions: Don't be afraid to fight dirty, there's no unfair fight except one you lose. Do whatever it takes to win.

Fenrir had too tight a hold on her wrists and the difference in their heights made it impossible for her to do any damage with her head, which only left her legs available. If she could get a little closer to him and angle her body just so she could knee him in the crotch hard enough to momentarily distract him and grab the wand out of his hands.
Just as Hermione moved to sidle against him in a seductive manner, Fenrir pinched her nose shut with one hand, but she instinctively knew what was coming next and clamped her mouth shut. He had to let go of her wrists to reach for something within his clothes which she instantly took advantage of by opening the palm of her right hand, bending her wrist backwards and using the heel of her palm to strike upwards at Fenrir's nose. The hit lacked the force required to break his nose but she caused enough pain that she let go of her nose to hold his own. She pressed her advantage by turning the same palm sideways to deliver a swift strike to his windpipe. Once again the blow was too weak to crush the organ but it did force him to stumble backwards a step or two.

Hermione frantically looked around to see where Fenrir had dropped the wand. Later, she would remember how the soil here was reddish in colour unlike anything she had seen in England, further proof that they were on foreign soil. The stars shone brightly in the night sky in a way that is only possible in the absence of light pollution, which meant they were far away from any kind of civilization. These things would register in Hermione's mind much later, at the moment her mind was solely focused on the task of locating the wand.

By the time Hermione remembered that the wand had accepted her and would very likely respond to her if she summoned it, Fenrir had recovered and launched himself at her. Distracted as she was, he managed to easily tackle her to the ground. Settling himself on her chest, he used his entire weight to bear down on her and planted his feet on her arms to pin her hands to the ground. She watched in helpless horror as he once more used one hand to pinch her nose while the other successfully retrieved a vial of the fertility potion from his pocket and used his teeth to uncork it. She tilted her head sideways as much as his hold would allow and kept her jaw tightly shut. But instead of forcing her to drink the potion, like she expected, he emptied the contents into his own mouth—though he didn't appear to swallow.

Fenrir tossed the now empty vial aside and used both hands to seize at Hermione's jaws and pry them open. Unable to breathe and feeling like he was crushing her jaw and tearing the corners of her mouth, her lips finally parted. Fenrir, who was waiting for just this moment, didn't waste any time to lower his mouth and force the potion from his mouth into hers. Her attempts to spit out the potion proved to be in vain as Fenrir's lips had formed a seal around her mouth, his tongue forcing the liquid back into her mouth while one hand massaged her throat in a way that made her involuntarily swallow.

Her heart sank because she knew what this meant. Ignorant as she was where this mysterious new potion was concerned she didn't know how much time she had before she would feel its effects. She had to act quickly while her head was still clear and she was still in control of her body.

Fenrir had done a good job pinning her upper body to the ground and rendering it useless. Plus with him seated as far up her chest as he was she would need to be an acrobat to swing her legs far enough forward to lock her legs around his neck like she wanted to. His mouth continued to remain over hers in a cruel mimicry of a kiss, his hand squeezing her jaw—hard enough she knew it would hurt as hell later—meant she couldn't even bite him.

He did finally let go of, both, her mouth and jaw at once. He shifted his weight to the left, swinging his right leg off her arm he brought it around so he was now kneeling at her side instead of seated on her chest. He gave her no time to react, roughly grabbing her shoulder to flip her around, then pressing his forearm to the back of her head to force her face down into the ground. Their movements stirred the mud around Hermione's face bringing on a coughing fit as she struggled to breathe through the dust she was inhaling.

Fenrir sat on her back and drew her arms behind her before softly muttering an Incancerous and binding Hermione's arms such that her palms lay curled into fists, ensuring she would remain
incapable of summoning the wand. Another muttered incantation and her ankles were bound together such that she could move them no more than a foot apart. Her struggles and attempts to wriggle out of the binding only resulted in them tightening further. Finally satisfied that she was sufficiently incapacitated Fenrir got up off her and roughly picked her up off the ground. He collected her satchel and wand in one hand and used the other to clutch at a fistful of her hair which he tugged to keep her moving in the direction he wanted. With her ankles bound and her short steps failing to match his long strides by the time they reached their destination she was sure her scalp was bleeding from all the times he had ripped out her hair.

Apart from the mountains in the distant background, for miles the scenery around them appeared to be nothing but the reddish coloured soil with the exception of a few shrubs and fewer trees dotting the landscape. But barely fifty paces into their walk and they had walked through the gates of a primitive version of a fortalice built from reed and mud bricks. The place was cleverly concealed by a Fidelius Charm, she doubted Fenrir or any of the other werewolves at Bleidd were capable of casting. That along with the international portkey, which made it possible for him to whisk Hermione here, made her suspicious that Voldemort or at least his Death Eaters were in some way involved in whatever Fenrir had planned for her.

Hermione tried to concentrate and draw on her raw magic to direct a blast at Fenrir, but she was more scared than angry now. All this was far too familiar, reminding her of the night the Death Eaters had taken her as a prisoner, fed her the potion and left her to get fucked by some werewolf. She could just as easily have ended up sharing Ginny’s fate; it was only her luck- or the act of a moon goddess, if one believed in the were myths- that had delivered her into the hands of a man she was proud to call her mate. Would she continue to be lucky a second time? She didn't think so.

Despite the crude exterior the carvings on the walls inside spoke of a level of sophistication one wouldn't expect of such a militaristic looking building. As Fenrir navigated them through the narrow passageways deep within the structure, it struck Hermione that except for their presence the place appeared to be abandoned. Fenrir threw open a large set of doors and dragged her with a force that had her stumbling down the steps of some sort of cellar. Fortunately for her the floor was made of mud and not stone so it didn't hurt as much as it could have.

The room was small and empty, if it was a cellar it wasn't being used to store anything. There was an earthy scent lingering in the air that she would've found soothing under different circumstances. A single window at a point where the wall met the ceiling illuminated the room.

Within the small space Fenrir's large body easily towered over her prone form. There was no mistaking the menacing tone of his voice when he finally spoke. "Looks like you need to be taught a little lesson, Mud-blood," he said, drawing out the syllables of the ugly word he had refrained from using while he was courting her.

Hermione kept her head lowered to the ground, only her eyes tracking the movement of his boots as he paced around her head.

"The Dark Lord is mad at Potter, but that's nothing new now, is it? Wanted to torture you and the redhead publically as a bit of payback, but I came to your rescue. Risked my neck to remind our Lord that you were gifted to the pack and I had yet to use your womb. He agreed to keep his word, but, of course he punished me for speaking up... All those Death Eaters- weak bunch of ponces, thinking they're better than me just 'cause they have the Mark- enjoyed watching me get punished, they did. Because of you! And how do you repay me?" He stopped his pacing to stand beside her. "Take advantage of my hospitality, spit on my generous offer, and nearly go and make that cunt of yours useless for the rest of us by trying to bond with the Malfoy pup, you ungrateful bitch!" He drew his foot back, then delivered a solid kick to her flank.
Hermione grit her teeth in agony as she curled in on herself. From the way her side hurt she was sure he'd cracked one of her ribs.

"Some of the lads came to see me last night- said you and Draco had bonded, which I thought was a bunch of bollocks till they said they felt a pack bond with you. Ever since he knocked you up Malfoy's been acting like he's hot stuff, but if that brat thinks he's going to challenge my position in the pack just 'cause he fathered a couple of bastards with you he's not as smart as he thinks he is. Now, this all must sound like a bunch of nonsense to you," Fenrir noted as he dropped into a squat and hunched over her head, "what with it being pack business and all, so I'll put this in terms you can understand." He eliminated the distance between them by grabbing a fistful of her hair to raise her head so she could meet his gaze. "I'm still alpha and I fully plan to breed you till you die or your womb breaks from all the births."

There was a dark promise in Fenrir's eyes as he delivered the threat, but instead of fear she felt a thrill shoot through her- a sure sign the potion had worked its way into her bloodstream.

He let go of her hair so suddenly Hermione didn't get the chance to support herself, causing her already tender jaw to forcefully hit the ground.

"Was on my way to Bleidd to pick you up and bring you here, imagine my surprise when I catch the scent of Mudblood on the castle grounds and follow it only to find my prisoner escaping! Almost made it too, didn't you?" he asked with a mocking laugh. "So now here's your punishment. You'll no longer be allowed to stay with the pack at Bleidd, this is your new home -" he held his hands out to gesture around him "- You'll live here and be a good little cunt till your belly's full with my babies. Please me and I'll bond with you during the next full moon, otherwise, soon as you've whelped a few pups for me I'll make you the pack whore and let each of my men take their turn at breeding you."

Hermione remained silent. There was nothing for her to say. She wondered if Draco had any inkling of what was happening to her. Obviously not, or she wouldn't be here.

"If you behave, you'll get to see your twins again -" these words made Hermione's head snap up. Did it mean Fenrir had brought her sons here as well? But when would he have done so? "- Funny bit of business this, and a good bit of luck for me I suppose, that I found you when I did. See, no one in the pack knows I found you, they'll just think you ran away!" he said gleefully.

"Now, you be a good little bitch who listens to her alpha and doesn't try to escape again and I'll bring you your sons so you can do some mothering every now and then. But try to defy me in any way or fight me and I'll bring your sons back here just to fuck their toothless mouths and tear off their limbs right before your eyes. Been years since I ate any babies, you can bet I'll go slow to really relish it."

Hermione shuddered in revulsion at the scene described.

"You're not a werewolf yourself so your mate bond will be weak. A bit of separation from Draco and a lot of my cum should do the trick, break whatever half-arsed bond you've got with him. Should be easy enough to knock you up after that," he declared with confidence.

Hermione looked at him in shock and disgust. With everything she had come to learn about werewolves and the pack during her stay at Bleidd it was hard to believe that the pack's alpha would stoop to such shameful levels. Instead of fighting Draco or any of the other wolves for the right to mate with her, he was essentially stealing her by attempting to forcefully destroy the mate bond. While the rest of the pack treated children as a sacred gift and cared for Wilbur and Martin like they were the most precious thing in their lives, Fenrir found it acceptable to use them as leverage over her. She tried not to focus on her imminent defilement- she needed her anger in this moment, not her fear.
Fenrir watched as Hermione seethed in righteous anger, then suddenly his fearsome face contorted into an ugly smile. As much as she was trying to be discreet in her attempt at rubbing her thighs together she recognised the futility of it, he had quite likely smelled the juices oozing out of her as her passage prepared itself for penetration. She turned her head away from him so he couldn't see the shame in her eyes as she teased her nipples by rubbing her chest against the ground.

Fenrir stood up, once more looming over her. His hand placed over his crotch, he began to rub his shaft over his clothes. While he had forced her to swallow the bulk of the potion perhaps he had inadvertently ingested enough to be affected to some extent himself.

"Can't have the pack wondering 'bout my whereabouts or getting ideas. I'm going to have to head back and organise a search for our favourite Mudblood. Your greedy cunt will just have to wait till next time," he said, but proceeded to free his member from the confines of his trousers. He dragged the toe of his boot up and down the crack of her arse teasing her flesh while he stroked his cock.

Despite the bindings on her ankle and the pain in her rib Hermione spread her knees and arched her back as much as she could trying to get his boot to graze against her clitoris. Even with her clothes on, she felt a spark of pleasure at the feel of his boot sliding against the outer lips of her labia, but simultaneously she experienced disgust over the intimate touch coming from someone other than her mate.

Fenrir was stroking his cock faster now, and Hermione had to bite her tongue to keep herself from begging him to stick it inside her and fuck her for all he was worth. He continued to tease her flesh, pushing her towards her own release till she was soon crying out in relief as well as grief over what was happening to her. He climaxed shortly after, aiming his rod at her so she was left covered in streaks of his seed to serve as a disgusting reminder of what he had done to her long after he left and long after the potion wore off.

When he was done he didn't bother untying her or saying another word before he walked away, leaving her alone in the dark. She heard him snap his fingers when he reached the top of the stairs and saw an elf appear just before the door was sealed shut. Her brain, clouded with the fog of lust as she bore the full brunt of the potion hitting her system, struggled to focus on the words they exchanged as they walked away.

If Draco and the pack were truly unaware of her capture, Fenrir was quite likely on his way to bring the twins here to use them as leverage against her. She didn't need to escape, she just needed to conjure a wandless patronus to alert Draco of Fenrir's intentions. She took a deep breath, concentrating on the magic flowing in her veins and opened her mouth intending to chant the spell but all that left her lips was a helpless whimper begging for someone, anyone to fuck her.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sure many of you are angry/disappointed but this is a dark fic (even if it's fluffier than I originally planned) and there was a reason I put all those warnings early on. The interaction between Hermione and Fenrir needed to be believable so it's a little more graphic than what many of you have grown to expect from this fic.

I took time to finish this chapter because I ended up writing a Dramione smutty short- I really needed that burst of lemons as a palate cleanser to make it through this chapter.
Draco looked around him- at Cora's upset face, at Ginny Weasley's body now lying in a magically induced sleep on her bed, and at the blood dried on the floor- if he continued to act without consulting with the members of his pack, he would be no better than Fenrir, whose poor decisions often negatively impacted his pack.

Draco stepped out into the corridor and signalled for Gunnolf to join them inside.

"I'm not sure what's going on, but I sent for Oskar- had a hunch we may need our Elder's counsel. He should be joining us any minute now," said Gunnolf.

Draco nodded in approval.

"So, what did actually take place here?" -Gunnolf pointed to the scene of the accident- "Going by the reports, it would appear as if Hermione attacked Ginny and escaped."

Draco didn't respond, instead he set about the task of cleaning up the blood and returning the room to its original state, erasing all traces of what transpired there in the evening.

"You look fairly composed considering Hermione is missing," observed Gunnolf with a smirk.

Hearing footsteps, they turned towards the door, to see Oskar slowly approaching; he was alone.

"Where are Martin and Wilbur?" asked Draco.

"I heard about what happened here and thought it wiser to leave them behind. They're in Cora's quarters being watched by Lexi and Zoey- they'll be fine."

Oskar slowly made his way towards the only chair available in the room and sat down before he addressed the room. "While the three of you stand around here, you ought to know the castle is abuzz with news of a prisoner escaping."

With Oskar there, Draco saw no more need for delay. Ready to talk, he first cast a Muffliato.

"It'll grant us privacy so no one can hear us," he explained to the baffled looking werewolves who were unfamiliar with the spell created by Severus. "Normally, we wouldn't care for secrets within the pack, but we may need to make an exception this time."

Cora, who had remained silent so far, took this as her cue to finally speak. "Of course! We wouldn't want any more people learning about how Hermione left Ginny for dead before she escaped."

"Cora," said Draco, for the first time using a severe tone with the woman who had been a mother figure to him since he joined their pack, "I know you're not too fond of Hermione and have reservations about her; but set aside your personal feelings and think logically."

"I'm not the one who's allowing personal feelings to cloud their judgement, Draco. You're the one denying evidence seen by your own eyes."

"And what is this evidence?" asked Oskar.
Oskar and Gunnolf looked to Cora for details and she wasted no time in recounting what had taken place. When she was done, both werewolves looked shock to hear of the extent of Ginny’s injuries.

"As damning as it appears, Cora, why would Hermione want to hurt her friend in this terrible manner?” asked Oskar.

They all silently reflected on the question. It was true; the level of violence didn't make sense.

Draco offered what he suspected might have taken place. "Hermione's magic can be unstable at times,” said Draco. "She once blasted me off my feet without meaning to... Maybe this was something similar?"

"Accidental magic?!!" Cora shook her head in disbelief. "I realise it's hard to accept that Hermione did this," she said, pointing to Ginny, "but, have you ever known accidental outbursts of magic to cause this kind of damage unless directed at a specific target?"

"I think we're missing a more vital point right now," said Gunnolf, preventing Cora from pressing on the matter. "While I'd like to get to the bottom of this someday, I'm more worried about what to say to the Death Eater waiting to take the two witches into his custody... This is going to hurt us.”

Everyone knew 'us' meant the pack. Sensing it was time to come clean, Draco shared the details of the plan Hermione was supposed to follow in order to escape.

"She only planned to obliviate here?" asked Oskar.

"But aren't memory charms risky?" asked Gunnolf, at the same time.

Draco gave each of them a nod. "Yes, but even in the worst cases I've never heard of a magical blast accompanying a poorly cast memory charm -- Look, we can solve this mystery by questioning Ginny once she's recovered. Right now, as Gunnolf said, we need to come up with an explanation... To start with, what incriminates the pack?"

"The wand," said Cora. "Both, the patronus and the state of this room, clearly show there was a wand involved."

Draco nodded. "The patronus would've appeared in pack quarters; I doubt anyone outside the pack saw it. Do we know who saw the patronus and who managed to get a good look at the bloodied body of Ginny Weasley?"

"I know of two who saw the patronus, but they could barely describe the animal let alone guess who it belonged to or where it was headed," said Gunnolf. "And, including the young Death Eater currently waiting in my office, about half a dozen got a good look at the scene in here."

"We have to hide what happened to Ginny," insisted Cora in an adamant tone. "They cannot know she miscarried... or they will take her and rape her again."

Draco had already given the matter some thought. "Is there any way to fool the Death Eaters into believing she's still pregnant?" he asked Cora.

Cora appeared thoughtful for a few minutes before she replied. "I expect the Death Eater who saw Ginny will want to confirm she's still pregnant. Unless he's had Healer training specialising in obstetrics, I doubt he knows more than the basic pregnancy detection spell... Provided I'm given some time to prepare, I may have a way to produce a false positive for the pregnancy detection spell, yes."
"We could say she had an accident - a fall... or something equally plausible - and risks miscarrying if she travels -- Given her condition not long before her arrival at Bleidd it shouldn't be too hard to sell such a lie," said Draco. He looked at Cora, who nodded in confirmation. "For now, we only need to convince everyone that she's still pregnant."

Though unsaid, everyone knew this was a temporary fix to their Ginny problem. After all, there was only so long they could fake a pregnancy.

"That still leaves us with the matter of Hermione's escape," pointed out Gunnolf.

"I see no way of hiding the fact that she's escaped... or that she had help to do so," added Oskar.

Draco had already considered multiple scenarios, but every excuse ultimately fell apart in the absence of a scapegoat. He knew Voldemort would need someone he could punish for Hermione's escape.

"I was thinking of framing our guests. Knock one of them out; take their wand and obliviate their memories of the last twenty four hours... Set it all up to look like Hermione got the better of one of their people and used them to escape."

"It'll take the suspicion off the pack," noted Oskar with an approving nod.

When no one else brought it up, Gunnolf decided to be the voice of their conscience. "Are we choosing to ignore what'll happen to whoever we decide to pin this on?"

Cora's eyes held pure spite when she spoke, but they all knew it wasn't directed at the head beta. "You think any of them have their hands clean? You think any of them, working down in the dungeons, don't have the blood of one of our own on their hands?"

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They parted ways once each of them was clear on what they needed to do. Gunnolf left to go look for a suitable scapegoat, Draco would try to sell Theo on the narrative they had cooked up and Oskar would use his influence to silence the pack members about the extent of Ginny's injuries. Cora was left behind to monitor Ginny's recovery as well as get started on the potion that would convince everyone else that the redhead was still pregnant.

The potion was simple enough and something she had learnt during the time she was training to be a Healer. It was said that a long time ago, this particular potion was created by one of the trainees as a way to prank their classmates. For up to an hour after consuming the potion, any diagnostic spell cast on the drinker produced a false positive, making any accurate analysis impossible. On more than one occasion Cora had witnessed fellow trainees plays pranks on one another by making them test positive for embarrassing illnesses like genital warts or exploding pustules. Created as a gag, the potion lacked any other practical applications and was unknown to the general population. As Cora prepared the ingredients needed, she hoped the potion typically used as a joke would help save Ginny from the very serious predicament she found herself in.

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Once it looked like it was just the two of them, with no one else around, Oskar turned towards Draco, uncertainty clouding his face.

"I know what we agreed to upstairs, but there's something I'd like to test out, Draco. I want you to be the one to talk to the pack," said Oskar solemnly, "I'd like you to order them not to say anything about what they actually saw today."
Draco was puzzled, something in his tone implied Oskar didn't just mean for him to issue an order as one of the pack's betas. He opened his mouth to ask for clarification, but was stopped short by Oskar placing a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

"I can't really explain it right now, but I will. When you talk to the pack, think about what it is you want them to do and then command them to do it. I'll go check on the twins." Offering no further explanation, Oskar walked away.

Hermione's body felt drained. She had no way of knowing how much time had passed with her under the influence of the modified fertility potion, but she knew it was day now from the sunrays warming her skin. Her lips were cracked, her throat was parched and her eyes felt swollen, they were probably red, from all the crying. For hours she had begged for anyone to touch her, and nearly dislocated her shoulder attempting to free her hand just so she could touch herself.

Now that she was conscious, she was painfully aware of every part of her body that hurt. She drew in a deep shuddering breath, but instantly regretted it as the stench of dried cum and her own filth, from when she'd soiled herself during the course of the night, made her stomach twist in disgust.

Hermione lay bound on the ground feeling weak and helpless in a way she had never felt before. She made another futile attempt at conjuring a patronus, in spite of knowing she was too weak and to succeed.

The elf appeared in her line of vision; she had no idea when it arrived in the cellar and how long it had stood there simply watching her. It wore a simple pillowcase. Hermione had never heard of any werewolf owning an elf, and certainly not Fenrir, but the elf's actions soon convinced Hermione that it followed Fenrir's commands. She hoped she could convince it to free her by appealing to its better nature, but her pleas were ignored by the elf, who was determined to complete its task. It squeezed her cheeks with its bony fingers till she opened her mouth and then fed her the damned potion once more. Her lips were so dry and she was so thirsty she greedily lapped it up despite knowing what it would do to her.

Draco walked to Gunnolf's office somewhat in a daze. This wasn't his first time ordering members of his pack, but something felt distinctly different today. He couldn't quite understand it, but when he issued his command that they were not to talk to anyone about seeing a patronus or Ginny's injuries, inexplicably, he experienced a certainty that these people, his people, would obey his order even if it meant defying Fenrir. It didn't make any sense and it was another thing in a list of things he would need to revisit later, right now he needed to speak with Theo.

Even before he entered the room Draco sensed Fenrir's presence inside as well as the excitement emanating from the alpha. Stepping through the open door, he saw Gunnolf and three other betas who were among their best trackers standing before the alpha. Fenrir's face showed no trace of the panic or fury he expected to see there, making Draco feel wary as he approached the group. With all the large werewolves standing around he almost missed Theo, who lounged in a chair at the back of the room. Theo gave the impression he was more interested in the imaginary lint on his clothes than whatever was going around them, but Draco was not fooled.

"Ah, nice of you to join us, Draco," said Fenrir with a sneer. "We're just figuring out a plan to hunt down your Mudblood. Amount of time you spent sniffing her cunt you'll be the quickest to pick up her scent, won't you?"
Draco kept quiet and looked down; it would make no sense for him to get into a fight with the alpha right now. Keeping his eyes cast down he asked, "Is it confirmed then; is Granger really missing?"

"Not just missing, pup... Escaped -- I caught her scent near the stables when I arrived this evening. Tracked it as far as I could but lost it somewhere near the portkey point."

Though it irritated his wolf Draco didn't make direct eye contact with the alpha, observing him only through his peripheral vision even when he spoke. "Do we know how she escaped?"

Gunnolf answered. "We found a confounded looking Black Cloak walking around. He couldn't remember how he got here. He" -Gunnolf tilted his head towards Theo- "took a look into his head but the man appeared to be missing a day. He was also missing his wand."

Draco could feel Fenrir staring at him.

"I must say, lad, all that time spent playing happy family with her, and yet you don't look nowhere as upset as I'd thought you'd be over losing your little fucktoy."

Draco shrugged. "My pups are fine. Why would I be upset about the Mudblood escaping? My only concern is figuring out how she managed to get past our security."

"Oh ho!" Fenrir chuckled. "That's your stone cold Malfoy blood talking. Bet your wolf's itching to chase after his bitch."

"My wolf and I are content with any bitch who can carry our seed. The womb is but a vessel, it is the fruit which is important."

Fenrir looked like he was going to say something but then changed his mind about it.

"Yeah, well, you were meant to keep a close eye on her, Draco, not just spend time filling her with your seed -- The Mudblood's probably fucking Potter right now, laughing at how easy it was to fool you," mocked Fenrir. "I say you're partly to blame for her escape, so you get to give the good news to the Dark Lord. You're to accompany Nott Junior here and explain to the Dark Lord why he won't be getting the prisoners he asked for today."

Fenrir turned his back on Draco and looked to Gunnolf. "Put together four teams to do a more thorough sweep of the castle grounds. Wait an hour till it's sunrise to have one of the Black Cloaks contact the Ministry. Ask them for a list of the portkey destinations for anyone who portkeyed from Bleidd in the last twelve hours. See how many locations they give us and accordingly assign tracking teams for each destination-"

Draco tuned out the rest of the conversation wondering what the Dark Lord would do to him this time. When it came to the Dark Lord, even being the bearer of bad news could prove detrimental to one's health- something Draco knew Fenrir would be well aware of. He had been so focused on giving Voldemort a target he forgot about Fenrir. Given his relationship with Hermione, he had never expected to walk away unscathed, but he had also not prepared himself for the possibility of having to face the wrath of the Dark Lord once again.

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"I know what I saw, Draco... No matter what your Healer or Mr. Beefcake say, whatever happened to Ginny Weasley was no small accident."

"Mr. Beefcake?" Draco wondered who it could be as it wasn't a name he recognised from anywhere.
"That hunk of flesh that runs the show for Greyback."

"...Gunnolf?"

"Is that what he's called?" asked Theo, adding, "I like it, suits him."

Draco kept quiet as they walked towards the portkey point while Theo continued to make his point.

"The Black Cloak struck me as scatty enough to be bested by even a wandless witch, but if Granger did indeed obliviate him, how strange that he has no memories of the time after Granger left him. Now, it is possible Granger used a Confundus or something more sophisticated that led to his state of confusion... But if Granger abandoned him at the portkey point, how serendipitous that after hours of clueless wandering the man should make it to the castle without running into a single soul till he was found by Mr. Beefcake!

"And yet incredibly, those things aren't half as suspicious as Greyback disappearing- apparently in pursuit of Granger- and returning hours later looking as merry as can be, despite his failure to catch her."

Draco wasn't really worried about Hermione. She was a capable witch with a wand, and though they were not completely bonded he felt confident he would sense if she was in any danger. No, it wasn't concern; it was being separated from her that was tugging at his heart. Still, he couldn't help the snarl that escaped his lips when he thought about Fenrir's suspicious behaviour. What had the alpha really been up to during the time he was gone?

Mistakenly thinking Draco was snarling at him, Theo put his hands up in a gesture of surrender. "Easy there. I hope you realise I'm not the enemy, Draco. I never have been," he assured, holding out the portkey for Draco to grab.

Soon as they arrived Draco placed one hand heavily on Theo's shoulder to halt him. "What's this really about, Theo? Why did the Dark Lord want Granger and the Weaselette?" Draco resorted to the use of old monikers in an attempt to re-establish familiarity.

Theo shook his head. "It's not like the Dark Lord keeps us underlings apprised of the minutiae of his plans, all I know is that it has something to do with Potter destroying another horcrux."

Draco inhaled sharply. He only found out about the cursed object after he failed to protect one of them. "You know about the horcruxes?"

Theo gave him an amused look. "Whatever my father's faults, one thing I'll say for him, that man does not believe in keeping secrets from his family."

One did not need to know Theo to read between the lines, his tone made clear that he did keep secrets from his father.

"So, Potter succeeded yet again..." Draco used a neutral tone, while Theo's demeanour was friendly, it was almost too friendly and jocular for the Theo he remembered.

"Yes. The Dark Lord made a locket horcrux which was safely hidden away in a cave for years. A few days ago Potter started sending him mental images of the locket through that odd link they share. It wasn't so much the image itself but the smugness he could sense in Potter during those moments that made the Dark Lord feel apprehensive enough to go check on his locket... To say he was enraged is an understatement. I haven't seen him this keen for Potter's blood since our school days."

"Well, The Chosen One did always know how to be a thorn in his side," Draco remarked,
maintaining a neutral tone. He would keep his guard up till he figured out exactly where Theo's loyalties really lay.

"Surprisingly so. When he didn't show up for that horror show in Godric's Hollow, I was confident Potter was dead- the kind of saviour complex he suffers from, it would've been impossible for him to resist a rescue attempt if he was still alive... But, I was wrong -- Looks like he finally learnt how this game needs to be played."

Draco doubted Potter would ever learn how to play the game. It was simply not in Potter's nature, on the other hand saving people was. Hermione and Draco were both puzzled over Potter's failure to show up at Godric's Hollow.

"Considering the Weaselette is carrying your father's child, I suppose they simply planned to parade her around- I doubt they would risk a public miscarriage after they've been going on about the birth-rate the way they have. As far as Granger is concerned, it's a mystery why they wanted her since Greyback had already got her a pardon."

Theo's last sentence caught Draco's attention.

"What do you mean Greyback got her a pardon?" he asked.

"It happened in a meeting of the old guard, I only know what father told me. Greyback in his own subservient manner objected to Granger being killed. As a reward Greyback received an hour of the Dark Lord's special treatment for daring to remind him that Granger belonged to the wolves. Father said Granger was to be spared, so I don't know why I was still told to bring her to headquarters."

A low growl escaped Draco's throat. It was absolutely unlike the alpha to risk angering his master and it was definitely unlike him to take risks to save someone else's hide. Fenrir would only wish to secure Hermione's safety if he stood to gain something from keeping her alive. And if Fenrir had endured torture for Hermione's sake, instead of being all cheery, he would have gone on a rampage soon as he discovered she had given him the slip. Added up, this didn't look good at all.

But if Fenrir did capture Hermione, why didn't he bring her back to Bleidd and where could he have taken her instead? If Voldemort had ordered that Hermione be brought to Headquarters, would the alpha be ballsy enough to defy his master and take her anywhere else or was he more likely to have done exactly as commanded? Everything he knew about Fenrir Greyback told him the latter was more likely.

It was a good thing they were already at Headquarters because snooping around seemed like the only way he would find out if Hermione was being held there. Draco wished he could confront Fenrir and shake the answers out of him, but even if he was strong enough to challenge the alpha he doubted he was strong enough to throw the alpha bond. No, he needed to play it smart. There were times that required the boldness of the wolf and then there were times, like now, that called for the deceptiveness of a snake.

She was losing time. Hermione looked up and realised someone was talking to her but her brain felt like it was full of wool. With great effort she managed to focus on the voice till her brain was able to identify it as belonging to Fenrir. Drugged and sapped of all energy, she could only make out bits and pieces of what he was saying.

"- Lord thinks I'm wasting time -- ordered to breed you -- doesn't know about mate bonds -- stupid fucking mate bond -- make Draco pay for -- going to wish he was dead -- what's wrong with you -- just doesn't make sense -- why is there no alpha bond when there's -- can't command you like this --
lazy fuckin' cunt -- dirty, stinky Mudblood -- lying in your filth -- am I supposed to get hard? -- full moon in two nights -- just have to turn you for now -- command you as your sire and your alpha -- should please the Dark Lord -- break the mate bond -- should be able to carry my pups then-

Hermione tried to fix her eyes on the blurry shape of Fenrir in the dim light, it was only when she felt ropes of hot come splash over her did she realise he had once again jerked off on her and left.

Chapter End Notes

I regret the chapter isn't as satisfying for the nearly two week wait time, but it is what it is. I want to finish Unfinished Business first (it's an itch I need to scratch at the moment), so the next chapter of Wolf's Mate will be posted after two weeks. Thank you for being patient and sticking around with the story. To everyone newly following the story, welcome.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It was incredible the difference three years could make, thought Draco as he walked the halls of the reformed Ministry.

"You probably haven't been here in a while," stated Theo, correctly guessing Draco's thoughts, "Things have changed a bit."

Draco nodded. At first glance it looked the same as always, a bunch of bureaucrats going about their business, but scratch the surface and-

"Foxes guarding the henhouse," muttered Theo voicing Draco's thoughts.

It was just the two of them when they entered one of the Ministry elevators. Theo stood at a distance from Draco within the confined space; he faced the doors with his back to Draco. If not for his lupine sense of smell, Draco wouldn’t have noticed the subtle movement made as Theo discreetly uncorked a vial and took a quick sip. Having excelled at potions in school he was able to recognise the potion the instant he caught a whiff of it.

The elevator dinged when it reached their floor and Theo turned towards Draco with a bright smile, gesturing for him to exit first.

"Where are we headed to?" Draco asked, making sure to get a good look at Theo while walking past him.

Till now Draco’s thoughts were too preoccupied with Hermione and pack affairs to spot the evidence in plain sight. Theo wore expertly applied glamour charms under his eyes, the caps of his teeth and on the bed of his nails, most likely to hide the tell-tale signs of long term addiction to the Elixir of Euphoria. Suddenly Theo’s unnaturally cheery disposition made sense.

*What have you done, old friend? How dirty did you get your hands before your conscience began to gnaw away at you?* Draco thought to himself.

In the shadow of the rising Death Eater Empire, Draco had discovered his conscience despite being relatively bloodthirsty when compared to the pacifist Theo. Though both wizards had believed in the superiority of Purebloods, Theo didn’t wish to see others exterminated or even segregated, claiming that even the non-pures served their purpose within their society.

*"We’re outnumbered, Draco."

*"Yes. Their kind breeds in the gutters and spreads through our world like a disease. We need to cut out the sickness."

*"No, Draco. We’re outnumbered. The ruling class usually is… That’s what we need to do, rule over them. We don’t need to kill the Halfbloods and Mudbloods; we just need to subjugate them."

To Draco’s fifteen year old self, Theo’s solution had sounded far more complex and far less satisfactory than his own solution of throwing Avadas at whoever they considered unworthy. Neither boy could have imagined that both forms of punishment would become a reality in the future with the Halfbloods enslaved and the Muggleborns murdered.
Thinking back to those old conversations, Draco could now recognise that as Pureblood nobility they were never given an opportunity to think for themselves. As children they had only parroted the words they had been indoctrinated into believing were true. If the hatred had originated in his heart his wand would never have failed to cast the killing spell and Theo would have been one of the bureaucrats in the Ministry drafting the laws that legalised slavery, and not a low ranking Death Eater.

Draco looked at Theo’s smiling face and wondered how bleak things had to have gotten for Theo that even with the assistance of the cheering potion a few bright smiles and some friendly banter was the extent of its effect on him.

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Hermione moaned and tossed about. With her hands bound behind her back and her ankles linked, no matter how much she struggled she was unable to stimulate herself to an orgasm. Her breasts were heavy and hurt from all the unexpressed milk, her nipples hardened nubs, painfully sensitive. All she could do was helplessly rub her thighs together and wait for someone to come.

\textbf{No one comes… especially not me}, she thought wryly.

\textit{Draco’s sense of humour has definitely rubbed off on me.}

\textit{Mmmm…Remember something else of his rubbing against me too.}

\textit{My mate’s so sexy… fucks me so good.}

\textit{He’d hit the spot if he was here.}

Hermione imagined Draco touching her breasts, his large hands kneading and moulding the swollen curves. She imagined his long fingers thumbing her nipples as he teased her. His skilled fingers would slide down to tease her clit, making sure she was good and wet before pushing her neck to the ground so her cheek was pressed against the mud floor. Her position would be similar to what it was right now, except her hips would remain invitingly in the air.

His hands would slide along her flanks and stroke her buttocks to ease the aches in her muscles before the head of his cock parted the lips of her labia and pushed inside her. At first he would shallowly fuck her, bringing her closer to the edge till he sensed she was ready. He would then grab her by the waist, pulling her hips back against him as he thrust forward to fully penetrate her in a manner so satisfying she would climax screaming his name.

With a final cry of frustration, Hermione came; her back arching into a bow -head, chest and feet lifted off the ground- as she experienced a mild orgasm from rubbing her mound against the floor. Her body remained locked in position momentarily till it became too painful to hold and she flopped completely to the ground again.

She was breathing in short shallow gasps but the brief climax helped to somewhat clear her head of the overwhelming lust that came with the potion the elf kept feeding her. As a trained member, first of the DA and then the Order of the Phoenix, she was used to making quick assessments of any situation and her current one appeared to be as bad as it could get.

Hermione was without a wand, bound, injured, exhausted, famished and drugged in a foreign country, in an unknown location protected by the Fidelius charm. Her warden was a house elf loyal to Fenrir. She had no idea how much time had passed since Fenrir last visited her or how many days before the full moon, she only knew that she couldn’t let Fenrir be the one to turn her.
While her head felt a little clear she needed to try and move. She tried to gather her strength by taking several deep breaths, but the combined stench of her waste products along with the dried sweat and cum made the pit of her stomach tingle disconcertingly as she tried to breathe through her nose. She would have puked if there was anything in her stomach to throw up.

Hermione rolled on to her side and using her elbow for leverage pushed herself up into a sitting position with her knees bent and feet tucked under her bum. Her fatigued body didn't appreciate the added strain on her calves and thighs as she first moved into a kneeling position then rocking backwards on the balls of her feet to jump into a squat. She could feel the muscle burn, but instead of crying she tried to muster her rage as she stood up. If there was any hope for a spark of her magic to cast a wandless spell, she would need to tap into the frustration and anger she was feeling over her incarceration.

The room was small and empty. A small flight of stairs went up to the door and a single window high above one of the walls illuminated the room. There was nothing she could use as a weapon but perhaps she could wear down the bindings on her hands by rubbing them against the end of the handrail. It was a long shot, but it was better than simply lying around in her own shit and piss waiting for Fenrir to return and rape her.

It was only a few minutes of rubbing her bindings before she felt the tingling in her clitoris again. Hermione closed her eyes and shook her head, feeling the sweat-soaked ends of her hair slapping her shoulders.

Her body shuddered, and she felt trickles of moisture along the inside of her thighs. At first she thought she had wet herself again, but then she comprehended where the moisture was coming from. She was hornier than she'd ever been in her life, than she'd ever thought possible.

"What..." she croaked as she backed into the wall, unable to get any other words out.

No, no, no... Not again! I've got to keep my head clear.

It was a dirty trick, but an effective one, keeping her feeling far too horny to plot an escape.

"Sweet Morgana," she whispered, feeling the wet patch on her chest as her breasts began to leak. It wasn’t long before she lost control of her thoughts once more, focusing only on the ache between her thighs.

Draco sat by himself in the anteroom as he waited to be called upon. The Dark Lord liked to hold court like some feudal overlord so Draco was left alone when Theo went ahead to request an audience for them. That was some hours ago. He knew they were deliberately making him wait so the anticipation left him a nervous wreck by the time he was finally called in.

Thankfully, the day had not been a complete waste. Familiar with some of the games the Dark Lord liked to play, he had slipped away early on to make his enquiries around the Ministry. Fortunately for him, most of the people working at the Ministry weren't aware of his current status as a creature but they were well aware of his name and family status. From what he gathered, there were no Order members currently imprisoned within the Ministry and none who had even passed through in a long time.

He was considering people he could question and places he should check, when a flash of heat and arousal washed over him. If not for the fact that he was alone, he would’ve suspected someone had jinxed him. It took him a few moments to recognise the feeling had come from Hermione. She must
have been incredibly aroused for him to pick up on it.

“The Mudblood’s probably fucking Potter right now, laughing at how easy it was to fool you.”

Draco growled, recalling the words Fenrir had mocked him with.

No, they're just friends!

Hermione didn’t want Potter that way. No, his mate must have been thinking of him for Draco to have sensed her need.

Part of him felt tormented that his mate needed him and he wasn’t there to satisfy her while the part that had worried about her safety relaxed a little. Ever since she left nearly twenty four hours ago the only thing he had sensed from her was her arousal, which he hoped meant she was safe somewhere.

There was no reason for him to believe that Hermione was in danger, except for Fenrir’s suspicious behaviour, which could be explained away by the fact that the alpha was a really creepy man who was always acting shifty.

Draco wondered what had his witch feeling so aroused. It was his birthday in four days and he had planned to celebrate it with his new family. In the day it would be just the four of them picnicking in the woods followed with some alone time with Hermione. He had deliberately failed to mention his birthday to her to put her on the spot. Then when she asked him what he wanted as his gift he was going to hand her a skein of red silk ribbon and ask her to get creative when she wrapped herself in it. He could just imagine the blush followed by the twinkle in her eyes when she heard his suggestion.

He hoped Hermione and the Order would work out some way they could be together. Honestly, after having worried about her being injured by Ginny and then captured by Fenrir, he just wanted to be together with her again, and didn’t care about being an outcast anymore. Maybe with his mate and his pups, his mind would survive the separation from the pack.

Draco shook his head. Being an outcast wasn’t the real issue here. The real danger was to the lives of his sons who along with Hermione and himself would be put into the crosshairs of Lucius, Fenrir, the Dark Lord and an army of Death Eaters the second they believed he had switched sides.

His father had taught him as a child that one needed to keep their enemies within sight. Even if by some miracle the Order accepted Draco and his pups, leaving to join Hermione was not an option. At the same time he didn't want her to return and accept Fenrir’s alpha bond.

Not for the first time, Draco thought that things would be easier if Fenrir wasn’t their alpha. Hermione could return, be mated with him and safe if the pack had a new leader- someone who had the pack’s best interests at heart, didn’t believe in the Death Eater cause and was deceptive enough to convince the Dark Lord he was still a loyal follower. Such a leader would solve all his current problems in a hurry.

*TRIGGER WARNING*

Fenrir was smiling at her expectantly. Through her drugged stupor Hermione tried to figure out what his expression meant. Her body felt limp like a ragdoll when he grabbed her hair and dragged her into a standing position.

Well, fuck this, she thought tired of his sick game. She tilted her chin and stared into his eyes
rebelliously.

His fearsome face contorted into an ugly smile before Fenrir held out a potion in his hand and snapped his fingers.

At the sound the elf popped into the room holding a familiar looking bassinet. Hermione craned her neck as far as she could and gasped seeing her babies peacefully asleep in there. She tried to get to her pups but between Fenrir's grip on her hair and the bindings on her wrists and ankles it was impossible.

He drew her back two steps further away from her sons and dangled the vial of potion in front of her. His expectations were quite clear.

Hermione mentally cursed the fertility potion. It would have hurt Severus to know the manner in which Voldemort and his followers were using his creation to forward their evil agenda.

Two fat drops rolled down her eyes as she squeezed them shut, and obediently opened her mouth in acceptance of her fate. She swallowed the potion Fenrir poured down her throat and knew she was given her a particularly potent dose when her whole body started heating up within minutes. Her skin felt so sensitive even the fabric of her own clothes brushing against her skin was stimulating.

When Hermione opened her eyes and looked around, she noticed the elf and her sons were gone and the only other person in the room a naked Fenrir Greyback. The alpha wasted no time tearing away at her clothes, pausing only to *evanesco* the layer of filth on her. He pushed her face down to the ground and put an arm under her to pull her up so her arse was in the air. The position wasn't different from what she had imagined Draco doing to her minutes, days, hours- she couldn't say how long- ago. With one hand keeping her face pressed into the mud floor in a show of dominance, he took his cock and thrust into her hard till he was balls deep inside her.

Hermione winced, unable to hide the disgust on her face when his cock entered her. Despite how turned on she was, his entry felt painfully intrusive. The mate bond tugged at her making her feel sicker with every thrust even as her body pushed back onto his cock due to the lust induced by the potion.

Though her first time with Draco had involved him roughly fucking her in his wolf form without her consent, at the time he was only acting on his biological instincts and, unlike Fenrir, wasn't deliberately taking delight in hurting her. While Draco was the one who had intercourse with her, it was Voldemort and Fenrir she held responsible for her rape. Compared to that, Fenrir was brutally pounding into her with no mind to her pleasure or comfort, grunting in approval any time she cried out in pain. There was no nuance to what was happening here, Fenrir was raping her.

A few more violent thrusts and the alpha released his seed inside her with a howl. He rolled off her and promptly fell asleep with no thought to her need. Cunt throbbing, the rest of her still sore from her previous injuries as well as Fenrir's rough handling she curled up into a ball and fell asleep crying. Her mind was so clouded by the lust she couldn't even remember the reason for her tears.

Hermione had only just begun to nod off when she felt her thighs being pried apart and a heavy weight settle on her. She was on her back, her bound wrists beneath her and Fenrir was inside the loop formed by her legs connected at her ankles, so her feet rested against his back. The whole position made it impossible for her slender body to roll away from Fenrir's enormous form. And if she pulled up her knees to ease the discomfort of having him squeezed between her legs, it would result in her feet drawing him closer to her.

"A good bitch presents her wet cunt when an alpha shows an interest in her," he snarled, nearly
crushing her collar bone as he gripped one shoulder and squeezed. He used his free hand to take his cock in his hand and shove it inside it her, but the effects of the potion had dulled and without her arousal he struggled to penetrate her.

Growling in frustration, he rubbed his cock against her entrance in an attempt to arouse her, but only made Hermione feel sick to her stomach.

"Work on showing me some gratitude, Mudblood. I may decide to spare your pups if you made an effort to please me."

Hermione looked at him in confusion. She had complied with his wishes, what more did he expect of her?

"You may have been clever at school, but you're just a dumb cunt, aren't you?" he asked snidely. Then, possibly deciding he had enough of the foreplay, Fenrir spat on the head of his cock and roughly shoved himself inside her. Hermione bit back the scream of pain, hoping he'd get bored and finish quicker.

"You're young; bet you could pop several litters before you're useless. So what need have I to raise Malfoy's bastards?" he asked conversationally as his cock pistoned in and out of her.

Hermione's panic grew as her brain finally understood what he was implying.

"There's no need for you to hurt my sons, Fenrir. If you think they'll be a burden to you in some way you could return them to the pack," she implored.

Fenrir made a sound, something between agrunt and a chuckle.

"Pack's going to be going through some changes soon. Doubt anyone willing to side with Malfoy will be long for this world."

Delighting in her turmoil he fucked her harder and savagely bit down on her neck. She jumped, startled by both the fiery pain shooting through her body as well as the surprise of the unexpected action. He was trying to mark her. Trying to slow her breathing, she lay very still and took his abuse, hoping her compliance would make him spare her babies.

"You will accept me as your alpha and do as I command?"

He was asserting his dominance as alpha, giving her no choice but to submit or risk having her throat torn open.

"Yes," she whispered, keeping her head down and eyes lowered like all the omegas she had observed at Bleidd.

"You will submit to me in all matters?"

When she was slow to respond he brought his hand within her line of sight and readied himself to snap his fingers.

"Yes," she cried out. "Just, please don't hurt my babies."

Pleased with either her submission or how broken she sounded, Fenrir bit into her a little harder making her whimper in pain despite her resolve not to show him how much it hurt. He speeded up his movements shoving his cock all the way inside her battered passage before finally climaxing inside her.
Fenrir had made sure to violently fuck her and dump his cum inside her two more times before he finally left. Hermione didn't care. She stopped caring at some point, her only concern now the wellbeing of her sons.

House elves were known to be good with babies. She hoped the elf was taking good care of her boys. Her heart ached when she thought of Wilbur's angelic face and Martin's angry pout. She hoped Fenrir had used elf magic to get them here, as travelling by portkey was considered unsafe for infants.

Hermione did not know how much time had passed since Fenrir left. At some point there was food lying on the ground near her head. Since she remained bound, she had no option but to feed like an animal by sticking her face into the bowl. She didn't even think about how degrading it was to eat this way; she needed to eat to get her strength up. The food was too little and too watery, but maybe that would be a good thing; she wasn't looking forward to lying in her own faeces till the next time Fenrir showed up to fuck her.

The food must have contained either the fertility or some other variant of a lust potion going by her body's responses. She curled into a ball, gritting her teeth and determined to fight off the feeling. Raping her was one thing but Fenrir made a big mistake when he threatened her babies. Never before did Hermione desire to end anyone's life the way she did Fenrir's now.

She didn't know what was going on with the pack, though Fenrir's words did not bode well. With the twins gone, Draco had to suspect something was wrong. And he would very likely be coming for them soon. She couldn't wait for him to show up. And when he did, together, they would rip Fenrir Greyback apart.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was on the shorter side so I was able to finish earlier than expected. I can't say when I'll post the next one as I'm travelling the next few weeks. Depending on how my meetings go, I could either end up with a lot of free time or none.

I couldn't respond to all the comments on the prev chapter... not without some spoilers.

Abt Cora- Consider Hermione's actions from Cora's viewpoint, then consider Cora's own actions and the things she feels guilty about. Her unwillingness to cut Hermione some slack is because she's projecting. This may be a good time to warn you (in case it's your first time reading one of my fics), I will fail your expectations of an HP story or any story with the kind of themes this story has.

Unfinished Business was completed a few days ago. It's pervy but fluffy (don't let the tags scare you off).
"Ah, young Draco! It's been ages since we last set eyes on you. I must say you're looking a whole lot better than the last time we saw you."

"Looking a whole lot whole too compared to the last time," added Bellatrix with a snicker.

"Ah-ah, Bella, don't be rude. He was your family after all."

Normally, Bellatrix looked about as different from her sister, Narcissa, as night from day; yet when the dark haired witch stared down her nose at Draco with a pinched look on her face like she'd smelled a rat, the familiar expression on her face brought to mind the one member of his previous family Draco still cared about.

As discretely as possible, Draco looked around hoping to catch a glimpse of his mother. She was the only part of his former life he truly missed anymore. It didn't matter that, as far as he knew, she had made no attempt to keep in touch; she was still his mother. Right up until the point Draco chose to join the Death Eaters, Narcissa had done her best to shelter him. She had been his champion throughout the years and was the only person who dared to try to intervene the night the Dark Lord ordered his followers to turn Draco's body into tenderised meat and throw him to the werewolves. But even if his mother had turned her back on him that night, Draco could not willingly distance himself from her emotionally the way he had Lucius.

Like most young boys, growing up, Draco had idolised his father and desired to one day become a powerful and influential wizard like him. However, while Draco had felt a sense of duty towards Lucius he had loved his mother. His mother who was always there to cheer him up with a boxful of his favourite treats anytime he was upset. His mother who would tuck him in at night and read him tales long after his father had decided he was too old for such things. His mother who patched up his battered ego with her kind words anytime he lost in a quidditch match to Potter or got outdone in yet another test by the 'Mudblood'. His mother who always snuck into his bedroom late at night to apply healing salve to his wounds after his father was done disciplining him. No, no matter the years apart and what Hermione had told him of her treatment of Ginny, Neville and whoever else, it didn't matter to him, he still cared about his mother.

Draco tried to suppress the disappointment he felt when several visual sweeps of the room confirmed that his mother wasn't present. He also noted Lucius' absence, though he couldn't be sure if that was a good thing or not.

He did his best to tune out the discussion going on about him. Having spent enough time around the Dark Lord, Draco knew they were simply toying with him and seeing if he would rise to the bait. He was smart enough to accept his own limitations and recognise that a direct fight with Voldemort was not in the cards for him, he just needed to survive whatever was coming next. So, ignoring protests from his wolf Draco assumed a submissive pose with his eyes lowered and mouth shut as the people around him attempted to taunt him to action.

"- Draco as a wolf. Wouldn't you like to see just what kind of creature your nephew turns into?"

Draco's attention was drawn to the conversation again. Were they planning a visit to Bleidd during the full moon? It didn't seem likely.
"Lord, please do not insult me by suggesting this filthy beast has any connection with my family. The only thing I want to see of him, are his insides as he bleeds."

Voldemort steepled his fingers beneath his chin feigning deep thought before he smiled indulgently. "I don't see why you can't get your wish. If I recall correctly you never did visit Wolf Castle to see any of the experiments we did on his kind- quite resilient that lot, strong. You could play with one of them for days without healing them before they finally dropped dead."

Bellatrix's eyes twinkled with mischief when she looked up at Voldemort. "Really, my Lord?"

"Of course, pet. It was unfair of me to leave you out of all the fun. But what better way to make it up to you than letting you extract your pound of flesh from one who has brought much disgrace to your noble family? Originally, it was my plan to make young Draco fornicate with the Mudblood before the public during the full moon. It would help the people see the Mudbloods for the sub-humans they are. But, more importantly, I would've knocked the smugness out of Potter by showing him that the brains of the Order is barely good enough to be a whore for one of my dogs... However, thanks to someone's negligence" -he looked towards Draco, his red eyes looking more sinister than usual- "I'm a prisoner short and in need of a main event for tomorrow's revel. Instead of having to stomach the sight of beasts rutting I trust you to provide us better entertainment testing the limits of Draco's new abilities."

Draco blinked his eyes open. His mouth felt dry and his body hurt- nothing new there, he thought. It took him a few seconds to remember where he was as he pulled on the chains that had him bound and hanging from the low ceiling of his prison cell. Observing the sliver of moonlight filtering into his cell through an opening outside his range of vision thanks to his lupine instincts he could tell that the following night there'd be a full moon.

I can't have been unconscious for more than a few hours. Guess I recovered a lot quicker this round.

Ever since his audience with Voldemort the previous evening the Death Eaters had taken turns abusing him with curses till he passed out. It started out with the standard Imperio but once they realised how ineffective it was on a werewolf they moved on to the Cruciatius. Some amused themselves by mixing up their Crucios with a tickling or leg-locking charm. They would toy with him till he fainted from the pain caused and each time he'd wake up bound in heavy metal chains in the same prison cell. Yet for everything done to him thus far Draco knew the worst was yet to come because his aunt and the Dark Lord had yet to turn their wands on him.

Something kept niggling at Draco every time he was awake; having spent his time either unconscious or getting tortured he was unable to pinpoint and say what it was exactly, just a general sense of something being wrong or terribly off. In his worry his thoughts immediately turned to his mate and his sons.

I just need to survive the revel, and then I can return to my family.

You could fight, insisted his wolf, but Draco knew that fighting the Dark Lord and escaping from the Ministry was not an option.

No, if I fight or escape they'll go after my pups. I just have to endure whatever the noseless one has planned for me.

Knowing what the sadists in the crowd liked, Draco deliberately chose not to dodge or fend off any of the curses thrown at him. He knew they'd quickly grow bored with him if attacking him was no
better than hitting an inanimate target. The lack of sport served to frustrate the Death Eaters who became more creative with their cruelty in their attempt to get a reaction out of him. While this strategy on Draco's part meant that he suffered more serious injuries and greater pain it also conveniently resulted in him getting knocked unconscious far more quickly than the Death Eaters would've liked. As a werewolf he already possessed remarkable healing abilities so the respite offered to him during the times he was passed out gave his body the time it needed to repair itself. As painful as this process was it was currently the best strategy he had to conserve his energy. He knew it was going to take all his strength to make it through the full moon, especially considering his aunt had already expressed her desire to see his insides and watch him bleed.

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Once more Draco awoke with that unsettling feeling of something being wrong. Yes, his body hurt from the abuses he had suffered but there was something different this time. It wasn't just a physical pain, accompanying that persisting sense of something being off was a hollow ache in his chest that could not have been caused by any of the curses he had been subjected to. He looked around wondering what could be causing him to feel this way.

Having visited the place plenty of times through the years, initially in his capacity as a friend of Theo and later as one of the Death Eaters, he instantly recognised the grand hall of Nott Mansion soon as he opened his eyes. The Death Eaters assembled wore their black robes and silver masks. As far as Draco could tell Voldemort and his inner circle had yet to arrive and among those present no one seemed to take any kind of interest in him as he lay on the floor in the centre of the hall.

He looked up and down and all around, but nothing in what he saw explained that feeling gnawing away at his gut. He closed his eyes and took a couple of deep breaths. The last round of curses had been particularly painful. The Death Eaters having finally caught on to his plan changed tactics, drawing out his torment with curses that left his body twitching in agony but careful to never go far enough to make him lose consciousness. The last session had gone on for so long that despite the time he spent out cold afterwards he had yet to sufficiently recover from the resulting injuries. Eyes closed, he focused on his breathing willing his magic to heal his broken body. He wasn't as good with wandless healing spells as he was with wandless offensive magic spells.

*Luna, help me. Give me just enough strength to see me through the night.*

*TRIGGER WARNING*

Draco found himself immobilised, its purpose not to prevent an escape rather to prevent any sudden movements on his part. The French windows running the length of one side of the grand hall showed a view of the outside- it was still a few hours away from moonrise, but inside the festivities were already in full swing. For a long time the revellers ignored Draco who remained positioned in the centre of the hall on his knees, suspended by his arms. Occasionally someone or the other would throw a hex his way, nothing serious, just the kind of thing needed to keep him awake and alert.

Though his body was frozen into place he could still move his head. Around him he witnessed a handful of Halfblood prisoners getting raped and some Muggle looking individuals being tortured and then killed. He knew that wasn't to be his fate today, they only meant to terrorise him by making him watch. Little did they know that he'd felt greater terror watching their sick games when he sat amongst them than he did in his current state of vulnerability.

Draco had managed to tune out the sight and sounds of the grotesque tableau that surrounded him to concentrate instead on the source of that uneasy feeling he had experienced on and off since the
previous day.

*What is it? What's wrong?*

*Something missing?*

*Someone in-

Draco's thoughts were cut off by his scream of pain. Someone had unexpectedly stabbed him in the tailbone, but his cry of pain went unheard as someone had cast a Silencio on him at some point.

"Oh my, a knife, Bella...isn't that a bit *Muggle*?"

Voldemort's mocking tone rang clear through the fog of Draco's pain.

"I beg to differ, my Lord." Draco heard Bellatrix speak and realised she was immediately behind him. "Why waste magic on beasts? Besides, since he belonged to my family, I figured the situation demanded a more personal touch."

"You're going to get your hands dirty, pet," Voldemort declared from his throne like seat. Draco could see him only if he turned his head to the right.

"It's for a good cause, my Lord," claimed Bellatrix.

"Which is?"

"To entertain you, of course," she stated with childish simplicity.

Draco felt the knife slice through skin and sinew up the length of his spine. He screamed again as he felt the knife cut across his back. Till now he had rated the Sectumsempra from Potter and the night he was turned as being his most painful experiences. However from the way Bellatrix had started things off he grew apprehensive that he was going to undergo his worst experience yet. Going by the looks on the faces on the faces of the unmasked revellers whatever it was that Bellatrix had done to his back was seen as shocking by even Death Eater standards.

He could clearly make out the mutterings of a few Death Eaters who must have had a good view of his back.

"Look at that!"

"That's not her first time with a knife for sure."

"Can see his spine, ribs and all."

"That is some clean knife work."

"Mmhmm. Haven't seen such skilful cuts even with a slicing spell."

"What in Hades-- What's she planning to do with the axe?"

"Now, now, pet. You don't want to end the fun too soon by using an axe on him," chided Voldemort gently.

Draco didn't get a chance to think about what was said. He screeched in silent agony as he felt what must have been the axe connect with his back. He was given no time to recover before he experienced another blow close to the first but on the other side of his spine.
"I'm not sure where you're going with this, Bella," said Voldemort, "but it's definitely different from the usual."

"Just you watch, my Lord. I plan to impress you with my handiwork before the night is over."

Draco received two more blows similar to the previous ones only a little higher up his back. This time the pain became too much and he immediately passed out. He could not have been unconscious for more than a couple of minutes because when he came to again everyone appeared to be in exactly the same position as before.

"I thought you said they were tough, my Lord," whinged Bellatrix.

"He's still alive, isn't he?"

"Yes, but I had to stop just to rennervate him."

"Don't pout, Bella. You know this is more than you could do to a Muggle or Wizard."

There was a burning sensation in his back that would've made Draco twist in agony if not for the spell holding him frozen in place; he was almost grateful for it as any movement on his part would only result in further trauma to his flesh.

"Are you literally applying salt on his wounds, Bella?" asked Voldemort sounding amused.

He could hear the glee in Bellatrix's voice as she heartily said yes.

"But there is also a practical purpose, my Lord. See, he's more alert now."

It was true; the fiery pain was keeping him awake and making him more aware of the throbbing pain in his back. Over the next few minutes- a span of time which felt like ages to Draco- Bellatrix alternated between using her axe on him and salting his wounds. All other activity around him had come to a standstill at some point with all eyes riveted to the show being put on by Bellatrix. When she paused, in the ensuing silence Draco was able to hear the distinct sound of Bellatrix's sigh of contentment which was followed by awestruck whispers from some of the Death Eaters present in the room.

"She's severed every rib from his spine!"

"I've never seen anything like it."

"I've never even heard of anything like this."

"It's like he has wings made of bones."

He had expected his punishment to be horrible but with moonrise mere minutes away Draco now doubted if he would make it out alive. Transformations were painful as it is, but in his current state...

No! This can't be how it all ends.

Instead of dwelling on the pain, he allowed his mind to retreat to the safety of his memories, one in particular: It was a warm afternoon when Draco spotted Hermione sitting under the cool shade of a tree in the courtyard. Wilbur was cradled in her arms while Martin lay in the bassinet, both sons peacefully asleep, Hermione herself looked drowsy. She must have sensed him approaching because she looked up towards him. He watched her sleepy eyes brighten up and the corners of her mouth turn upwards to greet him with a warm smile that made his heart do a little flip in his chest.
Draco desperately clung to that image of his family as he felt Bellatrix's hand tug on one of his organs.

"Bloody fuck!"

"She just- she just-"

"His lungs, fuck. Are those his lungs?"

"Watch, just shut up and watch. She isn't cutting them."

"Those are his fucking lungs she's tearing out!"

"No, she's just repositioning them... I think."

The whispers were silenced by the sound of Voldemort speaking.

"Bella, I can't decide if you've had some secret Healer training or if you've been moonlighting as a butcher. I refuse to believe this is your first time," commented Voldemort.

"I may have practiced on some animals... Maybe that's why it's so easy with him; he's also just an animal now, isn't he?"

Voldemort hummed in approval.

"There," said Bellatrix with pride in her voice.

"Do you have a name for it?"

"Not really, but with his lungs and ribs spread out on his back like that don't they remind you of wings? I think he looks like a slimy bloody bird," she said. Then after a pause added, "A bloody owl."

"Yes, you're right. And the name does have a certain ring to it."

"Ooh, moon's out. We'll now get to watch an owl turn into a wolf," said Bellatrix letting out a howl of laughter.

Draco who was only still awake due to the salt burning his raw flesh struggled to breathe thanks to the pain and whatever the fuck Bellatrix had done to his lungs. He could feel the transformation come on and thanked Luna that unlike other members of his pack, his was always swift. As he transformed he felt the immobilising and silencing spells fade away so his mutilated body fell to the ground whimpering in pain in his wolf form.

"Ugh! That was an anti-climax," said Bellatrix and moved away.

Once Bellatrix had left his side a few masked Death Eaters approached Draco's prone form, most likely to get a closer look.

"Show's over, I guess."

"Absolutely. No fun in watching the slow death of a wounded dog."

"You think he's gonna die?"

"Can't say for sure... their kind are pretty strong."

"She just- she just-"
"The Dark Lord would've killed him if they wanted him dead. This was just playing."

"Yeah. Someone will fix him up, just like last time."

"Did they really fix him up last time?"

"Sure. How else would he still be alive if they didn't?"

"I heard Narcissa Malfoy had a hand in it."

"Well, she's not here tonight."

"Heard that was on purpose."

"The Dark Lord?"

"No, Bellatrix. Didn't want anyone spoiling her fun."

"That witch is crazy."

"I'm just glad she's on our side."

"Tell her that. Ever fought near her in battle? She doesn't care who she hits."

"Careful, you fool. Don't know who could hear and report you."

"Mmhmm. Trust our side even lesser than I do the other these days."

The crowd having grown bored of watching the dying wolf moved on to other activities while Draco lay there, stuck somewhere between the living and the dead.

Chapter End Notes

So chps 21 and 22 were supposed to go back and forth between Draco and Hermione giving an account of what was happening to them right up to the full moon. However at the time of posting the prev chp I only had H's part written so 21 ended up being just her, and now 22 ended up being solely Draco. Hope this doesn't make the timeline of events too confusing to follow.

Thank you to those still reading and posting encouraging words. I know the content of the last few chapters has been tough to read, but I think once the story is completed many of you will agree that it fits.

I was able to write this chapter as I'm back home for a week. Couldn't work on it while away. I'll be gone again for a few more weeks so I can't commit to a date for the next chapter. Sorry. I know how annoying it is to be engrossed in a story and then have it drag out in this manner. Can't be helped though.
"Your body is pathetically weak, but you'd still make a good wolf."

Hermione ignored Fenrir, continuing to grit her teeth and resist the urge to touch herself or Fenrir. It was harder now that her hands were finally free. She felt lust but a part of her brain, now free from the effects of the potion last fed to her hours earlier, reminded her that it wasn't Fenrir she wanted. She tried to distract herself by rubbing at her wrists and arms to improve the blood circulation in them after all the time they had been bound. Touching herself, even her wrists, felt so good she was tempted to touch other parts of her or better yet reach out to the half naked male across from her. A part of her wanting nothing more than to ride the cock of the male across from her.

No, not him!

It was hard to think clearly through the lust but that annoying voice in her head insisted he wasn't the right one. This male- Fenrir her brain supplied- was bad. She longed for, ached even, for another. She struggled to remember who it was, but couldn't. She was just too damned weak and tired and horny to keep all her thoughts straight. In that moment all Hermione wanted was a good hard fuck followed by a week of doing nothing but sleep. Her stomach twisted painful reminding her that sometime between the fucking and sleeping she needed to eat as well.

No!

No, Hermione remembered groggily. She needed to escape, get away. The full moon would be out soon and that would be dangerous for her. She couldn't remember why just then only that it was important for her to get away.

"The Dark Lord wanted me to turn you and bring you to him tonight. They're having some fun with Draco" -Hermione's ears perked up at the name, her heart beating a little faster as she remembered soft grey eyes and a smirk- "and wanted to bring you in to add to the festivities. But, I have my own plans. Plans that will serve me better."

Fenrir leaned back against the wall, closed his eyes and sniffed at the air. She was sure he could smell her arousal. It was pretty hard to miss and with his werewolf senses impossible to ignore. She watched as he reached down, pushing past the waistband of his pants, and gripped his cock. He opened his eyes and having caught her staring smiled at her as he began to slowly stroke himself. A long sheath covered his cock, a red tip emerging as he squeezed and pulled at it. As his fingers worked their way around his shaft it began to swell and slide free of the sheath drawing a moan of pleasure from his lips.

"I'm bored of Bleidd. Don't get me wrong, it was great when it was just us but now the place is practically crawling with Death Eaters and Black Cloaks. Not a problem in itself, mind. Wouldn't be a problem at all if those arseholes learnt to show some respect. I mean, I'm the alpha of the biggest, no" -he shook his head- "the only pack left in Great Britain and I'm one of the Dark Lord's most trusted followers. But those fucking cunts still act like they're better than me!"

Fenrir let out an angry growl before he closed his eyes and inhaled noisily. He turned his attention back to his cock, stroking it till his breathing sounded normal again.
"I'm wasting my time with that lot. I need a fresh start, my own lands... This place is perfect. The locals are neutral in the war, though the Dark Lord is trying to woo them to his side with the fertility potion but it's a lost cause, it is. See, the people here are bloody skilled when it comes to magic- they haven't needed wands to cast spells since Merlin walked among us- but completely retarded in other ways. They have no Ministry or anything like that, just a bunch of tribes scattered around the country, each led by their own leader. Not that different from what it was like with the weres before the Pack Wars... As things stand, it'll be tough for any outsider to make a go at an alliance with the whole of their magical community. Which means no snooty Death Eaters or pesky Order members running around." The last sentence was said with a smile that reached all the way to his eyes.

"The imperius is good as useless on the locals; Nott and his teams found that out first hand. So fancy pants Malfoy suggested they give diplomacy a try. That's when they thought to offer the fertility potion- turns out there's been a fall in the number of magical folk the world over. This here" -Fenrir pointed to the structure they stood within- "is the only Death Eater base built in the country so far. The Dark Lord thinks long term, so he likes to go after the schools- catch 'em young and all that. This spot was picked for the base because of its proximity to Uagadou. Catch a look at the Mountains of the Moon on our way in, did you? They're quite the sight.

"Anyway, they don't have werewolves in this part of the world. Not sure if it's in the entire continent or just the country itself. But, they don't and the locals were quite taken with me and what I could do... From everything I've seen so far I believe the pack would be welcomed in this land. We could have everything here that we couldn't in Britain or anywhere else in Europe. Once the pack moved here, we could make this place the new Wolf Castle or Wolf Manor? The name can be worked out later, but this could become our home. And we could all make a new and better life for ourselves here. We could rule this land."

Hermione blinked a few times as she continued to stare at the hypnotic movement of the large male stroking his cock. The sane part of her told her she needed to pay attention to what he was saying, listen to the clues she was given to her whereabouts but it was too hard to focus. She licked her cracked lips in nervous anticipation as she watched the bulbous head of his cock peek through his fingers.

No, bad man!

No, the voice was right. Fenrir was a bad man. He hurt her, forced her. She didn't want him, or this.

Hermione's stomach grumbled noisily.

"Sounds like you're hungry. The elf hasn't been feeding you properly, has it? Guess its loyalty goes only as far as me and the pups. Does that mean we've succeeded in breaking the bond or wasn't there enough for it to feel bound to you to start with? Hmmmm...Won't matter either way in a few hours," he said cryptically.

"Well, I suppose I should feed you if I want you to survive the transformation," said Fenrir before he walked away leaving Hermione alone in the cellar.

Seeing the door left wide open behind him Hermione thought to take advantage to make her escape. However in her pitiful state she couldn't even make it to the base of the stairs before Fenrir had returned carrying something mouth-watering with him. He held a piece of juicy looking steak in one hand and a vial of cloudy looking potion in the other. He extended the potion to her first. The message was clear; she couldn't have one without the other. She was too hungry and thirsty to care about the contents of the vial. She would have snatched the vial from his hand and greedily swallowed its contents even if she had not recognised it as a potent health and healing potion. The way she saw it, he'd already done his worst to her.
It took a few minutes before she felt better than she had since Fenrir abducted her but was disappointed when instead of handing her the meat as expected he turned his back on her and began to walk away.

"Come on, let's go. You can enjoy this outside," he said calling out to her.

The smell of the bloody piece of steak overpowered her senses to the point where all Hermione could think of was eating it. All thoughts of fighting or escaping fleeing her mind she blindly followed Fenrir as he led her out of the cellar and outside the building that had been her prison the past few days.

Soon as they exited the little fortress Fenrir turned around and gave Hermione the piece of meat. Even though it was rawer than she normally preferred her meat she wasted no time before she began wolfing it down. She stayed hunched possessively over it as she ate like an animal afraid of having its meal snatched away before it was done.

"You know I could take good care of you. Life could go back to the easy way it was back at Bleidd. I'll bite you once the moon is out and all you need to do is accept me as your alpha once you turn. As your alpha I'd keep you safe and well fed. I'll keep your belly full in other ways too, but you'd be pack and you'd be taken care of for the rest of your life."

When he finished talking Hermione noticed he was holding out another piece of meat for her. Impossibly, this one smelled even more delicious than the last. Fenrir, who was completely naked now, sat on the ground and gestured for her to sit near him. Only once she was seated did he hand her the second steak piece.

Fenrir resumed speaking while she ate.

"There are some who've questioned my authority and ability to lead the pack just because I haven't sired any children all these years... Draco's one jammy bastard, always been. Lucky to be born a Malfoy and lucky again to be the first to drop his seed in your fertile womb. Who knew you'd actually end up pregnant, eh? We all thought you'd be a chew toy we could play with for a few hours before we ate you. Oh yes, we did. Yet here you are... But, know what? No one'll question my authority once I put my pups in you. They'll respect me again."

Fenrir fell quiet. His eyes closed, he was rubbing at his chest. He sighed heavily a few times before he spoke again.

"Just getting rid of Draco won't be enough to win them back. I didn't realise till they came and spoke with me just how weak the bonds have become. I've been so busy trying to win favour with the Dark Lord I haven't paid attention to the pack. And, somehow I forgot what it was like before... The loneliness, the madness, the violence... Oh, I love violence but it was different back then- like I was as angry with myself as I was with everyone else. With the pack I found the piece of my mind I'd lost. I don't ever want to be feral like that again.

"I'm not going to let Draco, or anyone else, steal the pack from me. I need them just as much as they need me. But I see that this time just defeating or killing the competition won't be enough. I've got to show them I'm capable of bringing new blood into the pack. And you're the key to my doing that. Once you're knocked up every one of them will follow me. And with the pack at my side I could gain power with the locals too... could even turn some of them. Once I control them I could choose to become an ally of the Dark Lord or just rule here."

Stomach now full after being starved the past few days, and having her injuries healed Hermione's body struggled to stay awake. Lulled as she was by Greyback's soft tone and with her gaze lingering
on the sprawling mountains, partially hidden by clouds and now bathed in moonlight, she failed to notice the man behind her make his transformation into a beast. By the time she felt his hot breath on her neck it was already too late.

Hermione felt the creature sink his canine fangs into her flesh, easily breaking through her skin. The bite was followed by an explosion of pain in her neck- it felt nothing like the time Draco bit her or even Fenrir's bite when he raped her, this was so much worse. It felt like a raging fire blazed its way through her veins, burning her blood to dust, scorching and charring her body from the inside out. Overwhelmed by the pain, Hermione remained frozen for what felt like an eternity. When she finally tried to dislodge the brute's teeth by twisting away it only resulted in the beast tearing a chunk of flesh from her shoulder.

Hermione screamed in pain but the sound out of her mouth was nothing like her own vocals, replaced by something other worldly instead. She sprawled on the ground panting, struggling to draw air into her lungs. But none of her organs seemed to be working as normal.

She felt hair sprout over her body, starting from above her sex to along her stomach and up over her chest, coming out thicker over her back. Her rounded ears elongated and turned triangular, the tips still hidden by her gradually receding wild mane of hair. Hermione's tongue swelled and grew till it hung free from her mouth, her lips began to blacken and swell, and fur raced up from her jaw to cover her cheeks and chin. She felt her eyelids change, unaware that her normally brown eyes now sported a golden hue. The heat blooming in her body was nearly unbearable. Her sex pulsed and swelled to expose slick inner lips, the region demanding immediate stimulation.

Hermione hunched slightly, panting, torn between the pain of the transformation and a burgeoning libido. It felt like she was losing control of both mind and body. She whimmed as her modestly sized breasts flattened. New muscles grew on her chest and over the rest of her body. Bones shifted and cracked, skin stretching as her face lengthened. She arched her back in agony as the bones and muscles at the base of her spine grew and shifted till a tail slid between her bare arse cheeks. Hard, sharp black points pressed through the tips of her fingers, cut through skin and nail as her claws came in. Her hands lengthened, thumbs shortened and the little finger on each hand turned into a dewclaw.

Even through the excruciating pain her gradually changing nose picked up a smell that made her frown. The scent of her sweat and other fluids clung to her but there was something else, a sharp, foul scent that overpowered all other scents even in the open space. She grimaced, almost cutting her lips on the slightly sharpened canine teeth that now jutted out of her mouth.

Her newly formed muzzle sniffed the air trying to identify the source of the unpleasant scent and realised it was coming from between the legs of the creature before her; the scent was concentrated around his genitals. Sweat beaded along her back, dark fur sprouting between her shoulder blades. She groaned quietly, eyes downcast at the odd sensation. She felt a sudden, intense heat spread through her body, radiating from deep in her belly to down between her legs. The human part of her recognised the effects of the lust potion and realised the meat she had feasted on minutes ago had been tainted.

She could feel the bare sweaty skin of her body get rapidly covered by a coat of fur. She accidentally dug her claws into her throat while trying to relieve the tightness she felt there as her transformation continued. Hermione got to her feet on legs still partially human. Her thigh muscles bulged and grew denser, her legs covered in tufts of dark fur. She growled as bones cracked and popped, new joints developing and forcing her to the balls of her now widened feet. The padding on the soles of her feet thickened and bloody claws scraped at the earth when her paws finished growing.

She dropped to all fours letting out a startled yelp at the sensation of her newly formed bushy tail
sliding against her exposed, engorged pussy lips. Hermione threw her head back letting out a howl of pain and lust which deepened into a bestial roar. Hearing other creatures deep in the forest beyond respond to her howl all human thoughts faded away, replaced with base instincts.

_Hunt, kill, eat, fuck, howl-

Hermione's mind struggled to hold its own against the beast she was turning into. She wanted to hunt and kill, but above all that she wanted to find her mate and have him fuck this damn itch out of her system.

The male beside her pressed a paw over her back attempting to mount her. Snarling, Hermione turned and easily shook him off her. She swiped a claw contemptuously across his face, cutting him; if he survived tonight she hoped she could at least leave him scarred. She watched the other wolf step back, in shock. Intuitively, she knew that as her sire she was his to command and she was expected to submit.

_No_, she roared defiantly, unable to articulate the word with her new vocal chords but her intent clearly communicated nevertheless. The she-wolf angrily launched herself at the male, but now he was ready for her. The two wolves tumbled to the ground as they fought, snapping, biting and clawing at each other. There was no way she would ever submit to him. This unworthy male had captured her, separated her from her mate, forced his seed into her and worst of all threatened her pups. He had to die.

The she-wolf was still weak from the abuse she'd suffered in captivity, yet she remained evenly matched with the male wolf who fought off her attacks with every ounce of his experience and strength. Having undergone her first transformation she was quickly getting exhausted, but she was also growing angrier the longer they wrestled without her landing any fatal hits.

In her rage and quest for vengeance Hermione's mind slipped further, surrendering completely to her animal urges. She became careless, her efforts now solely concentrated on hurting the male. She snapped her jaws aggressively and repeatedly attacked head first- no longer bothering to protect her flank or other vulnerable parts- making sure she tore away chunks of his flesh each time. He rose up to strike her with both paws held out. His dominating stance along with his sharp claws would've struck fear in her human heart, but she was no longer human. And she had no plans to yield to anyone ever again. With that thought in mind she recklessly charged at him, leaping forward with jaws open, going straight for his soft throat.

Soon as the she-wolf's powerful jaws clamped around the male's throat, she tugged. In her moment of triumph she was numb to the pain of the injuries caused by his claws tearing into her soft belly; she only felt satisfaction course through her when she finally tasted the blood bubbling in his throat. However she had underestimated the strength of the alpha or the extent of her own injuries because the wolf managed to push her off him.

She geared herself for another round of fighting but felt dizzy. She watched the blood flow freely from her wounds and then looked to the male who had already turned tail and taken off. A part of her knew she needed to attend to her wounds or risk bleeding to death, but she didn't care. 'Hunt, kill, hunt, kill, hunt- was the refrain stuck in her head.

Unable to see him anymore, she blinked her eyes trying to remember which way the male had taken off. She couldn't understand how he had vanished into thin air. She closed her eyes trying to sniff him out but couldn't smell him over the scent of her own rapidly spilling blood.

Although changed, the she-wolf still possessed a sharp wit. Getting healed would have to take
priority over her vengeance. Once she was back to full strength she’d deal with her sire as well as everyone else that had ever dared to hurt her or one of her own. She envisioned an army of werewolves following her into battle and destroying everyone who stood in her path. The land of her enemies would turn red with their blood by the time she was done conquering it.

Seeing nothing other than the mountains before her she decided to go that way in search of help.

-----------------------------------------------------------

Pain. Agonising pain running through his whole body was the only thing Draco was aware of when he finally woke to a churning stomach. He was disoriented at first, believing he was once again experiencing nightmares about the night he was turned but only once his mind registered the strange surroundings did he recall his most recent nightmarish ordeal.

He gasped for air, his body aching as he sat up. The foul taste of skele-gro strong in his mouth he rolled over to the side of the bed and began to vomit, the sound of it splattering to the floor lost over the sounds of his continued retching. His entire body heaved, the motion jerked and jarred freshly healing wounds causing the clots and calluses formed to stretch till he winced from the fresh hurt.

The throbbing pain in his back was a reminder of what he had suffered at the hands of his own aunt. By the time Bellatrix had finished with him death had felt like a certainty. Draco hugged himself remembering how alone and hopeless he’d felt in those last moments. He didn't even realise he was crying till he tasted the tears streaming down his face. It felt like hours had passed by the time he finished, eyes swollen red, bile and spittle on his mouth, snot dripping from his nose. He mentally thanked Luna and whoever had taken pity on him and fixed him up.

"Oh, Draco."

He looked up at the sound of a feminine voice. Pansy and Theo rushed to his side.

"It's going to be alright, mate," said Theo, grabbing a clean towel from somewhere and handing it to Draco.

Draco used the towel to wipe his eyes and mouth clean before handing it back to Theo who now held a glass of water for him to drink. He accepted it with a nod of thanks and sipped on it slowly, enjoying its refreshing taste.

Pansy fussed over Draco. She propped his pillows, tucked the sheets, made the room warmer and then cooler again. Looking at him she shook her head and tutted. "I knew it was bad but this was...horrid. How could Bella..." She stopped, bit her tongue and shook her head again.

Instead of finishing what she was going to say she sat beside him on the bed and used her fingers to groom his hair and ran a hand over his bare chest. Draco didn't object as it was clear she only meant to comfort him with her touch. He leaned in as she wrapped her arms around his shoulders, pulling his head down onto her bosom.

"How long?" he finally managed to ask.

"Three days," replied Theo. He was seated at the foot of the bed.

Draco nodded and looked around, taking in his surroundings.

Theo noticed and supplied an answer to the unanswered question. "It's one of the servants' quarters in my home- closer to the dungeon, which is probably where they were expecting me to put you."

Draco nodded again. There were questions he needed to ask but he was too exhausted right now. Still, he managed to ask the most important one.

"Why?"

"After everything we've been through together? How could you think we wouldn't help you if we could?" Pansy spoke softly from beside him. She sounded angry.

"They'd moved on to other entertainment once you passed out," informed Theo. "No one seemed to care anymore. So I asked if I could move you and the Dark Lord didn't object. I brought you to this room and then we tried to fix you as best we could."

"We almost lost you, Draco," said Pansy with tears in her eyes. She pressed her lips against his hairline. "I was so scared. I don't care if you're a werewolf. You're one of my oldest friends and watching what was done... Watching you..." She trailed off, making a swallowing sound.

"It was hard to watch. Both, during and after. Neither one of us is proficient with advanced healing spells so we had to get some help... It was a really close call, Draco." It was obvious to Draco that his old friend was feeling a little emotional as he spoke especially since he immediately tried to make light of the situation. "You must be part kneazle with the number of lives you have."

Draco smiled back at Theo's attempt at a joke, fresh tears threatening to spill from his eyes upon discovering what they'd done for him.

"This world is just unbearable. This can't continue. We cannot continue like this."

Draco’s body went a little stiff at Pansy’s words and all they implied. While he didn't doubt his friends were genuinely shocked and upset over his injuries it was hard to accept that they'd be moved to the point of wanting to rock the boat. He hoped he wasn't being set up for some kind of trap.

Theo who was watching Draco closely didn't fail to notice when the blond's expression changed to a more guarded one.

"She isn't just saying it because of what happened to you. Both of us had already reached our breaking point long before this incident," explained Theo.

Draco looked at him, studying his old friend for any sign of duplicity.

"There was a reason I chose to take the Bleidd assignment. I wanted to come see you. There is much we need to discuss, Draco. But, right now you need to finish healing up."

"The healer has asked that we try feeding you solids today," said Pansy releasing her hold on Draco and slipping out of bed.

She snapped her fingers summoning an elf who arrived with a bowl of something warm. It didn't smell particularly appetising to Draco, who crinkled his nose and turned away.

"Try eating some of it. It was specially prepared for you. It's filled with nutrients that'll help you heal."

Though prepared differently from what he remembered something about the meal triggered childhood memories for Draco. He ate what was put before him quietly while pondering over what he'd learnt so far.
Considering how much I scarred many of you with the last few chapters I felt obligated to deliver this one before I left. Hang in there folks, there will be an HEA, but how 'bout some story first?

Thanks to everyone who left comments expressing understanding towards my choices and a special thanks to those who chose not to post rude comments despite being upset.
The she-wolf felt torn between her rage and her need to mate even as she grew dizzy from blood loss. She had run for who knows how long without running into a single living creature. From the sounds around her she knew there were other animals about, however they were too frightened to cross paths with her. She didn't need to see them quake to know they were afraid, the stench of their fear was unmistakable to her sensitive nose.

_Cowards._

It made her face twist with disgust at these creatures too afraid to confront her even in her current state. She would need to be careful, though, while they may keep their distance now they would be sure to be upon her as soon as she was down. So even though she needed to stop and attend to her injuries she kept moving forward in search of a safe haven.

The she-wolf wasn't sure how much longer she could hold on. Shortly after her fight with the male wolf she had attempted to heal herself by drawing on her magic, but she was far too weak and her injuries far too serious to fix herself. Some of her wounds had already begun to fester and she could feel herself grow feverish as the infection set in.

Still, there was an unexpected flipside to her pain. It made her aware of her fragility which in turn served as a reminder of her human self, though her beast scoffed at the idea. The beast was confident she was invincible and insisted she run the other way to hunt down her sire, force his submission and then tear him limb for limb.

_Hunt, kill, hunt, kill, hunt, kill-_  

She shook her head, trying to refocus her thoughts. She felt her humanity slip away when she thought about her sire- her entire being focused only on her need for revenge. So great was her bloodlust in those moments she couldn't even recall why the beast desired to harm her sire, only that she did. Pushing aside thoughts of vengeance, the she-wolf forged on. Even though she had yet to encounter a friendly face she was pleased to discover the entire region covered in a variety of potent medicinal herbs. She took several mouthfuls of centella, a plant famed in both the magical and Muggle realm for its healing properties.

There was a magical barrier that prevented her from moving further up the mountain so she struggled towards the outcropping of rocks she had noticed on the side. She hoped to find a dry and clean spot she could use as a temporary shelter and she was not disappointed. Hidden amongst the rocks she noticed a gap that opened into a small cave. Thinking this place was good enough her knees finally gave out.

The she-wolf struggled to remain conscious knowing she had yet to heal herself. She spat out the centella and few other herbs she had been chewing the entire time in order to create a crude poultice for herself. With great difficulty she managed to get the paste into the worst of her injuries and then lay still directing the magic in her veins to knot the torn flesh together and stem the blood flow.

It was hard for her to remain calm and concentrate on healing herself when her primary desire was to hurt the one who had hurt her. Everything within her demanded she hunt him down and finish him. Her lips pulled back to display her deadly canines as she snarled at the nothingness before her.
"Happy Birthday, Draco!"

Draco drifted awake. Was it a memory or a dream, or a memory of a dream? With sleep heavy eyes he recalled watching his mother lovingly stroke his hair and smile down at him like she used to when he was a little boy. Except, she looked so much older and about as weary as he felt. It had to have been a dream as his beautiful mother had yet to develop the worry lines around her eyes that were rather prominent in the dream. Draco let out a sigh before he closed his eyes and fell back asleep.

The she-wolf lay still having sensed another presence in the cave. She didn't move or do anything that would alert the intruder to her state of wakefulness. She heard an incantation in a foreign tongue followed by a brightness behind her closed eyelids. She guessed the intruder had cast a lumos. While the person walked around her, inspecting her, she was aware of how delicious they smelled, like prey. If she had to guess she'd say it was a small child. She was hungry, but could she risk opening her wounds by moving to attack the child?

She lay on the rock floor, unmoving, while the intruder satisfied their curiosity. She felt something prod her side- not enough to hurt but enough to draw her attention. She still didn't move or even open her eyes. The intruder repeatedly prodded her with what felt like the end of a branch. Annoyed she finally opened her eyes partially, without lifting her head she pulled back her lips baring her sharp teeth and snarled.

The intruder turned out to be a young girl who, startled by the discovery that the she-wolf wasn't asleep or dead, let out a yelp and stumbled backwards. She landed on her bum and stayed down rubbing at the sore spot.

The two stared at each other for a whole minute- the young girl though apprehensive appeared to be obviously awestruck while the she-wolf continued to bare her teeth in an attempt to appear more ferocious than she felt in that moment. When it became too much of an effort to maintain the display of hostility the she-wolf dropped the act and simply observed the girl. The she-wolf sniffed fear on the child and shut her eyes certain that the girl wouldn't bother her again, which is why she was surprised when she felt the child prod her sides again with the branch. It was too taxing to move right now or she would've torn the girl apart for her insolence.

She opened her eyes and let out a low growl of warning, but noticed that the child's eyes were fixed on the gash in her belly that still looked quite bad despite her attempts to heal it. It was severely infected but healing it was out of the range of her current abilities.

The girl prodded around the wound with the branch and appeared to be studying the she-wolf's responses. The girl's dark eyes sparkled with intelligence. The she-wolf couldn't say if the girl had figured out exactly what was wrong with her, but she had definitely realised that her injuries were far too severe to pose any serious threat to the child.

The she-wolf drifted asleep and was woken up rudely by the sensation of someone prodding her sides again. Opening her eyes she saw the girl had returned but was accompanied by two boys of a similar age this time. The three children stared at her with curiosity before they began an animated discussion among themselves. The girl was arguing with one of the boys, both trying to convince the second boy of something. She was sure she had never seen the trio before but something about them tugged at a distant memory that filled her with warmth and longing.

The girl must've won the argument because she turned to the she-wolf and smiled smugly while her
friend sulked. The second boy, the smallest of the three, had a determined look on his face. With his friends now watching him the boy closed his eyes and mumbled something before transforming into a little bird right before their eyes. The bird was a pretty little thing that chirped something indecipherable as it flew circles around her head. The she-wolf was tempted to swap at it with her paw- slice its little wings with one of her claws- but it flew back to its friends before she could as much as twitch a muscle. Just as quickly as he changed into a bird he was transformed again into a boy.

From the look the three gave her the she-wolf realised they believed she was like them.

Animagus, the faint human side of her supplied.

All three approached her, it was only then the she-wolf noticed the bag they held in their hands. They reached for something inside and pulled out a cauldron along with a variety of ingredients. She watched as one of the boys lit a fire and set the cauldron on top of it while the other boy chopped up the herbs. The girl slowly drew closer to the she-wolf and said something to her, though she couldn't understand her words from the way she held her hands out she was clearly trying to convey that she meant no harm. If she could the she-wolf would've made a meal of all three children, but in her weak and fevered state she couldn't muster the strength to even lift her paw.

Once certain that the she-wolf wasn't going to pounce on her the girl placed her hand above the worst of the injuries, the gash on her stomach, and closed her eyes before she began chanting in a strange tongue. As she watched the poultice, dried blood and dirt fall away from her wound the she-wolf realised the girl was cleaning her wounds. Out of the corner of her eyes she watched the boys work on preparing something in the cauldron. She wasn't sure what was going on exactly but she wasn't particularly worried. If these children meant to hurt her at least death would be swifter. She closed her eyes and lay still allowing the children to go about whatever they were up to.

At several intervals she heard the three children take turns making incantations in a strange tongue. It was some time before they appeared satisfied with whatever was brewing in the cauldron. The she-wolf watched them siphon some of the contents into a bowl which they cautiously placed before her. Three eager dark faces nodded at the bowl directing the wolf to drink their concoction. She sniffed at the potion- while it was strange it didn't smell like anything harmful. Keeping a close watch on the children the wolf slowly lapped at the bowl till it was empty.

The girl was the first of the three to straighten up while her friends still remained stooped staring at the she-wolf's injuries expectantly. She turned and dragged her friends by their collars, waving to the she-wolf on her way out. Within minutes she could feel the changes brought on by the potion. Her skin grew heated and while she no longer felt feverish she was absolutely drained. She put her head back down and lost consciousness once more.

"Trust doesn't come easily for people like us, raised as we were. So before we discuss anything, here" -Theo held up a vial of silvery memories- "this should help you understand our motives."

Draco took the vial from Theo's hands and poured the memories into the penseive placed before him. He was joined by Theo as he entered the swirl of memories.

A man settled himself behind Pansy on the bed. His face wasn't visible yet but Draco had an idea of who it might be. The man shuffled about till he found a satisfactory position before his leathery old hands reached around to roughly grope Pansy's breasts.

"Hello Pansy. Did you miss me?" he asked in a taunting voice while he continued to molest her
young flesh.

There was no mistaking the disgust on Pansy's face though she made sure to keep her face turned away from the man. She grimaced when she felt his fingers painfully twist and pull at her nipples but she didn't make any sound and held still even when it was clear that the man was deliberately trying to cause her pain.

"Why so quiet, my dear wife? You know how I love you listen to your sweet moans," he mocked as he began pinching the soft undersides of her breasts with his fingernails.

"Oh well, since you insist on remaining unresponsive during foreplay I'll just have to find other ways to make you scream."

Just before the memory faded Draco saw the man draw his wand and direct several stinging and slicing hexes at her bare breasts and buttocks that had Pansy howling in pain.

"Why?" Draco asked Theo who stood beside him, his face an unreadable mask.

"That's my father for you," was all Theo said in response.

The next memory began with Pansy landing on the bed, the wind knocked out of her from the force of her fall. Her husband climbed between her thighs and positioned himself above Pansy. His fingers were between her legs stroking her dry lips. He appeared angry over her lack of arousal. Pansy's mouth was clamped shut and the look on her face said she was trying her best not to wince in pain. His hand painfully pinched her inner thigh when she flinched away from his fingers.

Finally giving up on the foreplay Pansy's husband spat on the entrance to her pussy before shoving his cock inside her unwilling body. The force of the thrust made her slide further up the bed and away from him so his hands clamped around her throat to hold her body in place. Her body bucked involuntarily almost throwing him off. He squeezed harder and only when she went limp under him did he loosen his grip on her neck.

"Come on, don't just lie there like a dead fish," he complained while thrusting into her.

Pansy raised her knees and wrapped her legs around his waist. It didn't look like she was doing it out of pleasure, more like fear of what he may do next if she didn't play along.

"You like that, don't you?" he whispered in a poor attempt at a husky voice. "You're just a slut, aren't you, Mrs. Nott?"

Pansy's only response was to widen her thighs further to accommodate him as he drilled into her. She was looking away from him while he continued to fuck her into the mattress.

"Fuck," he grunted. "You may be a Pureblood, but you're no better. Just another slut, like the rest of them."

Draco watched Pansy cower and close her eyes shut tight, tears leaking out of the corners. It was hard for him to believe Pansy would tolerate being treated so poorly. Growing up her father had indulged her to the extent even her friends had thought of her as a spoilt princess.

Theo spoke up, probably noticing the look of disbelief on his face.

"They're hard to watch, I know, but you need to see these. You may not believe what we have to say unless you see these and know what it's been like."
The memory faded from view as another played out.

"This one is older than the others," said Theo watching the scene unfold.

"I don't want to! It's one thing to marry that old hawk but you can't make me sleep with him!" Pansy screamed as a couple of Black Cloaks grabbed her by the waist and began to haul her over towards the bedroom. Pansy was physically so much smaller than each of the men that had her surrounded that there was no need to manhandle her if restraining her was all they wanted. However, from their expressions the men were clearly enjoying what they were doing.

Pansy was dragged to the bed and pinned to it using physical restraints while they went about tearing her clothes off her body. They made it a point to grope and fondle her as they did so, not even bothering to pretend like it was anything else.

"Stop that! What the hell do you think you're doing? How dare you touch me this way?" Pansy shouted at them, infuriated by their treatment. "Just give me the damn potion like you're meant to and leave, arseholes!"

"You're not really in a position to be giving any orders, princess," said one of the men mockingly using the term of endearment often used by her father when talking about Pansy.

"Besides, your dear husband doesn't care for any potion made by that Halfblood traitor, Snape. He'd rather use us to get you nice and wet for his cock."

"What! Lord Nott is aware of this?"

"Not just aware, princess, he commanded it. Thought a spoilt bitch like you could use a reminder of your proper place and purpose in this house."

Pansy screeched as the man roughly shoved three fingers inside her unprepared passage.

"Look, you've already got her screaming for you," said one of them to the man violating Pansy drawing peals of laughter from his peers. The memory sped up as different men used different objects on Pansy all in the name of priming her for intercourse with her husband. Though none of them used their own cocks each of them undoubtedly raped Pansy that day.

Draco felt sick to his stomach having witnessed what he did. He had watched his share of atrocities during his time as a Death Eater, but watching one of his friends get raped in her marital bed was especially upsetting. What was worse was that in the memories he saw none of the strong-willed, free-spirited girl who had been a bigger brat than him growing up.

"It's fucked up, Draco."

They were out of the memories now and Theo's usually guarded face was grief-stricken, appearing as upset as Draco felt.

"It's all so severely fucked up. It's not just Pansy. Ever since they passed the Procreation Law it's no longer safe for any witch unless they're as twisted as Bellatrix. Though I never approved of the Dark Lord's methods I believed things would change for the better when he came in power.

"I thought the Death Eaters would lose their tribal nature, and with it their violence and brutality, once they were charged with governing the entire realm. It is only logical that an advanced civilization would steer towards a conflict free, peaceful society that favours intelligence and compassion over brute strength and ruthlessness."
"Instead it feels like we've been in a near constant state of war for the greater part of the last decade and I don't see things ever improving under current leadership. There are now enough number of us who refuse to maintain the status quo. The reason Pansy shared these memories and the reason I came to see you at Bleidd is because we seek to make alliances.”

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From beyond the safety of her hideout the she-wolf observed the sunrays lazily creep into her sanctuary. As far as she could tell this was her fifth day in the cave and already she could feel a marked improvement in herself. The throbbing pain in her body had reduced to a dull ache and she no longer felt the chill in her bones like her life force was leaking out of her. Pleased and surprised by her unexpected recovery she looked around taking a proper look at her surroundings. Noticing the remains of a fire and the cauldron placed above it she remembered the three children and what they had done for her.

When she had entered the cave a part of her had believed this would end up being her tomb. She had picked a spot where her carcass would not be ravaged by the other creatures that roamed the forest beyond because the she-wolf was certain she had kin out there who would want to find her and know what became of her.

Each time she fell asleep in the cave she had done so thinking this would be the one she wouldn't wake from. When the girl had shown up the she-wolf had expected her to return with grown-ups who would either exterminate or capture her. She had not expected the girl and her friends to heal her. In that moment she was glad she was unable to kill the girl or else she too would have been dead by now.

Chapter End Notes

Excuse the errors- system issues... I'm still travelling so next chapter will take up to a fortnight. A thank you to those posting encouraging words- you're my reason for continuing despite the current restraints on my time.
"You cannot imagine how glad I am to see you again, brother." Gunnolf wrapped his muscular arms around Draco and crushed him to his chest, not letting go till he heard him wince in pain.

Gunnolf looked sheepish when he finally let go of the blond man. "Sorry, but you better brace yourself for a few more hugs like that welcoming you back home."

"So, you heard?" asked Draco.

"The better question is, who didn't? The Death Eaters who attended were shocked enough to talk about it to anyone who cared to listen and with the Black Cloaks here being as chatty as they are the news was bound to reach us. Thankfully, we received news of your dreadful ordeal along with news of your recovery, otherwise I can't say how the pack would've reacted. It was most peculiar..." Gunnolf trailed off, appearing thoughtful for a moment or two, then gave his head a little shake before he spoke again. "Come on, I'm sure you must be eager to see your pups."

Draco nodded, feeling relieved. During his recovery he had been plagued with worries about Hermione and his pups. And while he had no way to check on Hermione, he could at least do so for the twins. As soon as he was cleared for travel Draco begged his friends to let him return to Bleidd so he could check on his sons himself.

"They're okay?" he asked wishing to confirm it even if he knew the pups would never face any harm while they remained under the protection of the pack.

"Yes, of course, but something odd did occur in your absence that I need to report to you."

Gunnolf seemed to be oblivious of it, but he was walking a little behind Draco instead of beside or in front of him like he usually did. Like every other werewolf, Draco was far too conscious of their social hierarchy to fail to miss the deference shown in the senior beta's actions.

"Soon after you left with that Death Eater, the alpha took the twins saying they were going on a trip. None of the older pack members were around at the time to object. When we were informed about him leaving with the pups, we panicked, not knowing what to make of his actions. We didn't believe they were in any kind of danger but it still bothered most of us that he would take the children away from the safety of the pack without offering a good reason for doing so.

"We'd just barely put together a search party and started out when the alpha returned. Not sure what they did while they were gone, but we didn't dare question the alpha since Wilbur and Martin appeared to be in better spirits than they were before they left..." Gunnolf paused looking uncharacteristically nervous.

"What is it?" asked Draco. When Gunnolf still looked like he wouldn't speak Draco decided to try a different approach.

"Tell me, what is it you hesitate to say?"

"The alpha was missing during the full moon- not strange in itself, I know- he returned in the early hours of the morning. He was badly injured. I've never seen him like this... He was both wounded and somewhat subdued when he returned."
Though Gunnolf had stopped Draco sensed he wasn't telling him all yet.

"Go on, Gunnolf. You can tell me the rest of it."

Gunnolf looked to his left and then his right, a pointless action meant to delay the inevitable.

"He had clearly been cleaned and treated by someone before he came to us, but I still managed to pick up a familiar scent on him- a scent I knew had no reason being anywhere near the alpha. So I asked Ash to take a sniff..."

Draco nodded in understanding. Ashley, or Ash as she was known in the pack, though an omega was already one of their best trackers thanks to her sensitive nose.

"She said, well she confirmed, that I was correct. The scent we caught on Fenrir quite clearly belonged to Hermione."

Draco wasn't even thinking, his body merely acting on instinct as he let loose a growl and rushed Gunnolf, slamming the head beta's body against the nearest wall before wrapping his fingers around his throat in a menacing manner.

"What the fuck are you trying to imply about my mate, beta?" he snarled in a way that left the more muscular were cowering.

"Calm down, Draco. I meant no disrespect. I'm just letting you know that the alpha has been in contact with Herm- with your mate."

Gunnolf's arms hung limply at his side, his eyes cast down and his neck bared in submission.

It took Draco a few moments to calm down, gather his wits and let go of the head beta.

"Have we received any cauldron orders since I left?"

Gunnolf stared at Draco in astonishment, questioning the blond were's sanity.

"Do I need to repeat myself?" snapped Draco impatiently when Gunnolf continued to silently gape at him instead of responding.

"No, I just wasn't sure if-" a withering look from Draco had Gunnolf cut himself short. "No. No, we haven't had any cauldron orders."

Draco growled and punched the stone wall with enough force his knuckles made a loud crunching sound as they broke on impact.

"Sonofabitch!" Draco cursed.

"Come on, let's go show this to Cora."

"No, let me see my pups first. I'll be able to think and act more rationally once I've calmed a bit."

It was much later that Draco was finally composed and seated beside his pups, who were fast asleep, exhausted from playing with their father. The sight of them peacefully sleeping, along with their soothing scent had helped calm Draco so he could process everything he was learning from the pack. At some point Cora had healed his hand. Right now Draco appeared to be holding court, with him sitting on the bed in his quarters while Cora, Oskar and Gunnolf remained standing around his room.
"Lord Malfoy visited us the day you left. We managed to convince him that Ginevra Weasley still carries his heir," said Cora in response to Draco's question about Ginny's condition.

"That doesn't answer my question. Is she awake? Is she sensible? Does she have an explanation for what happened?"

Maintaining his tranquil state of mind was turning to be a real struggle when all Draco wanted was to tear apart every person that stood between him and the information he needed to find his mate.

Cora, though stunned at Draco's snappy manner, didn't admonish him like he knew she would normally. He couldn't help but grow irritated by how oddly they were all behaving, not at all like their usual selves.

"Can you just sit down already?" he barked at Oskar who continued to remain standing even though the old man was usually the first to sit down since he tired more easily in his human form.

Instead of demanding Draco's submission for daring to order his sire, Draco was shocked to see the elder silently move to the nearest chair. He closed his eyes and refocused his thoughts. He would have to ignore their unusual actions for now as there were more pressing matters needing his attention. Draco turned his cold grey eyes upon Cora, waiting for a response from the pack's healer.

"She's awake. We don't have a skilled legilimens who can take a peek inside her head, but according to Ginny it was an accident. She says she overheard Hermione and you talking and believed Hermione meant to return to the Order as a spy for the Death Eaters. So when Hermione raised her wand to obliviate her, Ginny grabbed her wand and turned it on her friend. Unfortunately for Ginny the wand was loyal to Hermione and her spell backfired."

Draco considered this narrative and expressed his doubts to the group.

"Can we trust that she isn't just playing us? She sounds far too reasonable and not at all like the witch we've seen the past few months."

"I can see why anyone who hasn't spent as much time with Ginny as I have believe that to be the case. But I assure you, there's been a remarkable alteration in her mental state since she woke up. She knew she lost the baby and expected to be sent back with Lord Malfoy. She began to reassess her opinion of us once she realised we were all lying to make sure she wasn't returned to those monsters.

"It wasn't as simple as it sounds now... I've spent a lot of time talking to her since her arrival here. She told me that after Lord Malfoy left she reflected on how she's been treated by the werewolves at Bleidd and concluded that we weren't the enemy. Once she heard about what your aunt did to you, she was fully convinced that she was wrong about all of us. Above all she feels shame over her attitude towards Hermione."

"And you believe her change of heart to be genuine?" asked Draco closely observing each were in the room.

Oskar and Gunnolf nodded subtly though only Cora spoke.

"Yes. The pregnancy was a continued source of trauma for her; the child growing in her womb was a daily reminder of the hell she'd lived through. She resented carrying her rapist's child to the extent that she couldn't think rationally enough to discern the difference between her situation and Hermione's. As horrible as it sounds, losing the child did her a world of good. Over the last two days I feel like I've seen glimpses of the woman Ginny must've been before she was taken by the Death Eaters."
"Cora may not be a mind healer," said Oskar, softly interjecting, "but I trust her judgement on this."

Draco nodded. "Good, because I need to make sure we can trust Ginny Weasley as I plan to return her to the Order."

Everyone looked on in shock.

"Hermione was supposed to contact me once she made it back to the Order, but we've had no news from her. Fenrir was acting so suspiciously when Hermione escaped I worried about foul play on his part. Soon as I had the opportunity I made my enquiries at the Ministry. If Fenrir crossed paths with Hermione at some point and took her captive, one thing is for certain, he is acting without any assistance from the Death Eaters. This leaves him very few options when it comes to places he can hide her."

"But, if you believe the alpha has taken Hermione why do you wish to send Ginny Weasley back to the Order?" asked Gunnolf. From the expressions on their faces it was clear they were all just as curious to hear his reasons.

"Well for one, I would like confirmation that Hermione didn't make it back to the Order, but I also wish to establish contact with them. I believe it's time for the pack to reconsider our existing alliances."

Oskar looked at Draco curiously before leaning forward and posing his question.

"Does this mean you wish to break some of the current alliances?"

Draco turned his gaze upon Oskar and flashed him a cold smile.

"Considering how unbenefficial the current one has proven to be, wouldn't you say it was about time?"

They were talking treason and yet Draco noted not a single one of them shuddered at the prospect as they should've. If anything their bodies appeared to imperceptibly sag in relief.

There were a few moments of silence before Gunnolf spoke. "So are you going to question the alpha about your mate?"

"Don't you mean challenge the alpha?" Cora corrected the head beta before returning her gaze to Draco. "Fenrir may be weak right now, recovering from his injuries. But then, so are you."

"I have no plans to challenge the alpha," said Draco. However, no sooner were the words out of his mouth that he realised how untrue they were, so he quickly added, "right now."

"Do you believe Hermione is... in danger?" Cora asked Draco.

From her softened tone and hesitant manner Draco figured what she really wanted to ask was if he believed Hermione was still alive, but most likely didn't wish to risk his wrath by suggesting his mate might be dead. He himself had considered the possibility ever since Gunnolf told him about Fenrir returning injured and carrying a faint trace of Hermione's scent, but every instinct he possessed affirmed that his mate was alive and out there, waiting to be reunited with him.

"We may not have completed the bonding ritual, but we do share a bond. During the little time I spent awake the last few days I never sensed any distress from Hermione. Still, with Fenrir somehow involved, my mind won't know peace till I've verified for myself that she is really okay."
"Had Fenrir not arrived sporting the injuries he did, I might've grown concerned about the presence of Hermione's scent. As it is, I think it's safe to assume she must be among friends. How else could she have succeeded in delivering such a walloping to the alpha?"

Draco looked to Cora in surprise. "You think Hermione had a part in what happened to Fenrir?"

From what Draco had learnt about Fenrir's injuries, they were so bad that despite receiving timely treatment the alpha was bound to sport a scar across his face for the rest of his life. Even armed with a wand Hermione would be no match for their brute of an alpha during a full moon.

"He was feverish for the major part of the day when he returned," explained Cora. "More than once I heard him mutter the same thing in his sleep- 'I'm gonna kill that bitch'. Since we all smelled Hermione on him, I believed she was responsible for his injuries."

"If she had help, it had to be the Order," added Gunnolf.

"Except, she was supposed to send word once she met with the Order. And since she hasn't so far..." Draco let out a sigh. "Well, for one reason or another, it looks like we need Ginny Weasley to establish contact with the Order."

They all nodded in agreement.

"If Fenrir has taken Hermione captive are there still members in the pack who would willingly help him?"

Everyone looked to Oskar. No one was as in tune with pack politics as the elder.

Oskar shrugged. "Depends on what he's promised them in exchange. I'll say this, Fenrir and his mutts are definitely up to something. They've been acting like they're in on some secret the rest of us know nothing about. But other than Fenrir and you, none of the weres left Bleidd during the past week. So unless he's got her stashed somewhere on the castle grounds, Greyback's working on his own."

"Apologies, but I'm going to have to correct you, Oskar," said Gunnolf. "The day Hermione went missing and the next, we sent out hunting parties. We only have their word for whatever they were up to during the time they were gone."

Oskar shook his head.

"As someone who runs the pack, Gunnolf, you should endeavour to find out how many are truly loyal to the alpha. I made sure to conduct my own debriefing on the hunt and I can confirm that everything went as officially reported during their time outside Bleidd."

"So, we know Fenrir is working alone. And, he hasn't left since he returned?"

"Yes," replied Cora confidently. "Whatever happened to Fenrir, he's looking to settle a score, but there was something different about this incident... I've tended to him after many fights in the past, but I've never seen him shaken up like this before. He's determined to fully recover and be at full strength before he considers leaving the castle grounds again."

"The best course of action then would be to closely watch Fenrir and follow him the next time he leaves Bleidd. He's bound to lead us to Hermione, if he has her," stated Draco.

"It won't be easy to follow the alpha without tipping him off," pointed out Gunnolf.
"Surely we have some skilled trackers with a scenting range greater than Fenrir's?"

The head beta nodded and looked to Oskar.

"I'm going to run some names by you to check which ones can be trusted."

With pack loyalties currently divided they needed to be wary of the ones who still followed Greyback.

Throughout their exchange Draco took note of an uneasy expression on Cora's face and knew there was something she wished to reveal but once again refrained fearing his reaction.

"If you're withholding information that relates to my children I will be more angry over that than anything you may have to say, Cora," warned Draco growing further annoyed with the way everyone was acting today.

"A couple of omegas claimed to have spotted an elf with the alpha at the portkey point, both, while departing as well as when he arrived with the twins."

It wasn't odd that Fenrir would use an elf to take care of the boys, as elves were commonly employed as nannies in the Wizarding world. However, it was remarkable that Fenrir would have an elf since he didn't come from a prominent Pureblood family and was unlikely to find an elf willing to bond itself to a werewolf.

"I didn't know Fenrir had an elf."

Cora shook her head.

"He doesn't- well, if he does, it's news to me. No, this particular elf, from the description I heard of the crest on its garments... Draco, the description of the crest sounded far too much like the Malfoy crest."

Draco wasn't sure what to make of the news that a Malfoy elf had accompanied his children during the time they went missing. Could it be that Fenrir took his sons to see their grandparents? Why would one of the Malfoy elves be involved unless his parents were involved? But he had not heard from his parents ever since the birth of his children. No, that wasn't entirely true. Even if he was unconscious at the time, from what Theo had told him, his mother did indeed come to see Draco in his time of need and was possibly the reason why he was even alive today.

"It would be selfish of us to take complete credit when it was someone else who played a crucial role in saving your life," said Theo.

"Who are you talking about?" asked Draco feeling confused.

"She wanted to come see you once you were recovered but she needs to maintain appearances... She asked me to tell you that no matter how she's acted towards you since you were turned, she has never stopped thinking of you as her little boy."

Draco gasped when realisation dawned upon him.

"That- that's not possible."

"I told you I wasn't good with healing spells, Draco, but I remember you telling me about how Narcissa would sneak into your bedroom late in the night to heal you after Lucius was done disciplining you. When you were dying I thought, if there's anyone that can be relied upon to save
"So my mother?" Draco was feeling too overwhelmed by the news to coherently express himself.

"I showed her my memory of the revel and what they did to you. She didn’t even need to watch what Bellatrix did before agreeing to help any way she could. She attended to your wounds that night while Pansy and I merely assisted. She came back on your birthday to check on you and make sure there weren't any setbacks to your recovery."

"Mother?" he asked again, shaking his head in disbelief.

"Draco, you really don't realise what it's like for Pureblood women in this new world. Witches no longer get to make decisions for themselves, not even those of high standing like your mother. Narcissa never agreed to have her son turned into a werewolf and thrown out of her home. And she certainly never agreed to have her husband rape and impregnate a witch the same age as her child just so he could have a Pure heir. It doesn't help that despite being unhappy with the way things have turned out Lucius still continues to follow every one of the Dark Lord's commands.

"Narcissa may play the compliant little Pureblood housewife, but she is among a growing group of individuals who are against torture and have grown weary of the never ending war. Not only did she help save you, she has also agreed to pass on any useful information that will help bring about a much needed regime change."

As much as it hurt him, Draco had resigned himself to the fact that his dear mother would never be a part of the new life he had built for himself. Just when he had given up the hope of them ever having a relationship again, Theo had dropped that Muggle style bomb on him. But notwithstanding what he’d been informed about his mother's role in saving his life he couldn't imagine Narcissa contacting Greyback to arrange a secret meeting with her grandsons. So what was the connection between the Malfoy elf, Fenrir and his sons? Well at least now he had someone reliable to solve this mystery for him. He could simply ask Theo to convey this bit of information to his mother and have her investigate the matter.

Before Draco could mention it to the others Gunnolf had something else to share.

"I have nothing on the creature accompanying the alpha, but I do have a lead on where the alpha may have gone with the boys. Before the alpha returned the search party managed to pick up traces of his magic along with another unknown creature at the portkey point- from what Cora says the elf must've been the unknown creature. It was impossible for our trackers to pinpoint their destination without contacting the Ministry for travel details, but they all concluded that it was definitely an international portkey."

"Did you examine the boys when they returned to confirm that they were okay?" Though the question was addressed to Cora and Gunnolf, Draco was looking at his sons, inspecting each of their precious little bodies for any signs of harm.

"Yes," replied Gunnolf with Cora adding, "If anything they looked healthier when they returned. They were definitely well looked after wherever it is they were taken."

"International travel isn't safe for children," stated Draco growing angry once again.

"It explains the presence of the elf," offered Cora. Elf magic was better suited to transporting infants than any wizard mediums.

Draco let out an angry breath immediately seeing her point. He would floo Theo straightaway and
ask him to contact his mother.

"Let me look into this business of the elf. But, I want it made clear to everyone: my sons are not to be handed over to Fenrir ever again and they are **never** to leave the castle grounds without my express authority."

Draco heard a chorus of yeses in response to his order.

Oskar cleared his throat loudly to gain everyone's attention when it finally looked like there were going to be no more revelations that evening.

"I thought in the spirit of full disclosure I ought to come clean about something I haven't discussed with the people in this room." He paused only long enough to ensure he had their complete attention before he continued. "By now, I'm sure you all know about the Were Prophecy that concerns the twins, but there's another lesser known prophecy which is considered a myth by even most Elders."

The impatient looks on their faces told Oskar they didn't care for another one of his lectures on Were history just then, but he proceeded nonetheless.

"In brief, decades after we were cursed to our current state by the wizards, a were possessing great powers of divination spoke of the arrival of a Promised One-"

Draco raised a brow at that. Great, he thought, even the werewolves had a prophecy about Potter!

"During a period of great turmoil the Promised One would find their powers awakened. It was foretold that the Promised One would be a powerful were destined to become the Alpha of all alphas. The Promised One would be responsible for the creation of a powerful alliance that would rid the world of a great scourge, ushering forth a time of harmony between the Beings of the world."

* A powerful were, wasn't that how the original were prophecy had referred to him, thought Draco.  

Draco pointed to himself and raised a questioning brow.

Oskar responded with a shake of his head. "Right until recently I never even considered the possibility it could be you. No, I've had someone else in mind."

"Greyback? He's pretty formidable, but I don't see him-"

"**If** there's any truth to the prophecy, I believe the Promised One to be Hermione. I even told her so before she left."

"Sweet mother of-" started Cora.

"Merlin's balls!" exclaimed Draco at the same time.

Gunnolf was too stunned to form words.

"If I'm correct, we have no reason to fear for Hermione's safety- and having seen the state Greyback returned in, I believe I've been right all along. In my opinion it would be wiser for us to focus on establishing alliances and settling pack affairs."

"Even if true, I still need to confirm that my mate is safe," insisted Draco. "But, I won't neglect the pack's welfare pursuing my own selfish desires," he assured his pack.

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Hermione slammed her forehead against the tree once and then again trying, as always, to control the beast. Her fingers cramped and cracked, her claws sliding forth under her nails, digging into the tree's trunk. She moaned, trying to remember who she was, as she thrashed about, her claws tearing chunks of bark free.

The she-wolf snapped at the air with deadly fangs and then cocked her head, listening. Her eyes reflected golden moonlight on a face dotted with dark black fur. She slid from tree to tree, amazed at how quickly she had grown used to spending all her time hunched down on all fours, feeling no desire to ever stand again.

Ever since she'd recovered enough to leave the safety of the cave she began prowling the area around the cave marking the territory as her own. She noted the smells of the other creatures that shared the woods with her, searching and failing to pick up the scent of another predator like her. She didn't know where her sire was, he and his scent had disappeared since the night of their fight.

She heard another creature move nearby and propelled by her hunger she pounced on it, ripping it apart with her fangs and claws ignoring its pitiful whimpers. As a human she may have winced at the pathetic sound emitted by the dying animal, but as a beast she only thought of satisfying her own needs. However, not every attack was motivated by her desire to feed. There were times she sought out larger and more powerful animals for the sheer pleasure of satisfying her lust for blood. Engaging in acts of violence was the only means she had of abating the fury constantly churning within her. When she didn't find animals big enough to fight back, she took out her anger on the sturdy trees-tearing at the bark with her claws and slamming into their tree trunks till her body hurt to move.

She patrolled the area around the cave regularly, and though she saw no humans, the magical barrier that prevented her from ascending to the top of the mountain was a palpable evidence of their presence there. The three children visited the cave two more times after the day they saved her life, but the she-wolf made sure to stay out of sight anytime her nose picked up their scent. She saw the disappointment in their faces every time they returned and failed to find her. The she-wolf was wary of the children. Even if they hadn't brought any grown-ups so far she didn't know what to make of them. Still, she owed them a life debt and so she looked out for them and kept a watch on them any time she sensed their arrival on her side of the barrier.

The she-wolf was growing restless with each passing hour. Now that she was healed and having no leads on her sire she wasn't sure what she was meant to do or where she was meant to go. She desired revenge, she desired a reunion with her pups and her mate, but didn't know how to accomplish any of it. So in anger and frustration she continued to lash out at the trees and animals in the forest till at last the staff of the magical school at the top of the mountain were alerted to her menacing presence at the edge of their school grounds.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to those of you still leaving comments- it's an encouraging reminder that there are people still following this story.
"If Red isn't in place there will be consequences for you," said Theo giving his friend a meaningful look soon as Draco finished telling Theo about their plan to bust out Ginny Weasley.

"We have no other means of contact, except through Red. And based on the way things have progressed in my absence, establishing contact has become more urgent than before."

Even though Draco had called Theo's private floo they was no guarantee that their conversations weren't being monitored. Therefore, both made use of previously agreed upon code names as an added security measure.

Theo exhaled loudly.

"Well, I hope you make good use of your birthday goodies."

Draco smirked in response. "Oh, I was planning to. Thanks for the treats."

The 'treats' were an assortment of objects that would prove useful in their future endeavours, but ones Draco could not have procured for himself without alerting the authorities. The items ranged from portkeys to something as rare as a set of two way communication mirrors.

"I suppose it's better if I don't know your plans."

"It is best. By the way, we may have a lead for the Mudblood."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yes. The trackers say they picked up her scent at the portkey point they also picked up traces of an international portkey. They may be unrelated events, they may have even occurred on two different dates. But with no other leads and none of the pack members ever portkeying to any overseas location straight out of Bleidd we thought it was worth investigating."

Draco knew Theo was clever enough to figure out what he was getting at. And sure enough, Theo's response proved Draco's confidence in his friend had not been misplaced.

"I'll take a look at the travel logs when I'm at the Ministry tomorrow and check the list of destinations for any international portkeys activated from Bleidd."

Theo looked ready to conclude their call, but Draco halted him as he had one last request left.

"Oh I just remembered. The next time you see the Lady let her know that her elves are in need of discipline. It may just be a case of mistaken identity, but one of her elves was recently spotted handling precious cargo it had no reason being anywhere near."

Theo inhaled sharply knowing that by precious cargo Draco was referring to his sons.

"That's-" Theo appeared to be at a loss for how to delicately frame his question without betraying the true nature of their conversation to anyone listening in.

"Unusual, at the very least," supplied Draco. "It quite likely transported the cargo overseas." From
the calm tone of Draco's voice no one would suspect he was referring to the abduction of his sons.

Their conversation had started with standard pleasantries with Theo asking after Draco and his sons, so Theo knew that the twins were back currently and safe with their father.

Theo nodded. "Hmm, unusual. I'll mention it to the Lady the next time I happen to see her."

Throughout the call Draco made use of previously agreed upon hand signals to relay the severity of the situation to Theo. So despite his friend's casual responses Draco was certain Theo grasped the urgency of his requests.

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Something was different in the forest. The she-wolf got the distinct feeling of being hunted. So far she had managed to successfully evade the humans, but with the number of them lurking about she was bound to encounter one of them soon enough. She wasn't scared of them, after all, she could easily deal with any would-be hunter by simply ripping off their heads. But the soft voice in her head cautioned against it claiming such actions would only make the humans more determined to find her. The she-wolf didn't like obeying her weak human - who couldn't even protect herself unless armed with a stick - but she wasn't going to ignore her counsel; the last time she-wolf spared the life of a human had proven to be rather advantageous to her.

Unable to vent her rage on the humans she once again went on a rampage in the forest.

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Draco stood at a discreet distance from the entrance to Ginny Weasley's quarters at Bleidd. Ginny was carrying on a conversation with Cora, oblivious to Draco's presence on the other side of the wall. Hearing the redhead describe one of her nightmares to Cora made Draco feel extremely uncomfortable with eavesdropping on them. He continued to remain there though as he agreed with Cora; in the absence of a legilimens, listening to Ginny Weasley open up to the mediwitch would offer much needed insight into the witch's current frame of mind.

"I'm on the floor, screaming from the labour pains. There's nothing in the empty cell, just a blanket beneath me that I grasp as the pain shoots through me... My nails are practically scraping the stone floor as it crowns. I reach down, feel for its head as it passes, wrecking my body on its way out. It flops into my hands. It's no baby. It does not even resemble anything human, just a mass of blood and flesh wriggling in my arms. It greedily clutches at my breasts, only instead of suckling at my teat, it uses its sharp teeth to bite me and drink my blood. When it's full it falls to the ground and crawls between my legs where it starts to forcefully penetrate me..."

"It's gone. You know, you're not pregnant anymore. You don't have to worry about any unwanted - you don't have to worry about that," assured Cora.

"I know, but I also know that we can't keep up this pretence forever. Don't get me wrong, as much as I appreciate what you've done for me, it's starting to feel like we've only delayed the inevitable. In a few months when there's no baby they will take me back and rape me till one of them puts their demon child inside me... I don't know if I could handle going through all that again. I couldn't handle it the last time, and this time I'm scared I'll be lost."

Her statement broke off on a sob.

"Amycus would rape me, then Alecto would hurt me as punishment for tempting her brother. She would find creative ways to rape and defile me hoping to put her brother off me. But either she didn't
know how depraved he was, or it was her own twisted way of feeding his fantasies. Somehow her involvement made him want me more. He was always eager to rape me only when she was around...

"Of course none of them compared to Bellatrix. She was the one who tore out my hair and singed parts of my scalp and body. That crazy bitch was actually jealous that her husband and his brother would team up to rape and torture me! The more excited they got as they tormented me, the worse she treated me afterwards.

"But what they did had lesser impact on me because of what Lucius had already done. I had stopped thinking of myself as a person. I stopped thinking of my body as my own. So it didn't really hurt as much as it should have... I can't imagine being handed over to one of them now. I'm terrified of facing that kind of pain, but, I'm even more terrified of losing my mind completely just to cope with their horrors."

Ginny's voice broke into what must have been body-wracking sobs from the sound of it, thought Draco. In the intermittent silence he heard soft shushing and cooing noises.

"Do not despair. We may have a way to help you. But it would require a great deal of trust in each other."

Cora's voice was measured, hesitant almost.

"Cora, after everything you've done for me- I trust you. I think you've earned it, many times over. I would do anything you asked me to."

"What if there was a way for you to get back at the pack, at Draco? Would you jump at an opportunity to hurt Draco?"

There was a long pause, too long for Draco's comfort before Ginny exhaled loudly.

"I-I know I've spoken some things about Mal- Malfoy... He's, I don't know what he is, but he can't be as rotten as we imagined if Hermione- I mean, I remember how they were together. I don't think Hermione would've been as eager if he was like the Carrows or Lestranges, or even anything like his father. I just- I never liked Malfoy. And he looks so much like his father. It was easy to hate him.

"But I've been thinking, maybe, maybe Malf..."
disgusting family. But, if they can have him turned into a werewolf and hacked for entertainment... No, I don't want to hurt Malfoy, or the pack.

"I know what happens to prisoners; I know what we've done to prisoners. You took care of me, fixed my broken pieces somehow. I wouldn't do anything to hurt you, and hurting your pack would hurt you."

A pregnant pause ensued before Cora spoke.

"We're going to help you get back to the Order."

Draco slinked away having heard enough. He knew Cora wouldn't have decided to share their plan with Ginny unless she was certain of her loyalty. Draco himself was sufficiently convinced. Though a small part of him remained pessimistic, after all this was war and Ginny Weasley was not pack.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

They had her surrounded. And now that the adult humans had finally caught their first glimpse of the creature terrorising their forest the she-wolf instinctively knew they wouldn't stop till she was captured. Her choices narrowly came down to either slaughtering her hunters or escape her newly familiarised surroundings.

No, that wasn't any real choice. Where would she go? She didn't have the means to make it back home. The now faint voice in her head asked her to let go, give over control to her human, but she couldn't, wouldn't, not yet. Not while her sire and other enemies still walked alive out there. Not till her bloodlust was satisfied. With that thought in mind the she-wolf launched herself at the encroaching humans.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

"Looks like Ginny Weasley will be returning home soon."

"So you were convinced?" asked Gunnolf.

"Adequately so. It's still a risk, but better than any other option presently available," replied Draco.

Gunnolf grunted in agreement.

"Good thing we still have that batch of polyjuice. Provided the alpha has no use for it anytime soon, we should be able to pull this off."

"One way or another I don't see us needing to keep up the charade for more than a couple of months. Considering it'll only be for a couple of hours every other day we should have enough to tide us over."

"Sounds about right. Luckily, none of the alpha's followers have direct interactions with her. If any of them were assigned to something like laundry duty no amount of polyjuice in the world would be enough to convince a werewolf the scent on what are supposed to be Ginny Weasley's clothes didn't belong to someone in the pack."

"Hmmm."

"You look like you're still hesitant about something."

"I'm still not comfortable with how vulnerable this plan leaves Cora-"
"She volunteered. She knows the risks involved and she still offered to be the one to escort Ginny."

"Yes, but-"

"Draco, we know that Cora is the best choice. She'll leave with Ginny during her routine monthly supply run. And since she's known to go with one of the omegas she's grooming nothing will look amiss. None of the other betas would be able to leave out of blue without drawing attention to themselves in some way. Above all, you seem to forget that as a beta and a healer Cora is the best candidate to ensure Ginny is safely returned to the Order."

"I know. I just don't feel comfortable with the idea of a solo mission."

"Cora is a decent enough duellist. And while she may struggle to best another beta she could easily take down any witch or wizard she encounters. Besides, she'll only be on her own during the brief period when she leaves Bleidd and makes her way to the Order."

"You make it sound like the Order has no reasons to instantly attack Cora at sight."

"They're supposed to be the good guys, right?"

"It's war, Gunnolf, none of us have clean hands anymore."

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The she-wolf blinked once, twice, tried and failed to clear the fog that had settled in her eyes. She could just about make out the human shapes around her. She made a futile attempt to get up and attack the shapes closing in on her, but her body felt weighed down, her limbs immovable despite the absence of bindings.

The people around her were talking but she couldn't make sense of the words, not because her hearing was impaired like her vision. No, her hearing was just fine, she just couldn't understand the language they spoke. The nagging voice in her head had returned to tell her that there may be more than one language being spoken.

"- animagus."

She turned her head to look in the direction of the person who had spoken the one word she recognised.

Either her expression or her body language gave her away as they stopped speaking all at once before recommencing in a most excited manner all together. Only the speech wasn't directed at her, rather, at the person who had drawn the response from her. They grew quiet before the person spoke again.

"We know you are not animal," said the person, his words drawn out by his heavy accent.

She stared at him, but couldn't make his features out. No matter, she knew his scent now. Her blurred vision and lack of mobility was obviously the result of something they had done to her so she didn't feel particularly inclined to offer a response. The nagging voice pointed out that this person may be her chance to finally leave this land and return home.

Yes, home!

That is most likely where her sire had fled to in an attempt to lick his wounds.
Home also meant returning to her pups and her mate, reminded the voice. The she-wolf ignored her human, all those other concerns were secondary to her now.

The she-wolf tilted her head to indicate to the strange wizard that he had her attention.

"Are you stuck? Can you not turn back?"

It was technically correct, though she doubted they really understood what she was. She had scented no other being like her in and around the forest. Perhaps it was best for her to let them continue to believe she was an Animagus stuck in her animal form.

She nodded her head in a distinct and deliberate manner so there was no mistaking her action.

"Yes. Okay. Good."

There was some discussion among the group before the man spoke again.

"You are not from around here."

She would've snorted at that if she could, instead she offered another slow nod.

"Do you know where you are?"

She had an idea. Her sire had even told her where they were on the eve of her turning.

"You are in the Mountains of the Moon, Uganda. This is Uagadou. We are school for magic. You have been entering on our school grounds without permission. Do you understand?"

They needed to extend the magical barrier all the way to the base of the mountains if they were part of the school grounds, said the voice inside the she-wolf's head. The she-wolf only nodded.

"I am Akiki Zuluka. I am the Potions teacher. We call the Transfiguration teacher, then we help you change back," said the wizard, his voice reassuring despite the strange inflection of his words.

The she-wolf knew a Transfiguration teacher wouldn't be able to force her to turn so she would play along till she could get from them what she needed. Either that or till whatever spell they had cast on her had worn off and she could move freely again.

"We are excited to see you. We have never seen animagus of extinct animal-"

Hmm, thought the she-wolf maybe they had figured out what she was after all. She couldn't blame them for being excited, she had quite the thrill run up her spine when she saw her reflection at the watering hole.

"- We have seen patronus, but never animagus. We did not know it is possible to become animagus of dead animal! We want to know how you became-

Akiki switched from English to some other language. It sounded like he was consulting with his colleagues.

"Adjule?"

"No."

"Tibicena?"
"No."

The Potions teacher fumbled around some more trying to grasp the correct word before he addressed her again.

"We want to know how you became *canis dirus.*"

"Uganda?"

"Yes."

"Why Uganda? What's there?" asked Draco, thoroughly confused by the information Theo had provided him.

"Potential allies, I hear."

"The Dark Lord wishes to make an alliance with the magical community in Uganda?"

It still made no sense to Draco. Sure, there were communities scattered throughout the lands of Africa with people who possessed amazing magical abilities. The problem was that even within any single nation the magical folk were not unified under a single government or leader. No one wanted to take on the nightmare of having to deal with the multitude of clans existing in any one of the countries on the African continent.

"We all had similar reactions. But the Dark Lord had the idea that they could control the locals by taking control of Uagadou."

"By Salazar, he's going after the kids again!" It made sense now. The Dark Lord found success in Britain using the same tactic on Hogwarts. He then tried doing the same with the magical schools in America and Bulgaria but failed since their governments had protected the schools from the Death Eaters. It made sense that he would go after Africa.

"That was the plan anyway. Father says, both Lucius and he have failed in their attempts so far to establish dialogue with the locals. It's the same old problem one always faces with the magical community in Africa."

Draco nodded in understanding.

"Though they did succeed in getting them to agree to the Death Eaters building a base there. The Dark Lord made sure it was as close to Uagadou as they would allow. Greyback's been there a few times. Father says he managed to thoroughly captivate the locals as they'd never seen a werewolf in person before. Their community is quite fascinated with the concept of animal transformations."

"So the portkey is to the base near Uagadou?"

"That's what I got from the Ministry travel logs."

"But why would Fenrir want to take my sons to Africa?"

"Show off for the locals? I have no fucking clue. Anyway, we've been talking long enough. I only rushed here because I didn't think there was any other secure means of dispatching the information to you," said Theo glancing nervously around him.

"Any news from my mother?"
"Not yet. Then again, I only managed to relay your message a day ago when we met at an event at the Greengrass residence."

Theo was ready to activate his portkey when he was stopped by Draco.

"I'm going to need another favour from you," said Draco.

"You know those are piling up rather rapidly at this point."

"I'm aware. Nonetheless."

Theo sighed and looked at him impatiently.

"I need you to go to Uganda and investigate this matter further."

"What?! Why would you want me to go?" asked Theo.

"Because I don't have a portkey for Uganda and I wouldn't be able to get one without raising a lot of red flags. You on the other hand, as an active Death Eater, could easily come up with a reason to visit the base there."

Theo appeared to begrudgingly concede.

"I'll have one of the pack members accompany you. In the absence of any visual clues, they may be able to assist you by tracking scents."

Theo nodded. "Okay, but if I have to take one of you I insist it be Mr. Beefcake."

Draco responded with a raised brow.

"Hey, one look at him and my father or anyone else at the Ministry wouldn't bother questioning my motives for wanting to go to a remote location with a werewolf for company."

"Lord Nott wouldn't care that you're cavorting with a werewolf?"

"Why would he?" asked Theo with a shrug, then proceeded to pull out his vial of the Elixir of Euphoria and took a small sip. He waited for a minute for the potion to take effect before answering his own question in a cheery tone.

"It's not like he has to worry about me producing any Halfblood or mixed breed heirs that would taint his family name in the future. Quite frankly, father is more disappointed about my lack of ruthless ambition than he is about the places I choose to stick my dick."

Theo had an bright smile plastered on his face as he portkeyed away.

Chapter End Notes

I ended up taking more than a week to post this chapter- clearly underestimated all the things that would be vying for my attention around xmas time.

To anyone newly following the story, welcome; I'd love to hear what made you finally
check out this fic.

Thanks to all the readers who encourage me to keep me going. Happy holidays to everyone!
A groggy head and fuzzy vision were soon becoming the norm, thought Hermione upon gaining consciousness. In the midst of trying to clear her head and focus on her surrounding she felt a ripple in her limbs. Something was wrong, terribly wrong. Since the night she was turned this was the first time she had managed to take control of her body and it was only because she had been drugged by the humans so her wolf was finally asleep.

Looking down at her body she noticed parts of her had transformed. She tried to move but her body felt alien to her. There was so much power rushing through her veins even in her current state it made her feel dizzy and question if she could wield such power. Maybe her wolf was right, she was weak. She had a wand and Fenrir had still managed to capture and rape her. The only reason she managed to escape being bonded to him was due to her wolf taking over and dealing with him.

She felt an absence within her and realised that she no longer felt her bond with Draco.

Draco.

Merlin! Why had he not come looking for her? Fenrir took her, took their pups, and while she was being raped and abused where was Draco?

The she-wolf was right to focus on vengeance. It was all she had really.


With that refrain in her head Hermione let go.

The she-wolf woke up fuming. They had tricked her and trapped her. The humans in this land didn't use wands like she was used to and they spoke in a foreign tongue making it impossible for her to tell when one of them was firing a spell at her.

She looked at her body and was livid to discover that instead of her powerful paws she now possessed delicate hands with blunt fingernails. She couldn't tell if she was still a little out of it, or immobilised, or if her tail had just disappeared the same way as her paws but she could no longer feel it when she tried swishing it about.

While her surroundings looked comfortable enough it mattered little to her as she was brought there without her consent. She growled in anger and frustration and was pleased that at least her vocal chords remained unaffected by whatever they had done to her.

The humans must have heard her growl as one of them entered through the door at the far corner of the room. She could smell the fear on the wizard as he cautiously approached her. It made her recall another time not so long ago when she had been captured and taken to a castle as a gift to the wolves. Back then she was the human who had shuddered in fear and it was a wolf that approached her.

That wolf had turned out to be her mate.
Bah! Her lip curled in distaste at the word. Where was this mate of hers? Why had he let her be captured? Why had he not come for her? That was no mate. When she was done with her sire and others who had hurt her she would find her pups and a new mate.

The dark skinned wizard smiled at her and spoke in some strange language before he fell quiet, his face a mask of concentration for a second before his body changed and where the wizard stood there was a hippopotamus instead.

The she-wolf watched the creature in amusement wondering if she was supposed to feel afraid of it. It may have been bigger than her but she was faster and stronger. Usually anyway. Now, she was frozen in place and could only move her head.

Though focused on the animagus before her she didn't fail to notice Akiki slip into the room. He stayed at a distance but addressed her when he felt her eyes on him.

"Hello. I see you have met my colleague. I am sorry. I wanted to come earlier, but I have classes. I came as soon as I am free," he explained with a smile in his strange accent. His friendly manner appeared genuine but he was one of the people who had drugged and immobilised her so she wasn't going to be fooled by him again.

"This is Kwame Okereke," he said pointing to the hippo who stood there doing nothing. "He is the Transfiguration teacher. He will help you."

Akiki looked at his colleague who transformed back into his human self. He nodded to her and bowed in a manner that suggested he was greeting her.

Both the she-wolf and her human self didn't care for their friendly overtures. The only thing she needed from these humans was a way to return home.

The two teachers spoke briefly before Akiki addressed her again.

"Kwame says that he will now change into his animal and then slowly change back to his human state. He would like you to pay attention to him and copy him."

Akiki was barely done talking when his colleague transformed into a hippo. This time it was her human's turn to be amused. The transformation was done with such flair and drama that if it was a rabbit instead of a hippo it would have looked like something out of Muggle magic show.

It was no better than a Muggle magic show, thought the she-wolf. The hippo wasn't a real creature, it was only a wizard pretending to be one.

It didn't escape her attention that since she woke up her human self was no longer trying to wrestle control from her. She was even beginning to come around to her way of thinking. This was good. They were meant to be one, not two. It was good the two were finally merging, which would of course turn out bad for anyone who had ever wronged her.

The she-wolf didn't allow herself to be distracted by Akiki’s instructions or the Transfiguration teacher’s actions. Instead she and her human focused on her weak hands and imagined them changing back into the strong forelimbs of the wolf. There was no conflict between the creature and human parts of her, in the moment they were one spirit unified in their desire to change into the more powerful beast.

The she-wolf was pleased to feel her body change. She raised her head, proud of what she and her
human had accomplished together. She cast a glance towards the silly wizards who looked excited in their misguided belief that they were somehow responsible for the change.

"This is good. This is very good," babbled Akiki excitedly. "We will leave now and return later. Give you time to rest. Progress!"

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Oh, this is different.

Only Kwame and Akiki entered her gilded cage but with the door left open the she-wolf had already caught the scent of the three children standing just outside; they were the same children who had saved her life.

Over the course of the past couple of days the she-wolf was visited several times by the Potions and Transfiguration teachers along with other members of the Uagadou school staff. Despite their best efforts they failed to get her to change any part of her body. From their expressions, as well as Akiki's exclamations, it was clear that the lack of progress had caused their enthusiasm to quickly run out.

Their interactions had not been a complete waste of time. Through a series of tedious questions they had gleaned that the she-wolf was from Britain. They were ignorant of the war waging there and spoke about Voldemort like he was some kind of saviour of Wizarding Britain.

The humans appeared to increasingly grow frustrated as they failed to work out the mystery of why she was unable to return to her human state while the she-wolf was growing tired of being confined by four walls. She wished to run wild, flex her muscles, brawl with wild animals, and tear them up and feed on them. The ignorant humans were unwittingly torturing her by failing to cater to her needs as a creature.

"We had an interesting talk with three of our students," said Akiki once both wizards were done greeting her. "They said they found you injured and treated you. We looked at their memories- we saw your injuries. Something terrible happened to you. We don't understand how you are alive... Our Headmaster thinks that you cannot change because you may be frightened. We want to show you that you have no need to fear us."

Akiki turned to the door and called out in an authoritative voice.

"Watoto? Ingia."

The children entered as if summoned by Akiki. The little girl was giddy with excitement soon as she spotted the she-wolf. She looked like she would have rushed to hug the she-wolf if not for the presence of her teachers. The two boys were more restrained in their joy but they were also pleased to see her. Understandably so. The she-wolf had evaded the children each time they came looking for her after the time they healed her in the cave.

"Let me introduce you to your little healers. This is Kalisha Jakande, Bokamoso Falana and Mpho Saro-Wiwa," he said pointing first to the little girl, then her friend and finally the little animagus. "Instead of practicing with Kwame and myself in this room, we thought you may feel more comfortable practicing with the children. You will be free to roam the school grounds."

The she-wolf found Akiki's line of reasoning faulty. How could a bunch of children help her transform when their teachers had failed? But her own teachers had thought nothing of exposing their young charges to hippogriffs and blast-ended skrewts as well as the occasional duel with a Dark
wizard. To their credit, at least the staff at Uagadou had seen it fit to let her roam their school grounds because they believed she was a harmless animagus.

"- Now, Kalisha and Bokamoso have yet to learn how to change into an animal but young Mpho, he is very talented, as you have seen. He knew how to change into his animal even before he came to school," explained Akiki. He then turned to address the children, his tone conveying that he was most likely offering them instructions on how they were expected to behave.

The she-wolf thought the new arrangement would work in her favour. The children, she thought, should be easier for her to manipulate into providing her the help she really needed.

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"The rumblings have quietened in the days since Greyback's return."

"Do you think it has something to do with him returning injured?" Draco asked his sire.

"Indirectly, perhaps. I suspect Greyback ending up injured has either altered or delayed their plans. His mutts aren't quite as gleeful as they were in the first couple of days you were gone," said Oskar.

"How many of them are there anyway? Surely we can-"

"Do you think you're ready to fight Greyback?"

Draco didn't even need to ponder the question to give his answer, his wolf had been telling him he was ready for ages now. But Oskar wasn't done talking.

"I'm not just asking if you're ready to exchange blows with him. I'm asking if you're ready to kill him and take over as alpha of the pack."

And suddenly Draco understood Oskar's hesitation. It wasn't that he didn't believe Draco capable of defeating the alpha, he doubted Draco could bring himself to deliver the death blow to Fenrir and step in as their new leader. When he thought about it, Oskar wasn't mistaken.

_Draco, Draco, you are not a killer._

Dumbledore was right about that. Over the years Draco had discovered that he didn't have the stomach to kill anyone. How was he to bring himself to kill his own alpha? And what would happen if he succeeded in killing Fenrir but failed as a leader? Without an alpha to bond with, wouldn't he be condemning the pack to a life of madness and savagery?

Oskar saw the doubts flicker across his pup's face and attempted to comfort him by placing a hand on his shoulder.

"It is a lot, I know. We just need to wait till you're ready."

Draco didn't feel so sure and said as much. "What if I'm never ready? It's one thing to cause someone's death while defending myself in the midst of a battle but to carry out an execution... I couldn't- I mean, I don't think I could..."

He didn't know how to express to Oskar all the things that had led to him being labelled as a coward.

"You're over-thinking this, my son. Give it time, instinct will govern your actions when you're ready. We don't need to get rid of Greyback yet as we first need to ensure the pack is protected from any external threats that may arise once he falls. For now we continue to co-exist with Greyback and his
lackeys and you continue to exercise your control over pack members that have bonded with you.”

Draco nodded in agreement though he doubted he could ever do away with Fenrir in the manner needed to succeed him as alpha of the pack. Thankfully Oskar distracted him by changing the subject.

"Have you received any news from your mother about the mysterious Malfoy elf?"

Draco shook his head. "No, but I haven't spoken with Theo again. I know he's been concerned that we may be drawing attention to ourselves with the frequency of our floo calls and meetings."

"He's right to be concerned. More than a few members in the pack have taken note of your recently renewed friendship with the Death Eater, no knowing who else has noticed... It's too bad your friend didn't have another set of mirrors to spare."

"It's probably hard for you to imagine this but two way communication mirrors are a rare commodity these days. The Dark Lord made sure to have them destroyed and banned early on. He then added a Ministry trace to the magic that creates a new set... It would not have been an easy task for Theo to acquire that set. Simple possession of a set of communication mirrors is now taken as intent to commit treason which carries an automatic lifetime sentence in Azkaban. I'm grateful for the one pair he managed to find as it will provide us with a secure means to communicate directly with the Order."

"Every time you give me details of the world outside I'm glad I'm an old werewolf with no dealings outside the pack," said Oskar letting out a long suffering sigh.

"From what Theo tells me a lot of people are beginning to share that sentiment. People are unhappy with the way the Death Eaters have been running things. We're hoping there are just enough disgruntled individuals in influential positions to pull off a coup."

"While I pray for the success of your plans, I don't imagine any change coming without an all out war."

"We don't have the numbers for an all out war, Oskar. Apart from the pack itself, and hopefully some support from the Order, I don't see anyone joining our side should we engage in conventional warfare with the Death Eaters. Other Wizarding communities have long been aware of the civil war going on in Britain, but to them it's nothing more than a local conflict. Even when the Death Eaters launched attacks in the Americas and Bulgaria their governments downplayed the events as random acts of terrorism by individual groups with no connection to each other. They don't even recognise the Death Eaters as a group, let alone consider them a threat! Foreigners will not join us and the magical folk in Britain have been worn out by the events of the past five years. In bits and pieces they surrendered control to the Death Eaters, but even while they are suffering due to their past inaction they lack the energy needed to fight back and regain their previous way of life. They don't want a war."

"Only a fool ever really wants war, but wise men accept that sometimes war is unavoidable."

Oskar's words though simple lay heavy on Draco's mind with their undeniable truth. Theo and he had taken a page out of the Death Eaters' book when they made their plans. They were going to work in the shadows to infiltrate and regain control of the Wizarding institutions. But they had made one gross miscalculation. With years of being in power the Death Eaters and even the Black Cloaks were now emboldened and brash in their actions. They wouldn't simply go away; this time they wouldn't wait quietly in the shadows for their next opportunity to rise to power. They would put up a fight.
"We need to start preparing for a total war," said Oskar in a manner so calm it bordered on the casual.

Draco began to feel overwhelmed. It was all too much to think about. He wished Hermione was with him, he would have liked to talk to her and hear her thoughts on the subject. After all, she had maintained her will to fight the Dark Lord and his forces under bleaker and far more hopeless conditions. Thinking of her made his heart ache, but in the different way from the way it did the day she left. Instead of a sharp pain he just felt hollow and empty, like a part of him that used to be there had gone missing without him realising it.

Draco sighed, then looked at Oskar.

"One thing at a time. For now I need to locate my mate, take care of my pack and figure out what Fenrir's been up to. Speaking of which, we may soon have some answers about his trip to Uganda. I believe Theo's going there today."

At the questioning look from Oskar Draco explained, "Fenrir has ordered Gunnolf to report to Death Eater Headquarters- his presence was demanded for an overseas mission."

"As much as I find Greyback's dependence on Gunnolf to be shameful, it's an even greater shame that he would allow someone else to command his head beta," exclaimed Oskar with a disdainful shake of his head.

Draco shrugged it off. Fenrir had always shown zero qualms about letting the Death Eaters abuse his pack. Compared to some of his past transgressions Fenrir lending his head beta as a tracker didn't strike Draco as anything terrible.

"What do you expect to find there anyway? Your pups were brought back safe and sound and the pack will ensure they never leave without your consent again. Why pursue this?"

Oskar was right, whether or not Fenrir took his sons to Uganda and whatever he did there was not really a priority, and yet-

"I'm not sure what it is I'm looking for. I just have this hunch that this is something I need to pursue."

Oskar merely nodded and proceeded with the next order of business. It came as no surprise that Oskar would accept such an answer as reasonable enough. How many times had his sire told him, What we think of as instinct is only the goddess' way of nudging her favourite creatures on to the right path.

"I think Zoey is finally ready."

"She better be," rejoined Draco. "Cora will be leaving in a few days."

"Zoey's young and has a nervous disposition but she is loyal to Cora."

"We both know I wouldn't have chosen her if we had any other choice. Unfortunately, she's the only one we could use to play Ginny Weasley without the pack noticing her absence."

"It is true that I would prefer someone who wasn't sired by Greyback himself, but Zoey isn't a bad choice. And since the witch doesn't find Zoey threatening she has been spending time with her making it easier for Zoey to study her mannerisms."

"I'm more concerned that the foolish girl will get within scenting range of any of Fenrir's followers while she's polyjuiced as Ginny. It is a legitimate concern considering Zoey'll need to put on this act..."
more than a couple of times every week," expressed Draco.

"Cora is confident that Zoey will do just fine. You know Zoey has been under her care since she was turned so she knows her best."

"Doesn't change the fact that she's so young. A single slip up on her part would leave all of us exposed!"

"I heard you were far younger when you were planning the assassination of one of the greatest wizards of our lifetimes."

Draco would've taken offence at Oskar's words if not for the tone in which they were delivered.

"Don't hold her age against her. She may appear incompetent around you because you unnerve her. You should get used to having that kind of effect on omegas."

It took Draco a moment to catch on to what Oskar was implying. When he did he felt a little foolish. Knowing the way the social hierarchy worked within the pack he should have been more conscious of how members of his pack would respond to the changes in him. If the pack's bitches had been eager to mate with him before, now they would be doing all kinds of stupid stuff to win his attention. It would be worse during the full moon when they would most likely fight each other to be the one to receive his seed.

"I really need my mate back," Draco groaned out loud.

"You should never have let her go. We tried to make both of you understand."

There was no smugness to Oskar's words, just grim resignation.

"She wouldn't have been happy. She believes her place is beside her friends." Admitting it out loud to someone else was even more painful than Draco thought it would be.

"Once you were mated it wouldn't have mattered. Her place would be with you and the pack for eternity," explained Oskar.

"I wanted her to stay by choice," Draco said out loud. Silently he thought, and she didn't choose me.

Instead of the children, it was Akiki who entered the room and he was alone. She had spend the last few days in the company of the children roaming the school grounds as they urged her through gestures to imitate their little friend who could switch between his human and bird forms as quickly as he could flap his wings. While free to roam anywhere she pleased she was unable to leave the school grounds as she couldn't cross the school's magical barrier- though the children didn't seem to suffer the same problem.

Interacting with the children was a strange experience for her. For some unfathomable reason they accepted her and didn't fear her, not even after watching the grisly display of her feeding. The little girl in particular didn't shy away from showing her affection going as far as wrapping her arms around her neck in a hug as she wished her goodnight. Even stranger for the she-wolf was how she felt around Kalisha, Mpho and Bokamoso. Their mere presence was enough to make her feel and act less irrationally than when they weren't around.

But as much as she was enjoying the company of the kids, the she-wolf was tired of being stuck at Uagadou with no means to return home.
Well, if she couldn't return to the pack she may as well start building a new pack for herself. Isn't that how her sire had started out anyway, by biting random strangers? If he could do it surely she could too! So what if she didn't understand a word of any of the local languages, as their alpha she would still be able to command them as she wished.

Yes, thought the she-wolf and her human, that is exactly what she would do should the locals continue to prove useless.

When the Potions teacher started speaking the she-wolf noticed that she had not seen the man this excited since their first meeting.

"We have good news. We have an important visitor we believe can help you. He speaks English very well and he is a man of great influence. Even if he cannot help you change back he will be able to send you home."

Chapter End Notes

I went and edited my original AN because looking at comments for the last couple of chapters on both sites I think readers could use a helpful reminder. So here's a quote from chp 8 on the subject of lone wolves.

"Being an outcast is the worst punishment for one of our kind, pup. Doesn't matter if you leave, get kicked out, or are simply lost, once out of the pack you become a lone wolf, an outcast. As social creatures our minds cannot cope with the loss of the bonds-we slowly go mad.

"Our nature compels us to seek others, to create a substitute for what we would have naturally found with the pack. But this is impossible to do as humans do not accept our kind. A wolf who has lost his mind grows more feral, he envies pack members for having what he cannot. In his jealous rage the mad wolf will lash out and attack our weakest members, thus making him a threat- a threat we then bear the responsibility to eliminate."

If Hermione comes across as OOC these past few chapters it's because she's a lone werewolf with no pack or bonds.

Happy New Year!
"We have good news. We have an important visitor we believe can help you. He speaks English very well and he is a man of great influence. Even if he cannot help you change back he will be able to send you home."

Those were the excited words uttered by the Potions teacher before he left the she-wolf. He returned some minutes later accompanied by her three young friends, Kwame and someone new.

The group entered the room one at a time, their bearing formal and their expressions more serious than any she was used to seeing on them. Akiki and Kwame fussed about as they welcomed the stranger who was the last to enter.

"My friend," started Akiki looking at the she-wolf, "it is my honour to introduce you to the honourable Babjide Akingbade, the Supreme-"

*Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards!* supplied her human self soon as the she-wolf heard the name of the stranger. But the she-wolf didn't need a title to inform her of the man's superiority, not when she could sense the power of his magic. This man wasn't like the others she had met here so far. Despite the friendly smile his eyes warned of a cunning intellect.

Akiki proceeded to address the man in his native tongue with Kwame joining in, and though the stranger nodded along, even responding now and then, his keen gaze remained focused on the she-wolf. At first she thought he was studying her but soon her head began to ache from the tremendous force attempting to break through her natural mental barriers. If she was really an animagus her secrets would no longer have been her own.

*Rude!*

"Forgive my rudeness," said the wizard, "but you know what they say about old habits."

He didn't strike the she-wolf as even the least bit apologetic, and the timing of his statement made her wonder if he had finally succeeded in reading her thoughts. Fortunately for the wizard she could see the three children out of the corner of her eye. They were smiling at her now but they would be horrified if she were to rip out the impertinent wizard's insides right before their eyes. So she forced herself to calm down and tolerate his presence.

"Mr. Zuluka informs me that you are from Britain. I know things are different there now, but some things remain unchanged. For instance, animagi have been required to register themselves and the form of their animal for as long as I've lived. If you were registered I am certain we would have long ago heard about the existence of an animagus with such an unusual animal."

The man paused, his eyes continuing their appraisal of the she-wolf. If he was waiting for a reaction from her she was going to disappoint him she decided.

"The logical conclusion would be that you are an unregistered animagus, yet I cannot shake off the feeling that isn't quite it either."

She was too busy trying to work out what suspicions he may be harbouring she failed to notice that the man drew closer to her as he spoke till he was within reach. Despite his apparent power and
shrewdness the she-wolf was so confident in her own strength she didn't feel threatened by the Supreme Mugwump. Therefore he succeeded in catching her off guard when he unexpectedly lay his hand on her and shouted, "Homorphus!"

To her shock and to everyone else's- including her own human's- amazement her body transformed from her wolf to her human self. She barely had time to register her nakedness before Kwame had transfigured his cap into a smock similar to the one he wore and threw it at her.

Thoughtlessly the she-wolf pulled on the garment so she was covered.

Babjide looked a little stunned when he spoke. "I didn't actually expect that to work-"

The she-wolf stared daggers at the man who had forcibly changed her back into her weak human body.

"- When the Headmaster informed me that the reversal spell and potion had yielded no result I began to grow suspicious that you may not be an animagus after all; it was inconceivable that the highly capable staff of Uagadou, with all their expertise on the subject, would fail at helping an animagus return to form. No one considered the possibility of you being a werewolf, definitely not me. How could we? A werewolf who could stay in their wolf form for days sounded more like something out of human myths and legends than reality. But I saw you and thought, a dire wolf's also not a part of our reality."

The she-wolf watched the wizard closely in silence doing her best not to give away any of the anxiety her human was growingly experiencing the longer she remained in her human form.

She was certain of her strength and ferocity even in this form, but despite her attempts to reassure her human remained unconvinced. Her human pointed out that without her claws and fangs she was weak and vulnerable. They could hurt her. They had hurt her by keeping her trapped in this place on the pretext of trying to help her. And this particular wizard had gone so far as to put his hand on her.

I am not weak!

Never that, insisted the she-wolf. In her human form she still had her magic. She rubbed her fingers together, relishing the feel of the sparks jumping across them. Yes, she had her magic.

The she-wolf observed the ebony trio standing behind the adults who had most likely forgotten that they were also in attendance. The children's eyes were big and grins wide as they took in her new form. Silently and wandlessly the she-wolf concentrated her magic on one of Kalisha's pigtails till she successfully levitated the end to stand up straight in the air, the sight drawing a giggle from the children. She let the pigtail drop back into place just before their teachers turned around to check on them. With an imperceptible shake of her head she tried to convey that they were not to say a thing about what they had just witnessed.

Their eyes glowing with mischief, each of the children snuck glances at her as they responded with silence and a shake of their heads to their teacher's probing questions. Their actions made her feel just a little more connected with them.

While her little display didn't fully inspire confidence in her magical ability it helped her human self become a little less anxious. Feeling a little more composed the she-wolf turned her attention to Babjide who was speaking to her again.

"I know the school staff have a host of questions they would like you to answer, and I have a few questions of my own. But perhaps we could start with the simplest one. Who are you?"
The she-wolf was unsure if she wanted to tell this man the truth. As far as she knew he was neutral, not allied to any of her enemies, yet she had no desire to satisfy the curiosities of these strange men. But the Supreme Mugwump possessed the ability to send her home.

Instead of answering the question she walked around Babjide and moved closer to the children till she was surrounded by them, with Mpho now perched on her shoulder in his bird form. Of the three of them Mpho always seemed to be the one most attuned to her needs. Comforted by the company of her little saviours the she-wolf was able to make up her mind.

When she finally spoke her voice was faint, her human vocal chords strained from disuse. "I'm Hermione Granger."

"We have to tell Draco about this!" insisted Gunnolf staring at the fifteen-inch long wand made of elder wood in Theo's hands. "I can smell Hermione on that wand. That's definitely hers. She-"

"I don't mean to question your abilities, you're probably quite good with scent tracking, normally. But you're mistaken this time. I've seen this wand enough number of times during my school years to recognise it as Headmaster Dumbledore's wand. And as I recall Draco took to using it after his own wand was destroyed."

"If it belonged to Draco then this may have been the wand he gave Hermione when he helped her escape. We can confirm if I'm right by asking Draco."

Theo was shaking his head adamantly. "No, we can't do that. Don't you get it? What do you think will happen if it turns out that Draco did really give this wand to Granger?"

Gunnolf stared at Theo in confusion.

"I probably don't understand the whole mate business when it comes to werewolves but from what I've heard and seen of Draco's behaviour so far he's extremely protective of Granger. If it turns out that Granger was in possession of this wand when she left then it wouldn't be a stretch of the imagination to assume she must have crossed paths with some Death Eater at some point for this wand to end up here."

"Yes, which is exactly why we need to tell Draco-"

"Can you try to think through on what would happen if Draco discovers that some Death Eater may have ended up in possession of Granger's wand? Or have you suffered one too many blows to the head so now all you're good as is eye candy?"

"Instead of insulting me you could simply explain your- Wait. What do you mean eye candy?!

Gunnolf didn't know what to make of the temperamental Death Eater. Ever since they left the Ministry he felt like he was suffering from whiplash courtesy of Theo's mood swings. He noticed that every couple of hours, without warning or provocation, the wizard would go from carefree and chatty to quiet and gloomy, only to have his mood automatically perk up moments later. However once they discovered the wand lying abandoned on the floor of one of the many rooms of the building that served as the Death Eaters' base in Uganda the mood swings were replaced by a more acerbic tongued and contemplative wizard. Gunnolf instinctively sensed that this by far was the most real version of Theo he was seeing.

"Look," said Theo rubbing his face in agitation, "you may not be privy to all the details, but I'm aware that Draco has shared some things so you know what we're trying to do. Currently, Draco is
one of the key players on the chessboard. I can't have him abandoning our plans to go chasing after Granger instead."

Gunnolf was resolute. Theo may fail to grasp the significance of a true mate, but he didn't.

"If this is really Hermione's wand, then we need to find out what happened to her. She could be hurt, captured, or Luna knows what! She is most likely in need of our help."

"I take no issue with investigating this matter further. I would just like to leave Draco out of it till we know for sure that Granger isn't back safe with the Order. To me it seems more likely that she lost the wand at some point as I doubt she would've managed to command Dumbledore's wand. Let's take a look at the last few spells cast to get an idea of what this wand's been up to."

Both men stared at the results after Theo was done casting a *Priori Incantato*.

"No spells to suggest that the caster was under attack or even engaged in some kind of duel," declared Theo. Sensing that he was finally getting through to the werewolf Theo pressed on. "If she was captured or hurt by any Death Eater or Black Cloak I would've heard about it by now. Granger isn't just an Order member, she's one of the Golden Trio, people would want to gloat about her capture."

"We came here following the alpha. It's possible that this is Fenrir's doing and has nothing to do with the Death Eaters."

Theo rubbed at his temples. The sexy werewolf was quickly wearing away at his nerves with his insistence that they share his wild theories with Draco just because he caught a whiff of Granger's scent on the wand.

"Or it's just a coincidence? After all, we did find the wand at a Death Eater base not at Wolf Castle."

"He brought the twins here. We know that for sure since we found some of their things in one of the other rooms. Isn't it possible he also brought Hermione here?"

"Are you suggesting Greyback arranged some kind of reunion for Granger and her tykes?" Theo scoffed at Gunnolf.

"It may sound ridiculous when you put it like that, still doesn't change the fact that he brought the pups here and we found Hermione's wand here as well."

Theo sighed. He didn't have the energy to keep at this argument, not with his Elixir of Euphoria almost all gone. He should've packed a larger quantity, or better yet he shouldn't have taken as many generous swigs of the potion as he had that day. Except he had been enjoying Mr. Beefcake's company and didn't want to put him off with his usually dour mood.

"Before rushing back to Bleidd to raise the alarm, how about we first complete the task we came here for? Let's finish exploring this place for any clues for why Greyback would have wanted to bring Draco's sprogs here. Let's also talk to some of the locals and find out what he's been up to. At the same time we can search for clues on what may have happened with Granger."

Hours later both men weren't sure of what to make of the things they had found in and around the building compound.

"I don't have to be a Potions Master to know that's *fero*," said Gunnolf looking at the vials of clear liquid in his hand.
"Do you know how common this stuff is nowadays? It's the Dark Lord's favourite currency for bribing wizards and creatures alike."

"Sure, but this particular version has only been given to us werewolves... and Hermione."

"So? Greyback was probably planning on bringing the pack here. The reports I received said that the locals were rather receptive towards him. He may have been planning to carry out some breeding experiments of his own right here."

Gunnolf thought this was a possibility based off what he had heard from Oskar about the way the alpha and some of the pack members had been acting recently.

"- He may have even gotten started on it already. Weren't you saying you smelled the strong scent of sex in the cellar?"

Gunnolf nodded. There was a long pause before he spoke. "Don't you think it's time we addressed the elephant in the room?" he asked the wizard.

Theo swore and cursed under his breath.

There was a damning certainty in Gunnolf's tone when he spoke. "That was her blood I smelled outside along with the alpha's." His voice dropped to a low whisper even though there wasn't a creature around who could overhear them. "There was something different about it, but it was hers. She lost a lot of blood. Far too much."

Theo cursed louder this time.

"That yard has so much blood on it," said Gunnolf pointing to the ground just outside the main gate of the fort like structure build from bricks and reeds, "The mud has actually taken on the colour of the blood it soaked up. I think, I think this is where Fenrir got hurt. The tracks aren't clear enough to read but some kind of fight must have taken place. When he returned, we could smell Hermione on him. It made no sense to us at the time, but looking at that... We need to tell-"

Theo shook his head.

"We can't tell him. We just can't. He'll lose all motivation. This, this'll destroy all of us."

Theo's voice had taken on a pleading tone but he didn't care. Too much was riding on Draco and he didn't believe his friend would still care to do anything about the Dark Lord if he had reason to think his Mudblood was dead.

"Draco needs to know. He's expecting to be reunited with his mate. He believes she's still alive." It suddenly made sense to Gunnolf why Draco had been unable to sense Hermione the last few days.

"Just shut up and listen to me, you muscled oaf. Without Granger in the picture Draco will have no reason to fight the Death Eaters or contact the Order, which means you continue to be stuck with Greyback as your leader while the rest of us suffer under the Dark Lord. There is more at stake here than some dead mate, don't you see that?"

Theo watched Gunnolf's face crumple and knew he had taken the wrong approach so he changed tactics.

"Greyback made it back alive. Isn't it possible that Granger did as well?"

It was obvious to Gunnolf that even Theo didn't consider it a real possibility.
"Fenrir is a werewolf, moreover he's an alpha. I don't see someone as frail as Hermione recovering from that sort of blood loss. Not unless..."

Could it be possible, Gunnolf asked himself. There was a chance it could be. It had been a full moon that night.

"Unless what?" asked Theo curious about what brought on the sudden change in the werewolf’s tone.

Gunnolf replied by voicing his thoughts out loud. "Unless the alpha turned her. She may have been turned. She could be hiding somewhere recovering from her injuries and struggling to cope with the trauma of being a new wolf and a lone one at that."

"You think Granger may be alive?" It was Theo's turn to be surprised by the abrupt alteration in the other man's mood.

"There is a possibility. It would explain why Draco is so certain about her being alive. Hermione getting away alive also explains why the alpha's been in a sulk ever since he returned. The alpha has never wasted an opportunity to torment Draco. If Hermione was dead he would have been gleeful and gloated about it."

"I doubt Granger would have a portkey to leave this country. If she is alive and hurt she could not have gone too far. Instead of aggravating me by once again insisting that we have to go tell Draco how about you join me in putting together a little hunting party? I would really prefer returning with Granger at my side or at least confirmation that she isn't in Uganda instead of going to Draco with what we know right now."

For once that day Gunnolf was quick to agree with Theo.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone showing support and encouraging me to keep posting chapters.

For those curious about Uagadou: According to the little bit of info I found about the school some of the students (as young as 14) were able to change into elephants and cheetahs. I imagine their classroom layout would’ve differed greatly from the ones at Hogwarts.
Hermione woke up in a bed feeling uncomfortable. Her discomfort arose not from her surroundings but her skin, which in turn didn’t have anything to do with her leaking breasts- she was so used to it now she no longer even thought about why they leaked. No, it was her skin, her human form that bothered her. It made her feel defenceless even if she was capable of wandless magic now. Hermione mentally cursed the wizard who forced her to change and wished she could go back to being the powerful beast once more, but despite her pleadings the she-wolf refused to transform. In her anxiety Hermione began to claw at her hands and face with her blunt nails in her pitiful attempt to discard her human shell.

Relax.

The she-wolf’s self-assured voice helped Hermione feel less anxious. If the she-wolf was still around then she would be fine. Hermione longed for the she-wolf to take over again, she had been forced Hermione into the spotlight by the she-wolf in the belief that the appearance of vulnerability would work in her favour with the strange wizards. And she was correct. Once they were done asking her a few basic questions about who she was they had left her alone to rest.

"Hermione Granger," repeated Babjide and she nodded in response. "Alright Ms. Granger, would you care to explain your unusual circumstances?"

"I wouldn’t know where to begin," stated Hermione. She hated how meek she sounded. She was unsure of herself, on the brink of all out panic. It was bad enough she was in her human form but the she-wolf had also forced her to the forefront. She closed her eyes and tried to come up with some kind of sensible answer to the man’s question. There was a long pause before she spoke again.

"All I can say is that I am the product of an ugly war."

"A war? And what war would this be?" asked the Supreme Mugwump in all sincerity.

"The fight against the evil regime of the one who calls himself Lord Voldemort."

"Ah, the very same Lord Voldemort who was the reason my predecessor was forced to step down?"

Hermione nodded in response.

"I take it from your statement that you belong to one of those little rebel groups?"

She gave another nod even though she didn't agree with his characterisation of the Order, but she knew that as far as the outside world was concerned they were rebels at best and terrorists at worst.

"I belong to the Order of the Phoenix." The blank look on his face told her the name didn't register."I fight alongside Harry Potter!" Emotions welled up within her as she remembered Harry, but it also brought a certain confidence to her. Harry, the fight against Voldemort, this was familiar ground.

"Harry Potter, yes I know what group you speak of. As I recall it was a group founded by Albus himself."
She nodded again, not trusting herself to speak. Gods, the days when they could still depend on the wisdom and guidance of Headmaster Dumbledore felt like several lifetimes ago.

Babjide let out an exasperated sigh. "All these years later your group still continues to chase the same bogeyman," he said with a shake of his head.

"I assure you, Tom Riddle or Lord Voldemort is no bogeyman, he is very much real."

"Yes. I’ve heard he is a very powerful Dark Wizard, but that is hardly a crime."

"No, but enslaving and killing people is a crime. Or it was till his followers changed the laws so they could do as they please."

"My experience in politics has taught me that there is always more than one version to any story. It is something I need to often remind myself to ensure I remain fair and unbiased in my role as Supreme Mugwump. From what we know of the situation in Britain this Lord Voldemort is a populist of sorts. However absurd his ideology he appears to have the support of the masses and poses no threat to the magical community at large. On the contrary he has helped developed a revolutionary new potion which is rumoured to have helped fix the fertility problem that has been plaguing magical beings for a while now."

Hermione felt drained. Listening to Babjide reminded her of all the reasons why throughout the years it had always been just a handful of Order members fighting against Voldemort and the Death Eaters. People either didn’t consider Tom Riddle to be a threat till it was too late or thought him too powerful to bother resisting. It was exhausting having to constantly convince people that Voldemort was an evil mad man who needed to be stopped and that he wasn’t an immortal god that could not be defeated.

"So, what brought you to Uganda?"

Hermione found this question harder to answer, it evoked far too much raw hurt and unvented anger when she remembered why she was there. She didn’t even know she was trembling till she felt Mpho and Kalisha hugging her tightly. It took her another moment to realise that her vision was blurry from the tears running down her cheeks; this show of weakness made her feel ashamed.

Instead of pressing her for an answer like she was expecting Babjide ended up surprising Hermione with what he said next.

"The Headmaster shared with me the memories of the night the children discovered you... I do not know why you came here but I think it may be a good thing that you ended up at Uagadou. The school staff have accepted you as their guest and extended their hospitality and protection to you. You can rest assured that you are safe here.

"I’ve been asked to help you return home. When I leave from here I shall arrange for a portkey so you may re-enter Britain. However, if you ask me, Ms Granger, I think you should reconsider your decision to return home. You’ve clearly experienced some trauma and from the way you speak of things it sounds like life back home is less than ideal for you. Stay here a while, let all wounds heal before you think of moving on." He stared at her in a manner meant to convey that he wasn’t referring to any physical wounds.

Babjide had left without asking her any other questions despite his obvious curiosity about her beast. Two days later he surprised Hermione again when an owl arrived with a package for her from Babjide. The package contained a small wolf totem along with a short note. The note informed her that the object was a portkey for some nondescript Muggle town in Wales. It was good for a single
use but would only be activated the following week. He ended the note expressing hope that she would use this time to properly consider making a fresh start for herself at Uagadou.

Hermione reached under the pillow and felt for the object. The portkey securely held within her fist a part of her was tired enough to be tempted by the prospect of a new strife-free life for herself. Between the acceptance she sensed from those at Uagadou as well as the adoration from her three young friends, Hermione thought she could make a life for herself among the people much like Remus had done with the Marauders and the Order of the Phoenix. She could be safe here, but the she-wolf refused to consider it, insisting she return home.

Pack.

Yes, pack was important. She tried to remember why.

"Werewolves are pack creatures, we go mad without a pack."

Hermione remembered Draco's reason for not completing the mate bond before she left. Thinking of Draco brought a confusing rush of emotions ranging from feeling loved and cherished to abandoned and disappointed.

The she-wolf was right, thought Hermione. Uagadou was a safe haven but it wasn't home. Her pack was out there somewhere waiting to be claimed, whether they knew it or not. Once she was with her pack she would stop feeling so out of sorts. Then she would be just as strong as the she-wolf and she could finally exact her revenge on everyone who had hurt her as well as the ones who had let her down.

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"Any news from your Death Eater friend?" asked Oskar.

Draco shook his head. "Which I suppose is a good thing or Theo would have contacted me by now."

"What about Gunnolf, any update on him?"

Draco shook his head again. "All I know is that there aren't any tasks assigned to him on the duty roster for the next few days. Fenrir hasn't spoken directly with me since I returned. He's been excluding me from pack matters even though I'm Gunnolf's second, as far as Fenrir knows, and in charge of running the pack when the head beta isn't around."

"I wonder why that is? If he sensed something different in the bonds he would've challenged you by now. He has to be up to something."

Cora who had remained quiet so far listening to the exchange between Draco and Oskar finally had a reason to speak up. "He's planning on splitting the pack. He's at last realised that the pack is too large."

"Ah, so he has sensed some change in the bonds," said Oskar. "Gunnolf's been after him for a while to form a second pack. Nice to hear he's decided to listen."

"Yes, Fenrir finally listened, but, true to form, not closely."

"What do you mean?"

"He wants to take some of the pack to Uganda and leave the rest here at Bleidd. He also plans to remain alpha of both packs."
Oskar shook his head vehemently. "He's even crazier than I thought he was if he thinks that'll work. He can't keep the packs that far apart if he plans to be bonded to both."

"He can bond with two packs?" asked Draco with genuine curiosity. No matter how much he learnt about pack dynamics it felt like there was always more for him to learn.

"He could technically. An alpha may bond with several packs if they so wished but the bonds would be far too weak for them to effectively perform their duties as alpha. This may sound like a paradox, but the purpose of the alpha's powers is to serve the needs of the pack."

Draco nodded in understanding. Once again he was reminded of how lucky they were to have an Elder in their pack. It was such a shame that Fenrir only thought of Oskar as some werewolf who was too old to be of any use to the pack.

"Has he mentioned anything about how he plans to go about it?" Oskar asked Cora.

"From what I understood he intends to let us decide for ourselves."

"Unlikely," said Draco. "Even if Fenrir hasn't caught on to what is going on he must sense the divisions in the pack. I suspect he will split the pack along those lines."

"But the division is between those loyal to him and those who aren't," said Cora.

"Yes, so we need to ask why would Fenrir even want a pack of those who aren't loyal to him?"

They fell silent at those ominous words from Oskar. There was no doubt in any of their minds of what Fenrir, the ruthless leader who had not thought twice before offering his pack to be experimented upon or used as cannon fodder in battles, would do to those he believed were disloyal to him.

"So much for waiting till I'm ready," grumbled Draco under his breath.

Oskar gave Draco a sympathetic look before turning his gaze upon Cora again.

"We proceed as planned."

In response to Oskar's stern words Cora visibly gulped, then looked down and nodded.

It took Draco a few moments to catch the meaning of their exchange. Cora was due to leave with Ginny the following day. The plan was for Zoey to emerge polyjuiced as Ginny every now and then to convince the pack that Ginny remained their prisoner. Since they were werewolves in order to pull off this deception they needed to ensure that no one loyal to Fenrir worked at close quarters with Ginny or Zoey's scent would give away her true identity. For now Draco and Gunnolf had worked out everyone's duties in a manner that kept that secret safe, but that would change with the pack split. Whether Fenrir chose to go to Uganda or remain at Bleidd, he would take his prisoner with him. Cora had good reason to feel concerned for Zoey.

Sensing Cora's unease Draco addressed her in a gentle tone. "Whoever Fenrir may decide to cast out, we can be certain he won't let go of Gunnolf and you. I'm sure the two of you can work out a plan that protects Zoey. If at the time it doesn't look like a viable option you can make it appear as if Ginny escaped."

Cora blinked at Draco in surprise. "Cast out?" she asked, her voice close to hysterical. "We would be lucky if that is all Fenrir will do. You cannot expect us to just leave the rest of you and switch allegiance to Fenrir!" She looked lost, almost scandalised by the suggestion.
Oskar came to her rescue. "Relax, little one," he ordered in a soft voice. "You will not be abandoned. Draco will do what needs to be done when the time is right. Till then we play our roles as expected."

Cora, though still visibly upset, appeared less agitated now.

There were things Draco wished to discuss about the future of the pack but looking at Cora's reaction he thought it better to wait and have that discussion later with Oskar. So he moved on to the next order of business.

"Have you managed to prepare Ginny for what to expect once she returns?" Draco asked Cora.

Cora shook her head. "She believes she will be safe once she returns to the Order. I'm afraid the shock may be too severe and she may return to her previous mental state."

"The shock? Surely she came to the same conclusion as Hermione about why she ended up a prisoner to start with?"

"I don't know. I've tried to talk to her about her capture and the events leading up to it, but she usually shuts me off. She either hasn't considered the possibility or is too scared to consider it."

"She needs to be prepared, Cora. We can't go to all this trouble to send her back only for her to end up a captive again because of a traitor in their camp."

"I understand, Draco. I just don't want to push her right now. While she is desperate to return to her loved ones as the day draws nearer she's been growing more anxious about seeing them again. She knows it wasn't her fault, but she still feels dirty because of everything they did to her. She's worried about how her fiancé will respond to her knowing she was publicly raped and defiled by nearly every Death Eater present at the revel that took place in Godric's Hollow."

Draco swallowed his groan of frustration. He pitied Ginny and even experienced guilt to an extent knowing the role his family had played in her suffering. It didn't seem fair that they were in this situation where they needed to rely on Ginny as heavily as they did.

"You have only till tomorrow, Cora. Talk to her. Get her to share details about who was their informant, who came up with the plan etcetera. It will at least give us a list of suspects that we could try narrowing down further with our own enquiries. We need to identify the leak on their end not just for her safety but ours as well," said Draco giving Cora a meaningful look before dismissing her.

Later, after Cora left, Draco turned to Oskar looking thoughtful.

"We're in no position to split off and start our own pack. We may be able to kill a few people along the way but eventually they will manage to kill each of us. Most of the pack is neutral. They don't like Fenrir but they won't fight him. We don't have the numbers, and that's not even taking into account the Death Eaters and Black Cloaks who will happily side with Fenrir to crush any kind of werewolf uprising."

Oskar nodded. "We need to figure out a way to delay whatever Fenrir has planned."

"It's our fourth day here and we've made no progress. I think we need to-"

"Return to Bleidd? Yes, I agree," said Theo, pre-emptively cutting Gunnolf off. He sounded resigned more than being annoyed with Gunnolf for suggesting the same thing for the umpteenth
"Really?" Gunnolf looked at Theo in surprise. He had expected the wizard to argue with him same as every other time he had suggested returning.

Theo shrugged. "Like you've been saying, there are no tracks to follow and based on all our enquiries with the tribes in the locality, all we've managed to figure out is that you shouldn't come to Africa without a translator."

Gunnolf showed some tact by choosing not to point out that in the end even a translator had proven to be of little help in their quest. After a frustrating first day of struggling to communicate with the locals they had managed to find a translator at a hefty fee, yet the man's translations had left a lot to be desired. Based on his descriptions the forest at the base of the Mountains of the Moon was recently haunted by a vicious beast that had terrorised the locals, managing to scare away every other predator in the forest till it was at long last captured by the teachers at Uagadou.

"They did also mention Uagadou."

"Yes, but you were present each of the times I flooed the school. Every time I tried to reach the Headmaster they said he was unavailable and asked me to call another time."

"I think it may have to do with that mark on your arm. Did you not notice how the locals would react anytime they saw it?"

"No, I didn't."

As someone who prided himself on his observational skills Theo was a little taken aback by the revelation that the locals had shown a distaste for Death Eaters he had failed to notice. What he did definitely notice were the stares he received every time he drew out his wand to cast a spell. As the only one who needed a wand during the course of this trip, Theo had consequently ended up feeling wholly inadequate as a wizard.

"Don't feel bad. My senses being as sensitive as they are I can hear even the mildest change in breathing pattern as well as smelling fear. Werewolves are really good at smelling fear."

"Too bad you're not as good at smelling arousal," Theo mumbled to himself.

More than once in the last three days Gunnolf had felt certain that Theo was hitting on him, but he didn't know the wizard well enough to tell if Theo was genuinely attracted to him or if he was just another hedonistic Death Eater who couldn't keep it in his pants. Even if the former was true Gunnolf didn't see the point of pursuing anything with someone who came from such a different background than him. Gunnolf doubted he was lucky enough to have a true mate but he wanted a mate, someone who would be his partner and share their life with him. He couldn't imagine someone like Theo ever willing to turn. So he chose to ignore Theo's advances.

Pretending not to have heard Theo, Gunnolf said, "We could give the school one last try before we head back."

"That Translator swindled me. The man had to be making stuff up, either that or the members of that one tribe imbibes mind altering substances. Do you really believe that, of all things, they found a dire wolf in their forest?"

"No, but isn't it an odd coincidence that they found a wolf? Worth looking into."

"First of all, I may not know as much about werewolves as I thought I did till recently, but I've never
heard of a werewolf that could stay as a wolf for days on end. And secondly, which is actually the 
more important point of the two, right until about two minutes ago weren't you pestering me about 
returning to Bleidd?" asked Theo looking justifiably incredulous.

Gunnolf hesitated briefly before he replied.

"We're going back with bad news. When Draco questions me I'd like to sound confident that we left 
no stone unturned."

"Makes sense-" said Theo, even though he silently acknowledged that they were only indulging in 
delaying tactics at this point. Like Gunnolf, he too was dreading being the bearer of bad news. In the 
past Theo had never been afraid of Draco. At worst he had thought Draco to be a fool to voluntarily 
join the Death Eaters as early as he did, but his friend was different now. There was something 
dangerous and wild about Draco now that unnerved Theo just as much as it inspired confidence in 
him.

"- If nothing else, we'll find out what kind of creature gets mistaken for a dire wolf in these parts. So 
what's the plan? Come up with some bullshit excuse to be on the school grounds and take a quick 
look around for ourselves?"

"Basically, yes."

"Alright then, Mr. Beefcake. You can apparate us to the Mountains of the Moon while I come up 
with that bullshit excuse," said Theo with a wink, holding his arms out for Gunnolf.

Chapter End Notes

For the most part this story is told from either Draco or Hermione's POV. The rare 
scenes written from any other character's perspective are ones where both D and H 
aren't present but there's stuff going on that I think the readers should know about. 
Mentioning this for readers who are likely to feel disappointed that they don't see more 
interactions between other characters.

In case you didn't notice, I'm back to the Friday posting schedule. TBH, the challenge 
these days is not so much lack of time as it is the lack of smut in this fic. It almost feels 
tedious to write these chapters when there's not a lemon in sight. The only thing keeping 
me going are the comments. So thank you for the motivation.
Hermione tossed about the bed kicking off the bed covers. It was hard to sleep when every time she closed her eyes she saw flashes of what felt like someone else's life. Even with her eyes open as she looked down the length of her naked, sweat covered body she could see a blond head between her legs, grey eyes sparkling as they watched her. She knew it wasn't real, that he wasn't really here but try as she did she couldn't just blink him away from her memories.

She sighed.

"Yours," she said out loud, remembering the promise she had made to him.

Mate.

She couldn't understand why it hurt to want to forget him. She knew the she-wolf was correct. Draco Malfoy had proven himself to be unworthy. She needed someone who would properly bond with her and never abandon her in her time of need the way Draco had.

A part of herself protested at these thoughts, but despite sensing that something wasn't quite right Hermione struggled to see the flaw in her logic.

Draco sat up in bed, his heart thumping wildly in his chest. His eyes cast about the room wildly till they rested upon the bundled forms of his sons. He relaxed a little knowing they were okay. If only he had some way of checking on his mate, he thought ruefully.

He got up from his bed knowing sleep wouldn't come to him now. He would've preferred to go out on a run but didn't want to be away from his pups while he was feeling the way he was. He decided to do some reading instead.

Draco's fingers caressed the spines of the books left behind by Hermione. His fingers trailed the bindings of the books remembering how eagerly she had devoured their meagre offerings. He had never thought it possible to miss anyone the way he missed his witch. It wasn't even anything to do with the mating instinct; he just wanted to see her, know she was safe.

He sighed.

The goddess had shown herself to be abundant in her generosity to him ever since he had been marked as one of her creatures. With that thought in mind, Draco closed his eyes and offered a silent prayer.

Luna, watch over my mate. Return her safely to me.
"Everything okay?" asked Draco as he crossed paths with Cora.

"All according to plan," replied Cora as she returned Ginny Weasley to her quarters at Bleidd.

To the casual observer everything would appear perfectly normal, except for the fact that the person walking beside Cora wasn't the redhead, but Zoey polyjuiced to look like her. Draco knew the debriefing would have to wait till Cora was reported to him in private later, but from her response he was able to ascertain that their plan to deliver Ginny to her contact in the Order had gone off without a hitch.

He reached into his pocket and fondled the concealed communication mirror expectantly. It was only a matter of time before he would have news on Hermione.

Nearly eighteen hours had passed since Cora had returned to Bleidd from her trip and Draco had yet to hear from someone in the Order of the Phoenix. He restlessly paced about the room leaving everyone around him feeling nervous.

"You're sure that the handover went smoothly?" he asked Cora for the fifth time in the past hour.

"Yes," said Cora, beginning to once more repeat her narration of what had taken place when she left with Ginny. "I gave her a wand when we got there. She sent a patronus. We waited till one of them arrived; it was one of her brothers. He asked her many security questions; he didn't seem to believe that it was really her and that she was really alive. Once they had both confirmed that they were who they claimed to be she introduced him as Bill. I gave her the satchel with the items you packed for the Order. They left first; he disapparated them. I checked the surroundings to see if anyone had spied on us, but didn't pick up any other scents. Then, I myself left."

Cora did her best to leave the irritation out of her voice even though her patience with Draco had worn thin around twenty minutes ago. Knowing the state he was in currently it would be foolish to anger the young alpha, she thought.

"Why haven't they contacted us yet?" asked Draco. He stared at the mirror in his hand willing for someone from the Order to appear but was only greeted by his own reflection.

Draco didn't know what to do with himself. He had not heard back from the Order and there was no news on Theo or Gunnolf. He had flooed Pansy in the hopes that he would get some news from her about Theo or his mother but that call had taken a completely unexpected turn.

"Contraceptive potion?"

"Yes."

"I know you were bad at Potions but surely even you could manage something as simple as a-

"Don't be daft. Of course, I can brew the contraceptive potion. If only such a thing were still legal."
"What do you mean?"

"By Salazar, Draco! It's a good thing I adore you as much as I do or I'd hex you right now. They passed a Procreation Law expecting us to reproduce like bunnies. How're we supposed to do that if we're using contraceptives?"

"So contraceptives are illegal now?"

"Um, they have been for a while. Yeah. And, you don't even want to know what they do to witches who have performed an abortion. Don't give me that look. Unlike you werewolves, the rest of us aren't as eager to have babies with whoever we've been shackled to. Gods, that's such a terrible expression to use now because it's literally what's happening with some witches," she said, visibly shuddering. "Theo usually gets it for me whenever I need it- can't have the stuff lying around, I don't trust the house elves not to report me. Not that he's very eager to have children with me, but my dear husband would welcome any opportunity to punish me, I'm sure."

"Pans, do you think it's safe for you to be talking-"

"Oh that," she said with a dismissive wave of her hand. "The Ministry witch in charge of monitoring the Nott floos is related to the Parkinsons. Her situation is barely better than mine. I share my stock of the potion with her and in exchange she erases records of my more sensitive floo calls provided I'm not trying to overthrow the government."

Well that explained why Theo never contacted him from Pansy's floo.

"I believe we have the necessary ingredients. I'll have it brewed for you, but how do I give it to you?"

"Just have your elf send it over."

"What are you talking about, Pans? You know we don't have any elves here."

"Honestly, Drakie Poo! How do you expect me to believe Purebloods aren't superior when you act like this? I don't remember you being so stupid before. I'm talking about your personal elf. What was its name? Winky? Dobby? Whatever. Even if Lucius struck you off the family tree your personal elf is still bound to you. I don't have mine anymore. That bastard Theosophus had poor Millie's head chopped off the first time he caught her doing something for me that wasn't in line with his orders- he said it should serve as a lesson on obedience for me."

"Anyway, have your elf bring me the potion when it's ready. Because of your past it should be familiar enough with Nott Mansion to come and go undetected. Just be sure to order it not to say anything about the potion or who it's been to see to anyone else."

Draco was left feeling pretty foolish when the floo call was over. He really had forgotten all about his elf. For him, Mipsy had been just another one of his possessions that came to him with his name. There were so many things he could have gotten done using his elf. For example he could have easily contacted his mother and passed messages to her using the elf. No doubt, as a Malfoy elf, Mipsy would also be loyal to Lucius, since he was the patriarch of the family, but as his personal elf Draco's orders would always supersede all others.

He decided to wait till a late hour of the night to call upon his elf. That way Mipsy come see him and return to Malfoy Manor before anyone noticed his sudden absence.

"Draco, I believe someone's trying to contact you right now," said Oskar, drawing Draco's attention
to the mirror in his hand. It had grown hot and was faintly glowing.

Draco drew the small mirror close to his face and was startled by the nearly unrecognisable face peering back at him.

"Malfoy," the other man said by way of greeting.

Draco was shocked by the haggard appearance of his former nemesis. With his gaunt face and its careworn expression, dark circles and deep lines around his eyes, his scruffy beard and wild hair he resembled more an inmate serving a life sentence in Azkaban than the Harry Potter he remembered from Hogwarts. Seeing him now it was hard for Draco to believe that this man was the same age as him.

"Potter, I see your grooming habits still leave a lot to be desired," he replied.

Potter's face took on a wry smile that made him look even more pitiful somehow.

"And here Ginny's been telling us how much you've changed."

Draco shrugged it off. Some things would never change, he thought, like his rivalry with Potter.

"I've been expecting to hear from you for a while now," said Draco accusingly.

"Sorry for taking as long as we did. We thought Ginny had been executed when she was captured. It was quite a shock to have her return- to say nothing of all the things she had to tell us. We were-"

"Yes, Potter. You can fill me in on the specifics of your reunion later," Draco snapped at Potter impatiently. "What of Hermione?"

Draco didn't need Potter to say the words, the wretched look on his face said it all.

"Malfoy, we've spent the last twelve hours getting in touch with every known Order member and contact. No one's heard from Hermione; we didn't even know she was supposed to be alive till Ginny said so."

All this time Draco had been hoping Hermione was somewhere safely tucked away with the Order. Despite all signs pointing to some kind of foul play involving Fenrir he had hoped his mate was safe.

"Where could she be?"

Potter shook his head.

"I don't know. You have no idea what an emotional rollercoaster the last twenty four hours have been for me. First, I receive a patronus telling me that Ginny's alive. Then Ginny gets here and tells us this fantastical tale of how Hermione's not only been alive this whole time, but that you helped her escape nearly a month ago and she was supposed to be back with the Order... I cannot express how Ron and I felt every time we saw a patronus arrive only to deliver the disappointing news that they had no info on Hermione...Today, I feel like we lost her all over again."

"She has to be with someone in the Order. Where else could she be? The Death Eaters don't have her, I've checked. She left us because she believed she was meant to fight beside you in this twice damned war. So, where is she, Potter?" he demanded angrily.

"Ginny told us about you- I mean, about Hermione and you, and about the twins. It's all incredible. I've barely been able to digest the fact that Hermione has babies, let alone that it's with you! And I
"Don't you dare finish that sentence, Potter, or I swear I'll hunt you down and rip your throat out. She's not-" He couldn't say it, refused to even think that way. "Hermione's out there, somewhere, and for some reason she's unable to contact either one of us, but, she's alive."

Draco tried to infuse his voice with all the certainty he could muster but he only came across as a man desperately trying to convince his own self of such a possibility.

"She's alive. She has to be," he insisted. "I would feel it if she wasn't," he said, too upset in the moment to realise that Potter had once again caught him in a moment of vulnerability.

Both men were silent for some time, each appearing thoughtful. The silence was finally broken by Cora clearing her throat in the background.

Draco shook off the morbid thoughts passing through his head and looked at Cora.

"Why did they believe Ginny was dead?"

It took Draco a couple of moments to refocus his thoughts and understand the significance of Cora's question.

"That's right, Potter. I can understand why you may have believed Hermione to be dead- knowing what we know about what happens to Muggleborns. But, why did you think Ginny was dead?"

Draco hesitated for a moment, uncomfortable about having to mention it but seeing no way around it. "Surely you heard about the revel at Godric's Hollow."

Potter's eyes, dull till now, looked ablaze with a level of rage that combined with his bedraggled appearance made him look completely unhinged.

"We were informed that Riddle had already killed Ginny and the witch at the revel was just someone polyjuiced to look like her in a last ditch attempt to flush out Order members. There's no way we wouldn't have attempted a rescue if we had even the slightest inkling that Ginny was alive. I can't even begin to imagine what she must have gone through that day- not only did she suffer at the hands of the Death Eaters, she had to do so believing we had abandoned her..."

"So that's twice Ginny has ended up being the victim as a result of the Order receiving bad intel," pointed out Draco.

Potter looked taken aback, like it was something he had not considered.

"That's right. It was Ginny specifically that ended up-- Do you think this could be something more personal? Like someone was after Ginny in particular?" asked Potter.

"Hermione suspected it may be the case. And I think it's a fair assumption given that the night they were captured, Hermione said, she noticed the wards were only triggered after Ginny cast a spell."

"Oh. I don't believe Ginny's realised that as yet."

"Potter, Ginny was," Draco paused, unsure about how much he ought to tell Potter about his fiancée's mental state during her time at Bleidd. "Let's just say Ginny wasn't really herself. I don't know how much she's disclosed about what she's been through" - looking at Potter's expression Draco suspected it wasn't much- "but, she's- ah- survived a lot. More than anyone would think
"When you say survived, you mean to imply that Godric's Hollow wasn't all of it?"

"Draco," interrupted Cora before Draco could speak. "Perhaps we ought to let Ginny decide what she wishes to share?"

Draco looked from Cora back to Potter.

"Cora's right, but I think you should know that there was more, a whole lot more. When she came here, it wasn't just her body that was broken. She's shown tremendous improvement recently, but she's still-- Look, it's probably best you speak with our mediwitch, Cora- by the way, that was her just now in the background. Cora's been taking care of Ginny since she arrived at Bleidd so she's the right person to talk to. She's not a mind healer but she's familiar with Ginny's medical history for the duration of her captivity. She'll be able to provide you with some dos and don'ts so you're better prepared to meet Ginny's current needs. My only advice is that you don't expect to get any reliable information from her unless you have access to a really good legilimens."

Potter nodded, then hugged himself and let out a long sigh. "I'm going to call Molly and Poppy so they can hear whatever your mediwitch has to say. We're going to do everything we can for Ginny."

Draco nodded back in understanding.

"Keep asking people on your side about Hermione, Potter. If she isn't being held by the Death Eaters or hiding with the Order there's only one other person with any motive for taking Hermione prisoner and that's Greyback. But going after him for answers right now will have some grave consequences for my pack so I need to be certain first."

"This has been such a crazy day. I find out that Ginny's alive and someone in the Order wants, or at least wanted, her captured. Hermione's a mother and missing. But you, Draco Malfoy, somehow you have ended up being the biggest surprise of all. The 'boy who started the war' now wants to help the Order. It's all a bit too much for me to process."

Draco was a little surprised at Potter taking him at face value. He had expected to spend time trying to convince Potter that this wasn't some elaborate trap. He was almost disappointed by how easily Potter had accepted the situation.

"I am not being a gullible fool, Malfoy," said Potter, making Draco wonder if the wizard was a better legilimens than anyone had given him credit for.

"I've heard a few stories about you recently that had me thinking you may no longer be as committed to the Death Eater cause as you were back in our school days. In particular, we heard about what your aunt did to you. It caused quite the sensation- had people talking about it for days. I guess till now most thought they'd be spared if their blood was pure enough or their vaults had enough galleons. And then they heard about what was done to you- and it made them pause to think about how your impeccable lineage, overflowing coffers, and dedication to the cause was still not enough to save you. Believe it or not, the past couple of weeks you've served as a better poster child for the Resistance than I've ever been. For the first time in all these years that we've been in hiding I feel like the people are finally waking up to the reality of what it means to give free rein to the likes of Riddle and his followers."

Considering the recent revelations concerning Ginny, Draco didn't have any faith in Potter's sources and would most likely have questioned everything he was saying if Theo had not already informed him about a similar sentiment being harboured by many of the Pureblood elites.
"In all those stories you heard about me, I'm not sure if you also heard that I haven't been a Malfoy in years, Potter. Not since I turned into a werewolf."

Draco stared at Potter challengingly. He knew in certain circles being a werewolf would be considered worse than being a Death Eater, such was the rampant prejudice against his kind in their society.

"It's yo- the other side that cares about blood purity. I don't care about you being a werewolf, Malfoy. But, I'm not sure how to react to your intentions to claim Hermione as your mate. Everyone knows how smart Hermione is, but I don't believe they realise how remarkably resilient she can be. I think what I need is to hear from her mouth that this thing between the two of you wasn't just her way of coping with a horrible situation. From what Ginny tells me you, at least, appear to genuinely care about Hermione, enough that you let her go. That counts for something with me.

"I'm often scolded for acting impulsively, Hermione especially hated my inability to stop long enough to think things through. But as much as she likes to plan things, I like to follow my gut, and right now it's telling me to trust you. So that's just what I'm going to do."

"Fair enough," said Draco with a curt nod. "But, just to be clear, I don't want to help the Order. I want to do whatever it takes to get Hermione back and ensure the destruction of the Dark Lord and his empire. If helping the Order accomplishes this, so be it."

Potter smiled in a way that made his eyes sparkle. "You know, Draco, I suspect I'm going to enjoy us working on the same side."

Chapter End Notes

I've seen two comments with readers saying the story's dragging. I've seen this criticism at another point in this fic. I didn't agree with it back then, but this time I'm not so sure... Considering they are only a few readers who comment even two seems like a pretty high number to me. I'd like to hear if there are others who feel the same. Depending on your responses I'll get a clearer picture of what's not working currently. Having said that I'd like to make something clear: The reunion will happen when it has to happen. Please stop holding your breath for it.

Thank you to everyone who left a comment in response to my Chp 29 AN. I've decided to stop getting annoyed with the current lack of smut and just go wherever this story takes me. (If I'm really honest my upbeat attitude prolly has something to do with the fact that I got my weekly fix of Dramione lemons from a different fic I was working on this week. Will post it in a day or two.)
"It has to be Fenrir, right?" asked Draco, soon as he was done talking to Potter. "I can't think of anyone else with a motive to secretly hold Hermione as a prisoner."

He stopped his mind from dwelling on what those reasons were.

"It would seem that way by process of elimination... but unless he's holding her right here on the castle grounds, I don't see how," replied Oskar.

"You're certain he hasn't been away even once in all this time?"

There was no need to ask, Oskar's information was always reliable and he had given Draco his assurances more than once that day. But fresh out of leads, Draco felt compelled to go over everything once again to be certain they had not overlooked anything.

"My sources confirmed the same thing as yours: Greyback hasn't left Bleidd since he returned injured after the last full moon. He's been staying close to the pack, in particular the ones loyal to him and the ones he sired. From what I've seen for myself and gathered from others, Greyback making an effort to be more of an alpha to the pack is the only suspicious thing he's done so far."

Draco agreed. Fenrir, in all likelihood, was feeling the strain of the weakened pack bonds because apart from ignoring Draco- which frankly wasn't the worst thing Fenrir had ever done to him- the alpha was making an effort to bond with his pack.

"His efforts are too little too late. He thinks sleeping huddled together in one room with his omegas and sharing meals with his betas will be enough to undo all the damage he's done-- He never has and never will deserve to be alpha. That brute's only good on the battlefield," said Cora with a look of disgust on her face.

Oskar ignored Cora's interruption and continued, "If Greyback was keeping Hermione he would need someone he trusted to watch over her. No one from his trusted circle has left Bleidd in all this time. With all the quality time they've been spending with Greyback, if it was any other alpha I would've suspected that Greyback was trying to calm an upset pack."

"Why would they be upset now? More importantly why would Fenrir care now when he was okay with signing us up to get slaughtered in the Dark Lord's poorly planned overseas missions or letting the Death Eaters gut us on the pretext of studying our kind? I don't buy it. There has to be another explanation for his behaviour," said Draco.

"Sure," replied Oskar, "but that's a different discussion from the one concerning Hermione."

"Forgive me for speaking out of turn," started Cora as politely as possible, "I mean no offense, but can we be certain Hermione's still..."

Oskar shielded Cora by stepping in front of her so Draco couldn't see her.

"I think we can trust Draco's judgement on this, Cora. Take it from someone who had a true mate once, your wolf just knows when your mate passes on..."
Oskar looked away and for the briefest of moments the usually self-possessed elder looked more disconsolate than one would think possible.

"Your wolf has known your mate. Even if you didn't bond with her your wolf would know if she was no more-- Your wolf would mourn her passing. And, there's no mistaking that grief for any other."

Draco looked at Oskar, for the first time seeing him as someone other than his sire and the pack's Elder. Here was a man who, like him, once had a true mate. Luna had blessed the two men to be among the lucky few who found their true mate in their lifetimes. As a young pup, new to the realities of what it meant to be a werewolf, Draco had never fully appreciated how fortunate he was when his wolf first mated with Hermione. But there was also a flip side to that fortune. Even though he didn't complete the mate bond with Hermione he was constantly fighting off feelings of fear and anxiety just from not having her beside him- not knowing where she was or how she was doing made it worse. Draco felt a chill creep up his spine trying to imagine the misery and despondence that would come with knowing your mate was no more.

"If your instinct tells you she's alive, we should listen to it," said Oskar looking at Draco with all the compassion and understanding Draco had come to expect of his sire.

"Alright. Then we need to consider the possibility that she was injured during the fight with Fenrir. She could be stuck somewhere behind enemy lines, which is why she hasn't contacted the Order," suggested Cora.

"Merlin! Not this again," groaned Draco in frustration. "No doubt Hermione's a capable witch, but even armed with a wand, the idea of her besting Fenrir during the full moon sounds... farfetched," he said with a shake of his head.

They had discussed this theory before and each time it was brought up Draco reluctantly accepted it as a possibility only if Hermione had some help.

"Cora, did you not say that Hermione had to be among friends or she wouldn't have managed to beat the alpha? Well, now that we know for a fact that she isn't with the Order can we finally give this theory of Hermione fighting Fenrir a rest?"

"I know what I said before, but I believe I was wrong. Think about it, Draco, is it really that hard to imagine that Hermione could hold her own against Fenrir?" asked Cora. "Even if, like me, you're sceptical of Oskar's belief that Hermione's some 'Promised' were who's going to usher in a new age of tolerance and harmony, surely you must realise that Hermione's not the average witch if your wolf chose her as your mate? You've now been a werewolf long enough to know our ways. Our wolves only seek mates who are our equal, if not better than us. And if you're an alpha what does that say about Hermione?"

It was true, social hierarchies were ingrained as instinct in their kind. It was why his wolf had always protested when he was forced to mate with the pack's bitches- his wolf had found all of them unworthy of his seed.

"Setting aside the lore, let's just examine some of the facts. That witch achieved the rare distinction of not only surviving mating with a wolf, but she also managed to successfully carry the twins to term despite suffering the effects of whatever perverted magic was used to shorten the gestation period. And then there was the incident with Ginny- if she could do that accidentally to a friend why couldn't she do the same deliberately to Fenrir?"

Cora raised valid points. Draco had not forgotten about the training session when Hermione had
blasted him right off his feet with some accidental magic. Yet it wasn't enough to ease the worry that plagued him.

"So the best case scenario you can come up with is my mate's lying injured and friendless within enemy territory, and I'm supposed to take comfort in that idea?" he asked scornfully.

"No, but I wish you'd consider other possibilities for why no one's heard from Hermione before you go charging after Fenrir like you've been itching to do. There's more at stake here than a missing mate, especially since you chose to ignore our counsel when you willingly let her go without bonding with her. You didn't think about the pack, or even your pups, when you decided to help her escape-- We've suffered far too many years from the actions of one selfish alpha, I don't wish to have misery heaped upon the pack just because the next one is a different kind of selfish!"

Cora's eyes went wide in fear and disbelief, her mouth snapping shut soon as she realised that she had just spoken her dangerous thoughts out loud. She fell to her knees, head hung low and eyes cast down. Her whole body trembled with fear as she waited to feel the full brunt of Draco's wrath.

Draco's face was a mask of cold fury. When he spoke his voice was low and his tone measured and even,. "How dare you! Do you have any idea what it's taken for me to sit back and wait for answers when my wolf wants to pummel the living daylights out of Fenrir- be it about taking off with my pups or showing up smelling like my mate. All this time I've kept my head down and pursued other options because I understand how much my actions could adversely affect the pack."

Cora remained silent, continuing to display submissiveness, though it did little to pacify his wolf. Draco would have punished Cora for her insolence, except she had spoken the truth. By letting Hermione go he was also culpable for any ill that may have befallen her.

Seething, Draco sucked in air through gritted teeth. "I don't need this thestral dung right now," he said to no one in particular. "I need answers. Where's Hermione, what happened to her? Right now questioning Fenrir seems like the only hope I have for finding my mate."

Fenrir had to know something about Hermione's disappearance. He could not have picked up Hermione's scent unless he came in direct contact with either Hermione or something belonging to her.

"If Greyback has taken Hermione he needs someone to watch over her," said Oskar. "I fail to see Greyback's involvement if no one he can trust has left Bleidd -"

Draco was rapidly losing what little patience he had left. It was clear that they only had one valid option to explore- Fenrir- but they were still wasting time rehashing the same theories over and over again while coming to no new conclusion. They were all in agreement that Hermione was only useful to Fenrir alive and Fenrir could only depend on someone from the pack to do his bidding. If he was holding Hermione as a prisoner someone would need to leave Bleidd to check on her and provide her with food and water on a regular basis.

"- unless he has some Death Eater or Black Cloak minding her for him."

Despite the situation, Draco snorted. The idea of any Death Eater, no matter how low in ranking, taking orders from someone they deemed to be a 'half-breed' was ludicrous.

Cora cleared her throat, drawing the attention of the men. She nervously shifted her weight from one knee to the other. It was obvious she had something to say.

"What is it, Cora?" asked Oskar.
"Sorry to interrupt, sir, but I just thought of someone else Fenrir could've asked to help him. Someone we only recently found out about."

"Who?" asked Draco.

Cora nervously looked up at Draco. "The- the elf. We know the elf helped with the pups, so maybe the elf is an accomplice of Fenrir?"

The silence in the room was heavy as they tried to process the import of what Cora was suggesting. Draco was practically dizzy from how quickly his mind began to connect various- what he had previously considered to be random- dots.

Rather than speculating about the possibilities, thanks to Pansy, Draco now knew at least one reliable means to get him some answers.

"Mipsy."

At Draco's summoning a wrinkly old elf, dressed in only a pillow cover bearing the Malfoy insignia, appeared before them.

"Oh master!" wailed the elf upon seeing Draco. Tears freely flowed from eyes that were too large for his face and mucous dripped from his hawk nose. "Oh master, you finally called old Mipsy! Mipsy is a good elf. Mipsy waits so long for master to call him."

"Yes, yes," said Draco impatiently. He had never cared for elves and was in no mood right now to console a blubbering elf just to get him to perform the simple task of relaying a message from Draco to Narcissa questioning her about the recent activities of the Malfoy elves.

"There's something I want you to do, Mipsy," he started but was cut off by the excited elf.

"Oh yes, master. Mipsy is a good elf. Mipsy does what master wants. Mipsy takes good care of master's babies even if they bring shame to the house of Malfoy."

Draco did a double take at the elf's words.

"Mipsy, have you seen my sons?"

The elf nodded enthusiastically. "Yes, Mipsy takes good care of master's babies. Mipsy takes better care of the babies than the filthy Mudblood. Filthy Mudblood only cries and sleeps in filth."

Draco's gut twisted painfully. "What filthy Mudblood, Mipsy?" he asked with bated breath.

"The filthy Mudblood in the cellar. The Mudblood sleeps in filth till Mipsy cleans her. Bad Mudblood only cries and begs Mipsy to be a bad elf, tells Mipsy to disobey orders. But Mipsy doesn't listen to the bad Mudblood. Mipsy is a good elf."

"What cellar? Are you talking about some prisoner in the dungeons of Malfoy Manor?"

The elf shook his head. "No, master. Not Malfoy Manor. He called it Wolf Fort."

"Who called it Wolf Fort?"

"Master's master."

"My master?"
Draco was struggling to make sense of the things the elf was saying. Was he referring to the Dark Lord?

"Yes, master's master, the werewolf. He takes Mipsy to Uganda. He tells Mipsy to take care of the filthy Mudblood. He rewards Mipsy by bringing master's babies to Mipsy because Mipsy is a good elf. Mipsy takes care of filthy Mudblood. Mipsy takes care of master's babies. Mipsy even takes care of master's master after the bad Mudblood attacked him."

"Mipsy, I've having a hard time following what you're saying. Be a good elf and don't speak unless I tell you to. I'm going to ask you some questions and I want you to nod if the answer is yes and shake your head if it's a no. Okay?"

The elf nodded.

"Is the werewolf Fenrir Greyback?"

The elf nodded again.

"Fenrir brought my sons to you and asked you to look after them?"

Another nod.

"And there's a Mudblood that Fenrir is keeping prisoner?"

The elf shook his head, then nodded, then shook it again.

"Which is it? You have my permission to speak."

"The bad Mudblood attacked the werewolf and escaped, master."

"But the Mudblood was Fenrir's prisoner till then?"

The elf nodded.

"When did the Mudblood escape? You may speak."

"On the third of this month, master."

Like other werewolves, Draco had developed the habit of memorising the dates of the full moon. "The night of the full moon," he whispered to himself.

Even though it wasn't a question the elf nodded in response.

Draco dreaded asking the next question but needed to confirm it nevertheless.

"Mipsy, was the Mudblood the mother of my sons?"

The elf nodded eagerly.

All his fears realised in the moment Draco's control finally snapped. Draco threw himself at his elf, intent on ripping him apart for his role in Hermione's captivity when mid-leap in the blink of an eye Draco unintentionally transformed into his wolf.

Landing on his feet Draco was annoyed to find the elf didn't lay crushed under his paws but was sprawled on his arse some feet away.
"Easy there, pup," he heard Oskar say. Looking at the way he held his hands stretched out in front of him, Oskar appeared to be the one responsible for depriving Draco of his prey.

"The elf won't be able to answer any more of your questions if you kill it now, Draco," reasoned the old alpha.

While Draco's wolf tried to choose between seeking satisfaction by killing the elf or heeding the wise words of his sire Draco's human side retook charge of the situation. Willing his body to return to its human form Draco assured his wolf that when the time was right he would deal with every one of those involved in the abduction and imprisonment of his mate.

"You're still my fucking elf, why in Hades have you been taking orders from Fenrir?" demanded Draco of the cowering elf.

"Mipsy doesn't understand why master is angry with Mipsy. Mipsy is a good e-

"You're not a good elf. You're a bad elf, Mipsy. The worst. You helped Fenrir hurt someone I love very much."

The elf sobbed loudly.

"Mipsy is sorry. Mipsy is very very sorry, master. Mipsy only does what the werewolf says. The werewolf is master's master, so he is also Mipsy's master. Mipsy is a bad elf if Mipsy does not follow his master's orders."

Fenrir was able to command Draco's elf because he was still Draco's alpha. It just added insult to injury knowing his own elf played a part in his mate's suffering. And Fenrir had succeeded in doing so just because Draco had forgotten all about the wretched creature.

"Unless you wish to be banished to some realm where you will never get to see, let alone serve, another being in your life, you will tell me exactly what happened to Hermione- the mother of my pups- during the time she was Fenrir's prisoner."

The elf nodded.

Over the next half hour they grilled the elf till they had a clear picture of everything that had happened to Hermione that the elf knew of. Throughout, the elf shook like a leaf fearing Draco who was just barely holding it together.

From the elf's responses they learnt that Hermione had been a prisoner at the Death Eater base in Uganda till the night of the full moon when she somehow attacked Fenrir and escaped. The place was unplottable, so the elf had only managed to go there when accompanied by Fenrir. During his visits to the base the elf was required to prepare and serve Hermione her meals that were laced with a potion given to him by Fenrir- from its description they concluded it was the version of fero used by the pack.

As angry as they were to hear about Fenrir taking Hermione as a prisoner and her living conditions in the cellar, they were most disturbed when they heard about the time Mipsy was asked to bring the twins before Fenrir, while he physically restrained an already bound and drugged Hermione. At that point, both, Cora and Oskar had needed to stun Draco and bind him just to get him to sit through the rest of the interrogation.

"You're also a snake, Draco. You wait for the right time to strike," Oskar had yelled at him more than once as they continued to drill the elf for every piece of useful information.
Draco clung to his sanity by repeating a single refrain in his head.

*She attacked the werewolf and escaped.*

*She attacked the werewolf and escaped.*

*She attacked the werewolf and escaped.*

"To hell with this," Draco said to the others when he was finally able to get his emotions in control. "Did he turn her?" he asked the elf.

The elf gave Draco a confused stare.

"Mipsy does not understand, mas-" 

"Shut up! Just tell me if Fenrir bit Hermione during the full moon."

The elf shook his head.

"Mipsy does not know. Mipsy was inside. The werewolf came to Mipsy bleeding. Mipsy did what the werewolf told Mipsy to do."

"So Hermione's in Uganda? But then why hasn't she send a patronus to the Order?" wondered Cora out loud.

"She doesn't necessarily have to still be in Uganda. The travel restrictions apply to Britain, she could use any of travel options available to leave Uganda," Draco pointed out.

"But why not send a patronus if she escaped?" asked Cora. "Uganda is neutral territory as far as I know."

Was Hermione simply being overly cautious or was she too severely injured to produce a patronus? Draco asked himself.

"If she was turned, she would have gone feral," suggested Oskar.

"But she attacked him. If Fenrir sired her he could've simply compelled her to stop," argued Draco.

"True, but what are the odds that Hermione fought Greyback during the full moon and got away without being bitten?"

As much as Draco hated to consider the implications of Hermione being turned by Fenrir it seemed to be the most likely scenario.

"Fenrir's going to pay for this," he swore.

"Yes," said Oskar in a reassuring tone. "Just not right now. As far as the situation with the pack is concerned, nothing's changed, Draco. You cannot get rid of Fenrir yet, even if you finally feel up to the task."

It took Oskar and Cora stunning Draco two more times and reinforcing his bindings before they were finally able to subdue the angry alpha.

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The children bid Hermione goodnight and headed towards their dorms. Thanks to a Swahili-to-
English translation guide from Akiki the children were starting to communicate with Hermione using some basic day-to-day use words. Bokamoso in particular was proving to be quite the linguist. She smiled as she remembered the look of exasperation on his face as he attempted to correct his friends when they fumbled with the foreign words. Watching the trio brought back fond memories of her own school days with Harry and Ron.

But it wasn't all happy memories. Sometimes when she watched the trio Hermione remembered her own children. She didn't like thinking about them. It didn't make sense why even thinking of her sons upset her even more than thinking about Draco, but it did, to the point where she suspected she may have mauled Akiki earlier in the day just for broaching the subject of her children.

"Forgive me," said Akiki averting his gaze when she caught him staring at the twin wet spots on her blouse.

Hermione shrugged her shoulders in indifference.

"We understand why you want to rush home, but please, Hermione Granger, Uagadou welcomes you and your family. You can bring your baby here."

The statement was innocent enough, some may even consider it a generous offer, and yet the reminder had brought on a full blown panic attack. Palms sweating, heart racing, Hermione struggled to breathe. She felt the she-wolf take control just before she lost consciousness. When she woke up she was alone, unaware of how much time had passed and no explanation for why the room resembled the aftermath of some natural disaster.

It took Hermione most of the day, with some assistance from her three little helpers, to put the room back to its original state- though the children didn't assist as much as stare slack jawed as she cast nonverbal spells to repair the various items.

"How?" Kalisha, the ever curious one, had asked Hermione.

Hermione hunched to bring her face in level to theirs and then rubbing her fingers together in front of their faces whispered in a conspiratorial tone, "Magic."

Kalisha and Bokamoso nearly tore the translation guide in their eagerness to look up the word. She failed to restrain a giggle at their baffled expressions when they did find it, the children joining in the giggles once they caught on.

Now, as she sat by herself Hermione pulled out the wolf shaped portkey and squeezed it in her fist, assuring herself it was real. She found herself doing this several times in the day since receiving it. Each time she did a mental countdown to the days and hours before it would get activated and she could return home.

But where is home?

Not in England, not since she altered her parents memories and made them want to pack up and leave for Australia.

Harry and the Order?

It's where she was supposed to be, where she would've been if not for... if not for certain other things that had happened.

She would be accepted in the Order, welcomed even. They could be her pack the way they were Remus' pack.
The she-wolf insisted on returning to Bleidd. It was where Fenrir was most probably hiding. She could never be free so long as her sire was alive.

*Pack*, insisted her human self. She needed a pack first and foremost. During her light-hearted moment with the children today Hermione had experienced a brief instance of lucidity. For the first time she was able to recognise how irrational her thoughts had been recently and understood why. The she-wolf was a mighty being, but she was also a ruthless predator who unchecked would force Hermione to lose her humanity.

Hermione used to think that between her long standing friendship with Remus, the host of books she had read on the subject and all the insights she had received from Draco she knew what it meant to be a werewolf. She had no *fucking* clue. At least not until she experienced the toxic mix of darkness and madness for herself. She finally understood why Remus feared the creature within him and why he had resisted Tonks for as long as he did. The wolf was a bloodthirsty being unable to distinguish between friend and foe. Hermione had a greater reason to fear the she-wolf because, unlike Remus, she could transform at will, her human half far too timid to control her beast.

A pack was the only cure for her fractured mind if she ever hoped to bring her two halves together but returning to Bleidd in her current state was dangerous. There were no guarantees the she-wolf would stop her homicidal spree once she got started.

Hermione shuddered as she vividly recalled wanting to kill Kalisha when she saw her for the first time. If she didn't have that child's blood on her hands it was only because she had been on death's doorstep at the time. But she wasn't injured anymore and the she-wolf was not only possessed physical strength but also the cunning to manipulate her human half. In her current state she was a ticking time bomb and she needed to keep her distance from Wilbur and Martin for their safety.

Hermione forced herself to remember that first and foremost she needed a pack. Her friends in the Order would accept her and through their bonds she would conquer the darkness inside her.

*Pack.*

*Pack.*

*Pack,* she repeated over and over in her head. She would learn to control her beast and then return home. She knew where it was now. Hermione had a wistful smile on her face as her mind drew the image of Draco scowling at her for giggling after both their sons had relieved themselves on him at the same time.

Chapter End Notes

Looking at the number of comments this week I thought the fic had attracted new readers but the Views stats say otherwise. Guessing I struck a nerve if so many suddenly felt compelled to review.

Thank you for sharing your opinions (some of you really know how to give a person an ego boost). Normally I wouldn't take my cues from readers while writing a fic, but I see
Wolf's Mate as a collab between me and the readers (if you've read all my ANs you'll know what I mean). I did pore over the reviews from both sites (though some were obviously made just to hurt my feelings) trying to discern what I'd consider to be both applicable to the fic and actionable on my part... In an effort to keep this AN to a minimum, instead of listing my takeaways from the feedback, I'll just say that I'll try to avoid the highlighted pitfalls, however, I won't always succeed. The reason being partly (lack of) skill but also will- I refuse to put more time and effort into a project that will be forgotten about two weeks after its completed.

Yes, this chapter also repeats things mentioned in previous chapters. If I sense the reader isn't picking up on some detail I automatically assume it must be because I was too vague and try to provide further details in the following chapter (this is the problem when only a few review- they become by default the voice of all readers).

tl;dr I'm still a sinner, just slightly more self-aware now.
"That was a dirty trick you played on me," accused Hermione while staring at the totem in her hand. Babjide's image in the floo let out a soft chuckle.

"You must forgive an old man his eccentricities, Ms Granger, especially when he means well. I understand that you are quite motivated to return to England, I only wanted to ensure you would give my suggestion proper consideration."

"You haven't a clue about my motivations," Hermione replied sternly, unaware that her eyes flashed a shade of golden yellow as she stared down at the Supreme Mugwump.

Babjide stared at her, dumbstruck for a moment. He leaned forward trying to get a better look. "You are a curious creature. There are so many questions I would like to-

"I am not some specimen to be investigated," she warned.

"Come now, Ms Granger, it's just a few harmless questions. Not like I'm suggesting we cut you open and study your insides," he huffed indignantly, but moved back nevertheless.

"Why not? That's exactly what Voldemort's been doing and you appear to be okay with it because you get an effective fertility potion out of it."

Babjide spluttered.

"What are you even-- How dare you-- I'd never!"

"What? You didn't think you got your precious potion without some creatures being gutted along the way, did you?"

"Even if there was something unethical going on, you can't just accuse-"

"Oh no, it wasn't an accusation, Your Honour, just resigned acceptance that people will find ways to ignore atrocities so long as they benefit from it."

"Ms Granger, you really go too far! You cannot-"

Hermione cut him off to calmly state, "Don't tell me what I cannot do."

The Supreme Mugwump didn't notice how she stood with her arms pinned to her side, fists clenched so tight there was blood dripping from where her claws had pierced her palms. While she was able to keep the she-wolf in check Hermione was certain that had the infuriating wizard been present there in person nothing could have stopped the she-wolf from delivering a life-long lesson on what she could and couldn't do.

"Ms Granger, as part of a rebel group, I have no doubt that you have been led to believe certain things, however, let me reassure you the ICW has yet to be presented with any kind of evidence to substantiate any of your insinuations. We're aware of the existence of some sort of personal rivalry between Harry Potter and the self-declared Lord Voldemort, but as far as we've been informed their feud is at most some kind of local power struggle-"
"You really believe this is a local conflict even after Voldemort's Death Eaters attacked the Ministry in Bulgaria last year?" asked Hermione, adding a snarky, 'Your Honour' at the end.

"You've been misinformed, Ms Granger. The attack on the Bulgarian Ministry was committed by a group of rogue werewolves that have no known affiliation to the Death Eaters or Lord Voldemort."

If Babjide was being honest, thought Hermione, the Death Eaters had obviously been busy effectively disseminating their propaganda overseas as well.

"Rogue werewolves who were somehow united in the task of attacking a foreign Ministry?"

"Ms Granger, you are yourself a prime example of the gaps in our knowledge of werewolves."

"Voldemort could provide you great insight on the workings of not only werewolves but other magical creatures as well. At their master's command the Death Eaters have butchered- Merlin knows how many- magical beings conducting all sorts of horrific experiments on them in their ungodly quest to produce a new generation of powerful-yet-easily-controlled soldiers for Voldemort's evil army."

"We have heard of no wrongdoing-"

"No, of course not. Like so many others in the magical community you probably share the belief that not all beings have the same right to life, liberty and dignity as humans so there could be no wrongdoing when it comes to nonhumans!"

"Ms Granger, if you would just allow me to finish-"

"But it's foolish of me to expect you to care about the abuse of creatures when you've willfully ignored the genocide of Muggleborns and enslavement of Halfbloods in Britain these past few years!"

"Ms Granger!" exclaimed Babjide, "These are some serious claims you're making, and it is the first I've heard of such things!"

It occurred to Hermione there was a good chance Babjide wasn't just another bureaucrat deliberately ignoring the ugly inconvenient truth. There was only one way to be sure.

"What if you had proof?" she asked. "What if I could provide you incontestable proof of their wrongdoings?"

"Ms Granger, if any one of those allegations turn out to be true your little band of rebels would have the full support of the ICW."

"What do you mean by support? If all it involves is your stamp of approval, then it's not going to be worth the risk and trouble."

"What I mean, Ms Granger," said Babjide leaning forward and giving Hermione a pointed look, "is that if you can bring us proof of any of the things you've alleged then Harry Potter would have the backing of all the nations in the ICW and your group would have our resources at your disposal in your fight against Lord Voldemort."

"It's been a war of attrition so far, Your Honour, and our numbers have dwindled greatly. We don't just need wands, we need men and women to wield those wands."

Babjide appeared to contemplate Hermione's request for a few moments before he spoke.
"How is it, Ms Granger, that you did not have the support of the people if what you say is true?"

"It's Hitler and the policy of appeasement all over again."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Just a muggle reference," said Hermione dismissively before she went on to answer Babjide's question. "People made concessions to Voldemort's aggressive manoeuvres as a way of avoiding conflict, but all it did was let the Death Eaters expand their powers and control over Britain unchecked."

"And you still don't have the support of the people?"

Hermione sighed.

"Everyone thinks they'll do the right thing, when the truth is that most only choose to do the right thing when it's an easy choice."

"So it has been an easy choice for you?"

"I'm a Muggleborn, Your Honour, I didn't get to choose sides in this war."

"We heard about this pure blood ideology but never gave it too much thought. Every community has people who are intolerant of those who are different from them, their reasons may differ but they exist everywhere. Still, the idea of classifying magic based on parentage- rather than the purpose it was employed for- was so outright ridiculous I could never imagine anyone taking it too seriously."

"Well, the Death Eaters believe in it firmly enough that they insist only the Purebloods have the right to magic. Muggleborn children and their families now receive an Avada instead of an invite to Hogwarts when they turn eleven. Halfbloods are used as elves, unless some Death Eater takes a fancy to them, in which case they're condemned to a life where they wish they were dead. And none of this means the Purebloods have it any better if they're found guilty of being a Blood Traitor."

Babjide wore an expression of disbelief by the time Hermione was done talking. She couldn't fault him for being sceptical of her claims. Five years ago she too would have found it hard to believe that their society would devolve to the extent it had.

"I don't expect you to take my word for any of this. I will get you your proof, but you better be prepared to deliver on your end."

"Ms Granger, a piece of advice? Don't alienate potential allies by threatening them. May the gods show you favour in your mission."

Hermione didn't get the chance to respond as Babjide had concluded their floo call.

"Stop stupefying me," yelled Draco having observed Oskar raise his hand out of the corner of his eyes. "I'm angry, but that doesn't mean I'm going to rush out of here like a raging hippogriff. I'm willing to hear reason if you're willing to do the same."

Oskar and Cora hesitated a moment but nodded.

"Can't you see? I have to do something. You can't still expect me to wait for the external threat to be neutralised before I go after Fenrir!" insisted Draco. "Not after knowing what we do now."
"I understand-"

"You don't understand anything, Cora," snapped Draco. "You've been the pack's mediwitch for how many years now?" He didn't wait for her response. "You've seen what it's like for a new wolf even with a pack. Now imagine what it must be like for Hermione to be stuck in some unknown territory for nearly a month without a pack."

For the love of Luna, even Oskar had stated that Hermione was most likely feral by now. He tried not to think about the mental hell Hermione must have lived through the past month as it would only enrage him further at a time he needed to show his pack he was capable of keeping his wits about him.

"Don't ask me to abandon my mate in this manner!" Draco was nearly pleading even though he knew as their alpha he could have easily ordered them to stand down.

"We aren't asking you to abandon her, just don't go after Fenrir yet," expressed Cora.

"It's all one and the same. We all know that there are only two ways I leave Bleidd- either as a rogue, or as alpha of the pack after I've killed Fenrir."

It was only a few days ago that Draco had struggled with the idea of killing Fenrir, not anymore. The alpha had crossed some kind of unspoken line of the werewolf code when he chose to steal Hermione from the pack the way he did. That Fenrir used their pups to get Hermione to do Merlin knows what... Draco realised he could no longer afford the luxury of waiting till he was ready to deal with Fenrir.

"You know you couldn't just leave Bleidd once you killed Fenrir, you'd have the Death Eaters to deal with..."

"What are you suggesting I do then?"

"There has to be a middle ground," said Oskar even as he struggled to think of what that could be.

"No, not anymore. This is it. I'm willing to fight for my pack and do what needs to be done for the good of the pack, but don't ask me to sacrifice the welfare of my mate. Not over Fenrir, damn it!"

Draco futilely struggled to free himself of the magical bindings. He could've just commanded them to release him, but flexing against the restrictive bindings gave him the temporary satisfaction of feeling like he was doing something.

"What are we even waiting for at this point? We know Fenrir plans to leave Bleidd with the pack some time soon. We also know he will most likely get rid of everyone he finds untrustworthy. Why allow ourselves to be forced into a weak defensive position when we can have the advantage of the element of surprise with a pre-emptive strike?" reasoned Draco.

"But what happens afterwards? How do you protect us from the Dark Lord?" asked Cora.

Restrained as he was by Oskar and Cora it was hard for Draco to remember that they weren't really opposed to him killing Fenrir, they just needed assurance that the pack would be protected from the fallout of Fenrir's death. He couldn't kill Fenrir without having a plan for what came next.

Staying at Bleidd would no longer be an option as they would be sitting ducks for the Death Eaters. There was no knowing what kinds of secrets Fenrir had already shared with the Dark Lord with regards to the pack's workings and defences. But then where could they go?
There was nowhere in Britain where they would be safe from the Death Eaters, and that was not taking into account people's bigotry when it came to werewolves. Their partnership with the Order was far too new and fragile to expect the Order to hide the pack. For one the pack was too big and would be a strain on already limited resources, and more importantly the Order would most likely refuse believing it to be a ploy by Voldemort to get his wolves into the Order's henhouse.

And even if he did find a place in Britain where the pack would be welcomed to stay, Draco couldn't stick around to ensure their safety as he was eager to set out on his search for Hermione. As the new alpha of the pack he couldn't abandon them to go to Uganda, but he also couldn't abandon Hermione!

But what if he took the pack with him? "We could all go to Uganda like Fenrir planned to..." He was still thinking and didn't mean to say it out loud, but now that he had, Draco couldn't see anything wrong with the idea. What reason did they even have to stay in Britain anymore?

"Britain isn't safe for us while the Death Eaters are in control, but even before the Dark Lord's reign things were never great for werewolves. Uganda on the other hand is neutral territory. The locals haven't pledged allegiance to any side in the war and based on what I've heard from Theo they're unlikely to join the army of the Dark Lord. Theo also said the magical community in Uganda is more open minded when it comes to creatures than people here. Plus no one would think to look for us there. And it would be too much trouble for the Death Eaters to come after us even if they did learn that we were hiding in Uganda. The pack could get a fresh start and I could freely search for my mate."

"Aren't you going to wait for Gunnolf?" asked Cora.

"After what we learnt from Mipsy, I think it's safe to say that Gunnolf and Theo stumbled upon some evidence of Hermione being held captive at the Death Eater base in Uganda. I hope the reason they haven't returned is because they've found some lead on Hermione... I expect Gunnolf to return in time for the full moon tomorrow no matter where they've reached in their investigation."

"So you're planning to challenge Fenrir during the full moon?" asked Oskar. Draco nodded. "Yes, it is right that a fight like this take place under the auspices of the goddess."

Draco felt ashamed to have not considered it. He had more practical reasons for wanting to fight Fenrir during the full moon. The Death Eaters knew their routine well enough not to expect to see any pack members during the full moon or the day after when their bodies recovered from the strain of the transformation. Their absence wouldn't be noticed by the Death Eaters till the pack was long gone from Bleidd.

"I wish to speak with the pack first," said Draco. "I would like them to decide whether they will choose to follow me or stay here. I won't force anyone to bond with me that doesn't wish to."

"They won't have much of a choice in the matter once you kill Fenrir," Cora pointed out.

"If the pack doesn't wish to leave Bleidd with me, I will leave by myself. Gunnolf can finally ascend to alpha like he was supposed to and lead the pack. I wouldn't challenge him and I'm sure no one would object to Gunnolf being in charge. I want the pack to decide their fate," clarified Draco.

"You'd risk becoming an outcast yourself?" asked Cora looking visibly shocked.

"My mate has been surviving all by herself for nearly a month as an outcast. I'm willing to risk my sanity for however long it takes me to find her," stated Draco matter-of-factly. "I owe her that much."
"Go home?" asked Kalisha her brow furrowed in confusion.

They were walking towards the forest where Hermione had planned to spend the evening in her wolf form playing with the children in the hopes of exhausting herself. There was going to be a full moon tonight, her first one since she was turned. As the moonrise hour drew nearer, Hermione was filled with both excitement and dread over what the night would bring. As a precaution she had decided to spend the night isolated in the cave the children had first found her in. She only needed to make it through the night as the following day her portkey would finally be activated and she could return to Britain and back to the Order.

Hermione was surprised by Kalisha's question as she had not told them she was leaving- their teachers must have discussed her departure with them. Hermione had hoped to slip away quietly, leaving them was going to be hard enough without also having to deal with the inevitable questions.

Hermione nodded in response to Kalisha's question."Yes, I have business I need to take care of."

"War?" asked Bokamoso making the motion of someone firing a gun.

Hermione had learned from Akiki that the young boy's tribe lived right in the middle of one of the most conflict-ridden regions of the Congo. Though his village was magically shielded from the activities of Muggles, the people in Bokamoso's tribe had seen enough of guns and what Muggles did with them to associate the weapon with war.

"Yes, my little friend," she replied with another nod.

Since the children didn't speak English she tried to use simple words and gestures as much as possible while communicating with them.

"Friend?" confirmed Bokamoso pointing to himself. He grinned widely when she nodded again.

Hermione then took turns pointing to Mpho and Kalisha while repeating the word 'friend' making all three children grin with pride.

"Come back?" asked Mpho after consulting with the translation guide.

"Yes," replied Hermione, "I may even bring back some of my friends who are in need of a safe place. Sanctuary," she said and located the word for them in their book.

Bokamoso stared at the word and then asked, "Home war, Uagadou sanctuary?"

"Yes." She wasn't sure of the current state of the Order. She assumed it had to be bad if no one had turned up to save Ginny during the revel at Godric's Hollow. If there were too few of them left she had spoken with the Headmaster- with assistance from Akiki- about the possibility of making room for the Order at Uagadou.

"Hermione," said Kalisha slowly, trying her best to correctly pronounce her name, "Uagadou home."

At first she wasn't sure what Kalisha meant. But soon all three children were repeating the phrase while nodding profusely till she understood that they wanted her to make Uagadou her home.

Hermione knew she owed these children more than just her life. Their wholehearted acceptance of her along with their affection had saved her mind from completely surrendering to the madness of the beast within her.
"Hermione, bring baby?" asked Mpho.

It looked like Akiki and Kwame had spared no details in whatever discussion had taken place between them, thought Hermione with some degree of irritation.

"Babies," she corrected, holding up two fingers. "I have two sons."

Merlin, why did they have to bring up her children. It hurt too much to think of them and realise that she didn't know when, if ever, she would see them again. And yet, now that she had mentioned them she found it hard to stop.

"I have two little boys- one of whom looks like an adorable little piglet and the other an angry demon," she said with tears in her eyes. "Martin has a cute little dimple on his left cheek while Wilbur's got one on his right cheek. Everyone else thinks those are the only differences between the boys, but I'm sure that Will's face is just a little longer and Marty's is just a little wider than his twin's."

There was no way the trio could keep up with what she was saying, but in that moment Hermione was no longer talking to them.

"They're bald now, but I have no doubt they'll end up having that same ridiculous shade of hair as Draco. I only hope that by the time they're in school they'll show better sense- in not just their hairstyle- than their father did in his school days. By Godric, he was absolutely insufferable back then with his, 'my father will hear about this,' threat for everything. Even though I know it's unlikely to happen, I still shudder at the thought of the twins ending up like some version of Draco during his Hogwarts days."

Hermione winced from pain as her fangs suddenly emerged and bit into her tongue and lips. It was a warning from the she-wolf who did not appreciate the unmistaken tone of longing in her verbal meanderings.

The trio who had struggled to understand the words were quick to sense her emotional distress.

"Hermione go. Hermione come back," said Kalisha wrapping her arms around Hermione.

"Hermione bring baby," said Bokamoso holding up two fingers before he too hugged Hermione.

"Uagadou home," asserted Mpho and joined his friends in the group hug.

Draco spend most of the previous night and the morning before the full moon talking to different members of his pack sharing his intentions with them. It would be impossible to have a pack meeting till his actual confrontation with Fenrir so he was forced to meet them in small groups.

"I will kill Fenrir. The choice isn't between him and me," Draco had explained. "The choice is between following me into the unknown and trusting me to be your alpha or continuing here with Gunnolf as your alpha."

Most had scoffed at the idea of Gunnolf abandoning Draco to become alpha himself.

"If you join me, you join me in my cause as well. Things won't be as easy as they've been at Bleidd. Where we once fought alongside the Death Eaters we will be fighting against them. Even though we will be leaving Britain, we will be a part of the war."
Draco’s attempt to scare them off with talk of war was met with boisterous laughter as many in the pack were itching to give the Death Eaters a little payback for all the suffering they had inflicted on their kind.

"You should know that I'm prompted to act now by my own selfish desire to save my mate."

Draco didn't share all the horrific details, just enough to let the pack know that Hermione had been imprisoned by Fenrir and possibly turned as well. Even so, everyone he spoke with expressed a desire to leave Bleidd and rescue Draco's mate. As the witch who had given birth to the pack's miracle, Hermione held a special place in their hearts. They were not only disgusted to hear that as alpha Fenrir would try to steal a pack member's mate but they were angered in particular by the fact that it was Hermione Fenrir had hurt and potentially doomed to the life of an outcast.

Now armed with the knowledge that his pack was behind him despite the risks involved, Draco and the betas spend the day making quiet arrangements for their travel the following day. They tried to consolidate whatever items of value they had which they could use later to purchase basic necessities once they left Britain.

Hours before moonrise the realness of the moment finally hit Draco. He was going to challenge his alpha. He was going to kill Fenrir. He was going to leave Britain. These were things he was certain would happen within the next twenty four hours. As for the rest, was anybody's guess.

"Come on, we've wasted enough time as it is," Gunnolf scolded Theo.

"What's your rush? It's only been a couple of hours since we got here. Is it that time of the month, dear?" asked Theo with a roll of his eyes.

"As a matter of fact it is," replied Gunnolf, misunderstanding Theo's remark. "It's still a few hours to moonrise back home but we're cutting it close here. I don't want to end up spending the full moon alone in a strange place just because we lingered a little too long."

Theo almost ended up saying, 'You know you don't have to spend the night alone,' but checked himself just in time. He needed to ease up on his consumption of the cheering potion as it was clearly clouding his ability to think sensibly if he was thinking of propositioning a werewolf during the full moon.

Theo wasn't sure what it was he was expecting to find as he roamed the school grounds. He didn't possess the ability to track scents or hear the difference in heartbeats but when he paid attention, Theo always had a good instinct for when he was being lied to and right now he just knew the school was hiding something from him.

They had shown up on the pretext of being clueless tourists eager to take a peek at the fantastic beast living at Uagadou that all the locals were yapping about. The staff had politely explained that the only fantastic beasts at their school were the animagi in their transfiguration class before asking them to leave. At first Theo chalked it up to good luck that they weren't escorted off the premises. Then he thought that perhaps schools like Uagadou didn't need to worry too much about security because, unlike Hogwarts, they weren't facing the constant threat of attack from one deranged wizard or the other. But now he was beginning to suspect there may be something else going on.

Taking advantage of what he had initially assumed to be oversight on the school's part, Theo and Gunnolf had discretely explored the school for any signs of Hermione or whatever beast they were definitely hiding.
"I haven't picked up anything in the area we've covered so far," reminded Gunnolf. "And I didn't pick up any of the usual signs shown by people when they lie."

Theo couldn't shake off the feeling of being watched, and the more easily they were able to access different areas of the school, the more it confirmed the feeling that they were deliberately being misled.

"I'm sorry, but I'm leaving now," stated Gunnolf then pointed to the sky. "We may have less than thirty minutes before moonrise."

Theo looked around and just knew they would come to regret leaving without solving this mystery but he would probably regret it more if he didn't manage to find shelter before Gunnolf transformed into a beast.

Chapter End Notes

This one was a little rushed as I was pressed for time (it's why I haven't managed to get around to responding to some comments on the prev chap). There will be more mistakes than usual. Thank you everyone for posting encouraging words. Thank you ofthemoon for providing details about the twins.
"Fuck, fuck, fuck!" exclaimed Theo with dread as Gunnolf transformed right before his eyes.

The werewolf had clearly miscalculated the hour of moonrise. They barely made it past the gates of the school and the anti-apparition barrier when the clouds cleared and they found themselves struck by moonlight.

Theo who wasn't a skilled or experienced duellist lacked the battle-hardened nerves to react appropriately when staring at the face of danger. Transfixed by the sight of Gunnolf's hunky form transforming into that of a killer beast Theo stood rooted to the spot muttering expletives for a good while before he finally remembered to use his wand.

Gunnolf finished transforming and turned his gaze on the cowering form of the human before him. He rushed towards the wizard, jaws snapping, but only managed to get a mouthful of dirt as Theo had apparated away.

Back cracking and spine rippling from the change taking over her Hermione grunted in pain and fell to her knees. Her head stayed bowed while she caught her breath. The change was quicker this time, much quicker and far less than painful than she expected it to be. What took her by surprise though, was the rage, hunger and urge to mate she was overcome with all at once.

Hermione flexed her muscles and ground her canines before she let out a long and triumphant howl. Even though she had changed form she had managed to stay in control. For whatever reason the she-wolf appeared to be content with letting her human self steer them, choosing to only urge her to act on her desires.

_Hunt, kill, eat, fuck. Hunt, kill, eat, fuck. Hunt, kill, eat-

Hermione didn't agree with the fucking part, but as ravenous as she was at the time she couldn't fault the first three. Forgetting all about her resolve to isolate herself, Hermione left the cave and rushed out into the forest.

With moonrise only a couple of hours away Draco finished with his most important task for the night, securing the safety of his pups. Having no other non-werewolves he could discretely entrust with the care of his sons during the full moon Draco was forced to call upon his elf. While he couldn't absolve Mipsy for his role in Hermione's suffering, the rational part of Draco's mind recognised that the creature couldn't be faulted for its actions as he had only been following orders. Unlike the Death Eaters who made a moral choice to execute their master's evil commands, as a house elf Mipsy was forced by nature to act as instructed. For the first time ever Draco looked past their usefulness and pondered the responsibility that came with owning house elves.

Having already summoned Mipsy earlier in the day to dispatch the contraceptive potion to Pansy, Draco had called his elf for one more task.

"Make sure you keep them safe and well hidden till the time I summon you again. Don't let anyone,
werewolf or Death Eater, get their hands on my boys. Protect them at all costs, Mipsy."

Draco had informed Mipsy of his plans to travel to Uganda the following day and handed Mipsy the bassinet holding his sons asking Mipsy to ignore any command that would subvert his instructions in any way.

The way the elf had gushed at Draco's feet, bawling in gratitude for being trusted with such an important task, Draco had felt a twinge of guilt knowing he had basically ordered Mipsy to die if necessary to protect his sons. It was selfish on his part to demand such a sacrifice, Draco knew, but didn't spare it another thought as he send his sons off with a kiss to each of their foreheads.

Having walked past the castle wards to hand over the twins to his elf, Draco was on his way back to the main castle when he was informed by a breathless omega that Theo was waiting for him at the portkey point.

"Where's Gunnolf?" asked Draco seeing Theo by himself.

"Why, hello to you too!" replied Theo earning a glare from Draco.

Theo rolled his eyes at Draco before answering his question. "He's back in Uganda. We messed up with the time and he ended up transforming."

"So you just left him behind?"

Theo made an unintelligible sound objecting to Draco's accusatory tone.

"He nearly bit my arm off! I fuckin' got away just in time. By Salazaar, I'm never going to be able to think about his mouth without picturing those deadly teeth ever again," explained Theo- the last part muttered to himself with a shudder.

Draco, who was on a tight schedule, had no patience for Theo's antics. He scowled at his friend who had clearly indulged in a generous helping of the elixir of euphoria.

"Don't give me that look," Theo cried out. "Mr Beefcake just pounced on me in a way I never imagined-- my nerves are fuckin' shattered."

"So you just left Gunnolf behind?" asked Draco repeating his earlier accusation, his tone more menacing this time. "How in Hades were you expecting him to return to Britain without an international portkey?!!"

Theo looked around sheepishly like it wasn't something he had considered before.

"Did you miss the part about how I was nearly killed by a werewolf?"

Draco found it rather telling of Theo's battle experience that even after years of being a Death Eater it had taken so little to unnerve his friend to such an extent.

"I suppose it may be a good thing after all. I'll just meet with Gunnolf in Uganda," stated Draco before telling Theo about everything he had found out the previous day and his plans to leave Britain.

"Fuck! It confirms what we suspected," replied Theo, handing Hermione's wand to Draco. Theo gave Draco a brief overview of their unproductive trip, deliberately choosing to leave out any mention of the bloody field they had found. Draco's plate looked full enough, thought Theo, and Draco stood a better chance of winning against Fenrir if he was hopeful about finding Hermione
alive.

Theo now worried about how they would proceed with their plans once Draco and the werewolves were gone.

"This changes things," said Theo with a smile that contradicted the depth of his concerns.

"Not by much," reassured Draco. "We heard from Potter."

"Oh? Okay... I suppose it's all up to me now, eh?"

Theo's flippant tone hid his panic well. While Draco was correct in assuming that his leaving Britain wouldn't have much of a negative impact on their plans in and of itself, it would definitely affect an already stressed out Theo to know that Draco was temporarily out of the picture.

"No pressure," rejoined Draco with a smirk.

Summoning parchment and quill, Theo wrote down the location of the Death Eater base in Uganda.

"When you get to Uganda, give that place a try. Mr. Beefcake will most likely expect to find me waiting there for him."

Draco nodded, taking the parchment from Theo. They discussed how and when they would next get in touch before parting ways.

"Apologise for me, will you? He scared me, that's all. It's one thing to know someone's a werewolf, quite another to see firsthand what that actually means..." said Theo referring to Gunnolf. "Of course, given the opportunity I'd still shag him, I'd just be sure to keep my distance during the full moon," added Theo with a chuckle.

Hermione noticed that the predators she had scared off weeks ago remained gone, leaving her alone to hunt.

This is boring, she thought, spitting out the decapitated head of yet another rabbit.

Despite being hungry she didn't care for the taste of the rabbits, warthogs and antelopes she had slaughtered in the last few hours. At least when it came to the hyena she had some fun separating it from its pack before she killed it just as easily as she had the other game available in the forest.

Hermione knew her wolf wished to return to Uagadou where she would find prey to satisfy her tastes. While the little creatures in the forest made for decent appetisers she needed bigger game to satiate her hunger. She didn't need to kill the Ebony Trio, the she-wolf argued, there was a smorgasbord of people at the school to choose from whether she wanted to eat or just bite and turn them. After all if they wanted her to make Uagadou her home what better way than making them pack in the true sense?

Hermione gripped the tree trunk, claws digging in, and slammed her forehead against the tree in her struggle to resist the urgings of her beast. She moaned and slid to the ground- tearing out chunks of bark free in the process- as she tried to remind herself that she was more than just her beast. The she-wolf tried to coax and cajole her human half to forget why she needed to stay away but made no attempt to wrestle away control. Having her two halves so opposed on this subject battered away at the sliver of sanity she had regained over the past couple of days, Hermione knew it was only a matter of time before her humanity would succumb.
In an attempt to get as far away from the school as possible Hermione ran further down the mountain, letting out a howl of frustration. An unexpected sound made her stop dead in her tracks, her ears perked up. For the first time ever Hermione heard her howl answered by another.

Moonrise nearly upon them the pack gathered in the designated spot on the castle grounds to welcome the new moon. As the pack waited to undergo the painful, and for some lengthy, process of transforming into their wolves Draco took in his surroundings- the lush green grass beneath them, the dark silhouette of the castle towered behind him, a vibrant forest just beyond and the silvery light of the moon that slowly washed over them all. He took a moment to soak in how beautiful it all appeared. This would most likely be the last time he would ever stand on this piece of land he had called home for the last three years of his life. Bleidd had seen him transform from a cowardly Pureblood snob to a warrior, a father, and tonight, the alpha of his pack.

The battle lines had been drawn without a word being exchanged between the groups. A large grey wolf with a scar across his face stood at the head of a small group on one side. Ears flat against his skull, tail twitching agitatedly, he looked ready to strike. On the other side a large white wolf stood shoulder to shoulder with the bulk of the pack, his posture relaxed but alert.

The white wolf cleared himself of all thoughts that had brought him to this point. He knew he was strong enough to defeat the alpha but to emerge victorious tonight he only needed to ensure his human half didn't try to take over in a fit of rage. He stepped forward into the clearing, bared his teeth to the grey wolf and threw his head back to let out a howl that rang clear in the crisp night air. He had issued his challenge to the alpha.

The large grey wolf, who till now had looked eager to fight, unexpectedly stepped back and transformed into his human form to the shock of those gathered.

"You reckoned you'd actually pull this off, did you? Foolish, pup," said Fenrir with a shake of his head, "all you went and did was make sure every one of them" -he pointed to the wolves standing behind the white wolf- "dies with you tonight."

Fenrir looked around the field before barking out one of his most destructive commands, "Kill every werewolf disloyal to me tonight."

To avoid arousing Fenrir's suspicions by too many of them abandoning his alpha bond all at once, Draco and others had believed it to best if most of the pack continued to remain bonded with Fenrir till the time Draco defeated, and replaced him as alpha. They had not anticipated a scenario where Fenrir would ask the pack to turn on itself. Draco could only watch in muted horror as members of the pack aggressively attacked each other.

The she-wolf snapped at the air with deadly fangs and then cocked her head, listening. There was someone else in the forest, another wolf, a male.

Was it her sire? Had he finally returned for her? The she-wolf excitedly took off, leaping over bushes in places and tearing through them in others in her rush to discover the source of the howl. She felt a thrill like no other at the prospect of finding another creature like her.

The she-wolf was terribly disappointed when she did eventually catch sight of the wolf. Even from a distance she could tell from his scent that he wasn't her sire and neither his scent nor his inferior form enticed her into considering him as a potential mate. But, he could make for excellent prey.
She recalled biting her sire and how good it had felt to taste his life force. *Would this wolf taste as good? Only one way to find out*, she thought as she stalked him.

The she-wolf let out a growl heralding her presence to the unknown wolf. Her size and strength already gave her too much of an advantage over the grey wolf, she would need to be on his guard and ready for her attack if there was to be any sport for her in this fight.

Once certain she had the grey wolf's undivided attention she charged silently, loping on all fours until she forcefully collided into him and knocked him to the ground. The unknown grey wolf did all he could to get out from under her, wheezing as he struggled to catch his breath. The she-wolf eased away from him, careful not to nick him with her claws- it wouldn't do to prematurely end their fun by accidentally killing him.

So confident was the she-wolf of her own superiority to the grey wolf she carelessly turned her back to him and walked a few paces away, ensuring she gave him sufficient time to recover. When she faced him again she expected to find him looking a little winded, not staring at her in wide-eyed bewilderment. The expression on his face as he got to his feet was one of recognition.

Did he know her? Was this Draco? She asked herself.

*No.*

No, Draco was a white wolf, she corrected, recalling some of her human's memories.

But it didn't matter to the she-wolf who he was and if he knew her. The grey wolf was her prey tonight and the only one likely to satisfy her urges without upsetting her human... not too much anyway.

The she-wolf gave her opponent a few more minutes to prepare himself before she used her claws to tackle him to the ground. *This is fun*, thought the she-wolf as she alternated between using her muzzle and forehead to repeatedly pound into his flank, his feeble attempts to fight her off only adding to her amusement.

The male wolf whined and hissed pathetically before yielding to her by resting his head and shoulders flat against the ground. Instinctively, Hermione recognised the sign of his submission even though the she-wolf pretended otherwise. The she-wolf snarled at him and motioned for him to get up and resume fighting. But the infuriating wolf refused to even look at her let alone hit back. Her attempts to force him to his feet by biting into his scruff only made him whine louder.

Pathetic.

Rapidly losing interest in fighting the snivelling creature at her feet the she-wolf decided she was done playing with her food.

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The battle turned out to be like nothing he had imagined. Draco had believed it would primarily be a fight between himself and Fenrir, with perhaps a couple of wolves loyal to Fenrir foolishly choosing to challenge Draco in the heat of the moment after the death of their alpha. Instead, the sadistic alpha had introduced the pack to a new kind of hell by forcing those bonded to him to kill one another.

A few of the betas were still able to resist their alpha's command to a small extent but they were viciously beaten by the omegas who were helpless to do anything but act out the order. The handful of those who had bonded with Draco sustained severe injuries within the first few minutes.
Killing Fenrir was the only way to end this madness so Draco fought off the horde of charging *weres* in his attempt to reach the cruel alpha. Despite taking great care not to seriously hurt any of the attacking wolves, caught as he was in the heat of the battle the white wolf ended up maiming a good number of those who had stood in solidarity with him earlier that night.

Over the noise of gnashing teeth, clashing limbs, whimpers of pain and cries of terror, Draco could discern the sound of Fenrir's laughter. Draco glared daggers at him when they made eye contact, leaping over the werewolf in his path to get at Fenrir. However, his progress was halted by three others that tackled him all at once.

"Are you so eager to die that you'd fight me, pup?" he heard Fenrir ask.

The white wolf snarled at Fenrir as he tried to shake off his assailants. He willed his face to morph into his human form.

"Fight me, Fenrir! Defend your position as alpha with honour. I challenge you to fight me," Draco roared at Fenrir before returning to his wolf form.

Fenrir responded by ordering the werewolves to leave Draco for him.

"So eager for a piece of me-- just like your bitch, aren't you?" sneered Fenrir when the white wolf finally reached him. "Ah, but you don't know 'bout that, do you, pup? All that time you were here pretending like you didn't help her escape I had your little Mudblood with her knees behind her ears begging for my seed."

Draco didn't realise it but Fenrir was slowly circling him, assessing his weak spots, while he flung jibes at Draco.

"I bit that bitch and turned her, you know, she'll always have that bond with me now." He noticed Draco's hackles rise and added, "Probably knocked her up too with the amount of cum I dumped into her stinky Mudblood gash."

Fenrir chuckled in amusement as Draco blindly attacked and failed to get a hold of him each time. It wasn't like Fenrir was particularly quick on his feet, just that on top of beginning to feel the brunt of all the injuries he sustained while fighting off members of the pack Draco was too enraged to correctly anticipate Fenrir's movements.

The white wolf tried to compose himself. It wouldn't help anyone right now for him to dwell on the possibility of his mate carrying another wolf's pups. He reminded himself that his mate possessed a spirit far too strong to be broken by the likes of Fenrir. All that mattered was that she was still alive and as soon as he killed Fenrir he could go find her.

Draco focused on the sway and motion of Fenrir's body instead of the taunting words aimed at goading him to act brashly. He managed to time his assault perfectly and tackled Fenrir from behind, causing him to yelp in surprise when he lost his balance and fell down.

Fenrir grabbed at the white wolf's neck and began to choke him as they wrestled on the ground. The white wolf in turn swiped his sharp claws at Fenrir's face. Fenrir's head recoiled in time to avoid the hit but had the wind knocked out of him by one of Draco's paws slamming into his chest.

Fenrir grabbed the white wolf by his tail and flung him off himself. Quickly stumbling to his feet, he jumped back, shifting forms mid-jump. The grey wolf feinted to his left before he spun around and charged at the exposed left flank of the white wolf, but instead of cutting him like he hoped, the grey wolf only managed to graze the white wolf with one of his claws.
Dipping into his reserves the white wolf relentlessly delivered a series of blows that left the grey wolf flat on his stomach in a short while. Picking up Fenrir by the scruff of his neck Draco gave him a good shake before he threw him down again. Fenrir growled and glared but could do little else. The white wolf stepped on the grey wolf's tail, pinning it in place to ensure Fenrir couldn't move while the white wolf bit and spat out chunks of his adversary's flesh.

The grey wolf roared in pain and thrashed about wildly trying to kick back at the white wolf. Just as it became apparent that he was going to meet his demise his body contorted in an unnatural manner after he attempted a poorly timed shift back into his human form. Fenrir was still able to blast the white wolf with a Stupefy which, although not strong enough to knock him out completely, was enough to free the white wolf's hold on Fenrir.

Getting back up Draco chanced a quick glance around him to see how the battle was progressing. The field was littered with motionless bodies of pack members he hoped were only unconscious. Many of those still engaged in battle had a crazed look to them that made Draco suspect they had broken their bond with Fenrir in a valiant attempt to ignore the alpha's orders.

Draco also took note of Fenrir's injuries. Though in his human form, parts of Fenrir's chest, stomach and hip were mangled bits of fur, flesh and bone with his head, torso and hips at odd angles to each other. All in all, Fenrir's injuries reminded Draco of the more fatal variety of splinching accidents. Fenrir didn't look like he was in any state to move and any spells cast from his current position could easily be averted. He was done. So when Fenrir called out, "Shield me," and around two dozen wolves rushed to his side to provide him cover Draco knew he wouldn't be killing Fenrir tonight.

During his time with the pack Draco had heard varying accounts of the Pack Wars, but one point had remained consistent in every telling: Fenrir Greyback was a ruthless alpha who would commit any atrocity to win his challenges. Having already seen an example tonight, Draco had no doubt Fenrir would use the pack as pawns to beat Draco. To kill Fenrir Draco would also need to kill everyone who was still bonded with Fenrir.

So where did that leave them?

Most of the pack needed immediate medical attention and the ones that didn't were exhausted from the fighting or feral from going rogue. Draco himself had not come out unscathed that night. Though he projected strength and vitality, in his current state even an omega could knock him down if they resumed fighting. With Draco out of the picture Fenrir would finish the task of killing all who supported him.

There wasn't much of a choice here- killing Fenrir was secondary to the survival of the pack- so Draco decided to negotiate with Fenrir.

Changing into his human form Draco put forth his proposal in the simplest of terms.

"Call off the attack and let me leave here tonight with whoever wishes to join me."

There was an odd noise, which could have been Fenrir snickering or just wincing in pain for all Draco could tell from the expression on his face.

"And why would I ever do such a thing?"

"Because I suspect you'll die if you wait till morning to get that" -Draco pointed to the oozing hole in Fenrir's stomach- "fixed. The longer this fight goes on the greater the likelihood of you croaking before you get appropriate help."
"I could just kill you and finish it right now."

"You could try," said Draco in a matter of fact tone, "but there's no guarantee you'll do any better now than you have the past hour and it would cost you precious time. Do you really want to gamble with your life?" he asked, knowing Fenrir would always put himself first. "Let us go and I'll pour the dittany on your wounds myself before we leave."

Fenrir was silent- he was either considering Draco's offer or was in far too much pain to talk.

"I can't let you take the pack and leave... I need them," he admitted after some hesitation before quickly adding, "I'd rather see them dead than leave."

And that kind of thinking is exactly why the pack would rather have anyone else as their alpha, thought Draco. Out loud he said, "Face it Fenrir, you lost here tonight. Be happy you get to walk away alive."

"I want to keep the ones I sired," insisted Fenrir.

"It's got to be their choice. That part is non-negotiable."

Fenrir reluctantly agreed and called off the attack on the condition that Draco would attend to his wounds before anyone else's. In exchange Draco made Fenrir swear on his magic that he wouldn't call for another attack or abuse his alpha powers again for the next twenty four hours.

Not wanting to risk the lives of anyone in the pack by waiting till morning for Cora's assistance, despite being dead on his feet, Draco spend the rest of the night dispensing their limited reserves of dittany to whoever needed it the most and forming pack bonds with the werewolves still willing to follow him. The rogue wolves were proving to be particularly difficult to manage in his exhausted state so Draco used a sleeping charm on them to ensure they didn't do anything to endanger themselves or the pack for the rest of the night.

Fenrir was taken to one side after being treated. It would have been so easy to kill him in his vulnerable state but both alphas had sworn not to make any attempts on the other's lives during their twenty hour period of truce. If not for needing to care for his pack Draco could have probably figured out a way to circumvent that oath and put an end to Fenrir but he was just barely able to put one foot in front of the other attending to his injured pack.

When morning finally came Draco needed to be levitated, along with the sleeping feral werewolves, to the portkey point outside the wards of Bleidd to follow their plan of escape. Even though Draco lay bruised, bloodied and too weak to hold up his own head, his pack was proud to call him their alpha as they set out to make a new life for themselves.

Chapter End Notes

A helpful excerpt from Ch 8:
Obeying the alpha's command gave one a general sense of calm and wellbeing not all that different from executing an order while imperiused. Ignoring an alpha's order caused constant unease and unrest in the werewolf followed by intense pain. While it was possible for someone other than the caster to end the imperius curse, the only way to throw off an alpha's command was to break the bond with the alpha, which in turn would result in a loss of the pack bonds as well. At that stage, you may as well be a
rogue, an outcast.]
Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He submitted, pointed out her human.

I don't care, I'm hungry and he smells good, countered the she-wolf.

He smells familiar, thought Hermione, though she couldn't be certain. Her wolf only recognised the scents she had encountered since she was turned.

The she-wolf was about ready to take a bite out of the grey wolf when a shift in the wind brought a strange new scent that gave her pause. Something wasn't quite right. Her eyes scanned her surroundings but the forest was denser here and she couldn't see too far in any direction.

Taking advantage of her distracted state the grey wolf made a dash for it. He didn't get too far though, as he unfortunately ran straight into something and ended on his butt on the ground. The grey wolf was quick to get back on his feet but stopped dead in his tracks when he took in the beast scowling at him.

Even though she couldn't remember the name of the strange rhinoceros-like creature, Hermione recognised it from one of Luna Lovegood's magizoology books as an extremely dangerous beast. Despite standing over a foot taller than her and almost five times her size she could tell from the underdeveloped horn sitting rather prominently above its nose that this one wasn't an adult. Hermione instinctively knew she needed to keep a safe distance from the horn that had begun to glow eerily after the creature locked eyes with the grey wolf.

Alas, the she-wolf didn't share her human's concerns. Excited by the prospect of a challenging opponent she raised her tail and stood as tall as she could before baring her fangs and letting out a challenging roar. The grey wolf was her prey and she wasn't going to let an oversized hog steal it from her!

Focused solely on the grey wolf that had dared to attack it, the creature paid no mind to the larger black wolf growling in the background. Head lowered, horn aimed at the offending wolf, the creature prepared to charge.

But the she-wolf wasn't to be slighted in this manner and she wasn't going to let someone else kill her prey. She ran at the horned beast, making a flying leap over the grey wolf to hit her target squarely in the chest with enough force to shove the massive creature back a few steps. She landed on her feet between the grey wolf and the unknown beast to protectively cover the grey wolf.

Mine!

Her claim, though voiced as a growl, was clearly understood by the creature who responded with a wide swinging motion of its bulky head easily knocking the black wolf out of the way. The creature's attention was now centred on the black wolf, nevertheless when the grey wolf scrambled backwards in an attempt to get away, with a gentle nudge the creature send him sprawling on his arse, glaring at him in a manner meant to pin him in place. The grey wolf had inadvertently become a prize, to be claimed by one of the two ferocious beasts at the end of their deadly match.

Despite having the wind knocked out of her, the she-wolf quickly recovered. Using her powerful legs to get on her feet and jump back into the fray, she easily cleared the gap between her and her
most recent opponent in a single leap to resume her attack. Swiping downward, the she-wolf made several attempts to carve into the creature with her claws but she barely managed to scratch the surface of its thick hide.

Thinking a different approach was in order she quickly rolled away to a safe distance and shifted into her human form. Still in control, the she-wolf began to assault the beast barrelling towards her with a succession of spells: Stupefy, Diffindo, Confringo, and out of utter frustration even a Rictusempra, all to no avail. The creature's hide appeared to be nearly invulnerable to her spells as well. It must have stung though, because the beast looked beyond enraged as it butted Hermione in the midsection. Hermione narrowly missed getting grazed by the deadly horn but she crumpled to the ground doubled over in pain. The creature had raised one of its massive paws poised to stomp on her prone form when for no apparent reason the creature tottered to the side bellowing in pain just as Hermione rolled away from under its body. She couldn't understand what was going on till she caught sight of the grey wolf swinging from the creature's tail; the grey wolf had his fangs so deeply lodged into the creature's tail that no matter how hard the creature tried it was unable to shake him off.

Aware now of the futility in attacking the creature's hide the she-wolf took her cue from the grey wolf and sought out other vulnerable parts for attack. Her eyes immediately went to the glowing horn that beckoned to her like a beacon. In the midst of the creature thrashing about Hermione managed to perfectly aim a diffindo at its horn making it howl in pain as a fluid erupted out of the wound and burned its way down the creature's face.

By now the grey wolf had managed to disentangle itself from the beast and lay on the ground catching his breath while the creature floundered blindly, unable to see either one of its opponents. As eager as the she-wolf had been to fight the mammoth creature a few minutes ago she had lost all interest in it once she finally managed to best it. It irked her that the grey wolf had contributed to that feat in some way, especially since it meant her human would absolutely refuse to let her kill him now.

Realising she was still hungry and wasn't going to get to enjoy her prize she decided to walk away and resume her hunt. But first, the she-wolf transformed back into her true form and dragged the grey wolf by the scruff of his neck to her cave where he was bound and left to be dealt with after sunrise.

The actual task of leaving Britain turned out to be easier than one would have imagined with the current travel restrictions. As planned the pack split up into smaller groups, each group setting forth in a different direction. They made a couple of jumps around the country before they portkeyed to different locations on the continent from where they finally travelled to Uganda. While the pack would have definitely alerted several different departments in the Ministry when they put to use Draco's stash of stolen portkeys accumulated over the years, they were counting on the fact that the Death Eaters wouldn't consider the newly formed pack worth the trouble it would take to hunt down.

It was late afternoon by the time all groups arrived, seemingly without incident, at the Mountains of the Moon in Uganda, but the pack was suffering. Transformations were taxing enough for any werewolf, but the life-and-death battle coupled with the debilitating nausea from travelling via portkey multiple times and over long distances meant that for the first couple of hours after their arrival there wasn't a single were in the entire group capable of doing anything more than groaning in pain.

Draco was among the first to move, ordering his betas to do a head count, tend to their injured and check on their supplies. It came as a shock to Draco that neither Cora nor Oskar were present in any of the groups that arrived and no one recalled seeing either one of them in the groups they had
travelled with.

It didn’t make sense for either Oskar or Cora to have stayed back as they had bonded with Draco long before the events of the previous night. Although there were a few pack members who had unwittingly switched allegiance and bonded with Draco even earlier, Oskar and Cora- along with Gunnolf- were among the first to consciously choose Draco as their alpha. Their absence was disconcerting to the young alpha. There was still so much he didn't know about being an alpha, or even a werewolf, that Draco doubted his ability to successfully lead the pack without Oskar's counsel to rely upon. Cora was equally indispensible to the pack in her role as medwitch- with their aggressive natures, werewolves tended to attract trouble anyway and there was no knowing what kind of dangerous creatures or unfriendly humans the pack may end up having to fight as they tried to settle into this foreign land.

Lacking the means to travel back to Britain- even if it was safe for him to do so- Draco saw no choice but to wait and see if Oskar and Cora were part of a group of stragglers, despite knowing there was little chance of that being the case. Each and every one of the werewolves Draco had spoken with the previous day had joined in the exodus this morning. Even a few who had no idea of Draco’s plans, ones Oskar had claimed would only accept a new alpha once Fenrir fell, had preferred to follow Draco when offered the choice. Werewolves respected strength, first and foremost, and it was what they sought in their alpha, the ability to protect the pack. Draco knew he had failed the pack members who had stayed with Fenrir when he failed to kill their cruel alpha. His only consolation now was that at least he was able to do his part to ensure no lives were lost the previous night.

He couldn't do anything about two of the three pillars of his pack, but he could do something about the third, thought Draco, recalling Theo’s tip for where he might find Gunnolf. Draco summoned from his belongings the parchment with the co-ordinates for the local Death Eater base. He wasn't keen to go visit the place that had been the location for his mate's captivity and suffering, but then the wizard in him pointed out his hypocrisy since he had no problem living at Bleidd despite Hermione being a prisoner there as well. Draco had mixed feelings about the times he had forced his desires on his mate. The wolf in him was unapologetic about claiming his mate, but as a wizard his conscience would have felt lighter if Hermione had willingly participated in the act because he had won her affections and not because a potion had made it so.

There was no changing the past and, as far as he knew, Hermione didn't hold their first coupling against him. Still he couldn't help wondering if she would have chosen the Order as easily over him and their sons if not for such an ugly start to their relationship.

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"Oh Merlin! Gunnolf?" asked Hermione in disbelief when the wolf finally transformed into a human. "What are you doing here?" she demanded, completely disregarding their naked state.

"Me? What in Hades are you doing, Hermione? You tried to eat me last night," Gunnolf rebuked. Though she had terrified him in her wolf form, Gunnolf was more confident when dealing with the more familiar form of Hermione as he towered over her.

His confidence was shaken the very next second when her eyes flashed yellow and her claws emerged.

"Watch your tone, wolf," she warned in a tone that made Gunnolf instantly hang his head and lower his gaze.

It occurred to Gunnolf that despite her resemblance to the frail looking witch that was his alpha's
mate, the Hermione before him was a dangerous beast.

She closed in on him, invading his personal space while she appraised him. He was more impressive in this form, she noted, using a single claw to lightly run across his pectoral muscles and then down his abdominals to stop just short of his manhood. She watched his proud member shrink in fear and let out a peal of laughter. She was right about him last night, this specimen was only good as prey.

*Pack*, her human half insisted. He was a werewolf, he had already submitted to her last night and helped her defeat the strange beast, maybe even saved her life in the process.

"I believe I asked you a question, wolf. What are you doing here?"

"Incredibly, I was here, today, looking for you," he said without raising his eyes. Gunnolf then proceeded to inform Hermione about his reasons for arriving in Uganda and everything that had happened since.

"So Wilbur and Martin are with Draco and the pack?" asked an anxious Hermione, once her human half wrestled away control from the she-wolf.

"Yes."

"And they're okay, they're safe?"

"Yes, absolutely. The pack's been ordered to never again leave Fenrir alone with the twins."

Hermione stepped away from Gunnolf considering what she had just learnt.

"And, you never realised something had happened to me till you arrived here? Draco doesn't know I'm missing?"

"No," he replied, daring to look up this time. His shoulders subconsciously sagged in relief noticing that her eyes were back to their normal shade of brown.

"As far as we knew, you had escaped. Draco was still concerned when you didn't contact him like you were supposed to and wanted confirmation you were okay. He planned to return Ginny Weasley to the Order to confirm your whereabouts."

"Ginny!" gasped Hermione feeling guilty for once again forgetting about her friend's fate. "She's okay, then?"

It took Gunnolf a moment to understand the nature of Hermione's concern.

"Oh, yes. She's okay," he assured with a nod. "It was a close call, but thanks to Cora and Draco's efforts she survived. The baby couldn't be saved though..."

Hermione felt no guilt knowing she was responsible in some way for the death of an innocent. For Ginny's sake she was glad the baby that was a continued source of her friend's nightmares and anxieties had not survived.

"Does that mean she's been sent back to the Death Eaters?" she asked, worried Ginny was returned to her rapists to be impregnated once more.

Gunnolf shook his head.

"Lucius Malfoy himself arrived to confirm that his heir was okay when he received word that Ginny was too weak to travel for the revel held during the last full moon. But, Cora fooled him just as she
did the rest."

He told Hermione about Cora's inspired ploy to fool everyone into thinking Ginny was still pregnant to ensure she wasn't taken from Bleidd. He also spoke of Ginny's recovery in the aftermath.

"Does that mean she's back to being herself?" asked Hermione, hopeful.

"I can't really say as I didn't know the witch before she was brought to Bleidd," explained Gunnolf with a light shrug of his shoulders. "She sounds far more reasonable when you talk to her now--most notable is the absence of vitriol when someone mentions Draco. Given that she's still in prison, Cora thinks the witch's mental health has shown remarkable improvement since her miscarriage." "And Draco's going to help Ginny escape just so he can get news about me?"

"Unless something's happened in the week I've been gone the witch is most likely back with her family."

Hermione looked visibly shocked that Draco would take such risks just to confirm she was okay.

"We needed to talk to the Order anyway," Gunnolf explained. "Draco thinks the Order would naturally be our ally if we are to go against the Dark Lord."

"Draco wants to fight the Dark Lord now?"

Despite the discussion she had with Draco before she left Bleidd Hermione was surprised to hear that Draco actively wished to join in the fight against Voldemort.

"He says he wants a world where he can raise his family without worrying about people trying to kill his sons, his mate, his pack or himself."

Hermione leaned against the wall of the cave to support herself. Her vision was blurry from the tears that flowed freely from her eyes.

"Why didn't he come for me? Why didn't he sense my distress?" she whispered under her breath.

"Why didn't you return, Hermione? Clearly, you aren't being held a prisoner- probably haven't been since you were turned- so why didn't you return?" he demanded.

Gunnolf flinched as Hermione's teeth elongated and her eyes rapidly changed from brown to yellow, then back to brown again.

"It's complicated," she replied dismissively, "I haven't really been myself."

"Have you been alone all this time?" he asked, genuinely curious about how she had managed to survive as a lone wolf. "I'd say you're doing pretty well, all things considered."

Hermione shrugged.

"Looks like Oskar was right about you."

Hermione gave him a questioning glance.

"You must be the Promised One. I mean, you're a dire wolf, Hermione! And you managed to defeat that erumpent last night."

"Is that what that creature was, an erum-?"
"An erumpent, yes. Thanks to a terrible translator we ended up learning about quite a few African beasts while looking for you. When we heard about a dire wolf sighting in the Mountains of the Moon we didn't really expect to find anything even though we did go up to Uagadou to check."

"While you've been running around looking for me where was this so-called mate of mine? If we have a bond why didn't he stop Fenrir from violating me?"

Hermione and her wolf were of one mind in that moment. She didn't wish to discuss with Gunnolf the degradation she had suffered at Fenrir's hands, but she needed to know why Draco had failed her.

"The Dark Lord punished Draco for your escape. I'll spare you the gruesome details, but he was tortured and left for dead. He's alive only due to the timely actions of a few of his former friends... Hermione, I don't know how you've managed to remain sane all this time all by yourself, but we aren't meant to be on our own. Unless you want to go on a murderous rampage like Fenrir did, you should return to Bleidd with me so you can be a part of the pack."

"Isn't that where Fenrir is as well?"

Gunnolf nodded.

"I don't trust myself around him. I'm not sure I'll be able to remain sane when I see him."

"Then we'll get rid of Fenrir. Your place is with Draco, your pups and the pack, Hermione. We're social creatures, we can't handle being on our own. We think and act irrationally, becoming more and more of a threat to those around us, as well as ourselves, the longer we remain without bonds. Come back to Bleidd, you don't have to physically be with the Order to work with them."

Hermione considered Gunnolf's words. She knew there was truth to what he said as she herself had grown concerned over her erratic and irrational thoughts.

"You need a pack, Hermione. I can see you have a powerful beast but you have little control over it. You need bonds to banish the chaos in your mind before you can successfully master your wolf. And, your sons need you. Have you any idea how rare it is for our kind to meet our true mates and to have children with them?" asked Gunnolf, both angry and resentful towards Hermione for the callous disregard she had shown towards Luna's generosity. "You already spat once in the face of this incredible gift from the fates when you abandoned your children and mate, do not repeat the same mistake twice."

Hermione felt exhausted. She still wanted to keep away from Bleidd for the safety of her children, she was still angry at Draco despite the explanations. She also wanted to see her sons again, wanted to be held by Draco again, and a part of her still wanted to kill Fenrir along with every Death Eater and salt their lands after she had burnt everything they owned to the ground. She was unable to distinguish the irrational from the rational thoughts. The she-wolf was surprisingly quiet.

"Let's go back to the Death Eater base. Theo's most probably waiting there for me. We can all portkey back to Bleidd together."

"There's no need for that," said Hermione summoning her own portkey. There was no way she was returning to that place, unless it was to torch it down. "This one can take us to Britain."

Gunnolf nodded, thinking it was safer to arrive at a different location than just showing up at Bleidd with Hermione. He wasn't looking at her so he didn't catch the predatory look in her eyes.

"- But before we go, wolf, I think it's time for you to pick an alpha."
Upon arriving at the given co-ordinates Draco barely made it to the entrance when his keen werewolf senses picked up on the unusual looking colour of the soil in the adjacent field. He decided to take a closer look and was nearly driven mad with grief and rage when he realised it was Hermione's blood staining the ground. From what Mipsy had told him, he knew Hermione had escaped and needed to remind himself of it over and over again.

*She attacked the werewolf and escaped.*

By Mipsy's account, not only had she escaped, but Hermione had also managed to do quite some damage first. From the copious amounts of blood residue- belonging to both Fenrir and Hermione-still present a month later, Draco was certain the two must have engaged in an epic fight. Though his wolf was proud to have a mate powerful enough to hurt his former alpha and be the one to leave that ugly scar on Fenrir's face, the wizard worried about what his witch must have suffered through trying to cope with such injuries all on her own.

Draco forced himself to go inside the Death Eater base to look for signs of Gunnolf and was surprised by the state of the place when he was finally able to see it. An entire quadrant of the structure resembled a war zone, the few charred walls that still stood looked like they had been struck by several powerful confringos. Draco looked around, searching for Gunnolf as well as the cellar, where according to Mipsy his mate had been held captive and abused. He knew he wasn't powerful enough to demolish the entire place by himself, but he was capable of wrecking one room. However, Draco soon discovered that someone else had beat him to it; the cellar had caved in on itself and was completely inaccessible. He couldn't think of anyone else who would have wanted to damage the room, except for Hermione. His senses were far too overwhelmed by the scent of the smouldering remains of the building, but the magic employed in its destruction was strong enough its origin could be traced even hours later.

Draco's heart soared with hope when he identified the caster as Hermione. She was not only alive, but well enough to pull off something like this, he thought with awe as he took in the scene of destruction. His wolf grew restless, far too excited and all the more eager to claim his absolutely stunning mate.

Draco did not consider it prudent to stick around. There was no telling if any wards were triggered when Hermione attacked the place; a group of Death Eaters may very well be on their way to investigate. He failed to pick up Gunnolf's scent on any of the entry points, which could be because the werewolf had not been there in days or because the smoke was still messing with his nose. However, it was clear that without a portkey to take him back to Britain, Gunnolf, like Hermione, was very likely still in Uganda. In addition to Hermione, he would have to search for Gunnolf too. Fortunately they appeared to be missing in the same region. Draco left, but not before he had left his own scent all over- should Gunnolf return- in the most disrespectful manner possible to express his contempt for the place.

It was close to nightfall by the time Draco returned to the site of the makeshift camp constructed by the pack on the other side of the Mountains of the Moon. He checked on their injured followed by a meeting with the betas to plan their tasks for the next few days. It was past midnight when he finally called it a day. They were all worn out by the trials of the last twenty-four hours and were likely to function more effectively after a good night's sleep.

Draco himself didn't immediately join the others, deciding instead to take a walk before he went to sleep. Despite being the alpha, he ended up performing a perimeter check- he was so accustomed to performing the task, both, as omega and then beta, he knew it would be a while before he outgrew...
the habit. During his solitary stroll Draco thought about Gunnolf and wondered if he had already
gone looking for Theo and encountered Hermione this morning. It may have only been wishful
thinking on his part, but he thought there was a chance that Gunnolf wasn't waiting at the Death
Eater base because he was with Hermione.

As he lay on the pile of rugs besides members of his pack already fast asleep, Draco tried to sense
Gunnolf through the alpha bond, but felt nothing. He was either doing it wrong or Gunnolf was too
far out of range- it was just another one of those things he would have liked to discuss with Oskar.

Sometime in the early hours of the morning Draco was awakened by one of his betas and led away
from the tent serving as their sleeping quarters. From the beta's mannerism Draco concluded
whatever had led Adrian to disturb his alpha's sleep was important, but nothing to be alarmed over.

Draco saw Oskar and Cora sitting beside the campfire and was so relieved to see them he didn't
immediately notice Cora's reddened eyes or how frail Oskar appeared. He hugged each of them in
turn, and finally picking up on their sombre moods suggested that with dawn only a few hours away
they all get some rest first and talk in the morning.

Chapter End Notes

Uganda is 3 hours ahead of the UK. I don't always stick to chronology when shifting
between different narratives, as seen here (and previously with Theo and Gunnolf bits).
"Zoey's missing," said a visibly upset Cora. "No one's seen her since yesterday. When I went around doing diagnostics and patching up the injured, I asked everyone about Zoey—no one admitted to letting her out last night."

Just like every other full moon since her arrival, Ginny Weasley had to be locked into her room for the night— a measure meant to protect her from any Death Eaters aware of her presence at Bleidd as much as prevent her escape. The only difference was that this time the person locked in was a polyjuiced Zoey, who was required to remain in Ginny's quarters till one of the betas returned to let her out before moonrise.

"Wasn't Serafina assigned that task?" asked Oskar.

"Yes, but when I asked her about Zoey last night, she said the wards were down and the room empty when she got there. Serafina said she was held up by some other duties. She just assumed that since she was delayed someone else must've let Zoey out. She expected to see her with the pack at moonrise."

"But, Zoey wasn't there last night?"

Cora shook her head.

"Are you sure? It would've been easy to miss her with the way things went down."

"I never told her about Draco's plans- with her nervous disposition she would've given us away. Zoey should've come looking for me like she does every full moon- I make sure she doesn't get any unwanted attention from any of the males." At Oskar's look of confusion she added, "You know what it's like once they've had a sip of the _fero_- they'll hump everything in sight, consent be damned."

Being as old as he was Oskar kept to himself during the full moon. If he felt energetic enough, he sometimes joined in a pack run, otherwise his interactions with the pack were limited to watching the brawling matches where pack members displayed their strength and skills in an effort to improve their ranking within the pack. He was never a participant in any of the sexual activities all packs engaged in during the full moon- as someone who had lost his mate, he didn't see the point. Instead, Oskar spend his time basking in the moonlight, mentally reliving fond memories of his time with his mate. So he never witnessed firsthand most of the deviant behaviour that was caused by the _fero_ potion. Any werewolf could easily discern if a female was ripe for breeding by her scent alone. Even if Zoey's human form had completed puberty, she was considered immature by their kind as she had yet to have a heat cycle. He knew the potion made them promiscuous, but was unaware it could compromise a werewolf’s instincts to the point where they would not only desire but force themselves on an immature female.

"I'm not leaving without her," Cora had informed Oskar before running off towards the castle instead of joining the group of migrating werewolves.

Cora, who always had a soft spot for broken things had taken Zoey under her wings almost as soon as the teen was turned and brought to the pack by Fenrir. In a short span of time Zoey had become
the closest thing Cora ever had to a child so Oskar could understand her unwillingness to leave without Zoey. He also knew Cora wasn't one of the people in possession of a portkey, but he was, so he decided to wait for her. He didn't need to wait too long.

"Couldn't find her anywhere," said an out of breath Cora.

"Then we leave without her. It's possible you can't find her because she doesn't wish to be found—Fenrir is her sire after all."

Cora shook her head.

"No, Zoey fears Fenrir but feels no loyalty to him. Something must've happened to her."

"We do not have the time to investigate! I saw the last of the groups leave an hour ago. We are the only ones still here," Oskar informed Cora.

While the clock had not run out on the temporary truce Oskar was certain Fenrir would figure a way around his oath just as soon as he had sufficiently recovered to do so. They were only courting trouble by lingering.

"You should leave then," said Cora ready to walk back to the castle.

She was stopped by Oskar.

"Between the two of us there's only one international portkey to get us out of Britain. We either leave together, or stay."

"Then we either leave with Zoey or you leave without me," Cora insisted.

"By Luna, you are so stubborn sometimes you must be more mule than wolf," exclaimed Oskar. "Go find your missing omega, you silly child. I shall wait for you beyond the forest."

Cora smiled at Oskar in gratitude which he immediately waved off.

"Stop grinning at me like a fool and get to it, unless you wish to stay here and become a part of Fenrir's pack again."

Cora gave him another smile before she turned away. She had taken only a few step when Oskar called out to her.

"Keep away from Fenrir—no telling what insane scheme for retribution he's cooked up by now."

Cora didn't turn as she shouted her boastful response, "Fenrir trusts me, out of everyone I know best how to manipulate that status-seeking brute."

Oskar watched Cora jog out of sight before he began to slowly make his way past the castle grounds and through the forest. Not quite as swift in his human form and too old to handle the rigours of transformation outside the full moon, Oskar knew he was more likely to hinder than help Cora in her search for Zoey. He patiently waited for Cora beyond the anti-apparition wards of the castle, alert for any sign of a threat.

With nothing else to do while he waited, Oskar pondered upon the fight from the previous night. There was no clear winner. Fenrir had undermined his status within the pack by making an uncharacteristic use of the alpha command to fight Draco, which was a puzzle in itself. Draco was no stronger than the average alpha, and Fenrir had easily killed many fiercer alphas during the Pack
Wars. It was utterly senseless of Fenrir to choose to appear weak before his pack by refusing to honour Draco's challenge in the manner he normally would have.

But Draco himself had shown his shortcomings by choosing to negotiate an exit deal with Fenrir instead of slaying him. Oskar knew from previous talks with his, now, former pack members that they stayed with Fenrir because they believed him to be the better choice. Outside the pack, life in Britain was beginning to turn into a living hell for groups targeted by the Dark Lord. Fenrir had favour with the despotic wizard, Draco didn't, which put Fenrir in a better position to act as protector of the pack. For these werewolves it didn't matter that Draco had saved their lives with his strategy the previous night; all they would see was a weak alpha who was unable to protect his mate or kill Fenrir even after he confessed to kidnapping, raping and turning Hermione.

It was long past sunset when Cora returned looking absolutely distraught.

"Zoey?" he asked.

Cora shook her head and stumbled forward, but luckily Oskar managed to catch her just in time. He thought it best to leave first and ask questions later. Without warning he apparated them to a different part of Wales, a Muggle forest he knew would be abandoned at this hour. He cast a Muffliato, taught to him by Draco, in case they were still any Muggles within earshot before he finally pried apart an upset Cora who was clinging to him.

"What happened?"

Cora shook her head, refusing to speak.

"What happened, Cora? Tell me," he insisted.

Cora opened her mouth but instead of words it was an agonising screech she let out before collapsing to the ground despite Oskar's hold on her.

Oskar sat down beside her, cradling her like a child against him as she sobbed broken heartedly in a way he had only seen her do once before- after the war which resulted in the deaths of their alpha, her mate and many others in their old pack. He had no idea how long he sat there rocking her till she was finally done crying.

"Is she dead?" he asked, assuming the worst from her reaction.

She nodded against him.

"Fenrir," he thought out loud. He knew Fenrir wouldn't wait for the twenty-fours to finish before he acted.

Cora shook her head, surprising Oskar.

"Le- Lestrange," she uttered through sobs.

Oskar was confused as the name was unfamiliar to him.

"Death- Death Eater," she explained.

If Fenrir had used a Death Eater to kill Zoey he would have broken his oath, so the Death Eater would have his own reasons for murdering Zoey.

"Why would any Death Eater care about Zoey?"
"Gin- Ginny. They thought- Ginny."

"They killed her thinking she was Ginny?"

Cora shook her head.

"They killed her because they discovered she wasn't Ginny?"

Cora began tearing up again.

"I searched and searched for her. She was nowhere. No one had seen her. Fenrir was livid, furious with Draco, with the pack. He wanted to punish his pack, for the ones that left. But he can't, not till the twenty-four hours are up. In the midst of it all there was a message. Fenrir was summoned by the Lestranges. But, he's in a bad state. He's been in a bad state since his fight with Hermione, he's just been hiding it from us. He couldn't go, so they came instead, those- those monsters.

"She was such a sweet child, and the things they did to her- horrible, terrible things- when they thought it was Ginny, when they believed it was a pregnant witch, someone they thought was a Pureblood, someone they found desirable... They bragged about it, describing their actions like they had created a masterpiece.

"But then the polyjuice wore off. And, they saw her... The way they spoke about her-- they found her ugly, unworthy. They were angry with her and showed her... And the goddess must have forsaken her, for the moon rose and her mutilated body transformed, infuriating the two men even further. They had been deceived. They had given Fenrir information and he was to give them Ginny- he waited till the full moon to fulfil his end of the deal knowing the pack would be too busy to notice her absence. They were furious with Fenrir for trying to cheat them, instead of their prize they were given an ugly mongrel!

"Any chance of her survival died the moment they discovered her identity. That poor child, who had endured so much in her short life, was made to suffer in horrific ways till her very last breath. They came to Bleidd only to toss her butchered remains at Fenrir's feet as a warning to him-"

Considering everything Cora had witnessed in her lifetime, Oskar had no doubt that Zoey had met a particularly barbaric and painful demise to draw such a strong reaction from Cora.

"-Who are these people? How can they treat others in so despicable a manner? What gives them the right to decide whose life has value and whose doesn't?" she demanded angrily.

Oskar didn't need to respond. Like him, Cora was aware that Death Eaters could and had gotten away with worse crimes in the world they lived in.

"Draco's right, I guess even Hermione's been right... This cannot continue," Cora stated with finality.

Due to his closeness to Cora, Oskar deeply experienced her grief. He sat beside her for some time, both silently staring into the thicket of trees before them, completely listless. With some effort he finally got up himself and then helped Cora to her feet before activating the portkey to Greece. From there it took him little time to procure a portkey for Uganda.

Cora was silent throughout, speaking again only when they finally reached the Mountains of the Moon and made out, what had to be, the pack's campsite.

"Fenrir plans to blame Draco. He plans to contact Lucius Malfoy and say Draco played a dirty trick on everyone and escaped with half the pack, taking Ginny as a hostage with them. He knows the
Death Eaters won't care about Draco or the pack, but they will give a damn if they think he has Ginny."

Oskar nodded and they silently continued to make their way to the pack. Oskar didn't say anything that night but first thing in the morning, he sought out Draco and informed him about what had taken place as well as Fenrir's scheme to enlist help from the Death Eaters. Unless they did something to forestall it, war may come their way sooner than imagined.

Chapter End Notes

Annoyed with myself for being unable to meet my self-assigned weekly posting schedule last week, but priorities... [sigh]

Would it be too gauche for me to gush about the fic reaching 1600 kudos? Thank you, generous readers.
"Gunnolf? Where the hell have you been?" demanded Fenrir.

Gunnolf was passing by the main hall, on his way to Draco's private quarters, when he was spotted by Fenrir.

"Death Eater Assignment," was all Gunnolf offered as a reply. If Fenrir noticed his head beta's failure to address him with the customary 'my alpha' or 'sir' he made no mention of it.

" Took you long enough! That bastard, Malfoy's, cocked it all up. Took off with more than half my pack, he did! Haven't the faintest who's even with me anymore-- No good, soft, bunch o' cunts-- Do a quick count and report who's still here," barked Fenrir before distractedly looking around.

"Now where in the bloody hell is Cora?" he asked as he unsteadily walked a few paces before sitting heavily on one of the stone benches. "Someone get the mediwitch. Tell her the blasted omegas can wait, she needs to see to her alpha right now."

He stretched out on the bench and looked like he may have passed out when he suddenly sat up and started yelling at the werewolf standing closest to him, "Go check if there's any dittany that didn't get nicked by those thieves and get me some," and then to no one in particular, "I'm gonna have a little lie down till then."

Fenrir lay back down. It wasn't clear if he was asleep or not, but he did not stir again.

Gunnolf, who had stood in place watching Fenrir instead of doing as ordered, was alarmed by the state of affairs since his return to Bleidd that afternoon. He would have arrived sooner if not for their impromptu trip to the Death Eater base in Uganda that morning. When he agreed to take Hermione to the unplottable location he had done so thinking her wolf would vent her rage by tearing up the sparse furnishings in the place. Even if the structure was made of brick and sticks, it was still reinforced with potent magic; he had not expected her to blast through walls and make the floor sink.

Having lived most of his life exclusively around werewolves, Gunnolf was used to seeing amazing feats of physical strength, but he had never witnessed magic like this. He had fallen to his knees watching his alpha in action. Even in her fury and madness she was a sight to behold, gracefully her fingers twirled and wrist flicked to unleash destruction on the place she had been held captive. The corners of her mouth lifted into the smallest of smiles as she admired her handiwork. Fenrir would be shown no mercy.

Gunnolf watched her work, awestruck, needing to repeatedly remind his wolf that he would only make a fool of himself if he attempted to impress this bitch; she was not for him. She was Draco's fated mate and he hoped, for the sake of the man he called a brother, the mate pull was strong enough that Hermione's wolf did not end up rejecting Draco for being so very inferior to her.

They had portkeyed to Britain immediately after their detour, with Gunnolf parting ways from Hermione in a Muggle part of Wales before apparating to Bleidd. Upon his arrival he was astonished to find there were no guards in sight. Foot patrol was usually light the day after the full moon, but never completely absent. Given the hour, the betas should have recovered and taken to their posts, but, every checkpoint on his way to the castle and inside was unmanned.
Gunnolf dashed towards pack quarters, not wasting time with any other part of the castle, knowing he was bound to find either Draco, Cora or Oskar there. Along the way Gunnolf observed that instead of slumbering in their quarters, as they usually would, many pack members were resting in and around the main hall. Every one of them sported bruises and, even in passing, their injuries looked far more serious than anything typically sustained during their full moon brawls.

He could hear Fenrir walking up and down the length of the main hall, ranting and raving; despite his keen hearing Gunnolf couldn't make sense of Fenrir's angry mutterings. A quick peek inside showed a feral looking Fenrir chastising the group while his betas stood around looking absolutely miserable. Not wishing to deal with Fenrir till he had spoken with Draco, Gunnolf had attempted to sneak past the alpha unnoticed, but failed.

Once it looked like Fenrir was not going to get up again anytime soon, Gunnolf signalled to a couple of the betas to follow him as he stepped outside the hall to have a private chat with them. The worn out looking werewolves spared no details as they told Gunnolf about Draco's failed attempt to challenge the alpha, Fenrir's chilling revelation of what he had done to Hermione, the unprecedented battle between pack members, and the temporary truce negotiated by Draco that prevented Fenrir from carrying out retribution against Draco or the pack till the twenty-four hour period was up.

It came to light that the alpha's magic had become unstable ever since his fight with Hermione. Subsequently, more than his physical wounds Fenrir was worried about any adverse effect his most recent fight may have had on his abilities and powers as an alpha. With his weakness exposed, Fenrir was afraid of being abandoned by the rest of his pack. His insecurities led him to force the pack to gather around him in the main hall so he could keep an eye on them till the truce period expired; the ones too injured or exhausted to move had been physically dragged, as close as he could in his current state, by Fenrir himself.

As if losing half his pack in one night wasn't bad enough, Fenrir's bad day had only gotten worse after he received a puzzling howler from a couple of high ranking Death Eaters accusing him of attempting to deceive his superiors. The voices mentioned something about having provided information about an elf before ordering Fenrir to immediately deliver their payment to Chateau Lestrange in person. Fenrir had looked more confused than concerned throughout and would have disregarded the severity of his wounds and answered the Death Eater summons if he didn't question his pack's loyalty to him.

While Gunnolf was still getting caught up on everything that had taken place since moonrise someone had managed to locate Cora. Gunnolf had no chance to talk to her or even draw her attention to himself as she was rushed to Fenrir's side. Cora's hands moved automatically as they went about the task of changing Fenrir's dressing and healing him, but she was more focused on questioning the alpha about his knowledge on Zoey's whereabouts. Gunnolf watched her grow frustrated as Fenrir avoided her questions- the older alpha wasn't keen on talking about anything other than Draco and the many ways he planned to torture the newly minted alpha as soon as he was healed.

No one seemed to know where Draco might have taken his pack so Gunnolf was relieved to see Cora still around even if he didn't know what to make of her presence. Given what he knew now of Draco's departure from Bleidd, Gunnolf couldn't understand why Cora would have chosen to stay back and not follow her alpha. He doubted Cora wished to bond with Fenrir again and couldn't imagine a scenario where the tough mediwitch was coerced into staying against her wishes. There was no point in guessing at Cora's motives, he decided he would simply ask her once they had a chance to speak in private.

What happened next took them all by surprise. One moment Gunnolf was trying to catch Cora's
attention while waiting for her to be done with Fenrir and the next moment the hall was stormed by a
group of Death Eaters, who within minutes had every werewolf, except for Fenrir, subdued and laid
out on the floor. Unaware of what was going on, Gunnolf thought it would be wiser not to resist at
the time and just see what happened. The Death Eaters' ability to pull off a surprise attack on the
werewolves confirmed a suspicion long held by Gunnolf and a few others, that Fenrir may have
shared details pertaining to the castle's security and pack operations with outsiders.

A pair of important looking Death Eaters entered, their regal black robes billowing around them.
From the things the men would say, along with what he knew of the howler Fenrir had received that
day, Gunnolf would later realise that these men were the Lestrange brothers.

"Did you really imagine you'd get out of paying by sending an owl, you foolish mutt? You need a
lesson on how to treat your betters."

The wizards tossed a pile of fur, flesh and bones at Fenrir's feet that looked like the remains of a
creature, but, with the numerous odours cloying to it, it was impossible to identify what it may have
been. It was equally impossible to ignore the words coming out of the brothers' mouths as they
gleefully described the creative ways in which they had raped a pregnant Ginny Weasley. Though he
had never cared one way or another about the witch, Gunnolf felt his hackles rise when he heard the
way these men spoke about her.

His fury only increased as he heard the rest of it and managed to piece together what had actually
taken place.

Fenrir owed the Death Eaters for some information provided in the past and was supposed to give
them Ginny Weasley on the sly for a night as repayment. But because Draco had executed their plan
at some point and replaced Ginny with Zoey- though he couldn't tell if it was done the previous
evening or much earlier- Fenrir had unwittingly given them a polyjuiced Zoey instead. When they
discovered the deception, the Lestranges were livid and punished the creature for Fenrir's attempt to
cheat them.

Every werewolf in the room stared in horror as they simultaneously realised that the remains of the
creature callously discarded near Fenrir's feet was all that was left of one of their own, with Cora and
Gunnolf feeling the added pain of knowing just who it had been.

The brothers ordered their men to find the pregnant redhead, choosing to entertain themselves while
they waited by casting crucios at the werewolves. Once again Fenrir was spared.

When their men returned empty handed they issued an ultimatum to Fenrir along with a reminder of
his insignificance to their organisation.

"Deliver us our payment by sunset tomorrow, Greyback," said one of the brothers in a menacing
tone while staring pointedly at Fenrir.

"Yes. We'd hate to risk a crucio from the Dark Lord for killing a filthy mongrel like you," added the
other with an amused snicker.

Fenrir began to rant and rave as soon as the Death Eaters left, but he wasn't angry with the men who
had just hurt his pack and humiliated him. He blamed Draco for what had taken place. He whined on
about how Draco had tricked them all and how he planned to get back at him soon as he got could
get word to Lucius Malfoy.

The hall was littered with bodies groaning in pain from either the crucios or their reopened battle
wounds. Gunnolf searched for Cora among them knowing she would be in need of consolation.
Zoey was one of the many omegas Cora had taken under her wing over the years and it was well known how much she cared about the girl. But the mediwitch could not be found; she had left, he realised.

With Cora gone, he saw no need in sticking around any longer. Taking advantage of the chaos in the room, as the injured tried to heal each other, Gunnolf slipped away himself. However he had only made it down the corridor when he got the impression he was being followed. He turned around and stared at the shadows till a group of omegas stepped into view

"What do you think you're doing?"

"Just following you, sir."

"No, you're not. Turn around," he ordered flatly before going on his way.

But the group wasn't easily deterred and they continued to follow him.

Gunnolf scowled at them.

"Why are you still following me?"

"We're omegas, but we're not stupid, sir. Unlike the alpha we notice things."

"And what is it you think you've noticed, pup?"

"You no longer follow Fenrir Greyback. We know you're leaving Bleidd, sir, and we wish to join you."

"If you wanted to leave Bleidd you should've left with Draco this morning. Now turn around."

"We stayed because we were too scared of what would happen if we left," said one.

"But it's clear now that the alpha plans to punish even the ones who stayed," said another.

"And it looks like there's going to be trouble with the Death Eaters come sunset tomorrow," a third chimed in.

"If you're looking to run away because you're scared of fighting then following me is the worst choice you could make right now."

"It isn't the fight we run away from, sir. The alpha had no problem ordering us to kill Draco and other members of our pack last night, but never acted against the outsiders who attacked us in our house today," said one of the few betas in the group. "If we are to die, we'd rather die fighting our true enemies."

Gunnolf growled in frustration but made no further attempts to stop them. The group following him grew larger as he made his way out the castle and past its wards.

The werewolves were taken aback when Gunnolf apparated them to an abandoned Muggle house and found Hermione waiting in there, instead of Draco like they were probably expecting. She was attired in some strange looking clothes, he assumed were Muggle in style, and appeared far more composed now than she did this morning.

Gunnolf ignored the murmurs from the weres standing behind him as he dropped to his knees, and again when he addressed Hermione as his alpha during his rushed explanation for why he had taken longer than expected only to return with members of Fenrir's pack. Gunnolf was more afraid now
than he was when the Lestranges attacked- despite her seemingly good mood, there was no telling how Hermione's wolf would react to him showing up with nearly two dozen werewolves and no clues for where her pups or Draco might be.

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It was sheer chance that Hermione happened to notice the abandoned suburban house in the Muggle town they had arrived in. While she waited for Gunnolf to return, Hermione enjoyed an evening of dull normalcy, the likes of which she had ceased to remember ever existing. The old Muggle house, devoid of magic, was a throwback to the familiar world of her childhood that preceded the arrival of her Hogwarts letter.

Here it was easy for Hermione to pretend she was just another Muggle girl as she put on a pair of oversized jeans and a faded Oasis T-shirt she found among the items left behind by the house's previous owners. She nearly cried when she found an unopened pack of her mother's favourite brand of tea among the tea things and proceeded to prepare the beverage like she remembered watching her mother do so many times as a child. There was no milk, of course, and insects had gotten into the sugar, but the tea still tasted just as good to her.

Hermione made herself comfortable on a cushy armchair, she had earlier spend a good deal of time beating the dust out of. A chipped cup of tea in one hand and a dog-eared book- another thing she found during her exploration of the house- in the other, Hermione felt the tension leave her body as she immersed herself in the silly tale of a naive young woman, seduced by her older and more worldly boss. Engaged in her game of pretend, Hermione relaxed to the point where she fell asleep only to be abruptly woken by the cracking sound of apparition in the adjoining room.

Hermione was confused to see that Gunnolf had returned with company and the she-wolf felt disdain for the sorry bunch of werewolves before her. She waited till Gunnolf was done explaining himself- reserving her questions for when she would speak with him alone later- but instead of addressing Gunnolf, Hermione looked at the fidgety group behind him.

"Is there something you wish to say?" she asked.

They looked at each other till one of them spoke, albeit hesitantly.

"There's been some confusion, is a'. We came along thinking Gunnolf was taking us to Draco 'n' th' rest. Dinna ken what's gone on 'ere, but we- eh- We dinna want no-"

"This isn't what we left Bleidd for!" declared someone else definitively.

The she-wolf decided that whatever was going on didn't concern her, so she returned to the armchair, occupying it like it were a throne.

Gunnolf got to his feet and addressed the group.

"Planning to return to Bleidd and Fenrir then, are you? Because if you leave now that's the only other option you have left."

"We'd be better off on our own," stated one of the betas. "No offence to Hermione," she added, briefly looking Hermione's way, "I have a great deal of admiration for her. But, just coz she's carrying Fenrir's pups doesn't make her fit to be an alpha."

The she-wolf's look of disinterest changed to one of antipathy.

"Who said I'm carrying Fenrir's pups?"
"Fenrir did. He told us he had fucked you enough times to knock you up," someone else replied cruelly.

The she-wolf bared her fangs and snarled in warning, "Watch your tone, wolf."

Ignoring the collective gasp from the group, she rose from the armchair and approached them.

"Let's get something clear and then I want you gone;" she told them in a tone that brook no argument. "I'd rather rip any pups out of my womb than let that foul creature's seed grow inside me," announced the she-wolf. "I'm not pregnant and he didn't fuck me. He imprisoned, drugged and raped me. If the coward had not turned tail and run away from our fight he'd already be dead for his crimes."

When it looked like no one was going to say anything Gunnolf spoke up.

"Hermione, my alpha, these people need your help" -he glared at the group behind him- "whether they realise it or not. You cannot turn them away; they need an alpha."

Hermione gave Gunnolf an exasperated look. She didn't know what he expected her to do when they didn't want her as alpha.

"Fight them. Make them submit to you. It's the only way to make them see you're the best choice they have right now."

"My wolf doesn't even want them in my pack."

"But you do need a pack," pointed out Gunnolf.

"It wouldn't be a fair fight-"

"Yeah, there's twenty-two of us," said one of the betas.

"-They're mostly omegas and they're all injured. It's beneath me."

"It'll end their doubts in a hurry."

Seeing Gunnolf's point, Hermione shrugged and transformed into her wolf, thinking she may as well get it over with.

"What in Hades is that?" cried one of the omegas, the room abuzz with nervous murmurs.

Hermione realised that her wolf must have cut quite an imposing figure within the confines of the small and over-crowded living room. She rolled her shoulders, cracking her spine and flexing her muscles, she had never felt this good in her wolf form before. It took her a moment to realise that she could feel more than one wolf bonding with her, accepting her as alpha even if their humans had yet to say so.

With not enough space to prowl like she would have liked to, Hermione impatiently tapped the floor with one of her paws- her claws clacking noisily on the wooden floor- as she waited for an opponent to step forward. When they continued to talk amongst themselves she grew bored and changed back into her human form.

"Are we fighting, or did I just ruin my jeans for nothing?" asked Hermione looking at the tattered pieces of the garment lying on the floor.

"Fight or submit, because we don't have time to waste," Gunnolf snapped at the group, then turned
to Hermione, "We'll have to hide them somewhere. Fenrir will be looking for his pack soon as the truce ends."

"Won't he have his hands full with the Death Eaters?" asked Hermione.

"No, Fenrir may not be the brightest alpha, but he's one cunning wolf. He's gonna use Lucius Malfoy to go after Draco and the pack. Can't imagine any place in Britain safe for the pack when that happens."

Hermione looked towards the group of werewolves who were on their knees now. They had submitted and she could feel tendrils of their magic entwining with hers. The she-wolf was right, they were a sorry bunch, but they were hers now.

She sighed loudly, then closed her eyes and tried to concentrate on the bonds forming between them. They were hurt, confused and scared, so Hermione did what came naturally to her and reached out to them, pushing all the comfort and reassurance she could muster their way through their bond.

There were gasps, and even some tears this time, as the battered wolves experienced for the first time what it meant to be cared for by their alpha. They drew closer to her, hesitant initially, but when she didn't object they huddled around her, drawing strength and comfort from their alpha.

Hermione herself felt overwhelmed by everything she was experiencing in those moments, unable to distinguish her own emotions from theirs; the Muggle, the witch and the wolf had all melted into one being, the pack.

Chapter End Notes

Between time restraints and dwindling reader interest (numbers don't lie) I'm lacking the motivation to push chapters out on a weekly basis. From now on I'll update as and when I complete a chapter, so sign up for alerts.

Thank you to all the regulars, you've kept me going all this time with your reviews.
Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Draco had no time to mourn for Zoey or even reflect upon what he could have done to prevent her tragic demise. No sooner was Oskar done telling him of the events that had transpired following the pack's departure from Bleidd and warned him about the potential storm headed their way, Draco found himself contemplating strategies to ensure the safety of his pack.

Upon considering all his options, Draco concluded, with the pack as vulnerable as it was, he didn't have the luxury of time to execute the silent coup he and Theo had been working towards all this time. *The hand which strikes also blocks*, was something Oskar often said to pups when he gave them sparring tips. Oskar had been right all along about the necessity of war; it was time for them to go on the offensive.

Having decided on a plan of action, Draco summoned Mipsy and asked to be taken to his sons. As per Draco's instructions the elf had rented a wizarding home near Lake Victoria. To Draco's immense relief, the modest abode was secure enough that in the event of an attack the inhabitants of the house would be alerted and able to disapparate to safety long before its wards were breached.

When Draco had charged Mipsy with hiding his sons from Fenrir and the Death Eaters he had not anticipated needing to keep his pups away from the pack for more than a couple of days while they adjusted to their new surroundings. As much as he disliked being separated from his family, with the way things were developing it was safer to continue keeping his sons hidden away till the threat passed.

Despite the urgency of the situation Draco took a moment to reassure himself that Wilbur and Martin were doing okay. He knelt on the floor beside the bed so his face was in level with his sons as he ran his hands on each of their heads. Previously bald heads now sported a light sprinkling of that signature shade of Malfoy blond hair Draco could have sworn had grown overnight. It may have been a simple case of his memory playing tricks on him, but these days it always felt like the twins had achieved some new milestone while he was distracted with something else. Draco hated feeling like he was missing out on watching his sons grow.

While Draco spend time with his sons he send Mipsy to Pansy with a request. Draco wanted Pansy to contact Theo, relaying to him the need for them to speak over a secure connection on an urgent basis.

As was typical of any wizarding home, the house at Lake Victoria possessed a fireplace which was connected to the floo network even if it was currently warded shut. Before he got started on readying the fireplace to receive calls, Draco hastily scribbled a short note for Mipsy to deliver to his mother; this would be his first direct communication with her since he was disowned. Quill in hand Draco realised there was a lot he wanted to say to his mother, none of it relevant to what he needed from her at the time. So he stuck to the bare facts.

*Mother,*

*I have left Bleidd Castle. I cannot say where I am, but I am fine.*

*Ginevra Weasley miscarried last month; she was returned to the Order a few days ago.*
Greyback is still alive and plans to use Lucius to find me.

I have a plan but I will need your help.

Love,

Draco.

He knew his clever mother would read between the lines and understand that the nature of the help he sought involved a degree of risk for her. Considering everything he had learnt from Theo about his mother's actions recently, Draco had no doubt that she would agree to help. However, he presumed there would be some conditions placed, or at least some limits to the extent to which she would be willing to help. Narcissa surprised him with her simple three line response.

My dearest boy,

You only have to ask.

Your ever-loving mother.

Draco was stirred to tears upon reading to note. It occurred to him that as far as his mother was concerned, nothing had changed between them.

Carefully folding the note, Draco put it away for now. He proceeded to write a short response thanking his mother and asking her to block all forms of communication between Fenrir and Lucius for the day and do whatever it took to ensure Lucius didn't leave the Manor until they received news of an attack on Malfoy Potions.

Malfoy Potions wasn't exactly the cash cow of Malfoy Enterprises, but it was the sole company charged with the commercial and wholesale production of Fero. With so many of their local and international policies now dependent on the trade of Fero, the formula was a closely guarded secret and any disruption in the supply chain would have far reaching consequences. At the very least Lucius Malfoy would have his hands full answering the Dark Lord and working on producing replacements should their entire potion stock be destroyed.

Draco took out the two-way mirror he needed to contact Potter; the Order didn't know it yet, but if Draco had his way they were going to have a really productive day.

"Draco," said Potter in greeting when he finally answered.

"Harry," replied Draco finding it strange to refer to Potter in such a familiar manner.

Potter looked even worse than he did the last time they spoke. As tempting as it was to tell Potter to start using glamour spells if he didn't want to be mistaken for an Azkaban escapee, Draco instead opted to ask about how Ginny was faring.

"She's- um- Well, let's put it this way, I wish we had listened to your healer; she was right about Ginny and we were wrong. We just assumed we knew better because we're the ones who know Ginny best. Instead I think," he paused and shook his head. "We've made it worse. She's pulling away from us, we can all feel it.

Harry pulled at his hair, somehow managing to make it look even more dishevelled.

"The Weasleys have always been a lively bunch but they have to walk on eggshells around Ginny now for fear of startling her and setting her off. Molly's hurting because she can't understand why
Ginny won’t talk to her. She doesn’t get why Ginny felt comfortable talking to one of her captors, but refuses to talk to us.

Even with the recovery made at Bleidd, Draco imagined the alterations in Ginny would have still been a shock to her loved ones. Watching Potter talk, there was no doubt the man was still in love with Ginny and clearly hurting from not knowing how to help her. The situation would have been tough enough for any normal person, but was probably devastating to Potter, who suffered from a massive saviour complex. For a brief moment Draco wondered how he would cope if he found himself in a similar position with Hermione.

"Just give her time and space. And, follow whatever advice Cora gave you. Even Hermione couldn't get through to Ginny in the way Cora did."

Draco couldn't think of anything else to say to reassure Potter, they weren't exactly friends.

"Have you figured out anything else to say to reassure Potter, they weren't exactly friends.

"Have you figured out who set up Ginny to get caught that night?"

Potter shook his head, the dismal expression on his face changing to something much darker.

"Each of the suspects on the list we narrowed down is a trusted long-time member of the Order. We don't have access to veritaserum so conducting interrogations is a bit of a challenge."

Veritaserum had always been a controlled substance but at least the ingredients used to be freely available before, so a skilled potioneer could brew themselves a batch should they wish to do so. That was no longer possible.

"-As a precaution Ginny's staying with Arthur and Molly. No one's allowed to visit her, apart from her brothers and me."

Draco nodded in approval.

"Well, I called because I have news on Hermione and a mission for the Order," said Draco, then proceeded to provide all the information he had gathered about Hermione.

"That bastard Greyback, I'm going to kill him!" declared Potter with a cold glint in his eyes after hearing what Fenrir had done to his best friend.

"Get in line, Potter," Draco replied stoically. He then gave a brief summary of how he had ended up in Uganda and what he had discovered since.

"Thank Merlin, she's alive! When we couldn't find her I was so sure she was-- But she's alive and that's all that matters. She's alive," repeated a visibly emotional Harry. "Let me know what I can do to help find her. Is the mission you mentioned related to Hermione?"

Draco shook his head and informed Harry about what Rodolphus and Rabastan Lestrange had done to Zoey, and Fenrir's plan to use Lucius to come after him.

Harry looked horrified when Draco was done.

"And that was supposed to be Ginny," he said in a choked voice, perhaps for the first time getting an inkling of the kind of hell Ginny had survived.

Draco nodded.

"They have all the power and this is how they choose to wield it- by torturing and killing a little girl,"
Potter said with a shake of his head. "Ever since the Death Eaters gained control of the Ministry their bloodlust has only increased. I'm so tired of hiding, being safely tucked away while Riddle and his followers destroy everything we care about bit by bit."

Listening to Potter practically growling in frustration, Draco had no doubt he would wholeheartedly welcome his plan.

"I have a mission for the Order," said Draco. "Perhaps, more than one, that you should find quite satisfying."

Draco then shared with Harry the Order's first task of the day: attack Malfoy Potions and destroy their supplies of Fero. Growing up, Draco had spend enough time around Lucius' businesses to be familiar with the layout of his factories and any vulnerabilities that could be exploited. The Order would only need a skilled curse-breaker in their team to deal with the wards, otherwise, with the kind of intel Draco could provide, any of their members could successfully carry out an attack on Malfoy Potions.

Hearing the floo chime in the background, Draco concluded his call with Harry. They would talk again once Harry put together a team for the task. With the limited amount of time they had to act, Harry wanted Draco to brief the team himself. Draco agreed as he was no longer concerned about word of him working with the Order getting out.

Draco crouched before the small fireplace and was greeted by a grumpy looking Theo Nott.

"Do you have any idea how early it is?"

In fact, Draco had forgotten about the time difference, but given the circumstances he wouldn't have shown Theo the courtesy of waiting even if he had remembered.

"Is this secure?" he asked referring to the call.

"Yes, I'm using Pansy's floo," replied Theo, adding in a stage whisper, "And unless Eugenie wants her husband or the Ministry to find out about her illicit use of the contraceptive potion she'll strike this conversation from their records."

Draco couldn't help but snicker at Theo's underhanded manner of ensuring compliance by implicating the witch at the very start of their call. Still, they would need to be careful about what they said lest she consider it safer to come clean about her own activities than risk being caught up in any obvious scheme to commit treason.

"Greyback's alive."

"So you're still at Bleidd?"

Draco shook his head.

"I'm where I said I'd be."

"But, Greyback's still around? I take it not everything went to plan."

Draco nodded.

"I underestimated him. Anyway, he plans to use Red to make them come after me."

"How?"
"Lionel Mayfield."

"Wait, it's still too early for this," complained Theo and summoned the encrypted parchment with the list of codenames they had previously agreed upon.

"Ah," he said, realising Draco was referring to Lucius. "But, with junior out of the picture why would he care?"

"He doesn't know it yet; he'll want to recover his belongings."

"And Greyback plans to convince them you're the thief who's taken off with his goods?"

Draco nodded again.

"Hmm. That's tough. Greyback may not have the resources to find you, but Lionel does... What's your plan?"

"Nothing," said Draco, faking nonchalance. "I figured Lionel's going to be too busy putting out fires in his own backyard to bother with me."

"Sounds like you have this handled, what do you need from me?"

"Time to start knocking down some pillars."

It took a moment for Theo to realise Draco was referring to the key supporters of the Dark Lord, who were pivotal players in the Death Eater organisation as well as the Ministry.

"And you wish to start with me."

It wasn't a question. Theo understood that Draco had contacted him because he wanted to start with Theo's father.

Draco shrugged.

"Figured it would be the easiest one, given the lack of time."

"When?"

"No later than tomorrow."

"Fuck! I had thought we'd have more time..."

"Me too," replied Draco.

Theo exhaled loudly then his expression changed to one of resignation. "Well, at least Pansy will be happy."

"I can imagine."

"Will you be sending your people?"

Draco shook his head.

"I'm going to ask the scarred one to handle it."

Any damage done to the Death Eaters would end up having twice as great an impact once the Dark Lord learnt that it was carried out by Harry Potter and his merry band of misfits.
Theo appeared to contemplate the idea before he nodded.

"Send your elf to Pansy in an hour. I'll get you the schedules by then."

"Thanks. Theo, you know you'll have to get that seat at the table."

Theo didn't exactly roll his eyes, but the expression he wore he may as well have. "Goes without saying, Draco."

Raised as Pureblood elite, they were taught about power dynamics at an early age. Both men knew that in a power vacuum one needed to be the first to act. Theo was going to have to do whatever it took to ensure he became a part of Voldemort's inner circle once his father was out.

"You've been around non-Slytherins for too long," ribbed Theo, expressing Draco's own unvoiced thought at the time.

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By the time Potter called, Draco had already sketched the layout of the factory, highlighting the areas they would need to focus on and the ones they would need to avoid. Introductory introductions were quickly made by Potter before they jumped straight into discussing the plan. Draco was surprised that no one commented on him being the one to brief them, despite the number of Weasleys in attendance; the Weasel himself only spoke to ask questions about the layout as he copied Draco's map.

Draco wanted them to carry out the attack during operational hours so that once inside they could move around the factory by blending in with the rest of the employees- something easily achieved by transfiguring their robes to look like the ones worn by the workers. However, Potter was concerned about workers ending up as collateral damage and insisted on carrying out the attack during after-hours. He informed Draco that they would enter the factory during the day but ensure the stocks weren't destroyed till later that night when no one was likely to be around.

Draco couldn't grasp the specifics of everything Harry said, but what he broadly understood was that the Order, low on resources after they went into hiding, had learnt how to use Muggle explosives. Arthur Weasley, who was fond of tinkering with Muggle devices, working with his sons, the prankster twins, had figured out how to build simple bombs that could be triggered by a timer.

The Weasel asked Draco lots of questions about the structure till it became clear to Draco that they planned to blow up the factory itself, something Draco had no qualms about. The bigger the problem they could create for Lucius right now, the better it would be for the Order's image.

Sometime during his briefing with the Order, Mipsy had returned with a set of schedules for Nott Senior and other high ranking officials. For a while now, Theo had his contacts watching the movements of several members in the Dark Lord's inner circle, so he had information on when and where these men and women were likely to be at their most vulnerable. Studying the information provided by Theo, Draco was able to identify two other Death Eaters, in addition to Nott Senior, they could successfully ambush that evening.

Draco's plan was simple, attack, and if possible kidnap, the worst offenders, thus forcing the less-zealous-and-more-easily-scared prominent Death Eaters like the Parkinsons and Greengrasses to reconsider their choices. The Death Eaters had used a similar strategy to garner support when they first began, so many had joined their ranks only because it had been far too dangerous to refuse the Dark Lord. For the influential few who continued to support the Dark Lord just because they did not suffer under the new regime, Draco planned to use fear-mongering tactics to convince them to join the revolution.
Draco looked down at the twins who were struggling to get their father's attention by grabbing at his hands. He placed a finger within each curled up chubby fist and smiled fondly when he felt them squeeze at the same time. Draco decided to take a short break from his plotting to play with his sons. After all, when it came down to it, everything he was doing was ultimately meant to secure a better future for his pups.

Hermione needed a place to hide the pack till she could re-establish contact with either the Order or Draco's newly formed pack.

*Can't imagine any place in Britain safe for the pack,* Gunnolf's words echoed in her head.

Hermione disagreed. She could think of one place in Britain where the Death Eaters would both, fear to venture into and would definitely be unwelcome.

From everything she had heard during her time at Bleidd, Hermione knew it wasn't just the werewolves Voldemort had conducted his twisted experiments on. And while the werewolf experiments had borne fruit when she fell pregnant, the rest of the creature experiments ended up being little more than glorified torture.

Even if the Death Eaters had taken control of Hogwarts, the Forbidden Forest with its abundance of dangerous creatures, would be out of their reach despite its proximity. Hermione thought it would be safe to gamble on the assumption that the creatures would be unhappy enough to provide her pack refuge.

And so alpha Hermione decided it was time for her to return to Hogwarts or more specifically, the Forbidden Forest.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the comments left on the last chapter. Even if I wasn't referring to the Comments count when I stated that reader interest has been dwindling (which is still the case- trust me on this, I know how to interpret stats) I was rather moved to see so many of you commenting just to reassure me that you're still here.

In turn, let me assure you that I plan to continue this fic- I've just decided not to prioritise it over sleep and other stuff (which did happen for a while). I'm very particular about meeting deadlines (even self-assigned ones) and I realised I was putting undue pressure on myself to finish chapters within the set time frames.
Bordering the grounds of Hogwarts, the Forbidden Forest was an untamed stretch of woodlands that didn't easily reveal any of its secrets to outsiders. The aptly named forest was home to a wide assortment of flora and fauna, most of which were more likely to kill you than not. The ancient forest still remained largely uncharted due to its dangerous inhabitants, who turned especially hostile when confronted by humans within territory they had long claimed for themselves.

Before the Death Eaters took control of Hogwarts, as Keeper of the school grounds, Rubeus Hagrid had been charged with the care of the forest, but, in the years following the death of their beloved headmaster, Hagrid had disappeared and the school board had seen no need to foist the dangerous job on anyone else.

Wizarding Britain was in general far too prejudiced to even recognise the creatures within the forest as sentient beings let alone citizens of their society; the Death Eaters had nothing to gain politically by attempting to gain control of the forest and were only likely to end up dead if they ventured inside. Hermione was therefore confident her pack would be able to enter the Forbidden Forest without as much as encountering a single Black Cloak.

Her confidence, as it turned out, wasn't misplaced.

Under the cover of night, Hermione's pack apparated to the Forbidden Forest. The sight of Hogwarts castle looming in the background made Hermione's heart clench as she thought about everything the edifice had come to represent to her over the years. She was no longer naive enough to think they'd rid the world of all its prejudices, but she hoped that by the time they were done, the school could be a safe haven for any magical child seeking an education.

Inside the forest it wasn't long before Magorian, the leader of the centaur colony residing in the Forbidden Forest, sent a couple of his representatives to Hermione.

The chestnut-haired centaur stared down at the pack with open hostility while the other- the one with the light skin and brilliant red hair- eyed Hermione with curiosity. It wasn't until he spoke that Hermione recognised him as the centaur who had tried to protect Harry and her, during their skirmish with Umbridge and the centaurs in the Forbidden Forest, all those years ago.

"You're not a foal anymore," he pointed out.

"I'm not entirely human either," said Hermione. Pointing to her pack she added, "None of us are."

The centaurs snorted in response.

"You may not be a human, but you're hardly the same as them."

"They're my pack," said Hermione, "and we seek refuge within the forest."

The centaurs shook their heads in unison.

"You trespass on our land and you know it. We will not yield to any other creatures."

"I do not wish to fight you-"
"That is not a choice for you to make," said the chestnut-haired centaur with a sneer.

Hermione ignored the interruption and continued to address the red-haired centaur.

"I do not wish to fight you as I seek you as an ally. Muggles have a saying: The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

Hermione noticed the way their ears pricked up and their pupils dilated ever so slightly signifying their interest in what she had to say.

"The one who calls himself the Dark Lord and his followers, the Death Eaters," said Hermione.

Their expressions soured at the mere mention of their enemies, yet the centaurs expressed a surprisingly indifferent stance.

"The Death Eaters are of no concern to us anymore. We have a truce with them; they stay out of our forest and we steer clear of their business."

The she-wolf was growing frustrated with the attitude of the creatures before her. Couldn't they see that it was in their mutual best interest to work together?

"Then your people must not have been among the unfortunate beings who lost their dignity and their lives to the vile experiments carried out by the Death Eaters. We weren't as lucky. Enticed with the promise of children, my kind allowed themselves to be brutalised by the Death Eaters," Hermione calmly informed them. "But, it wasn't just the werewolves; I heard about giants and other magical folk being subjected to a similar treatment."

They didn't need to verbally admit to anything. From the way their nostrils flared, Hermione was certain the centaurs had not been exempt either.

She pressed on.

"The Dark Lord sold a lie to everyone, he wasn't trying to help anyone. The whole time he was only looking to build himself an army of loyal, invincible soldiers."

The centaurs gave an imperceptible nod of agreement.

"Tom Riddle, the man you know as the Dark Lord, has an insatiable greed for power. He's defiled his own soul for a piece of immortality; he won't stop of his own free will... You, who read the stars, know that Harry Potter can defeat the Dark Lord, but what about the Death Eaters? As powerful as they are now, do you imagine they will simply disappear once their leader falls? They helped create a Dark Lord, and- unless we stand in solidarity to strongly condemn their abhorrent actions- in due time we will have a new tyrant aiming their wand at us."

"Funny you should mention Harry Potter," said the chestnut-haired centaur.

Hermione didn't have chance to ask what he meant as she was blindsided by a succession of stunning spells that knocked her out cold.

Hermione wasn't sure how much time had passed when she woke up with a throbbing headache, which, as far as she could tell, was the extent of the damage she had suffered from whatever attacked her. But her immediate concern wasn't for herself.
Knowing the centaurs would respond to any perceived threat, however slight, with extreme aggression, Hermione had ordered her pack that, no matter the circumstance, they were not to attack anyone while she negotiated with the centaurs. With her newfound abilities, Hermione could still escape to safety herself, but even the she-wolf didn't think she could take on an entire colony of centaurs; if a fight broke out, she would not be able to protect her pack like she was meant to as their alpha. Now, she sincerely hoped she had not sentenced them to their deaths with her order.

While her hands and feet were bound together, Hermione found it was done in a manner that didn't cause her discomfort. Instead of the stony floor, she had been placed on a relatively comfortable, makeshift bed of grass and leaves. The consideration shown made Hermione think the situation may not be hopeless after all.

Hermione stared directly at the man lurking in the shadows of the cave; he had probably not realised till then that she could see him quite clearly thanks to her lupine vision. Soon as she gained consciousness Hermione had sensed that she was not alone. The person had a familiar smell, but looking at him, she found the face belonged to a stranger.

_Polyjuice._

And, since she couldn't identify the scent, the person had to be someone she must have known before her wolf came to be.

After the number of times she had experienced being kidnapped, knocked unconscious and waking up in strange new places, Hermione found herself feeling oddly composed as she went through the now familiar routine. Though the she-wolf was restless, wanting to break her restraints and fight her way to freedom, Hermione thought it would be far more prudent for her to first understand where she was and what was going on.

"Who are you? Why are you holding me?" asked Hermione quietly.

The stranger didn't speak, or even look at her. They kept their distance from her, staying in the shadows, only moving to look at their watch every few minutes as if eagerly waiting for something to happen. Hermione concluded that the person must suspect she was using polyjuice herself and was waiting for the potion's effects to wear off.

It wasn't long before Hermione got the pleasant shock of watching the stranger's face morph before her eyes into the familiar features of her dear old friend.

"Harry?" she asked, uncertain at first if it was really him. But once sure, she flung herself at him enthusiastically crying out, "Harry!"

Instead of hugging her back like she would have expected, Harry pulled a bucket of water out of nowhere and emptied its contents on her.

"Harry! ... What in blazes...," she spluttered.

"Oh Merlin, Hermione!" Harry exclaimed finally. "Sorry. Just needed to make sure it was really you."

Hermione stared at him in disbelief.

"Okay, but did you really need to give me a wash first? I would have gotten around to--" Hermione stopped short as something suddenly occurred to her. "Merlin! I can't remember the last time I took a wash -- or even a scourgify! Goodness -- Okay, so maybe I don't smell quite as fresh, but still, Harry, priorities! -- Besides, you can't just go around greeting old friends in this manner. It's just so- so-"
incredibly rude."

The rest of Hermione's rant was cut off as she found herself being smothered by Harry as he engulfed her in a tight hug.

"It's really you! Thank Godric."

If it were anyone else, Hermione might have complained about the embrace being a little too tight for comfort, but coming from her best friend- who she had not seen in so long- she found the hug to be just perfect as she relaxed into his hold.

"I've missed you too, dear boy," she said. Then remembering the circumstances under which they were meeting she began firing questions at him in rapid succession.

"But, what are you doing here? And where are we? -- Are you working with the centaurs? Or did you rescue me from the centaurs? -- Where's my pa-"

"Merlin, Hermione! Take a moment to breathe. Or at least give me a moment to answer your questions," Harry playfully teased.

"I'm sorry," she responded sheepishly. "Just checking if we're safe.

"We're safe. And we're still in the Forbidden Forest."

As Harry explained his presence, Hermione discovered she wasn't the only one who had thought to turn to the Forbidden Forest for sanctuary.

After Hermione and Ginny were captured, as a safety measure the Order abandoned the safe houses known to the two witches. Naturally, Harry had to be relocated. And, it wasn't long before Harry was tired of doing nothing but move from one hideout to another as the Order could not find a place he could safely stay at for too long. As always, Harry acted on instinct, deciding to try his luck in the Forbidden Forest.

When the centaurs found him trespassing, they didn't even wait for Harry to ask for asylum before they offered him their protection. They were angry, having cause to believe the Dark Lord and his followers had kidnapped and killed over a dozen centaurs from their colony in recent months. However, Magorian had refused to let the herd leave the forest to attack the Death Eaters and violate their truce as there was no definite proof of their involvement.

Ever since the Death Eaters had taken control of Hogwarts, the forest's inhabitants had noticed the inexplicable disappearance of many of their fellow creatures and beings on a regular basis. They had heard all rumours of the Dark Lord trying to create some kind of abomination in his quest for the perfect soldier but received confirmation when one of the captured unicorns managed to escape and return to the forest. The unicorn told them about a place that was little more than a slaughterhouse with bins overflowing with hands and legs, hooves and paws. Everyone was on high alert after that, on the lookout for Death Eaters who had dishonoured their deal.

The centaurs, though fine with offering refuge to the child of prophecy, Harry Potter, weren't as welcoming of the rest of the Order- something the Order had no problem with as securing Harry's safety was their chief concern. Consequently, Harry had spent the last couple of months living alone in a cave deep within the centaur occupied portion of the Forbidden Forest, leaving only when his attendance was required at an Order meeting.

Hermione also got to know that the water Harry had, earlier, unceremoniously dumped on her was taken from the Thief's Fall in Gringotts. Griphook and Bill Weasley had finally succeeded in
Order members now routinely used the water on anyone they feared might have been compromised by the Imperius curse or any other enchantments, which was why once Harry had confirmed that Hermione wasn't someone else polyjuiced to look like her, he had used the magical water to ensure she would be acting of her own free will.

"You have no idea how good it is to see you again, Hermione," said Harry emphatically. His face looked tired and careworn well beyond his years, but there was no mistaking the genuine pleasure lighting up his eyes as he looked at her. "I mourned your passing, not once, but twice... I was sure we'd only meet again beyond the veil. Even though Draco insisted you were alive, I believed--"

Hermione's body stiffened at the mention of Draco. It had not escaped her attention that Harry referred to Draco by his given name and not Malfoy, as he normally would have.

Eyes narrowed, she asked, "You've spoken with Draco?"

"Yes," replied Harry warily, "a couple of times now."

"So you know...?" Hermione chewed her lip nervously.

"Quite a bit, yes. Though, most of it came from Ginny."

"You've spoken with Ginny?"

The corners of Harry's mouth lifted into a small smile. "She's back with the Order, Hermione. Draco as good as delivered her to us."

"Oh," exclaimed Hermione in surprise. "He actually did it."

"Yes," replied Harry softly.

There was an awkward moment of silence as Hermione tried to think about where she would begin to explain everything that had happened between her and Draco.

"He's different now, isn't he?" asked Harry. "I mean, we're all different now, none of us are the same kids we were at Hogwarts, but Draco-- He's a completely different person."

Hermione nodded.

"It's the wolf," she said, knowing just how much the wolf could force the human to change in order to gain control over it. But a part of her knew she wasn't being fair to Draco by attributing all the changes in him to his wolf alone.

Harry gave her a knowing look.

"Draco told me about what you did... in Uganda -- Did you really wreck one of their bases all by yourself?" asked Harry, eyes twinkling in amusement.

Hermione ignored the question; she had some of her own that needed answers.

"Draco was there?"

"Yes. According to him, he may have missed you by only a few hours."

Hermione wasn't sure what to make of her feelings as she learnt this new piece of information. The she-wolf had sown doubt in her heart so Hermione questioned her feelings for Draco as well as his
feelings for her. Having never met him, the she-wolf had judged Draco unworthy and made sure Hermione didn't forget any of Draco's flaws—the greatest one being, that he didn't come for her. The manipulative she-wolf knew just how to play on her insecurities, twisting her memories anytime she thought of Draco with fondness or pined for him.

He doesn't think you're worthy.

He thinks you're just a Mudblood... He always has.

He was mating with other bitches even when you were there with him.

His wolf would never have let you go if he wanted you as his mate.

He has his pups, he no longer has any need for you.

But, Draco had escaped from Bleidd and gone to Uganda of all places. It couldn't have been a coincidence. It had to mean-

"He's looking for me," she said out loud.

"Yes. He took his pack to Uganda after he discovered that's where Greyback had imprisoned you and-"

The she-wolf snarled at Harry in warning.

"Sounds like you and Draco have been getting rather chummy in my absence," said the she-wolf, stepping away from Harry to casually recline against the wall. "Go on now, tell me what else has Draco been telling you."

Harry didn't comment on it at the time, but he would later tell Hermione he had noticed the odd change in her speech and manner, but had chosen to ignore her uncharacteristic behaviour realising he had most likely upset her when he brought up Greyback. Harry was just so happy to have his best friend back and amazed by how resilient she appeared despite her recent experiences, he had not wanted to make a big deal out of any of her oddities—compared with the dramatic alterations in Ginny, Hermione was practically her old self.

Harry responded to Hermione by sharing with her everything Draco had told him, starting with what he had discovered about Hermione and his decision to go to Uganda.

For someone who had always put self-preservation first, Draco's decision to leave Bleidd and go to Uganda to look for her, as well as putting the pack's welfare over his desire for revenge was proof to Hermione that the Draco she had fallen in love with wasn't a figment of her imagination. But the she-wolf was quick to remind her of Draco's unworthiness—he had fought an injured Fenrir, yet failed to kill him. Hermione knew the pack agreed with her wolf—they all saw Draco's decision to negotiate with Fenrir as a sign of weakness.

What good is a mate who can't protect you?

What good is a mate who chose to run to safety than kill the beast who threatened his pups and violated you?

Hermione didn't even realise when Harry was done telling her about his call with Draco early this morning.
"Wow," said the she-wolf, admiring Harry's alpha-like qualities as he discussed his plans with her. She liked how he wasn't afraid of her or obsequious in any way. It also bode well that far from feeling threatened by such a powerful male, her human was comforted by his presence.

"Yeah, that's how I've been feeling this morning. Our whole existence has been reduced to hiding and surviving -- It's a relief to be going on the offensive for a change," said Harry excitedly before he checked his watch. "Speaking of, it's nearly time for our briefing with Draco so I need to go join the others."

Hermione nodded in acknowledgement while Harry gave her that knowing look again.

"There's a lot we" -he gestured between them- "still need to discuss. I'm not going to tell Draco you're back till you and I have finished our talk-" He paused as if waiting for Hermione to object.

On her part, Hermione felt relieved. Needing to sort through her own conflicting emotions first, Hermione wasn't quite sure if she was ready to speak with Draco just yet. Thankfully, Harry had spared her the mental turmoil by taking the decision out of her hands.

Her friend must have guessed the thought running through her head; he nodded once, muttering, "Right, thought as much."

Both were concerned that if Hermione was the only reason Draco was helping the Order it was best that any confrontations between the two take place only once the Order were done with the day's missions.

"I'll be gone for a few hours. Do you want to check on that ragtag bunch accompanying you when you arrived in the forest, or do you want to come along?" asked Harry. He waved his wand at a portion of the wall till an opening revealed itself. "Ron'll be there. Bill and Fred, maybe Arthur too."

"How are the Weasleys?" asked Hermione, falling into step with Harry as he lead the way out of a series of connecting maze like tunnels.

"They're hanging in there -- They're tough, you know, but it is a struggle- trying to come to terms with the fact that Ginny's back, but she isn't really Ginny anymore."

Hermione knew what he meant. She remembered how unsettling it was to be around Ginny only to find a stranger in her friend's skin.

"How is Ginny? -- Does she still hate me? I heard she's shown a great deal of improvement since she lost the baby, but-"

"Baby? -- What baby?" asked Harry stopping suddenly. He turned to face Hermione.

Hermione realised then that Harry had not known about Ginny's pregnancy. She closed her eyes and chided herself for talking without thinking first. Of course, Ginny had chosen not to tell Harry about the baby!

Harry didn't need to be a legilimens, he knew Hermione well enough to see she was trying to hide something from him.

He narrowed his eyes at her as he demanded, "What baby, Hermione?"

Hermione decided it would be better if she just came out and told Harry the truth before he began to assume the worst- although, given everything Ginny had been through it was hard for her to imagine what that could be.
"What has Ginny told you, Harry?"

"She definitely hasn't told me anything about a baby. Was it..." he gulped, "mine?"

Harry appeared to be in pain as he contemplated the idea that he and Ginny had conceived and lost a child.

Hermione shook her head, then proceeded to tell him about Voldemort's decision to use Ginny as a broodmare for his followers. She told him about Ginny's time at Malfoy Manor and Chateau Lestrange; about Lucius and Narcissa, the Lestranges and the Carrows. Even though she couldn't truly convey to Harry the horror that was Ginny's life during those months, the brief glimpse of hell she had provided was enough to bring him to tears.

Harry simply stood still for a while, not saying a word. Then he wiped off his tears and jaw set in determination began to march off.

Hermione had seen that look enough times to know Harry planned to do something dangerous.

"What are you going to do, Harry?" she called after him.

Harry looked at Hermione, steely glint in his eyes.

"Draco wants the Order to return into the limelight with a bang. Well, how about a real bang? -- A really really big bang."

Hermione stayed back to check on her pack while Harry left to meet up with the Weasleys. Once he was done telling them what he had found out about Ginny, they were all determined to do their worst to Lucius Malfoy. For years the Order of the Phoenix was presented as a terrorist organisation to British Wizarding society, Harry began to see Draco's point- it was about time they embraced their new identity and terrorised the Death Eaters. If an attack on the factory was the only way they could hurt Lucius that day, they decided they wouldn't just attack it, they would reduce the place to nothing but a hole in the ground.

Plans were made and executed that day- guided more by emotion than good sense as the Order would discover.

Chapter End Notes

I've noticed that some of you are a li'l confused about the order of the events. So, the day Draco makes it to Uganda, Hermione and Gunnolf are back in the UK. Cora and Gunnolf are at Bleidd when the Lestranges drop off Zoey's remains. After which, Cora goes to Draco and Gunnolf goes to Hermione (taking some of the pack with him). In the morning when Draco is contacting Harry, Theo and Narcissa, Hermione heads to the Forbidden Forest.
"What are you doing here?" asked Theo as he guided Gunnolf out of view of the other Ministry workers in the lobby. In his nervous state his voice took on a shrill tone. "You can't just show up here -- What was Draco thinking!

After his early morning firecall with Draco, Theo had chosen to arrive at work same time as always. It was important that he stick to his routine to ensure the finger of suspicion didn't point at him during any investigation subsequent to his father's kidnapping. A werewolf from Draco's newly escaped pack showing up to see him at work the same day as the attacks on the Death Eaters wouldn't look good for him.

"Draco doesn't know I'm here. He was no longer at Bleidd when I returned. I came to see you hoping you'd know where Draco's taken his pack," Gunnolf explained calmly.

While his alpha took their new pack to the Forbidden Forest hoping to find sanctuary there, Gunnolf, with permission from Hermione, went to see Theo, believing he would know where Draco had taken the pack; Hermione may not be as eager as Draco to get back together, but she was very keen on finding her pups.

As a werewolf, Gunnolf wasn't allowed into the Ministry offices unless summoned by an official. So Gunnolf had spend the morning in the Ministry lobby, hoping to catch Theo on his way in to work.

"Are you telling me that by some absurd twist of fate you returned to Bleidd just after Draco reached Uganda?" asked an incredulous Theo.

"Uganda?"

"Yes. He found out about Greyback holding Granger at the base there. He's taken the pack and gone to look for her. I told him he'd find you there-" Theo paused suddenly, then eyes narrowed in suspicion he asked, "How did you manage to get back?"

Theo caught the hesitation in Gunnolf's eyes.

"Holy fuck! I'm so stupid," exclaimed Theo drawing his wand.

Theo gave Gunnolf no chance to process what was going on before he stunned and bound him. Theo put on a grand show of levitating the werewolf through the halls of the Ministry and into the privacy of his office, this way if anyone checked it would look like he was taking a creature in for questioning.

A stressed out Theo couldn't be certain the man he left bound in his office was the real Gunnolf and not someone polyjuiced to look like him. Under pressure to act quickly to guarantee himself a spot within the Dark Lord's inner circle by the following day, Theo decided he would deal with Gunnolf when he had the time to do so.

Draco wasn't sure what was going on as he didn't hear from the Order again after providing them with the schedules of their targets. He received no response despite making numerous attempts to
contact Potter during the night.

With no other options, Draco listened to the radio and scoured the newspapers Mipsy had fetched for him, but there was no mention of either the attack on the factory or the kidnappings—attempted or otherwise—of top Ministry officials. As the day wore on, Draco grew more and more uneasy wondering what could have possibly gone wrong. Nonetheless, tempted as he was, he resisted the urge to contact Theo. If the Order had succeeded in capturing Nott senior the next few days would prove to be critical for Theo; Draco couldn't afford to expose his co-conspirator by attempting to contact him.

Wilbur and Martin were left in Mipsy's care at the Lake Victoria house once Draco returned to the pack's campsite. As much as their father would have liked to spend more time with his sons, he needed to see to his pack's affairs as well as organise tracking teams to start the search for their mother and for his head beta.

Unknown to Draco the Order had been rather busy. Instead of following his plans, they made their own, deciding to ambush their targets at the same time as the bomb was set to go off. By orchestrating a synchronised attack they would own the element of surprise, the Death Eaters would have no reason to be on the alert or alter their routine. It was also likely that by pulling off multiple attacks all at once everyone would mistakenly believe the Order had far more people and resources than was actually true.

A mixture of low and high explosive devices strategically placed throughout the structure ensured that the factory and everything inside it was reduced to rubble. Unfortunately, they had not thought to account for all the other potions as well as potion ingredients present at the factory. The blast had the unintended consequence of creating a smouldering fire that burned for days, leaving the area within a hundred metres of where the factory once stood lit with an unnatural glow.

Fearing his master's reaction, should he find out his stock of Fero was destroyed, Lucius Malfoy—and everyone with a fondness for the Malfoy galleons—spend the first few hours after the blast containing news of the event. But the politics of their world was predicated on them gaining favour in the eyes of the Dark Lord; consequently, lower ranked members could only hope to distinguish themselves by sabotaging their rivals. Being in power for years, with no fear of any external threats, fissures had gradually formed within the Death Eater organisation. Lucius Malfoy, in particular, had earned himself enemies within the Death Eater ranks. These wizards and witches resented that on top of his enormous wealth and ancient lineage, Lucius also held the distinction of being one of the top two Lords in the Dark Lord's army. Therefore, even though Lucius was successful in preventing the general public from hearing about the incident at his factory, he failed to conceal the news from the Dark Lord, who heard about both, the blast as well as the cover-up.

The Death Eaters assembled at the Parkinson's estate where the Dark Lord was currently in residence. Their nervousness at receiving their master's angry summons in the middle of the night turned to concern for their own welfare as certain things were revealed to them during the course of the night. For starters, the enemy they believed they had thoroughly crushed was active again. Sure, they had known that some of the members, including Harry Potter, were still alive and free, but the Order was essentially toothless; in the past couple of years, the worst they had done was destroy some of the Dark Lord's treasured items. Hence, it came as a shock that the goody-goody Order had attacked Malfoy Potions using the kind of excessive force even an insane sadist like Bellatrix Lestrange would shy away from. But, that was not all.

Theosophus Nott, the other top ranking Lord in their army, failed to answer the Dark Lord's
summons. When they realised he was missing, an angry Lord Voldemort tasked Corban Yaxley with locating Nott senior before realising that the Head of Magical Law Enforcement was also not in attendance; like Nott senior, Yaxley appeared to have mysteriously gone missing as well. A quick count of their leadership revealed the Carrow twins were also among those who had vanished without a trace that night.

There was no doubt in any of their minds that the Order was involved, the question that lingered in their minds was about the fate of the missing Death Eaters- were they merely taken as hostages or were they killed? Before the attack on Malfoy Potions they would not have thought the Order capable of executing their prisoners, but now they weren't so sure.

Lord Malfoy, with his silvery tongue, managed to convince the Dark Lord that he only meant to deceive the Wizarding public. He argued that the flames of resistance would be fanned once more if news leaked that, rather than being snuffed out as believed, the Order was alive and strong enough to destroy an important Death Eater property; he explained that he had intended all along to brief his master after he had done some damage control. Thus, Lucius was able to save his neck that night but couldn't entirely save himself from his master's wrath.

The Dark Lord was angry; angry with Harry Potter for still being alive, angry with the Order for still being active, and angry with his followers for having grown complacent enough to be bested by the Order. Voldemort summoned Greyback, demanding that Ginevra Weasley be brought before him- as the only high profile Order member in their custody he would have to satisfy himself with torturing her. However, Greyback arrived empty-handed, looking pathetically weak, with some half-baked tale about Draco having taken off with Ginny and half his pack two nights ago. Voldemort believed Greyback, but was furious about the incident not being brought to his attention sooner. He concluded that he had had enough of his followers concealing things from him.

Unable to punish the Order, Voldemort now directed his fury at his own people. He punished every member in attendance, denigrating them for turning into bloated officials the Order had successfully subverted multiple times in one night. Members of Voldemort's inner circle were made to cast the Crucius curse on lower ranking members, following which they themselves were subjected to the curse by their Dark Lord.

There were Death Eaters like the Lestranges whose minds were already far too damaged to truly suffer from the curse, but the rest of them felt the brunt of the Crucius for days, suffering from shakes and spasms as their body tried to cope with the lingering effects of the curse. A crucio from Voldemort was unlike any other form of torture; coming from the wand of one of the darkest wizards in history, one who really meant to torture the individuals he chose to curse, it was the worst kind of pain. Thomas Avery, who didn't have the best constitution to start with, succumbed to the curse. Minutes after the Dark Lord was done with him, Avery dropped dead, blood dripping out of his ears.

As Draco would learn from Theo later, this act of the Dark Lord became a turning point for the Death Eaters. There were many among them who had long tired of Voldemort's autocratic style of governance. What was the point of propping an evil tyrant if the quality of their life was worse off and they weren't offered any protections in exchange? A high ranking Pureblood like Draco Malfoy could be reduced to an inconsequential half-breed and butchered like an animal, and loyal supporters tortured to death!

Despite their growing discontentment, the majority of Death Eaters continued to support the Dark Lord, fearing there was no one powerful enough to take him down. However, they recently discovered that the man they were led to believe was immortal was not invincible as Harry Potter had already located and destroyed a number of Voldemort's horcruxes. With the Order active once again, it gave the reluctant Death Eaters hope that things could change after all.
They recognised they would be better off in a world led by the Order; even if they wouldn't be able to carry out their selfish plans for self-enrichment quite as blatantly as they had under the Dark Lord, their lives would certainly be safer and far more predictable. While their aversion to any form of risk meant they were unwilling to directly fight one of the darkest wizards to have ever lived, they decided they could help the Order by not obstructing them as they went about their business of destroying the empire the Dark Lord had built himself.

Through a major part of the day and some of the night, members of the Order of the Phoenix bustled about as they planned and executed their attacks. An abandoned Wizarding home served as the command centre for the day as Harry Potter, with help from Remus Lupin and Minerva McGonagall, coordinated the strikes.

The first mission of the day- infiltrating Malfoy Potions to leave the explosive devices build by Arthur- went without any hitches. The next order of business, which was attacking the Death Eaters, went even better than expected. A sceptical Draco had thought the Order would only succeed in taking Nott hostage, and at most injure the other targets in their skirmishes. Instead, thanks to Ron's brilliance at strategising, they were able to use the intelligence they received from Draco to put together a plan that resulted in them snatching up all four targets.

The hostages were all brought to the command centre from where each prisoner would be taken to a different safe house. They would isolate the Death Eaters, depriving them of food, water and light for as many days as was needed to soften them for their interrogations. In the past Order members would have objected to such inhumane practices, but now they all knew the stakes involved.

Nott senior and Yaxley remained calm, believing that if the Order had not killed them yet, they weren't likely to, but the Carrow twins began to panic soon as they saw the faces of their fellow prisoners and the number of Weasleys present. Considering everything they had done to the Weasley girl, Amycus and Alecto feared what would happen to them should her family find out. Desperate to escape, the twins were able to cast wandlessly and sever their bindings, following which they made a poorly thought out attempt to escape by simply making a run for it. It didn't take much to recapture and subdue the duo, separating them from the other two prisoners. Sometime during the chaos of the debriefings and the Carrows thwarted escape attempt, Molly Weasley arrived and before anyone even had a chance to understand what she meant to do cast an Avada at the Carrows. She managed to hit Amycus before she was tackled to the ground by her own sons.

Although Molly was not present at the meeting with Harry earlier in the day, when he told the attending Weasley men about what was done to Ginny by the Death Eaters, Arthur later confided in his wife after returning home from the mission at Malfoy Potions. Molly had listened in silence as Arthur named the culprits and their worst offences against their daughter. He told her about the attacks the Order was going to carry out that night, as well as the names of their intended targets. Molly heard it all, unresponsive at the time, but waiting for the right moment to act.

Everyone was shocked by what Molly had done- whatever Amycus' crimes, he was unarmed and their hostage at the time. Molly had committed cold, calculated murder in full view of many Order members.

George and Fred needed to physically restrain their mother to get her to stop. They hugged her, tears in their eyes as they asked in disbelief, "Why, mum? Why?"

Molly's answer, delivered in a dull monotone, was simple: "They hurt my baby."

Molly didn't cry or become upset, she didn't feel her soul fracture from casting the Unforgivable. All
she felt was deep regret that she had not managed to kill Alecto as well.

Overall the Order considered the day to be a success for them. They had destroyed the potions factory- disrupting the supply of Fero and announcing to the Wizarding world that the resistance was thriving. They also had three high ranking Death Eaters they could use to go after the rest of Voldemort's supporters.

The Dark Lord and his most loyal supporters took comfort in the thought that the day wasn't as bad as it could have been, given that Lucius had ensured the Wizarding world wouldn't hear of the Order's exploits. The rest of the Death Eaters were pleased that the Order was active again as it could possibly lead to the end of Voldemort's reign of terror.

Meanwhile, Draco, unable to get in touch with anyone, and finding nothing in the papers thought no news was probably good news.

But, there was something critical they had all overlooked. None of them thought to check the Muggle news reports of the attack on Malfoy Potions.

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(BBC) -- Fire-fighters continued on Tuesday to battle a fire caused by a massive explosion at Coleshill Street, Birmingham.

Two people were injured critically in Monday night's explosion. Five others are being treated for various burn injuries at Birmingham City Hospital. Birmingham Mayor, John Hood confirmed that Emergency services are at the scene working to control the fire and provide medical aid to the injured. As a safety measure, all the residents within a kilometre of the site were evacuated from their homes.

So far no bodies have been found by rescue workers and there is no information on the number of people that may have been present at the location at the time of the explosion. Fire-fighters continue to struggle to put out the fires-

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(The Sun) -- World War 3 is here!

It sounded like the end of the world, and looked a lot like it too. About 10pm on the 2nd of August, there were a series of explosions on Coleshill Street, Birmingham, that were heard 10 kilometres away. The smoke and flames prompted the evacuation of more than 200 workers within a 5-kilometre radius of the site, which was in an industrial area near Arsenia steelworks.

Not since the Luftwaffe bombed the city during the blitz has Birmingham seen this level of destruction. Barely a month after the London bombings, where a series of coordinated terrorist suicide attacks targeted commuters travelling on the city's public transport system, the explosion that shook Birmingham last night, has people wondering if this isn't a clear declaration of war despite PM Blair and his government's empty assurances-

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(CNN) -- A large cloud that appeared over Birmingham in satellite images was not the result of a nuclear explosion, according to UK government officials.
Local news agencies within the UK reported a huge explosion that shook Coleshill Street Monday, producing a mushroom cloud nearly half a mile wide. Early reports claimed the smoke cloud could be the result of a forest fire while others believed it to be a nuclear explosion, however these claims have been denied by government officials. Downing Street Press Spokesman, John Campbell, stated that the explosion was, 'nothing, but a leak in a chemicals factory due to their failure to meet safety regulations.'

According to data gathered by Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), the level of radiation found at the site in the aftermath of the explosion indicate the undeniable presence of radioactive materials, which has the international community questioning if the UK government was secretly conducting a uranium enrichment program at the site. This theory has been gaining support over the week as satellite images of the area from days before the blast show nothing but a vacant lot at the site -

Chapter End Notes

Want to point out, that (just like in the real world) the news articles aren't an entirely accurate description of what happened- between the three articles you're meant to get a sense of how the Muggle community viewed the event. (BTW, not that it matters, but the London bombings referenced were the ones that took place on the 7th of July 2005)

Also a reminder: Dear Reader, this fic is a drama, so while there may be glimpses of action, you will be disappointed if you're looking for a proper action fic here.
Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Hermione chose to stay with her pack while Harry left to meet with other members of the Order. She couldn't decide how she felt about Draco, Harry and Ron working together, but they were all capable men who seemed to have matters in hand, the same couldn't be said of her pack. From her talk with Harry she sensed the centaurs weren't going to welcome them to stay in the Forbidden Forest. She still needed to seek out Magorian and obtain his blessings, though the likelihood seemed slim considering he had refused the Order.

With nothing to do but wait till Harry returned, it didn't bother Hermione that the centaurs made her wait till night time before she was finally given an audience with Magorian. The leader of the centaurs listened in silence, his face a blank unreadable mask, as Hermione repeated what she had already said to his representatives early that morning. If she had to guess, Hermione would say things weren't looking too favourable for her pack.

"Our enemy is strong, and neither one of us is capable of defeating them on our own, but if we worked together -- if everyone affected by the Death Eaters came together to form an alliance, together we may stand a chance," she said in summation.

Magorian simply stared at her for a while- making Hermione feel like a bug being scrutinised by a far more superior being- before he spoke.

"We spared your life the last time you encroached on our lands... or so I thought. But, it was your fate to live so we may one day fight in your army."

Then Magorian did something that shocked and surprised Hermione as well as his herd. He bowed his head in a show of respect.

"We will not follow the Order, or the Death Eaters, but we will stand with the Promised One."

There it was again. It's what Gunnolf had called her and Oskar had believed her to be. Yes, she was different from the other werewolves, it was obvious, but could she really be-

"The Promised One?"

"Yes. While your friend is destined to be the downfall of the Dark Lord, it is you who will ensure we never return to such times again. You have your own path to follow now."

"What do you mean?" asked Hermione, struggling to keep her frustration in check. She never understood why the centaurs- and just about anyone who practiced divination- always felt the need to speak in riddles when they could save everyone a lot of unnecessary grief by just coming out and stating in simple terms what they needed to say.

Before her human could begin to lecture the centaurs on the subject of effective communication, the she-wolf took over.

"Speak plainly," she ordered Magorian, who shocked them once again by answering instead of punishing Hermione for her insolence.

"You cannot follow the Chosen One. He has his path and you have your own destiny to fulfil,"
explained Magorian. "Your pack is free to stay in our forest," he added before dismissing her.

Hermione's reunion with the Order didn't take place till the following day. Harry returned to the Forbidden Forest sometime in the early hours of the morning looking exhausted but pleased. He took Hermione to the command centre where some of the Order members had stuck around when they heard news of Hermione's return. Harry explained that, as a security measure, Order members now only met when they were called for an assignment. The people present were just the ones involved in the night's missions so Hermione wouldn't get to see everyone.

One by one Hermione took turns meeting with the handful of Order members present before they departed to return to their respective safe houses. Hermione was disappointed that she didn't get to meet the Weasley family, in particular Arthur and Molly who had acted as her surrogate parents in the Wizarding world.

Overall, even though it was an emotional reunion, it was not what Hermione had expected it to be. Everything felt different now. But, instead of acknowledging that she felt out of place with the Order because she had changed and that home now meant Draco and their sons, she convinced herself that she was only feeling out of sorts because of Magorian's cryptic revelation.

Whatever did he mean by Hermione having her own path to follow? Was she not supposed to follow Harry anymore? Did it only apply to Harry, or the Order as well? How was she meant to stop another dark wizard from ever rising to power again? Is that even what he meant when he said she would ensure they would never return to such times again? She would have liked to ask Magorian these questions, but he and his herd had galloped away soon after dismissing her. Seriously, what was even the point of a prophecy if it didn't offer any clear answers on what one was meant to do!

A little lost in her own thoughts she didn't notice the large redhead approaching her. Before Hermione could understand what was going on she was being crushed against a broad chest.

"Bloody hell, Hermione," was all he managed to say, choked with emotion.

Ron.

Hermione felt herself relax as soon as she knew who it was. Ron wasn't very good at expressing his emotions, not with words anyway, but the man always knew just what kind of hug any situation demanded. Hermione couldn't stop the tears from flowing as she found herself once again in Ron's caring embrace. She wrapped her arms around his torso, squeezing back.

Gods, she couldn't remember the last time they were together like this. Things had become tense between them ever since he began to date Padma. Resentful that he had found it so easy to move on while she continued to remain hung up on him, she had been a terrible friend to him and let their friendship suffer due to her unrequited feelings. It was almost liberating to have Ron hug her without it awakening a hope for their relationship to turn into something more.

Harry had stood watching them, teary eyed, from a couple of feet away till Ron held one arm open and beckoned to Harry, "Get in here, mate -- What're you waiting for -- a personal invitation?"

Harry didn't need to be told twice, and soon Hermione found herself sandwiched between her two best friends. And just like that the Golden Trio was back together.

Ron couldn't stay for long as he needed to join his family- Harry would later tell Hermione about Molly's actions from earlier that night- but in the short time he was there a couple of things became
absolutely clear to Hermione: her friendship with Harry and Ron was strong enough to survive anything life would throw her away and, she was no longer in love with Ron.

Hermione was drawn from her thoughts by the sound of Harry calling out her name. Everyone else had left so it was just the two of them now. He came and sat beside her on the bottom step of the staircase. Hermione watched the sombre expression on his face and knew it was time for that discussion they had managed to put off so far.

"From what Ginny and Draco told me I have some idea of what you've been through, Hermione," said Harry without preamble. "Anything you may have done- anything you feel you had to do to survive, you know I won't judge you... I want to help, but I understand you may not be ready to talk about what happened -- I want you to know, that I'll wait, however long it takes, I'll wait till you're ready to tell me -"

Hermione was touched by her friend's perceptiveness. He was right, she wasn't ready to relive the last couple of months of her life by recounting them just yet.

"- But there is one thing I need to know right now- just so I know how to deal with him. Right now, all I need to know is where you stand with Draco."

"What do you mean?"

"He clearly cares about you- I don't understand it... not entirely sure if I could understand even if you explained it to me, but, I don't doubt that he cares about you. I need to know if this thing was just your way of coping -- I guess I'm asking if you feel-"

Harry appeared to struggle with phrasing what he needed to ask Hermione before finally blurtling out, "What are your feelings toward Draco, Hermione?"

What were her feelings towards Draco?

Hermione thought of the eight months she had spend at Bleidd. She remembered the sick feeling of discovering that her childhood bully was the wolf who had raped her. She remembered how scary and devastating it was to learn that she was pregnant. She remembered the crushing feeling of abandonment when she kept waiting for Draco to act on the mate-bond and rescue her. The she-wolf wouldn't let her forget any of those feelings, just as she wouldn't let her forget who Draco was. The boy who had called her a Mudblood. The cruel boy who started a war because he wanted her kind dead. The horrible boy who had tried to kill Harry, kill Ron, kill Professor Dumbledore...

"I'm in love with him," she replied in a calm and steady voice, remembering not just the boy from Hogwarts, but the man she had gotten to know at Bleidd.

"But, I don't know if I should be," she added after a brief pause. 

Harry looked at her in obvious confusion.

"I'm in love with him," she repeated, continuing to ignore the angry snarls of the she-wolf and refusing to give her control, "but I've had so little control over my own body for so long..."

Hermione hugged her knees and spoke in a voice barely above a whisper. "I don't know if I can trust my own feelings anymore. I want to be with Draco and Wilbur and Martin -- Goodness, Harry, I have two sons now! And even though I never planned to become a mother, it has been the most-

Hermione tried but failed to put into words what being a mother was like. She felt Harry's arm wrap around her shoulder drawing her against him.
"It's been the most something," she said, deciding there was no single word to describe what motherhood had been like. "I never thought I would love them as much as I do. I thought it would be easy to leave them -- I thought I was doing what was best for them -- I was wrong. I miss them, all three of them -- They're my family, Harry. Sure, you and Ron are my family too, but my place is with-"

And suddenly Magorian's words made sense. She had left her sons at Bleidd, because she believed their place was rightfully with their father and her place with Harry and the Order. She had been wrong about it all. She had her own path to follow.

She felt Harry squeeze her shoulder and raised her head to look at him

"You want to go back to him?" he asked.

She nodded, teary eyed.

Harry spend a few minutes in thoughtful silence before he spoke again.

"Convenient of you to give birth to twins," said Harry, drawing a blank stare from Hermione. "This way," he went to explain, "Ron and I won't need to fight over who gets to be godfather."

Hermione's jaw dropped at the unexpected response.

"Hermione, if the last few years have taught us anything, it is to seize any chance at finding happiness while we can. I've always trusted your judgement and if you want to be with Draco, you should."

"You're okay with this?" asked Hermione, bewildered by how calm and accepting Harry was being about all of it.

"Like I said, he seems to genuinely care about you, I doubt he'd be willing to help us otherwise- he may be changed but he's still essentially the same bloke who sees to his own interests first and foremost. And, I can't hold any old grudges after he returned Ginny to us -- I will always owe him for that..." said Harry, his eyes reflecting the gratitude he felt.

"Ginny told us that you and Draco are mates, that-"

Harry paused suddenly and gave Hermione a bewildered stare.

"What?" she snapped at him.

"Okay, I wasn't going to mention this but why do you go from sniffing me to snarling at me?"

"What," exclaimed Hermione in protest, "I do no such thing!"

"Umm... yes, you do," insisted Harry looking at her like he was questioning her sanity. "You keep doing it. The sniffing, though strange, is harmless I suppose, but the snarling -- What's that about?"

Hermione squeezed her eyes shut in embarrassment realising that while she had been ignoring the she-wolf, she had not managed to keep her as much in check as she believed she had.

"It's my damn wolf," she replied, mouth drawn into a tight line.

Harry's response was a raise of the brow almost as impressive as Draco's. It made her chuckle.

"I'm a werewolf, Harry," confessed Hermione reluctantly. She wasn't ashamed to be one, but she
had so far avoided telling her friend about her lycanthropy because she didn't want to talk about how she came to be a werewolf. So she continued talking, giving Harry no time to ask her any of the questions that would have naturally arisen after hearing her declaration.

"My wolf doesn't like the thought of me returning to Draco," she explained. "She wants me to find a different mate. She's been sniffing you because she thinks you're hot and would be a good mate."

This time, both eyebrows shot up.

"Uh, Hermione... I'm flattered- obviously- but, this is very confusing. Very," said Harry emphatically. "I'm not sure what to make of -- By Merlin, Hermione, I've never been much better than Ron when it comes to figuring girls out. Are you saying you were coming on to me?" asked a wary looking Harry, leaning away from Hermione.

"No, you prat," she replied, delivering a swift slap to his knee, "I've just got this... entity inside me that has a mind of her own."

The expression Harry wore said he was thinking he had spoken too soon when he said he trusted her judgement.

"I realise how mental it makes me sound. But, I don't know how else to explain it... There are times my wolf just feels like an alien being, not an extension of myself," she told him.

"Why is that?"

Hermione shrugged. "Not sure. This is all fairly new still... I probably need time to learn to control my wolf."

"You said your wolf isn't happy about returning to Draco?"

Hermione nodded.

"Yet you definitely want to?"

She nodded again.

"But the wolf is in actual fact you... right?" asked Harry. When she responded with yet another nod he began to tug on his hair the way he did when he was trying to solve a mystery.

"So why does your wolf not want to return to Draco?"

Hermione let out a sigh. Harry would not understand the problem unless she told him about some of the things she didn't wish to talk about; there was no other way. Without going into too many details, Hermione told Harry about the days she spend as a prisoner at the Death Eater base in Uganda waiting for her mate to show up. She told him about Draco's failure to protect their sons, due to which Fenrir was able to force her compliance. And she spoke about the repeated rapes, meant to destroy the bond between Draco and her, and yet Draco never showed up.

Harry listened to Hermione explain why her wolf was so unwilling to forgive Draco. There was kindness in his eyes and not even a hint of confrontation in his tone when he spoke.

"Hermione, I can understand why you'd be angry over being abandoned... Though I don't understand how Draco was meant to find you when he didn't even know you were taken captive, let alone where you were held."
"My wolf believes my mate should have sensed my distress and found me; that he didn't means either there was never any bond or he's just an unworthy mate."

"I can't say anything about his worthiness as a mate- I don't think I even fully understand what it means to be a mate in the sense you're using the word- but, when I spoke with Draco I got the feeling he would've done anything to find you. He reached out to the Order, just to get some news on your whereabouts and left for Uganda once he heard you were there."

"I know. I also know he was tortured by the Death Eaters during the last revel so he would have been a little preoccupied."

Hermione's tone received a shake of Harry's head.

"That was beyond torture, Hermione... even by Death Eater revel standards it was a new low. Draco was meant to die that night," explained Harry before sharing with Hermione the scared whispers they had heard of what had transpired during that night.

Hermione was horrified to hear just what Draco had lived through. But the she-wolf was unrelenting.

So he's weak. Just a weak and unworthy mate.

"What do you plan to do, Hermione?" asked Harry.

Hermione didn't respond so Harry continued. "You didn't come here seeking the Order- us crossing paths, was a mere coincidence. And your wolf doesn't want to go back to Draco. What are you going to do now? ...return to Uganda? ...stay with the Order?"

Hermione remained silent, having yet to decide what she ought to do next.

"Draco's been trying to contact me -- I've ignored him so far because I needed to know where you stood first. Should I at least let him know you're here now?"

Hermione shook her head. Until she got her wolf in control there were two men she needed to avoid: her mate and her sire.

It appeared everyone had something they were waiting for over the course of the next few days.

Hermione worried about Gunnolf, wondering what had happened to her beta. Knowing he went to visit his contact at the Ministry she didn't wish to risk exposing him by sending him a patronus; all she could do was wait to hear from him.

Draco waited to hear from Harry or Theo about what had happened and if they had carried out the mission at all. He also waited for his tracking teams to return with a trace on either Hermione or Gunnolf, but all fronts there was no news.

The Weasley men waited for Ginny's nerves to settle so they could breathe around her without giving her a fright. They waited for Molly to acknowledge the line she had crossed when she cast an Avada, but the matriarch only expressed regret that she had failed to kill both of her daughter's tormentors.

Harry and the rest of the Order waited eagerly for the Wizarding world to talk about the revival of the resistance. They listened to the radio and searched the papers for news of their exploits, but there was no mention anywhere. No one was talking about the kidnapped Death Eaters, or the attack on
Malfoy Potions, or the resulting fallout from losing nearly a year's supply of Fero. Instead of the fear and panic they had anticipated, it appeared to be business as usual.

Meanwhile the Death Eaters waited for the Order's next move, they kept looking over their shoulder expecting an attack that never came. It left them feeling rattled. Between worrying about being ambushed by the Order and worrying about pleasing their insane master, the Death Eaters had not known a more stressful time in their life.

The three captured Death Eaters waited, either to be interrogated by the Order or rescued by their fellow Death Eaters. They were left locked up in dank cells- with no light, food or water, and forced to sleep in their own filth within the cramped space. They was no one to talk to and nothing to do except wait. While they waited, they cursed the Order for their cruelty, forgetting how they had condemned many Halfbloods and Muggleborns to far worse. They kept waiting, hoping the next moment would end the endless nothingness, but no one came for them.

Theo Nott was the only one who made any notable progress that week. Using his contacts and money he ensured he was the one to inform the Dark Lord about Lucius Malfoy's treachery. While it earned him a powerful enemy in Lucius, it also earned him the Dark Lord's favour. Theo shone once again that night when news of his father's kidnapping came to light. He put on a big show about leading the charge on every known Order location and even though the raids yielded no result, other than destroying a few abandoned properties, the Dark Lord and senior Death Eaters liked that Theo was finally taking a more active role in their organisation. Theo cemented his reputation when he procured a potions factory which would be solely dedicated to the large scale production of Fero so the destroyed stock could be replaced in a month's time. Within three days Theo went from being one of the lowest ranking Death Eaters to being a part of the Dark Lord's inner circle.

Busy pulling strings and calling in favours to aid his rise to the top, Theo had forgotten about Gunnolf till the Dark Lord called for Greyback. He watched Greyback complain about Draco and then get punished for losing his prisoner. The Dark Lord ordered Lucius to bring back the woman who was carrying his heir and threatened Greyback with dire consequences if he failed to bring Draco to heel himself.

It was critical for Theo to stay close to the inner circle, he couldn't leave Britain now, but he also needed to keep tabs on Lucius and Greyback. That is when he remembered leaving Gunnolf, or someone pretending to be him, bound in his office.

Soon as the Dark Lord concluded his torture session and dismissed his followers, Theo informed Greyback that he had one of his men in custody and led him to Gunnolf. Theo was gambling on the slim chance that Greyback had yet to discover where Gunnolf's loyalties lay. If the bound man was really Gunnolf and if Theo was wrong, Greyback would most likely kill Gunnolf for being a part of Draco's group. Since they were at the Ministry, Theo was confident he could prevent Gunnolf's death, but it was still a relief to watch Greyback see a trussed up Gunnolf and express anger at Theo for restraining his top man.

At first Gunnolf couldn't understand what was going on, but Theo- clever man that he was- made sure to drop enough clues during his shouting match with Fenrir so Gunnolf was able to catch on what Theo wanted him to do. It looked like he was going to have to spy on Fenrir. If Fenrir had the Death Eaters working with him everyone with Draco, including the pups, was in danger. They would need someone on the inside to ensure they stayed a step ahead. So even though his alpha was waiting for him in the Forbidden Forest and he had no desire to follow Fenrir anymore, Gunnolf returned to Bleidd with the cruel alpha.
During the days following the explosion on Coleshill Street, while things remained quiet in the Wizarding world, the same couldn't be said of the Muggle one. Conspiracy theories ran wild over what was the true cause of the incident.

The current Muggle Prime Minister had no reason to suspect that wizards were responsible for the explosion in Birmingham even though his predecessor had told him about the existence of the magical world. Cooperation between the Ministry and the Muggle world having ceased once the Death Eaters gained control, the Muggle PM had never received a visit from the Minister of Magic or seen any evidence to make him think the outgoing PM's revelation was anything but a poor attempt to take the piss out of his successor.

With the entire Muggle world talking about the incident and all the speculations floating about, it wasn't long before the MACUSA caught wind of the mystery. Being strictly against exposing their world to the non-magical people, the MACUSA acted by first sending their agents to fix the breach before notifying the ICW about the incident as well as the failure of the Ministry of Magic to deal with their own mess. The ICW was contemplating what action they ought to take against the Death Eater controlled government of Wizarding Britain for their breach of the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy when they received reports that the terrorist group known as the Order of the Phoenix had claimed responsibility for the attack.

Chapter End Notes

I've been busy recently but still churning out chapters because if I set this fic aside I'm not likely to return to it. Motivating myself to keep writing is hard (and makes me cranky) as there's other stuff I'd rather be doing. So, I'm thankful to the regulars who keep posting thoughtful comments after every chapter as it makes me want to write what happens next.
Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Narcissa Malfoy stared at the bracelet on her wrist. Gifted by Lucius on their wedding day, the goblin-made, princess-cut diamond and emerald eternity bracelet wasn't the most extravagant piece of jewellery she owned, yet it was very dear to her and something she rarely took off. Narcissa absentmindedly fiddled with the clasp as she admired the intricate beauty of the bracelet that was a token of Lucius' love and commitment to her.

Lucius himself lay asleep on their bed a few feet away from where Narcissa stood. It was rare to see her husband sleep so peacefully anymore, not without the help of a sleep aid anyway, she thought just before she noticed the empty vial on the bedside table. How things had changed in the last few years. Her life gone from being nearly perfect to a perfect nightmare she couldn't awaken from no matter how hard she tried. Once at the pinnacle of their society, the Malfoys were both feared and revered... That much had probably not changed, except she no longer felt like she was at the top of anything. How could she after all the indignities her family had been forced to endure by the Dark Lord?

The biggest change was in the personality of her husband. Lucius Malfoy had always been the sort of man people feared more than adored, but Narcissa had fallen in love with him all the same. Her husband was an intelligent man who had dedicated himself to growing his family's wealth and power. He loved his family and was completely devoted to them. Much like his own father, Lucius was a harsh taskmaster, especially when Draco failed his expectations, but he didn't love their son any lesser than she did. When it came to Narcissa, there was nothing Lucius wouldn't do for the love of his life. However, the Lucius Malfoy asleep on their bed was not the same proud and powerful wizard she had enjoyed being married to till Lord Voldemort returned and cast his dark shadow on their lives.

The changes in her husband had been so gradual Narcissa had seen no cause for concern till too late. These days Lucius was little more than the Dark Lord's puppet; he would deny his master nothing, including disowning his heir and throwing him to the wolves. Narcissa's heart had broken that terrible night seeing her husband watch in silent impotence as their precious son was condemned to the life of a half-breed by that Halfblood usurper, Tom Riddle. However, Narcissa was not the kind of witch to sit idly by while her son's birthright was stolen.

Since Lucius was duty bound to provide his family with an heir, as long as he did not produce any other children he would be forced to accept Draco as his heir again someday. With that outcome in mind Narcissa had taken to secretly feeding Lucius contraceptives to ensure he could not sire any other children. Therefore, news of Ginny Weasley's pregnancy came as quite a shock.

Narcissa was in a rage when she realised all her careful planning had been foiled; there was no way for her to let on that the baby couldn't belong to Lucius without confessing to her own deception. She suspected the baby's father had to be either Rabastan or Rodolphus. Both men were frequent visitors to Malfoy Manor and she knew from hearing some of Bella's mad rants that the brothers had developed a fancy for the young Pureblood beauty after the revel held at Godric's Hollow.

Thinking only about securing her own son's future Narcissa had insisted Lucius move the pregnant witch to Chateau Lestrange; considering the Lestrange men's obsession with the redhead, she hoped it wouldn't take too long for Ginny Weasley to miscarry. However, Narcissa discovered that nothing went the way she hoped anymore and Ginny Weasley continued to pose a threat to her son's future.
Lucius had returned home a few hours ago suffering from convulsions- the after-effects of taking yet another Crucio from his master. The Dark Lord was unhappy that three days later, Lucius still had made no progress in locating the whereabouts of the witch carrying his heir. According to Draco's note, the Weasley girl had lost the child and was already back with the Order so Lucius' mission was entirely pointless. Still, Narcissa did not pity her husband's situation; instead she felt concern for what the Death Eaters may do to the girl once they discovered the girl was gone.

Narcissa was willing to do anything for her son, so great was her love for him. It didn't matter to her that he was no longer a Pureblood... In fact, Draco's new status- as well as the existence of his half-breed sons- was something she chose not to dwell on at all. As far as Narcissa was concerned this was all just a terrible phase of their lives- one they could move past with the fall of the Dark Lord. Narcissa was confident that free from his master's influence, Lucius would return to being his former self. Subsequently, Draco's status as the heir would be restored, following which he would find a respectable Pureblood witch- preferably one of the Sacred Twenty-Eight- and finally provide her with the grandchildren she longed for.

Narcissa was also proud of Draco's choice to actively work to overturn the Dark Lord's rule. Unlike so many Death Eater kids and his own father, Draco was trying to do his part to end the nightmare. She also needed to do her part by helping him.

Narcissa stepped outside the room and standing out of view of the hallway portraits she called for Mipsy. In his last note to her, Draco had requested his mother to send him one of her personal items that could be used, without raising suspicions or risking discovery, to communicate directly with her using the protean charm. Narcissa unclasped the bracelet from her wrist and handed it to the elf. Thus the item that was a symbol of her husband's love would become the tool used to conspire against him.

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Hermione decided to remain in the Forbidden Forest for the time being. Her pack could rest and properly recover from their recent injuries while she mastered control of her wolf. Hermione was also waiting for Gunnolf to return. Through the pack bond she knew her beta was alive and not in distress; she imagined whatever was keeping Gunnolf away had to be something very important to the pack.

She thought to help the Order by resuming her research on the horcruxes. All of her previous findings indicated that there were definitely two more left- one of which was Voldemort's pet snake, Nagini- but they still had no clue for the final horcrux. However, while the rest of the Order wanted her to work on the horcruxes, Harry was more focused on how they could get close enough to kill Nagini and progress to their final confrontation with Voldemort.

There was nothing odd in Harry's outward behaviour but anytime they discussed the horcruxes Hermione heard the increase in his heart rate that suggested he was hiding something. Knowing Harry, if he was being secretive it had to involve something that would endanger his life. Hermione resolved to keep a close eye on her friend.

"This is ridiculous," declared Hermione, looking at copies of the Daily Prophet as well as some other publications of prominence in front of her. It was the third day in a row with no news of the attack.

"Look at this one," she said, angrily jabbing her finger at one of the articles. "Nearly half a page dedicated to talking about Bertha Taylor's bold choice to wear white robes to last month's Ministry gala. Who on earth is Bertha Taylor and why would anyone care two knuts about her choice of robes?" asked Hermione, her voice turning shrill with her rising indignation.
"That is bold... everyone knows 'Ministry gala' is just code for Death Eater revel," said Harry, attempting to placate his friend.

Hermione continued as if Harry had not spoken at all. "Why is anyone talking about so-called fashion crimes when there are real atrocities taking place at these gatherings? And this" -she pointed at another article- "blithering idiot has written an entire page complaining about the Department of Magical Games and Sports for committing a grave offence against the Wizarding public of Great Britain by suspending the Seeker of the Wigtown Wanderers from playing in the upcoming match of the League Cup!"

"That is a travesty; he was their only hope-"

"Argh!" Hermione screeched in frustration cutting off Harry. "No one's talking about what is actually going on."

"This isn't new, Hermione," replied Harry with a nearing stoic level of calm. "They own the news agencies so they control what gets reported."

"Yes, but how will people know what's going on if the news won't report it!"

"How could they not know? The Death Eaters are hardly discreet about their crimes," countered Harry. "The general public may not want to do anything about it but they know," he said reassuringly.

Hermione shook her head.

"No, Harry. People have forgotten... or they've bought into the lies," said Hermione recalling the conversations she had overheard at Bleidd as well as her discussion with Babjide.

It seemed as good a time as any to tell Harry about what she had learnt from her talks with the Supreme Mugwump of the ICW. Of course, Hermione left out the part about how or why she even ended up meeting such an influential wizard. Fortunately for her, Harry was too stunned by her revelation to question her about those missing details.

"How can this be? -- How can anyone be so blind?" he asked no one in particular. "They've killed, no, slaughtered, dozens of Muggleborns that we know of... And, who knows how many Halfbloods are serving as slaves in Death Eater households across Britain... Surely, news of this-" Harry snapped his mouth shut when he saw Hermione shake her head.

"They don't know."

"They don't know," repeated Harry, leaning against the wall for support. "...I thought no one was helping us because they had their own problems... But you're saying they don't know...?"

Hermione could understand what Harry was feeling in that moment. They had all believed the Death Eater propaganda about their successes overseas, convinced that magical beings everywhere were fighting for their survival, same as them. It was the primary reason the Order had decided against taking the risk of leaving Britain and seeking help from outside.

"Yes. The Death Eaters only have control of Britain. Everyone else succeeded in beating them off... They don't even suspect the Death Eaters to be responsible for the attacks on their nations."

Hermione then shared with Harry everything she had found out about the Death Eater operations overseas. As she spoke she noticed Harry's eyes begin to slowly light up.
"This is good news then," he exclaimed excitedly. "We just need to get word out of what Riddle and his followers have been up to, then we can get the international community to come support us in our fight!"

Isn't that just what she told Babjide she would do- get the ICW evidence of what was happening in Britain?

Hermione shook her head. While she had no reason to doubt Babjide's sincerity, in her experience bureaucrats in the Wizarding world rarely took action until it was too late.

"We've got to spread our own propaganda -- The Wizarding public in Britain has been lulled into believing that the world as we knew it has not ended... The Death Eaters have been cleverly whitewashing their crimes for years so instead of feeling outraged, the public is now able to carry on with their lives pretending like it's normal for non-Purebloods and those who oppose Riddle to get tortured, raped and killed... The public needs to be reminded this is not normal," asserted Hermione.

"I see what you mean... We need to highlight everything wrong with the current situation so people feel outraged by what is happening... because then, maybe, they will join us in the fight."

Hermione nodded enthusiastically.

"Yes, and we need to let them know that the Order's still alive and kicking butts," she added. "People need to know they have a real choice- support us or continue to do nothing... in which case they're just as culpable because they're passively supporting this evil regime. This is a war, and it is time for people to pick a clear side... No more sitting on the sidelines."

"How do we do this -- how do we tell our side of the story?" asked Harry.

It wasn't like they had not known the importance of publicising the misdeeds of Voldemort and his followers before... Luna Lovegood, in particular, had in her own peculiar manner repeatedly warned them of the potential danger of letting the Death Eaters take complete and unchecked control of the narrative, but the Order had decided years ago that they could only afford to focus what little resources they had on hunting for Voldemort's horcruxes. The Order thus succeeded in destroying all but two of the horcruxes, however it was at the steep cost of being relabelled as terrorists and having their struggle forgotten by society.

Hermione couldn't come up with a suitable answer herself but she could think of a witch who may have an idea or three.

"Let's talk to Luna," she told Harry.

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Harry owled Luna and arranged for them to meet the same day in a busy Muggle zoo in Cheshire. It was soon evident they had made the right choice in contacting Luna as the witch had quite a few ideas for what they ought to do. One idea looked particularly promising, so they decided to call for a meeting with other Order members to properly plan their mission.

It was a productive meeting, but one that left Hermione feeling unsettled because of the way Luna kept smiling at her in that odd way of hers that made you feel like she knew something no one else did. It didn't help that the animals of the zoo behaved strangely anytime Hermione got too close to their enclosures. Harry may not have noticed the unusual reactions but someone like Luna, who studied creatures as a hobby, didn't miss a thing.

"I'm so glad you called for me, Hermione," said Luna as the three were ready to part ways.
"It was good to see you too, Luna," said Hermione with genuine affection for the younger witch. Though Luna's eccentricity took some getting used to, Hermione appreciated how considerate, intelligent and absolutely dedicated the witch could be.

"Motherhood suits you, Hermione... but then again you did have children with your mate -- You were fortunate to find your mate, even if it was in such terrible circumstances--"

Turned out most of the Order were aware of certain aspects of Hermione's life at Bleidd thanks to the information Ginny had shared when she first returned. Thankfully, Harry had kept a lid on what he knew happened to Hermione afterwards.

"- I don't think people realise how much of what we know about werewolves is false... Father used to say they can be very protective of their mates... but you couldn't have known that -- It must have been quite scary for you at first... especially when you found out you were pregnant," observed Luna in her typical dreamy tone.

Hermione wasn't sure how to respond so she remained silent.

"I hope you will let me paint you some time before you leave- I'm trying to be more diligent when it comes to documenting my findings."

Luna already had portraits of all her friends in the Order- including Hermione- which could only mean that Luna was referring to Hermione's wolf. And Luna could only have found out about her current status if Harry had said something about it, reasoned Hermione.

She looked at Harry and let out a growl before she remembered she was in public and stopped herself.

Harry, who was too busy staring longingly at the families visiting the zoo, failed to see the angry looks his friend was giving him. Luna didn't.

"I can see why Remus is afraid of you," uttered Luna when she was done laughing.

The sound of Luna's tinkling laughter had drawn Harry's attention back to his friends.

"What?! Remus isn't afraid of Hermione," stated Harry.

"Did Remus tell you that?" asked Hermione at the same time.

Luna flashed Harry a smile- the kind that could easily be mistaken for the expression worn by a patronising adult forced to deal with a dim-witted child- before she turned to answer Hermione.

"Tonks mentioned the way Remus was acting around you -- I visit others sometimes, even though I know we're not supposed to... She thought he was keeping a respectful distance and avoiding eye contact because he was worried you may react the way Ginny did when they tried to approach her... But I suspected there had to be something more to his submissive behaviour."

Tonks and Remus were among the few Order members Hermione had the chance to meet the night the Order attacked the Death Eaters. The she-wolf had noted the presence of another werewolf in the room, but beyond that took no further interest in the omega who carried the stink of fear on him. It never occurred to Hermione that Remus was afraid of her.

Harry looked like he was trying to make sense of the things Luna was saying while Hermione attempted to steer the conversation away from herself.
"There was something I wanted to hear your thoughts on... Is there anyone you suspect to be the one who set up Ginny the night we were captured?" Hermione asked Luna. She already knew from Harry that the Order's investigation yielded no clear suspects and without veritaserum it was unlikely they would find out unless the person responsible confessed.

"No, but I believe we will know something soon enough," mentioned Luna with a distant look in her eyes.

This time Hermione was certain the blonde knew something they didn't. "Yes...?" she prompted, hoping Luna would share what she knew.

"Yes," returned Luna then resumed to stare blankly at some point behind Hermione.

Hermione had known Luna long enough to know when to give up. With nothing else to talk about she suggested they move to a spot suitable for disapparition.

Luna made one more cryptic statement before she left her friends. "You've always been a quick learner, Hermione... I am hopeful you will learn to fully embrace your true nature and stop fighting it."

Draco thought his pack was adjusting well enough with their temporary living arrangements. Many of them still needed to heal after the big fight, but overall the pack's morale was better than it had been in a long while. It also helped that despite their campsite being large enough to have caught the attention of the locals, so far no one had thought to cause any trouble over a foreign pack of werewolves squatting on their land.

The tracking teams had not come across Gunnolf's scent but they did find Hermione's in a cave within the forest on the Mountains of the Moon. The trackers couldn't say how long ago, but they believed she had made the cave her dwelling at some point.

There was still no news on what was happening in Britain. Desperate for information Draco finally sent Mipsy to Pansy, who didn't have a lot to say- Theo's father was missing and Theo's stock with the Dark Lord had improved dramatically. But these were things Pansy got to know from her father as Theo himself had become too busy to even come home recently.

Draco had resigned himself to not knowing if everything had gone to plan till he heard from either Theo or Harry, when Mipsy appeared before him with his mother's bracelet in hand.

While Ron and Luna may not have been too fond of each other, they undoubtedly made a good team. Between Ron's street smarts and Luna's creative thinking they were able to devise a plan that would allow them to hijack the airwaves and broadcast over the Wizarding Wireless Network. That was Luna's big idea- host a pirate radio program on the WWN to get their message out to anyone who may be listening.

To ensure their transmission was strong enough to be picked up by the wireless in neighbouring countries as well, they needed to hack into the WWN's signal tower. Luckily for the Order, the WWN still operated out of Hogsmeade Village, a place they were all well acquainted with. While there had been a strong presence of Death Eaters in the early years of Voldemort's reign, these days only a few Black Cloaks manned a solitary watch-post in the all-wizard village. Breaking into the radio station and placing the charm on the signal tower that would give them access to the airwaves...
wasn't the challenge. The real challenge was gaining remote access to the signal tower so they could use it for future broadcasts without having to break into the radio station each time.

The only fool-proof way they could think of achieving this was by placing the owner of the WWN under the Imperius and having him perform the necessary spells each time they needed access. Unfortunately for them, the current owner of the WWN was the Imperius curse specialist himself, Edmond Mulciber Jr.

There was no way for any of the Order members to gain access to one of Voldemort's high-ranking Death Eaters, let alone maintain control of him over an extended period of time. They would need assistance from someone close to the Death Eaters. And, so it was that Harry finally contacted Draco.

"Where in Hades have you been, Potter? You've been ignoring my attempts to reach you for days," accused a justifiably angry looking Draco.

"There were some personal developments that prevented me from speaking with you sooner," was all Harry offered by way of explanation.

To Harry's credit he did look genuinely contrite, thought Draco. In light of their previous conversation, he suspected the personal development was related to Ginny and decided not to press Harry on the matter.

"So are you going to tell me how it went or not?" he asked, jumping straight to the point.

Draco had already received a gist of what had taken place all thanks to one protean charmed bracelet; nevertheless, he wanted to hear all the details.

Harry obliged him, telling him how they executed the plan as well as what was done with the prisoners afterwards. Hearing about the way Molly killed Amycus, Draco believed Ginny must have finally started talking about her time before Bleidd. It was no wonder Harry had been too busy to deal with anything else.

"We need your help, Draco," began Harry. "The Death Eaters have control of the news agencies, as well as the news. We do not have the resources to print and owl pamphlets to the masses, but we could manage a radio broadcast to get everyone to hear our story... We need help from someone close to Riddle's inner circle..."

Draco approved of Harry's reasoning as well as the plan he shared with Draco. The Death Eaters may not have forgotten about the Order because of the Dark Lord's obsession with Harry Potter, but the rest of the world had. Draco thought it was smart of the Order to finally take some steps to fight the Death Eater propaganda.

Draco concluded their call without mentioning anything about what his trackers had found or what his mother had told him about Lucius and Fenrir working together to find him and Ginny Weasley.

A whole week would pass before the Order would get to carry out their plan for the WWN. During the week Theo finally fire-called Draco and told him about the state of high alert at the Ministry. Theo had used his time well to test the waters and found more and more Death Eaters welcoming a revolution against the Dark Lord even if they were too afraid to act against their master.
Through Theo, Draco discovered that Gunnolf was back in Britain and with Fenrir's pack at Bleidd. Draco was angry with Theo for putting Gunnolf in danger but Theo assured him, Mr. Beefcake- as he was so fond of referring to Gunnolf- was just fine. Gunnolf provided Theo with regular updates over the floo and had expressed concern over Fenrir growing more 'feral' as they continued to fail to pick up any leads for either Draco or Ginny. Theo didn't understand Gunnolf's concerns but Draco did; if Fenrir went feral his entire pack would turn rogue.

It took Theo a couple of days to act on Draco's request but he came through, and of all the people it was Mulciber's wife who helped Theo finally catch the hardened Death Eater off his guard.

For a long time witches in the Wizarding world had enjoyed equal standing with their male counterparts, performing all sorts of roles in their society. That changed when the Dark Lord decided to do something about the declining birth rates with the introduction of his Marriage Law.

Though called the Marriage Law, its sole focus was reproduction. The law effectively stripped witches of all bodily autonomy, outlawing all forms of birth control and abortion for witches and demanding they produce children or face dire consequences. Since there weren't enough Pureblood witches to go around, it wasn't long before those of fertile age began to be owned and traded like chattel by their male family members- their only purpose and value, now, as breeding stock. It wasn't a lot better for the rest of the Pureblood witches. Those too old to serve as broodmares got to watch their husbands defile Pureblood prisoners till they successfully knocked someone up.

The loss of independence and the intrusion of Black Cloaks- who served as enforcers- in the intimate aspects of their lives was too much for most witches. Even the ones happy with their choice of husband and wanting children thought it was a terrible time to start a family.

Because of efforts made by Pansy and Narcissa, Theo knew exactly who amongst the high-standing witches were the most disaffected with the new regime, and therefore most likely to help the other side. Unfortunately for the current owner of the WWN, his wife's discontentment had reached the point where she would have traded places with a squib if it meant being free of Mulciber and the impositions of the Marriage Law.

Theo, with assistance from Mrs Mulciber, hoodwinked her husband and turned him into an unwitting puppet of the Order. The Order then carried out their plan- breaking into the radio station and making the alterations needed to use the WWN's system to broadcast their messages. The break-in was never reported as Hermione expertly obliviated memories of the incident from the minds of everyone working at the radio station that day.

Soon the WWN began to broadcast regular messages from the Order about what was happening in Wizarding Britain. Order members took turns hosting the show reminding the public about the crimes committed by Voldemort and his followers as well as the measures being taken by the Order to fight the Death Eaters. They spoke of their dreams of a new world, free from the prejudices of blood superiority. They spoke of what they had lost, and how much more they were willing to sacrifice to achieve their dreams.

The show was a success, with more and more people tuning in for updates. The Wizarding public in Britain was ready for a change and they were filled with hope knowing the Order was still championing their cause. However none of their broadcasts had quite the same impact as the first one, when Harry Potter himself took the microphone and made his speech act. The Chosen One informed the public that as their first major act, the Order had destroyed the entire stock of Fero and taken four top Death Eaters as hostages; it was in his words, their declaration of war against Tom Riddle and his Death Eaters. Yet the words that haunted everyone who heard his speech that night was a line he had uttered in closing: it was time for them to pick a side.
I'm sure there are many mistakes in this one- I accidentally deleted half the chapter and then struggled to remember all the details... Anyway I can't seem to get myself to stop working on an internal deadline. When you spot something off, just let me know and I'll fix it when I see your comment.
It's been so long some of you have forgotten, but it was mentioned back in Chp 3 that the Order was declared to be a terrorist organisation.
Thanks for the kudos and especially the comments. I don't think anyone imagined this fic turning into what it is right now and it's all thanks to AO3 readers.
Hermione could sense Ginny's awkwardness as they quietly sipped on their respective cups of tea. It was just the two of them in the tiny living room of the safe house, but Hermione could hear Arthur, Molly, Fred and George eavesdropping from the other side of the wall.

The Weasleys- having grown concerned over Ginny's declining state- had invited Hermione to visit, in the hopes that the meeting would spark a breakthrough. As far as the Weasleys were concerned, both girls were kidnapped, raped and impregnated by Death Eaters, yet Hermione appeared to be coping- even if she was slightly more aggressive now- while Ginny had become withdrawn and timid since her return home. The Weasleys desperately longed to hear Ginny say that she was going to be okay.

Still, understanding their reasons didn't make their behaviour any less annoying to Hermione. She was sure even Ginny could hear the Weasleys holding their collective breath as they strained to listen to what was being said- which, currently, was nothing.

Tired of the stifling silence inside, Hermione asked Ginny if she would join her for a walk outside. Hermione wasn't really expecting Ginny to follow her out when she stood up and headed towards the door- from what the Weasleys had informed Hermione, Ginny had yet to leave the house since she was brought there- but a few minutes later, both women were seated on a bench in the backyard. Upon noticing Ginny's reluctance to leave the yard, which along with the house was protected with a concealment charm, Hermione had settled on the bench where they would be out of earshot from the house.

Ginny remained quiet- she wasn't looking at Hermione, her body was visibly tensed and her face scrunched in deep concentration- but at least the awkwardness from earlier was gone.

Hermione found herself relaxing as she leaned back with her eyes closed, soaking in the sunlight.

"I want to apologise to you."

The harsh quality of Ginny's voice did nothing to disturb the peace of the moment for Hermione. "Apologise?" she asked, eyes still closed.

"Cora told me what you were trying to do that day -- You were trying to help and I attacked you... I was a terrible friend... the whole time at Bleidd. I never listened to what you were saying, I didn't believe you... You tried to be there for me, but I didn't -- I couldn't do the same when you needed me to..."

"It was different for you."

Hermione opened her eyes to look at Ginny, who in turn was staring at the ground while she picked at a scab on her mutilated leg.

"-There was a vast difference in our circumstances."

Ginny nodded, teeth clenched as she continued to stare at the ground. A tear drop rolled down her cheek. "I lost the baby..." she said, in a voice barely above a whisper, "but I don't regret it. I don't feel bad that it died -- To me it was a monster growing inside of me... except, it wasn't a monster. It
was an innocent -- an innocent, I wished was dead, who then died because of my actions... And yet, I still don't feel remorse over its death... Did they turn me into a monster like themselves?"

Hermione mentally cursed each of Ginny's abusers. If anything, Hermione thought it was a testament to what a decent person Ginny was that she would question her own humanity for not mourning the loss of her forced pregnancy.

"I was relieved," said Hermione, in a low, steady tone of voice. "When I first heard about the miscarriage, my immediate response was relief." Ginny looked up in surprise so Hermione was finally able to make eye contact with her friend. ".The baby may have been an innocent, but so were you- so are you. You should never have been forced to carry that life. And I will never regret its death because as long as that baby lived, you would never be able to move past what they did to you," Hermione stated with unwavering conviction.

Ginny returned her gaze to the ground again before she nodded; her hands now gripped the edge of the bench instead of picking at one of her scars.

Hermione exhaled loudly, trying to release the anger that had quickly build-up inside her. The she-wolf wanted to tear apart the people responsible for hurting her friend and was struggling to sit still and just talk.

Hermione felt Ginny lean against the side of her arm.

"You think I can move past it?"

"I hope so. Do you feel that you can?"

"I used to... After I lost the baby, I used to think, I'll be okay once I'm back home... But now, I feel so... dirty... like I don't belong among these good and decent people..."

"You're good and decent too, Gin."

She shook her head. "The things I've done -- that they made me do -- did to me..." Ginny let out a frustrated breath. "Talking to Cora was so much easier... She already knew- because of my medical reports, she already knew most of it... But, how could I ever speak of such things to them?" asked Ginny, looking towards the house.

"You have no reason to feel dirty, Ginny. And no one in your family thinks any less of you," assured Hermione. She then revealed to Ginny how her slip-up had led to the Weasleys discovering what she had survived in captivity.

"They know?" asked Ginny in disbelief. "But, they haven't been any different around me."

"How were you expecting them to be?"

"Disgusted... ashamed? I don't know, just different from before," expressed Ginny, staring at the house like she could see its inhabitants through the walls.

Hermione proceeded to tell her about Molly's actions- how she had narrowly missed one and killed the other Carrow twin for what they had done to her daughter- by the end of which Ginny was sobbing openly. It occurred only then to Hermione that Ginny had been so broken by her abusers she had forgotten just how fiercely her family loved her.

"I don't care for revenge," Ginny said to her between sobs. "I want my old life back. I want to forget everything that happened... I want to be myself again."
Hermione wrapped her arm around her friend, hugging her. Ginny, in turn, clung to her friend and cried for a long time. There had been many an instance at Bleidd when Hermione had held Ginny in a similar manner, but back then her friend had shed tears of despair. Ginny's tears felt different this time, more cathartic- as if she was crying away all the negative thoughts and emotions that had kept her true self imprisoned all this time. When she finally settled down, despite the puffy red eyes and tear-stained cheeks, Ginny appeared hopeful.

"You know Harry's feelings for you haven't changed either," said Hermione. She knew she was risking pushing Ginny too far, but she would have been a lousy friend if she failed to mention Harry.

"I still want that future with Harry- one I'd always dreamed we'd have some day after the war. I want to believe we can still have that future, but... I don't see how he could still want me."

"He still loves you," said Hermione.

Both were silent for a while as Hermione wasn't sure what else she was meant to say. She doubted Ginny would be convinced unless Harry himself convinced her of the truth of his feelings- just like the she-wolf wouldn't be convinced until Draco himself convinced her of his worth as a mate.

"Tell me what else has been going on... How did we even manage to capture the Carrows?"

So Hermione told Ginny about everything that had happened since she left Bleidd. She told her about how Fenrir had taken her, raped her, threatened the lives of her sons and bitten her. She told Ginny these things not because she wanted to talk about them, but because she thought she should.

Hermione told Ginny about the changes at Bleidd, about Draco's escape to Uganda, and about Zoey's horrible death. Ginny didn't know the girl but cried for her, being the only one with an understanding of what Zoey would have endured in the hours before she died. Aware of Cora's attachment to Zoey, Ginny expressed concern for how the mediwitch was coping with her loss. Ginny held Cora in high esteem for all the timely help provided, without ever judging her. It made Hermione snort out loud at how unlike Cora the latter sounded; in her personal experience, Cora had always been extremely judgmental.

Hermione didn't tell Ginny about being a dire wolf- and possibly the Promised One- but she did tell her about Uagadou, her little saviours, and the opportunity for a better life that awaited her there. She told her about Babjide and the ICW and their thoughts about the Order. She also spoke of the Order's recent successes- Ginny was particularly happy to hear that the factory producing the damned Fero, a potion that had been used multiple times to rob them of their will, was destroyed.

"I want to give you my memories," said Ginny when Hermione had finished her narration. "They want proof, show them my memories" -Ginny gulped audibly- "of the revel at Godric's Hollow and my memories of the day Riddle decided to give me to Lucius -- It wasn't just me, there were other Pureblood witches given away as rewards. Let them see what it was like for me," said Ginny.

And even though she was shaking, clearly scared by the very prospect of showing strangers those horrific moments of her life, Hermione had never seen Ginny appear more courageous than she did in that moment.

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The pack was beginning to grow restless, which Draco realised may have something to do with his own mood. His pack was camped on land that was not their own, without an idea of how long they may have to live there. His pups were living away from the pack and based on the number of times Mipsy had needed to call him for help, it appeared the twins didn't like being away either; even
though it was for their safety, not having them under his roof left Draco feeling off-kilter. And, his mate was still missing.

A small glimmer of hope came in the form of information gathered by one of the tracking teams. Some of the neighbouring tribes had spoken about a creature terrorising the local animals till it was captured by the teachers at Uagadou. The language barrier made it a challenge to grasp details like what kind of creature or how long ago the event had taken place, but with no other leads to pursue Draco thought he ought to give the school a try.

"Yaxley's ready to talk."

Hermione was startled by the sudden appearance of the silvery patronus; she couldn't recall the last time she had seen one.

The message, sent by Cho Chang, was meant for Harry, who was besides Hermione at the time, napping instead of helping out like he said he would. Hermione had resumed her research on the horcruxes and had spend most of the day reviewing her old notes. She didn't join Harry when he left shortly thereafter. Hermione felt she was close to solving the mystery of the final horcrux and try as she might, couldn't shake off the feeling that the answer she sought may have been staring her in the face all along.

"Moonrise," warned Fenrir before turning into a wolf and mounting the bitch in front of him.

Except, it wasn't moonrise, not a full moon anyway. There were still a couple of weeks left before the next full moon, but no one was going to try explaining that to the alpha who was slowly losing his mind.

Gunnolf watched in silent horror as Fenrir roughly fucked another one of the pack's females—something the alpha had done to a different female every night of the past week while making the rest of them watch. In his madness, Fenrir had grown certain that he would sire a litter of pups with every female and would say so each time he was done knotting with them.

"You're young and strong. I'm sure you'll give me a healthy pup," said Fenrir with a toothy smile to the whimpering female lying on the ground. He ignored the trail of blood and cum leaking out due to him forcefully pulling out before his knot had deflated.

Gunnolf was helpless. Even with his mind coming apart, Fenrir was still one of the strongest alphas Gunnolf had known of; he would never win in a fight against Fenrir. But Gunnolf's task was not to take down Fenrir, it was to keep tabs on him and in order to do so Gunnolf knew he had to be extra careful not to draw unnecessary attention to himself or he would risk Fenrir finally noticing the absence of a bond between them.

The ring on Draco's finger grew warm— it was a message from his mother, a warning that Lucius and Greyback were headed to Uganda.
A short chapter like this should've finished sooner, but it was hard finding the time. Speaking of time... while it's taken me 6 months to write the last 20+ chapters, it's only been around 2 months between Hermione escaping Bleidd and returning to Britain.
In the weeks prior to Fenrir and Lucius suspecting that Draco could be hiding in Uganda, the Order caught a big break independent of any help from Draco, Theo or Hermione. While Theosophus Nott and Alecto Carrow had feared the Dark Lord's retribution more than anything the Order could do to them, Corban Yaxley, didn't feel the same way. Yaxley decided it would be more prudent to cut a deal with the Order and live to be tortured by the Dark Lord someday in the future than suffer now and most likely end up dead like Amycus.

Normally, any information Yaxley had to provide would have been useless as both sides followed certain security protocols to safeguard their interests in case any of their members or networks were compromised. This was the chief reason why interrogations had become pointless and a flimsy excuse to torture the enemy. However, Yaxley had something that none of the Death Eaters knew he possessed.

A paranoid person by nature- more so after seeing how easily the Dark Lord could turn on his followers- Yaxley had started to secretly collect and preserve strands of hair belonging to several Death Eaters across the ranks. He would use his collection as a disguise to spy on those he suspected were scheming to replace him as Head of Magical Law Enforcement but he could also use it to frame his enemies if he ever found himself in a pickle and in need of a scapegoat.

Yaxley offered to direct the Order to his hidden stash of hair and freshly brewed batch of polyjuice potion in exchange for a promise of leniency to be showed towards him for his crimes. It took them a couple of days to get back to him- days they had probably spent verifying he wasn't leading them into a trap, confirming his suspicion that they were most likely receiving help from someone within the Death Eater organisation.

Harry Potter, as the current leader of the Order, made a wand oath swearing that, as agreed, Yaxley would not be executed or given the Kiss. However, once the war was over he would live out the rest of his days in Azkaban with no hope of parole. Yaxley was fine with that, after all, he had sworn no oath agreeing to stay a prisoner forever.

His only goal now was to survive for as long as it took his fellow Death Eaters to rescue him- if they ever bothered to rescue him at all.

"The Department of Magical Transportation?" asked Harry Potter.

"The Department of Magical Transportation," repeated Neville Longbottom.

After a discussion among themselves, a majority of the Order had voted that upon infiltrating the Ministry it would be in their best interest to, first and foremost, either render useless or completely destroy the department responsible for various aspects of magical transport.

Ever since the Death Eaters took over the Ministry, travel by portkey and the floo network was restricted and closely monitored; international travel by broom or apparition was completely banned, and nearly all forms of magical travel within Britain was heavily regulated. Consequently they succeeded in not only crippling the Order by restricting their movements, but also cutting off the
possibility of seeking any help from outside.

Destroying the Department of Magical Transportation was a bit extreme and would add to the daunting task of rebuilding Wizarding Britain in the aftermath of the war, however, Harry agreed that the Order could only afford to worry about saving their world from Voldemort and the Death Eaters, for now.

Once planned, the attack was carried out by members of the Order like Percy Weasley and Kingsley Shacklebot, who had worked within the Ministry and were familiar with the layout and workings of its different departments. They entered the premises polyjuiced to look like employees of the Department of Magical Transport; this was the most dangerous phase of the Order's plan as they had to find the opportune moment to confront the real employees they were impersonating and cast an Imperio on them.

Once the Order had the legitimate employees under their control, they used them to wreck the spellwork which allowed the Ministry the ability to monitor travel within Britain and replace it with a bogus spell meant to generate random dates, names and places to create the appearance of records being maintained. Finally, the compromised employees were obliviated so they would have no memory of what they had done while imperiused.

Thus within the span of a few days, the Order had not only secured the means to travel freely without worrying about being tracked by the Ministry, they had done so without their enemies being any wiser. But, Hermione was not involved in either the making or the executing of these plans as around the same time she found herself set upon a different path.

"Of the three, I would never have pegged Yaxley to be the first one to crack," observed Harry with a shake of his head.

"What on earth??!! You've had sex... and it wasn't with Ginny," accused Hermione when she was done sniffing Harry.

Harry stepped back. "I don't know what-

"Harry Potter, don't you dare even think of trying to lie to me right now," stated Hermione with both hands on her hips.

"Okay, okay," replied Harry meekly, raising his hands, palms facing outward in surrender. "This whole sniffing thing you do is really creepy," he grumbled under his breath.

Hermione picked up one of her research scrolls and whacked Harry on the head with it. She would have liked to hit him with something harder, but he was too vital to their cause to risk any permanent damage.

"You just cheated on your girlfriend; you don't get to call me a creep."

"I didn't cheat on my girlfriend."

"What did I just say about lying-"

"Ginny ended things between us... The very day she returned, her first and only words to me -- She said, she couldn't see a future for us." Harry looked away, adding in a quiet voice, "And she's not wrong about it."
Hearing the despondency in her friend's voice, Hermione's tone and expression softened immediately.

"Harry, you can't give up on her this easily... Have you forgotten the number of times you ended things with her? If you love her- which I know you do- you have to give her the time she needs -- You don't go have sex with someone else!"

Hermione gave him a couple of whacks to the side of his head for good measure.

"Who was it?" she demanded.

Harry looked like he wasn't going to answer but Hermione maintained her death glare on him till he conceded.

"Cho."

"Chang?"

He nodded.

"Bloody hell, that's still going on?!!"

It wasn't a secret that Harry and Cho had hooked up a couple of times over the years, usually whenever he and Ginny were on a break, which was often in the early years of their relationship. Harry had tried several times to distance himself from Ginny fearing for her life and safety. But after the Order was forced to go into hiding Harry was finally convinced that as a member of the Order, Ginny would be a target irrespective of her association with him and staying away from her was only causing the two of them needless grief.

Hermione never understood why Harry kept returning to Cho, she knew he didn't love her. When she had asked him about it once he had explained that it wasn't all that complicated. Harry claimed to have a no-strings-attached relationship with Cho, where each made the other feel a little less lonely when they needed it.

As Hermione thought about all the odd things she had noticed about Harry's behaviour recently, alarm bells began to ring in her head, leading her to only one conclusion.

"Okay, out with it. What kind of suicide-mission have you got planned?" she asked him while rubbing at her forehead. There were times Harry could be mature beyond his years, at others he was still that reckless boy she had come to know at Hogwarts, mindlessly risking his own life for one thing or the other.

Harry's response was a bemused stare.

"Don't think I haven't noticed how moody you've been acting since I returned. You keep pushing for the final confrontation with Riddle and act like you've nothing to live for anymore," observed Hermione. "And now you're sleeping with Cho and saying you don't have a future with Ginny. So you've obviously planned to do something that's going to get you killed. What is it?"

Harry shook his head.

"I haven't planned any suicide-mission and I don't plan on doing anything to endanger my life either," he assured her in a sad voice. "Maybe I'm just resigned to the fact that I may not come out of this alive."
It was true that there were no guarantees Harry would emerge victorious in a final battle between him and Voldemort, and all of her senses confirmed that he was telling her the truth, yet Hermione felt there was more to Harry's behaviour.

"There has to be something else," she said with a shake of her head. "You've always been an optimist, Harry. From when do you go around getting all broody imagining the worst?"

"You know me too well," said Harry with a smile- a slightly asymmetric smile that only underscored the deep sadness in his eyes.

Harry sat down, inviting Hermione to sit beside him.

"I'm not sure if I should tell you, since I wasn't meant to find out myself... not this early anyway," he told her. "When we evacuated our safe house after you were captured I ended up in possession of Severus's belongings... Among the vials of his memories was one I didn't remember having seen before- it had Professor Dumbledore's name on it.

"I spent a lot of time alone being shuffled from one safe house to the other... I had time and nothing to do, that could be why I did it- or maybe my curiosity just got the better of me, again- but I couldn't resist the urge to view it... The memory was Professor Dumbledore's alright. It was a conversation between him and Severus about a horcrux that was unwittingly created."

Harry looked away from Hermione and sighed deeply.

"Haven't we often wondered why is it I can speak Parseltongue when being a Parselmouth is a hereditary trait? And why do I have this connection with Vol -- Riddle's mind?" asked Harry rubbing his scar.

Hermione gasped, covering her mouth with her hand. She couldn't say it, the thought was vile and its implications tragic. It couldn't be. Harry couldn't be-

"I am the final horcrux," he said with resigned certainty. "I believe we're meant to kill each other, which will finally put an end to his dark reign."

Hermione was unable to respond to Harry as an unknown patronus came bounding into the room, interrupting their conversation.

"Hermione, DANGER! Muh-coo-sa are hunting your friends. They said Order of Phoenix are terrorists. They send American agents to Britain to kill terrorists-"

Hermione had instantly recognised the voice. From her intonation, it was clear that Kalisha had read the first few lines, but any doubt that someone else had forced the child to do so was removed when she heard the rest of Kalisha's message.

"-Come back to Uagadou, Hermione. Bring babies and come back. We keep you safe."

There was no mistaking the warmth and sincerity in Kalisha's voice, which meant there was no questioning the severity of the warning.

"Am I hallucinating, or did a child just warn you that we're being hunted by agents of the Magical Congress of the USA?" asked a stunned looking Harry.

Hermione nodded.

She wanted to talk to Harry about his discovery that he was a horcrux. She wanted to console her
friend and tell him it was not a hopeless situation, even if they both knew otherwise. But, all that would have to wait as she needed to speak with Babjide first.

So far the international community had stayed neutral, why would the MACUSA suddenly call the Order terrorists and want to kill them? Hermione didn't think agents of the MACUSA would act without the tacit approval of the ICW, but Babjide had promised to support the Order. Had he reneged on his word already or simply grown tired of waiting for her to turn up with evidence to backup her claims? Surely he must know that these things take time, argued Hermione even though she had actively done nothing so far to collect proof of the Death Eaters' misdeeds.

"I'm going to have to speak to the Supreme Mugwump of the ICW- he's the only one who'll be able to provide the answers we need right now," she explained to Harry.

Hermione tried, but failed to think of a secure means to contact Babjide. Frustrated, she decided to contact him on his personal floo. The closest working floo she knew of was located in the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade. It was risky, but Hermione was confident she could easily sneak in, use their floo and get out before anyone caught wind that she had been there.

She borrowed Harry's invisibility cloak and waited, hidden, till it was late enough that the place was abandoned by its patrons and the owner retired for the night before she broke into the Three Broomsticks and gave the Supreme Mugwump of the ICW a call.

Babjide looked like he didn't appreciate being disturbed at so late an hour, but he didn't refuse to speak with Hermione, far from it.

"I've been anticipating your call," he began, "I had hoped the children would pass my message to you."

Hermione demanded to know what was going on. She inwardly winced at how rude she sounded, but there was something about Babjide's persona that made the she-wolf want to assert her dominance.

However, the wizard ignored her displays and quickly explained why he had felt the need to warn her. The call lasted for lesser than five minutes, during which time he relayed to her the extent of the damage caused by the attack on Malfoy Potions as well as its far reaching consequences.

Hermione, who was unaware that there had been any casualties, was shocked to hear just how many Muggles were critically injured by the blasts. Even worse, the blasts had created an international crisis within the Muggle and Magical communities that was resolved only because of the timely intervention by agents from the MACUSA's Department of No-Maj Misinformation.

Hermione begged Babjide to intervene, assuring him that she would bring him the evidence he needed.

"It is out of my hands now, Miss Granger -- You did yourself no favours by going on the radio and taking credit for those blasts-"

These words, like the rest of their conversation, would taunt Hermione later. After all, wasn't it at her prompting that Harry went on the airwaves to take credit for the attack?

".The MACUSA has decided that the Order is dangerous and needs to be stopped -- I have come to suspect that they are aware of what your current government has been doing to the Muggleborns, but have chosen to turn a blind eye because, while they may not approve of the methods, they do approve of total separation of the Magical from the Non-Magical.
"Their agents are known to work in a manner that is more unconventional than you are -- well, I suppose it's unconventional to what you were used to... I believed I owed you the courtesy to warn you of the danger these agents pose to your lives; be careful," he said, surprising her with the genuine concern she saw reflected in his eyes.

Before concluding the call he reminded her once again why he couldn't do more for them right now. "Without any concrete evidence, I cannot help you or command the MACUSA to recall their agents. I fully intend to follow through with our deal, but for now my hands are tied."

Later that night, unable to sleep as she wrestled with her conscience, Hermione sat alone by herself, instead of sleeping with her pack like she did every night since they started to live in the Forbidden Forest. Quietly, she shed bitter tears of regret. She had abandoned her infant sons because she believed her place was beside Harry, yet her return triggered a series of events that resulted in the MACUSA concluding that members of the Order were a threat to the Wizarding world and needed to be hunted down and executed.

On the day of the blasts, Harry would never have found out about what the Death Eaters had done to Ginny, if not for her. Then, the Order would not have used excessive force in the attack on Malfoy Potions, and the MACUSA would have continued to remain neutral.

Instead of doing the task she came here to do- a task that would have resulted in the Order receiving the help they needed to win the war- she had allowed herself to get sidetracked. Was this what Magorian had tried to warn her about when he said she had her own path to follow?

The best way she could help the Order now was to collect the proof Babjide needed. Harry did not need her help. He had spent months burdened with the knowledge that to ultimately kill Voldemort he would have to sacrifice his life and still he had not let that cloud his judgement. Even the Order seemed to have managed just fine without her.

So many had tried to tell her that she didn't need to stay with the Order to help the cause- Oskar, Cora, Gunnolf and...

Hermione tried to not think about the man who had called her mate and promised to be hers forever. He had let her go even though he didn't wish to be separated from her because she had insisted her place was beside Harry. He had tried to explain to her why he couldn't leave with her, why he couldn't turn her if she was leaving; he had spoken of the madness that affected their wolves if they were without a pack, but she had not understood, not back then anyway.

She needed to gather what evidence she could and return to Draco. The she-wolf was her animal spirit, instead of worrying about what she may do, she needed to trust herself. The she-wolf had not hurt Kalisha or any of the other children even in her weakest and most feral state so why would she hurt the man she loved?

The truth was that she was hiding. Hiding, because she was ashamed. She was the one who chose to leave, to abandon her family. And because of that Fenrir was able take her and turn her. It should have been her mate who turned her when they claimed each other before the moon goddess. Instead, she would now forever be linked to a monster like Fenrir because she had chosen not to stay with Draco.

But she understood her path now and why she could no longer stay with Harry or the Order.

Hermione was like a different person in the days that followed. She explained what the situation was
to Harry, what she needed to do and why she needed to do it. Harry approved, even though it meant he would be all alone once she left. She would try and convince him to speak to Ron or anyone else within the Order. It wasn't right to leave him by himself, feeling desperately lonely, with nothing to look forward to but his final battle with Voldemort. Her heart went out to Harry, but nothing could distract her from her personal mission.

All she had so far were the memories given to her by Ginny, but she knew those alone wouldn't be enough to paint a picture for the outsiders of what their world was like now. So while the Order carried out their gradual infiltration of the Ministry of Magic, Hermione started visiting members of the Order and collecting their sworn statements and memories. She also spoke to the various creatures of the forest to find the unicorn who had seen firsthand the creature experiments being conducted by the Death Eaters.

All lives mattered, as far as Hermione was concerned, but when it came to large organisations, Hermione had seen that some lives mattered more than others. Hermione doubted the MACUSA and ICW were any different. They wouldn't care too much about the plight of creatures or even Order members since they were considered to be terrorists. To provide, what they would consider, unbiased proof of the criminal activities and systemic abuse that had become a norm under Voldemort's rule she would need to obtain testimonies of the Pureblood elite.

As if there weren't enough reasons already, Hermione had yet another reason to want to hurry back to Draco.

Chapter End Notes

The chronology may appear confusing (because of course I have to write things in a way that make them needlessly confusing) as there is a lot of going back and forth between different characters covering different events that happen within the same time frame. Even though last chp ended with Draco getting a warning from Narcissa, in this chp we're not there yet. Also, I've been looking at the summary and it just doesn't look right anymore. When I sit back and now look at this fic I'm not sure how to summarise it in a way that doesn't put off new readers (the word count and 'wolf sex' tag probably does that anyway). Pls share if you have any ideas.
"How did they even figure out where you were?" asked Theo.

"Fenrir connected the dots between my departure from Bleidd and the base in Uganda being destroyed the same day... He assumes I'm responsible," explained Draco.

"Talk about crappy luck- flawed assumption, though it may be, it still leads them straight to you," said Theo with a shake of his head. "Tell me you've at least moved to a different location?"

When Draco didn't say anything Theo shook his head again.

"Unbelievable! You've relocated your sons, even though they are the least in danger... Knowing how much the Dark Lord is interested in the twins- after all, they are the only success story he has to show for all his ungodly experiments- you can be certain that neither Lucius nor Greyback would dare harm your sprogs. But you move them, while the rest of you- who they have no reason or desire to spare- continue to stay camped within a stone's throw of the Death Eater base! There are other cities you know, it's not like Uganda has the same travel restrictions as we do -- did."

Even though Theo didn't think his sons were in danger, Draco didn't feel the same way. Draco knew Fenrir was envious that Draco was able to sire children where he had failed, repeatedly. With Fenrir slowly losing his mind and growing more irrational by the day, Draco wasn't so sure that Fenrir wouldn't try to hurt his pups as a way to punish him. But Theo wasn't wrong about moving. It was a huge risk staying so close to the base of their operations in Uganda- especially since Draco knew they were more likely to kill than try to subdue him and his pack- but some instinct told Draco he was in the right place. And as Oskar often said, instinct was nothing but the fates giving you a nudge in the right direction.

"I have a lead on Hermione..."

"Oh... I wasn't sure how to say this to you before but I think Mr. Beefcake knows something about Granger -- He's definitely hiding something."

"Why do you say that?"

Theo shrugged. "He just acts very cagey anytime I mention Granger and he refuses to tell me how he managed to return to England -- I know when someone's keeping something from me and he's definitely hiding something... Also, isn't it odd that you learnt about Greyback going to Uganda from Narcissa? -- Convenient for you that she has a piece of jewellery she never takes off. Makes me wonder if I should start wearing my signet ring, in case I have need again in the future for this kind of scheming and planning. If only, the damn thing wasn't so huge and gaudy- unlike the Malfoys and the Blacks, the Notts believed in flaunting it."

"Theo..."

"- Of course, this would be something I could only consider in the future- couldn't risk it right now. It would look suspicious if I suddenly started wearing-"

"Theo," Draco called forcefully enough to at last catch his attention, "...you were saying about Gunnolf?"
"Yes, I'm getting to it. As I was trying to say, before I was rudely interrupted, Mr Beefcake was sent to Wolf Castle to keep an eye on Greyback, but he hasn't given me any useful information so far... In fact, the only update I got from him this week was about the fuckfest Greyback's been having -- Unless... Do you think it was a signal? It's hard to tell over the floo, but maybe he was coming on to me- he does strike me as the type who would be bad at flirting... Nevertheless, isn't it odd that he never mentioned anything about Greyback making war-like preparations for Uganda?"

Draco wasn't sure if Theo's paranoia was warranted or just the side-effect of the high amounts of cheering potion he was consuming these days. His unnaturally bright eyes, uncharacteristic babbling and animated gestures suggested the latter. Although it was odd that Gunnolf had failed to mention Fenrir's plans to Theo in any of their recent conversations.

"Can you check up on Gunnolf?"

"I spoke with him a couple of days ago, he's fine."

Draco couldn't explain the uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach but he knew better than to ignore his instincts. He had spoken with Oskar about his inability to sense Gunnolf. At first both men had brushed off their concerns presuming it was the distance that was affecting the bond, but after Draco described the emptiness he felt where he once had felt his bond with Gunnolf, Oskar concluded that their bond had been severed. Both weres agreed that in all likelihood Fenrir had at long last noticed Gunnolf was no longer bonded with him and forced him to accept his alpha bond.

"Find some excuse to go there and check on him in person. Please," requested Draco and Theo begrudgingly agreed.

"So what is this lead you have for Granger?"

"Uagadou."

"Ah... yes!"

Theo jumped to his feet and began to pace in front of his fireplace as he spoke so all Draco could see of him were his legs.

"We went there to look for her- didn't find her, of course, but the entire time I couldn't get rid of the feeling like they were hiding something from me... I doubt they'll be any more forthcoming with you -- Wait a minute, they just might! The people there really do have a thing for creatures. You should play on that -- By the way, who's been advising the Order lately?"

"Hmm?"

"Come on," said Theo in a tone Draco could practically hear him roll his eyes, "after all this time, out of the blue they decide to switch strategies just like that? Can you imagine the kind of interrogation tactics they must have used to get someone like Yaxley talking? Even their plan to attack the WWN and the Department of Magical Transportation- nothing like the Order we've known all these years.... Definitely some new influence there."

It wasn't just those things. Draco had called Harry soon as Theo informed him, yet when he spoke with Harry he got the impression Harry already knew that agents from the MACUSA had joined forces with the Death Eaters to hunt down members of the Order. Draco's knowledge of what went on within the Order was limited to whatever Harry told him and Harry appeared to be holding his cards close to his chest.

"Potter said the plan to attack the WWN was Luna Lovegood's idea."
"Looney Lovegood?"

"The same."

Theo got back down on his knees so Draco was able to see his face again.

"The radio program is really popular. Don't know about Mulciber, but his wife sure enjoys it. In fact, as per Pansy, many Death Eater wives have expressed their pleasure over how nervous their husbands have become in recent times... Draco," said Theo, looking pensive all of a sudden, "it's time for that talk with the Order."

"So soon?" asked Draco. "You think people are ready? Shouldn't we at least wait till the Dark Lord is dead?"

"The tide's been turning for a while, but now there's finally some momentum built... The only thing that can ruin it is if people start worrying about repercussions -- Without assurances they may fail to act."

Draco nodded. It was time talk to Harry about the future.

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"So Greyback now has Lucius helping him and he's figured out that you're in Uganda?" asked Harry.

Draco had finally told Harry about Lucius and Fenrir being ordered by the Dark Lord to work together to find him. He began the call by telling Harry of their objective to kill Draco and his pack of militant werewolves and return to Britain with his sons and Ginny as their captives.

"Didn't you have someone watching Greyback?" asked Harry.

Draco had previously mentioned that he had a spy at Bleidd, so like Theo, Harry too appeared to be wondering why his mother had been the one to send him a warning.

"Gunnolf, he would run the pack in Fenrir's absence. Fenrir doesn't know it, but Gunnolf's loyal to me and has been passing along information about the happenings at Bleidd."

Harry didn't look too convinced but let it go.

"What's your plan to stop them this time?"

Draco shook his head.

"Nothing. I don't think I can put off this confrontation any more... At least my pack is well rested and fighting fit right now."

The pack was restless and eager to move out of their temporary abode. They also didn't like being separated from the twins. The pack adored Draco's sons, who they saw as a manifestation of the promise Luna had made to their kind so long ago. Draco's decision to have the twins living away from the pack was taken as a personal insult by each were- to them, it meant their alpha didn't deem them capable of protecting his pups. Instead of being afraid, they were almost relieved by the news of Fenrir preparing to come to Uganda. They believed they would finally be able to move on with their lives once Fenrir was killed; consequently, they were looking forward to the fight.

Harry's disapproval was clearly written on his face but instead of voicing it, he asked, "What can I do
"I actually wanted to talk about a different matter. I had planned to discuss these things with you at a much later stage but with how quickly things have progressed within just the last month perhaps it is time we spoke about the future."

"What do you mean?"

"What happens after the war, Harry? As winners of the war, how do you plan to deal with those of us who didn't always fight alongside the Order?"

"What makes you think we'll win... or that we'll even survive this war?"

"Must be the Slytherin in me, I know I'll do whatever it takes to survive- it's just how I am. What's going to happen to people like me...like Theo...my mother and others like her?"

Harry's response was to stare at him, brow furrowed in thought. Draco supposed Harry had never considered these things before.

"There are many Death Eaters ready to defect, what is the Order willing to offer them in exchange?"

"What do you mean, Draco? What other alternative is there, but to join us?"

Draco shook his head.

"If joining the Order means having to face a tribunal after the war and being tried for their crimes, then people may choose to maintain the status quo over supporting the Order."

Harry looked like he was beginning to understand at last.

"What do you want?"

"What can you give us, give them?"

"I don't know. Never really thought about it before."

"Well, I'm telling you to think about it now. Talk to your people and decide what kind of a deal you can live with..."

"What else?"

"Go on your radio show and offer full amnesty for any defector who was only carrying out orders." Draco could tell that Harry wasn't too pleased with the idea so he quickly added, "More people will be willing to defect if you do so. You can properly prosecute those belonging to the Dark Lord's inner circle- they chose to act of their own free will- but anyone who was simply following orders-"

Harry shook his head.

"You're suggesting we let all these people walk away without facing any consequences- where's the justice in that? Are we supposed to pretend like the past few years never happened? Things would not have gone on for as long as they did, or get as bad as they did, if it was only the inner circle committing these atrocities.

"People were raped, tortured and killed for sport... People were enslaved, stripped of all their basic human rights... Instead of a well rounded education at Hogwarts, children were corrupted with Dark Magic and trained to become his soldiers... So many lives ruined... So many lives lost... And you say"
we should offer them absolution for their actions because they are willing to join us now?"

"Yes," replied Draco with brutal honesty. "You, your people, may not be happy about the situation, but you need to accept that you can either hold out for justice or offer clemency to the people who hurt you and your loved ones as the price to put an end to this war... But while you're trying to be all noble, bear in mind that without the support of the people you may succeed in killing the Dark Lord but we'll never be free of the Death Eaters."

Harry continued to shake his head. "Too much blood has been spilled-
"

"And a whole lot more will be spilled before we ultimately defeat the Dark Lord's army. People are selfish and will always want to protect their interests first. Don't expect them to do the right thing just because it is the right thing to do... especially not if it's going to hurt them in the future."

Draco softened his tone a little before he continued to speak. "The only way to destroy the Dark Lord's army is to make them turn on their own. Harry, we need to regain control of the Ministry - for which you will need the backing of many influential Death Eaters- otherwise we may very well find ourselves in a situation where it is the Order, and those who fought along with you, who will be tried as criminals for killing the Dark Lord."

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Hermione believed she had managed to collect whatever evidence she could hope to obtain on her own. She wondered if it would be wiser to first alert Draco using Harry's two-way mirror or simply head straight to Uganda and surprise him. Either way, she would need Draco to intervene if she wished to get any proof from the Purebloods; the completion of her project would need to wait till after her reunion with Draco. Thinking of seeing him again filled her with both dread and longing. So she chose instead to think of the other person in Uganda she was looking forward to meeting, Cora.

Voldemort had personally been involved in the experiments conducted on the werewolves, the outcome of which was the most commonly used version of the Fero potion. Who better than Cora to testify to the crimes committed during the potion trials? With her medical background and dispassionate manner, Cora could convincingly provide her expert opinion on the things she had witnessed in the dungeons at Bleidd. And considering the nature of Zoey's death, Hermione suspected Cora would be highly motivated to speak before the ICW even though it was unlike her to want to get involved with anything not directly concerning the pack or their kind.

Now that she was no longer warring with herself all the time, Hermione found she had a lot of free time to think. For the most part her thoughts were occupied by her sons, Draco and the pack- in other words, her future. She wanted to talk to Cora to learn more about what was done to the werewolves at Bleidd. Draco had tried to explain it to her, but lacking any formal medical training he himself had understood little of the procedures only that some form of gene manipulation had been involved.

Hermione questioned whether her children existed because Draco's genes had been altered by the experiments or because she was Draco's true mate and their children truly were the 'fruit' mentioned in the ancient prophecy? What did the prophecy really mean? How were her sons meant to break the curse of lycanthropy? She realised that the key to solving the puzzle lay in first understanding what it was Voldemort had done to the werewolves. The more Hermione thought about it, the more she felt like this was the thing she needed to focus on once she wrapped up her current project and submitted all her evidence to the ICW.

Still in the midst of her ruminations, Hermione had an unsettling feeling in the pit of her stomach. The source of her distress was Gunnolf, or more accurately, she could sense his distress. The
problem was that she didn't know where he was. Short of going to the Ministry and asking Theodore Nott if he knew anything about Gunnolf's whereabouts she had no idea where to even start looking for her beta.

Just then Harry walked into her line of sight. He looked troubled and quickly told Hermione about the conundrum Draco had placed before him. Harry's area of expertise extended to hunting and defeating Dark wizards. Forced to deliberate the cost-benefit of forgoing the prosecution of individuals who may have been complicit in committing genocide and other war crimes was giving the poor man a headache. So it was understandable that it slipped Harry's mind to inform her about the rest of his conversation with Draco.

"Lucius and Greyback have discovered where Draco is hiding. They're going after him," Harry told her later, the same day.

"No, he's mine," yelled the she-wolf leaping towards the exit.

Harry jumped after her, grabbing her by the waist in his attempt to stop her. He realised too late that it was the wrong move when quick as a flash Hermione transformed and grabbed his scruff between her teeth.

She didn't need to imagine what was going through Harry's head at the time, his scent said it all. It didn't make Hermione think any less of Harry. Watching her transform and attack him would have been terrifying enough even if she had been a normal sized wolf.

Hermione dropped Harry to the floor and circled his prone form. He had the good sense to keep his head down and stay still, so it took only a few minutes for her to relax enough to slip back into her human form.

"Hermione, what was that?" Harry asked her when he eventually found his voice.

Undoubtedly, he had been shocked by the discovery that a werewolf could transform without the influence of the full moon. Like most wizards, Harry would not have known of the special powers alphas possessed to enable them to protect their pack. She wondered if it would serve any purpose to betray the secrets of their kind by telling him.

"I think it's a side-effect of the potions they fed me," she lied. Harry may be her best friend, but he was not pack.

"I'm sorry for startling you the way I did," said Harry, most likely attributing her reaction to trauma from her rape. She didn't feel the need to correct him. If believing what he did prevented Harry from touching her in any manner her wolf could perceive as a threat, there would be no need for her to ever have to beat her friend into submission.

"I have to go now, Harry," she told him. She needed to get to Uganda before Fenrir got there... before Draco killed him. Fenrir was hers and no one was going to steal away her chance for revenge.

Hermione suddenly shouted and fell to the ground, crying out in pain- except it wasn't hers. The excruciating pain was coming through one of her pack bonds.

*Gunnolf.*

It felt like an eternity passed before her agony ended and then suddenly there was nothing. Just like that where she had once felt Gunnolf linked to her, all that existed now was an emptiness.
Chapter End Notes

Bored yet?
Born into one of the oldest and wealthiest wizarding families, Lucius Malfoy was raised as Pureblood nobility, believing strongly in the notions of blood purity and the superiority of Pureblood wizards over everyone else. He grew into a proud, shrewd and influential man who enjoyed controlling others. Therefore he wasn't sure how it all went wrong and he ended up effectively the indentured servant of a Halfblood maniac.

No, that wasn't true. He knew who was truly responsible. Harry Potter.

Lucius had joined the Death Eaters, who shared his views on blood purity, and participated in the Wizarding War because he believed the Ministry's policy of inclusion, when it came to Muggleborns and other unworthy creatures, would ultimately lead to the downfall of their society. But his loyalty had always been towards the cause, not Lord Voldemort, despite being a highly ranked Death Eater.

After the war, ever the opportunist, Lucius had no qualms about considering an alliance with Harry Potter- the very same boy who as an infant had defeated their leader and brought their entire movement to a grinding halt- because he believed the boy could one day grow to be one of the darkest wizards of their times and be at the helm of the next Pureblood uprising. Unfortunately, thanks greatly to Dumbledore's meddling, the boy was completely opposed to achieving his true potential and had chosen instead to become a thorn in all their sides.

It started with Potter's refusal to befriend his son, choosing instead to cast his lot with the beggarly Weasleys, and tormenting Draco throughout their school years. Lucius lost his servant, Dobby, after the boy tricked him into freeing the creature. It was Harry Potter's actions that led to the destruction of the diary horcrux in the Chamber of Secrets and the prophecy at the Department of Mysteries, which in turn led to Lucius' fall from grace with the Dark Lord. Lucius was forced to suffer the horrors of the soul-sucking dementors for a whole year after he was imprisoned because of Potter's interference when he had gotten away with doing far worse during the Wizarding War.

But of all of Potter's sins, his worst one was escaping from the Room of Hidden Things with the diadem horcrux because that act had led to Draco, his precious heir, being condemned to the life of a half-breed. Lucius- who had once gone to the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures and insisted that a hippogriff, that had attacked Draco, be put to death- was forced to stand by while Greyback's dogs ravaged his son. Lucius didn't really care to have a new heir, but if forcing Ginevra Weasley to carry his child managed to inflict even an iota of the hurt Harry Potter had caused him, he was willing to go along with the Dark Lord's plans.

Lucius felt no attraction towards Ginevra Weasley; she was a chore for him. Though, perhaps her fate was linked to his. Years ago he had slipped the young girl Tom Riddle's diary in an attempt to force Dumbledore out of his position as Headmaster of Hogwarts and to sabotage her father's career. The girl had miraculously survived that ordeal only to end up as his prisoner years later.

Cissa was obviously not happy that he was required to have sex with another woman. It didn't help that Bella would often cruelly remind Cissa that Ginevra was the same age their daughter would have been, had she survived. Bella ridiculed Cissa for her inability to have children when she herself had produced none- there was a running joke among the Death Eaters that the only way Bellatrix Lestrange would fall pregnant was if she found a Time-Turner and went back in time to fornicate with the Dark Lord when he was still human.
Though Bella wasn't sexually interested in anyone other than her master, she did resent that her husband and brother-in-law preferred a young witch like Ginevra over an insane sadist like herself. She often projected her own insecurities when she taunted her sister, consequently even though Lucius had never given Cissa cause to question his commitment to her, she didn't believe he was completely unaffected by the Weasley chit.

The fact of the matter was that things had been strained between him and his wife ever since he returned from Azkaban. No doubt, prison had changed him a great deal, but it didn't change his ability to read his wife's emotions. He could see that she resented that a Halfblood had taken over their home and their lives, but she also resented him for allowing it. Unfortunately, by then Lucius, a fugitive from the law, had so little power and influence left that he was in no position to refuse the Dark Lord anything.

Lucius had many regrets, the greatest of which was how his choices had shaped Draco's life. Instead of teaching his son to appreciate what they had, he had raised him to regret that the Dark Lord had been defeated before their dreams were realised. He wished he had sheltered his son from the Death Eaters and not idealised them.

Lucius had known that Draco was only trying to prove himself to him when he volunteered to join the Death Eaters. He wished he had listened to Cissa- who had strongly opposed Draco's decision to join at such a young age- perhaps then things would have turned out differently and he would not be in a position where he was required to help them kill his own son.

Greyback had surmised that Draco was hiding in Uganda. The werewolf had explained how he had secretly kept the Mudblood imprisoned in their post near Uagadou and it was Draco who had most likely destroyed the property as his act of revenge. It didn't make sense to Lucius, because the way Greyback was telling it, it sounded like Draco was in love with the girl.

While he was not too happy about the thought of his son sullying himself to get Potter's Mudblood pregnant, Lucius believed that, like him, Draco had pushed past his personal disgust to do what was needed to hurt Potter. It sickened him to think Draco may truly care for the girl and the half-breeds he had fathered with her, but it also gave him cause for concern. Even if he somehow managed to ensure Draco lived, if his son was anywhere as devoted to his new family as Lucius had been towards Narcissa and Draco, his boy was in for a world of grief considering what was going to happen.

Greyback had figured out that Theo was working with Draco so Lucius had employed a few of his own personal resources to keep an eye on young Nott. He had been suspicious of the boy's sudden rise within their ranks, but later dismissed his thoughts as paranoia. A huge error on his part.

Knowing how Severus had deceived them for years, he should have remembered that it pays to be mistrustful of your friends.

By spying on Theo, his investigators were able to trace the address of the floo used by Draco and discovered the property was leased in the name of one Draco Loupgarou by one of the Malfoy house-elves.

Greyback had already hesitantly confessed to using Mipsy to do his dirty work. Lucius didn't care about that- the creatures existed to serve after all- but he was angry that the Lestranges would dare to barter his elf for an opportunity to abuse the witch carrying his child. But Rabastan and Rodolphus were lower on the list of Lestranges he had an axe to grind with. In the case of Bellatrix Lestrange, Lucius was biding his time, waiting for the opportunity to finish her using the exact method she almost killed Draco with.

Lucius had been able to look past the Dark Lord abusing Draco over the years for failing to kill
Dumbledore and punishing him for his inability to kill Potter by turning him into a half-breed so long as Draco got to live. In the kind of world they had created, simply being allowed to live felt like the greatest mercy. The Dark Lord was a sadistic, homicidal maniac and not even a Pureblood, but he was also as good as immortal. It didn't matter though, even if there was a chance Harry Potter could defeat the Dark Lord, Lucius could not defect to the other side.

The Wizengamot had tried Lucius for his activities during the Wizarding War. Unlike many of his peers, he had not only escaped imprisonment by claiming to have acted under the influence of the Imperius but also retained his social standing in the aftermath. This time around there would be no escaping punishment; it would be the Kiss for him and Azkaban for his family.

Lucius did not want to continue supporting the Halfblood despot who had wilfully chosen to pollute the Malfoy lineage by turning the true heir into a werewolf, but he had no other choice. In order to protect his wife and ensure his own survival he needed to safeguard his position within the Death Eater ranks, which he could only do by resorting to extreme cruelty and terror.

He was angry with young Theo for exposing Draco. If not for him they would never have known where Draco was hiding. But Lucius still had a plan to save Draco. He thought if he could bring back Ginevra Weasley and Draco's sons and kill the escaped pack of werewolves hiding in Uganda there would be no reason for anyone to go after Draco. It was a good plan, one that would have worked if only his obstinate house-elf would have done his master's bidding.

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Fenrir Greyback was angry. He had been deceived, once again, by his own people. This particular betrayal was the worst of all as it came from the man he had completely trusted to run his pack.

You're to be blamed as well, aren't you? What kind of alpha doesn't notice his head beta isn't even bonded with him anymore?

He ignored the voice in his head. As any alpha would confirm, It was exhausting being in tune with the pack's needs and their feelings under normal circumstances, but it was especially challenging when members of your pack were often the ones sent to battle frontlines or used as test subjects in unethical experiments.

Early on Fenrir had trained himself to ignore the bonds; he would have lost his mind, despite having a pack, if he had to feel every cut and curse his wolves endured. Sure, it was fun during the full moon when you didn't even need to stick your prick into a warm cunt to enjoy an orgasm that lasted for hours, but one night of pleasure was hardly worth putting up with the rest of the thestral dung that came with the pack bonds.

Since he generally ignored the bonds, he never would have learnt of Gunnolf Olsen's treachery if not for a spot of luck and the current size of his pack. With his pack being the smallest it had been in years- barely fifty of them now- it was easier to see the changes in his head beta's behaviour.

Fenrir had completely forgotten he had brought back with him the Mudblood's satchel, which he had taken from her after imprisoning her in New Wolf Castle- the name he had decided to call the Death Eater base in Uganda when he eventually took over the place. Low on supplies, ever since Draco and his pack of thieves had wiped him clean, he decided to check the satchel for anything useful. He wasn't disappointed as there was a good amount of dittany and some health potions among other things. But most interesting, was a scrap of parchment he found in there.

Now Fenrir may not have been the sharpest knife in the block, but even he recognised that the words must hold some significance and wasn't just a piece of pretty writing the Mudblood was holding
onto. He spoke to members of his pack to see if they had any idea about it. Every werewolf, except for Gunnolf, who came to Fenrir's pack from an older pack already knew of the prophecy and a couple of the clever ones still left in his pack even reckoned it could be about Draco's pups. Listening to their reasons, Fenrir had to agree.

He did not know what made him speak to his pack members individually, but he was glad he did or he may not have noticed Gunnolf's attempt to lead him astray. Fenrir was immediately suspicious when Gunnolf pretended not to recognise the handwriting on the parchment- bit hard to swallow as even he could identify Draco's distinct style of writing, having seen it often enough on schedules and such.

When he tried to order Gunnolf to tell him the truth, he could see that his beta wasn't really feeling any compulsion to act. It took him great self control to bite his tongue and play along like everything was fine, but as soon as Gunnolf left the room, Fenrir checked his pack bonds and noticed that, though weak, everyone else's bond was in place while Gunnolf's was gone.

Fenrir was livid. Draco was the only other alpha he knew of, so obviously Gunnolf had bonded with that disloyal, pack-stealing cunt, and was probably sent here to spy on him. He kept a close watch over him the next couple of days, acting as crazy and erratic as he could, hoping he would contact Draco; he didn't. The only outsider he contacted was Theodore Nott, the most recent addition to the Dark Lord's inner circle. The very same Theodore Nott, who had once been best friends with Draco Malfoy.

Gunnolf, Draco, Nott Jr. and the Mudblood were all connected somehow. Fenrir recognised that the plot against him ran deep and decided he needed help. He called Lucius Malfoy, who came promptly this time and didn't keep him waiting like the time after Draco escaped, when Malfoy had refused to even see him.

_That uppity prick, thinks he's better than me._

He told Malfoy what he had found out, but made no mention about the prophecy as that was a matter concerning the pack.

Fenrir wanted the go to New Wolf Castle to check if there was anything else left behind, maybe even go looking for the Mudblood. He was healed now and, unlike last time, prepared for her.

_Fuckin' cunt took me by surprise and nearly killed me, she did. Gonna have to teach that bitch a lesson._

He tried to arrange a portkey but was informed that the base there had been destroyed... the day Draco left from Bleidd.

It didn't take a genius to connect the two events. Fenrir realised Draco must be in Uganda looking for his bitch. The thought filled him with glee because he knew Draco wasn't going to find her.

_No way that bitch's still bonded with him after the number of times I shot my cum in her. Without a bond, Luna herself would have to lead that brat to his Muddy whore... Of course, as her sire, I won't have the same trouble finding her -- Bet the bitch hasn't figured that out yet._

Involving Malfoy had ended up being a good idea after all. He had used his galleons to have Nott's pup watched and was able to get Draco's exact location from his floo address. Somehow the scheming bastards had figured out a way to talk over the floo without there being a record of it in the Ministry. He wasn't concerned about Nott junior's treasonous activities, that was a problem for the Death Eaters to sort out. He was just happy to learn exactly where in Uganda that rat, Draco, was
They would need to be careful though, as they had to get Ginny Weasley and Draco's pups out unharmed. Malfoy didn't care for his grandsons, but Fenrir did. Even if they weren't lycans, like some members of his pack thought they could be, they were definitely special because of the Dark Lord's interest in them.

*Be honest; you want them 'cause you'd like to raise them as your own.*

The voice in his head wasn't wrong. It felt weird, but also good, to be able to hold a child and not want to eat them. He thought of Wilbur and Martin with a great deal of fondness and was jealous that such miracles had come from Draco, not himself.

Malfoy summoned Draco's personal elf, who was still bound to the Malfoy household. The snivelling creature performed every task asked of him yet refused to bring Draco's babies to them. Malfoy was creative with his punishments, having learnt the art of disciplining from his own master, but it didn't matter what was done to it, the pathetic thing would not open the floo to the house in Lake Victoria or provide them with any useful information about Draco.

They also questioned Gunnolf, who proved to be even more stubborn. Fenrir tortured his former beta while Malfoy used legilimency on him but they ended up killing him before they could break into his mind. Fenrir almost admired the strength displayed by Gunnolf in the moments before he passed away. Gunnolf had proven Fenrir had been wrong about him all along and he acknowledged as much.

*Gunnolf would've made a great alpha.*

Chapter End Notes

Keep in mind that we're seeing things from Lucius and Fenrir's POVs in this chapter and they're both a little nutty (L after Azkaban and F after his fight with H).

I didn't respond to some of the comments left on the prev chp that were related to Gunnolf’s death. As you can read in this one, yes, he really is dead.

My thanks to the reviewers who give me the motivation I need at the end of every chapter to write the next chapter.
Hermione was running. Fast. She was being chased and was running like her life depended on it. She couldn't understand why her wolf would rather run than stop and confront the thing chasing her. Her heart felt like it would burst out of her chest, but she kept running as she could feel the creature gaining on her. She didn't stop, but she did slow down as she weaved a path between the trees trying to make it harder to track her by her scent alone.

The weather was warm despite the time of night. Why was it so warm, so hot? Moonlight filtered through the trees she ran past. It wasn't a full moon, not tonight, but it was beautiful nonetheless. She knew this forest, recognised the trees- she had run through them before but she didn't remember them looking so lovely, she thought as she looked up at the forest canopy. She could hear the small creatures of the forest and the insects of the night. Then she heard the creature growl, an inhuman sound that made her pulse race faster.

She chided herself for getting distracted by the scenery and ran faster, crashing into bushes and foliage in her desperate attempt to get away. Every instinct inside her demanded she run, not fight like her wolf would usually want her to. She barrelled into a small clearing, her momentum causing her to lose her balance and fall to the ground. She scrambled to get back up, wanting to avoid the vulnerability of a prone position, but she was barely on her knees when the beast caught up to her.

Hermione stayed rooted to the ground, her whole body trembling as she took in the sight of the creature coming to a halt before her.

The howls of Draco's pack permeated the darkened bows of the ancient forest, heralding their night charge through the columns of trees. No creature dared to challenge their advance, fearing these new two-legged predators in their forest; they didn't know that the pack wasn't hunting, not tonight. Tonight was all about getting rid of the nervous energy built inside them in anticipation of the fight with Fenrir and his goons. Twenty-four hours had passed since Draco first received news of the impending attack which had yet to come, making them all feel a little antsy.

Draco himself was wondering why they weren't here yet. He had his people watching all the local spots used for international portkey travel, but there was no sign of Fenrir or any of the Death Eaters yet.

Draco ran ahead of the pack, marking a trail for them when he heard a sound that caught his wolf's immediate attention. Oblivious to everything but the arrival of the new predator in their midst he immediately transformed and tore through the forest.

One of the omegas noticed the manner in which their alpha took off and grew alarmed. They called out to the others for help, believing their alpha would need back-up.

"Stop," said one of the betas.

The omega looked on confused.

"We need to help him. Fenrir must be here."
A couple of others who had reached them by then shook their heads and smiled.

"Can't you smell it, pup?" asked the beta with a snicker.

"Ah," said the omega, finally recognising what was different about their alpha's scent.

"Yup. Draco's gone to get himself some," said someone else.

The pack responded with hoots and howls of laughter as they turned around and made their way back to camp.

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Without meaning to, Hermione reached out and stroked the soft white fur on the chest of the beast before her. It was just as luxurious as she remembered it. The creature stood still, the only movement coming from its nostrils as they flared now and again.

She ran her hands all over his body, drawing a whine-like sound from him. She ignored it and continued her exploration of the wolf.

It was perfect that he should approach her once again as a wolf first. Somehow she felt less uncertain of herself when it came to Draco's wolf- maybe because her experiences with his human had not always been pleasant.

The she-wolf, who had resisted returning to Draco so far, had completely changed her tune from the moment she caught wind of his scent. Her usually ferocious wolf turned suddenly playful, letting out a low whine to alert Draco to her presence before she dashed off. She had wanted him to chase her and catch her. And now that he had, she was eager for him to claim his prize.

While Hermione's wolf was restlessly waiting to present herself to her mate, her human wasn't as easy. She needed some time to decide how to tell him what Fenrir had done to her and how to explain where she had been all this time. But she didn't want to talk right now. Right now, she simply wanted to enjoy being close to him again. She wanted to breathe in his intoxicating scent and run her hands all over him to assure herself that he was real and before her at long last. She wanted him to hold her, comfort her, make her feel safe and loved again.

She clung to him with her face buried in the fur around his scruff, swallowing deep breaths of his delicious scent. The longer she breathed him in, the calmer and less anxious she felt.

"I've missed you," she said, kissing his muzzle. "Gods, I don't think I realised till now just how much I missed you." Hermione sighed contentedly as she continued to stroke his fur.

She could feel her fears and concerns vanishing as her wolf looked in approval at his well-muscled form. He continued to remain still, perhaps recognising her need to be in control, while she teasingly scraped her nails along his flank.

He let out another whine. She could tell from his expression he was waiting for her to give him the go ahead.

Hermione took a deep breath and mustered her Gryffindor courage before she looked him in the eye and nodded.

In the blink of an eye he was transformed and kneeling in level with her.

"Witch," he said, letting out a shaky breath. His voice was hoarse and uneven when he spoke. "You
cannot even begin to imagine how much I've missed you."

Draco showed no uncertainty when he leaned forward to grab her by the shoulders and crush her against him before his lips caught hers in a heated kiss. He had wanted to do this since he found her sprawled on the forest floor; instead, having sensed her hesitation, he had patiently waited in his wolf form for her to signal that she was ready.

He couldn't believe they had been apart for less than three months, it felt like a lifetime had passed since they were last together. One hand slid up the slender column of her neck to hold her head in place so he could deepen their kiss. Luna grant him control, he prayed, because she tasted even better than he remembered.

Hermione's hands greedily roamed Draco's body, feeling the jut of every bone and the curve of every muscle. She pulled his hips against hers, desperate to have him inside her again. As good as it felt to kiss him, her wolf wouldn't be satisfied with just some petting.

"Slow down, witch," he said reproachfully, nipping at her jaw while his hands ran down her back to grab her bottom.

"It's my wolf," she explained breathlessly, tilting her head back to provide him better access to her neck.

"I realised. Quite the feisty minx," he noted with a teasing smirk, which earned him a seductive purr from Hermione's wolf.

"Draco- Draco, I need you," she pleaded, attempting to undress herself without letting go of him.

"I know, love. I know. But you need to slow down." Draco was struggling to maintain control of the situation, but one of them needed to and it didn't look like Hermione's wolf was going to help matters.

She whined and demanded to know why.

"Because of what would happen next. I won't stop, I won't be able to stop -- I want you so bad. But, you're not ready... I think this is just your wolf reacting," he said, recalling how his wolf had reacted the first time he caught his mate's scent.

Hermione felt crestfallen and her wolf whined even louder. Was he rejecting her?

She didn't realise she had asked the question out loud till she heard him respond.

"**Never.** I want you. You can feel how much" -he rolled his hips against hers so she could feel his erection throb against her belly- "I still want to mate with you, but I sensed that you're not quite ready yet. I don't understand what it is you're scared of but I'm willing to wait till both, your human and wolf, are ready to be with me."

It was true, it was her wolf who had taken over and was responding to her mate. Her wolf just wanted to be with her mate, she didn't care that her human wasn't ready to jump straight to sex when they had so much to discuss first. Fortunately for Hermione, her mate was more sensitive about her desires, reminding her just why it was she had fallen in love with him in the first place.

Hermione nodded and sank against him. Draco pulled her into his lap and sat there, holding her in a way that told her he never planned to let her go. She responded by melting in his arms, pressing herself to him in a way she hoped let him know she had no desire to ever part with him again. Their wolves wanted to pounce on each other and rut till they passed out from exhaustion, knotted
together, but their humans understood there was no need to rush.

They spend hours kissing and caressing, savouring each other while also silently cataloguing every new scar on their mate's body. Every now and then one of them would be tempted to sneak in a quick grope or fondle, but they never let it go too far, continuing to let their passions simmer instead of bubbling over.

The couple sighed contentedly. They would mate, there was no doubt anymore in either one of their minds of the eventuality of their mating, but for now they were happy just to be reunited with their mate.

Hermione's pack had finally found Draco's and they sat together swapping stories about everything that had happened so far. They stopped suddenly and exchanged looks with each other.

"Wow, that's-"

"Something."

"Mmhmm."

"Now that's special."

"Scent of an aroused alpha pair -- I'd commit it to memory, except I believe this is going to be a regular occurrence from now on."

There were several snickers.

"Let's not forget, they're a pair of alpha true mates."

"Luna definitely favours them."

"And us. First children and now an alpha pair... Our pack is blessed."

There were many nods of agreement.

"Merlin! The kind of scent he's giving off, I'd be shocked if he didn't get her pregnant just looking at her."

There were a few nervous chuckles before everyone fell quiet. Even though they couldn't see their alphas, they were closely following the proceedings with their ears and nose.

"Too bad Will and Marty aren't here tonight," said someone out of nowhere.

"So they can hear their parents get ready to fuck?"

"No, you idiot. It would've been nice to have the whole pack together."

There were only a few quiet murmurs of agreement to avoid making too much noise. Everyone was straining their ears to hear every rustle and every sigh, to get an idea of how things were progressing between Draco and Hermione.

Eventually the scent and magical energy coming from the alphas got too much for many in the pack; they began to form pairs and leave in search of some privacy. As it turned out, fucking was just as good as running when it came to getting rid of pent up energy.
I'm sure this wasn't what you expected. (Even if I could write the kind of reunion that would meet your expectations, with everything currently going on and in light of Hermione being raped by Fenrir, it felt more natural to make Dramione's reunion about intimacy and not the smutfest we've been waiting for.) Hope it at least felt believable.

@ruthy- couldn't give you the 'get her pregnant with a look' scene you wanted, but at least I mentioned it in some way. ;p
"You've been with Potter the last few weeks?"

"It wasn't like that."

Draco didn't need to hear her protests to know Hermione would not have been with Potter in the way his tone implied, but she may as well have been as far as his wolf was concerned. He was hurt that she hid from him- that it was Potter she felt safest with, just brought back all his old resentment towards the Chosen One.

Hermione cupped Draco's chin and raised it so she could look into his eyes, smoky grey eyes that usually did a good job of concealing their owner's emotions. Now though there was no mistaking the hurt in them; hurt she had caused him by letting her insecurities keep them apart. "I'm sorry," she said, unable to look into his eyes. "I was scared -- I thought you would reject me..."

...because of what Fenrir did. She tried to tell him but failed.

After spending the first few hours kissing and caressing till each was convinced their mate was really back with them, the couple had gotten dressed to resist the urge to mate. However they did not return to the pack, opting instead to sit and talk, despite the late hour. They took turns filling in the blanks about things that had taken place since she left Bleidd, with Hermione telling Draco about everything except for what was done to her while she was Fenrir's prisoner.

When she gathered the courage to look at Draco again, she saw his eyes were bright.

"Do I need to write you a love ballad to make you understand that I'm in love with you, Hermione?" he asked in a tone that expressed his frustration over her failure to grasp something so simple. "This isn't some passing fancy a wizard may indulge in and neither is it about what your womb has to offer me. My wolf, my human... all of me wants all of you."

Hearing the truth spoken so plainly, robbed the brightest witch of all speech. In response, all she could do was nod while teardrops began to fill her eyes and slowly run down her cheek.

"Why are you crying, love?"

She pressed her lips together, shook her head and then shrugged her shoulders while the tears continued to flow.

Sensing her inner turmoil, Draco pulled her into his arms again and hugged her while she wept.

Hermione struggled to hold back the tears, this wasn't the time to fall apart- there were other more important things to discuss and do. She would deal with her emotions later, when there wasn't the threat of an imminent attack looming over their heads. However she felt so safe with Draco- a feeling of almost being at home- that Hermione couldn't hold it in anymore.

She unsuccessfully tried to restrain herself by trying to cry in silence, hands clenched into tight fists at her side. But she soon buried her face in Draco's chest, hands fistng his robes, as she began to heave and let out everything she had kept bottled inside of her. The sound of her sobbing resembled the sound made by a wounded animal grunting in pain as she let go of her anger, her pain and her fears.
Hermione cried, clutching at Draco, who remained her anchor in the stormy sea of her emotions.

He held her firmly, trying to silently comfort her by stroking her hair and her back while her tears soaked through the shirt of his robes. Draco was not a gentle or patient man by nature, but he would be whatever his mate needed him to be, grateful as he was that Hermione was not shutting him out like Ginny was doing to Harry and her loved ones. It made Draco's heart hurt to see Hermione like this, but there was nothing to do except embrace her and wait for her to conquer her inner demons.

Bill Weasley was hiding a secret he had been carrying around in his pocket since the attack on Malfoy Potions. Unknown to the rest of the members of the Order Bill had risked their entire mission at the factory by deviating from their plan that day.

As a curse-breaker, his skills were only needed at the point of entry. Once inside the factory, he was supposed to blend in with the workers while the rest of the team went about the task of setting up the bombs. Instead, Bill went snooping around the factory and through dumb luck happened to not only avoid getting caught but also found what he wanted.

Veritaserum and ingredients essential for brewing it were highly regulated, thus out of the Order's reach. They had adapted, coming up with more creative ways to get to the truth- using the water from the Thief's Fall being one such example- but some situations just called for the truth potion.

Someone in the Order- someone they trusted- was responsible for his little sister being captured by the Death Eaters. Their investigation had narrowed the suspects down to a list of six people and absent a proficient legilimens or any Veritaserum the culprit remained unpunished.

Bill didn't know if Malfoy Potions brewed Veritaserum, let alone where it might be stored inside the factory, but after hearing from Harry a brief account of the nightmare his baby sister had lived through Bill was so shaken up he acted in an uncharacteristically reckless manner as he was determined to know who had betrayed Ginny.

In the midst of all the excitement that followed the attack on Malfoy Potions Bill never got the opportunity to tell anyone that he now possessed a vial of Veritaserum and after what happened with his mother and Amycus, he reconsidered his original plan for revenge. He thought it would be better to conduct his investigation in secret and decide what to do next based on what he found out.

There was only one other person who knew Bill's secret, Luna Lovegood. Like most things involving Luna, it was a mystery how she had figured it out. During one of her visits had Luna stared down at his pocket through those weird glasses she sometimes wore and said, "There are some nargles circling your pocket, Bill. If you're not watchful they'll steal whatever it is you're hiding in there."

However it was that she really came to discover his secret, Bill knew Luna could be trusted. Besides, he was going to need someone like her to execute his plan. So, he had shown her the vial of Veritaserum and told her what he wanted her to do with it.

Luna was known to ignore the Order's security directives related to meeting members outside of planned missions, as she visited with different members of the Order whenever the mood struck her. With all her quirks, no one would question Luna's motives for randomly dropping in for a cup of tea and engaging in an odd conversation with some questions about the night Ginny and Hermione were captured.

Luna's odd sense of fashion and dreamy manner of speech made people underestimate her, which
made it that much easier for the observant witch to effectively carry out her interrogations. She had already questioned and cleared two of the people Bill suspected to be responsible for setting up Ginny and this had led to an unexpected problem.

Because of the heavy security around Veritaserum, Bill had managed to only swipe one vial- which had been a miracle in itself- not realising at the time that it only contained enough potion to be used on three people at most.

Luna had agreed to help Bill but they could not concur on who they ought to question. As a compromise they decided that Luna would first question two suspects picked by Bill while the third choice would be hers. Bill only accepted because he had been certain the culprit was one of the two people he had picked. But after being proven wrong he didn't want to waste the last of the potion on Luna's pick- a person who wasn't even on the list of six names the Order had shortlisted!

Since Luna wasn't willing to see reason, Bill had a decision to make: either let Luna do as she saw fit or question Padma Patil himself. He didn't want to believe that the soft-spoken Padma could be capable of something so cruel but she looked like the most likely candidate of the suspects left.

Padma's sister Parvati had been one of the early casualties of the war when the Order first went into hiding. The Death Eaters had launched a surprise attack on one of the Order safe houses. Ginny- and everyone who had been quick to portkey to safety- had survived while her roommate at the time, Parvati, had perished in the attack. Even though it wasn't Ginny's fault Parvati died, for a short while Padma, in her grief, had blamed Ginny for abandoning her sister.

Things between the two witches only got more complicated once Ron started to date Padma because Ginny had misguidedly hoped for Ron and Hermione to get back together someday. How convenient that both Ginny and Hermione, the two hurdles to her relationship with Ron were both gotten rid of in the same night!

Bill realised it was a stretch to think Padma had set the trap for Ginny... but not as much as thinking it could be Cho Chang, as Luna was suggesting. He knew that Cho and Harry would hook up sometimes but there was nothing noteworthy about it. Quite a few of the younger, single members of the Order had similar arrangements, apparently using sex to deal with their despair over the endless war they were engaged in.

Cho, an introvert to start with, had become a complete loner after her parents were killed. She was dedicated to the Order and was very good with intelligence-gathering as well as mission planning but she had terrible interpersonal skills. In all the years, Bill had not known her to date or engage in any serious relationship. It was incomprehensible that the aloof Cho could secretly harbour feelings for Harry that were intense enough to make her go to such extreme lengths to rid herself of her romantic rival.

If romantic rivalry was the main criteria they may as well question every wizard Ginny had dated and dumped during the times she and Harry would be on a break. It was ridiculous to think either Cho or Padma could be the traitor- although it was a little worrisome that the two were friends...

*What if Luna was correct and Cho had set it up to point the blame at Padma?*

Bill shook his head. No, this was nothing more than the product of Luna's overactive imagination- just like the wrackspurts and whatnots she went on about- and he would be a fool to waste what little Veritaserum he had left to test one of Luna's silly theories.

-----------------------------------------------------------
Hermione woke up feeling a lot better after her short nap. The way she had cried earlier had felt cathartic but had also left her feeling drained. Tuned to her needs, Draco had suggested she rest while he would keep watch. And she did. She could not have slept for more than an hour but she felt more rested now than she had in a very long time.

Hermione yawned and stretched out her limbs before turning to smile at Draco. "I can't wait for morning to see the boys again."

She remembered how difficult it could be to get the twins to fall back asleep when their sleep was disrupted- it was her only reason for not asking to see them before.

"You'll have to wait a little longer than that," responded Draco.

"Why's that? I'm pretty sure I saw the pack's campsite not far from here."

"They're not with the pack."

Hermione immediately sat up in alarm, only calming down after Draco explained the measures he had taken to keep their sons safe.

He concluded by saying, "The twins are safer where they are right now... Considering we could be attacked any minute by Fenrir and the Death Eaters, I don't want to risk leading any of them to the boys -- Let's first dispense with the trouble coming our way."

"They know your exact location?"

"They do now."

"What do you mean?"

Draco hesitated, worried about upsetting her again when her mood had finally perked up. He gave her a more indirect response. "Werewolves can track the pups they sire... up to a particular range, of course."

Hermione understood.

"Fenrir will have no trouble finding me once he's anywhere near the Mountains of the Moon, will he?"

Draco nodded but was quick to add, "There are many *weres* in the pack who were sired by Fenrir." He didn't want her to think she was the only one Fenrir could use to find them. The last thing he needed right now was her running away because she thought it would be safer for their pups and their pack.

"Oskar thinks Fenrir may still not be able to track us. He's always been hopeless when it comes to maintaining the bonds and he's turned so many people over the years, there's a good chance he'll get confused and lost if he tries to follow any of those bonds now," said Draco trying to sound dismissive of the threat posed.

But Hermione wasn't fooled. She understood it would be dangerous for their sons to be near anyone who was sired by Fenrir as he could easily track any of them once he arrived in Uganda.

"Who's watching Wilbur and Martin?"

Draco hesitated once again; it was hard to explain just who Mipsy was and why he could be trusted
with the care of their sons. It was even harder for Hermione to accept that the elf who had played the role of her prison guard was the one now tasked with protecting her sons. One question led to another and then another till Hermione had a clearer picture of what Draco's life had been like after she left.

Hermione had already noticed the scar tissue on his back- far worse than the scar crisscrossing the front of his torso, the result of the Dark and deadly Sectumsempra curse he had survived- and after hearing Draco's account she was finally able to comprehend what Harry and Gunnolf had tried to impress upon her. Draco had never abandoned her, he had been fighting for his life while that insane bitch, Bellatrix, was doing her best to finish him off.

Hermione was grateful to Pansy and Theo for everything they had done for Draco, however, her feelings towards Narcissa Malfoy were a little complicated. She didn't wish to disregard Narcissa's role in saving Draco's life or the help she had provided the Order in the past few weeks, but it was also hard to forget Narcissa's callousness towards Ginny, Neville, and Merlin knows how many others. Hermione was happy for Draco's sake that he was on talking terms with his mother again- it was clear that she was the only thing he missed from his old life- but she personally wasn't thrilled about it.

Draco was going to reach out to his Pureblood connections about providing statements for Hermione to submit to the ICW, he was going to ask his mother in particular. Hermione believed Narcissa would have been perfectly fine with Voldemort and the Death Eaters doing as they pleased if it had not negatively affected her own family- she wasn't a true friend of the Order. And yet, if Narcissa agreed to testify before the ICW they would all end up indebted to her because her testimony alone would carry more weight than any of the evidence Hermione had gathered so far.

When it finally felt like they were all caught up Draco and Hermione decided to return to the camp so both could get some sleep before the upcoming battle.

'Change in plans.'

'L summoned by DL.'

'Mysterious mission in Bulgaria.'

'L not happy.'

Draco read the messages from his mother; it was nearly noon when he received them. He had contacted Narcissa the previous day to ask if there was any update on when Lucius and Fenrir were planning to make their move. She had replied saying she had not heard from Lucius since he went to Bleidd the day before that. And now it seemed that Lucius was headed to Bulgaria. Did that mean they weren't coming after him anymore?

When asked, Narcissa replied that she didn't know if the Dark Lord's mission in Bulgaria included Fenrir as well. She ended her messages by asking Draco to call Theo, she informed him that Theo had tried to reach him several times during the night.

Her last message caused Draco some concern. Whenever Theo called, Mipsy would promptly come to the camp to fetch Draco, so he could return to the house and answer Theo's call. If Theo had tried to reach him several times it was strange that Mipsy had not shown up even once.
"Finally came back, I see," said Cora, when she saw Hermione at the entrance of her tent.

"Took me some time, but I found my way back home," replied Hermione. While the pack made their preparation for Fenrir's attack, Hermione had sought out Cora once it was morning.

Cora was both, surprised and pleased with Hermione's response.

"Hope you have no plans to take off before completing the mate-bond this time."

"I have no plans to take off, at all," replied Hermione before sitting down beside Cora.

"You've changed," noted Cora. It wasn't just that she was a werewolf now. The old Hermione had abandoned her pups and mate to return to Harry Potter and the Order, but this one- according to members of her pack- had left the Order to return to them.

"What do you need from me, my alpha?" asked Cora, shocking Hermione with her show of deference. Especially since it struck her as sincere.

Hermione explained to Cora about the evidence she was collecting to submit to the ICW. As expected, Cora reluctantly agreed to provide her statement. She wasn't too happy about involving outsiders in pack affairs, but the Death Eaters were too big a threat for the pack to deal with on their own. They could use all the allies they could get.

Hermione spent the rest of her morning with Cora trying to understand what exactly it was Voldemort had done in the experiments conducted at Bleidd. Hermione struggled to grasp the intricacies of what Cora was saying but it sounded like Voldemort had used some kind of blood magic to alter the potion originally created by Severus. Draco was among the group of werewolves who had been given this altered version of the Fero. Cora suspected Hermione had also been given the same version when the Death Eaters first brought her to Bleidd.

It was all a bit too much for Hermione to take in all at once- not only did she lack Healer training, even her basic magical education had been cut short due to the war. Fortunately for her, Cora offered to loan Hermione her collection of Healer reference books so she could read them properly in her spare time and use that knowledge to perhaps decipher the mystery of the prophecy regarding her sons.

While Hermione was busy with Cora, Draco had spent his morning checking on the new additions to the pack and making sure everyone was settling in okay. After he heard from his mother, he shared with his betas the news that the Death Eaters weren't coming but they still needed to watch for Fenrir and anyone from his pack. He then went to Cora's tent to see Hermione.

"Something strange is going on. I need to go check on my elf," he said to Hermione after he was done telling her about the change in Lucius' plans. "Do you want to come with me or stay here and watch over the pack?"

Hermione felt torn; she wanted to see Wilbur and Martin, but if she went to see them now she could be leading Fenrir straight to them. She shook her head.

Draco could see it was bothering her to have come so far and still not be able to see her sons. "For all we know, Fenrir could be on his way to Bulgaria with Lucius right now. Let's wait a day, if there isn't any attack we can bring the boys and move the whole pack to Uagadou- take up your friends on their offer of sanctuary," he suggested. "Just one more day and then we can be together as a family," Draco reassured her before disapparating.
Chapter End Notes

Here we have the rest of the reunion- still no smut... no family reunion either.
We also (kinda) have an answer to the question of who may have set up Ginny to get captured.
Thank you for your supportive comments on the previous chapter- I'm trying not to reply to every comment (because I'm feeling self-conscious over the high comment count) but I do appreciate you taking the time to express your thoughts about this fic.
Draco was appalled by the conditions he found his sons in when he arrived at the house near Lake Victoria. With sunken eyes, cracked lips and soiled nappies, the twins looked like they had not been fed or cleaned in the last twenty-four hours. Wilbur was uncharacteristically irritable and Martin completely subdued; the tear tracts formed on their infant faces told Draco of the hours his sons had spent crying.

Something had to have happened to Mipsy; it was completely against the elf’s nature to ignore Draco’s summons or be neglectful towards his charges. Draco was worried about his elf, but his primary concern was for his sons- having never seen them look this frail before.

He mentally cursed himself for failing to perform his daily check on his bonds else he would have known something was wrong with his sons much sooner. For all that he had criticised Fenrir for ignoring the pack bonds, Draco was coming to understand his reasons for doing so- being connected all the time could be distractingly overwhelming.

Draco took his time, carefully tending to the needs of his sons till he was confident that they were out of danger. He cradled his sons, one at a time, and gently rocked them to sleep. He felt grateful for the message from his mother that had brought him to the house and offered thanks to Luna for bringing him there in time. Given how dangerously dehydrated his sons were when he found them, he didn’t want to consider what could have happened if they had continued to suffer from neglect for even an hour longer.

Distracted as he was, Draco forgot about the purpose of his mother’s message, remembering only when he heard his fireplace roar to life.

"Where the fuck have you been?" demanded Theo soon as Draco answered. "I've called you at least three times with no response -- I even left a message with Narcissa asking you to call me."

"I'll explain later. Why were you trying to reach me?"

"I found out something," started Theo, still visibly ticked off. "Everything we've accomplished so far could end up undone..." Theo took a deep breath and exhaled loudly. "The Dark Lord's been busy."

"What had he done now? Mother said Lucius was called to Bulgaria."

"He has supposedly planned a whole new campaign for Bulgaria- only Death Eaters with regional expertise or those who were part of previous missions have been included- which obviously excludes me."

This explained why Fenrir had yet to attack them, thought Draco. "Guess this means the Dark Lord's sent what's left of Fenrir's pack to die in another one of his poorly planned battles in Bulgaria..."

Draco shook his head, feeling sorry for his former pack members who were going to senselessly die, like so many others, in yet another one of the Dark Lord’s overseas missions. "When is he going to learn that he can't win a war of aggression in Bulgaria?"

"Unfortunately for everyone, he has learnt from all his failed attempts... He's got a new secret weapon to deal with them this time -- Giants, Draco," Theo blurted out anxiously, "He's got giants to fight this war for him."
"How...?" asked Draco, too stunned to properly voice his question.

"Everyone directly involved was called away so I couldn't get a lot of details," explained Theo. "I hear he found a large colony of giants living in the Balkan Mountains -- Turns out giants, not quite as extinct as we thought they were."

"I meant to ask, how does he plan to control them? Given their volatile natures, aren't they bound to be a liability in battle?"

Theo nodded several times as he replied, "Similar question crossed my mind and asked around... Based on the answers I received -- I think the Dark Lord's figured out a way to control them..."

"Are you suggesting those ridiculous rumours about the Dark Lord conducting experiments on giants-"

"May not have been baseless after all," interjected Theo.

"Salazar's balls! What new hell has that noseless bastard created now?"

"I don't know, and it is cause for concern that he managed to do any of these things in secret -- Draco, what else do we not know?"

Draco silently shared Theo's worry, but there was nothing to do about it.

"It's worked in our favour so far. He's evidently been too preoccupied with his plans for global domination to pay attention to what's been going on in Britain," said Draco, trying to look at the silver lining.

But Theo wasn't in the mood for it. "He cannot win in Bulgaria, Draco," said Theo, pointing out the obvious.

Draco understood his friend's concern. Part of the reason the general public and many Death Eaters were finally ready to stand up to the Dark Lord was because they believed he could be defeated. It would damage morale and nip their uprising in the bud if the Dark Lord won in open battle against a militaristic society like the Bulgarians.

The Bulgarians needed to be warned; he had to speak with Hermione and Harry right away.

Given the urgency, Draco only briefly mentioned Hermione's return and the evidence she was asked to provide to the ICW; however he made sure to ask about Gunnolf before ending the call.

"Did you go to Bleidd to check on Gunnolf like I asked you to?"

Hermione had shared with Draco her concern for Gunnolf's wellbeing. Hearing her description of the unpleasant sensations she experienced before her pack-bond with Gunnolf had abruptly vanished only added to the unease he had been feeling over the last two days.

"I've had my hands full trying to find anything I could about this whole business with Bulgaria... I haven't had the time or an appropriate ex-"

Theo stopped talking; Draco jumped to his feet. Both were startled by an alarm suddenly going off in the background.

Someone was attempting to breach the wards of the house.

Draco peered through one of the windows and saw the house was surrounded by Death Eaters and a
few of his former pack members. He felt a chill run down his spine, but it wasn't out of concern for
his own life.

"What's going on?" asked Theo, turning one way and then the other, trying to get a better look than
he could.

"They've found me."

"Well, don't just stand there like a mannequin -- Disappear."

"The twins are here with me, and my elf's missing."

While there was enough time to apperate to safety, it would be risky to do so with children. Draco
looked at the floo and cursed out loud. Like elf-magic, floo travel was considered to be a safe mode
of magical transportation for small children, however the fireplace in the house was only equipped
for communication, not transportation.

"Surely you can transfigure a decent broom for yourself if you don't have one? You used to be pretty
swift on one of those."

"There's at least one werewolf outside who could easily outfly me on a broom... and he doesn't have
to worry about balancing two infants at the same time."

"You're going to have to disapparate," said Theo, raising his voice to make himself heard over the
noise of the alarm, "portkey travel would be far worse."

Draco looked at his sons- who drained by their recent ordeal were able to sleep through the racket-
then gave Theo a nod of resignation.

Theo returned the nod. "Take care and send word once you're safe," he said before terminating the
call.

Draco offered up a prayer to Luna, held his sons protectively against his chest and disapparated.
Little did he know at the time that he was going out of the frying pan and into the fire.

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"What are you doing here?"

Hermione- who had come to inform Oskar in person that she was back- was left open-mouthed by
the way she was greeted; for some reason she had expected him to be more welcoming towards her.

"I wished to talk about the prophecies," she explained, trying not to show her disappointment.
Oskar shook his head as he stepped further back inside the tent he had been in the process of exiting

"No, I meant here, in this tent -- You should be out there with the pack."

Hermione gave him a bemused stare.

"We're preparing for battle and our alpha is away. It'll boost the pack's morale to see you involved in
the preparations," he elaborated.

Hermione gave him a curt nod and turned to leave.

"I am glad you're back, Hermione-"
Hermione looked back into the face of a smiling Oskar, who set down the bag of chocolate frogs in his hand and stood with his arms wide open. She didn't think twice before stepping towards him and allowing him to envelop her in a warm hug. Her wolf was pleased by this mark of acceptance from the elder.

Oskar let her go with a pat on the back, saying, "Let's have that chat when you don't have alpha duties to attend to."

Hermione left Oskar to go speak with Adrian, who had taken on the role of Draco's head beta in Gunnoll's absence. Adrian, a member of Gunnoll's former pack, had grown up observing and trying to emulate the head beta, a man he deeply admired. Despite being considerably younger than other betas in their pack, apart from Draco, Adrian was the only one familiar with all the aspects of running their pack.

Adrian briefed Hermione on their security protocols and took her around the camp so she could speak with everyone as well as get a sense of the camp's layout. This was followed by a perimeter check where they tested the camp's wards, with Hermione even reinforcing them with a few of her own spells. In the short time she spent with Adrian, it became clear to Hermione that what the beta lacked in years he made up for in his knowledge of and dedication to his pack.

On Adrian's recommendation, Hermione next met with Serafina, their beta with the most battle experience. Serafina looked exactly like what one imagined a werewolf war veteran would look like-tall, muscular and sporting plenty of scars. She easily dwarfed Hermione, yet was surprisingly light on her feet. Though Serafina didn't talk much- and appeared to be uncomfortable when she did- she was able to effectively teach Hermione the basics every fighter in their pack would be expected to know and follow in order to keep them organised, and consequently alive, in any battle.

During the course of her interactions with the pack, it occurred to Hermione that it was only natural for the pack to act like a proper military unit considering they were always sent to the frontline of any fight that required the Death Eaters to face their enemy on a battlefield. Fenrir's former pack had trained themselves and developed the discipline necessary to ensure their survival against people fighting them with wands.

Hermione was sparring with some of the omegas- hoping to brush up on the combat techniques Draco had shown her all those months ago at Bleidd- when they heard Adrian sound the alarm.

"One of our scouts has returned... Fenrir's pack has been spotted on the other side of the mountain. They should be here any moment now so take your positions."

The two packs had been merged and split into three groups: combatants, support and non-combatants.

The support group, led by Cora, was made up of a dozen or so werewolves better at casting wandless spells than hand-to-hand combat. They would stay within the camp's wards and offer the fighters medical or any other form of assistance they may need during the battle.

Their most vulnerable group, the non-combatants, comprised of newly turned or injured weres. They would remain inside the main tent of the camp, along with Oskar, for the duration of the fight.

 Anyone capable of fighting was in the combatants group, under Serafina's command. This group was further split into smaller units they called sections. Every section was made up of six to eight werewolves with at least two weres proficient in defensive magic who were tasked with shielding
their section by casting protection spells.

Hermione joined the combatants, taking one of the attack positions; while she had always been better with defensive magic, Hermione had discovered that since she was turned she was able to wandlessly cast powerful offence spells with greater ease than she did even the most basic of defence spells.

Draco's pack, though newly formed, was able to function like a well-oiled machine with minimal supervision. Having belonged to Fenrir’s pack for several years, they were used to working with each other— they had also been preparing themselves for an attack from the time they left Bleidd. By contrast, Hermione and members from her pack—who were mostly pups—needed to be guided to their respective positions and told what to do before the enemy got there.

The camp sat at a point of elevation at the base of the Mountains of the Moon with the forest to their north-east. The area surrounding the camp was mostly bare—there were plenty of obstacles in the form of shrubs, trees and boulders, but nothing large enough to offer effective cover to anyone.

Wards had been applied to prevent apparition or flying within five hundred metres of the camp; their enemy would have to approach them on foot if they wished to attack them. When the enemy stepped into their line of sight, Serafina reminded everyone to keep the battle contained within this region alone.

By Hermione’s estimate, there could not have been more than twenty-five weres walking towards them, with their alpha nowhere in sight. She thought her side could easily rush the enemy and draw a favourable conclusion to the battle in a matter of minutes. However, they had been ordered to wait as Serafina was reluctant to give up their advantage of the higher ground till they could be certain there wasn’t a second wave of enemy fighters on their way.

It was nerve-racking to stand around doing nothing while they waited for the enemy to reach close enough to fire spells at them. Hermione bit her lips in her effort to hold back the curses ready to spill forth from her lips. The eerie silence, in particular, filled her with foreboding and she sensed her pack feeling antsy as well. They were all eager to charge at the enemy, so it was a relief when Serafina finally signalled for them to let loose.

Werewolves typically engaged in physical combat, using spells only when duelling with wizards; the use of magic would have taken their enemy by surprise, but it still didn’t explain their lack of co-ordination and poor fighting abilities. Especially when compared to the well-trained former members of his pack, Hermione could not comprehend how Fenrir’s current pack could be such a mess on the battlefield.

An explanation was shortly revealed.

"Pups, all of them."

"Aye. Cannae be mair than six months auld."

"Weak. Where's the rest of 'em?"

"Quit yer yakking or we won't hear when Serafina gives the next command!"

It was highly unlikely that their keen lupine hearing would fail to pick up on Serafina's bold voice, still the cross-talking had been distracting and Hermione was thankful when it ended so she could focus on her spell-work instead.
Thus far, the defenders were winning, having hit many of their enemies while taking no hits themselves. The combatants had stuck to the camp's perimeter till then, but when Fenrir's pack began to retreat, Serafina ordered a charge to prevent the enemy from leaving the anti-disapparition zone.

Fenrir's pups appeared to be better at running than they were at fighting. Hermione experienced a burst of adrenaline as they ran downhill, shouting battle cries, in pursuit of their prey. But the high didn't last for long. No more than two hundred metres from the camp, Hermione saw, out of the corner of her eye, Fenrir and a second group of werewolves charging at them from their right.

She turned to alert Serafina about the ambush and noticed the section beside hers was staring at something to their left. She followed their gaze to see a third group- mostly Black Cloaks with a few Death Eaters- rushing towards them from the left.

The relative positions of all the groups were such that they would not be able to return to the protection of the camp's wards before their enemies reached them.

Fenrir had used his weaker omegas to lure the defenders out and flank them on both sides, cutting off their retreat. The anti-disapparition charms, still in place, left the defenders no choice but to move forward- a strategy which would leave the camp and everyone inside susceptible to an attack.

Serafina shouted a series of commands indicating that she wanted them to smash through the lines of their enemies before the ambushing parties caught up with them. The section at the centre charged ahead of the rest, changing their formation from a line to a wedge. While their centre pushed forward, the sections forming the left and right wings of the wedge simultaneously defended the rear and moved closer together to end in a column formation.

Hermione, who didn't understand any of the commands, took her cues from the beta leading her section to know what she was meant to do. She tried to tune out the panic coming from less experienced members of her pack, just as she tried to ignore the thunderous sound of bodies crashing into each other. Instead, Hermione concentrated on putting one foot in front of the other, not falling down, and casting the same spells as the person beside her. In this manner her section soon joined others behind the first group of enemy weres. Only, instead of attacking the enemy right in front of them, they were moving towards the group of Black Cloaks- now on their right- and attempting to encircle them.

It didn't strike Hermione as a particularly smart move to ignore the greater threat posed by Fenrir and the second group of werewolves- who appeared to be mostly betas- to target the group of Black Cloaks first, until she realised that the attack was primarily focused on disarming the enemy. Though weaker, the wizards were able to do greater damage while risking very little as their wands made it possible for them to cast spells with greater accuracy and over greater distances. In comparison, all the werewolves were fighting without wands and, with the exception of a handful, were only able to strike their targets when casting spells at close range.

The Black Cloaks were disorganised and appeared to lack any kind of close combat experience; more than a third had already lost their wands and nearly all of them were surrounded. They fought in a desperate manner that only added to the chaos as they accidentally hit one of their own just as often as they hit their werewolf targets.

In the midst of it all Hermione was constantly aware of Fenrir's presence. Over the sound of bone shattering and flesh ripping, over the cries of agony and the last wheeze of someone's dying breath, over all the sounds of the battle she could hear Fenrir taunting her. The closer he drew the harder it became to resist the urge to break away from her section and attack him.

"Clever of you to come here, Mudblood. Like a good little bitch you led me to these rogues," he said
as he tore off the arm of one of the omegas in the midst of casting a Protego.

Using both, brute force and magic, Fenrir along with the second group of werewolves wasted no time in smashing through the combatants’ encirclement of the Black Cloaks. The defenders fell back using the Black Cloaks as human shields—though it did little to slow down Fenrir's *weres*, who didn't care if their allies ended up as collateral damage. In the ensuing clash they successfully broke up the *sections*, resulting in complete mayhem with hexes and punches flying every which way, making it hard to distinguish friend from foe.

Hermione had accepted that they would need to be more proactive than merely defending themselves if they didn't wish to be cursed, kicked or punched to death. But she was still surprised by the degree of violence displayed on the battlefield.

The pack was already riled up as it was going to be a full moon that night, paired with the adrenaline boost that came from the fighting and the scent of blood in the air, it was nearly impossible for them to keep their violence in check. There would be no prisoners taken today.

This was unlike any of the battles Hermione had fought with the Order; they weren't striking to delay, disarm or capture their enemies. Diffindos were aimed at the throat, stomach or the Achilles tendon—whenever a clear shot was available. Engorgios were cast at people's heads causing them to inflate rapidly and explode. It was blood and guts and war in a way Hermione had never experienced before.

Hermione was beginning to feel the strain of trying to keep up with the rest of the fighters. She had managed for as long as they fought using magic alone, but faltered soon as it turned into a melee. Nearly every *were* had switched to hand-to-hand combat as it was quicker to deliver a punch to the mouth than it was to articulate the right spell with a busted lip. Her lack of training put Hermione at a disadvantage, on top of which, due to her slight build and shorter stature, she kept getting pushed around by those fighting near her, making it harder for her to hit any of her intended targets.

The fight moves Draco had taught her all those months ago were more suited for one-on-one combat and useless in the current situation. Transforming was also not an option. If trying to manoeuvre her human form within the restricted space was hard, it would be impossible to do so in her massive wolf form. Furthermore, she was quite likely to accidentally hurt someone from her side and would definitely be an easier target for the enemy due to the size of her wolf.

As a precaution Hermione began to cast only Protegos, thinking she at least wouldn't accidentally hurt someone from her side that way. Somewhere between the jostling, trying to stay on her feet, avoid getting hit and sticking close to the leader of her *section*, Hermione inadvertently made it to the periphery of the fighting where there was finally room for her to move around and get a better view of how the battle was progressing.

Everyone on the battlefield was engaged in a fight for their lives, which is why no one saw a second group of Black Cloaks and Death Eaters arrive from the north-west direction of the camp and attack those inside, till someone shouted that the camp was on fire.

They collectively turned towards the camp and saw one of the tents engulfed in flames. The fighting ceased and everyone momentarily froze when they recognised that the flames were fiendfyre and the Death Eater who had cast the spell looked like he or she was struggling to keep it in control.

*Weres* from the support group were seen running around, helping the non-combatants escape before the fiendfyre reached them. Hermione’s heart sank when she spotted Draco’s platinum blond hair amidst the fighting taking place in the camp. He was surrounded by the freshly arrived group of Black Cloaks and Death Eaters and behaving very oddly—instead of ducking and dodging, he
appeared to be deliberately moving into the path of many blows and spells. It was hard to tell through the crush of people around him if Draco was on his own; when she finally caught a glimpse of the people behind him, she saw Draco was protecting Cora and Oskar, each of whom held a baby in their hand.

Hermione's blood ran cold at the sight. She wanted to break ranks and rush to help her family but knew that running in the open without any cover would not help Draco or her sons in any way and would only result in her getting killed. She remembered the one rule Serafina had told her combatants should never forget during a battle:

"Keep your cool and follow orders."

They could succeed in battle if everyone did what was expected of them; when they acted on their own, they disregarded their own safety as well as the safety of those around them and could even compromise the entire mission.

Hermione took a deep breath, reined in her panic and called out to Serafina, directing her attention to Draco's plight.

Serafina appeared to consider their current position relative to the position of her alpha, as well as the commotion in the camp, before ordering everyone to fall back. Following her directions, they retreated north-east of the camp, away from their enemies. While this led to them consolidating, unfortunately, it also put them in the disadvantageous position of having to defend while moving uphill.

Another set of orders were called out, of which Hermione was only able to understand one, "Aim at the ground."

The combatants began to haphazardly hurl Bombardas and Confringos, blasting away rocks, shrubs, or even the ground directly in front of the fighters chasing after them. They didn't cause any injuries, but they did manage to create dust clouds that affected visibility and appeared to slow the enemy down. Understanding the objective, Hermione concentrated and released one powerful Bombarda Maxima, knocking many of the frontline attackers off their feet and engulfing the group in a large cloud of dust.

Serafina ordered them to use the moment's respite to quickly re-form their sections. At this point the combatants were just as far from the fight taking place between Draco and the second group of Black Cloaks as the group led by Fenrir- who had changed course once the dust clouds began to settle and were now rapidly moving towards the camp.

The re-formed sections were ordered to cut off Fenrir's attack by moving into his path. Once in position, Serafina called out a new set of commands so half the sections engaged in holding off the group led by Fenrir while the remaining sections did an about-turn and charged at the rear of the troops attacking the camp.

It was mostly Death Eaters in this second group of non-werewolves. Despite being more organised and experienced than the first group of non-weres they were unable to hold on to their formation under the two-pronged attack. They were attacked from the front by the non-combatant and support groups, led by Draco; and attacked from behind by half the combatants, including Hermione.

The closer she got to Draco and her sons the more Hermione was tempted to run to their aid. She had to remind herself over and over again that it wouldn't help and would only add to the chaos. As it was, due to her height, she couldn't get a good view of most of what was going on around her. Hermione had no idea what was happening with Serafina and the sections engaged in battle with
Fenrir behind her, neither could she see what was happening with Draco and others fighting in front of her. To stop herself from feeling overwhelmed, Hermione cleared her mind of all else—especially the pain and fear coming through the pack bonds—and focused solely on aping the movements of the leader of her section.

Draco shouted out some order, surprising Hermione—he sounded nearer than she expected him to be. Through a gap in the wall of people surrounding her, she was able to see that all the sections engaged with the second group of non-werewolf fighters had steered to one side, away from the enemy and closer to Draco; the support and non-combatant groups had also moved closer together.

At Draco's command they began to release a volley of offensive spells in the general direction of the second group of non-weres. Hermione saw that it wasn't about accuracy, but saturation; they were attempting to inundate their enemy with a barrage of spells that would distract them from noticing that they were being forced to pull back in the direction of the fiendfyre. In a matter of minutes the entire second group of Black Cloaks and Death Eaters was either burnt alive by the fiendfyre or fatally injured by the hail of spells they were unable to dodge.

Draco ordered the support and non-combatant groups to form into sections as well and turn their attention towards the main battle taking place between Fenrir's and Serafina's troops. There appeared to be a lot of pushing and shoving going on between the formations of the two groups, with neither group succeeding in penetrating the opposition.

Draco led the charge in an oblique attack, followed by the combatants. The non-combatants, who had stood besides Draco and fought only minutes ago, were ordered to fall behind so they were in the tail end of the column formed by the sections.

Hermione was confused by Draco's choice to strike at the cluster of enemy fighters on the right, since it was their centre that was successfully holding back the sections under Serafina's commands. However, his reasons soon became clear.

The right wing of Fenrir's motley group of werewolves, Black Cloaks and Death Eaters had comprised of their weakest fighters, who collapsed under the very first wave of Draco's attack. Instead of countering, these fighters attempted to retreat by backing into their centre. Due to them carelessly bumping into their own fighters, the tight formation of the stronger fighters in the centre was ruined.

Draco did not force them into the thick of the fray to chase the retreating fighters. Instead, he ordered them to run around in a manner that drove the scattered group of Fenrir's fighters closer and closer together. While the sections led by Serafina continued to engage Fenrir's fighters, the rest tried to herd their enemies, leaving them little room to use their limbs effectively.

Once the sections led by Draco had their enemy close to surrounded, he called out orders for Serafina and her troops—who upon hearing their alpha's commands briefly stopped fighting to look around them before switching tactics. Following Draco's instructions, instead of actively engaging the enemy in a fight, Serafina's troops used defensive spells to facilitate their movement towards the outer edges of the mass of bodies fighting.

Under Draco's leadership, pack members dodged blows and fired spells to provide cover to the combatants trying to break free from the crush, while simultaneously constricting the movements of Fenrir's troops by closing in on them.

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A veteran of many wars, Fenrir should have been able to easily pre-empt and counter any move of
Draco's- anyone with battle experience would have known to avoid the trap of encirclement, yet it was the second time Draco was going to pull it off in the same battle.

But the Fenrir in battle that day was nothing like the grand victor of the Pack Wars. Fenrir had abandoned every other strategy in favour of psychological warfare carried out through taunts and barbaric acts of savagery. He gouged out eyes and ate them, tore out limbs of one to pound the life out of another; he ripped off scalps and shoved them down the throats of his enemies. But it was all in vain. His enemies were former members of his pack who, used to his cruel ways, remained unfazed. If anything, it solidified their resolve to defeat Fenrir.

On the other hand Greyback's gruesome displays had the Black Cloaks ready to tuck tail and run. They had marched into battle on the orders of Lucius Malfoy, second in command to the Dark Lord himself. They were ordered to accompany Greyback and ensure he brought back a pregnant red-haired witch named Ginevra Weasley and a werewolf with distinct platinum blond hair, named Draco, alive as their prisoners. In exchange for their services they were promised a handsome reward, though they would have done the job for free because of the prestige that came with being recognised by the likes of Lord Malfoy.

In their hope to impress Lord Malfoy- and possibly be elevated to Death Eater status- the Black Cloaks had even been willing to take orders from the half-breed Greyback. However, having never participated in any of the wars or allowed to attend any of the Death Eater Revels, they had no idea what they were getting themselves into. They were horrified by both, Greyback's displays as well as the brutal reality of the battlefield. They had arrived expecting an easy and glorious conquest of the rogue werewolves; instead, the Purebloods felt like they were cattle in an abattoir waiting to be butchered by the half-breeds.

A few Black Cloaks had been quick to realise their error in judgement and tried to abandon the fight while they still could, only to meet their demise at Greyback's hands. The mutt- wanting to make an example out of the deserters- had dug into their chests, ripped out and then proceeded to eat their beating hearts while the rest of them had watched in dumbstruck terror.

"Don't even think of running away, you cunts, or it'll be your loved ones who'll be paying the price for your spinelessness... If I don't return victorious with the redhead and the twins, expect the Dark Lord to kill each and every member of your family for his entertainment at the next revel," he had shouted menacingly at them.

Sensing defeat, a desperate Greyback had outright lied to the people following him, but the Black Cloaks had believed it to be true. It was his threat- more than the promise of galleons or recognition- that motivated the Black Cloaks to stay on the battlefield and fight to defend Greyback with their very last breath.

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It took the older alpha some time, but he did eventually see through Draco's strategy to trap his troops. Fenrir issued his own orders, commanding his fighters to attack the centre of the pincers Draco's pack had formed around them.

The combatants had moved right and left to form the claws of the pincer, but the centre of their formation consisted primarily of non-combatants who failed to put up a fight, thus giving the enemy a breakout point. Draco's futile attempts to patch the opening by redirecting other sections there only further ruined their formation. Subsequently, the fight once again devolved into a melee.

Draco didn't show it, but he was feeling out of his depth. Trying to pull off a pincer formation was a risky move, but he had been desperate to bring the battle to a quick conclusion and now they were
worse off for it. Draco was aware he had not been in the right frame of mind from the very start of the battle, arriving as he did, right in the middle of a war zone, holding the splinched bodies of his infant sons. Objectively speaking, their injuries weren't as bad as they could have been, but it was hard to be objective when his hands and robes were stained with his children's blood.

Leaving Wilbur and Martin to Cora's care just so he could join in the battle was one of the toughest things Draco had ever had to do. In that moment he didn't care about defeating Fenrir or protecting the pack; he wanted to stay with his sons, ensuring Cora was doing everything she could to heal their injuries. However, by then a new group of Death Eaters had arrived, torn down the wards and attacked the camp itself. Left with no choice, with a heavy heart, Draco had turned his back on his sons to defend the camp.

Draco wanted Fenrir dead, but when he envisioned battling his former alpha, he had not expected his sons to be there on the battlefield with him. Them being present and injured changed everything for him.

Family was the only thing that had ever really mattered to Draco. As a Malfoy, he had wanted to make his family proud of him and prove himself worthy of his name and heritage. As a werewolf, he cared for the well-being of his sons, his mate and his pack, but he wasn't capable of being responsible for so many people. He wished to be selfish- to take his sons and hide- and ignore those relying on him.

Why did he ever think he could be an alpha? Why did he ever imagine he could handle being responsible for other people when he could not even keep his mate and sons safe? What did he even know about saving people? That job was for people like Potter.

But he was their alpha. And his pack was depending on him. So, once again Draco found himself unwillingly doing something that was expected of him and hoped that this time it was the right thing to do- that this time he would not be punished for his decision.

After hours of fighting, everyone was exhausted. Through the bonds, Draco knew his sons were okay but sensed that many in his pack had fallen while others were barely holding on. With the twilight hour quickly approaching, he feared that if they didn't emerge victorious soon they could all end up dead.

"I challenge you to a duel," Draco shouted at Fenrir while fighting off a couple of Black Cloaks in his way. All his efforts to get closer to Fenrir were proving ineffective as he kept getting blocked by someone or the other. "...if you win, we return as your prisoners."

Draco was placing the pack's welfare over his desire for revenge or even his desire to flee with his sons to safety. Soon, the moon would be out and, with the exception of the alphas, every werewolf on the battlefield would be vulnerable for the first couple of minutes when they underwent their painful transformations; plenty of time for the non-were survivors to slay his entire pack.

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"I challenge you to a duel... if you win, we return as your prisoners."

Hermione stopped short at Draco's words.

No!

Fenrir is mine.

She would fight Draco, if needed; no one was going to snatch her prey from her. And there would
be no prisoners taken either. She would fight or die fighting, but she was never going to be anyone's prisoner ever again.

Thankfully, Fenrir was not interested in Draco's offer.

"Give up now, pup... Moonrise is only a couple of hours away and I'm expecting reinforcements to arrive by then," replied Fenrir while singlehandedly pummelling two weres to death and not even sounding a little out of breath as he did so.

He raised his voice so he could be heard by every were on the battlefield, "Surrender now and I may spare your life, keep fighting and I promise you a horrible death."

Fenrir was lying again—about reinforcements as well as the possibility of showing mercy—but it didn't matter because everyone in the pack was of the same mind as Hermione. Unwilling to surrender, the pack continued to fight their former alpha and his troops.

Both sides were invigorated by the reminder of what would happen once the moon came out. The defenders, determined to finish the battle before moonrise, became more aggressive and also a little careless while the non-weres exercised caution, knowing they only had to hold out a little longer before they could seize victory.

Somehow Hermione had managed to stay on her feet, despite taking numerous hits to different parts of her body, and pushed herself to the edges of the fighting once more. She was able to survey the battlefield from her new position and was relieved to see Will and Marty still with Cora and Oskar, safe behind a wall of combatants. Not far from her, she also saw Draco, who appeared to be failing in his attempts to reach Fenrir.

As much as Hermione was eager for the battle to end, it didn't look like Fenrir's troops were ready to give up yet. Far from it, the Black Cloaks were fiercely defending Fenrir, displaying a surprising amount of loyalty towards someone the blood supremacists would typically look down upon as a half-breed. So long as the Black Cloaks acted as Fenrir's armour, none of the combatants could get close enough to kill Fenrir. And as long as Fenrir remained alive, the battle would continue.

Hermione stared at the Mountains of the Moon looming before her and considered calling upon her friends at Uagadou for help. But even if they agreed to help, and arrived in time, they would not know how to identify the enemy. Moreover, once the transformations were completed all the humans would be in grave danger. No, she decided, she could not call them.

The battle raged on with neither side making any progress. Draco looked like he was trying to organise a retreat, thought Hermione. She moved closer to him so they could have a conversation without drawing the attention of half the weres on the battlefield.

"What's the plan?" she asked him.

During the brief glimpse she got of his face, he reminded her of the scared little boy she would sometimes see during their Sixth Year—back when he had been given the task to fix the vanishing cabinet by Voldemort. This couldn't be a good sign, she thought.

"Uagadou," replied Draco, continuing to fight. "Take the pack there. Your friends should be able to help."

"No! We can't put all those children at risk."

"They're going to die if we remain here."
Not that moving was going to be any easier, but she understood Draco's point- the pack needed a safe place to undergo the transformation and it needed to be somewhere nearby as everyone was either too fatigued, too injured, or both, to pull off long distance disapparition.

Hermione remembered the cave she had hidden in after she was turned. It was not large enough to accommodate the entire pack but it could provide shelter to their injured and more vulnerable members.

"There's a cave in the forest," she shouted. "I've used it before."

"Opening's partially blocked by a pile of rocks?"

"Yes."

"Our trackers know its location."

Draco ducked out of the way of a blow to his head and stepping in front of Hermione cast a shield charm to block the Confringo aimed at her. Hermione fell into step beside Draco and they fought side-by-side for some time. With Draco physically fighting off everyone within arm's length, Hermione was able to focus on casting powerful attack spells. As a result they ended up being far more effective working together, than either one of them had been on their own.

"Cave works... Let's move the pack... You lead the way... I'll protect the rear... Wait for my signal... then, start to run," Draco told Hermione between throwing punches and blocking hexes. He then gave the command for the pack to retreat towards the tree-line of the forest.

With time quickly running out on them, it felt like forever had passed before they reached the boundary of the anti-disapparition wards they had set up. When the trees were only a few feet away, Draco ordered the pack to apparate to the cave; those who could not apparate or did not know the location were told to follow Hermione. Using just the trees for cover each one was going to have to make a run for it.

Draco shoved Hermione out of the path of a Diffindo and gave her the signal to run. The curse missed her but grazed his shoulder.

Draco was just as bruised and battered as she was but she had not seen him getting injured till now. She watched in horror as the curse sliced through her mate's flesh and blood poured down his arm.

She needed to help him, thought Hermione, moving towards him to do so.

Draco stopped her.

"Don't," he warned. "Go -- Now."

He blindly hit at the Black Cloaks surrounding him to provide her with the opportunity to run. Hermione wasn't over her shock but forced herself to do as Draco asked. Casting a Protego on herself, she ran into the forest.

Hermione heard the sounds of people running behind her. She also heard a few loud cracks that sounded like some members of the pack may have succeeded in disapparating away in spite of the anti-disapparition jinxes she could hear being hurled by their enemies. However, she never stopped, or even slowed down, to turn around and confirm any of this for herself. Completely knackered, Hermione kept running, using the last of her energy reserves to lead the pack to the cave.

She could have run much faster in her wolf form, but she currently lacked the energy needed to force
the change. So she remained in her human form, pushing her human body beyond its capabilities. While running it didn’t escape her notice that, not twenty-four hours ago, she had run through the same forest, pulse-racing, for an entirely different reason.

Hermione ran all the way, till she at last reached the bottleneck in the path that led to the narrow opening of the cave. She saw Adrian and a couple of combatants emerge from the direction of the cave, most likely having apparated there.

"Anyone - else - make - it?" she asked between pants, barely able to stand as the muscles in her legs shook uncontrollably.

"Only a few. I've got the non-combatants settled inside..."

Adrian trailed off mid-response, staring at something behind Hermione. Curious about what had distracted him, she turned to see members of their packs making their way towards them in groups of threes and fours.

"We need to get Cora here right away- too many injured who'll need to be patched up before the change."

Hermione understood what Adrian meant; the majority of them had survived, but sustained serious injuries.

"I'll go," she offered, even though she wanted to crash and have healing potions poured down her throat. Out of the two of them, Adrian was far more familiar with pack duties; in the little time they had, he would do a better job of organising the arriving weres and preparing for the full moon than she could.

It was much slower going this time around as Hermione dragged herself back in the direction she had just come from. Along the way, she passed many arrivals and began to grow hopeful that they would all make it somehow.

Hermione had to keep moving as she had yet to see any sign of Cora. She rested heavily against a tree to briefly catch her breath when she heard the sound of several growls and a loud wail. But it was the sound of crying babies that send Hermione into a panic. She dashed towards the sound, no thought given to the possibility of stumbling on any of the rocks or the certain damage she was causing herself by pushing her body past its capacity.

To her great relief she didn't need to run far before she came across a band of combatants, including Serafina. They were moving in close formation, shielding a pair of omegas who held the twins protectively.

Assured that her sons were unharmed and well-guarded, she was able to calm down enough to finally notice the stand-off taking place a few feet away between a dozen of the enemy troops, Draco and three combatants. Cora was also there, bent over a halfway transformed Oskar, who was very clearly bleeding to death. While the others fought, Cora was crying and desperately trying to heal Oskar, but Hermione could see how pointless it was.

"Forget these mongrels, go get the babies," bellowed one of the Black Cloaks.

"There! They went that way."

Hermione, who had stayed hidden behind a tree a couple of feet away, watched the Black Cloaks turn in the direction taken by Serafina. Understanding their intentions, she cast an Expulso that was powerful enough to slam their bodies to the ground. The ones who still remained standing were
quickly taken care of by the combatants.

"Hurry," she yelled, worried the explosion would attract others to their current location.

No one moved. Grief-stricken, they watched as the light left Oskar's eyes.

"Leave him," she ordered when they still wouldn't move.

The sun had begun its descent towards the horizon; there wasn't much time left and plenty to get do. Hard as it was they needed to accept that, "He's moved beyond the veil now."

When they still wouldn't move, she physically yanked Cora to her feet.

"We have living pack members in need of healing before the moon is out, Cora; or forget about Fenrir, the transformation will kill them first," she cautioned the mediwitch.

"Anyone left behind?" Hermione asked no one in particular.

"Only the dead," replied Draco, his face a hardened mask and his gaze fixed on Oskar's lifeless form.

Chapter End Notes

Fenrir calls the werewolves who left his pack 'rogues', because that is how he see them. They aren't rogues in the sense the word's been used in the rest of this fic.
At Hermione's suggestion, the group apparated to the cave. Draco was distant and would not make eye contact with Hermione even though he took her side-long with him.

Upon arriving, they found two dozen of the most severely injured pack members—ones unlikely to even survive the change—along with Cora and the twins situated inside the cave. Wilbur and Martin looked cozy in a bassinet—transfigured from a branch and some leaves—which had been fortified with protection spells to ensure the twins weren't accidentally injured during transformation.

Outside the cave, everyone else was awaiting the arrival of their alphas. Hermione studied Draco as he walked past, enquiring about his plan for the next phase of the battle. Draco still wore his mask, but his eyes, she thought his eyes betrayed his emotions.

Concerned, she pulled him to the side and asked him what was wrong.

"We should not have come here," he whispered discretely to her, still not making eye contact. "This was a really bad idea. Packed in one spot like this -- We've essentially trapped ourselves in."

"Then let's turn it into a trap for Fenrir," said Hermione. "Whatever happened to all your Slytherin cunning?" she teased.

"How can you be so flippant at a time like this? Don't you see, Hermione, we're all going to die because I messed up..." He clenched his jaw, and continued to whisper angrily, "Oskar is already dead... Oskar- and so many others who were depending on me- died today because I failed in my duty to protect them."

The anger suddenly left Draco, making him look deflated as he stood before her, hands hanging limply at his sides, head hung low and eyes squeezed shut like he was trying not to cry. In a small voice he confessed, "I always fail whenever my family needs me the most."

Hermione slipped her hand into Draco's; intertwining her fingers with his, she gave his hand a squeeze.

"Today has been terrible, but I refuse to abandon hope... I want to believe that together we can find a way to beat Fenrir... that we will survive because we have so much to live for."

There was a great deal she would have liked to tell him, but there wasn't enough time to do so. Hermione was scared herself, but her determination to live trumped her fears. If they were going to survive the night, thought Hermione, they needed to act quickly and there could be no room for self-doubt.

She raised Draco's chin and forced him to look at her.

"I believe in you, Draco," Hermione stated with conviction. "We all do," she added with a jerk of her head to indicate the werewolves gathered round them, observing their alphas with an eager expression on their faces.

Draco swallowed the lump in his throat and nodded. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath and blew it out noisily.
Hermione’s suggestion to trap Fenrir sounded like the best idea so far, so Draco called Adrian and Serafina to join them in quickly forming a plan to do just that.

Hermione had spent enough time to know the forest and the surrounding region well; the same was true of Draco and his pack. Since they lacked numerical strength, they hoped to use this knowledge of the local geography to their advantage.

They were certain that so far the enemy had not followed them to the cave. They also agreed that given the number of times they had run through the forest within the last twenty-four hours it would be very hard for Fenrir to track them by scent alone—especially with the distracting scent of human flesh and blood lingering in the air now.

Considering the only way left for Fenrir to track them was through his bonds with the ones he had sired, Draco formed a team of thirty of their best fighters, who were not turned by Fenrir. This group was sent away with instructions from Draco.

The remaining weres—now numbering in less than a hundred—stood guard outside, blocking the path that led to the cave. Their proximity to the cave was determined by how long they took to transform—the weakest members stood closer to the cave while the strongest stood up front. As bait, Hermione stood front and centre of this new group of combatants.

Fenrir's troops had found them by the time everyone took their positions. Their enemy appeared to be conserving their energy, choosing to wait till moonrise when they would be able to massacre the werewolves with little effort. They could smell Fenrir and the non-weres but not the werewolves, making them wonder what kind of ambush Fenrir had planned. Except—Fenrir had arrived with only the non-weres.

Fenrir was aware that if he had brought his wolves along, there was a good chance they would be unable to resist the appetising scent of human flesh. Not wishing to see the Black Cloaks—who he needed to defeat the rogues—torn apart before they had fulfilled their purpose, Fenrir had left his pack behind to feast on the corpses littering the battlefield.

Even without his pack, Fenrir's troops still exceeded Draco’s. Not that it mattered how many rogues there were, when the change hit them they would all be helpless and at his mercy.

Fenrir stepped into view but stayed out of the range of any spells they could fire. "Draco, you tricky usurper, I have an offer for you," he announced scornfully. "No one else has to die today if you give me the twins and the Mudblood."

"I have a better offer," countered Hermione, ignoring Draco's earlier instruction to avoid directly engaging Fenrir in any way. "Fight me. Defeat me in a fair fight and I'll willingly go with you... But if you lose, your people need to withdraw and return home."

When he didn't respond she taunted him, "What is it, Fenrir? Can't stand the idea of a fair fight? Like a thief, you needed to abduct me because you knew you couldn't beat Draco in a fair fight..."

Fenrir continued to disregard her, so Hermione persisted.

"I think you're just too much of a coward to fight me... That's it, isn't it? The big bad wolf is afraid I'll beat him again... Did you tell your pack who gave you that scar on your face? Bet they don't know how their alpha tucked tail and ran away the night he turned me-"

"You lying bitch! You tricked me that night."

"-because he was too afraid to fight me."
"I'm not 'fraid to fight a pup like you."

"Prove it then. Fight me."

"I'll fight you, you cunt. And when I beat you I'm going to kill Draco and everyone else right before your eyes."

"You'll have to defeat me first. Make your troops swear on their magic that they will leave and not attack when you lose."

Fenrir wavered. He had not intended to keep any of the promises he made.

Hermione saw the look on his face and understood his intentions.

"You're a thief, a coward, and a liar," Hermione spat angrily at him.

The moon slowly peeped out. Fenrir looked up at it and grinned.

"I'm also going to be your mate in a few minutes, I am," Fenrir jeered at her. "No potion for you this time, Mudblood; I'll be using Draco's blood to lube you up."

Fenrir transformed into his wolf and retreated behind his fighters.

Under the moonlight, Hermione was easily able to change into her wolf despite feeling too exhausted to do so a short while ago. Transformation complete, she noticed Draco's white wolf staring at her from where he stood, nostrils slightly flared; clearly his wolf liked what he saw and was eager to claim her but now was not the time for it. She cocked her head in the direction of the approaching enemies to remind him of their priorities. Seeing the Black Cloaks, the white wolf quickly sobered up and took up an attack stance.

Draco had instructed the pack to hold the line by spreading themselves such that the enemy could not go around or past them. They would be vastly outnumbered when the moon came out, so Draco wanted to avoid an all-out fight in the initial stage. Instead they would wait for their enemy to come to them, past the bottleneck in the access path, thereby limiting the number of people able to attack them all at once.

The White and black wolves worked together to counter the attack on their packs. The white wolf rammed his head into the shins and knees of the wizards with enough force to shatter bones and have them drop to the ground so the black wolf could easily maul and incapacitate them. But, despite their joint efforts, they couldn't protect everyone. By the time the first fifteen minutes- the most critical stage of this battle- had passed, there were more than a dozen half transformed wolves who lay dead and close to twenty who lay severely injured along the path that led to the cave. Nearly every casualty had been a combatant.

They could not see Fenrir but they could smell him. He stood lurking somewhere in the shadow of
the trees not too far away from where the fight was taking place. They needed to draw him out somehow and get him away from the Black Cloaks. Draco and Hermione were confident that Fenrir could be bested in a one-on-one fight but he continued to remain untouchable while he hid behind the wizards.

Fenrir refused to walk into the trap the Usurper had set for him. What kind of a fool did they take him for, thought Fenrir, if they expected him to fall for such an obvious ruse? The path leading to where the rogues were fighting the Black Cloaks narrowed, with most of the region obscured by trees and boulders. He couldn't see them, but just to the right of where the fighting was taking place he could definitely smell more *weres*. Since none of the Black Cloaks bothered with that direction, he assumed that must be the cave some of his pack had overheard the Usurper and the Mudblood mention on the battlefield. They were trying to lure him in just so they could ambush him from the side. But, he wasn't falling for it.

As the fighting progressed, the grey wolf noticed that while most of the rogues attacked and retreated—drawing his troops further in and closer to the cave—some of the Black Cloaks had succeeded in separating the Mudblood from the Usurper and the rest of the rogues. He noticed that not only was she moving in the wrong direction—away from others—but she was thrashing about wildly to fight off the spells thrown at her. When she was a little closer he noticed the cut above her eye, dripping blood, which had most likely impaired the Mudblood's vision, he supposed.

The grey wolf joined the Black Cloaks in stalking the Mudblood down a path that led to a clearing dominated by a rock overhang; it was a dead-end. Even if the Mudblood had been in any state to do so, the overhang made it impossible to fly without risking crashing into the rocky protrusions. The Black Cloaks ignored the Mudblood as she staggered for a few paces, then stumbled and fell. Instead, they worked on quickly setting up anti-disapparition wards so they had her completely trapped.

Fenrir changed into his human form to order the Black Cloaks to halt their attack and make way for him. He had no plans to kill the Mudblood; she was far more valuable to him alive. Where he had casually observed the slaughter of the rogues, he had gotten excited seeing the Mudblood cornered and then prone on the ground. If he could take her as his prisoner, he could mate with her and sire many children. Having children of his own, Fenrir had come to realise, was something he desired more than everything else. He desired children more than being recognised as a superior by the snooty Purebloods in the Dark Lord's inner circle, and even more than he desired being finally considered worthy of the Dark Mark.

Little did Fenrir know that he had acted just as expected and trapped himself in just like they planned. Hermione howled, signalling to the elite group of combatants Draco had sent to hide nearby earlier.

The group flew in from behind the Black Cloaks, blocking their exit. The Black Cloaks had two choices now—defend themselves against the attack on their rear or protect Fenrir. Under assault, they were forced to choose to former.

Fenrir saw the black wolf's face twist into the approximation of a smile and knew he had played right into their hands. Angry, he charged at her while she was in the midst of getting up, landing a kick that rattled her skull; he needed her alive, not conscious, to knot with her. Fenrir watched with satisfaction as the black wolf fell to the ground, genuinely disoriented this time. He slammed his foot into her rib cage, not stopping after one kick.

Right leg. Left leg.

Right leg. Left leg.
He alternated between both legs to kick her repeatedly with enough force to lift her body off the ground, enough force to break the dire wolf's bones.

Fenrir's kicks hit Hermione with the force of a wrecking ball, transforming her body into a limp bag of meat and bones. She had to get away from Fenrir's assault before she bled to death from internal injuries. In her wolf form, she could have easily borne Fenrir's thrashing, if hours of fighting had not already drained her of her strength. Unlike Draco and the other werewolves from Fenrir's former pack, Hermione's wolf, while naturally strong, had not trained to build the kind of endurance needed to sustain herself through such prolonged fights. The kick to her head only made things worse, causing a ringing in her ears that was louder than the sounds of the battle taking place around her. Even the sound of ribs cracking had sounded so distant; she didn't know it came from within her own body till she felt the explosion of pain in her chest when she tried to draw in a breath.

"I don't want to kill you, Mudblood," Fenrir assured her once he stopped. "You can make this a lot easier on yourself by submitting to me. You've done it before... you know it's not hard," he whispered seductively to her.

Never!

Never again.

I'd rather die.

Hermione was in too much pain to even growl in response, but she wanted to shout at Fenrir that she was never going to willingly mate with him. She was prepared to die than be taken against her will again.

Just as Hermione resigned herself to being killed for refusing to yield to Fenrir, her would-be killer flew backwards with a great deal of force. It took her brain a few moments to process what was happening, so when she felt several spells cast at her, she braced herself, expecting pain, only to feel tremendous relief instead.

Through tear-clouded vision Hermione saw she was surrounded by four of her pack's wolves attempting to heal her. Sensing her distress, members of her pack nearest to her had come to their alpha's aid. Unfortunately, they paid a steep price for rescuing their alpha.

The worst of her injuries healed, Hermione was trying to get back on her feet when she heard Fenrir laugh- but his focus was no longer on her.

"Pathetic... How any of you weaklings ever survived in my pack is a mystery!" Fenrir mockingly addressed Hermione's saviours while executing the last of the four with great ease.

As a member of the Order, Hermione had found herself in many life-or-death situations where she had been forced to fight. Despite that, in all her years, Hermione had never actively killed anyone. Even in the battle that day, though she had delivered many a mortal wound, she had not aimed to kill any of her attackers. But watching Fenrir kill her wolves- wolves she was meant to protect, wolves who had saved her life- broke something inside her. Hermione felt her humanity abandon her as she found herself engulfed with a hunger for blood and vengeance.

The she-wolf launched herself at Fenrir, using her head to deliver an uppercut to his chin that send Fenrir flying into the trees. She pursued him, catching up to him just as he cancelled the anti-disapparition jinx. Before he could disapparate, the she-wolf pounced on him, claws extended.

With her front paws, the she-wolf latched onto his shoulders, opened her jaws wide, and used her
fangs to tear out Fenrir's throat, causing him to eventually choke on his own blood and die. For the first time since she was turned, the she-wolf was completely unrestrained in every manner and succumbed to her bloodlust. She ripped out chunks of Fenrir's flesh and consumed it without caring that she was cannibalising one of her own kind.

The gruesome sight of Greyback's mangled corpse being chewed up by the ferocious looking dire wolf struck terror in the hearts of not only the Black Cloaks, but also the wolves, who backed away in fear even as they howled in celebration of Fenrir's death.

News of Fenrir's death was quick to spread, leaving the Black Cloaks worried about how this would impact them. They had failed in their mission, which, according to Greyback's threat, meant the worst kind of death for their loved ones. Some of the smarter ones tried to think of ways in which they could mitigate the impending disaster and figured that perhaps Lord Malfoy would be willing to intervene on their behalf if they were able to accomplish his goal for this mission.

There had been no sign of any pregnant witch, and definitely not any pregnant redhead, but they had seen the platinum blond haired werewolf many times during the battle and when the moon came out they had seen him change into the white wolf- who wasn't really white, they realised, but the same shade of platinum blond as his hair in his human form.

The white wolf was defending a group of injured omegas when he was caught off-guard by some of the Black Cloaks. Draco had been prepared for a lot of things to happen during this battle, but he had not been prepared for the enemy to take him away as their hostage.

After Fenrir's death and Draco's abduction, every Black Cloak who didn't have the good sense to flee was killed by the werewolves. By midnight the battle had concluded and the pack had won. But with one alpha captured, the other acting like a rogue, half the pack dead and more than a quarter critically wounded, it felt like a completely hollow victory.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you've read Chp 49 and didn't accidentally skip to 50.

Sorry for the long wait- but I thought you'd prefer to read this entire sequence of events in one go instead of having to wait to read the conclusion of the battle.

I really struggled to come up with a believable battle scene given how magic can conveniently create conflict as well as resolve it within the HP verse. It was also hard for me to describe the battle in a way that was easy to visualise without being too wordy. Don't know if the end result is engaging, I just know that, considering I spent 3 weeks on these two chapters, I'll be seriously pissed if I read this a year later and find it's sh!t.

Thank you for the kudos- we've crossed 2k now... I still remember how exciting it was to see this fic reach 500.
Chapter 51

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The she-wolf struggled to breathe. She was dizzy and felt confused when she looked around her. Her body was bruised and battered, but the real pain came from somewhere deep inside her. Where she had once felt the completeness that came with the pack bonds, there was nothing now; it was all gone.

She had taken her vengeance by killing and devouring the grey wolf till all that remained were his bones; it did nothing to dull her pain.

Her grief weighed heavy within her, dragging her down into its inky depths, choking what was left of her humanity.

***

She woke up feeling hollow on the inside. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't remember the details of what had taken place. All she remembered was the rage and madness that followed the feeling of having each of her bonds severed.

She couldn't be hungry- the foul taste of her last kill still lingered in her mouth; regardless, hunger and rage appeared to be the only thoughts left in her head anymore.

*Hunt, kill, eat. Hunt, kill, eat-

Her wants and desires were so much simpler now. No more pack. No more playing alpha. She was a lone wolf and free to do as she pleased.

***

The she-wolf licked her paws, wiping off all traces of the group of wolves that had ambushed her. Like most things tonight, the attack was a blur in her memory. She remembered their fangs and claws sending her tumbling. There was pain, but more than that, there was anger. She had attacked her enemies with all the fury she possessed, tearing out flesh and greedily swallowing it whole.

One by one she had dealt with her attackers, growing stronger by consuming their life forces, but it wasn't enough; she still needed more. Her body, though healed, did not feel whole. Her belly, though full, was nowhere near satisfied. The hunger inside her consumed her as much as it did her enemies.

She spent the rest of the night prowling the forest- needing something to fill that emptiness inside her- drawn towards the scent of flesh.

***

The she-wolf squinted in the sunlight. She blinked in confusion, wondering how the sun could be shining when she could feel the darkness bear down on her from all sides. She felt like she had lost something- she wasn't sure what it was or when it had happened- but she was certain something vital was missing.

She flexed her muscles, and then lay back down. It made no sense. There was nothing wrong with her body, but there was a weariness in her that went beyond flesh and bone.
Come morning, with Draco gone, it fell to Adrian to pick up the pieces of their pack. With a heavy heart the young beta went about the task of performing his duties. He was able to see to the pack’s physical needs but was unable to comfort them—there were some things only their alpha could provide them. However, Draco remained missing with no clues for where the Black Cloaks might have taken him.

Hermione was missing as well. She was last seen killing Fenrir, when she appeared to have gone completely feral following the death of her pack. Their trackers had failed to locate her, but they did find the carnage she had left in her wake.

Fenrir’s pack had gone rogue following his death. Draco’s pack had killed any rogue they encountered during the night, but they didn’t have able-bodied weres to currently spare for the task of hunting down the rest of the rogues. Adrian added the task to the pack’s ever-growing list of things they would need to take care of once they recovered.

Building a new settlement for themselves was going to be at the top of their list. A couple of their betas had gone to the camp to retrieve Cora’s medical supplies, and anything else of use they could find. When they got there they saw the fiendfyre had destroyed most of their camp and the fire was still raging—although it looked like some of the locals were dealing with it. To avoid a confrontation with the locals, they snuck away empty-handed. They would have to return for their belongings another time— if there even was anything left once the fires had burned out. For now, the pack continued to live in the cave, where they would remain till they found something better.

The pack mourned the death of their elder and worried about their healer. Cora had remained stoic about Oskar’s death so far, but that may be because she had been too busy trying to heal injured members of her pack without a wand or any kind of healing potions or salves. There was a good chance Cora would fall apart once she had a moment’s pause to realise Oskar was well and truly gone.

They gathered as many of their fallen brethren, or whatever parts of them they could find, as they could. They would need to dispose of the bodies in a fitting manner and hold some kind of service so the pack could properly mourn for their loss.

Adrian felt out of his depth. It was one thing to play head beta when everything was fine, but it wasn’t. He tried to do his duty, focusing on one little task at a time, but it was hard to ignore the pile of dead bodies or the painful groans of the ones alive. The pack needed a proper alpha right now, he needed an alpha to guide him and tell him what to do. Looking at Wilbur and Martin an idea began to form in his mind.

Over the course of the night, many concerned locals alerted the Headmaster of Uagadou about the clouds of smoke seen not too far from the school. They also received reports of wolf attacks in the neighbouring village. Given that wolves were not native to their region and the full moon the previous night, it wasn’t farfetched to think that werewolves could be involved.

The most obvious suspects were the group of foreigners camped at the base of the Mountains of the Moon. No one had cared to challenge their presence, thus far, as they were not perceived to be a threat by the locals. Now however, the school authorities decided that the foreigners had outstayed their welcome.

Members of the school staff arrived at the camp and were shocked to find the surrounding area
littered with human body parts. Nevertheless, they had to ignore the half-eaten corpses to deal with the fiendfyre that had ravaged most of the tents and was progressing up the side of the mountain.

It took several of their best witches and wizards working in tandem to finally bring the fiendfyre under control and cease the flames.

Theo stood petrified, staring at the object lying on his bedroom floor. Shortly after his call with Draco ended, an owl had tapped on his window dragging with it a rather heavy looking package. Theo had cautiously opened the mysterious box to find himself staring into the lifeless eyes of Mr. Beefcake himself.

Startled, when he realised just what it was he was holding, Theo had dropped the box and watched in muted horror as a head rolled out of the box and on to his floor. He had spent the next fifteen minutes hyperventilating as he realised that he had been compromised.

Eventually- after downsing an entire vial of the cheering potion- Theo calmed down and tossed his bed covers over the disembodied head to hide it from his sight. The Elixir of Euphoria made it easier to stop wondering if Gunnolf would still be alive if he had gone to Bleidd when Draco first asked him to and focus his thoughts on trying to figure out who could have sent him the package and why they had chosen to send him an unveiled threat when they could win favour with the Dark Lord by ratting him out.

Uncertain about just how much the other person knew, what they wanted from him or what they planned to do, Theo decided it would be in his best interest to keep his distance from Bleidd and Draco for now.

The group of Black Cloaks stood nervously in the anteroom of Malfoy Manor with a stunned and unconscious Draco levitated besides them. They were there to see Lucius, unaware he was in Bulgaria at the time.

Unless it was someone of high social standing, the house elves were expected to turn away anyone who came seeking an audience with their master. They would not have normally dared to bother their mistress over the arrival of such an unimportant group of people, if not for Draco's presence. Instead of having them brought before her, Narcissa went to see her visitors in the anteroom where there were no portraits that could spy on her; she needed to confirm that the prisoner was indeed her son.

It didn't take much probing on Narcissa's part to learn what had transpired in Uganda. Based on their accounts, she gathered that Greyback, and everyone who had followed him into battle, had perished. The group of Black Cloaks standing before her were the only survivors. They had escaped from the Mountains of the Moon and come straight to Wiltshire to report to Lucius; they had yet to inform anyone else about the outcome of the battle or the prisoner they had captured.

Despite the striking similarity between Draco and Lord Malfoy, the Black Cloaks had yet to work out that their captive was related to the Malfoys. They did not question Lady Malfoy's motives when she offered to let them use the Malfoy dungeons to hold the creature they had captured and they expressed gratitude for her hospitality when she suggested they stay at the Manor till her husband returned.
Narcissa gave her elves careful instructions to ensure none of the portraits caught a glimpse of either Draco or any of the visitors on the way down to the dungeons. The elves were also bound with oaths to never mention anything that happened that day to Lucius when he returned home.

That night, Narcissa treated her guests to a lavish feast of the choicest wizarding dishes and finest firewhiskey to thank them for their dedication to the Dark Lord's cause. It was only fitting, thought Narcissa, that they enjoy a last meal before their execution.

Chapter End Notes

Short chapter. Would've finished sooner, except I took a break from Wolf's Mate to write a chapter for A Convenient Affair (needed my smut fix). Funny how I feel guilty about any delays in posting chapters for this fic, but I'm not bothered when months go by without me updating the other fic.

Updates will continue to be sporadic for a while.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!