The Pride's Hatchling

by Petrakitty

Summary

A Potions accident leads to a de-aged Draco being taken into the Lion's Den and things go down the rabbit hole from there. Who is The Pride of Gryffindor, and what is going on at Hogwarts? Surprises abound in a tale of the repercussions of greed and betrayal. This accident may lead to the Wizarding World's salvation…or downfall.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Prologue: The Spell

Chapter 1: Prologue: The Spell

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any of the characters therein.

Warnings include:

-Evil/Manipulative Dumbledore and McGonagall (well explained, not just because),
-Good/Moral Severus and Lucius
-Eventual Slash (multiple couples will be slash and multiple couples will be Het.) I am keeping the rating T until the slash occurs, but there will be an eventual rating change as well as warnings before chapters that warrant more than a T rating.

A/N on Canon: So, this is an adopted story and plot. I changed as little as possible to kept with the original and moved in my own direction from there. This story is 7th year, Half-Blood Prince never happened, but everything else is the same. During 6th year the Golden Trio went to classes, got into mischief and Voldemort did something just in time to get final exams canceled.

Monday,

Sept. 1, 1991

GRYFFINDOR!

He never knew what awaited him as that fated word fell from the Hat's tattered mouth. The Gryffindors clapped and cheered, hails of "We got Potter!" could be heard, but it was a forced acceptance. Forced by a spell placed on them this very night in the year and years past. Every Gryffindor year 2 through 7 were without fail enslaved to the behavioral traits of their House, and had been for decades now, despite the fact that many of them should never have been there. What Harry and every other student could not see were the lines of strain around every exuberant student who knew the fate that would befall the newest Gryffs that night. Their bracelets heated as they fought it's compulsions, hating themselves for cheering each name. They knew that in a few short hours, these first years, still innocent of the evil in the world…Soon, they too would know the hell that awaited them their first night inside the Lion's Den.

Bravery. Courage. Daring. Nerve. All of these, along with chivalry were good character traits in moderation, but being forced to go against your own nature, to be constantly short-tempered, reckless and ever rushing into pointless heroics and useless self-sacrifice. That was their fate. To embody all that encompasses the House of Godric Gryffindor, as interpreted by Minerva McGonagall.

Since 1956 when she took over as Head of House Gryffindor, Minerva McGonagall had placed an obscure charm over the Sorting hat. Being of Godric's House, the original creator of the Hat, she was privy to old notes on the Hat's creation, and knew how to circumvent certain sortings. Her charm convinced the hat that any child of a light family, a rich family, or a child with the potential for a large magical core and reserves should be sorted into Gryffindor. There were many students who were so perplexed about their sortings, but accepted it as their nature, but before the night was out they knew what had happened. They knew that they were in the House not of the Brave, but of the Enslaved.

Their pumpkin juice, the only juice served at Feasts, was laced down the entire Gryffindor table,
courtesy of the House Elves who knew not what that the "Nutrient Potion" the Gryffindors needed was actually a calming draught laced with a compulsion liquid. The first years regularly needed the calming effects after the excitement of the day, but combined with the compulsion draught, they were helpless to fight the charm McGonagall cast over them until it was set deep into their psyche. Anytime they were not inside the Lion's Den they would behave like a "True Gryffindor." Inside, the room The Lady Hogwarts herself, was able to shield them from the wort of the bind's compulsions. The castle was just too vast and the ward structure of the castle overloaded with useless wards that took too much strength from her.

Yet, their freedom to act as their true nature willed inside the Den was only a small consolation for their very nature pushed them to spend ample time exploring and finding mischief around the castle and her grounds.

"Welcome to Gryffindor Tower, House of Godric Gryffindor. Seconds through Seventh year students will go to the beds immediately. First years please have a seat as I go over a few House Rules."

The tiny first years watched as the students walked away, and Harry knew something was wrong as he saw silent tears running down the faces of one of the girls as she ran out of the room. He tensed, drawing McGonagall's attention. She raised her wand in one hand and a fiery crystal in the other. In a flash she had them pointing to the them, murmuring, "moribus e pueri teneantur ad voluntatem meam!"

The children screamed as pain tore through their bodies in two directions. One flowing out as the crystal pulled a bit of their own magic as well as the latent magic from the castle itself to power the spell. The spell then created a strip of pure energy around each child's left wrist. It stopped just short of burning them, but tears and wails flowed through the room in abundance. One girl blacked out from the shock to her system.

McGonagall pursed her lips in disfavor, sending an Ennervate at the weak child, they were Gryffindor now, and would need to toughen up. Immediately. She watched the students gather themselves, the girls gathering together, sniffing and wiping the tears from their eyes. The boys were rubbing their arms, and-yes, Mr. Potter was glaring death at her his eyes shifting from their Avada Kedavra green to that of jade for an instant. McGonagall cleared her throat, watching every child save one flinch back at the noise. Perfect.

"Again, I welcome you to the Lion's Den. I am Professor McGonagall, your Head of House. From this day forward you will learn what it truly means to be of Godric Gryffindor's Noble Army."

**Literal Latin Phrase Translation: "behavior of the children are bound to my own will"

Google translate is never your friend, so I apologize for the rough spell work.

I am a firm believer that the intent behind the spell is what causes the desired results. Just as Bombarda means cannon, but it's used to create a blast, not to create a physical cannon. So, here McGonagall uses this spell with the intent to bind their behaviors to Gryffindor's traits because that is what she is willing the spell to accomplish.

So, Hi everyone! I'm PetraKitty. As you can see, I have adopted Tiger DeRanged's The Pride's Hatchling. I've loved this story since I first saw it. Something pulled at me to read it, despite hating to read WIPs. So when I saw that it was being put up for adoption, I had to grab it. I hope I can do as well as Tiger, I know the story she started was amazing, and I hope to continue in that fashion.

This story is also posted on FF, but because of some of the themes of this it is the T rated version. Here is where the darker and hotter scenes will actually be shown, so fair warning.
I really hope you enjoy the story.

A/N 6/15: I’m back, for reals this time. I know whoever is still reading this is freaking out, but I didn’t take the story down, just trying to revamp it. I have gotten past the exhaustion of year 1 in the US education system and the 7 cold/flu/bugs I got in 10 months. So, be on the look out here for a better story than before.
Friday, Monday 10, 1997

Harry sat in Snape's class trying to ignore Ron's constant rattling about Hermione and how hot she was. He gave a grateful sigh when his magic instinctively put a Silencio on the babbling red-head and went back to his potion. Neville shot him a thankful smile over his shoulder before quickly turning back to his cauldron in hopes that Snape wouldn't notice and leave them be for the class. It was obviously too late as Harry caught the swirling black cloak of the Head of Slytherin heading their way. He kept his eyes down and focused on his potion, maybe if he didn't meet the Professor's eyes he wouldn't need to put on the Gryffindor act.

"Mr. Potter," came Snape's silky drawl, Harry cursed as an excited shiver went down his spine, why him?! He quickly recovered and masked his reaction quickly before looking up and meeting his Potion Professor's onyx eyes, "Yes, Professor?" he asked quietly, continuing to work on his potion, he was almost finished.

"Why does it seem Mr. Weasley is speaking with no voice?" his voice was not accusing for once and merely curious and Harry felt surprise, was the spell finally wearing off them? Were their efforts finally enough? From the surprised looks from the other Gryffindor's his assumption was true and he had to fight down a grin.

Harry looked over snorting at the sight of his friend glaring at him and obviously cursing him with every word in the book before his eyes widened slightly. The Boy-Who-Lived turned back to his Professor to draw attention back to himself, "He got annoying," the emerald-eyed boy said with a shrug.

He quickly ducked a swipe from the red-head behind him and stuck his tongue out teasingly before turning back to his potion and finishing it. He placed a protective stasis charm over the cauldron and then began cleaning his area, returning the supplies to the storage closet. While he was gone the Potions Master decided to check the boy's work just in case and was surprised to see a perfect Dreamless Sleep potion before him.

When Harry returned Snape spoke up, "How is it, Mr. Potter, that you can create a perfect Dreamless Sleep potion but fail at creating a simple boiling reducing potion?" he asked incredulous, staring at the seventh year shocked.

Harry went to answer but both men's attention was drawn to the other side of the room where a horrified scream shattered the tense silence of the potion lab. Crabbe stood staring horrified at Draco Malfoy, who lay writhing in pain on the ground as a toxic looking green liquid sunk into his skin and clothing. Slowly the writhing stopped and the pale aristocratic boy lay shaking on the ground before he began glowing and suddenly a burst of white light blinded everyone in the room, causing them to turn away.

The moment the light disappeared everyone was peering back to the spot where Draco had laid, curious to see what had happened to their fellow seventh year. Where the blonde boy had once lay was a smaller version of him. Wide, fearful silver eyes scanned the crowd of students, his soft blonde locks fell down to frame his face. Even with the baby fat the young Malfoy looked like a
prince. As people began to crowd around him Harry saw what the others had not, the look of a frightened animal cornered. He had seen it enough in his own eyes when he had caught his own reflection when running from his cousin and his gang or trying to shield himself from his Uncle's beatings.

"Back off!" his voice was quite, only a bit above a whisper, but it carried a steel tone as it traveled over the chattering voices in the lab.

Everyone went silent instantly, his tone held no room for argument. Harry began making his way over to the small Slytherin and the small crowd of students parted to make a path from him as if afraid to get in his path. The few Gryffindor's he passed nodded in respect to his standing and he smiled at them briefly, but his mind was set on the fearful boy before him.

When he was within a few feet of the boy he stopped, knowing better than to get in striking distance. Even newly hatched snakes had fangs. He removed his cloak slowly so the little blonde would see his every move and placed it in the small space beside himself before sitting down where he had stood, crossing his legs. After a few moments the boy finally gave a movement, shivering in the cold dungeon air. Harry slid his robes behind him, signaling to Hermione, then to the shaking figure before him. She blinked a moment at him, then realized the poor child was naked, having worn his robes in the traditional style. Twisting her wand she shrunk and transfigured the robe to a more fitting size and style for the tiny three-year old. Harry took the new robes, sliding them closer to the pile of his own robes.

Draco kept a wary eye on Harry, but glanced about fearfully if anyone around them even shifted. He moved his hand hesitantly toward both Draco's original robe and Harry's now smaller robe before snatching it up and wrapping it around his trembling, naked body.

Harry gave him a warm and reassuring smile before he spoke up in a soothing whisper, making sure not to raise his voice in any way that may be taken as anger, "Are you hurt Hatchling?" he asked kindly.

Draco's eyes widened as if he had never been asked that question before, and in his mind he probably hadn't yet Harry thought angrily. Whoever had harmed this boy would pay dearly if he had any say in the matter, and he was determined to get one! The Boy-Who-Lived was drawn from his thoughts when the silver-eyed boy gave a hesitant shake of his head in negative, flinching into himself when one of the seventh years shuffled forward from being pushed from behind.

Harry drew the boy's attention back to himself by smiling at him warmly, "That's good to hear!" he said, letting some of the relief he felt leak into his voice.

The blonde tilted his head to the side, searching Harry's emerald eyes with his own silver, knowledge beyond his years shining there. It seems he found what he was looking for because he gave Harry an angelic smile before walking the small distance between the two and cuddling into Golden Boy's lap. Harry slowly and deliberately wrapped his arms around the small boy, holding him to his chest to calm his shaking. A fond smile came to the seventeen-year-olds face as the small blonde snuggled in closely, giving a peaceful sigh.

"My name is Harry, what is your name little one?" he asked gently, knowing better than to act as if he knew him it would only make the blonde fear him.

"D-Draco," the blonde whispered, face screwing up as he focused on making the difficult sound. Harry ran his fingers soothingly through the boy's hair as he chuckled a warmly replied, "That's a very nice name, Draco. I hope we can be friends."

The blonde smiled enthusiastically before hugging Harry tightly around the neck and the Boy-Who-
Lived felt his heart soar, he was happy to have been able to help at least one child like him. Harry squeezed Draco to his chest warmly, making the boy snuggle even closer into his chest.

Suddenly, Harry felt a pulse of warm magic flow through the room and tears fell down his cheeks. He jolted in shock. Harry hadn't cried since he had been forced beneath the spell McGonagall had placed on them all! Looking around he saw that the other Gryffindors were in the same situation and were staring at each other in shock. A gasp from Hermione caused them all to look over to her and she pointed to her wrist. The energy bracelets, visible only to those who knew of their existence, were finally gone, and that's when they all knew the spell was truly broken!

Cheers of pure joy filled the room as people embraced and high-fived all around. The Slytherin's glanced around confused and Snape just watched all of this unfold in shock. Harry was drawn from his thoughts when a little hand placed itself on his cheek, wiping away his tears.

"Harry hurt?" the boy whispered, fear in his eyes.

Harry gave the boy a watery smile. "No little Hatchling, I'm just really happy," the Boy-Who-Lived whispered to him gently running his fingers through his hair.

Harry could tell the former Prince of Slytherin was confused but he only nodded his head and went back to snuggling into the Golden Boy's neck. Harry chuckled, looking up his eyes were caught by Snape's own onyx. A shock of awareness shot through him before he felt a slow click inside his chest. His emerald eyes widened slightly, wondering if the spell had twisted everything so far as to keep him from his own soul mate?
Harry felt a tumultuous mix of emotions rise within him at the very thoughts circling his mind, but quickly pushed it down when he felt the small boy in his lap shift. He loosened the arms that had tightened around the little boy. The last thing Harry wanted to do was startle the boy.

Keeping his eye contact with Severus, Harry rubbed a soothing hand up and down the boy’s back to make him relax. Quickly, he looked away to grab the tiny robe and slid it over Draco's head, waving a wand to put pants on the toddler. He looked back up to find those eyes still on him, the emotion in them unreadable. Neither could read the mind of the other, regardless of how much they wished to know more.

The moment was broken between the two ebony haired men by a horrible shriek as Pansy Parkinson came barging through the mixed crowd of shocked and celebrating students.

"What do you think you're doing holding Drakey-pooh like that?!” Her voice screeched horribly, grating on everyone’s ears.

She lunged forward and grabbed the Draco's arm and yanked him to her side, ignoring the whimper and cries that came from him in the process. Anger filled Harry and his eyes became a deadly jade as he calmly climbed to his feet. "I would recommend letting the Hatchling go,” he murmured his eyes shadowed by his bangs.

"Oh really?! Why should I? He's a Slytherin! I have every right to pull him away from you idiotic Gryffindors!” She screeched again, not noticing the flinch from her former Slytherin Prince or the deadly glares being pointed her way.

Harry raised his head and his cat-like eyes made Pansy force herself not to flinch. He affected a slight sneer as he held his hand up to count off, trying his best not to throttle the idiotic bitch before him.

"Well, let's see, number one you're hurting the one you're supposedly ‘protecting.’” He paused as he let that sink in to every ear in the room, Draco’s soft whimpers and sniffles louder than before as each person listened for them. “And two, you will soon learn that hurting someone under the Gryffindor's protection is not wise. I'm sure even someone of your low intelligence can comprehend that our mascot is a lion for a reason,” he said menacingly, a growl underlying his words.

Pansy then noticed the wands trained on her and the threatening glares pointed her way. Every other Gryffindor had surrounded her and had their wands at the ready to get rid of her should she scare Draco any more than she had. What happened next broke the Slytherins, and even Severus, from his frozen shock.

As she comprehended her station, Pansy brought the boy between herself and as many of the offending wands as possible, using him as a human shield. A feral growl filled the room and had everyone looking around for the wild animal that made the sound. Only the Gryffindors had their eyes trained on either Harry or Pansy, waiting.

"Ms. Parkinson, that is quite enough. I would ask that you unhand my godson at once. Failure to do so will see your serving detention with me for the remainder of the year and I will see you taken to
the Headmaster for further discipline!" Severus spoke, his voice cool and sharp as ever. In her shock the Slytherin girl loosened her hold on the wiggling boy in her arms and he plopped to his feet with an excited smile. Draco quickly ran to Severus, yelling happily, "Unca Sev!" before hugging his legs and burying his face into his robes.

Severus bent down and in one moment of kindness picked up the boy whispering, "It's okay little Dragon you're safe now." He held the boy close as he snuggled into his neck, feeling the warm tears that fell from the boy's eyes.

The next he looked up he was surprised to see Neville Longbottom taking threatening steps toward Pansy only to be restrained by a calm hand on his shoulder from Harry. "Now is not the time Nev, we were just freed. We don't know how this will affect our cores yet," the Boy-Who-Lived-By-Luck said cryptically.

At the sight of so many students Severus finally came back to himself, "Class dismissed. Alert the Headmaster his presence is requested in the dungeons," he announced, fully expecting his command to be fulfilled.

All of the Slytherins filed out save for four: Pansy, who was still surrounded by armed Gryffindors, and Blaise, Crabbe, and Goyle who were Draco's friends and were looking towards him in concern. Severus gave an uncharacteristic sigh, knowing that none of his House members would think of going to Dumbledore's office, let alone get the man; however that problem was solved by Harry.

"Seamus, fetch. Get Dumbledore for us and remind the twinkling coot that he is required to send for Mr. Malfoy," Harry called out and the Irishman quickly ran out of the classroom. Harry then turned to Hermione, "Fetch Madam Pomfrey. We need to make sure that Draco wasn't harmed in any way by the potion, and we need to know what exactly the potion did to him."

The bushy-haired girl nodded and ran out after her Housemate. It seemed Harry thought of something because he smacked himself in the forehead as he muttered, "Dean follow Seamus, I don't trust him on his own right now."

All the Gryffindors chuckled as the Muggleborn boy nodded and ran out with an equally amused smile. Harry finally looked to the other Gryffindors. "Alright the rest of you go to the common room and prepare for a meeting, if you run into the Cat act like you usually do. Sleeves down, no eye contact. Small groups. We don't want to arouse suspicion, is that clear?" When he noticed most of them about to protest he shot them a glare, "It wasn't a suggestion. Go!"

With that all the Gryffindors left grudgingly. Ron and Neville however stayed back and kept their wands trained on Parkinson. Harry had his back to her while watching his housemates leave, making sure they all made their way to the common room. When the door shut behind the last one he turned back to the Slytherin girl and she felt a shiver of foreboding go down her spine, knowing that something bad was going to happen.

"Ron, Nev, she's all yours until the Headmaster gets here so get in as many licks as you can," Harry told them coolly before turning to the other Slytherins in the room.

He stepped forward and saw them tense in preparation; an amused smirk came to his face as he held out his hand, "Harry Potter, pleasure to meet you. And you are?" he asked.

The Slytherins stared at him in shock before the smallest one stepped forward and took the Gryffindor Golden Boy's hand. "Blaise Zabini, pleasure is mine," the Italian boy replied, giving a charming grin.

Harry smirked, he liked this kid; he turned to the other two and held out his hand expectantly. The
next to step forward was a hulking boy. "Gregory Goyle," he grunted taking the offered hand in a surprisingly gentle grip.

At this Harry smiled kindly at the boy before turning to the last boy who stepped forward and took Harry's hand. "Vincent Crabbe," the boy said softly, his deep voice surprisingly soothing.

Harry grinned and clapped his hands together, calling out, "Well, now that the introductions out of the way!" He turned back to his friends only to freeze at the sight before him. After a moment he doubled over in laughter followed shortly by his new friends from Slytherin. Draco peeked out from his godfather's neck and quickly giggled which turned to full-blown laughter that filled the lab with the sweet notes.

Harry paused, turning to look at the boy before getting a goofy grin on his face and Neville and Ron smiled with pride. They had made the Hatchling laugh!
At first, Pansy just stood there looking as if nothing had happened. She smirked at the stupid Gryffindors and proceeded to yell obscenities and insulting remarks at them—never realizing she had the same silencing charm on her that Harry had used earlier on Ron. But then quickly, she found that the boys’ wand waving wasn’t quite as impotent as she originally thought…with each rude remark and insult strange things started to occur. Her hair began cycling through the Hogwarts school colors, moving faster with each insult. Her robes began shrinking and growing at intervals, the fabric and colors changing, at random but through the most putrid and eye watering colors imaginable. But the most hilarious was her skin—it cycled between the entire spectrum of colors with stripes, plaids and polka dots coming through every few minutes. Even her fellow Slytherins gave a snort.

Severus felt the corner of his lips twitch as he fought off a smile and turned to the perpetrators. "How long do the spells last, Longbottom?” He used his usual sharp tone that he always used on the rowdy Gryffindors hoping to bully the boy into a stumbling answer.

Severus felt shocked though, as well as a bit of pride when, instead of stuttering and trembling in fear, Neville lifted an unimpressed brow and spoke confidently in cool, smooth tones. "The spell ends when she’s learned her lesson, Professor."

Beside him Weasley gave a smirk. "She also won't feel very comfortable sitting down.” At Severus' raised brow he shrugged, "My mum was always a firm believer in spankings if you misbehaved, taught us all the spell for it, unintentionally of course." Ron's smirk moved to a full grin as Harry’s clear, care-free laughter filled the room. He hadn't laughed like that since the train ride on the way to Hogwarts first year, none of them had.

Severus had to tear his eyes away from the emerald eyes before him and mat Neville’s one more. “And how will we know the lesson has been learned, Mr. Longbottom?”

Neville shrugged, unconcerned as he watched Pansy pulling at her clothes, currently a purple paisley robe over a currant yellow damask dress skirt. “The longer she goes between insulting someone the more neutral her hair, skin and clothes will become. And because the spell is on her, not her clothes, it won't matter what she tries to do to circumvent the spell work. It’s all in the intent.”

Ron and Neville shared proud glances before turning back to the little blond peeking out of the Potion Professor's black robes. With a gentle and kind smile Ron began to make funny faces at Draco, causing him to giggle. Draco tentatively reached out his arms to the funny red-haired teen.

Ron felt warmth fill him when their Hatchling reached for him and gently took the boy out of his godfather's arms, throwing him up in the air and catching him. It brought a surprised, but happy squeal of joy out of the boy. Ron grinned and did it again and again, well used to little ones. While this was going on Harry directed his three new friends to take their housemate back to their common room, and with sadistic smiles they obliged. Turning, the Boy-Who-Lived-By-Luck saw Ron toss Draco up once again but this time, using his seeker abilities, he snatched the boy out of the air and ran across the classroom to the opposite side of Ron.

With twinkling emerald eyes Harry looked down into Draco's bright silver as the boy continued to
giggle and laugh. "What say we play a bit of a game, eh Hatchling?" Harry whispered playfully to Draco, knowing full well everyone in the room could hear if they tried.

Draco grinned wide and nodded enthusiastically making Harry smirk. "Okay here's the plan...," he began whispering their "attack" plan in the Hatchling's ear.

When he finished Draco snickered and threw secretive looks at Ron who, having heard everything, put on a perfect act and began fidgeting nervously. Harry threw him and Neville a wink while the blond-haired boy wasn't looking before a look of mischief stole over his features. Being free, the weight that had lifted from his body, soul and magic was making him giddy now that he was among no enemies. He set Draco down on the floor and began to walk casually toward Ron, a wide grin on his face. Ron actually felt a bit fearful at Harry's smile; it didn't bode well with him after so long of seeing that look aimed at prey. His gut told him to run and he quickly turned to do so only to find himself tackled by the little dragon that he hadn't been paying attention to.

Falling to the dungeon floor with a grunt, he looked over his shoulder at the chuckling Harry. "You used code didn't you," he accused.

Harry smirked. "Couldn't let you in on our big plot now could we?!" He sent Draco a wink and salute. "Good job Hatchling! At ease," he said in mock seriousness.

The blond Slytherin stood stoically before falling forward into a fit of giggling. Ron took this as his chance and quickly snatched the boy up into his arms. Throwing him gently over his shoulder he ran behind the teacher's desk, crouching with an almost animalistic flare. "Take that Potter!" he said sticking his tongue out.

Harry laughed as he tried to pull off a mock horrified look, but was only able to break down in laughter. Severus watched all this in amazement from the side of the room. He was beyond shocked; these young men treated his godson as if he were a jeweled artifact and feared his breaking at the wrong touch. He was also shocked at his godson's reaction. Draco had obviously resorted back to his childhood mind as well as body and knew the boy had been abused--much to his eternal regret. It had made the boy find masks to wear at too early an age, warping his own sense of self. And yet... here he was giggling and playing like any innocent child would with his older brothers.

Suspicion filled him, taking over the warm happiness that had been settling inside of him. It had become second nature in his spy career. He wondered...Were these boys trying to get to his godson while he was weak and traumatize him even more than he already had been?! Were they out to embarrass him in hopes to get rid of one more "dark wizard"?! His face contorted in rage as his fists clenched.

A soft voice from beside him brought him from his rapidly circling thoughts. "Calm down Professor, we wish him no more harm than a mother lion does to her cub." Severus looked down to meet Neville's kind, but serious hazel eyes in shock.

"I have no idea what you speak of Longbottom," Severus said in a cool voice, but inside his mind was exploring every option. How had the teen known? Legilimency? In seconds of that thought, the Slytherin began checking his shields.

Neville chuckled. "I'm not reading your mind Professor, merely your emotions," he told the shocked man. "I felt your suspicion and wished to reassure you that we will not hurt your godson intentionally." With this last part Severus' eyes narrowed, but Neville merely raised a brow. "Do you mean to tell me in all your years as his “Unca Sev”, you've never made him cry?"

Severus gave a reluctant nod and Neville was satisfied, turning back to the scene of Ron, Harry, and
Draco playing about he spoke again, saying, "Besides it goes against Harry's very nature to harm those like himself." He knew his statement was very cryptic, but said it anyway before walking forward to join the fun.

Severus was left to ponder what the usually shy Gryffindor said. What did he mean "those like himself," both McGonagall as well as Dumbledore said Harry's home life was exuberantly happy and the boy was treated perfectly if not spoiled. Could it be they had lied to him? He was brought from his thoughts by a squeal. Looking up, he expected to see Draco in a corner looking at them fearfully, but instead he found Harry standing on top of one of the lab tables with Draco above his head, grinning in triumph.

"Neither of you shall ever see him again!" Harry claimed in an overly dramatic fashion.

Draco was giggling and squealing away. "Help meee!" he gasped between laughs.

Neville grinned. "I don't know little Dragon, Harry's pretty scary when he's mad," the boy said, putting on a reluctant face.

Harry's eyes were sparkling merrily and for some reason it brought warmth to Severus' usually absent heart. "That's right peasant! Fear me!" He pointed a finger at Neville with a fake superior look on his face.

Ron and Neville exchanged looks before rolling their eyes. Ron turned to Harry and said, "You know if you're trying to pull off the pureblood look it's not working, you have to make it look like there's dragon droppings beneath your nose," he said sarcastically, leaning on the table behind him.

That was it for Harry's self-control--he burst into laughter. Neville took this moment to grab Draco from his arms and ran over to where Severus stood observing. Placing the boy in Severus' arms he winked and ruffled his hair. "Stay here where it's safe Hatchling. We'll deal with the Big-Bad-Harry," he said with a smile, hearing Harry and Ron's responding snickers.

"Big-Bad-Harry?! Really Nev, nothing more creative?" Harry said, raising a brow with a smirk. "Nope!" Neville said with not-so-fake enthusiasm.

Ron was about to put in a word when the doors burst open and Seamus came running in and hid behind Harry. "I don't wanna die young!" He whispered passionately. "I haven't even gotten to third base yet!"

Raising a brow Harry watched as Dean came storming in his face filled with irritation. "Where is he?" Dean asked menacingly.

At this Harry smirked while hiding the Irishman with his body. "Who?" He asked innocently, and Severus was slightly awed at the boys acting skills.

"You know exactly who I'm talking about Harry James Potter!"

Harry snorted at the full use of his name and rolled his eyes, "What did the idiot do this time?" he asked.

"Hey! I'm not an idiot!" Seamus said popping up from behind him.

Harry just raised a brow. "You know you just gave away your location right," he said with a smirk. "Shi-," he started, but was cut off by a glare from Harry, "-atsu in a soup!"

All the Gryffindors stopped to look at him. "Shiatsu in a soup? Really Seamus, that's all you could
come up with?” Ron said, raising a sarcastic brow. “Don’t you have enough practice changing curses yet?”

Seamus glared, "Well you try coming up with a cover up for the word shit on the spot!” He snapped out the reply before realizing what he just said and slapping a hand over his mouth.

Turning fearfully he met hard, glimmering emerald eyes. "You know, there was once a time when I would have saved you from Dean's wrath," he said off handedly, but Seamus knew not to let that distract him. Harry was more lethal when he seemed relaxed. "But now he's all yours Dean. Have fun!" He sang the last words in a cheery voice, stepping aside and giving the Muggleborn teen an open path to the Irishman.

As he was about to lunge Harry stopped him for a moment, asking, "Where are Dumbledore and Malfoy?"

A voice behind him made him freeze, "Headmaster Dumbledore, Harry."

Slowly turning around his gaze met a set of twinkling blue eyes. Turning his eyes to the side he saw Lucius Malfoy standing there, a bit tense having not yet spotted his son. When his attention returned to the Headmaster Harry raised a brow. "Honorifics are a show of respect, and if I am to respect you, Dumbledore, then you must also respect me. Besides, I am a firm believer in the fact that respect is gained," the ebony haired boy stated coolly before turning to Lucius and nodding his head in greeting.

Everyone in the room noticed the obvious brush off Harry had given the Headmaster. All the Gryffindors were hiding their snickering while the older Slytherins’ minds were working a mile a minute. No matter how he worked it, Severus could not understand what could have happened to the blind faith and respect these lions had put into the Headmaster. The tense silence was broken by snickers from the Gryffindors behind Harry who could no longer hold their mirth.

Finally Lucius spoke up. "I would like to know why I have been brought to Hogwarts on such short notice."

Harry nodded with his lips tight, laughter gone. There was only one thing he was wondering and it would be answered shortly. What he was about to say next however was cut off by a shout.

"DADDY!"
Lucius spun around quickly, eyes wide with shock as he caught the three-year-old version of his son. "Draco?" His voice filled with shock and confusion.

The blond aristocrat turned to his dark friend, his eyes wide and questioning. The cool, collected Malfoy Lord was gone and had been replaced by a worrying, protective father. Severus sent him a small, reassuring nod causing the blond to relax slightly but he was still tense. Draco seemed to sense this because he became quiet and began to shake. Harry noticed this and quickly stepped forward placing a soothing hand on the boys back before looking up into Lucius wide, silver-blue eyes. The fact that Draco had run to and not away from his father answered one of Harry’s suspicions.

"Mr. Malfoy. I understand how disconcerting this situation is but I'm going to have to ask you to relax if not for your sake then for the sake of your son," Harry told him indicating the still shaking Draco.

With an obvious struggle Lucius fought to relax and slowly Draco's shaking came to a stop. Wide silver eyes peeked out from his father's robes and looked into Harry's own emerald. Severus and Lucius both watched as The Boy-Who-Wouldn't-Bloody-Die gave the toddler a small, warm and reassuring smile that made his emerald eyes sparkle with a warm light.

Draco finally came from his father's robes and grinned, reaching out for Harry. The ebony haired teen's small smile turned into a full-out grin and he pulled the blond lovingly into his arms, though he was surprised that Mr. Malfoy had not fought to keep a hold of his son. Lucius turned to Severus. "Why is my son a child again?" His voice was perfectly calm but Severus wasn't fooled--he noted the hint of steel beneath it.

The Potions Master heaved a stressed sigh and ran his fingers through his hair tiredly when a voice spoke up.

"It was a potions accident." They both turned to see Ron's clear blue eyes on them as he stood beside Harry.

The other Gryffindors came to stand behind their leader while completely ignoring the Headmaster whose usually twinkling blue eyes were hard and filled with surprise, then anger. Silence fell over the classroom for a while before Lucius finally raised a brow. "Would you care to elaborate Mr. Weasley?"

Ron raised a matching brow, still not sure what to make of the man before him. Lucius Malfoy was an enemy to his family, but he also knew that appearances were deceiving. So, being the smartass he was he said smartly, "Not particularly, no." His amusement was short lived though, and he grunted as Harry and Neville both elbowed him.

"Fine! Spoil sports," he muttered rubbing his ribs and pouting. Draco giggled into Harry's neck and the ebony haired teen turned and grinned at Neville and they exchanged a high-five behind Ron's back. This caused Draco's giggles to turn into snickers which turned into laughter when Dean and Seamus started making funny faces at Ron behind his back as well.

"Is today 'Laugh Ron Day' or something?" Ron exclaimed throwing his hands in the air in mock
exasperation.

Harry snorted, raising a sarcastic brow. "No. Who in their right mind would dedicate a day to you?"

Ron glared and smacked the boy upside the head and as Harry was about to retaliate a clearing of a throat made them turn to the Slytherins once more. Giving a sheepish smile Harry snatched Ron upside the head, keeping his eyes on the two men. "Sorry about him," he stated. "Fred and George informed me that Mrs. Weasley dropped him on his head a lot as a baby."

Ron started to splutter but once again they were interrupted, this time by the door. Madame Pomfrey and Hermione walked briskly into the classroom, with the bushy haired girl quickly joining the rest of the Gryffindors to give Draco a small greeting smile. She kissed him on top of the head and stage whispered, "Hello Draco, my name is Hermione, but you may call me Mya." Draco buried his head in Harry's neck shyly, but smiled at the girl. "These dunderheads aren't annoying you are they, little Prince?"

Draco giggled behind a hand and shook his head as the boys gave indignant "Hey!"s. Madame Pomfrey merely rolled her eyes and took Draco from Harry's arms and walked over, setting the boy on Severus' desk. Hermione followed her, determined to offer as much help as she was able. With his arms now empty Harry heaved a sigh and ran his fingers through his shaggy hair before turning back to the men.

"We were making Dreamless Sleep today in class. I had completed my potion adequately-" The Gryffindors snorted.

"Only you would call a perfectly made Dreamless Sleep potion adequate," Dean said, rolling his eyes.

Harry continued as if he hadn't been interrupted, briefing the blond man. "Apparently the shock of the fact that I can indeed brew potions shocked Vincent Crabbe into dropping a random potion ingredient in prematurely. Shortly after his potion exploded and Draco didn't have enough time to remove himself from the blast radius."

Neville spoke up next. "The potion coated him and suddenly there was a blinding light as it soaked into his skin. When it was gone the teenaged Draco Malfoy was gone and replaced by the toddler Draco Malfoy. It would seem he cannot remember any of his memories here so it is our hypothesis that the potion did more than change his body as he now does not remember anything past his time at, we think, three years of age," the usually shy Gryffindor said seriously.

Poppy turned around from her examination. "The potion affected him and suddenly there was a blinding light as it soaked into his skin. When it was gone the teenaged Draco Malfoy was gone and replaced by the toddler Draco Malfoy. It would seem he cannot remember any of his memories here so it is our hypothesis that the potion did more than change his body as he now does not remember anything past his time at, we think, three years of age," the usually shy Gryffindor said seriously.

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Poppy turned around from her examination. "The boys are right. This potion quite literally turned him back into a three-year old and it would seem it is permanent unless we find out how to change him back with a counter potion, that is if you even wish to explore that option," she said before turning back.

Ron spoke up, "If it helps any Madame Pomfrey the potion was a sickly green color and seemed to cause him pain as it sunk in."

Harry suddenly turned to Lucius. "Your son shows signs of abuse," he told the man bluntly. "I'm assuming it wasn't you, otherwise he wouldn't have greeted you so warmly. That leaves your wife, or someone in your household. Were you aware of this?" His voice left no option for the man except to answer, his emerald eyes the color of jade in his cool anger.

Lucius eyes filled with grief and regret. "I was….aware, but had no course to prevent it," he whispered. Before Harry could shout at him he stated, "She has the Head ring."
Harry was shocked, to say the least. He knew, after the events of the past summer, that if someone had a Noble House’s ring they could use it to wreak havoc on the Noble House. The ring was what identified the owner as the Lord of that particular Noble House. The fastest way for a man to be disgraced in Pureblood Culture is for a woman to hold the Lordship ring, unless she was the Heir Regent of a House and holding it until a son was finally born. The ring granted a person privileges as the Head of House and with it disciplinarian status.

Harry thought about the rings he held, those of House Emrys, Potter, Evans, Gryffindor, Slytherin and Black. Some had come to him that very summer on his inheritance birthday, while others had come through…other means. He smiled at the thought. They were hidden in a secret vault at Gringotts under multiple wards and inside countless hidden compartments. He came back from his thoughts when Ron spoke up.

"Is that why you serve old Moldypants?" He ignored the snorts from his fellow house mates behind him as well as the rolled eyes from Hermione as she sighed and whispered “you can’t just ask people why they serve Voldemort, Ronald!” to herself.

Before the blond could speak Harry turned to his red-headed brother and raised a brow. "Moldypants? Seriously?" he asked.

Ron shrugged. "It was either that or the Duck Lord," he said in an uncaring manner before turning back to Lucius with an expectant look.

"The reason for my serving…him is a long story that I will tell you after I know my son is safe and healthy," he finished seriously.

The Gryffindors nodded before turning back to Madame Pomfrey who had just finished and was putting Draco's shirt back on. When she finished Hermione picked him up and they walked over to the small group waiting on them. Draco reached instantly for his father and snuggled into his chest once Lucius had him in his arms. For a moment Lucius just buried his face in his son's hair and held him close, feeling his heartbeat and even breathing as he fell asleep in his arms. Harry watched this with a sad smile as Hermione and Ron wrapped an arm around him. He leaned into their warmth and sent his other three housemates reassuring smiles. No one caught this but Severus who had watched the boy closely.

Finally, Poppy spoke up. "Your son is perfectly healthy except for a few signs of abuse. There is a potion with similar results to this. It is used in many child abuse cases, though slightly different. Now, we can use the original potion and a sample of Mr. Crabbe's potion to find a counter, or you can allow your son to continue as is. Hopefully in better surroundings," she said with a pointed look at Lucius.

Lucius looked down at his sleeping son, torn. What should he do? A hand on his shoulder brought him from his musings and he looked up into the onyx eyes of his friend. "Do what you think is best Lucius," his friend told him quietly offering silent support.

Harry stepped forward and ran a loving hand through Draco's hair. "Know this Mr. Malfoy, should you choose to allow him to re-live his life he will have protected status within the Pride of Gryffindor. No one will be allowed to harm him while we have a say," he said seriously, his magic flaring into life and sealing his promise.

Lucius stood wide-eyed and looked at the other teens in the room to see their serious faces and them nodding along to Harry's words, their own magic flaring to their silent promises. After a few moments of thinking he finally came to a decision.
"I…need to think about this," he whispered bringing his son closer to his chest.

Footsteps sounded in the dungeon room as Dumbledore moved closer, a sick smirk on his face. "I do believe that this is not your decision to make, Mr. Malfoy." They all spun to see Dumbledore, his eyes alight with a malicious glee. "It would seem, if what you said earlier is true, that your wife will be making the final decision here. I will see that this…child goes back to his loving mother and his true age."

Lucius started to express his outrage at the old man, but a feral growl stopped him. He looked over to Harry whose eyes were the color of jade and slitted like a felines, his mouth pulled back in a snarl. "Stay out of this old man," the teen hissed angrily with only the presence of the hatchling keeping him from lashing out then and there.

Dumbledore's blue eyes flashed in shock before he took another step forward. "I would watch your tongue, my boy, or I dare say Professor McGonagall will hear of this impudence," he told the boy in a cold voice.

Neville snorted from beside him. "Tell her, go ahead. We don't care, but neither of you will cause any harm to us again!" His face contorted in rage as he spoke, the feeling of being controlled by that bitch still fresh in his mind.

Dumbledore’s eyes shifted between the angry young men before him and his hand twitched towards his wand, but stopped as he realized every student's wand was trained on him. The Gryffindors surrounded Severus, Lucius and Draco protectively.

"If you so much as come within a few feet of Draco I will personally tear you limb from limb, you idiotic old fool! You and that worthless woman you call a Professor have caused enough trouble for the children of Hogwarts. If either of you try to harm a hair on his or any child’s head you will find yourselves expelled from these grounds! I will find a way to make it so, or die trying." The magic in the room flared around Harry giving support to the promise and his ability to carry it out. "Are we clear?" the boy hissed menacingly.

The old fool could do nothing, his limbs shaking with fear though he tried to suppress it.

"Know that the Pride of Gryffindor will be watching you and your witch thoroughly. We have no trust for people such as yourselves, nor will we ever," he said coolly before turning and waving his hand, the door to the potion’s classroom swinging open. "Leave."

Dumbledore moved swiftly through the door for a man of his age. Harry made his way back to the shocked Slytherins and smirking Gryffindors. The subdued mediwitch watched the entire debacle, keeping her own counsel. Today had been a long day and it was only noon.
Chapter 6: Big Brother

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein*

"Now that that is taken care of, Harry, I believe we need to change our meeting to a full Council to decide what our next move is going to be," Hermione said, hiding a small smirk as she gazed at the two Syltherins’ still shocked expressions.

Harry calmed from his previous rage to a simmer, but smiled at the girl. "Always thinking two steps ahead, aren't you Mya?" He asked her fondly, and chuckled at the small flush that infused her cheeks. He wrapped her in a loving one-armed hug before growing serious instantly. "Yes, you are correct, we should call the Council. I want you to go ahead of myself with the others, I will stay behind with our three snakes and follow soon after so as not to look too suspicious to the Cat."

"But-!" Hermione's protest was cut off by a simple lift of Harry's hand, his jade eyes pierced her own. "You will go ahead of us with the others and call the Council Hermione Jean Granger, my safety is not paramount. They wouldn't hurt their cherished 'Chosen One' and we all know it. It's you who I love that I worry over. Now go and make sure Moony and the Twins attend."

Harry sighed and ran fingers through his unruly hair, shaking his head at their behavior. Really, one would think him a helpless child for all their worrying. He turned to meet the confused eyes of the two older Slytherins which brought back some of his good mood once more. Smiling kindly to them he waved them to follow him out the doors.

"I'm sure you have a lot of questions, but for now it would be best to keep them to yourselves until we have reached the safe haven of the Den," he told them seriously as he strode confidently down the hall, looking every bit like the royal he was.

They walked silently down the marbled hallways and Draco ran ahead, grabbing Harry's hand and pointing to things excitedly. Severus watched Harry's face in fascination as the warmth that was always in those emerald depths seemed to grow and encompass his face. Lucius gave a small mental smirk at his friend's predicament; he knew the man had been harboring a small spark of interest for the teen that strode before them, ever since the boy's fifth year when he had shown Severus a flash of his Syltherin side mistakenly. And by the look in the boy's eyes every time he looked at his brother in all but blood, he felt much the same for Severus as Severus felt for the boy.

Interested.

Severus moved his gaze often so as not to be caught staring. He watched his godson with a fond smile and was shocked when the boy skipped back to Lucius and himself and dragged them up level with Harry.

The teen laughed at their shocked expressions. "I've been sharing my adventures with him and he wanted you to hear them as well," the seventeen-year-old explained, swinging his and Draco's interlocked hands between them gently making the blond boy giggle.

Draco looked up at them with hopeful eyes and they both caved instantly. "Well let us hear of these
adventures, no doubt a few have kept me on my toes and out of bed in the middle of the night," Severus said, lips twitching slightly.

Harry gave a mock shocked look. "Do my ears deceive me or did you just make a joke, Professor?" His smile slightly ruined the incredulous affect his voice gave off.

The corner of Severus' lip came up further than before but only Lucius caught sight of it, making him smirk widely. "Yes, yes Potter I'm not completely without a sense of humor," he said exasperated. "Now what adventure are you going to regale us with?"

Harry smirked at him but was drawn from his thoughts by a tug on his hand. He looked down to meet Draco's pleading silver eyes. "Please?" he asked.

Harry stopped short, feeling as if ice had replaced every drop of blood in his body and a vice had been placed too tight around his heart. A face not seen in years, except through photos, so similar to the face before him appeared in his mind’s eye and swallowed him in memories. An echo of screams, the desperate sobs filled his ears, deafening him to the real world, and he clutched his chest, his knees giving at the sudden reminder of the past.

He closed his eyes quickly to fend off the tears as the image of a gap-toothed smile and messy blond locks seared his mind behind his eyelids. A warm hand on his shoulder that transmitted worry and hidden love into him brought him back to the present. He looked up to meet Draco's terrified silver eyes, Lucius' worried ones, and Severus' questioning gaze.

Harry reached up, placing a reassuring hand on the one on his shoulder, Severus’ hand, and squeezed before moving that arm down to his side. "I'm okay, just a bad memory," he whispered, rubbing at his chest.

A small body barreling into his stomach knocked the air out of him. A wet spot began growing on his chest and he looked down to see Draco's head buried in his chest as he cried. He settled an arm under his bottom, grasping Lucius' hand to help himself stand. "Draco? What's wrong, Hatchling?"

He closed his eyes quickly to fend off the tears as the image of a gap-toothed smile and messy blond locks seared his mind behind his eyelids. A warm hand on his shoulder that transmitted worry and hidden love into him brought him back to the present. He looked up to meet Draco's terrified silver eyes, Lucius' worried ones, and Severus' questioning gaze.

Harry reached up, placing a reassuring hand on the one on his shoulder, Severus’ hand, and squeezed before moving that arm down to his side. "I'm okay, just a bad memory," he whispered, rubbing at his chest.

He rocked the boy softly, rubbing his back as confusion filled him. Why would he hate this little boy? He hadn't been the one to shoot- Harry cut that train of thought off. Pulling Draco back from where he'd buried his head was useless, the boy clinging to Harry like his life depended upon it. Harry laid his cheek on the blond curls, nuzzling the boy comfortingly he asked, "Why would I ever hate you, Hatchling?"

Tears kept falling and Draco hiccuped his answer. "Be-because I talked too much and you got sad and...and then you fell down.....and....and now you hate me," he sobbed. "I no want you to hate me like my Mummy," this last part a tiny whisper.

Horror and understanding hit Harry like a ton of bricks; this boy had lost so much self-confidence because of his mother and he was determined to fix that! He remembered those days of questioning himself, his actions and what he could do to make his Aunt and Uncle love him. Harry softly whispered in Draco's ear, "I will never hate you, little dragon. You will be loved no matter what you say or do, no matter what anyone else says about you..."

At this Draco leaned back, looking at Harry with tears of hope in his wiping the tears from the boy's cheeks Harry pulled him forward and hugged him. "You will be the little brother of my heart and I will always love you like one. No matter what you can always think of me as your big brother." At this he pulled back and looked Draco in the eye, "understand?"
Tears filled Draco's eyes but this time they were tears of happiness and he nodded before he threw himself at Harry and wrapped his arms around his neck and buried his face there.

Harry pulled the boy as close to him as possible, burying his face into Draco's hair and breathing in his innocent scent that brought out the protective instincts of his Animagus form. He petted the boy's hair for a bit and just absorbed the warmth that came from their embrace but reality caught up to him and he reluctantly pulled away.

"We should really get to the Den before we're caught," he said quietly, standing and pulling Draco up with him into his arms.

He got nods of ascent from the two older Slytherins and they made their way to the Tower quickly, all good humor gone and leaving them all in a serious, thoughtful silence.

Unbeknownst to the others Harry and Severus' hands joined between them instinctually, pulling comfort from the other. They finally reached the Fat Lady's portrait and she glared threateningly at the Slytherins, it only softened when it landed on Harry and a shy Draco peeking from his robes.

"Harry dear!" She exclaimed happily at the sight of the only polite boy in her Common Room. "Anything juicy happen in the classes today?" she asked excitedly, looking pointedly at Draco, who burrowed even further into Harry's robes.


She gave a mock disappointed look but nodded and asked regally, "And am I to assume you wish me to allow these snakes to enter the Lion's Den?"

Harry smirked at her and with a glint in his eye spoke the words the beings of Hogwarts had been waiting for for so long.

"Saoirse tagtha d'imthosca an duine a d'fhan," he spoke with a perfect Irish accent, laughing mentally when he remembered Seamus teaching them the phrase.

The Fat Lady's face morphed to one of absolute joy and she quickly swung open giving a shout of joy as she ran off into other portraits to spread the word. Laughing quietly Harry climbed into the Common Room gesturing for Severus and Lucius to follow. After sharing a look the two Slytherins nodded to one another before climbing in reluctantly. As they straightened their clothes a shout brought them to take inventory on their surroundings, what they saw made the freeze in complete shock.

Irish translation: Saoirse tagtha d'imthosca an duine a d'fhan: freedom has come to the ones who waited

Again, I apologize for google translate. The only other language I know is American Sign Language, and there's no way to write that, so you'll have to make do with my Google Translate skills :)

Please review and let me know what you think so far.
The common room was unlike any others they had seen before. Unlike the Slytherins' own it was built much like the lower courtrooms of the Ministry where they tried the worst of the Wizarding Worlds' criminals. It was positioned much like the Roman Coliseum in many aspects. There were stands for spectators surrounding an open area. Inside this area was a raised platform with multiple seats and one raised above all the rest that the Minister would usually sit in the situation. The platform encircled a large area that was below the spectator area, but above the main floor and held two tables with two chairs behind each. They had walked into the spectator stands and were looking down into this area.

Multiple squeals rang out as the females of Gryffindor caught first sight of the toddler Draco. They rushed forward, surrounding Harry and Draco, giggling and talking shrilly to one another as they started cooing and coddling Draco. Harry's eyelid began to twitch with his irritation and the two men could see his patience hanging by a thread after such a tumultuous morning. Finally, it snapped and he tucked his lower lip in and let out a shrill whistle that made everyone cringe and step away.

"Good. Now that I've gotten your attention can you act your age? As you can see you're scaring the boy you're crowding and frankly I am very close to hexing all of you!" He growled and glared at them, making them back up a few steps. They knew that Harry's patience was typically long running, and if it ever got this low…well, running was always a safe option.

Giving a sigh Harry ran his free hand through his hair. "Heather!" There was a shuffle and one of the Gryffindor girls from the back of the mob came forward smirking and amused.

"Yes, oh powerful Master?" she asked sarcastically, her smirk growing when he gave her a glare and a snarl.

"Shut up and take Draco into the back room with the rest of the Council's children and watch them would you? Keep a good eye on Draco here, I don't want him hurt," he said calmly, kissing Draco on the top of the head and handing him over to the girl he had grown up with.

"Hatchling, this is your Aunt Heather and she's going watch you while your Uncle Sev, your Daddy, and I sit in on an important meeting okay?" He asked the boy gently, meeting his eyes head on. The boy looked under his lashes at Severus and Lucius to get their confirmation and when he got reassuring nods he turned back to Harry and nodded hesitantly. Harry smiled at the boy gently.

"I'll be okay, Draco, I promise," he whispered holding out a pinkie.

Draco's face clouded in confusion until Harry explained that it was a pinkie promise. His eyes brightened and he linked pinkies with Harry and the ebony haired Gryffindor shook their linked hands. Harry kissed the boy's forehead before stepping back and nodding for Heather to go ahead. The girl nodded in respect to him, even though she joked, and turned away with the blond Slytherin boy in her arms, heading into a room off to the side. Harry watched until Draco was out of the room before his voice seemed to project to everyone in the room.

"Has everyone arrived?!!" He called out, not looking anywhere but the door Draco and Heather
Hermione came up beside him, laying a calming and reassuring hand on his shoulder. "All present and accounted for, even the outsiders," she told him gently.

Harry smiled and squeezing her hand he turned to the people assembled. "Very well, everyone to their seats we'll be beginning our meeting soon. Parvati, if you would place two chairs next to my own, Professor Snape and Mr. Malfoy will be joining us," he stated calmly before gesturing the two men to follow him as he walked to his seat at the head.

The two Slytherins sat beside him quietly, feeling slightly out-of-place with no idea what was going on around them. Hermione smiled at them sympathetically and stood between their chairs and spoke quietly to them as people came to their seats.

"Harry took over the council in our third year so that, when it came to decisions that affected the entire House, we made the decisions that benefited everyone rather that just a few years." What she didn't mention is that the Sword of Gryffindor choosing him made him the leader of the Pride from that time on. No Lion would challenge him.

"Each year has a representative and each representative has a secretary and we have three seats reserved for adults who have already graduated from this House," she explained before stepping back to stand beside Neville Longbottom on Harry's right as Harry began the meeting.

Harry stood before the chair looking at everyone and waiting for everyone to settle down. "Alright the first order of business is to congratulate everyone on keeping calm and inconspicuous when we were released. I know it must have been hard, but no one is any wiser as to what happened to us. I am proud." He swung his gaze especially to their youngest housemates, and smiled at each of them. He saw the remnants of a celebration around the common room, but also the trembling lips and relief in every slumped shoulder in the room.

"Next," Harry stopped, unable to get further when he saw a small hand rise in the first year section. He nodded to the girl, waiting.

Sarahbeth, the first year secretary stood, though she was so small it did little to help her height. In a small, but confident voice she asked, "Why they here? I know Professor Snape works here and all, but…isn’t that man a…" her voice dropped as she whispered, “a Death Eater?” Murmurs echoed of agreement echoed through the room, but Harry silenced it with a hand.

Harry nodded and smiled at her. “That they’re fake for a reason?” Harry nodded.

“Yes. We all have a story, and our mask does not always match our motives. I trust him, and I ask you all to trust me in this matter.”

Severus kept his face blank, but watched incredulously as every head in the room nodded at once, as if things were settled. Things got more interesting with every passing moment…

Harry called their attention back to the matter at hand soon after, though. “Next. We need to decide our stance on the leadership in this school. As we all know, our intelligence suggests that only the Headmaster and Deputy Headmistress know of what was done, and what has happened today supports this.” He held a hand out to the lone professor in the room. “So, with this in mind I say we have two courses for action. One, we wait, see what happens in the next few days and start making decisions from there. Knowledge is Power, our Ravenclaws know this. Second, we rid this school of their influence and come out about what has happened to the students. We purge the castle.”
There was complete silence in the room, except for the intense whispering between the two Slytherins of the room. Purge? What the hell did he mean a purge of the castle?!

“Discuss.”

Hands flew up, and Harry picked a third year boy to speak first, then a 6th year.

“I say we purge them. After everything we’ve been through, they deserve to be ripped to shreds!”

“We should wait. None of us know our own strength now that our cores are not being pulled upon.”

“Why not both? Why can’t we wait for now and decide later, when we know more?”

Finally Hermione stepped forward, hands raised. “I think Henry has a point. I think time is of the essence, but rushing into a situation is not what we need right now. We need more information about ourselves first before we can move forward.” Harry saw nods around the room, and after a few more minutes of the same arguments, called for the vote.

“It looks like Hermione’s suggestion is popular and fair. Those in favor of allowing them to stay in Hogwarts but under strict surveillance, and deciding based on that information, raise of hand and say aye,” a chorus of ayes rang through the room and hands flagged a majority vote as they all stared at him seriously; he nodded and continued, "Those opposed?" The common room was spotted with calls of "nay" and a hand here or there, but not near as many as the ayes. Unlike the Ministry, where wands were lit for votes, the unspoken rule of Council meetings was that no wands were drawn. Not for votes, and not for fights.

Harry bowed his head. "Very well. They will be watched and we will lie in wait."

A fellow seventh year raised her hand and was acknowledged. “When we do purge the school, and you know that old coot will do something warranting it soon enough, who’s going to be in charge? We can’t just take over ourselves, it wouldn’t be fair to the other houses.”

Hermione whispered in his ear and he nodded. “A fine idea. So, the next order of business is to toss out ideas on this as we cannot truly trust the Governors to place someone fit for the job into the seat, are there any suggestions?” He looked around the room, waiting for someone to speak.

The second year president raised their hand and Harry smiled kindly and nodded, gesturing for him to take the floor. He sat back gracefully in his seat and relaxed a bit. Discussions like this were his favorite as he got to truly see the magnificence of his pride.

The boy stood a little nervously only to take more confidence when he got encouraging smiles from the older presidents looking at him expectantly. Taking he a deep breath he steeled himself to speak and said, "Who says we have to stick with only a Headmaster to run the school, it doesn’t seem like that has worked in the best interests for the students in years." He started to smile as he saw the agreeing nods of those around him. "I think we should form a council like this one! But… with only four seats instead of a lot like we have here.” He bit his lip as the idea solidified in his head. “Yeah. We could have an adult from each house, and…and a student from every House who will serve as their representatives! They can keep the adults up to date about what’s going on and stuff.” He blushed at that and laughed.

“But that’s an even number! It’s impossible to vote with an even number,” a voice called out.

Neville stood quickly, a solution in mind. “Then we have one impartial member added. A Headmaster position who swears to take no house affiliation or prejudice. The Headmaster will be at the head of the council and the entire council must all decide on a plan of action before it can be
carried out."

Severus and Lucius were impressed. It was a good, sound idea and from the proud grin on Harry's face the teen agreed. He stood, saying, "That's a wonderful idea, but let's add to it a bit shall we? I believe each representative should have a staff member to help them as well so they can make informed and educated decisions."

Everyone was nodding smiling widely. "All in favor?" Harry asked, and everyone called their agreements. The first year president beamed proudly, following formality Harry spoke again, "All opposed?" Silence. "Good, however we must gain the acceptance of the other Houses as well."

He received nods from all those around him, before one of the adults spoke up. Both Lucius and Severus were shocked to see the Weasley twins and Remus Lupin sitting to Neville's left. It was Remus who had raised his hand and cleared his throat.

"How do you suggest we go about this? We still need the children's parents' approval before we can carry out any of this or we will have the Ministry on us in an instant and I know how opposed to the Ministry you are Cub," the werewolf said seriously, his gold eyes flashing with something akin to hatred at the mention of the Ministry. Seeing the same in all the students’ eyes the two Slytherins deduced that the feeling was shared by everyone in the room.

Harry sighed and sat back in his chair, resting his elbows on the armrests he placed his folded hands in front of his lips with a distant look in his eyes. Everyone sat whispering to their respective secretaries or their neighbors, seeming to search for the elusive answer. Severus leaned closer to Harry and whispered quietly, "I know of a way."

Harry turned his bright emerald orbs on Severus and the dark man felt heat fill his belly and an electric shock go down his spine. For a moment Harry's eyes flashed and his pupils became slits once more, but the moment passed and the teen smiled encouragingly nodding for the man to continue.

"While the school usually asks the parents' permission for most things the school only needs such permission on out of school activities such as Hogsmeade or a field trip taken by a class. It is really up to the discretion of the staff to decide upon the structure of administration and I'm sure they will agree," the dark Slytherin said quietly.

Harry's eyebrow lifted skeptically before he gave a nod and stood. "It has been brought to my attention that we do not need parental permission unless it is for an off-campus activity given by the school such as the Hogsmeade weekends," he announced at the cheer that spread through the room Harry raised a restraining hand.

The third year secretary stepped forward gaining the attention of the council. "If it’s up to those of us in the castle to decide, I believe we should only allow the Founder's heirs to choose whom should be appointed," she said, Harry saw the greedy look in her eye and bit back a growl.

His magic expressed his anger causing the air around them to tense and he rose from his seat calmly, which was even more frightening with the power he was emitting. His sharp jade eyes met hers in a cutting way causing her to step back. "There is no place for greed in this House. It was greed that landed us in this bloody mess," he spoke in a silky, cool voice that caused many of the younger years to shiver and the older years to flinch in sympathy.

The girl flinched fearfully and nodded quickly, stepping back to her place beside the president, who sent her a disapproving look. Harry then turned his eyes to Neville and Hermione.

Neville shrugged. "I can ask the Hufflepuffs of the house, but I think I have an idea of who would be
perfect for this,” he walked forward, signaling the should have been ‘Puffs to follow him.

Hermione looked over her shoulder, and grimaced. “I’ll ask our Ravenclaws who they feel fits the bill,” then she walked off as well.

Harry called Ron over and spoke to him before they both nodded, an easy decision made between them. They waited for the others to return, and when they did he motioned for everyone to return to their seats.

“Our House is filled with those who should have been placed elsewhere. We know this. We accept this, and it seems, for once, it has worked in our favor. We have some choices to put forward, however, our choices must be approved by Hogwarts and the Castle shall choose her representative.” Severus and Lucius shared a confused look, but otherwise waited and watched this amazing group work.

The students nodded in understanding. As seventh years they were the elders of their particular house within the Den. McGonagall’s tinkering with the Sorting Hat had forced students who were not destined to be in Gryffindor there anyway. Hence the eclectic mix Gryffindor always seemed to end up with, and another reason for their often volatile tempers around those of other Houses: Jealousy.

Hermione, Neville, Ron and Harry stood on their platform and each closed their eyes, already having an idea of whom they would choose. They sent their choices up to Hogwarts for her approval. All grinned when they felt the approving magic filling them with warmth.

Harry stood first. Turning to Severus beside him he spoke in an ominously powerful voice that resounded with his magic as the magical heir by conquest of his House, "Severus Snape, you have been chosen as the leader and guide to the representative of Slytherin: do you accept?"

Shocked onyx eyes met his own sparkling emerald before determination filled them. He was wary of just what he was agreeing to, but could feel the acceptance and warmth surrounding him, a feeling of pure magic he had not felt since his own boyhood. And so he spoke on instinct, "I, Severus Tobias Snape, accept the responsibilities of guiding the future representative of Slytherin and any who may come after."

Magic swirled between them in an intimate way that caused them both to shiver with desire, forging the contract and sealing it before it disappeared completely as if never there. Nodding in satisfaction Harry gave Severus a small smile before turning to Ron. The serious red head moved to Remus on the dark man's other side. Meeting the gentle werewolf's eyes he spoke with the same power as came before. "Remus John Lupin, you have been chosen to guide and protect the representative of Gryffindor: do you accept?"

Remus' eyes showed love, warmth, and honor as he spoke firmly in his calm, smooth tenor. "I, Remus John Lupin, accept the responsibilities of guiding and protecting the future representative of Gryffindor and any who come after should I continue to be accepted."

Once again magic filled the room, this time warm and loving. It seemed to embrace everyone in the room, forming yet another contract and sealing it immediately. With a proud and warm smile Harry turned his eyes to Neville and nodded who stood instantly as Ron gracefully set himself back into his spot in line.

"I ask permission to bring the man I wish to choose to this gathering to form the necessary bond," the usually shy boy spoke confidently and proudly. He looked every bit the pureblood Lord he had been raised to be now that his magical core was his and his alone to control.
Harry smirked knowingly. "Permission granted," he said formally.

The fireplace flared to life and Arthur Weasley stumbled into the room, looking as shocked as the others did. He had felt a familiar magic pulling him and he had followed it, not realizing he'd apparated from his office into a floo directed to what he guessed was the Gryffindor Common Room. Harry smiled kindly to him and let his magic soothe the man, letting him know that he was safe. Harry turned to Neville and nodded for him to continue.

Neville stepped forward, whispering the basics of the situation to him. The energy band had prohibited them from informing anyone of those specific circumstances within Gryffindor House. The older man's face crumpled in a look somewhere between despair and rage, but he pushed it away until he could get further information and let Neville continue. Neville stepped away from the man and they made their way down to the dais near Remus.

Stopping in front of the balding, but kind, wizard Neville spoke with surprising power, "Arthur Weasley, you have been chosen to guide and support the representative of Hufflepuff: do you accept?" His magically backed voice echoed in the room around them.

Arthur smiled gently before speaking. "I, Arthur Septimus Weasley, accept the responsibility of guiding and supporting any representative of Hufflepuff that comes forward until I am deemed unworthy," he said calmly and confidently.

Magic swirled once more and formed the binding contract before disappearing and Arthur was led to sit beside Neville. Hermione was the next to step forward and Lucius was shocked to find the girl stopped confidently before him, meeting his silver blue eyes kindly, smiling.

"Lucius Abraxas Malfoy, you have been chosen to represent the Ravenclaw line in guiding and teaching any representative who shall come forward: do you accept?" She asked this in a melodious voice that seemed to sing about the room with her magic.

Mentally shaking off his shock he spoke in a cool silky voice, "I, Lucius Abraxas Malfoy, accept the responsibility of guiding and teaching any representative of Ravenclaw that should step forward until deemed unworthy by heir and castle."

One last time, magic swirled about them and sealed the binding contract. Nodding with satisfaction Hermione leaned forward and kissed the shocked blond man on the cheek before doing the same to Severus and gaining the same shocked reaction. "Welcome to The Pride," she whispered to them before returning to her place standing beside Neville.

Harry smiled at her fondly before standing and addressing them all. "We shall spread the word of this new agreement to all the students and about a meeting in a week's time." He turned to the Weasley Twins with a grin. "I expect we will see a few new products tested during this time as a diversion?"

Without pause he continued, though he saw the Twins' heads together and knew it would be a sight to behold. "You who have been chosen will have that time to decide who from your new House is worthy of the seat and announce it at this school meeting. You should choose two students. Hogwarts magic will decide who she wants representing her, and we do not want you floundering if she doesn't approve of your representative." Here he gave an amused smile that was returned by all the adults and gained nods of understanding as well.

"Wonderful, now the next order of business," he said happily, a mischievous gleam in his eyes that made everyone who knew him bounce in eagerness.

They leaned forward expectantly and Lucius and Severus were curious to know what they would
discuss next.

"You asked me why Mr. Malfoy was allowed inside the Den when his reputation has preceded him. I give you this: Our Lord Malfoy has had his Head ring taken as blackmail. He has been forced to serve a lunatic and stay with a woman who harms his cub."

Shouts of outrage filled the room and Harry held up a hand, which silenced them instantly.

Severus felt himself slightly aroused at the teen's show of power while Lucius felt touched the teen would be so worried and helpful to him. Harry continued to speak, "Now for Lord Malfoy to be able to sever ties with both parties and protect his cub he must gain back his Lordship ring. I wish to know if you will support him in his quest?" His voice was quiet, but compelling.

Cries and cheers were given all around and if Lucius hadn't been raised to do otherwise he would have cried tears of joy; he felt so honored by their kindness as well as amazed at their willingness to help a known Death Eater as himself, despite his personal unwillingness to carry that particular moniker.

As if reading his mind Harry sent him a gentle smile and before turning back to them all and grinning wildly with pride. "You all have grown to be amazing people and I am proud to have known you and have the ability to say I went to school with each of you," this caused many to blush and beam up at the Boy-Who-Lived happily.

"Ron," Harry called out, making the redhead step forward from where he had gone back to watching from the shadows when his portion of the contracting had been finished. This startled the Slytherins as they hadn't notice him moving, let alone hiding. He came to stand behind Harry as if he were speaking to a commanding officer.

"I want you and your party to find Lord Malfoy's ring and bring it back to its rightful owner," Harry said calmly. "Can you do this?"

"Of course," Ron said with a rogue smile that held a certain wildness behind it. "Shall we leave the victim--I mean, the kind people who held it for Mr. Malfoy a message?" This caused many to snicker at his mock cover-up.

Chuckling fondly Harry met his best mate's eyes over his shoulder. "Go wild," he said with a smirk, making an animalistic grin come to Ron's face.

"Dean, Seamus we're going hunting boys!" he called. The two teens appeared beside him before they all bowed and pulled Lucius aside for any details they would need for their assignment. Once they had all the answers necessary they disappeared out a side hallway.

"Mya," Harry said softly. Hermione looked up from her notes at him. "I want you to gather your team and pull a stealth mission. Check on the Coot and the Cat. Surveillance only. Diversion plan 9 and 17 should do if there is any trouble."

Hermione's grin would put the Cheshire Cat to shame. She nodded and twisted her wrist, a group of 6th and 7th year girls gathering the latest editions of Teen Witch Weekly and prepared themselves to seem vapid and brainless as they gossiped through the halls. Each also spelled their Gryffindor badges to record what was seen into a crystal kept in their pockets before leaving through the portrait—a handy spell Colin Creevey had invented the year before, his obsession with cameras giving them an invaluable boon.

"Now that we have finished, do any of you have business that should be addressed?" he asked kindly, silently waiting for any who may step forward. When none did he spoke once more.
"Very well, do we have a motion to adjourn this meeting," Harry spoke formally. A call came with said motion.

"We second this motion," Fred and George called in unison like they were prone to do.

"All in favor?" Harry called, many hands and voices rose.

"All opposed?" he called once more, but was met with silence. Nodding Harry continued, "We shall meet again formally next month at the correct time. Remember the school meeting in a week's time and have a good weekend." Before everyone cleared the room and the common room transformed into a comfortable and warm sitting room.

Harry sighed and rubbed his forehead tiredly and smiled kindly to any who came to speak to him. Severus and Lucius watched as the teen showed his amazing leadership skills. Lupin came forward and hugged the young man to his chest.

"I will see you in a week, Cub," the man said smiling with pride and kissing the teen on his forehead.

Smiling fondly Harry stopped him. "Remus, in accepting the responsibility on the Council you have made the castle very happy. We can feel it. I’m sure if you found a corridor you liked a set of rooms could be arranged," he said in fond amusement.

Snorting Remus gave him a sly look, "You planned this didn't you?"

Harry gave him a mock innocent look, "Why my dear Moony however could you accuse me of such nonsense!" He put on a look of mock hurt, placing a hand on his chest as if Remus had hit him.

Shaking his head fondly he popped the teen gently in the back of the head before speaking. "Oh, alright! I'm going to pack and I'll be back to take the rooms I stayed in before."

Harry smiled kindly, "Hogwarts will have them ready for you." After receiving a warm brush of fingers against his cheek in acceptance the werewolf left. His place was taken by the twins.

"You really must-," began Fred.

"Visit us soon dear Hare-bear we-," George continued.

"Have new products to show you at the-," Fred continued off his brother's sentence.

"Shop. So shall we expect you soon?" George finished, grinning widely like his twin whom he hung from.

Chuckling Harry nodded and received a smashing hug on both sides from them before they two left. Laughing tiredly Harry turned to the two Slytherin men who were observing him and smiled tiredly, "Shall we collect Draco and have that talk?"

The two Slytherins nodded and followed the young Gryffindor through the door Heather had taken Lucius' son.

A/N: Please please please please review if you can and let me know what you think about the story.

A/N2: Sorry for the longer wait, I got married this past weekend and had no time to stop for my computer!
They walked into a small sitting room that looked like a smaller replica of the Gryffindor's common room. A fire was blazing and above it was a mantle littered with small knickknacks. Most were small, decorated picture frames others were broken seashells or small colorful pebbles-things a small child might collect. Sitting in front of the fireplace on the floor were Heather and Draco flipping through a worn picture album. Behind them was a couch that looked like something you could sink comfortably into and fall asleep along with two cushioned, leather recliners. The rest of the walls were covered in bookshelves filled with ancient looking texts, photo albums, journals, and some Muggle fiction novels.

Harry made his way over to the two and looked over their shoulders at the pictures. Smiling fondly he listened as Heather told stories of their childhoods to Draco, making him laugh at their few misadventures trying to get money for food before they adapted to the groove of the London streets. Lucius and Severus stood in the doorway for a while before they too made their way over to listen.

"This was the time one of the Agents pissed Harry off by insulting some of the children and the house," Heather said, chuckling as Draco laughed at the picture. In it was a man who looked like he’d been through hell and back. His hair was matted and filled with something that looked a lot like animal droppings. His clothes were torn, filled with tears that looked like they came from a rabid cat or the talons of a bird. Splatters of white covered him from head to foot along with rotting food. He was tied to a chair with a sock in his mouth and small kids standing around him grinning and holding different objects while Harry and Heather stood in the background, arms crossed and looking satisfied.

Harry grinned. "Wasn't that the time you locked all the stray cats that hung out behind the house in a room without feeding them and then bathed the ass-tronomical idiot in tuna without his knowledge?" He remembered that day fondly, and was mentally relieved at his cover up.

Heather smirked up at him. "Sure did. That pansy screamed like a little girl," she winked at Draco making the small boy giggle.

Harry smiled fondly when Draco cut himself off with a yawn and Lucius scooping him up into his arms. "I do believe it's time for one little Dragon to go to sleep," he said quietly.

Draco looked mutinous. "But Daddy," he whined tiredly, "I'm not sleepy!"

Harry raised a brow before tapping the boy on the nose. "How about a story then?"

Draco looked at him with wide awed eyes. "Really?" he asked hopefully. At Harry's nod the blond boy threw himself at the teen and snuggled close looking up at Harry expectantly. Laughing gently Harry held the boy close as he sat on the sofa next to Severus. He shivered when Severus' arm brushed his unexpectedly. Lucius gave the three of them a fond smile before taking one of the recliners while Heather put the photo album back on one of the many bookshelves and went to leave.

"Where are you going?" Harry asked teasingly, giving the irritated girl a cheeky grin.

"Let’s see. I’m off duty and free to be myself…I couldn't possibly be going to visit my pregnant
friend! That would be just too scandalous wouldn't you agree?" she asked in a sarcastic tone.

Harry gave her a mischievous grin, "Scandalous would be going to get pregnant yourself, I do believe. But visiting a pregnant girl...how uncouth! Exactly why you should do it my good lady! It's about time Gryffindors started truly stirring the air again. Say hi to Elizabeth for me, and the others, too." The grin on his face became devious and almost feral. He noticed both men's puzzled faces, but knew that this was one House secret that would have to wait.

Heather gave a giggle and skipped over, kissing the teen on the forehead fondly and stroking Draco's blond hair lovingly before making her way out with a wave to the two other men in the room. Severus fought off a fit of jealousy when the girl kissed Harry and turned his full attention to Lucius and the teen that had captured his interest. Harry watched Heather walk out with a fond, brotherly light in his eyes before turning to see three pairs of expectant eyes on him and couldn't help the chuckle that escaped him.

"I believe I promised you a story didn't I, little Hatchling?" Harry said with a small smile as the boy nodded enthusiastically a far cry from his cool teenage self; Harry was really glad the former teen was getting another chance at childhood.

Clearing his throat dramatically, Harry wiggled about in an equally dramatic manner to get comfortable and Draco giggled, leaning his head on Harry's chest and looking up at the teen's face. Harry smiled down at him and winked before he began to speak in a soothing, almost hypnotic voice.

"Our story starts on the night of October 31, Halloween in the eyes of Muggles and Samhain to those of Wizarding heritage. On this night a small family sat in their small living room of their house in Godric's Hollow. The father lay snuggled fondly with his wife as their small baby boy toddled about gurgling happily dressed as a young fae. The walls and ceiling were covered in orange and black streamers with small pumpkins and Muggle witches on brooms outlined by the full moon hanging from the wall. The married couple smiled fondly at their boy sending proud and promising looks in each other's direction as the boy continued to toddle about. Promises of love and life, and the future."

As Harry spoke he had the three Slytherins' rapt attention, and though the boy's eyes drooped Draco hung on every word Harry spoke. "But little did they know they would never be able to fulfill those promises; that they would be torn from this world and accepted warmly into the arms of Death."

Harry's voice was solemn, eyes trained on the fire but the emerald orbs did not see the dancing flames...only the night he described in vivid clarity.

The two recognized instantly that the teen was informing them of what they wanted to know as well as getting Lucius' little Dragon asleep. The little boy's silver eyes widened and a little fear shone in them but Harry held him closer to his warmth and stroked Draco's back gently.

"You see this family had been in hiding and a dear friend betrayed their trust and location to the Dark Lord. That very moment the boy toddled into his mother's arms, yawning widely and about to sink into dreams of playing with his godfather the next day, a twisted man was making his way to their door. Suddenly the door was blown open and the lad's father jumped to his feet, wand in hand. As he battled with the formidable dark wizard he ordered his wife to run with their son and not to look back. He lasted quite some time but it was not to be, with only the utterance of two words the man died, his only regret not being able to watch his baby boy grow into a man and a prayer that his wife might live to protect their little fawn. With that last thought Death took the man's soul on its final adventure before eternal rest."

Harry paused a moment at the sound of a quiet snore and couldn't help the loving smile that warmed his features. Severus looked on with a wanting look in his eyes and Lucius watched all this with
amusement having caught the tension between the two and seen the two casting side-long glances at one another when they thought the other wasn't looking. He knew one thing was for sure he wouldn't be bored with these two around to constantly amuse him with their tiptoeing about each other. Untangling his hand from where it had strayed to the boy's blond locks Harry waved it in the corner, transfiguring the unused recliner into a small comfortable, twin sized bed. Tucking the boy beneath the blue blanket with little silver dragons soaring about on it; Harry walked over to one of the knickknack shelves and pulled down a worn stag with 'Prongslet' written in calligraphy along the sides before returning to the small blonde's side and tucking the stag in beside the boy, whispering protective charms on the stuffed animal so that should the blond be in any trouble he would be transported into the Burrow where Molly would care for him until it was safe for the boy to leave.

Just standing there for a moment Harry took in the small boy's peaceful features going over what had happened today. The Boy-Who-Lived wouldn't have changed any of it for the world but he found it calmed his mind and reassured him that none of his loved ones were in danger-especially the little blond hatchling that had wriggled his way into Harry's fiercely guarded heart. With one last smile Harry bent to kiss the boy on the forehead before returning to his place on the couch. He waited until Lucius did the same, tucking the little blonde in a bit tighter and kissing his son on the forehead. The older Slytherin whispered something to his son before returning to his place on the recliner, silver eyes so similar to his son's trained on the ebony haired teen, encouraging him to continue his story.

With a small sigh Harry continued without the theatrics he usually put on for the children's stories. "My mum rushed into my nursery and slammed the door behind her, she put me in my crib and started pushing everything she could find in front of the door. There were anti-apparition wards in place."

Harry didn't keep up the pretense of staying vague and inexplicit now that Draco was sound asleep. "She tried to escape through the trap door that led to Siri's flat but I guess she knew it was too late for that so she covered it again and merely walked over to me. I remember being a little scared and sad that my mum was crying." Harry's voice was quiet as he remembered that night he should not have. The two men listened horrified the teen had lived with this knowledge all his life. Not noticing the effect he was having on the men Harry continued. "Voldemort easily got around the night stand and changing table and his maniacal laugh sounded around the room at my mum's failed attempt to stop him. Mum stood in front of me and Voldemort told my mum to step aside but she stood her ground and told Voldemort if he was going to spare anyone it should be me. Unknown to the damn bastard my mum was spinning a wandless protection charm about me as she distracted him with her pleading."

Harry had seen this memory multiple times in a pensieve, had lived it there and in his dreams...But even at that age Harry had sensed magic, feeling if flow about him like a sentient being and caressing his core lovingly every moment. Coming back to himself the teen finished his story.

"Without a thought the idiot killed my mum, unknowingly completing the ritual she had begun. When he turned his wand on me with that same maniacal laugh I felt excruciating pain in my forehead before everything went black. The next thing I remember was flying over England, tucked into the sidecar of Siri's motorbike, I thought he had come for me so I fell asleep idiotically thinking I was safe once more. What I didn't know what that it was Hagrid, not my godfather, who was driving Siri's bike." Harry's tone was bitter and his emerald eyes hard.

Lucius seemed to find his tongue when the teen finished. "You remember all that?" His voice was a mere whisper and shaking with suppressed emotion.

Wise emerald eyes met Lucius's on silver mercury. "Children understand much more than we give
them credit for and have an odd way of knowing things. We are much closer to Magic than ever when we are children and have no preconceived notions blocking our minds. We soon lose that as we age and grow older, logic overcoming the pure wonder of Magic; I was able to store those memories deep in my subconscious and," he looked to Severus now. “After learning Occlumency from Professor Snape, I shielded them away and tricked everyone who wanted to rifle through me head by giving them memories they thought I would care that they saw and keep the true secrets hidden and locked away.”

The blond Lord seemed in awe and if Severus were being honest with himself, he felt the same. Severus opened his mouth to ask what he meant by “learning Occlumency” from him as he felt the time together had been to no avail when he remembered something that Harry said that brought foreboding to his heart. "What happened after you fell asleep?" He asked the young man before him while trying to keep his voice even and his hands to himself.

Lucius seemed to catch on to his thought process instantly and turned worried eyes to Harry. The Boy-Who-Lived was shocked to say the least. He knew the two men were kind, having seen their interactions with Draco, but to receive that kindness humbled him even more. Giving them a sad smile he told them his story quite bluntly. "I was left with muggles—my Mum's sister, her husband and their son--by Dumbledore and McGonagall, despite the fact that my Godfather was willing and able to take me. I lived on Number Four Privet Drive, my personal hell. The Dursleys hated Magic with a pure passion and believed they could beat it out of me. By the time I was four and a half I was expected to cook their meals, eating only what I could pocket or steal without notice, doing the house and gardening, and was forced to exist in a cupboard under the stairs unless I was working," the teen said without emotion.

Both Slytherins felt pure hatred and rage fill them with every word spoke. This young man before them, the Savior of the Wizarding World, the damned Chosen One—forced to live a life worse than an animal…a work mule! A house elf! This teen had done nothing but save those ungrateful cretins’ lives and they repay him by treating him like a lowly house elf! Lucius felt words welling up in him, but could find no words to express the feeling he was overwhelmed with. Severus though, gave him a look. “Would you care to repeat that?” He bit out each word to keep from yelling, or blowing something up.

Harry gave them a bitter smile. "You might as well calm down, it only gets worse from there."

The two men felt true fear at those words and were dreading what they would be told next. Both shared a look, coming to a silent agreement: those Muggles were dead. The Gryffindors had adopted them and Harry was going to find out that it went both ways in the men’s eyes. Before Harry could continue Severus scooted over and pulled Harry with him while Lucius stood and went to sit on the other side of Harry. Now Harry was between the two expectant Slytherins.

Chuckling slightly, Harry began his story again. "When I was six I had a bout of accidental magic that got noticed…big time. I apparated to the roof of a school. Safe to say my relatives were well and truly pissed and I got the worst beating of my life that one night," Harry whispered. He stood and removed his shirt and then, taking a deep breath, he let his glamour drop. He knew that these men were going to be a big part of his life. He didn’t understand how, or why, but that niggling voice in the back of his mind told him he had to share this now or he’d never be able to do it.

Lucius and Severus were horrified at the sheer amount of white, almost shimmering lines of skin along his back. Dots that marked old burns, lines where welts and stripes had been before scarring over, they littered his body. One particularly bad burn was in the shape of a cross along his spine and shoulder blades. The Dursleys were not religious in any sense of the word…until a neighbor asked, of course. They loved nothing more than to show proof—even if only to themselves—that their
holier than thou lifestyle was truth, and there was no better way than to force that belief on Harry, making him believe himself no better than the Freak they had called him for years.

Suddenly standing, Severus reached out with long, elegant fingers that felt cool to Harry's abnormally warm skin. Harry gave a shudder of desire at the spark that lit what nerve endings were left on the ruined skin when Severus's fingers touched his bare skin, but hoped against all odds the man thought it was because of his cool fingers.

"Sorry," Severus whispered, pulling his fingers back instantly.

Harry bit his lip to stop a mewl at the loss and merely shook his head, smiling kindly at the man before putting his shirt back on. He kept his glamour down now that the men knew, and sat back between the two. Lucius shifted feeling a protective instinct fill him that he only remembered getting around his son when the boy was hurt; placing an arm around the back of the couch, close enough to having them around his shoulders. Severus would have been jealous had it been anyone else, but he knew Lucius better than anyone and saw the overprotective, fatherly light in his friend’s eye. Sending the man a knowing smile Severus returned his attention to the teen that unknowingly held his…his soul.

Harry took a deep breath. "After that night Uncle threw me in the boot of his car and drove us to London. I was then promptly left in a dumpster, bleeding and barely able to move let alone fend for myself on the streets of London," he said. He remembered that night well. The pain, his vision little more than spots in the blackness that covered his sight, had blinded him but he also felt relief. He had finally gained freedom from his personal prison, a prison he was forced to endure thanks to the machinations of a mindless old man and his greedy whore.

"That's when Heather found me. She had run away from the old orphanage she had been dropped off at by her parents. They didn't feed the children and more often than not beat them to death. Heather literally dragged me to her hideout and healed me a little at a time. That's when I discovered she was a witch, and she realized that I was a wizard because my magic responded to her to help heal me. I had a rib puncturing my lung, and wouldn't have made it through the night without her." The men's shocked and almost enraged looks made him chuckle. "She didn't have as much control as a fully trained wizard, but it was pretty damn close. She had no choice but to learn to control it if she wanted to survive."

Harry took a deep breath the hard part was coming up; he would most likely need to explain his reaction to Draco earlier. "When we were older, around seven, we found an abandoned building that was kept hidden by some kids. An old orphanage that had been abandoned when the owner had run off with all the money collected to support the place. We pitched in our help, using our connections on the streets, a sympathetic cop we had charmed, our nimble fingers and even performing now and then for extra cash. While we were there we met a little boy who fast wiggled his way into our hearts."

Standing Harry strode over to the mantel and took down one of the frames before carrying it over to the two men. In the photo Harry stood laughing with a little boy in his arms looking up at Harry with awe-filled eyes. The boy had messy blonde hair and was giving a gap-toothed smile up to the teen. It was obvious that Heather had taken the picture because a smaller one was added showing Heather smiling mischievously with a finger held to her lips. The two men instantly saw the resemblance the boy held to Draco and were beginning to understand Harry's reaction to the boy earlier. Lucius and Severus both also saw the resemblance to another family. They shared a look over Harry's head, but decided to dig into this on their own so as not to upset the boy further.

Biting back the sobs of pain that wanted to escape and clutching tightly to his chest, above his heart
trying to quench the pain that lay there since his baby brother's death he bit the words out.

"His name was Cyrus," he whispered. "While Heather and I had been on the streets we gained some territory and in the process made some enemies. One of those enemies found out about the orphanage and went after them." Tears fell down his cheeks as he relived the memory. "We returned in time to hear two gunshots and see Cyrus and a little girl, Natasha, fall. They were already dead. My magic...grew and whipped around me before it struck.

"I... it killed the boy who shot my little brother and sister."
Severus felt pain. For the first time in a long time he could not push down the hurt bombarding him. Hurt for a young boy who watched his chosen family fall apart in one moment, pain for a child forced to do something he didn’t even get a choice in. Following his instinct he stood and pulled the teen into a warm embrace, shocked at his own boldness. When he went to pull back he was stopped as Harry's toned arms wrapping about him, his hands clenching at the Slytherin's robe. He could feel those thin shoulders shaking as the teen swallowed down sobs that tried to escape.

For all his apparent maturity and responsibility, Harry was still only human, and few wounds strike so deep as the death of a beloved sibling. Harry couldn't help but let his barriers collapse when his soul mate wrapped understanding arms around him; he couldn't help but feel safe and protected and that, for once, he didn't need to be the strong one. When another pair of arms wrapped around him from behind he peeked out to meet Lucius' understanding and fatherly silver-blue eyes and couldn't help but the drop his walls further. Even if just for a moment, it was nice to feel protected.

The two Slytherins stood around him like protective pillars, keeping away danger and giving him silent, unconditional support. His bond mate set out constant waves of caring and understanding while a feeling of love he hadn't felt since his parents' deaths came flowing from the man behind him. After a while Harry began to calm and took deep breaths, now gripping both of the men close not wanting to lose that feeling just yet. The two men shared an understanding look and, together, lifted Harry and carried him to the couch again. Severus settled the boy in his lap, his legs laying over Lucius' as the blond man sat next to him. Severus felt no desire, only the need to comfort the distraught teen, knowing Harry probably saw him as an authority figure and nothing more. Lucius sat beside his brother in all but blood and ran one hand soothingly along his leg, the other hand holding the teen's, running circles over Harry's knuckles.

Trying to distract the teen Severus spoke up in a deep, soothing silky tone, "How did you get to Hogwarts?"

Harry laughed bitterly. "The Bobbies, Muggle version of Aurors, got involved. As soon as we realized what had happened we ran away with the rest of the children, hiding them in hideouts with...well, the intent was a Notice-Me-Not Charm, but we didn't know that then. They ended up catching Heather and me... It was a late night we left for a food run. I was taken back to Privet Drive and Heather went to an orphanage. I was ten at the time, almost eleven, and Heather was almost ten, I think." Harry sighed, scrubbing at his eyes. "Anyway, when I was returned...well the Dursleys were angry, but before they could boot me again, which is truthfully what I was hoping for, I got my Hogwarts letter and they ran with me."

At this last sentence Harry rolled his eyes. "Why they did that is beyond me. Dumbledore wasn't watching the house; I didn't know what the damn letter was and frankly at the time didn't give a shit. I just wanted to get back to the other kids. I knew Heather was doing all she could, but..." He shook his head, as if to clear it. "You know, they could have just left me out on the streets again, I wouldn't have been any wiser and I wouldn't have gone to Hogwarts. Now, I'm glad they were complete idiots, but I still can't quite believe how air-headed the lot of them truly were... and still are," Harry said sarcastically shaking his head.
Severus let an amused smile settle on his face, he was coming to realize just how vibrant a person Harry was despite such a desolate background. "What happened when you came to Hogwarts? What's this spell you and the other Gryffindors are always chattering about?" He was extremely curious to know what the small pieces he'd picked up truly meant.

Lucius was equally curious and squeezed Harry's hand in encouragement. Snorting aloud, Harry couldn't help but be reminded of Draco when he had told the boy he would give him a bedtime story. "Did you know, when I first stepped on the Hogwarts Express I was ecstatic. I had found out that I had a vault full of gold, Hagrid took me, you know. I sneakily stuffed not only my pouch, but also every pocket and nook I had with the gold, then I mailed as much as I could to Heather with a note. I told her to find Diagon Alley and the Goblins, convert the Galleons to Pounds, buy any shelter she could and take any magical orphan she ever found on the streets and hide them in her shelter. I was so happy I was able to do that, that I was able to give her the security and stability of a home for her because she was the one thing holding me back from Hogwarts."

Harry smiled in remembrance. "Once I boarded the train I found a compartment with a brilliant redhead—he really is a pure genius and a boy who, though soft-spoken, was strong and confident in himself. Ron and Neville became my first friends that day. Hermione soon joined us with her sharp wit and sarcastic tones. When we arrived at Hogwarts the lot of us were ready and each of us was supposed to go to a different house; however, McGonagall charmed the Sorting Hat to sort anyone from a very rich, light family or with large magic reserves into Gryffindor to complete her army," spat Harry cold fury filling him as he remembered that first night in Gryffindor.

"Excuse. Me?" Severus voice was tight, and cold. He was absolutely livid. Over the years he had noticed something off about the students once they had joined Gryffindor, but had simply put it off as the students thinking themselves better than anyone else.

Harry gave him a sympathetic smile. "She's been doing it since Grindelwald," he whispered sadly, "She grew corrupt with all the power she got leading small platoons and decided to build her own army straight out of Hogwarts so that they could not defy her. She developed a spell and places it on all the first years their first night. It's extremely painful and literally forces us into the Gryffindor stereotype. We have to despise Slytherins, we can't get above a certain grade in any class unless given approval by her. We literally have to rush into situations without thinking, and we must sacrifice ourselves, make ourselves martyrs for the world. Have you ever known a Gryffindor to work anywhere but the Auror Department or a job that the Order needed?" The two men were speechless, horrified.

Lucius spluttered, not wanting to believe someone supposedly "light" could do this to a couple of children! His mind stalled, trying for anything to falsify this notion. "What about Arthur Weasley and his wife?"

Understanding emeralds met his own and Harry gently spoke, "I guess you two wouldn't know considering you didn't go to school with them but Arthur and Molly were in Hufflepuff."

"But what about that spiel about how all the Weasleys were in Gryffindor?!" Severus asked confused, even Arthur and Molly had said it.

Harry sighed and shook his head. "Dumbledore works with McGonagall, he knew Molly and Arthur would have powerful children and ensured they were under a spell that made them overlook anything odd about their children's behavior. The Moribus spell, as we call it in the Den, continues beyond school, which is why my father, Sirius, and Remus treated you the way they did. In truth they really wanted to befriend you and respected you," Harry said, meeting Severus's tortured onyx orbs.
"What about Pettigrew?" Severus whispered this, reeling that the three boys that had tortured him in childhood worse than his father…that they had respected him and had wanted to be his friend. Coming to realize that they had been forced to torture him against their will.

Harry shook his head. "The spell and magical torture from McGonagall broke him. He found escape the only way he knew how: a suicide mission." Harry's voice held pity for the rat; he had never hated Pettigrew for what he had done for he knew the spell had ended up twisted and projected itself upon Voldemort rather than McGonagall and drained his magic. This made him the weak, stuttering fool he was now.

"Where does the Council fit in? A well thought out system of order does not seem like to fit with the Gryffindor recklessness," Severus commented. "And the meeting ran too smoothly to be your first."

Harry scoffed, though not at the man. "McGonagall must have learned early on that if the Den was not made a safe haven from the Gryffindor stereotyped behaviors then we would kill each other with our short tempers. Behind the Fat Lady's portrait is the only time we are allowed to truly be "ourselves." The Council was established before my time, before even my parents' time, but it works, so it's continued through the years."

"And Dumbledore knew?" Severus finally asked, needing to know the depth of the betrayal he was facing.

"Since the beginning. He helped her develop the spells, I think. I know he encouraged her use of the Moribus and made sure that she was his successor of Gryffindor House. How else could the Order keep a steady membership, despite how targeted they were during the First War?"

The two Slytherins were silent. How could they have been so wrong? What else was not what it seemed? Harry sensed their need to absorb what they were just told and remained silent. Lucius subconsciously squeezed Harry's hand before going over to sit on the floor beside Draco's bed just to watch his son sleep and hopefully calm his tormented thoughts. A small chuckle escaped him against his will when he saw the child's foot dangling out from beneath the blankets and the pillow thrown to the ground, but the stuffed stag remained clutched to his chest.

Gently lifting the boy's foot beneath the blanket and tucking it more firmly about him once more he reached down and lifted his son's head before sneaking the pillow beneath once more. Leaning down he kissed his son's forehead and found himself at peace once more. He couldn't do much about the past but he sure as hell could do something now.

Severus stared into the fire an inner conflict battling out behind his onyx eyes. Harry felt the man's struggle, an almost niggling tension in the back of his mind. He turned to put his head in Severus' neck, and ran soothing fingers through the usually cross Slytherin's dark locks. The four of them sat there for quite some time just enjoying the peaceful silence. Severus tilted his head to lay his cheek on Harry's head. He was deep in thought, and savoring the moment while it lasted. He felt comfort at inhaling Harry's warm and soothing scent, and decided that this was probably what peace felt like...if only his head was spinning with all the new revelations he had been confronted with.

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Thanks for reading!

A/N: I am currently working on a chapter (mind it's 40 or so chapters from now) to do with the Dursleys and what will be done with them. I have an idea and a scene written, but I also want some suggestions as I feel they deserve something worse. Due to a scene down the road my heart is hurting and my anger slow boiling, so please feed the writer and send me some suggestions. What would you have happen to our illustrious Hated Family? Keep in mind Harry only lived with them
five short, but memorable years, and the summer before Hogwarts before putting up deuces and walking away after his first year at Hogwarts.
Plots

Chapter Notes

Edited: 9/27/15. I cut out the scene with Luna. It just occurred to me that it was on my revie list, but never got done. Sorry.

Chapter 10: Plots

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein

KinnatSeanach, a reviewer, asked me:

"I'm a little confused, is McGonagall allowed in the lions den or not because in this chapter she not because she lost the right but in chapter 1 she is welcoming the first year and putting the spell on them in the lions den? just wanted to point that out."

This was an added change when I revamped, so I may have missed the wording at one point to make this clear. McGonagall carries her crystal around with her always. During the Welcoming Feast, and the subsequent casting, the Gryffindors new and old have their drinks laced. After being on a train without liquid refreshment all day and with the crystals effects making them eat, drink and be merry during the feast, they have no choice but to drug themselves again. This lowers their ability to fight the crystal and it's owner, so they cannot keep McGonagall from casting it year after year. After that one day there is no reason for McGonagall to visit the Lion's Den as she gets cocky and her own crystal makes them want to go explore outside the Den anyway. (Even in Canon McGonagall was a rare sight inside the Den). I've added a lot of this below as well into the story.

The sound of a stomach growling interrupted the quiet contemplation of the two Slytherins. Lucius laughed which started Draco to stirring. They had talked through the afternoon, and it was near dinner time. Lucius and Severus both knew of one Little Dragon who would be grumpy until he had eaten. Severus grimaced, remembering some of Draco's better, or worst you might say, tantrums as a child. Harry stood with the two men, deciding that eating in the Great Hall and getting a visual on the Coot and the Cat for himself would be wise, though not as wise for the Malfoys.

"I need to check on things around the castle, and eat before any discussions resume. I know that it isn't safe for you until your ring is returned. I offer you the sanctuary of the Lion's Den, and a promise that you will not be disturbed." The men's look of surprise made Harry smile in a sly way. "The intent behind magic has a funny way of biting people in the ass sometimes. After spelling the common room as a dampener for her spell, basically a safety zone, McGonagall lost her access to the Den. The Fat Lady will not let her pass. While Dumbledore still holds the castle wards, it is only temporary. By this time next week we'll hopefully have a new prospect for Headmaster or Headmistress and we shall move forward from there."

With that Harry turned and led the men, Lucius holding the stirring Draco in his arms, to the common room once more. He pointed out rooms and hallways that led to guest quarters that they
were more than welcome to. He led them down the hall to a guest room, a modest set with two bedrooms, one bath and a small sitting room with a table for dining set to the side. It was done in neutral colors, browns and greens, but Lucius felt welcomed in the rooms.

"Remus will have the rooms next to these," Harry said easily. "He can show you the door that you can use to reach this area from the main hall tomorrow. If you need anything at all call for Dobby, I think he'd be overjoyed to see you outside of your wife's sphere of influence."

The Great Hall was filled with chattering students, many of whom were sending wayward glances at the doors each time they opened, waiting for a tiny Draco to come in and put truth to the newest school rumor. Harry caught Hermione's eye at the Gryffindor table and nodded at her. He sat beside her, and tapped her forearm.

"All clear so far. Coot holed himself in his office, and Cat was in lessons until now. The castle apparently decided that a ward on the fireplaces needed strengthening because no floo call would connect, so the retrieval operation is unhampered. Cat is free now, so we need another watch after dinner."

Harry nodded. "I leave that to you, Mya." She accepted with a smile, knowing that while they were the alphas of their Pride, they loved each other with a familial love. Sibling love, and nothing more. The trust between them was unparalleled, just as the trust within all the mission teams in the Pride were.

She patted his arm and filled a plate for him, nodding at Professor Snape as he stalked from the door to his seat. "Just eat, Harry. You need your strength, and it's been a long day. We'll probably be holding vigil until the boys return tonight, so we need to prepare."

He sighed and raised his head, eyes immediately meeting the deep wells that were the Potions Professor's gaze. He shivered at that contact, knowing that his earlier guess was true. It had to be. Severus Snape was his soul mate, and wasn't that just ironic. Harry laughed, but felt better about the situation now that he could act like himself. The dark-haired teen made sure to sweep his eyes up and down the table, reminding students to overdo their behavior, and keep the sleeves of their robes pulled down in order to continue keeping their freedom a secret from McGonagall a little longer.

"It is happening, Minerva."

"Happening? What is happening, Albus? You speak as if I can read your mind."

He glared at her. "Your Gryffindors are getting impudent. Mr. Potter and Mr. Longbottom both had the audacity to sass me today. Something must be done. You've gone soft on them. Have you even checked on your spell since you last cast it?"

It was Minerva's turn to glare, her Scottish brogue coming out to play in her anger. "Check my spell? What would I need to check it? It's been less than two weeks, Albus. Tha-

"Just check it, woman! Do you not see that they have tried to openly defy me? Me! I am Albus Dumbledore, Leader of the Light! They should have writhed in pain for daring to cross me, Minerva, and yet, that little shit Potter had the wherewithal to threaten me. How dare he?!

Minerva paled at his words and pulled the orange crystal from her robe. She carried it with her always. As she gripped the gem, it was abundantly clear that something was desperately, horribly wrong. A crack, no more than a sliver, ran down the center of the timeworn and spell-worn gem that
she had relied so heavily upon for years.

"NO!" She screeched aloud, realizing all of her efforts were for naught. For years Minerva had used the same crystal and the same spell. Every single time she cast the Moribus it was under the same conditions. As such, since the one crystal powering every spell had fallen, so had the spells. She had lost her literal and figurative sphere of influence.

For many wizards and witches it would be too little effort decades too late. The Gryffindor tendencies and stereotypes were too well set into their psyches, their lifestyles, and their thought patterns. But for others? For many like Remus and the twins this newfound freedom was being quietly celebrated. Toasts were made in ones and twos all across Wizarding Britain to some unknown being who had accomplished that which they were never able to do.

"I will not stand for this, Albus!" Minerva's were hard and glittered with devious plans, hatred lending a sibilant tone to her treachery. "Give me another crystal, a more powerful one this time—red! I will not settle for only controlling those simpleton Gryffindors this time. I want the castle, Albus. I will have my Army!"

So, if anyone was wondering about the crystal colors, no, they are not random.

**First, the Orange crystal:** "The strength of the red rays joined with the powerful fire of the gold rays give the orange crystals the powers to combine, integrate, and unite." Which was the original goal, to unite an army. In addition, "It also stimulates enthusiasm and creativity." Which was the orange crystal's downfall. The Lions found a loophole in the spell to protect Hogwarts' residents, which meant that the caster was enemy number one.

**Now, the Red crystal:** "It motivates...and is the color of fire and blood. It is emotionally intense and affects humans by raising their blood pressure and speeding up their metabolism. Red is a call to action, a battle cry...Red empowers...and engulfs." So, by McGonagall's thinking, red crystals will embody the traits she wants forced into all the students, and it was engulf them, overpowering their own wills.

A/N2: Keep the suggestions coming for the Dursleys. It's still a while away before their comeuppance.

**Finally, A/N3:**

For anyone confused:

1. This is an adopted plot. I adopted it from Tiger DeRanged over a year ago at 8 chapters written and one in the works. (Until chapter 13's end) Some parts of these chapters were hers, some mine. It's been so long I call them ours.

2. With the adoption came an understanding that her ships are my ships. So, this will have Snape/Harry, Remus/Lucius, Hermione/Ron, and Blaise/Neville for sure. If you do not like any of these ships, please do not leave reviews asking for something else, or complaining about them.

3. Any ships outside of that are mine, complain away, but if I state the couple as together explicitly consider it a done deal.

4. Everything from Chapter 14 on out is my plot/storytelling and it is going to get a little dark at
times, but stick with me.

5. I have 40 something chapters currently written and will be doing my best to upload every other day or every 3 days. July will have fewer updates due to travel, but as of now we are good for a few months to come.

6. The FF version of this story is censored, the AO3 version is not. Enjoy :)}
"It's happening..."

"He's lost it!"

"Are those children?!"

"She's got... Oh, no! Someone get the Pride!"

“Here! Use my frame! Hurry!”

Harry sat on the floor playing with a few magical toys with Draco and the other children that lived within the Den. Since his third year, after Harry had become both the Magical heir to Slytherin by defeating Tom Riddle’s Diary and the keeper of Gryffindor's Sword, he had smuggled in magical orphans off the streets and into the castle. He had always seemed to have a mysterious helper in his quest to help these young innocents. No harm had ever come to them from the malicious eyes that would harm them within her walls, and he hoped none ever would.

Dumbledore had lost any way to find out about the orphans when the portraits decided they would spy on him instead of for him, though he did not know that this was the case. The Headmaster's portraits fed him false information—the Slytherin Headmasters in particular took pleasure in the chance to use their cunning natures once more.

Now, Harry was glad to have the children all together and safe, but he still had a feeling in the back of his mind that the peace would not last the night. He remembered a time when he was split, stuck between protecting the students and caring for the shelter he and Heather had set up in London. It had been a few years ago, but Harry had finally been able to find and hire a married couple, the man a Muggle-born and the woman a squib. They now looked after those in London, while Harry led the Pride.

True to form, a pounding knock sounded against the door, and it opened before anyone could answer showing a panicked Hermione. She ran in breathless, her brown eyes wide with fear.

Harry saw the look in her eyes and was on his feet instantly, eyes only for Hermione and silently demanding her to inform him of the situation. The girl seemed as if Voldemort himself had entered Hogwarts with a horde of Death Eaters. The men didn't know how much worse it actually was.

"Cat, Coot...escaped...hatchlings.....danger," the girl panted before nearly collapsing with fear, exhaustion and no small bit of pain.

Harry caught her quickly, his face eerily blank and a cold fury in his emerald eyes as he lifted the girl effortlessly in his arms. "Tinker, Winky," he called out in a gentle but serious tone.

With a soft ‘pop’ the house elves appeared before Harry, giving the teen a deep bow of respect, "What can Winky and Tinker be doings for Master Harry?" Winky squeaked as she looked at the girl in Harry’s arms worriedly.
"Tinker, please take Hermione down to the Hospital Room. Set her on one of the beds, then please get Heather from the Ravenclaw dorms. Winky darling, would you mind terribly watching the hatchlings here," Harry asked in a gentle tone that belied his fierce, furious features.

The elf Tinker seemed to know better than to argue and quickly, with surprising strength, lifted the teenaged girl and popped away once again. Winky would never say no to watching over the lion cubs, and Harry knew that. It was her favorite duty. "Yes, Master Harry, Winky be happy to watch little ones."

Harry thanked her then spun and walked toward one of the bookshelves before seeming to walk through it. After a few minutes Harry strode out in a pair of tight leather pants tucked into a pair of zip-up, knee-high leather boots with a sleeveless black top that seemed to be made of some sort of reptile skin and a part of his chest, outlining his chiseled muscles. On his back were twin blades and a pair of daggers rested in his boots. On each thigh was a holster; the right was a gun, the left a back up wand, and his own wand strapped to his wrist.

Harry's emerald eyes were set and he strode over to the children and cast a few wandless wards making sure they were keyed into his, Lucius and Severus's magical signature. Every child but Draco ignored the goings on, quite used to such occurrences. Harry moved to him, giving him a hug and a short "Be good for Winky, we shall return soon, little Dragon," before striding out of the small room into the Gryffindor Common Room.

Severus and Lucius exchanged a look before rushing after the teen, worried about what was coming and what the teen planned to do about the situation. They were shocked to see Neville standing by the portrait hole with Colin and Dennis Creevey waiting for their orders with a panting, but hard eyed Lavender Brown.

All of the boys dressed similarly to Harry, with only their weapons varied. Neville wore a long sword across his back; Colin multiple Sais, and Dennis wore a pair of gauntlets and steel-toed boots obviously for hand-to-hand which frankly shocked the two Slytherin. By the set of his shirt he was concealing multiple weapons.

"Lav, report," Harry barked as he transferred a few items to Colin.

"Patrol. Portraits informed us Dumbledore and McGonagall have a new crystal, blood red. They've waylaid Slytherin and Hufflepuff first years from the halls on their way to the Astronomy Tower for class. Hermione engaged for extraction with her team. Ginny got all but two Hufflepuffs extracted and into their common room. The wards there protect them, and she is standing guard, disillusioned. Prefects have been alerted and are on the move. Cat and Coot are moving towards the Entrance Hall...and possibly the Great Hall with the remaining students."

"At ease, Lav. Go to the Hospital Room and check on Hermione. She was hit. Send a Patronus if necessary. Gather the 6th year president and secretary. You three are in charge of the Den until we return." Lavender nodded and rushed off, worried about her alpha.

"Formation, boys. Neville you come high, I want Dumbledore and McGonagall down and out as fast as possible. Dennis stay close to me, you and I are on extraction. We're going to get the hatchlings out of range for Neville to do his part. Colin, we're counting on your distractions: make them big and make them noticeable but keep the castle standing. Everyone got their orders?" Harry was quick and efficient as he stood before them looking them over and fixing a bit of their gear where it had been thrown on half-haphazardly.

"No," Severus said in a silky drawl, his onyx eyes hard. No one messed with his snakes.
Lucius was equally determined; these children were fighting a war that should never have been theirs to fight. Harry turned to them while Neville and the two Creevey boys exchanged looks before snickering behind their hands. These men were in for it! No one stood up to Harry when he was in his "General mode." Sharp jade eyes bore into the two older Slytherins filling both of them with horror at the atrocities the teen had obviously experienced to gain such a world-weary look, but it also shot a shock of desire down Severus' spine and made him want to take the man before him there and then. For in this light, with this power swirling around him, Harry was indeed the man he had always destined to be, the protector his nature would always make him.

"You two will tell the other teachers to keep their students locked safely in their Common Rooms until further notice," Harry said in a cool tone that left no room for argument, but in a moment of pure Gryffindor stubbornness, the two men argued.

"I will not be relegated to a messenger boy while you four go and wage a war against the most powerful wizard of our time!" Lucius roared, his silver-blue eyes blazing. Severus' own eyes were two hard, endless tunnels of darkness at the order Harry had given them. Neville and the two boys winced; oh these two were digging their graves deeper and deeper by the minute.

The snarl that escaped Harry's throat reverberated throughout the room and, unknown to the two Slytherin men, the entire castle. A whispering voice filled their ears, and they turned to see a small girl, maybe twelve, standing at the couches in the room. Her black hair was straight and sleek as it fell of her face, hiding her from the gazes boring into her as she spoke. “It’s useless to fight him, you know…He’s been doing these things much longer than you can imagine, stopping all the rapes and abuse from older kids with us little ones. Plus you’re only endangering those children more by arguing…”

The darker of the men felt shock shoot through him at the words. Severus had indeed noticed how much safer the castle had become in recent years, but she couldn't possibly mean that these Gryffindors had been the ones stopping it…right?

Severus was frozen in his shock as revelations hit him hard. Not only had this teenager suffered for the good of the Wizarding World, but now sacrificed himself for the good of the students of Hogwarts as well! That should have been the teachers' job and he felt no small amount of disgust for himself for not noticing it sooner. A soft but calloused hand distracted him on his cheek. His onyx eyes met jade green that sent multiple shocks through his system and left him confused at what he wanted to do.

"Please," Harry whispered. "I need to know you and Lucius are safe to care for Draco. I have very few people left to view as father figures, don't make Draco go through what I did," the teen's voice was soft, his emerald eyes filled with a soul-deep, heart wrenching sorrow as his gaze met Lucius’. When his eyes met Severus’ once more the words fled, but his eyes spoke of a need not for another father figure, but for something much deeper.

Severus couldn't pull his eyes away and Lucius stood to the side feeling as if his heart had just been ripped from his chest. This boy, no, the man before him had been through such pain and horror and yet he still had the strength to care and think of others; Harry Potter was truly one of a kind was the thought running through both men's heads.

But they were torn.

Did they sit back and allow these students to handle the problems or did they force their hand? Finally Severus came to a decision, he would trust Harry to know what he was doing and he would do what he could to assist in any way he can.
"We won't get in the way but don't expect us to hide away as you four fight. We will keep our distance and help from the shadows," Severus compromised in a silky tone, eyes saying that that was all the ground he was willing to give.

Part of Lucius wanted to argue with his childhood friend; he didn't want these boys to do anymore for such an ungrateful bunch, but he knew his arguments would fall on deaf ears and hurt more than help. With an aggravated sigh Lucius nodded, standing strongly beside his friend and brother. Harry stared them down for a moment more before he pulled his wand.

"Visu Captae," he enchanted.

Harry gave a small nod of acquiescence as the charm Colin had created sunk into a button on each of their robes. Then a devilish smirk came to his face as he turned back to the portrait hole. His eyes glinted with a dangerous light, pupils slitting.

"Time to hunt," he drawled, before striding through the portrait hole with the others close behind.

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Thanks for reading!

A/N: Translation: *visu captae* = View captured. I know, I know, bless me and my google translate skills.
Chapter 12: The First Battle

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein

Severus and Lucius watched as the Gryffindors moved gracefully and silently out into the halls, not even the whisper of their clothes brushing against their skin made a sound. After a moment they gathered themselves and rushed after them at a distance, using whatever skills they had learned as spies to remain silent and unheard.

The odd group traveled through the vast halls of Hogwarts in silence, slipping through the shadows unseen and met by only the portraits, suits of armor, and an odd ghost who quickly went about their way when they saw the hunt in progress. Only one dared stop to speak with Harry, meeting his sharp, slit jade orbs with a wide grin.

"Kitty and Lemon be near the Great Hall with the wee snaksies and puffers," Peeves said, shocking the two men watching with his helpfulness.

Harry's smirk was devious. When he spoke his voice was slightly deeper with power, sending another shiver of desire down Severus' spine and making him curse himself. "Thanks for the heads up Peeves. I need you to do something for us. Could you help Colin here with a...distraction," it was obvious that isn't what Harry was going to originally say but Peeves seemed to get the idea because he squealed happily.

"Of course, Peeves will humbly offer his services to the ickle Lions!"

Harry bowed his head slightly in thanks before they were once again moving. When they came to a point where they would reach the antechamber before the Great Hall the teens split with no prompting or noise: Colin and Peeves seemed to disappear in the very shadows, Neville continued forward toward the noises of scuffling, and Harry and Dennis went to the right, down a secret passage. Severus and Lucius exchanged curious looks before following Neville a bit further back.

When everything came into view they froze at the sight before them. Dumbledore and McGonagall were using first years as human shields from the Slytherin and Hufflepuff prefects that had arrived at the scene, pointing their wands at the young children's throats threateningly. Severus was torn between feeling proud of his snakes for trying to save the young ones and feeling furious that these…bastards would dare threaten his snakes!

Suddenly Harry's voice echoed eerily through the hallways bringing Lucius and Severus back to the present and reminding them once again of the plan. "I warned you Dumbledore, yet you have the gall to pull something like this in the shelter of Hogwarts," his voice boomed furiously about them.

Movement to Severus' right caught his attention and he saw Neville moving forward covertly through the shadows with a grace the man had never seen in the usually bumbling boy. The teen saw that he had the Potions' Master's attention and winked playfully before once again turning his full attention to the situation before him. Severus also turned back to the problem before him watching McGonagall's usually stern, yet warm features transform into an ugly sneer that, sadly enough, seemed comfortable on her face. All the while Dumbledore glanced about like a caged prey that knew it had no escape.
"How dare you defy my orders you worthless piece of filth!" The woman hissed the words menacingly, shocking the men at the insults she spewed at Harry. "You will stand down and leave this hall. We are your superiors, and we have not called for you. Leave." There was obviously a familiar power coating her order but it didn't seem to have any desired effect.

Harry's dark chuckle echoed eerily around them as the very shadows cast by the torches in the hall seemed to creep closer to the two prisoners, but when they reached the students they caressed them and gave them a sense of warmth and safety. "You have no hold here woman, even if you still held sway over my Lions we would still be able to defy you. Your prejudice has been your downfall. We protect all who reside in Hogwarts and whomever deems her halls home. You have lost," at these words chaos broke out.

"Lies!" McGonagall hissed, her head turning as she sought to find Harry's position. "I own you, Potter. You may have escaped this once, but you will be mine again. I have a Blood Ruby, and you cannot stop me. I will have my Army!" As she said this she raised her hand. True to its name, the blood-red gem was raised, an overwhelming feeling of magic and power spilling from it already. Harry's eyes narrowed and his wand dropped into his hand with one motion.

"You and your pitiful jewels will fall for the last time tonight, McGonagall. Either surrender yourself or face me with honor!"

With that word loud noises broke from multiple directions, coming from nowhere and everywhere at once as balloons filled with paint, water, and any number of substances rained down upon the two deviants—always conveniently missing the first years in their grip.

Neville burst from the shadows, pushing the two prefects at Severus and Lucius, who had pulled out their wands, before attacking the malicious adults with quick jabs and honed swipes of his sword, spelled dull with a spell. He aimed true, always hitting their backs or places not covered by the children in order to keep them off balance and distracted, but not fatally wounded as that would be a merciful death for them. This deadly dance continued as suddenly needles were flying and hitting the two in their weak points. One of the needles hit Dumbledore in the neck which obviously hit true because the man went down like a rock, paralyzed with the first year still clutched to his chest.

Dennis appeared and extracted the small snake, cradling the boy close before once more disappearing into the shadows and appearing beside the two men who had the prefects behind them protectively. The moment the first year saw his Head of House he knew he was safe and felt any shields he had held for so long break as he began to sob. Easily enough Severus let his compassion show by pulling the boy into his arms easily, rubbing his back soothingly and whispering softly to the boy.

Dennis nodded to the man before, once more, he was gone, joining Neville in his barrage upon McGonagall who still clutched the eleven-year-old girl to her; but it was useless now. Suddenly she threw the girl in the path of one of the daggers that had rained down, turning to run. Dennis ran to save the girl but he was too late. Before their eyes Harry appeared between the girl and the dagger, wrapping himself around her protectively not even uttering a noise as the dagger buried itself into his back, near his shoulder blade.

In turn, Neville quickly incapacitated the fleeing McGonagall with a Stupefy and Petrificus Totalis. They hit one after the other, both overpowered as to outlast any fight she would put against the spells when she awoke.

The little girl looked up with surprised and watering eyes to meet soothing and gentle emerald eyes of Harry. "It's okay now little one, you're safe," Harry whispered softly to her, wiping away a tear with his thumb.
For some reason she trusted him and smiled, tears continually escaping her eyes as she snuggled closer to his muscled chest feeling safe wrapped in his arms. She promptly lost consciousness from the stress of the situation and the exhaustion that hit after the adrenaline from fear had fled. Severus was could only stare at Harry in horror, more specifically the dagger stuck in the teen's shoulder.

Harry ignored the pinching pain and stood, waving off Dennis' apologies as he walked over and deposited the girl into one of the prefect's arms. Meeting the boy's eyes directly he narrowed his eyes slightly in warning, "You will take these two to see Madame Pomfrey immediately; no stopping, no detours, straight there am I clear Mr. Greengrass?" Harry said authoritatively, taking the near comatose boy from Severus' arms and transferring him to the other prefect's arms.

The teen stared at Harry in shock but something told him he could trust Harry…those emerald-green eyes seemed familiar to him, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it just yet. Thinking to himself, trying to remember where he had seen them before he nodded absently. Harry's face transformed with a gentle smile as he ruffled the fifth year's hair comfortingly, "Good boy."

This made something in Damon Greengrass glow and warmth fill his gut and with a wide, proud grin he turned and walked with his fellow prefect toward the Hospital Wing. Harry's eyes widened marginally at the look, a memory sparking in the back of his mind, but the adrenaline of the past few minutes pushed it away for now.

When the four disappeared around the corner Severus finally spoke. "You should be the one visiting a mediwitch! You have a damned knife in your shoulder, Harry!" The man was close to a rare panic.

Even considering the situation Lucius couldn't help but to grin at his friend's loss of control—Severus had it bad and Lucius couldn't be any happier about who it was. Neville distracted the blond by appearing at Harry's shoulder, sending a questioning glance at the teen that was his twin in all but blood. Harry nodded easily enough and with that Dennis and Colin appeared, grabbing the older teen's hands in each of theirs. They gave him support by leaning into his side, bracing him. Harry smiled at them as Neville placed a balancing hand on his opposite shoulder while the other hand gripped the handle of the dagger in a firm grip.

"On three, General," Neville said in a soft tone, knowing that Harry was still in battle mindset with the two bodies close by: one unconscious and the other paralyzed. Harry gave a miniscule nod but Neville saw it easily enough and before either man present could question what the boy was about to do Neville was counting.

"One," Harry stared determinedly over Severus' shoulder, at the empty portrait behind the man.

"Two," Dennis and Colin leaned closer, burying their faces in Harry's side and gripping his hands tighter.

"Three!" and with that Neville ripped the dagger out to the horror and shock of the two men watching.

The only sign of Harry's pain was the grunt, the widening of his eyes, and the suddenly flash between their normal gentle emeralds to the slit jade. Severus went to shout angrily at Neville for such an idiotic move only to watch in shock as Harry rolled his shoulders causing his muscles to ripple as the wound knit itself shut. When it was fully closed Dennis and Colin dropped the hands they were holding and wrapped their arms around Harry's waist while the older teen wrapped soothing arms around their shoulders; Neville also wrapped his arms around Harry's shoulders, leaning his head on the teen's shoulder, nuzzling into his shoulder.

Severus, at any other point, would have been green with jealousy but at a touch to his shoulder form
Lucius he took a mental step back. After all the references he'd heard today to a Pride and the Den he finally saw why they called themselves the Lions so proudly. He saw now that this was not an orgy of teens nuzzling against one another, but a group of lions seeking comfort and forgiveness from their leader. Their Alpha. Realizing this, Severus felt any jealousy slip away, and retained his quiet calm.

A few more moments passed before the small huddle of Gryffindors finally broke apart and Colin spoke up, throwing a brotherly arm over Dennis' shoulders. "What should we do with the two runaways?" He threw a thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the two forms sprawled on the stone floor.

Harry looked to the banes of his existence contemplatively. Logically he knew he could not kill them, but he also knew they could not remain free. Too much had been done against the will of the students of Hogwarts to overlook. He also knew that the Ministry was useless, and any attempt to move them would mean giving both maniacs an opportunity to flee.

Harry tapped his foot where he stood before turning to the two men. "Any ideas?" He asked, though his mind was running scenarios a mile a minute.

All of them shook their heads, unsure of what could be done before help came from a most unusual source: a portrait.

"The Founder's Dungeons could keep them," a man dressed in severe cut, blue robes said from above their eye level. "It's held worse than those cretins in its time, though you're going to want to get those wards off of him before you leave him unguarded, you will."

Lucius' eyes narrowed as he thought back to any reference he might have come across of any Founder's Dungeon before something clicked. "The Founder's Dungeon…that's what held Slytherin's beasts before their great fight? And the dungeon Igret the Terrifying was placed in after she tried taking control of Hogwarts in 1280?"

The man in the portrait laughed and slapped his knee from where he stood. "Indeed so! Quite the Historian you are! Few remember the dungeons because they were erased from the curriculum after her placement. Helps to remember it when you were the one to help place the witch in the cells, though." He winked at the rapt audience before him, glad for anyone to listen to his words.

Harry stepped forward as he finished, a question in mind. "What is your name, good sir, and how might we access these dungeons?"

"Professor will do, Mr. Potter, and simply call for Lissy." The man stated, before turning and moving to the edge of his frame. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have friends who will want to know of these events." And with that he left.

Harry, having had stranger conversations with portraits before, accepted the abrupt end of their conversation and called out for Lissy. He nodded when a tiny house elf arrived, already wearing the garb of a true Hogwarts Elf: a black tunic with the Hogwarts crest over the heart. It was only when purebloods began forcing bonds with the elves did they begin wearing tea towels, pillowcases and fear true clothes.

"The Professor has stated that you might help us in finding the Founder's Dungeons, Lissy. Is this true?" She nodded and looked to the side to see the bad man and bad woman on the floor. Harry, noticing this knelt down to get on a closer level to the elf. He pointed over his shoulder, not even deigning to give them names. "These two will need to be placed in the Founder's Dungeon." The house elf's eyes widened, if it were possible for them to go any wider, and she nodded.
"Yes, Master Harry. Lissy be doing that right aways."

"Thank you." He turned back to his team as she popped away with them. He watched as Colin collected their fallen wands and gave him a nod. "We should visit the Hospital Wing to make sure that the hatchlings have no permanent damage upon them," he said to the others, turning to head in that direction only to freeze as pounding footsteps from the same direction sounded. Lavender ran towards them, only able to stop running as Neville caught her. Almost out of breath from her speed she panted out, "Ron, Dean, Shay back. Injuries. Hospital Wing."

Harry's eyes flashed suddenly and dangerously as a growl grew in his chest shocking those around him. "Neville gather the professors. All of them, but alert Flitwick. He is in charge since this one," He pointed to Snape with a cheeky grin. "Refuses to leave my side. He can also help in gathering the others. I want the Professors meeting in the hidden room on the Hospital Wing floor. There will be a meeting to tell them what has happened. Put the prefects on alert. Be swift."

The muscled teen nodded easily, laughing to himself at Snape's look of indignation and obstinacy. He then broke off, tearing down one of the hidden passage ways behind a tapestry. Harry couldn't help the pride that filled him when the teen didn't ask any questions and merely trusted him and carried out his orders. Shaking this off for now Harry spoke once more. "Dennis gather the ghosts with Peeves, they should be present as well as they guard Hogwarts as much as we do."

The youngest teen gave a short nod before he too broke off turning completely around and racing down the hall, almost flying. Colin was waiting for his orders patiently knowing they were coming, staring at his General's back.

"Colin," Harry started, pausing for a moment.

"General?" Colin asked. Emerald eyes glanced at him for a moment before a smile twitched Harry's lips at the energy that seemed to vibrate within the sixth year. It reminded him so much of the young boy that used to follow him about like a loyal puppy, camera always at the ready.

"Take Lavender, inform the Pride of the situation and added security then check on the Council's children as well. Once done go and tell the Hufflepuffs that the problem has been taken care of and they may leave their dorms again," Harry told him softly. Colin grinned up at Harry cheekily, giving a playful salute, "Aye General, consider it done!"

Harry couldn't help but chuckle. Though the situation was potentially dire, Colin could always lift spirits. He turned away as the two lions disappeared down the adjacent hallway leaving Harry to begin running through the halls with Lucius and Severus on his heels.

"What exactly is going on Harry?" Lucius asked, having not heard the girl who had literally run into them very clearly. He easily kept up running the halls with the younger man, though. He and Severus had to stay in peak physical shape considering the dangerous game they had played as spies in the Inner Circle of Voldemort's Death Eaters.

Harry's eyes became serious as he kept his eyes trained ahead, the double doors of the Hospital Wing coming into view.

"The hunting party has returned."

A/N: So this will be the last chapter for about 2 weeks. I'm going on a trip and won't have access to my computer. But, as soon as I return I'll have the next chapter up!
Harry's calm statement met with a shocked silence, doused with a hefty amount of dread, adding to the tense atmosphere that never seemed to abate around the green-eyed teen. As they neared the doors it was almost as if Harry's pace increased though neither man could fathom how as they were nearly sprinting towards the infirmary as it was.

Harry lifted his arm within a few feet of the doors, pushing them open. Surprisingly the wood stopped before they could slam into the stone walls and the portraits adorning them, thus avoiding the disturbance of other patients of the Wing. If they hadn't been so intent on following Harry both men would have paused in the doorway to stare in shock at how busy the Wing seemed to be.

Every other time they had come to the Hospital Wing it had seemed practically empty, so empty in fact they usually felt any sound they made would echo off the walls. Even in Harry's second year when the Hospital Wing was filled with bodies it had still been quiet. Petrified people were quite simply the easiest patients to tend to.

The Hospital Wing had bustled with life for the last half hour or so as most of the beds were occupied with tiny guests resting on their respective beds. Madame Pomfrey paced from patient to patient to her potions stores, though she maintained a stern mask of calm throughout.

After the events earlier in the day she just knew something bad was going on within the castle. Then the prefects brought in the five first years who had been held as human shields. She loaded them down with Calming Draughts, though they were so very small that overdosing was very easy. So she had cast monitoring charms over each of them. The slowing blipping lights above them were cycling through seemingly random colors, easy to decipher when one is trained to know what to look for. Luckily each showed stable conditions for each child.

The prefects were also given a measure of Calming Draught, but she had only given it to them under duress. Just as she was sitting down to take their report for her files three hooded figures had burst into her Hospital Wing, almost getting themselves stunned until one called out to her, "It's Dean Thomas, Madame. I have Ron Weasley and Seamus Finnegan with me. Both injured."

It wasn't until that moment that she stopped to really look at them, seeing that the one on the left was limping and the middle figure barely holding himself up—only able to move with the help of his friends. She shoved the Calming Draught at the two prefects and rushing forward to cast diagnostic charms on Mr. Weasley, the more injured of the two, and let the readouts land on the foot of the bed she would set him on.

"Mobilicorpus. Mr. Thomas, please help Mr. Finnegan into the last bed here. Hurry." As soon as she could she began casting diagnostic charms on the other injured boy, paling at the readouts.

It was no more than ten minutes later that Harry, Severus and Lucius burst in together. They stalked
down the center path between the hospital beds toward two in the far right corner that seemed to be guarded by a dark being. His hood was pulled up so that it shadowed his face perfectly in the flickering light of the fire that lit the room. He stood still and stiff at the foot of the unconscious inhabitant’s bed guarding his friends.

As they approached some of the tension in the dark figure's shoulders seemed to dissipate at Harry's confident approach. It was slight and neither men would have noticed it had it not been for their years of spying on the Dark Lord and their constant need to remain on guard as the slightest body movement could give away whether they had been discovered or not. Harry stopped before the imposing figure, power coming off his body in waves of warmth and strength.

"Report," his voice was soft, yet demanding in a kind way that remained unheard by any but those who were meant to hear it.

Severus and Lucius watched in shock as Dean removed his hood and his cloak fell further back upon his shoulders to reveal not only his solemn features but also the uniform he wore beneath. They looked over to the beds to see all three wearing similar outfits, though Ron and Seamus were stripped of their shirts and Madame Pomfrey was spelling the trouser leg off of an unconscious Ron.

Their uniform consisted of cargo pants that fit well at the hip, pockets bulging noticeably and with unknown weaponry while the hems were tucked into dark army boots that were tied neatly to the top. A black, sleeveless shirt that fit to the teens’ chests like a second skin revealed intimidating muscles as well as pale scars along their arms and chests—some newer than others. Dean had gauze was wrapped from the forearm before the elbow down to his fingers, leaving the tips bare. He refused a bed in favor of guarding his brothers. Seamus had a similar wrapping, as did Ron. Seamus' calf was wrapped, though he was currently rolling his pants leg down to cover the healed injury. Ron had other injuries being taken care of as well, though the injuries focused mainly on his leg.

As she finished bandaging said leg Madame Pomfrey ran off to the back of the Wing towards her potions stores.

Dean spoke up in a similar, low tone as Harry's though his was filled with emotion. He lifted his wand and a purple viewing crystal. "Vigilate."

An image began above the crystal as Dean sat it on a small table Harry conjured for the group.

Three figures came into view, all wearing the uniform and cloaks with hoods raised. They stood before the gates of the massive Malfoy Manor, watching the windows and ground. Ron stood to the side, waving his wand in dizzying configurations. After a while Dean and Seamus were brainstorming amongst themselves for other ways around the wards when Ron grinned. The wards keeping them from entering had finally ripped enough for them to move through. Ron waved the boys forward. They made their way easily enough from the front entrance to the second floor. While there were a few Death Eaters milling about in areas they were taken out silently and stowed in the empty rooms nearest them, of which there was a seemingly never-ending supply.

As the figures began moving stealthily from doorway to doorway Dean spoke up in real-time.

"There was some difficulty in determining just what room she could be hiding in, as well as determining what rooms to avoid so as not to draw enemy fire," his tone was dry; he was reporting to his General there was not time for pride or exaggeration, that wasn't what his General wanted.
Seamus picked up here in a tired but steady voice, "It was Captain who thought to summon Dobby and ask him for the help of the Manor's remaining house elves and enlist them to our cause. As Dobby did this my fellow Lieutenant and I set about planning the traps we would lay to better accommodate our location."

As he said as much it could be seen in the crystal's projected image.

Image Ron turned around in the hall, softly calling, "Dobby." The little elf popped in, silenced at once as Ron held a finger to his lips, whispering. "We need a favor Dobby. I know you cannot get the Lordship ring yourself, we are not asking that. What we need to know is which room Lady Malfoy has hidden the Malfoy Lordship ring, and we need to know which rooms are occupied by Death Eaters of any rank. Can you do that?" The little elf nodded and slid his fingers together in a quiet snap.

"These is Death Eaters, Master Harry's Wheezy," Dobby pointed to the faded red X marks appearing on the doors, "And that is being the ring room." He then pointed to a door with a green X on it. Ron thanked the elf and watched as the elf resumed his disillusioned state.

At this Lucius nodded, knowing how ingenious these boys had been. House elves who bonded to a House would only answer to the keeper of the Lord's ring, and those bonded to an individual would not dare steal from a Lordship ring owner. It was an offense punishable by disgrace and death.

The three boys took a moment to spell every inch of the hall with prank hexes, jinxes and charms, leaving their "message" quite clearly. After finishing they stepped closer to the room marked by the green X, and grimaced at the sounds coming through another door as they passed it: a sickening, repetitive thump of a headboard against a wall as well as grunts and screaming from well-known voices sounded along with them.

Dean held a look of distaste and breached protocol by turning to address a pale and sickly looking Lucius, though Severus looked no better as he attempted to support his blond brother. "Snake-face and his whore were...copulating in the room next to the ring room. I dearly hope you plan to burn or bleach every surface in that wing once you regain your power, Lord Malfoy."

Lucius nodded, swallowing his own bile and desperately trying to erase the images of his disgusting wife having sex with the snake-like man who had enslaved them. Severus could sympathize; however, he had the benefit of having his soul mate within easy sight. Severus knew his feelings for the teen rang true, though he knew no matter what happened the teen would never feel the same for him. Harry could barely stand to feel his touch unless he was so distraught as to accept comfort from anyone who offered. Nevertheless, the spicy, warm smell that seemed to come from the teen calmed him and eradicated any horrors haunting his mind before they scarred him internally.

Seamus' Irish brogue speaking once more returned both men to reality as the two teens continued their report. "Watch." A sly, almost Slytherin look passed between the Dean and Seamus leaving the men thinking they had missed something, but the teen continued before they could speculate. "Ron thought he had taken down the entire ward scheme on this room as well, see the wand movements? Only one problem...we didn't take one thing into consideration: that damned snake. It was protecting the ring, not wards!"

The men could clearly see the self-disgust the two teens were poorly trying to conceal in their eyes and on their faces. They were angry with themselves about this mistake.

Attention refocused as the crystal caught up to their voiceover.
Seamus and Dean entered the room moving to the sides, wands at the ready. Ron took center and braces for magical backlash, but none came. They moved forward, seeing the desk set by the window and moving to it. Seamus and Dean rummaged through it as Ron's eyes swept the room, never expecting an attack from underneath the desk. Ron and Seamus dropped and rolled as the snake attacked, lunging for them both. Seamus hissed as it sideswiped him, and he scrambled backwards, transfiguring as he went. Ron was the true target, it seemed, as Nagini struck true the next time, a crunch and grunt of pain coming from the red-head as the snake crushed his already weakened knee in her jaw, her fangs piercing his skin.

Dean clapped softly twice, alerting the two injured teens that he had the ring as Nagini set her eyes on him. Seamus used her distracted attention to move in behind her with his newly transfigured sword, swiping once and beheading the creature. A wave of black mist rose from it, but before they could react Dobby had grabbed a limb of the two injured boys and used his magic to pull Dean to himself before apparating them to the Hospital Wing corridor.

The crystal ended as Dean settled Seamus on the bed and began treating his spell burned arm, a burn created by the few Death Eaters who put up a fight before going down.

Dean pocketed the crystal again and pulled a ring box out. He walked forward, going to one knee before Lucius and offering the box. "I return this, the Malfoy Lord's Ring, to its rightful owner." Lucius took the box with a nod of thanks, sliding the ring on his finger where it belonged.

"The House of Malfoy thanks you, Mr. Thomas."

Dean stood again, disregarding the thanks. He fulfilled his mission, and that was that. He looked back up into Harry's emerald eyes. "We got rid of that thing, for good, but not without a fight. It got a swipe of fang on Seamus before it bit the Captain near the knee. The same place where Snuffles got him in our third year. I wasn’t sure how we were getting out of there in that shape, but Dobby really came through. Apparently Elf Magic can move wizards through a hole in the current wards of Hogwarts. We're vulnerable to attack if that ever gets out, General. When we arrived Dean sent his patronus to the common room with an alert of our return."

Silence fell over them, all but Harry who stared at the ashamed and furious teens before him, putting all the information away for now. "What is the verdict?" he asked, his voice gentle and understanding, but still in need of information before he could release his team.

Seamus and Dean raised their heads as if given some signal and sadness covered their faces. "We got here fast enough that the poison could not spread any further than the current limb. Madame Pomfrey had the exact anti-venom in her stores thanks to Professor Snape. Seamus was fine, but the pressure and venom had already destroyed Ron's knee. With the break from Snuffles bite and the poison Ron will be lucky to walk with a limp, let along walk at all. Madame Pomfrey is calling St. Mungos to ask a discreet friend if vanishing the bones and regrowing them would improve his mobility."

Harry nodded and clasped them each on the shoulder. "Good work. You did your best, and I would ask no more than that. Enough with the negative emotions, understand? It was Ron's choice to take the mission, same as yourselves. We will heal him," here his eyes went behind the teens to gaze at his waking friend. "Return to the common room and send Colin to me. Once you've done that change your clothes, Pride robes and concealed weapons only. Spread the word. We have much to do and we are going to need as much rest as possible, so grab potions if necessary. I have a feeling that today is only the beginning of the oncoming chaos. Dismissed," the emerald eyed teen said ominously before giving his two housemates one last reassuring squeeze and walking over to Ron's bedside as the red-head stirred.
Severus and Lucius followed the other teen as Seamus and Dean exchanged looks and shared a silent conversation before nodding and making their way out of the Hospital Wing. They didn't bother to cover their heads again; they were home and free, they would not hide here again.

Lucius pulled the curtain behind them for privacy as Ron's raspy voice drew their attention back to the teen on the bed; his left leg was now propped up on multiple pillows and wrapped drastically in layers upon layers of bandages and gauze. "'S tha' you 'arry?"

Harry picked up Ron's slack hand from the bed and squeezed it, leaning over the teen so Ron's blurry eyes could register his face. "I'm here Ron, how you holding up mate?" his voice was soothing and low, comforting.

Ron coughed to clear his throat, trying to talk more but Harry quickly silenced him with a subduing stare and pushing a straw to his lips from the water cup that had sat on the side table. "Drink first, speak later," the younger teen ordered.

After a moment the red-head's blue eyes twinkled in amusement as he continued to drink deeply from the straw, a smirk on his face as he made a show of drinking to appease his worried younger brother. It made Harry smile, though. If Ron could be cheeky, it meant only one thing.

Ron would be alright.

Suddenly the curtain that was closed after Dean and Seamus left moved aside quickly for the Hospital Matron as she returned with a tray in hand.

"Alright young man, I do believe we have a leg to regrow for you. Again."

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*Vigilate* in Google-Translated-Latin means Watch.

**Thanks for Reading!**

**A/N:** I'm back! After a very long, but very rewarding, week I have returned! Jet lag has been vanquished and most everything is back to normal. The kids I chaperoned were awesome and Los Angeles is beautiful! I am so proud to say that this was the trip that threw me off writing last year (in addition to moving and starting my new job) and that it will definitely not be doing the same this year!
Chapter 14: Preparing for a Meeting

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein*

A gasp sounded behind them at Madame Pomfrey's announcement. Severus and Lucius spun, wands trained, but Harry merely waved a hand by his ear, not bothering to look since he knew exactly when the pair of Gryffindors had entered the Wing.

"He's fine, Mya," Harry said softly. "Come check on him and see for yourself."

Hermione stumbled forward, still recovering from her early mission. Ron smiled at his girlfriend and took the hand she stretched towards him. "I'm fine, promise. Just banged my knee a bit and need a new one. Nothing I haven’t needed before," he told her with a wink, hoping to keep at least part of the story from her until after he was fully healed. "I got to use the warding skills you and Bill have been working on with me. It was brilliant."

Bill and Hermione had spent the previous summer teaching Ron the theory of Warding and especially taking them down. Bill knew about and, at the time, was still under McGonagall's binding spell. It killed him every single day to know he was only allowed his beloved profession because McGonagall had need of a curse breaker in her “Noble” Army's ranks. While Ron had had some issues with power and memory while learning there were no issues now. With Ron's magic free from the limitations previously set upon it he was easily able to remember and cast the spells he'd worked so heard to learn that summer.

Hermione's shoulders slumped and the hand not holding Ron's went to her side as she sagged with relief. She knew as soon as she saw Dean and Seamus without Ron that something was wrong. They had come to the Hospital Room within the Den for Colin on Harry's order, and that act alone told her that Harry was still with Ron. At their mention that Harry needed Colin in the Hospital Wing she had risen and followed Colin across the Castle, determined to see that Ron was okay. Her imagination ran wild, conjuring images of a dead Ron, one in a coma or injured beyond what even Magic could repair...these images plagued her the entire way.

Harry's eyes narrowed as he watched her, noticing the way she favored her right side. He moved towards her, and without hesitating moved her hand, knelt and lifted the side of her shirt a few inches. "Mya," he growled, seeing the red and irritated skin showing signs of too recent healing. He stood just as quickly and lifted her in his arms, carrying her to the bed without argument. She sighed and avoided his gaze, nuzzling the underside of his jaw with her nose with a small whine. She knew he was angry with her. He set her in the bed next to Ron's but on the opposite side from where Seamus had been with an exasperated sigh. He gave her “the look” and she knew her explanation needed to be short and to the point.

"When we were on patrol the portraits alerted us the Dumbledore and McGonagall's movements. They had hatchlings, Harry! They...They had Miles." Her voice was hoarse as she spoke of her young cousin. "I engaged as distraction. Ginny and Parvati took lead on extraction. I got hit with the equivalent of a magical cat claw, three parallel slashing curses, but it was wandless. I put pressure on the wounds using my cloak and used Dittany on the wound as soon as I got to you."

Snape, with his knowledge of mediwizardry, lifted an eyebrow at this. "And did you heal the internal injuries at any point, Ms. Granger?"
Hermione grimaced at the looks thrown at her at that, especially from Madame Pomfrey, who was still working on Ron’s potions, but eventually continued under the gaze of her alpha and boyfriend. "Yes. Heather healed me as soon as Tinker got her. I'm fine, just sore."

"I can attest that she was healed by Heather, General." Colin spoke up from behind them, having been waiting in the aisle so as not to intrude.

Harry nodded, calling, "Status?"

Madame Pomfrey took this moment of distraction from Ron to administer the spell to vanish his broken and mangled bones and dose him with Skele-grow. Knowing, as she did, that legs were much more cumbersome to grow she sent a stunning spell at the boy. Other potions would interact with the Skele-grow, so that was out of the question, but she knew the boy would rather be unconscious while the potion did its work, and so she Stupefied him.

"Neville has found Flitwick and gathered the teachers, they are waiting, with the exception of Trelawney who is still being coaxed from her rooms," Colin stated in a no-nonsense manner. "She should be there by the time you arrive. Ghosts are assembled. Prefects are on guard and deciding among themselves who to nominate from their 6th year classes for a replacement to whichever current Prefect will be bumped up to Head Boy now that it's gotten around that Draco won't be returned to his original age."

"And the children?"

"All asleep without incident. Winky is still keeping watch until your return."

"At ease. Thank you Colin."

"No problem, General. Neville, Dennis and I will be waiting for you outside the meeting room. I'll call for refreshments."

Harry gave a grin at that, knowing that his sweet tooth was unrivaled in all of Gryffindor, though Ron could out eat anyone in every other course. "Caramel chocolate biscuits?"

"Always, sir!" Colin turned at that and walked out.

Harry, having had a thought, turned to Lucius. "I need two favors." Lucius lifted a brow, waiting for more details. "First, would you mind sitting in on the meeting as a Board of Governors representative, and secondly could you floo call Remus in his Den and Arthur at the Burrow for me?"

"Of course. I will attend to that now as you ready yourself. Might I suggest a shrinking charm for those fabulous weapons? Wands tend to get loose when faced with an armed and dangerous Lion King." He was confused, though, when Hermione, Harry and strangely Severus began laughing at him. He had no idea that a movie by that same title had been released only a few years before and had been a monumental success. He heard Hermione giggle and say, "Zazu!" But he had no context to understand the reference and kept walking to the fireplace to do as was needed.

As Arthur moved out of the fireplace and towards the group to discuss the situation at hand Lucius knelt before the fire once more, throwing the bit of floo powder needed for a floo call. He cleared his throat and called out "Remus Lupin's Den!" Lucius stuck his head in and closed his eyes briefly to stop the motion sickness that usually accompanied the whirlwind trip of one’s head while the body
remained stationary. He called out the man's name, not realizing Remus was currently in the shower, nor that he was in the werewolf's bedroom fireplace. He waited a minute then blinked rapidly as a door on the left of the room opened to admit a very wet and very naked Remus Lupin...

"Oh, Merlin!"

Colin was going to see how the Professors were doing after being called from their rooms at...he looked at his watch for the first time that day. Ten p.m. He tilted his head. Not bad for a stealth mission into a pureblood home and Death Eater central. "Too bad Harry didn't go with us to finish off Snake-breath for good..." he snarked under his breath. Colin nodded to Neville and Dennis, each standing on either side of the door, awaiting their Alpha's arrival. He walked past them into the room. "Mipsy, Mopsy I need you."

The professors around the room all sported comically wide eyes as first, a student walked into the room they had been herded to, and second said 6th year went down on one knee before the Elves. "We're going to be having a long meeting here with all the professors and some of the Pride attending. I need coffee, tea-things and plenty of biscuits. Harry will be here, too, so make sure Dobby knows. You know how he gets if he misses a chance to see his Master Harry."

The twin elves nodded knowingly, and knew just as well that they would tell Dobby as soon as they returned to the kitchens. A sulking Dobby meant bad things for the other elves, and they did not want a replay of last time by any means. They popped out with a nod and Colin turned to the gathered professors at last. There were a variety of expressions around the large table, some of them looked blank, having already donned their Professorial masks, while others were curious and still others running out of patience.

"Harry should be here shortly," Colin told them confidently. "He has the details you are waiting for and he is the reason for this gathering."

One professor, the new idiot Dumbledore brought in to waste time during the DADA class period, Dorian Diggle stood. He was quite ready to blast insult after insult at the ridiculous child before him, a child who thought it funny to pull respectable and hard-working adults from their sanctuaries to make them wait for another child to make some useless announcement. How dare he?! He opened his mouth only to be silenced by a scathing voice from his own past.

"Sit down, Mr. Diggle. Whatever inferior rant you had started is insufficient of our time and should be kept to yourself," Severus Snape's scathing retort came as the door opened to admit not only the dark Slytherin but Lucius Malfoy, Harry Potter, Neville Longbottom, Dennis Creevey, Arthur Weasley and finally a blushing Remus Lupin. Neville and Dennis pulled the door two and began setting the privacy spells as well as guard duty.

"Thank you, everyone, for coming at such a late hour. I know this is inconvenient but, circumstances what they are, I had no choice but to ask you all here."

Harry was considering how to approach the situation when the choice was pulled from his thoughts with one snarky question.
"It seems, Potter, that in your haste you have forgotten to invite the Headmaster and your own Head of House to this ridiculous meeting!"

Thanks for Reading! Please leave comments or questions in a review. As you can see below, I will answer some of the questions I receive at the end of the chapters; however, I promise I will never do like some authors and have more words in my answers to questions than there are in my chapter. :)

So, to answer some of lightnshadows questions in a review:

What will having Dumbledore and McGonagall locked away do for the war with Voldemort? Give it focus.

Will the Pride's next task to go after Voldemort? No, they need to clean up Dumbledore's mess first, and a little surprise will occur with our favorite Cat and Coot.

Or is he another victim of Dumbledore and McGonagall's power crazed grab for total control of the wizarding world? Not in the same way that the Gryffindors are. I have my Minerva about 15 years older than she is in canon, so she would have been born in 1920 while Tom Riddle was born in 1926. So, she was in school with Riddle during some of his time at Hogwarts, but Riddle was also in his 7th year when Grindelwald was at the height of his power. Minerva has some role to play in Riddle’s rise past dabbling in the Dark Arts to Dark Lord status. As you'll read about later, just because he left Hogwarts doesn't mean that they stopped trying to control him.
Harry refused to react to the current Defense teacher's taunts, wondering just what importance this man thought he had that he would continue trying to bait him despite Snape's caustic and scathing comment not five minutes before. He took a second to breathe deep and pull his magic down at the mention of the cause of his troubles. Harry knew he could not tell these people everything that had happened, it would take far too long, and so decided then and there that it would be a pertinent information only session.

"Around 10:50 this morning an accident occurred in the Potions labs. This caused two things. The first being that Draco Malfoy was de-aged to around three years of age." Harry took a step back from the table and called for Winky, having already alerted the House Elf that she would need to bring Draco to him at his next call. Harry smiled kindly at the elf as she popped in with the sleeping Hatchling.

"Young Master Draco is here Master Harry, sir," she whispered. Harry thanked her and took the sleeping child, holding him in his arms. Draco's head sleepily nuzzled into Harry's shoulder. Harry's magic wrapped around the boy, cloaking him in a silencing charm that would allow sound from him to be heard, but no sounds that could wake the toddler would reach him.

"His father has decided without duress," Harry continued, "that Draco should not be returned to his former age through magical means."

The professors looked curiously at the man as Harry handed his son to him, but decided that if Harry Potter could speak of, to, and with Lucius Malfoy without tension then they would hold their thoughts of the man for now. They watched as Lucius transfigured a book into a small cradle and set the boy in to sleep, an old stuffed animal in the crook of his arm now coming into view. The boy looked like an angel with his white-blond hair and thumb in his mouth. Lucius tucked his son in tightly before returning to the discussion, a small piece of tension at having been away from him so long finally dissipating.

"The second issue arising from this accident was the breaking of an illegal binding spell cast by Minerva McGonagall on the entirety of House Gryffindor for the past 40 years or so," Harry stated calmly, in report mode.

Gasps and cries of outrage broke out at this, the loudest being from Mr. Diggle who, it seems, was a very big fan of the Cat's.

"Do not lie to us, boy—," he began, but was soon silenced by, surprisingly enough, Filius Flitwick who was currently in charge of Hogwarts by sheer point of time. He had been at this school longer than anyone save Binns, and his seniority gave him control of the room.

"Silence, Mr. Diggle. Now, Mr. Potter, I am not disregarding your accusations, but I dare say we need some proof of what you have said before we can move forward."

Harry nodded and motioned to Neville. He brought an ornate wooden box from inside his robe, returning it to its original size with a twist of his wand, and opened it as he moved forward. Neville set the box upon the ground then lifted what seemed to be the first shelf, thus activating the
Wizarding Space inside. While there were only about ten crystals inside, underneath were shelves upon shelves of shimmering silver strands within glass phials—memories.

"These are viewing crystals. Last year Colin Creevey developed a recording charm that could be embedded in a crystal. The charm is placed on an outside feature of clothing, and the image in transferred to a crystal. You can view the recording as many times as you’d like unless the crystal is physically broken." At this Professor Flitwick forgot himself and gave a short "Bravo, Mr. Creevey," making the 6th year blush.

"We only have one recorded spell by McGonagall because she only casts on September first of each year," Harry continued. "Crystal recordings are better proof of an event because they are not influenced by the perceptions of the person supplying the memory. However, I do have pensieve memories of the casting of this binding spell from every year going back about 20 years now for those who are skeptical. I also have pensieve memories and crystal recordings of magical torture perpetuated by both McGonagall and Dumbledore. Until this spell was broken we had no recourse for alerting anyone. Now, all the evidence we have gathered is yours to view as proof of our tale."

Gasps again rang around the room. Harry took that time to set the crystal before him at his place at one end of the table and enchanted, "Vigilate."

Harry did not watch the crystal's replaying of a night not even two weeks before on September first, a night so similar to the one he experienced himself six years before. Instead he watched the faces of those in the room. Severus and Lucius were trying to do the same, having already heard the tale. Arthur though was enraged as he watched, knowing that this had been done to his children, innocents he had sworn to himself to protect. Remus did not need to watch the recording, but couldn’t look away. His own demons swallowed him as he viewed the scene almost exactly like his own memories.

Putting their days as spies to good use, the Slytherin men watched their peers. By Snape's estimation, one which his brother shared, only two of the professors had any inkling of what was going on within the halls of Hogwarts: Dorian Diggle and Rubeus Hagrid.

While the first looked on with barely concealed glee at the movie being played, the latter looked confused and pained. The first didn't surprise any who were watching as the House of Diggle was a notorious and fanatical supporter of the House of Dumbledore; however, the second set off warning bells as the men saw Hagrid suddenly grip his head in pain before dropping from his seat in a faint, his large body shuddering in seizure. A trickle of blood leaked from the large man's right ear. Lucius' eyes widened in shock, knowing what could cause this.

Lucius rose from his seat, casting quickly at the half-giant, "Stupefy. Stupefy! Mobilicorpus. Mr. Creevey—Dennis, alert Madame Pomfrey, Hagrid has had multiple obliviate and mind tampering spells unlocked."

Dennis tore out of the room with Lucius and Remus both carefully holding the Mobilicorpus spells and guiding the large man from the room. Arthur, seeing that there would be no way to fit Hagrid through the doors without help, began casting spells to enlarge the doorways for Hagrid.

Snape stood, moving to stand next to Harry. He saw the indecision in the teen’s eyes and placed a hand on his shoulder before whispering to him. "Har—Mr. Potter, calm yourself. You must stay and inform them of the rest. Lucius and Lupin are competent, they will take care that Hagrid is seen to. You know that Arthur would never allow harm to come to an innocent. Diggle knew, keep an eye on him."

Harry nodded, his eyes hardening as his fears were confirmed. Hagrid's mind had been tampered
with, and there were memories in Harry's mind that were now making a lot more sense. Times when Hagrid had guessed something was wrong within the Pride and promised them help, only to act as if he wanted nothing to do with them the next day—if he didn't forget about figuring things out, then he must have been forced to forget.

He waved his hand to shut the doors and turned back to the professors, keeping careful watch over them all.

"As I was saying, McGonagall has cast this spell on every incoming Gryffindor since she took over as Head of House. Today the spell finally broke and released us all. When she realized what had happened I think she decided that Gryffindors were not enough for her. I say this because she proceeded to take a class of first year Slytherins and Hufflepuffs hostage this very night," Professors Sprout and Sinistra gasped at this, tears gathering in their eyes.

Harry continued to tell the tale of the first extraction and the portraits' help, his team's mission and taking down the malicious duo. "We have recorded proof of this as well if you wish to see."

Flitwick stood in his chair. "I believe you, Mr. Potter, but could I ask that we view this at a later time? I do not think us capable of handling another round such as the last."

Harry conceded to the man. "As you wish. Now, the reason you have been asked here tonight is to inform you of what will happen now inside the castle. The Pride of Gryffindor has voted and with the blessing of Hogwarts has decided that both parties must be taken care of. They are a risk to all students, as they have shown not two hours ago, and they are in no way the 'Leaders of Light' they portray themselves as. A portrait and the elves have promised me that they are imprisoned within the castle walls where they may harm no one."

This was the breaking point for Mr. Diggle as he stood with a shout. "How dare you!? You impudent child, you dare disparage the reputation of such a great man as Albus Dumbledore?! I'll teach you to spread such nonsense and pure lies to these people!" Everyone in the room tensed as the crude man lifted his arm, wand in hand and a Dark Curse on his lips.

"Cruci—"

"Diffindo. Stupefy. Petrificus Totalis," Neville spoke clearly and with no hesitation as Harry cast, "Protego." He lifted a shimmering blue shield around everyone but Diggle as the man dropped, his wand cut in half by Neville's well-aimed cutting curse.

The professors, save Snape, were in shock at the ease with which Neville Longbottom, one of the clumsiest students in the school, was able to take down a man supposedly so well versed in Defense as to claim Mastery. A claim that was obviously false.

"Incarcerous." Snape stood easily, a malicious glint in his eyes. He cast one other wordless and wandless spell before Colin moved into place to stand guard over the man, taking and pocketing the former professor's wand pieces with glee. Colin hoped that he could "accidentally fell" the wrong way later and snap all of the wands he had acquired that day.

Snape, though, was pissed and overjoyed at the same time, though it did feel very nice to finally be able to cast some of his frustrations out. His little spell was untraceable but powerful, worthy of any repercussions that could come of his revenge on the man who would dare cast an unforgivable on his Harry—not that any would. Snape knew he would cast an Unforgivable or ten if he did not distract himself, and so moved to the baby cot to check on Draco. He noted the toddler's only reaction to the spell casting was to kick his blanket off, and so Snape tucked the child in once more.
"Now, as I was saying, Dumbledore and McGonagall have been deemed unworthy of their positions and imprisoned by Hogwarts herself. We, the true Gryffindors and missorted alike, have chosen a new system for running this school."

The professors in the room were speechless and a bit mesmerized by the magic filling the room, emanating from the teen before them. One woman who Harry had only seen, but never spoken to before stood up, asking what was on a couple of minds. "We? What do you mean by ‘true’ gryffindors? And missorted? There’s no such thing as a wrongfully sorted student. By that token, what power do you have to make such decisions? I do not mean to be rude, but please understand how preposterous this all sounds!"

Harry nodded calmly. "It should be impossible, I agree. However, you forget who created the Sorting Hat—Godric Gryffindor. He left his notes on the castle and spellwork involved…a journal of sorts to be handed down through his Heads of House and as shown before, McGonagall is not above greed. She changed the Hat so that it would sort certain students into Gryffindor. That is why we have students like Hermione, who we all know is a true Ravenclaw, or Neville, the most loyal of all true Hufflepuffs. We are all in Gryffindor, and to announce that fact would bring questions we were magically bound from answering."

The woman lifted her head in understanding. "I apologize then. I see that much has been going on behind the Fat Lady's portrait that we have been unaware of."

Harry went on without comment as Remus entered the room once more, though he was alone. "Again, it has been proven that the current system of heading the school has failed the students. There is a system used inside Gryffindor House, and we decided that it would be to the school’s benefit to adopt something similar. It has been decided that the new system will stand as follows: There shall be a one adult and one student representing each of the four Houses as well as one student representing Hogwarts whom her magic will choose. As I said, the eldest of our missorted gave their choices and they agreed to take on the position and magic agreed. They are Severus Snape standing for Slytherin, Remus Lupin standing for Gryffindor, Lucius Malfoy will stand for Ravenclaw, and Arthur Weasley will stand for Hufflepuff."

There was a bit of a rumbling here as both Sprout and Flitwick looked shocked at this. Severus, having known both for a very long time, knew what problem they may be having.

"Filius, Pomona, calm yourselves. You will not lose your positions as Head of House. Because of the time frame involved in these decisions I have yet to find time to think on this myself. Now I see that I may have too many constraints on my time and would like to concede the status as Head of House of Slytherin to you, Aurora. I will gladly help you in your transition if you would allow me."

Aurora Sinistra blinked in complete shock at the dark man. She had wanted this position for years, but knew that as long as Dumbledore was in charge he would favor Snape for the Head of House status. She stood and bowed to him, "I would be honored, Severus."

Snape inclined his head in respect, and the matter was settled. Harry looked on curiously, but said nothing about the exchange. Remus chimed in as well, having studied under and worked with these people for years. "While I will stand as the Head of House for Gryffindor, it is merely a title, as there is already a system in place inside the Den that is quite successful."

Filius, having regained some semblance of understanding waved his small hand towards the heap that was the DADA professor. "It seems we may well be asking you to return to your old position as
Professor as well, Lupin. I don’t think anyone here would stand for a man professed to have a Mastery of Defense yet taken down by a student to stay in any position of teaching others…”

Remus nodded, craning his head for a moment to see the man before sighing. “I would happily accept the post, Filius. However, I wouldn’t be too hard on the man. I’ve seen these boys in action, and they are quite scary, really.”

"The representatives have been confirmed," Harry said, steering them back to the topic at hand. He was tired and the day was long from over. "They will choose their delegates within the week. Are there any questions?"

The Grey Lady lifted her translucent hand somewhat tentatively. "If Hogwarts is able to choose a student to represent her, why can't she also choose an adult as well? And what is to happen to the wards?"

Harry sat at the head of the table and closed his eyes, cursing himself for not having thought of something so important as the wards! He rubbed his eyes a moment as he thought, but it was Neville who answered for him.

“Hogwarts was able to pull Professor Lupin and Mr. Weasley here so I don’t believe she will have any issue with leading her chosen here either. As for the wards, well…As of right now no one is truly holding them, right? Dumbledore cannot access any magic where he is now according to one Professor’s portrait. Until we have someone to hold and direct the wards the Warding Stone will just act without conscious direction. It isn’t ideal, but will work for a short period of time. Really, we need a Ward Master or two to look at them as soon as possible because there are leaks,” he ended in a huff, remembering what he had been told of the hunting team’s revelations. He knew a bit about wards from what his gran had taught him, and combined with what he knew from Hermione. The energy in the room changed gradually as he continued speaking, growing denser and enraged with his next words.

“The warding scheme is completely different than the Founder’s first envisioned. Bill Weasley and Hermione Granger have looked at them. They said that there are useless wards that drain the Stone and even curse strands built in that are extremely dangerous to the people living here.”

Harry's head snapped up at this, "What are you saying?"

Neville grimaced, but looked him in the eyes as he spoke. “If there are as many drains as Hermione has told me about…Without a Ward Master to comb the wards and rid the Warding Stone of the impurities, so to speak, the wards could be drained completely and fall within the next few days.”

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**Thanks for Reading!**

So **Bronkwin2**, a reviewer from FF made a review asking for more fitting death for Minerva than the original had. I was actually rewriting that scene as I got the review. So, now I want messages and reviews from you, my readers. Send me what you think is the most fitting death for our cat and/or coot. Either or both, doesn't matter. I want to see what you all come up with, and I may pick the one I feel best fits and write it in!

Also, there was one other review from FF I wanted to address. **Rising Phoenix-82** made mention of a redeemed!Tom because the ministry, Dumbledore and McGonagall were all bad guys. Unfortunately, that is not going to happen. The plot points surrounding Voldemort from my original are definitely staying, and once we get there you will agree there is no coming back from that point. I
did want to say that if I've made any mention of the ministry being "bad," it is by virtue of Voldemort being so evil. My Ministry, like most canon and fanon is made up of many good, and just people drowned out by the few (but noisy) corrupt leaders. It is a government trying for benevolence, but not quite reaching any sort of helpful status. Our Lions have no respect for authority, and as such, do not rely on the ministry where they can get away with their own justice, that's all.
Meanwhile...

Hermione began planning as she walked from the Hospital Wing to the dungeons and the Slytherins housed there. As she planned she used her fake galleon to call her own meeting within the Room of Requirement. The Defense Association, for it was only because of that cow Umbridge that anyone called them Dumbledore's Army, felt the coins they always kept on them heat and vibrate silently in their pockets. One by one the group consisting mostly of Gryffindors, but also a few Ravens and Puffs read the message that Hermione sent:

5th, 6th, and 7th years gather in Our Room. Mandatory. Emergency.

Knowing she had little time to do everything she sent Heather and Ginny a separate message through their journals with a drawing of the room she wanted. It was a similar tiered set up to their Council room, but split into four equal sections, one for each house. She also asked that someone get any Prefects from the Hospital Wing having been too focused on her task to mention the meeting before she left.

Hermione looked up from her journal in time to see the portrait she wanted in front of her. She pulled up her memory of Harry teaching them to say "Open" in Parseltongue to override the Slytherin wards if they ever had to hide in the dungeons for some reason. She steeled herself for what was to come and immediately pulled up a shield around herself as the room became visible. She noticed first how bright the room was. She had expected dark furniture and tapestries on the walls, similar to how Harry and Ron had described the room their second year, but it seems someone had decided to redecorate. The room was spacious and well lit, decorated with small groupings of comfortable chairs and couches to allow socialization of the students, but in areas easily spelled for privacy, or plotting.

To say the Slytherin students were shocked to see Gryffindor's Golden Girl enter the Snake's Lair of her own free will and without help was truly an understatement. Silence reigned for a few tense seconds before cries of outrage and a few spells flew at her. She raised her hands to reinforce her shield and watched their looks of shock as every spell was deflected.

"Cease your casting. Now!" Came a feminine call from a corner of the dark room as Theodore Nott and Daphne Greengrass stepped forward. Both glared at the occupants of the room with looks that could slice a jugular. "Wands away."
The Slytherins were motionless for a few short seconds before they all moved to stow wands in holsters. Only the 7th year students kept theirs out, which did not seem to set off any alarms with the students. Nott turned back to Hermione with a look. "How can we help Hogwarts' Head Girl?" He made sure to emphasize her title, reminding the students that she had a right to be here, though no one in the senior class really believed that was her reason for showing up as she did.

While Hermione had forgotten about her Head Girl status with the drama of the last 24 hours, she was not above using it. Thinking quickly she said, 'I need to talk with the 5th, 6th and 7th years of Slytherin only in the Room of Requirement. There is to be a mandatory meeting regarding the Head Boy and prefect choices," she lied. "The teachers have given me leave to hold the preliminary meeting with students only, so if you would all follow me, we need to get to the Seventh Floor as soon as possible."

Greengrass nodded at the other girl. "Fifth years gather. Follow Granger to the Seventh Floor, no detours. Sixth years follow, same rules. Got it?" Her voice was that of a Mother Hen that you never crossed for fear of what would happen. "First through Fourth years, curfew stands, and I will know if you break any rules." They nodded and went back to whatever they were doing before the interruption by the Head Girl.

Hermione was impressed with the students of Slytherin, but said nothing, knowing they were running short on time. She sent up a mumbled request asking Hogwarts to control the stairs for easy of access and sent a thankful pulse of magic when they were able to traverse the halls with ease.

The Slytherins were wary as Hermione opened the ornate door as saw in to the room inside. The semicircular room was reminiscent of the Colosseum, with its tiers of seats. The backdrop to each section matched the House colors, and a banner declared the year for each tier, clearly showing who was to sit where.

Hermione sighed when she saw the other Houses in place and Heather sitting at the table. Hermione, as Alpha Female of the Pride, would be taking Harry's place as Alpha while he was at the other meeting and Heather would be taking her customary place to take notes. Hermione gestured the Slytherins to their seats and moved to sit beside Heather. "Report."

Heather smiled, and showed her notes so far. "Everyone is curious but accounted for, save Pansy Parkinson, Ron Weasley and Harry's Team. Ginny has just arrived with the Prefects you asked for, but they've had no chance to talk to their Housemates."

Hermione nodded. "Ron is in the Hospital Wing, Harry and his team are briefing the Staff." She turned to face the curious eyes of the students. "Only one student who should be here is unaccounted for, Pansy Parkinson."

Snickers came from the Slytherins and then Nott spoke up. "I doubt Parkinson will be setting foot outside her dorm for many months, so don't take it personally, Granger. Seems Weasley and Longbottom got ahold of her after the accident and she's now a walking color palette."

Hermione sighed, she should have known the boys’ need for revenge would be strong after the Moribus broke and Pansy had tried to take the Hatchling from them. "Thank you, Mr. Nott. Now, I'm sure you're all wondering why I have called you in. I have two things to discuss which are on everyone's minds: the open position of Head Boy and a very recent attack on the Slytherin and Hufflepuff first years."

The Slytherins' outrage from before was nothing compared to finding out from a Gryffindor that their housemates had been attacked in any way. The Hufflepuff students knew what had occurred, having been the sanctuary from the attack for many of the first years, but the Ravenclaws were utterly
confused about what could have happened. The Gryffindors had not heard of the attack yet, as things had moved so fast, but knew that with silence came faster answers.

As well, with the *Moribus* gone they no longer felt compelled to make fools of themselves with demands for information they would get either way.

Hermione raised her hands for silence and nodded when it was quiet. "I need the Prefects present at the time to step forward." The Slytherin and Hufflepuff sixth year Prefects who had just been released from the Hospital Wing stepped forward along with Ginny Weasley and Lavender Brown. Each told their part of the tale, limited though they were.

Ginny told only that they were taking a stroll about the castle when the portraits said something was wrong. Lavender ended her story with telling Harry that help was needed, and the Prefects knew only that the Gryffindors took down Dumbledore and McGonagall, but nothing after.

To say that the students were confused at the events was also an understatement, which was quickly becoming the word of the night.

Hermione finally stood and addressed the students. "You have been asked here because you are old enough, and mature enough to know what has happened within the castle. When you return to your dorms you must make the other students aware of these happenings in a way that they can cope with." She did not look at the Gryffindor section of the room during this, knowing that their youngest members had had their innocence taken from them much too soon, as had they all.

"On the first of September every year Professor McGonagall comes to welcome the new students of Gryffindor," she did her best not to spit the name or her story, but to tell it without inflection. By the looks she was getting she was not doing very well. "In her welcome she uses a spell she created to put a Magical Bind on the students."

Gasp sound around the room, but Hermione pushed on. "A band of spell energy surrounds our wrists and binds our magic and behaviors to that of a Gryffindor. Reckless, short-tempered, foolhardy, brave. We are…given negative feedback until we are physically incapable of going against the compulsions, and cannot break the mold without McGonagall or Dumbledore’s permission. That is why I am able to be as smart as I am."

She looked to her friends in Ravenclaw who also joked about her being a Raven among Lions, never knowing how true that truly was. "She fixed the Sorting Hat to put any student she wanted into Gryffindor—" She was cut off by a Ravenclaw’s exclamation of ‘That’s impossible!’

Hermione gave him a sharp look. "Do you know who created the Sorting Hat, Mr. Goldstein?"

"Godric Gryffindor, of course. Everyone knows that."

"Yes, and do you suppose that Godric could have left his notes lying about to help his future Heads of House? Because that’s what happened. She found those notes and used them to counter the charms on the Hat."

Goldstein, waivered, but looked unconvinced still. "Prove it."

"*I, Hermione Jean Granger, do swear on my Life and my Magic that everything I say now is true.*"

The room was dead silent, her magical oath steps above the most serious promise a student would dare take for fear of losing everything.

“Minerva McGonagall used notes taken from Godric Gryffindor in order to sort students from Light
families, well off families, and those with large magical reserves into her House in order to force her binding spell onto them. Orchideous." She cast the flower creating charm and set the beautiful blooms in a glass on the table before looking Anthony Goldstein and the other skeptics in the room in the eye.

"Why would I be a Gryffindor? Me, a student you all have named an Honorary Ravenclaw, many times I might add. Why would this same student be sorted into Gryffindor, despite her intelligence and talent and pure thirst for knowledge? That Hat was manipulated into sorting every rich, light or magically powerful student into Gryffindor for that sick, greedy bitch's own needs. But she will not control us any longer!" She said with passion, her open palm hitting against the tabletop. A roar of approval came from the Gryffindor section, scaring the other students. Many had forgotten about the Gryffindor students in the room as they listened to the Head Girl.

Silence fell as she raised her hand once more. "McGonagall's spell fell today, just after Draco Malfoy's accident. When she found out just after lunch we think she decided to go after more than just the Gryffindor students. As you heard, she went after first years from Slytherin and Hufflepuff, but was stopped by Harry Potter and his team. Neither Dumbledore nor McGonagall will be able to harm us again, but there will be a lot of fallout from this. Hogwarts will be restructured, and changes made. The Professors are meeting about this as we speak here."

The students nodded, only vaguely understanding the situation, but still knowing just how close they had come to the same fate as their Gryffindor schoolmates.

"As I said," Hermione continued. "You need to figure out how to tell your House mates, but alert them that this cannot leave the school yet." Hermione nodded, and decided to move on the next order of business.

"Now, I know that this is a lot to take in, but any student of Gryffindor who is willing to answer questions will be able to do so. If they do not want to answer you, do not push. While this may be interesting to you, we have lived this for years, and it is still fresh to us," she looked pointedly at the Ravenclaws, whose thirst for knowledge sometimes superseded their compassion. She was pleased to get nods of acknowledgement and a few guilty looks, knowing she had gotten to a few of them.

"We will now move on to the second order of business for which you were called here tonight. The position of Head Boy is open after an accident de-aged Draco Malfoy. His father has decided to let him remain a child, and have another chance at a happy childhood." She looked pointedly at the Slytherins this time. "Because of this we have some rearranging to do. Theodore Nott, will you please step forward."

He did with a slightly wary glance at the Head Girl. "Mr. Nott, having the high grades and low disciplinary record necessary for the task, I ask if you would accept the responsibilities of Head Boy?"

Nott gave a grimace and with a few seconds to think shook his head. "I...can't. With the loss of Draco, Slytherin needs my focus. I regretfully decline the position of Head Boy and ask that I remain a Prefect of Slytherin House."

Hermione gave him a nod, respect shining in her eyes. "You may. Terry Boot, please step forward. Terry, having the high grades and low disciplinary record necessary for the task, I ask if you would accept the responsibilities of Head Boy?"

Terry smiled, "I accept."
Heather leaned over to Hermione as the students congratulated a grinning Terry. "Mya, how is it that two Slytherins had higher grades than a Ravenclaw?"

Hermione laughed. "They didn't. Terry Boot has the second highest grades for seventh year, only second to me. However, that is why the "low disciplinary record" was brought in, or we'd have a Ravenclaw Head Boy and Girl for the rest of eternity. Terry got one detention more than Nott and two more than Draco." Heather nodded, but then Hermione continued with a sly glint to her eyes. "I also might have tricked McGonagall into ranting about the choices for Head Boy to me about a week ago—she was pissed that Harry wasn't good enough for the job. Too many near death adventures for the other Head of Houses' tastes. I knew the ranking of the professors' choices coming into this meeting."

The girls laughed until someone came into their field of vision. Hermione looked up to see Susan Bones before her, one of the Prefects for Hufflepuff, and a member of the DA. "Hey, Susan. How are you?" Hermione started.

Susan smiled wanly. "I've been better to be honest. Been calming the puffs since Ginny bust in with Wayne Hopkins saying the Headmaster was holding first years at wand point. I wanted to tell you, though, that Miles has done very well so far. He's made a few friends with the other first years, and apparently has no care for the taboo of inter-house friendships as he has a new friend from Slytherin and Ravenclaw. Just thought you'd want to know. He's safe in the dormitory now thanks to your distraction."

Hermione sagged with relief. She had asked Susan and Hannah Abbott to keep as eye on Miles when he was sorted into Hufflepuff. She had taught her young cousin as much as she could about Hogwarts, being especially harsh about how much he did not want to go into Gryffindor for his protection. She didn't think he would go to her House as he was only mid-level in power and had an intensely loyal and loving personality.

She looked up past Susan to see her Gryffindors moving about, chatting amiably with the other Houses, where before there would already be spells flying. She smiled as it finally hit her: They were well and truly free. That was until the yelling started.

Expecting a Gryffindor, Hermione was surprised to see spells flying from the Ravenclaw section. Goldstein was casting jinxes at Terry Boot, the jealousy all over his face telling the story. Terry used defensive spells trying to shield and disarm only. Hermione growled and the Gryffindors moved back at once, the ones near the duel grabbing students and bringing them back as well. They cleared the path as Hermione lifted her hands, not realizing that her wand was still in her thigh holster. She moved the two boys apart, focusing on Anthony Goldstein as she immobilized him. "You call yourself a Prefect, Mr. Goldstein? Attacking a housemate, a fellow year mate! And for what? Out of jealousy? 50 points from Ravenclaw and detention for a month with Filch. I want your badge on Professor Flitwick's desk by morning. There are plenty of other Ravenclaw boys capable of 7th year prefect responsibilities."

She waited for the wide-eyed teen to acknowledge her words, the anger that formerly filled him deserting him and leaving his shaking in fear and a kernel of vengeance flourishing instead. Hermione was fearsome when mad, and the boy was right to be afraid as he stared into her eyes as the pupils went to slits and the chocolate-brown almost glowed with inhuman power.

"Meeting adjourned, you are all dismissed. Nott, Greengrass, see me."

Hermione waited for the Slytherins to make their way through the crowd to her and took that time to
prepare two DA galleons. When they arrive she gave one to each of them. "These are how everyone else knew to be here. Each is a message sending coin. I have the master coin. If I ever need you for a meeting like this, the coins will alert you. I'd like you each to have one in good faith. I want Slytherin and Gryffindor to become more civil now that we lions are now physically capable of it."

That got a smirk from the two Slytherins and a nod, both pocketing their coin before strolling away.

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**Thanks for Reading!**

**A/N:** In thanks for 200 reviews at FF and an awesome review that sparked my muse on TPH I am posting this chapter a few hours early. The A/N at the beginning is from my original posting, and I just didn't feel like deleting it. Again, if you have any suggestions for the Dursleys or Dumbledore send them my way. McG has a fitting end in the works thanks to a turn of phrase one of the AO3 reviews said and my own sadistic muse.
The Next Day

Severus Snape and Filius Flitwick stood at the Entrance Hall doors awaiting their visitors as their carriage traversed the pathway from Hogwarts Gates to the Castle. After the revelation the night before it had been decided that a Ward Master and Curse Breaker from Gringotts would be called in at first light. It had also been decided that something had to be legally done with Dumbledore and McGonagall, and so Madame Bones of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement had been asked to visit as well.

The students had been left notes in their Common Rooms that their classes would be canceled. Luckily it was a Friday, so they had the weekend to find replacements and settle the faculty after such a fiasco. At that moment the doors of the Thesstral-drawn carriage opened to admit the newcomers, drawing Severus from his current thoughts.

"Madame Bones, Mr. Croaker, Mr. Wealsey, Gornuk a pleasure to see you all, and thank you for coming under such short notice." Filius said, genuinely happy to see them as he bowed.

Severus simply inclined his head before turning to lead them to the Headmaster's Office. "As you may have been told we are implementing a time of...change in the Castle. We need to move the wards, which are currently only held by the castle's ward stone. In addition we need to clean the ward scheme and make it more efficient."

Madame Bones looked on curiously. "And what has Albus to say about this?"

Severus stopped, giving a look to Filius who shook his head. "That, Madame, is a conversation for a less public venue, if you would." She nodded, getting the sudden feeling that something was going on within Hogwarts, and not sure if she liked it, yet. Meanwhile Gornuk looked on with glee, he loved hearing of dissent among wizards for they made for fabulous tales at home.

Filius whispered an unintelligibly soft password to the statue guarding the staircase to the Headmaster's Offices and jumped on as it began climbing up. The party entered the office, and the three newcomers were shocked at the different look and feel of the room.

The Headmaster's offices had been cleansed of several Dark Artifacts by Severus and Lucius early that morning while Draco played with the other children. It had astonished both men the ease at which they were able to escape the grumpy, toddling menace when bubbles were involved.

The room's things, once clean, were given to the house Elves to sort into personal and professional items of Dumbledore's and the wizards got to work on making the singular office a space large enough for five desks. The room was currently without furniture, holding only chairs spaced about the room. There were a number of people occupying the room, conversing with others about nothing in particular as they waited from everyone involved to arrive.

Noticing the newcomers Harry stood and bowed to them. "Welcome and thank you for coming to
assist Hogwarts in a few matters. First, and I suppose most importantly, I have a question for you, Madame Bones.” She looked at the boy in anticipation of his question, never suspecting what would fall from his mouth.

"How would I go about legally deposing Albus Dumbledore from his position as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot?"

Blaise Zabini took a deep breath as he looked up at the portrait of the Fat Lady while she, in turn, cast a curious look over him. "Can I help you, young man?"

Blaise gave a charming, if nervous smile and bowed. "Signora. I need to talk to Neville Longbottom, is there anyway he could be alerted? I..." He blushed. "I need to speak with him about a very important matter."

The Fat Lady looked upon the boy with a hidden smile. While he was very handsome, she had seen more charm from others; however, she had rarely seen such sincerity in a student. She turned with a nod and alerted a lion within the Den to fetch Mr. Longbottom. She turned back to the Slytherin, hoping to get a few tidbits of gossip from the boy.

"He'll be along soon, deary. Now, tell me about-!" At that her portrait swung out and a curious Neville stood in the open doorway. The Fat Lady snapped her painted fingers with a universal "drat."

"Blai- I mean, Zabini. What are you doing here?"

Blaise couldn't speak for looking at the other teen just now. It had been years since they last spoke, and to finally get a look at the real Neville again. Self-confident, brave, steady Neville. It'd been six years since his Neville had disappeared and Blaise felt his heart skip a beat to see him again.

"You're back."

"Neville! Wait up!"

Neville never turned around, knowing this voice, knowing that he couldn't bear to see him. Blaise. His best friend, confidant, his rock: gone. Neville knew that the minute he talked to Blaise he would try to spill everything, he would tell the boy what had befallen him and his entire House, and for that he would die. Neville looked to Ron with panic in his eyes, pleading for his newest friend to help. The ginger boy nodded and turned, stopping with his arms crossed over his chest, a look of disgust on his face.

"Beat it, Zabini. No one wants a dirty snake hanging around, least of all Neville."

"You're back..."

Neville blinked in shock to hear those words from his friend's mouth, to once again hear that smoothly whispered Italian accent.

Blaise was his childhood best friend. His parents had met Blaise's mother, Belladonna, before they had children. They were friends of a sort, as much as an Order Member and someone who was neutral in the War could be friends, but they had remained close when the boys were born. Neville had always thought his parents had convinced themselves that they were converting Belladonna and her current husband to their side of the War so that they could befriend her…and Belladonna had let
them think as much to keep their friendship.

When Frank and Alice had been tortured, and later put into St. Mungos, Belladonna had watched over Neville while Augusta had seen to their care. Blaise and Neville had been raised as friends, especially after the First War was over and the Zabinis did not have to hide their neutrality. The charming half-Italian, half-black child had taught his shy friend to be confident in himself, and in turn was taught compassion.

Blaise and Neville stepped on the Hogwarts Express with a promise to never let their sorting come between them, but neither had counted on the greedy machinations of the ones charged to look after them. From that fateful day on Neville had withdrawn into himself, lost his self-confidence, become clumsy, wilted, and outside of the Den was considered almost worthless as a wizard. Everything that made him who he was had left, and Blaise knew it.

He just didn't know why.

Neville had made a hard decision six years ago and pushed his best friend away to protect him. McGonagall's threats were not idle words to instill fear, and Neville had been punished more than once for his frequent glances at Blaise when he thought no one was looking. Blaise had never again been allowed to visit Longbottom Manor, nor had Neville ever replied to his letters or missives. It was as if their friendship...no, it was as if his friend had never existed.

Now, though, he was back, and Blaise was wasting no opportunity.

Suddenly, Blaise grabbed Neville's hand and began dragging him through the halls and up the stairs to the seventh floor. "Please, come with me," was all he said, but the brunette followed his friend without question. Neville simply watched as they reached the Room of Requirement and Blaise walked the hall with his desired room in mind. He knew what he wanted and smiled, tugging the other boy through the door as soon as he was able.

"Mr. Potter, would you please say that again, I don't believe I quite understood you," Madame Bones all but commanded, knowing full well her hearing was perfectly fine, but wanting to make sure she had heard the boy correctly.

"How would I go about legally deposing Albus Dumbledore from his position as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot?" he repeated dutifully. "I do believe that being an accessory to the casting of a Dark Arts spell isn't technically illegal, but would accessory to over one thousand illegal binding spells, child abuse, child neglect, accessory to child abuse, oh—and kidnapping of a minor...would that be enough?"

Everyone in the room was speechless at this, and Madame Bones' eyes hardened and narrowed. "I do believe we shall be having quite the conversation, Mr. Potter. Off record, I will say that anything you say must come with undeniable proof. On record I would like to make an appointment to take your statement."

Harry smiled a genuine smile at the older woman. "I will be sure to contact you for that appointment, Madame."

At this Snape stepped back in to his role as guide. "Now that that has been taken care of, may we move on to other important matters, Mr. Potter?" There was no sting or hate to his question, only a sarcastically posed question and a raised eyebrow, and so Harry nodded happily. "As I was saying
before, we need the ward scheme of Hogwarts cleansed, updated and finally moved from the Ward Stone to a certain few within this room."

The Ward Master, Curse Breaker and Goblin nodded, having done this act innumerable times in their line of work, though not to such a grand scale as Hogwarts. Bill looked on curiously. "I'm guessing you want the curse on the DADA position looked at, Professors?"

"Oh yes!" Flitwick chimed in. "And I dare say there are other curses trying to take hold that we need eradicated." The newcomers, excepting Bill, were quite puzzled at this, but asked no questions until the Ward Master called everyone's attention.

Algernon Croaker cleared his throat at that. "Will you want the magical signatures of the curse casters recorded for evidence?"

Filius and Severus shared a glance, but were saved from deciding by Madame Bones. "I dare say any curse cast at this magnitude warrants recording and any evidence given to my department. I shall authorize it, Algie." She looked at the man she'd known for many years with a hard smile. There was something going on at Hogwarts, and she was determined to find out just what it was.

"Mr. Snape, Filius, I am not sure you are aware that any updates to the current wards of Hogwarts must be authorized and approved by the current Headmaster or a majority vote by the Board of Governors, at which time the warding fee must be paid in full." The goblin gave a malicious grin. He was sure the gold flowing from a warding of Hogwarts would give his family name a boon as never before.

"What if a Founder's Heir approved the warding?" Hermione asked, knowing the exact loophole that stated the Founders and any of their Heirs had more control over the castle than any employee thereof.

Silence engulfed the room. "Founder's Heir?" Madame Bones asked. "You mean to tell me that one of the Founder's Heirs are attending Hogwarts?"

Harry grinned. "Yes, Madame. All 20 or so of us through one child or another of the Founders however far back. Families back then were like the Weasleys now, the more children you had, the better. At the present moment most of the main lines have died out or were cast out as squibs tend to be in any pureblood family—I man family." His shit-eating grin telling everyone there that he had not slipped accidentally. "However, those squibs had families and the magic they were not able to conjure in themselves grew strong in their children and grandchildren."

"What are you trying to say, Mr. Potter?" Croaker barked. While he wasn't an extremist in this war, he was adverse to young people who felt themselves smarter and more knowledgeable than their elders. At close to 90 years of age he had run into more than his fair share of insufferable know-it-all swots, and every single time he enjoyed pulling them down a peg or five.

"What I'm saying is that most—though not all—of the muggle-born children of the Wizarding World are actually descendants of pureblood lines via squib children. And the Founders are no different."

Gornuk cackled madly at his pronouncement. "Finally, finally a wizard sees what the Goblins have known for years now. Good job, Mr. Potter. May your gold flow freely through your vaults. There are indeed Founder's Heirs in this castle. Gather me one of each line who will approve of your warding and I will accept that in lieu of Hogwarts' Board."

Harry grinned, knowing that his declaration was a blessing in the Goblin's culture, and he already had an heir of each line in the castle. "And for you as well, Gornuk, many thanks." Harry turned
towards the office door and cast, "Expecto Patronum!"

His regal stag flowed from his wand and galloped in a full circle around the room. Everyone in attendance felt pure joy fill them at the sight of the majestic spell-animal. The stag moved to Harry to gather his message then trotted from the room in search of someone. "I just need two people and we will have the Founder's Heirs gathered."

The wizards and witches in the room looked around in shock as Hermione Granger came to stand at Harry's side, taking his hand. "May I introduce," he began in the snobbiest butler voice he could affect, "the heiress of Rowena Ravenclaw by her eldest daughter, Hermione Jean Granger." Hermione gave a cheeky curtsy, and looked to Harry.

"And may I," she said in a prim voice, "introduce the sole Magical Heir to Salazar Slytherin, Harry James Potter, The-Boy-Who-Lived, won by right of conquest."

Neville was once again speechless as he walked into a perfect replica of the children's playroom at the Zabini Manor, a place where Neville and Blaise had spent many hours together playing and laughing. Blaise watched Neville's face carefully, relieved to see that light in his eyes once more. He felt himself too forward but disregarded that immediately. This was Neville, his friend, his... Blaise leapt forward smoothly and took the other boy's hand, pulling him to their corner that had sat unoccupied for so long. They sat cross-legged across from one another and Blaise gave a knowing look at the boy.

"Why did you abandon me?" he asked without preamble.

Neville looked up with wide, tortured eyes, but could say nothing for a few minutes. Finally, when the churning fog clogging his throat dissipated he finally spoke, but had trouble finding the words. "Oh, Blaise..."

Neville held his head in his hands, elbows on knees as he tried to find a way to tell Blaise a story six years in the making, but decided to just go with the major points. He started his tale with the first House meeting within Gryffindor and the spell being cast. He told his oldest friend about McGonagall's threats, hoping he would understand.

"Do you understand that I was forced to stay away? I knew that if I spent even one moment alone with you I wouldn't be able to stop myself from telling you, and it would have killed us both. Please, understand that I wanted to tell you...for so long, my friend." Neville looked up at this and saw the tears glinting like ice on the caramel skin before him. "No...please don't. I'm okay." Neville reached forward and wiped the tear from his cheek before pulling to his knees and grabbing Blaise in a hug as he used to do so long ago.

Silver edged joy filled the two boys and Blaise tilted his head back, brushing his lips against Neville's before both realized they were not alone, nor were their emotions entirely their own. Harry's stag nudged his spell-created feelings of bliss and elation against the two boys and Neville heard Harry's voice in his head calling him to the Headmaster's Offices.

"I have to g-," Neville started, but was stopped by Blaise's soft words.

"I'm going with you."
Just as soon as Harry pulled up from his playful bow the door opened to admit two curious boys, Neville Longbottom and Blaise Zabini, the latter of which refused to leave the former's side. Not far behind them was Heather, and he waved her in as well.

"Ah, and our final members!" Harry gleefully stated. "May I introduce the heir of Helga Hufflepuff by way of her only son, the illustrious Neville Longbottom!" Neville gave him a scathing look at the outrageous announcement, and gave his friend a sarcastic bow, with a soft, "At your service," before laughing outright with Harry and Hermione.

Heather, having caught on quickly, gave a quick curtsy and introduced herself. "And with none of the fanfare, I'm blood Heir to Gryffindor’s line through some kid of his, I never cared to keep any of them straight."

Gornuk gave what Goblins called a grin, and wizards viewed as a sneer of the highest degree. "In that case, let us get on with things."

Thanks for Reading!
Chapter 18: The Warding Stone

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein

A/N 6/29: I am currently working on a short chapter set on the first day of classes seventh year from Harry's POV and shows just what life with the Moribus was like. Please let me know if you would even like to see it when I finish and if there is any particular class you'd like to see, or whatever. (I only have about 1000 words right now, so it's pretty open)

Warning: This chapter mentions atrocities that happened in Nazi Germany and Concentration Camps, not explicit, only a mention, but even then they are horrible enough. The chapter is very technical and there is an author's note at the bottom to help explain some of my logic, if my Muse can have logic that is. This is the very precipice of how dark this story is going to get. While you may think that Dumbledore is bad, Voldemort is worse, and while revenge is not swift, it is sweet. So, if you are wanting a sweet, fluff story, I am very sorry, but this is not one.

"I, Hermione Jean Granger, Heiress of Ravenclaw's line, do give my solemn approval for any and all changes to the wards of Hogwarts." Hermione cast Avis, watching the small birds she conjured fly about the room. The spell was to show that she still had access to her magic, and was thus a rightful heir, as she had claimed.

"I, Harry James Potter, Heir to Slytherin, do give my solemn approval for any and all changes to the wards of Hogwarts." Harry promptly cast a spell to move the air in the room and blow everyone's hair.

"I, Heather Anne Jameson, Heir Regent to Godric Gryffindor, do give my solemn approval for any and all changes to the wards of Hogwarts." She transfigured a spare bit of parchment into a perch for Hermione’s birds and watched them flock to it.

"I, Neville Franklin Longbottom, Heir to the line of Hufflepuff, do give my solemn approval for any and all changes to the wards of Hogwarts." Neville, being last, and knowing his Uncle Algie was in the room decided to show off a bit and prove his worth as a wizard. "Expecto Patronum."

A sleek, silver panther moved about the room, watching everyone with assessing eyes before moving to Neville and Blaise, bumping its head against Neville's hand while its tail flowed around Blaise's abdomen, sending shivers of pure desire and elation through the teen.

Algernon Croaker had yet to say a word since his great-nephew had walked into the door, and decided to hold his tongue even after the impressive display of power. He would definitely be taking this back to Augusta, and he felt his sister-in-law needed a bit of a positive boost in her treatment of her grandson. For years he had watched her nit-pick at his every behavior, finding him lacking in comparison to her precious son, but Algie had seen the confidence the boy had, and he had also seen it disappear like smoke after his first year.

He had thought the boy to be like all the others he had met in his travels. Arrogant, until someone better comes along to show you how incompetent you really are. It seemed his great-nephew had come into his own, and at just the right time, too.

Gornuk broke the silence that had fallen with his raspy acceptance. "That will suffice. Now show us
Severus looked to Harry as he saw the boy's eyes stray to Hermione for an instant. There was a problem with that. Hermione had informed Harry that there were two Ward Stones. One was from the Founder's Era, and another was put in place by a (in her estimation) coniving Headmaster who wanted to control the wards himself a few centuries earlier.

"We will need to work on the Ward Stone in the central courtyard." She finished. "The castle is too vast to work on one stone only and the one placed outside is mentioned as being built in the 1500s. So there has to be another older stone. If there is another Ward Stone going back to the Founder's Era it should be able to kick back in when the newer Ward Stone is cleansed. I believe we will find one of the curses is blocking the other Stone from functioning fully."

Gornuk nodded at that and turned, moving down the spiraling staircase with the others of the party towards the central most part of the castle which, coincidentally, was marked by a stone fountain that was currently devoid of water.

Harry studied the fountain and following his gut instinct called out, "Wingardium Maxima."

The fountain as a whole lifted and Harry guided it to sit beside the hole as a block of sandstone rose from underneath, guided by Gornuk. The rock was glowing in pulsing waves of colors, some light, warm and protective, while others were an angry black and purple and still others an arrange of sickly colors that kept to the surface of the stone in a threatening manner.

Bill gasped to see such malevolence covering the wards of Hogwarts, tainting them with their energy. He raised his wand to cast a ward diagnostic, and sheet of parchment appeared beside his shoulder with a running list of every spell contained in the stone.

Everyone, even the Goblin, had a look of displeasure at the true curses contained, and at the names of their casters, thought there were only two: Tom Marvolo Riddle, Jr. (1) and Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore (9).

Riddle's most noticeable curse was really more of the dark version of a Bad Luck Jinx mixed with the spell version of Murphy's Law, causing the worst possible situation you could imagine to actually happen. Harry, and the others, guessed that this all came with the intent that it happen to the DADA Professor.

While not unexpected, it was Dumbledore's curses that made tensions rise. They were varied, but all were vindictive, cruel and geared to harm the occupants of the school, if not outright kill them when triggered. There was one spell binding and nullifying the ward that kept males out of female dormitory floors, with angry red curses writhing beneath. When Bill mentioned this Harry and Hermione met each other's eyes with a knowing look.

"It makes sense, though." Bill said. "Because I remember recasting that ward as Head Boy in Gryffindor's rooms, but I couldn't tell any of the other Prefects without explaining...well, the spell."

Bill grimaced as he returned to examining the amalgamation of wards. "I can't..." He choked up and had to clear his throat. "I don't think I can take these apart. Dumbledore must have spent weeks if not months cooking up this ward scheme, just waiting to cast them. The new curses look like they've been recently added, but in reality they are woven into older wards to trigger combined reactions."

He stopped to calm himself for his first revelation. He pointed to one of the pruple strands. "If I tried to take this negative compulsion curse down it will splice the ward that keeps the House elves bound the Hogwarts. It would kill them. And binding this curse here keeping anyone from asking questions to the Ward Stone."
about Gryffindor House…see how the strand winds around that green one…that would cause the charms keeping the castle from Muggle detection to backfire. It would draw muggles to us.” He pointed to a line of spell work on the parchment. "This would cut the ward that keeps all the Dark Creatures in the Forbidden Forrest away from the castle and grounds..."

He continued listing the consequences of trying to cleanse the stone, feeling the situation grow more and more dire. "Croaker. This curse. Oh, Merlin." Bill handed the sheet he was reading to Croaker, and gulped when the older man's eyes widened in recognition. They had found the curse epicenter…the very thing that most endangered Hogwarts. Croaker handed the parchment to Flitwick, who immediately began running calculations in his head.

"Oh, Merlin indeed,” was all the older man could get out before silence reigned. Every eye focus on him before moving between the pale curse breaker and ministry worker. Finally, unable to stand it any longer, Lucius barked out in his imperial voice, “Tell us!”

“At the center of this stone, buried beneath wave upon wave of traps and hexes is one single curse. When this curse activates, which it can be by any number of tricks melded in this ward scheme… We are looking at generations upon generations of Wizarding children all dead. But not in the way you’re thinking,” Croaker stated without emotion, for if any emotion came to him it was utter despair. "If any wizard were to trip any of these, or even just try to remove the ward holding these curses to the Warding Stone it will trigger one final spell. We only just realized it because this is not one any of us have seen outside of history lessons and its creator was a madman. If it is triggered it could release a powerful enough blast to affect a two miles area with this stone as the epicenter.”

"More than that, I believe,” Flitwick said, his calculations coming to an end. "The spell has been set to feed on what is left of Hogwarts' wards if set off. The effects would be seen across the country, not just the town."

"What is the damned spell?!” Madame Bones roared, unable to hold her tongue any longer.

"Grindelwald's Sterility Curse. Sterilem Fieri"

Harry moved quickly through his shock, grabbing an already sobbing Hermione before she fell, her knees having given out at the announcement. Blaise and Neville both had tears rolling down their cheeks, hands grasping for the other, searching for comfort in any way they could. Whispers of "No...oh, gods, no..." were heard, but no one could move for the realization.

This would truly cause the utter desolation of Wizarding Britain.

There was no coincidence that Hitler and Grindelwald's fall from power coincided. Grindelwald used the Nazi's crazed desire for a superior race as an experiment that he hoped to apply to the Wizarding world. He had, in a way, accomplished this when one took into account the Grindelwald was the one to incite Voldemort's rage and hatred of Muggles with their secret meetings inside Nurmengard as well as teach the young Tom Riddle Jr. the Dark Arts they both so loved.

In the 1940's Grindelwald had watched the muggles, even going so far as to help Adolf Hitler gain his precious title as leader of Nazi Germany. He protected the man from the war, especially those damned Americans, until Dumbledore decided he wanted the Elder Wand more than he wanted a partnership with his friend.

Dumbledore's challenge to a duel had seen the end of Hitler's protective wards, and the imprisonment of Grindelwald. It was also when Dumbledore took control over the Elder Wand—his entire reason for that duel. However, during his rise to power Grindelwald created many spells that mimicked the
effects of the experiments the Nazi's had done to the Jews, including forced sterilization.

One reason why there was so little heard of other Magical schools on the Continent was that they were still trying to recover from the effects of Grindelwald's reign of terror when Voldemort took up his mantle as the next and an even greater Dark Lord. There was little need for nine magical schools with an entire student population of eighty students, and so the other schools slowly began shutting down, the students shuffled to the remaining schools to bolster matriculation rates.

They had thought the spell’s usage lost to history with Grindelwald’s fall, but now, with the return of this spell, the entirety of Europe’s magical gene pool was about to be cut by over a third.

Harry was trying to console Hermione when he felt the hand on his shoulder. Severus. He wasn't sure when Snape, the most hated Potions Master, professor and all around Gryffindor hater had become Severus in his mind, but he had.

Harry felt waves of emotion from the man flow into him. Comfort, however awkward it felt, was still comfort. Harry could feel Severus' magic trying to soothe his own, and it was working until a small piece of dread that, no doubt, the man thought he had hidden from the boy, slid to the surface. He knew there was little hope of cleansing this ward stone, which meant Hogwarts would never fully regain her strength. The minute any wizard's magic touched those stones to remove a ward, they would all detonate together.

He looked over his shoulder and up into Severus' deep eyes, asking anyone who could answer. "What happens if we leave the wards as they are?" He closed his eyes, praying to any deity who would listen, even Fate, bitch that she was.

His hopes were shot down with Bill's emotionless answer. "Anyone who stays within the castle for more than 22 hours at a time will have a magical siphon begin to attach to their core. It will feed to Albus Dumbledore. The longer they stay in the castle, the deeper and faster the siphon will…work."

Croaker picked up as the younger man faltered, thinking of the siblings he had in the castle who may already be subjected to this spell. "At some point the siphon will drain faster than the child can regenerate magic and they will have nothing to regenerate from. If the child is young they may be able to live through this as a squib, but the older children's bodies have relied on their magic for too long, and losing their magic will kill them."

"But Dumbledore is in a magic dampening area,” Heather commented. "Wouldn’t that mean the siphons wouldn’t work properly?"

Bill and Croaker shared a glance, thoughtful. It was Snape that answered first. “There are two ways this could unfold, I believe. The first, is that the magic is taken directly to Albus' core, but cannot be expended, thus having no outlet. The second…” He faltered for a moment. “The second being that the free magic taken is recycled from the air back into the castle walls and wards…”

“Thus making the siphon faster and stronger!” Hermione cried, finishing his sentence.

Madame Bones picked up from here with a sharp realization. "When was this cast?! How long have the students been subjected to this, Algernon?!

Bill and Croaker jumped for the diagnostic sheet, both doing calculations. Bill dropped to his knees as a Tempus showed the time to be 11:35 am. Filius look up with dead eyes as he answered.

"He cast it before noon yesterday, I guess after he realized Minerva's spell had fallen. It's been in effect for 24 hours if not more now. The siphoning spell is already in place."
Neville's reflexes were the only thing keeping Blaise from falling to the ground as he passed out.

Far below the castle, lower than the Black Lake and Chamber of Secrets even, was a set of rooms, all stone with no amenities. It was a Dungeon in the true meaning of the word. It was simply a rounded room, deeper than it was wide with a small nook set back with a grate for bodily wastes. Along the walls were chains at different levels and intervals, attached to which were an older man and woman.

They had not been there long, less than a full day, but their anger, rage and hatred for those who had imprisoned them were still going strong. Earlier they had yelled themselves hoarse when a house elf had come in to spell nutrient potions into their bodies, having been told not to allow the prisoners any true sustenance.

Tinker, the elf, had used magic to eliminate any waste on them before popping out. He had completely ignored their demands to be freed, and their attempts to coerce him to listen to them. Tinker was glad he was bound to Hogwarts, not to them, for he would have no way to disobey them if he was their elf.

"How dare that creature disobey me. How dare those...those snot-nosed brats. How could they do this, Albus? Doing this to me...ME! I am their commander! Their leader!" Minerva continued ranting, though Dumbledore had tuned her out long before.

"Quiet, woman!" He hissed at her, not able to take more of her voice. He ached with standing in the concrete room, hands shackled to the wall by chains. But, no matter.

His original plan was working, he just knew it. If it took more work than he originally thought, fine. The siphoning spell had truly started only a half hour or so ago...it was hard to measure time in a room only lit by sconce. But it mattered not. He would eventually be strong enough to overpower the anti-magic wards in the room. They were geared towards wandless magic, and Dumbledore kept multiple wands on his person for such reasons.

Soon...soon he would not only be free from this hell hole, he would have power unimaginable! Those Gryffindors, the entire Wizarding world...no! The entire world would know the name Albus Dumbledore, and he would be the "Benevolent Leader of the World," or at least he would try for benevolence. His version of benevolence.

First, he would kill Minerva and cast the blame for this whole fiasco on her. Then, he would enslave that ungrateful Potter-boy, use him for the tool he was to kill the traitor Voldemort. If any major deaths occurred he would just blame Snape and those disgusting Death Eaters. All for the Greater Good, of course. They would soon find out what happened to anyone who dared to side against the great Albus Dumbledore.

The former Headmaster and self-proclaimed future ruler used his rising strength to lift himself to a standing position, his hand just barely able to grasp…it wasn’t there! He reached into every pocket, nook and cranny he could reach to no avail. They were gone! His wands, all of them, gone!

No matter. He shook his head and settled for a back up plan, still tuning out the screeches of his prison mate. He maneuvered his wrist and, by the tip of his nails was able to pull a trinket from his pocket. He turned the metal contraption with his ever-increasing magic building. Three times it turned before he put it away and waited for his servant to answer his call—willing or not.

He grinned as a light filled the room from the stone door that was slowly opening.
"Ah, yes, Argus, my boy. I need you to free me from these chains at once."

Thanks for Reading!

A/N: Thanks to Giz2mo for thoughts on the actual curses left by Voldie and Dumbles on the Warding Stone. Originally there was no "list" or mention of what those 9 curses are because I felt no one would care. So, the mentions of what's going on is for you, dear!

A/N2: If anyone is curious about my math and numerology, the explanations are below, if not, please Review and let me know what you think!

So, my math for the student population: Hogwarts is a school that everyone seems to think should hold around 1000 students, easily. However between the short time it takes to sort students, and the general description of the towers we can say there can be up to 5 students per gender, per year, per house. So at any given time there are 5 male, first year Gryffindors and 5 female, first year Gryffindors, and the same goes for the other years and houses. So that makes 70 students per house, times 4 houses you have 280 students.

That's a little less than a third of what the castle could hold. That means there are about 840 students spread over 3 schools (if they all hold the same amount of students). If they were spread over all 9 school (I picked a random number for that, numerology says 9 is a number of great change) they would have about the same as one Hogwarts House as the entirety of the student population.

So it got me thinking, why is the population so tiny. Why are there only 3 magical school for the entirety of Magical EUROPE. So, I created a reason: Grindelwald and Nazi Germany. It's stated in canon Grindelwald was kicked out of Durmstrang (a school in Germany that willingly teaches Dark Arts to students) for his sick and twisted experiments. So, naturally, I let him go further from theory to practice and what better way than in his home country during Nazi Germany times.

Numerology: Then, if anyone is curious about the siphoning spell's time (22 hours), I used the numerology of 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8. So, meanings: 2 (union/receptive), 3 (interaction), 4 (creation), 5 (action) and 8 (power/sacrifice) and added them together.
Gornuk could not control his reactions at seeing that much malevolent magic on the Warding Stone. A stone that was set to harm not only innocent children, but his own race as well. He felt the rage and power rise within him and roared a Goblin expletive, his clawed hands raised before him. The highest dishonor to a goblin was to harm a child. In goblin culture children, no matter what kind, were precious, and harming a child was simply not done. Anyone found harming a young one would be sentenced to immediate death.

As Gornuk's rage rose, so did his power. A Goblin's magic was not like that of wizards, it was a brute force to a wizard's delicate finesse, and no one won a battle of wards against a Goblin. Ever.

The Ward Stone glowed an eye-searing white as the Goblin started chanting, the amount of power in the courtyard became physically oppressive as the Goblin and the Wards fought for dominance. The adults fell to the ground, unable to find the strength to fight the pressure, nor wanting to be caught in the crossfire. Lucius pulled Madame Bones into a more protected area behind the fountain, knowing the woman was distraught at all that had been gleaned from the wards. Filius was forced against a tree trunk in the backlash, suffering a few scrapes to his small body in the process.

Severus, realizing the danger, and blind to protect Harry from whatever was happening, pushed the boy to the ground, covering him with his own body on instinct. Harry had already covered Hermione, protecting his sister in all but blood, and Neville lowered Blaise to the ground, crouching in front of him, an arm over his unseeing eyes. Bill, having been closest to Heather gathered her in his arms as he turned his back to the fierce glare, one hand reaching up to pull Algernon to the ground before he was thrown from his feet. He gave a grimace at the blinding effects of the Goblin's work.

When the blinding light finally receded to show the original pulsing whites, yellows, blues and greens of the protective wards the wizards sat up, still trying to blink the spots from their eyes.

Inside the Founders' Dungeons Argus Filch was confused. He didn't know where he was, how he got there or where Mrs. Norris could be. He blinked at the sight of Albus Dumbledore and Minerva McGonagall hanging from chains as he had always dreamed he could hang students in the years since he was forced into the job of Castle Caretaker. What a joke, putting the poor squib in charge of uptake on a magical castle.

Argus knew his primary task was eavesdropping, but no salary was worth the hassle of dealing with magical children day in and day out. No, Argus Filch was trapped in Hogwarts just as surely as Voldemort was plotting to take over the world at that very moment.

Argus knew that infernal metal thing in Albus' pocket was how he was controlled in times like these, he just had no idea how to destroy the damned thing. He blinked as he realized Dumbledore had said something, but the effects of the metal's compulsions were wearing little by little. His body moved forward, unable to fight that much yet, and he cursed inwardly as a key for Albus' manacles
appeared before him. He tried to fight his own body, but only succeeded enough to fall after the first cuff was unlocked.

"Sorry, sir, sorry..." He said, a plot forming in his mind. He stood shakily and moved to the man, ignoring the vitriolic insults on his intelligence and parentage as he stuck the key into the manacle with one hand and pocketed the trinket with another. As soon as the lock clicked he made a run for it, escaping the Dungeon room and calling for a House Elf that had always been particularly kind to him over the years. Lissy, the sweet elf, saw the caretaker and popped him away from the Dungeons, having been watching the rooms for some time with her worries growing.

Albus laughed at the odd man, knowing that with a flip of his wrist the man would be serving him once more, despite his reluctance. He patted the inside of his pocket in his search for the trinket, growling as he realized he'd been duped!

"No matter. I'll get that squib. I'm free now, and no one will stop me this time!" He snarled to the only other occupant of the otherwise empty room as she yelled for Albus to release her.

When their sight and other faculties finally returned to them after several long minutes Harry stood with a slight blush still staining his cheeks. He had enjoyed feeling Severus' body pressed against his, and was sad when the man rolled away so quickly from him, as if Harry were a leper just out of quarantine. He was still trying to get his mind to work, so dazed by those few short minutes of feeling as if he didn't have to protect everyone anymore.

After a bit he was able to focus and waved his wand a bit, conjuring enough benches for everyone to sit on before he helped them from the ground. Neville roused Blaise with an *Enervate* and helped him to the bench the students had apparently claimed for themselves.

Filius Flitwick stood and limped over before bowing to the Goblin in thanks. "I am in your debt, Gornuk." The Goblin accepted the debt with a nod.

"No Goblin would allow a child to suffer needlessly, you knew this."

Flitwick nodded, he did know, but he had not known any from the Goblin Nation to go so far for a Wizarding child before.

Harry got a strange glint in his eyes before he turned to Mr. Croaker. "There is a set of spells in place to override and hamper another Ward Stone. I need these spells erased as quickly as possible."

Croaker nodded and moved toward the paper with Bill. They read over it, making note of the spells that were at issue in the stone before raising their wands. They took turns speaking the name of each spell then overpowering a *Finite Incantatem* at it as it rose to the surface of the warding stone.

As they did this Harry called for a House Elf, smiling when Mipsy and Mopsy arrived together. When the elves arrived, ears flapping with joy, they bowed to Harry.

"What can Mipsys and Mopsys be doing for the great Master Harry, sir?"

Harry bit back a groan at the new adjective and smiled at them. "I need a restoration potion from Professor Snape's stores for everyone." The elves nodded and popped away and Harry gave a cheeky grin to counter Snape's scowl. "What? You brew better potions for yourself than the general students' potions that Madame Pomfrey gets, and you know it!" Severus could not argue, for he was correct, and simply continued scowling at the brat.
The four students smiled as they sipped the restorative potion that was brought to them. With each spell's release they could literally feel Hogwarts' magic grow stronger.

Dumbledore smiled to himself as he made his way from the back of the room to the door, straightening his robes as he went. He was stopped not by the desperate pleadings of his second in command, but instead by a popping, disconnected feeling in the pit of his stomach. He stood still, taking stock and roared as he realized what was wrong.

The siphons that had only just begun to truly fill him were gone.

"NO! This is impossible! No wizard can remove those spells! Raaagh!" He turned, seeing the door and ran as fast as his old from could towards it in his rage. He was surprised when not only did the door slam shut, stones began to block it up completely.

He growled and threw his magic at it wandlessly, not knowing that the newly strengthened wards on the room would only absorb any and all magic that was not Hogwarts' own. Stone walls began dropping in the room, effectively boxing him into a corner and depleting his extra magic as he tried to blast one wall, only to hit another only inches away from the first.

Within minutes Hogwarts had her prisoners well and truly trapped inside one hundred feet of stone walls. Her magic glowed and moved through the grounds with a warm, smug feel, making many students feel more at home in the castle than they would have been otherwise. Albus Dumbledore and Minerva McGonagall were well and truly imprisoned with each having only stone and one small grate to the sewage to look at...though it would be quite a while before the latter realized just what had happened to her.

When Croaker had finished his last spell he stepped back with a slight stumble. Lucius caught the panting man before he fell as Severus did the same for a sweating Bill. Severus conjured two more comfortable chairs than the benches present and they settled the two men in them to rest as Filius negotiated the new ward scheme with Gornuk.

Harry, taking advantage of their being occupied, called for Lissy to see about Hogwart’s inhabitants.

Lissy popped into sight in front of him, ringing her hands. “What cans Lissy be doings for Master Harry?”

Harry smiled at her, and simply asked after the castle.

“Hogwarts is happy again, Master Harry. She be strong again. Mr. Bad Lemon almost escaped, but was punished for it by the castle. He is being trying to make the Filchy-man free him.”

Harry gave his thanks to the little elf as he took in what had happened.

He sighed then told the others of the situation, and how close they had come to losing the Castle to a madman. Without time to be able to truly analyze what had happened their reactions boiled down to being glad that nothing had yet come of their horrible circumstances.

Madame Bones alone was able to see that with her vast training in analyzing such situations and she was furious. As far as she was concerned justice would come to Albus Dumbledore, and he would
never set foot outside of his prison for it to happen. She got a malicious gleam to her eye and began planning.

When everyone had settled down from the latest revelation they eventually decided that Gringotts' typical ward scheme for the other magical schools would work for Hogwarts as well. They had developed it for other boarding schools that had contacted Gringotts for wards, but the goblins were willing to share their scheme with Hogwarts for a price.

"Take the payment from my vaults, Gornuk." Harry stated calmly to the protests and looks of disbelief from the adults. "I am the Lord and Heir of multiple Houses. I can afford to spend a bit of gold to ensure safety here at Hogwarts." Not to mention the fortune he still had from selling those Basilisk parts.

Lucius, though, still put up a fight. "Mr. Potter, while the House of Potter is an Ancient and Noble House, its vaults have sat idle for years. Please, allow the House of Malfoy to take some small measure of this burden."

Harry looked at him with an odd light in his eyes before nodding. "The House of Malfoy will pay one-quarter of the fee. Please pull half of the remaining cost from the House of Potter and another half from the House of Black vaults, Gornuk."

Gornuk bowed, "As you say, Lord Potter."

Hermione leaned into Harry's side with a laugh, stage whispering, "However did you get them to stop calling you Lord Potter-Black-Slytherin-and-every-other-House you preside over in one breath?"

Harry wrapped an arm around her shoulder, kissing her temple. "Well, no one has ever been able to match you in the 'Most Said in One Breath' department, Mya." Hermione gave him a mock glare at that, hitting his arm with a huff. "And apparently if you ask Goblins to call you by one name, they will."

Gornuk nodded his agreement to the comment. "If you are ready I would like to get on with the warding, Lord Potter. If you could," he pulled out a parchment sheet, "I need a drop of blood from each of you for approval of the transfers." Harry bit his finger and pressed a droplet of blood to the parchment, while Lucius cut his thumb against his cane, pressing the blood that welled up to the paper. "Now, Lord Potter, could you show us all to the next stone?"

Harry grinned. "Well, no time like the present I suppose. Back of Front entrance?" He turned to his friends for their thoughts. "Front, I think." And with that and a few nods of agreement he started away with Hermione, Heather and Neville in tow.

Severus quirked an eyebrow. Harry's true personality had really begun showing more and more in the last few hours, and he could not say it was a deterrent to the feelings that he was developing for him. Realizing he had no clue where the other warding stone could be kept that it was out of even Dumbledore's vast reach he asked, "And where, Mr. Potter, might you be taking us?"

Harry turned his head and winked at the dark man, "Why, the Chamber of Secrets of course!"

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**Thanks for Reading!**

Please review and let me know what you think! I have agonized over this chapter for a long time, now, and I want to know how you feel.
Two things:

1. I made a Facebook account for my writing with TPH and the stories I have formulating, if anyone wants that as a place to ask questions get insider feed as I pull my hair out over sophisticated Snape word choices and such... If you do, add me FB name "Petra Kitt"

2. I am currently working on a chapter set on the first day of classes seventh year from Harry's POV and shows just what life with the Moribus was like. Please let me know if you would even like to see it when I finish and if there is any particular class or scene you'd like to see, or whatever.

So, my PSA: No students were harmed in the making of this chapter. :)
"A girls' bathroom? The entrance to the Chamber of Secrets, the lair of the great Salazar Slytherin is in a bloody girls' bathroom?" Lucius was astounded, and not a little shocked. He could not wrap his head around the fact that his idol's sanctuary was only accessible through a girls' bathroom.

"Research shows that the original entrance was through Slytherin's personal bathroom," Hermione started to enter lecture mode at this, enjoying the wide eyes of the adults as she told them something so well-known to the Pride, but unheard of by the adults' standards. "However, the area was destroyed in the 1600s when, well, imagine the Slytherin version of the Weasley Twins remotely set off an explosion that blew up two floors. After the clean up was completed any furniture still standing was dispersed through the castle. It just so happened that the faucet that Slytherin used in his personal area was relocated to this bathroom a few years later. The entrance reset itself as it is tied to the faucet itself, not to the Chamber."

"Are you having us on, Ms. Granger? For, I assure you, we are unamused," Lucius said.

At the incredulous and unbelieving looks on all the adults faces, save Snape, as he held his face blank as always, she sighed. "What? You use magic every single day! Have you ever used Wizarding Space to move a door? I swear, growing up with magic just stifles the imagination. Listen, Magic is intent. Just as you must want to make a needle when you transfigure a match, you must want what you cast. Slytherin's journals say he wanted an entrance to his Chamber, and he wanted that faucet to play an important role because it was made just for him."

She walked to the faucet in Myrtle's bathroom, pointing out the snake etched on the side. "The other Founders had this made for him. Basically, there was no running water in that time, so they made this shape, well..." Hermione glanced at the faucet. "Actually this faucet has been transfigured to look like the others in the room, but its original shape was created as a focus for an augamenti spell to pass through to fill a basin. And thus, a magic made shower. A squib who had been cast from his family actually saw them using it outside one day and was later credited with revolutionizing water pumps of the time."

Neville, knowing that Hermione could go on in this fashion for a while moved forward and gripped her shoulder in his hand. "Mya, can we delay the history lesson for an hour to set the wards?" The others nodded and Hermione's mouth set into a pout.

Harry dissolved the tension by stepping up to the sink and turning back to look at the room's occupants. "Brace yourselves. Open." Despite the warning the adults of the room had a variety of reactions. Mr. Croaker, Madame Bones and Bill jumped in surprise at the sharp hisses falling from his lips. Gornuk made no move except to tilt his head curiously at the boy.
Severus and Lucius however had much different reactions. Lucius shuddered in delight at hearing the language he so detested hearing from Lord Voldemort fall from the boy’s lips in a way that he already loved, while Severus thanked his tailor for the voluminous robes that hid his traitorous body’s reaction to the sibilant language. He had no idea why a language he abhorred from one man shattered his tight control and sent shivers of desire through him when spoken by another.

The sinks that before were set up in a circle now began melting away, a set of stairs forming where they had been. "Well, that's new," Harry said, causing the adults in the room to look at him in alarm. He shrugged, "What? Usually there's just this big slide." Hermione and Neville agreed, having been to the Chamber before.

"What do you think happened?" Neville asked.

"At best guess the other warding stone was cutting off something in the Entrance's power source." Harry replied while looking around the new entrance.

The others nodded and Hermione gave a delicate sniff. "At least we wont need a Scourgify when we reach the bottom this time." Neville agreed with a "thank Merlin!" and the party began descending down the new set of stairs.

Harry cast a lumos to light the path down the stairwell, grinning as the glowing ball of spell-light bounced back and forth across the walls setting small torches aglow on its way down.

As the party reached the bottom Harry gave a good look about, noting the small changes to the first room. Where before the walls were crumbling and structurally unsound, they now looked sturdy. Almost as if they had been built only years not centuries beforehand. Neville and Hermione were astonished.

They had first been down to the Chamber themselves in third year when all of Gryffindor pitched in to help Harry collect and sell the Basilisk parts. All those who had helped were given a small piece of the profits in thanks, though that wasn’t why they helped. When your Alpha, your Leader, needs help, you help.

During that time Harry had searched for a way to house the magical orphans and abandoned children from London within Hogwarts, but away from the prying eyes of McGonagall and Dumbledore. The shelter in London was a great place for finding the orphans, but there was only so long one could hide a building filled with magical toddlers and children before someone’s accidental magic blew up the place. Once the Chamber had become inhabitable Harry had used both the Chamber and London for the children. The older children and squibs were housed in London so that they could get a good educational foundation. Later the squib children would able to learn about the muggle world, and pursue their dreams without shame, while the little witches and wizards would have a steady residence so their Hogwarts letters could be addressed properly.

Up until an hour ago the Chamber had looked old, timeworn, and like it would crumble at any moment, though it had always been a stable shelter inside the castle. The Pride had spent months traversing through its tunnels and rooms, with books of household charms in hand. They had set up a nursery and bedrooms for the orphans, as well as play rooms and school rooms. The children were watched over by a couple, Ronan and Elsbet Prewett. She was a witch and he a squib cousin of Molly Weasley nee Prewett.

Percy had told him about his relative when Harry brought the problem to the Pride his third year and so Ronan and Elsbet were contacted. They hardly agreed to help in any way they could. They were brought anything they needed by Dobby and helped by Winky who adored children.
A few of the rooms were used to hide students who were being targeted by McGonagall or Dumbledore for a few hours, as well as house them over the summer if they had no safe place to turn. Those students could also hide at the London shelter, and did on occasion. Harry often escaped to the Chamber after Dumbledore forced him on a Horcrux Hunting excursion until he could heal without alerting the other Gryffindors that he was injured in any way.

At the end of the Chamber was the giant head of Slytherin whose mouth and throat were actually a tunnel. This acted as an exit to the Forbidden Forest and gave the Pride a way to flee the castle or go on raids for one reason or another without alerting anyone. Dumbledore monitored the doorways from the castle to the grounds, but they ended at the edge of the forest.

Neville sighed, remembering a few of their more dangerous raids, tracking down Wizarding children who were being brutalized and rescuing them, or saving squib children who had been abandoned by their families. Many times those children had been treated as Neville had been, hung from windows and dropped, thrown from a pier into freezing water all just to see if their magic would manifest itself.

Unfortunately for those children, it never did and they were cast out, left in a field to die...or they would have been until Harry found a way to circumvent it. Harry had someone on his payroll at St. Mungos. For a small stipend, one that Harry insisted she take, Artemisia would take note of any child who was brought in for odd or repeated treatments or showed signs of abuse. She would write the name into a notebook that would alert Harry and the Pride’s graduates and older members would investigate.

The students came back from their thoughts as they finally reached the statue of Salazar Slytherin's head and snakes. Harry stopped and sent his patronus ahead to give Ronan and Elsbet time to round up the children and put them in the back room. He ignored the questioning looks and called "Open" again to the statue. The adults watched with widen eyes as the snakes slithered into place and Slytherin's stone version of a self-portrait swung open to show the open Chamber.

Harry walked in and called to Hogwarts herself. "Lady Hogwarts, please show us the Warding Stone."

He knew it was the right thing to do when he felt the warm and welcoming magic of Hogwarts flow over him. The stones in the very center of the large Chamber melted as the sink had only minutes before. A small monolith, reminiscent of those at Stonehenge rose from the floor and its position between Mother Earth and Lady Hogwarts.

Gornuk was in awe at the level of magic emanating from the Ward Stone and started to put Gringotts warding scheme into place using the latent magic in the air to power his work.

"So, Blaise, how is Pansy?" Harry asked with a sly glint in his eye as they sat around the Chamber, waiting while Gornuk worked on the wards. They were all sitting in a corner against the walls as any magic used in the room while Gornuk worked his wards could throw them off.

Blaise blinked with a puzzled expression for a moment, his mind having wandered to the boy sitting next to him. It took a good shake before it cleared. "Oh, her. Well, I'm not sure. She's holed herself in her room and hasn't come down even once as far I know. Nott had a blast riling her up and watching what color combination would pop up next."

The students giggled at that, and even Severus had a hard time keeping the smirk off his face. The
other adults looked confused, but knew that in this case ignorance was probably bliss.

Hermione, though, huffed. "He never said anything about goading her like that when I asked him at the gathering last night." She looked piqued until she realized the boys were looking at her oddly. "What is it?"


Hermione blushed. "I called a meeting of the students, 5th through 7th years for all houses."

Snape blinked in surprise, thinking of the chaos that could have happened with so many teenagers together without an adult there to threaten them into behaving. "And by what authority did you have to call such a meeting, Ms. Granger?"

Hermione smirked. "I am Head Girl and was without a Head Boy. McGonagall gave me the list of rankings for the Professors' Head Boy candidates, so I just went down the list. It was for the best, and fairly boring. Theodore Nott turned down the position in favor of keeping things in Slytherin House under control, and Terry Boot took the job instead. Goldstein will not be staying on as 7th year prefect, and if he steps one foot out of line I'll expel him from the castle myself, jealous git."

She ranted towards the end, surprising the adults there who had never actually heard the girl say a bad word about anyone. "Professor Flitwick, you'll need to find him a replacement and one for Terry too. I'm really sorry."

Hermione seemed to remember herself and blushed in indignation as she saw the look on Harry’s face. She raised a finger to Harry who gearing up for a fit as his imagination ran wild. "Harry Potter, you will remember yourself. I was fine, and we are no longer bound! I can protect myself just fine, thank you!" Hermione took a calming breath before looking at him once more. "I had Seamus and Dean in the shadows, Nott and Greengrass had the Slytherins under tight reigns, and Susan kept the Hufflepuffs at heel. The Ravens were the worst of the night, and that was mainly them arguing with me when I said..." she trailed off and looked at the ground around her, realizing what she was saying.

Harry raised her face with a finger under her chin, knowing that everyone was watching them with curious interest. "What did you tell them, Mya?"

"Um...well, Ikindatoldthemthebriefversionofthepride'shISTORYandthatI'mafoundersheir..." She said with her talent for saying way too much in one breath. Harry growled, his eyes closed in pain and Neville tensed, both remembering the pain that usually came with trying to tell someone what was going on, and the tears of helplessness that usually followed when nothing worked. No one, other than Harry and Neville could even make out what she said, so Madame Bones and Mr. Croaker remained in the dark about the details involved in the Gryffindor Pride's secret.

"How did they react?" Neville asked softly.

Hermione leaned forward, grasping his hand and Harry's, unknowingly causing a flare of jealousy in two others. "It's okay. With the exception of one Ravenclaw they accepted without question, and that one was only because he didn't believe what I said about the Sorting hat. I proved him wrong though. I also kind of put the Secret Keeper Charm on the room, you know, the one I invented for the shelter, so there will be no owls home, Harry. I promise."

At the curious looks Hermione elaborated quickly, “Anything written will be smudged, and anyone trying to tell an outsider will get too confused to remember what they were supposed to be talking about.”
Every non-Gryffindor in the room wore a surprised look at this. "Ms. Granger," Flitwick began, his voice squeaky with barely held excitement. "Do you mean to tell me that you've developed a spell that keeps people from telling a secret?"

Hermione blushed, then nodded. "Yes. I got the idea from magical oaths and the Fidelius charm. Both keep people from spilling secrets, but one is voluntary and the other too hard to cast for a small secret. So, I created this with my team. It's a take on a charm I created in my 5th year. With that one, if you signed a spelled parchment you agreed not to tell a secret to anyone. If you went back on your word, well, I'm sure you've seen Marietta Edgecombe's face the last few years." Neville snorted at her choice of words, while Blaise tried to hide his laughter, remembering the girl and her peculiar acne.

"This one though, I cast on a doorway and the spell seals the agreement when you walk through it in any direction. It's a take on a Fidelius, Confundus and a Containment Charm, I suppose. I have the notes for it and a few others," she broke off, her hand rummaging through a small beaded bag by her side. "Ah, here it is. Yes, Secretum Amet, The Secret Keeper Charm."

Flitwick looked ecstatic at that and moved to her side, not caring that there was not enough room for him between her side and Harry. The boy stood and took the professor's former place next to Snape instead of being sat on.

"I told the older students to tell their housemates last night," she continued. "And then this morning I cast the spell on the Great Hall doorway after Harry sent the Gryffs back to the Den. Anyone still inside the room at that point would not be able to tell anyone else the secret." She noticed Harry's tension lessened with her explanation and his eyes, which had edged towards jade, went back to normal.

"Ms. Granger, this spell work is flawless, fantastic! How ever did you learn spell crafting?!" Flitwick went on.

Hermione deliberated, but with Madame Bones there, decided to go with the general answer. "Necessity. If the Pride had need of a spell my team and I would create it any way we could. Sometimes…It was either that or suffer, Professor."

As they waited the group seemed to break into smaller cliques. Hermione, Flitwick, Croaker and Madame Bones sat together, talking about spell crafting, and the possibility of Hermione creating spells for the Auror Corps. Hermione was intrigued, but would not give any definite answers. They continued talking about Hermione's other spells, like her Point-Me Spell, the spell Harry had used to move air about, and others that the Pride had needed through the years.

At the same time Blaise and Neville had their heads together, talking softly about god knows what, and Harry sat chatting with Severus and Lucius.

Hearing Hermione mention her Protean Charm for the Defense Association, Harry got an idea and turned to her.

"Mya, do you have the notes on project D-5?"

Hermione rummaged through her bag again and came up with a folder of loose-leaf paper, handing it off to Harry with a curious look before returning to her previous conversation. Harry leafed through the folder, coming to the section he wanted.
"Professor, Mr. Malfoy," he addressed the two men. "This is the Pride's research into a subject I think you would both be very interested in. I'd like to give you both the chance to look at it, but I want to warn you both that our research is not yet finished. We've never been able to test our theories."

Snape and Lucius looked at each other and back at Harry. "Give it to us, Mr. Potter. Your incessant ramblings, much like Ms. Granger's, will likely not end until we've read and come to the same conclusion as whatever is in your folder." He held his hand out at the boy, trying to find the old hatred he held for him, or even an inkling of annoyance to help make his facsimile of an attitude seem real, but found he could find little negative emotion for the boy.

His long-held beliefs about Harry had been shattered beyond repair, not that he wanted to repair them, and he had no ammunition with which to add to the neutral emotion he felt for Harry Potter. After spending time in his company it was clear that the only piece of James Potter to be passed to Harry was the unfortunate mess he called hair and a predilection for poor taste in glasses.

Such as it was the boy was far more like his mother, and for a time Lily had been his only friend. They got along well without trying for they had similar temperaments and were generally interested in the same broad subjects, though they found different areas to specialize in and enjoyed sharing that knowledge with the other. They had also enjoyed interests outside of the magical world that kept their friendship alive when others fizzled after three months of summer spent apart.

Severus was startled from his thoughts, though he did not show it, when Harry pushed the folder into his hands softly. The teenager sat back, waiting. Severus and Lucius leaned in together, neither able to read more than the title for fear of getting their hopes shattered.

There, written in Hermione Granger's neat hand was the answer to more than a few of their regrets:

\[ \text{SPELL BREAKDOWN OF THE DARK MARK (RE: REMOVAL)} \]

Thanks for reading!

So, writing is going well! I have a title for the new fic about before the Moribus broke. Unless something better comes along I am thinking about "No Rest for the Weary" and over all it is coming along well. I have about 5000 words between 2.5 scenes, and still climbing. I'm also working on McG's death scene, which is bloody and gruesome and fun. Wish my muse lots of evil, nasty fun, loves and please let me know what you think of the story so far!!!
Severus couldn't breathe.

Lucius couldn't move.

Neither could let the hope they felt welling in them reach their souls, for hope with no true escape would break them. Instead the former turned to an easier emotion: anger, and the latter remained unmoving, unspeaking.

"Is this a sick joke, Potter? Going to tell me you're able to resurrect your ill begotten parents as well, now?" Snape hissed, pulling the first Herculean task that came to mind to compare to the impossibility of removing the Dark Mark. He looked up into confused emerald eyes before they quickly turned to jade, his pupils shrinking to slits at the challenge in Snape's voice.

Hermione and Neville both called out Harry's name as they felt the change in the air, moving almost instantly to his side. They did not care about their awkward positions in crawling across the stone floor or that they dropped their conversations without warning to tend to their Alpha.

Blaise watched, intrigued at the scene before him. Neville had just been telling him about things like this, and what happened when a Pride member lost control of their animagus-selves, but he hadn't yet gotten around to telling him what happened when Harry lost control. It seemed he would be getting a show instead of another story.

Hermione wrapped herself around Harry, making him move to accommodate her. This in turn made the situation worse as it incited Snape's jealousy further. Neville crawled to kneel before Harry, crowding the boy's vision and making him focus on Neville as Hermione nuzzled his neck soothingly, a soft purr emanating from her throat.

Neville started talking softly to Harry, nose to nose with the boy, but on a slightly lower plane, showing his deference to the Alpha. They slowly calmed the teen, knowing he was back when his arms wrapped tighter around the girl and he nuzzled her back with a soft, "Thank you, Mya. Thanks, Nev." The trio's shoulders slumped as the tension of the moment was finally released.

Madame Bones was the first to break the silence that followed. "Mr. Potter, I know that today has been a day for surprises the likes of which would get me locked in a St. Mungos Ward if I even tried to pass them off as office gossip, but what in Merlin's name just happened?"

Harry grimaced at that and looked at her past Hermione's shoulder. "Can I get your word that this is off the record and nothing will come of it?"

She watched him warily at that, but eventually gave him a nod. "Yes. On my word."

Harry sighed, a bit of residual tension leaving him at that. "That, Madame, was my animagus form trying to take control. I do not have full control of my form, nor do any of the Gryffindors inside Hogwarts due to the way we became animagus."
Madame Bones' head tilted to the side. "And this is a side-effect of the spell we will be making an appointment about?"

"Yes, Ma'am, it is. Because of the spell every Gryffindor has a feline animagus form from the time they hit puberty on. We all know when we hit puberty because we change into our form and cannot change out of it until someone coaches us out of it."

The look of horror on everyone's faces matched those of the Gryffindor pre-teens when they were told that this would happen and to prepare themselves. It was one reason that Harry made sure to have a shelter for students outside of Hogwarts. So they had a place to run to when their animagus form took hold.

"We had...hoped," he continued, "that when the spell was lifted we would be able to go back to the forms our bodies were originally intended to have, but it was not so. Only the first and second years will have any chance at a their own forms, but we won't know if being under the spell will continue to affect them after its release until they hit that stage of puberty."

Hermione sniffled, though her eyes were dry. She was upset still over the thought that the spell still controlled them in any way even though they were free. She stopped and nudged her nose against Harry's chin.

"What upset you, Harry?" She asked innocently enough, but didn't expect an answer. She was surprised when he gave her part of one.

"Professor Snape was upset with me because I didn't explain something well enough before dropping it on him. His voice had an edge and the lion took it as a challenge, that's all." He nuzzled her hair once more before setting her on the ground, and pushing her closer to Severus and Lucius. "Explain the D-5 project to them, I need a moment." Harry stood, brushing himself off as he walked to a half-hidden door a few feet away and moved inside.

Severus, feeling like a heel for letting his emotions get the better of him, followed Harry but stopped mid step as he realized where he was.

Hermione gazed at Lucius with a questioning glance as he tried to pull himself together. He was finally successful in this and they moved together to rejoin the other group at Hermione's behest. "This," she said as they both sat down, "is a folder of research around eight or nine years in the making. It is the Pride's work on deconstructing the Dark Mark, and our theories on removing it, based mainly on the protean charm, magic links and our understanding of Parsel-Magic."

Lucius and Madame Bones were flabbergasted, speechless that this child would have so much work done on a topic not even the Department of Mysteries could resolve. Though, they could not know that it had been started and added to by many students over the years. The bulk of Hermione’s progress had been made with the help of a time turner. To this day Hermione could not believe how easy it had been to lie to the Headmaster's face and say the time turner was destroyed while helping Sirius Black escape in her third year. He never questioned her, not knowing that she had used the binding spell’s loophole: recklessness and bravery were Gryffindor acts and what is more brave and reckless than telling lies right in the Supreme Mugwump’s face.

Lucius was to the first to break the silence with just a look aimed at Madame Bones, waiting. She eventually sighed saying, "Off the record."
He smiled and held out a hand, politely asking, "May I?" to Hermione. He wanted the mark off of him, had for years. Even the original cause he had been forced to join had not been near as awful as they were now. The reasons and fight he had been prepared to wage had been warped beyond repair, and he no longer wanted any part of it. He looked over the notes, noticing the attributes listed as part of the spell. "You're missing a point here."

He looked up to see a Hermione looking at him intently. It reminded him of Draco and his ever-increasing curiosity as a teenager. He smiled at the memory, before focusing once more. "The Dark Mark does contain parts of a protean charm to alert us when we are needed, and a locator charm, yes, so we know where to go, but the magical link that you describe is wrong. It only goes one way. His link draws on us, but we cannot draw from him."

Hermione gasped at his words, the click of things falling into place almost audible in the room. She turned to Bill, immediately jumping on the new link. "I need the parchment from the first ward set." He handed it over, leaning over her shoulder. "Which ones caused the siphon?" He gave her a hesitant look, but pointed them out to her, hoping he was on the right track with where her thoughts were going.

Hermione pulled a muggle pen from her hair, causing waves of curls to cascade down her back as she did, but she did not care. She marked each spell as Bill pointed them out, then grabbed the folder back from Lucius to add them to her list.

Lucius, meanwhile, had followed her thoughts and paled. If it was truly a siphon, it was one that could kill them at any time. At no other time had Lucius ever hated his family as he did now--now that their decisions were set to kill him.

Severus Snape had just stepped into Salazar Slytherin's personal library, and he was astounded. The room was a large rounded wall of shelves. No space was free from the bound sheaves save two spaces where doors were placed. Severus looked about the room for Harry, finding him a few feet away pulling books from the shelves.

He didn't realize he'd said anything until the words had already left his mouth. "I am sorry. I did not mean to upset you, Mr. Potter, it was truly an unintentional reaction to your research."

Harry leaned against a shelf, looking at the dark man standing just inside the doorway. "Harry."

"I beg your pardon?"

"My name is Harry. Mr. Potter makes me feel like I am facing down Dumbledore or McGonagall, so I would appreciate it if you would call me Harry...when not in class, of course." He pushed a shoulder off the shelf and watched the door shut behind Severus. He stalked towards the man, his lion not quite settled. He gave the man a thorough once over, appreciating the sight before him.

They were of similar height, though Harry was only an inch or two shorter. Severus was long and lanky, bordering on skinny, while Harry was all wiry muscles and hard lines, though that was not to say that Severus had no muscle. If Harry had to hazard a guess, he would bet galleons that the man before him had a lot more going on under his layers than met the eye. It was the nature of a spy to keep any advantage, and the ability to escape by any means was a necessary skill to have.

Snape watched with wary eyes as the teen, no, this was a predator coming towards him. Harry's jade eyes did not escape his notice, and he tried his hardest to give any measure of deference to the
animagus that he could. He pulled his shoulders in, slouched from his great height and lowered his
eyes, but the animagus didn't react as he expected.

Gornuk had just stepped back from the ward stone when Hermione's magic alerted her to Harry's
loss of control again. Because of her training with the upperclassmen and extra time with the time
turner, Hermione's magic was more stable than that of her peers. She was able to scan her
surroundings steadily without tiring and was typically the first to realize something was wrong with
any of the Pride's animagus control. Mya tended to be the person the children of the Pride went to
when puberty was looming close due to her compassionate nature and female Alpha status. The lions
each of them held had a feel to them, more predator-like, in their aura. So, those who were trained to
watch for puberty changers around the school knew what a lion too close to the surface felt like, and
watched for it constantly and subconsciously.

There was no telling how many students had been trained in their animagus form by the girl, or how
many had been dragged by their ears into a training room by Hermione when they were getting too
volatile. The worst part of being forced into an animagus form was the constant need to let the animal
run, for fear of the animal, most especially the lions, took control of their emotional responses.

There were many times in their past that Harry had lost control. He was aggressive, territorial and
vicious in that form. He only let the lion take control purposefully one time: the Battle for the
Department of Mysteries. The lion took control of the fights, and was one of the few reasons they left
that area alive.

The Moribus had limited how much magic and intellect that the Gryffindors had control of, hence
Ron's idiotic exploration of the brain aquarium, and their limited spell repertoire. When Harry
realized that his magic was only powerful enough to cast a few blasting, cutting and disarming curses
he lost it and the lion took over.

Hermione had felt it that day, and it was her lioness responding that kept her from being fully hit by
Dolohov's spell. She had leapt out of the way in time to glance a blow, but it was enough to save her
life.

She shook herself back to the present and rose, noting when Neville realized the same thing she had.
"I'll get him, Neville. Cast the wards, and prepare the others." She called this over her shoulder,
already on the way to the library.

"Mr. Po—Harry, I do apologize for before." He continued, having finally gotten the thread of their
conversation back in mind.

Harry smiled genuinely, but predatorily, as he stopped to stand beside Severus, their shoulders
touching, and the lion purring at having the bond mate so close. "Do you know where you are?"

Severus nodded. "Slytherin's Library, if I had to guess."

Harry nodded. "Yes, but not only his library, this was his personal Study. Through that door," he
pointed to the right side, "is Slytherin's Potions Lab. That one, though," he pointed to the left. "That's
my favorite. Slytherin's bed chambers. He was...well, a bit kinky for his time. Such an array of...
devices he owned, it's enough to make an innocent like you blush." Harry laughed softly at the wide
eyes and slack jaw that Severus could not hide, and the lion couldn't help but add to the man's surprise.

Harry's predatory grin took on a lascivious tone as he reached a hand out to touch those pinkening planes and said, "I can show it to you, sometime, if you'd like?" The lion was purring inside at the idea of them together in such an intimate room, but Severus was still trying to get his brain to work so he could respond to the first surprise, let alone the proposition.

His racing thoughts froze as Harry moved in front of him, crowding him into the shelves behind his back, hard body pressed against hard body. "It's quite...fascinating, really," he said with a swirl of his hips. "Come-"

Then came a knock on the door.

Harry growled, knowing his time was up, and the door swung open. Hermione looked at them intently, though there was little surprise in her expression over their positions. "Gornuk is done with the wards. You need to change forms, Harry, or the lion is going to take over completely."

Harry shook his head as he turned to stand territorially in front of Severus, the lion too deep in his mind already. Hermione noticed and moved at once.

"Neville! Changing in 30, prepare the stones," Hermione called out the doorway. She looked at Snape and pulled his arm to get him out of the room. "I'm sorry for whatever he's done, but please go to Neville, Professor. Harry's gone too long without changing, and we have to force the lion out for a while. Whatever happens, I promise he won't hurt us."

Harry gave a growl at his Severus being touched by another and glared at Hermione, fists clenching and clawing at his side. She ignored her own immediate instinct to make amends with her Alpha, and instead she pushed Snape behind her and moved towards the boy, pushing his shoulder with her fingertips to rile him higher.

Harry went into a snarling crouch, ready to launch himself at the girl, but the small piece of Harry that remained knew he would never attack Hermione. He only growled at her grumpily and bared his teeth at her. Hermione, though, was uncaring, having done this many times over their years together.

Snape, not wanting to get in the path of an angry lion, quickly walked to the rest of their group as they sat behind a golden protective ward. Neville was talking frantically to Blaise, probably telling him what Hermione had said to Snape. Neville rose abruptly and laid down two stones, one to the left and right of the group. As soon as the line had been completed a lightly shimmering wall of magic sprung up between them. Those looking through it could see clearly, but any spell or object trying to pass through it would be stopped in its tracks.

Snape was surprised, knowing what he was looking at: Godric's warding stones. Legend had it that Godric had a pair of stones that, when lined up, created a protective ward. He would use them when dueling or training to protect onlookers from stray spells.

Severus turned to watch the movement he saw from the corner of his eyes. Hermione pushed Harry hard, knocking him over. She turned, changing on the spot to a beautiful, sleek lioness and Harry changed into his lion form with a roar. The lion's mane was black like his hair, and, if you looked closely, one could see a red-brown colored shape of a lighting bolt on the lion's forehead.

Immediately, Hermione turned and gave her belly to her alpha, paws extended to show her apology. Harry nudged her over with a nose to her rib cage in acceptance and with a few rumbles they began to play and ease off the animalistic energy that had built up with the tension of the past few days.
Harry and Hermione rolled, playing and pouncing with one another in their new forms, only stopping when Neville moved towards them. He'd separated himself from the humans and changed into his own form: a slinky, Black Panther. He romped with the two lions, helping them to get out their excess energy after the strange, intense and emotionally wrenching day and a half they had endured so far.

Eventually Harry-lion moved to Hermione-lioness and gently nipped her neck, again asserting his dominance over her, but in a way she knew was a thank you for knowing what he needed. She licked his face in response and the romping continued for a few more minutes. It was again Neville who alerted them that playtime was over by nudging their faces to the humans who sat and watched them wide surprised eyes. And so, with some reluctance, they changed back to their human forms, panting with the exertion of playing as a big cat with other big cats.

Those who had watched the Gryffindors were silent for a few moments before Croaker broke the thick silence. "Neville, you realize your Gran will never believe a word of this without proof, right?"

Those who knew the formidable woman laughed, and agreed. Augusta Longbottom was in for the shock of her life when she found that the grandson she always thought to be a near squib was already an animagus, and an illegal one at that. Neville took the two stones back and pocketed them for later, knowing they always came in handy.

Blaise gave his friend a very heated look as he returned.

A throat being cleared brought their attention back to the task at hand. Gornuk watched them all before pulling six bracelets from a pouch. They were all a simple silver band of metal, but the odd part was that they had no visible clasp, tie or hinge.

Gornuk handed them over to Filius saying, "These are Gringotts' newest ward monitors. Rather than moving the wards, they will stay here, without any stress to the system. These monitors instead will alert you when one has been breached, broken or otherwise compromised. This pouch is supposed to hold a maximum of four bands, but it seems the castle had another idea. I leave them to you to disperse."

Filius nodded, and put them in a pocket of his robe. "I thank you Gornuk." Formalities were exchanged as the party made their way back to the Entrance Hall of the Castle. As they reached the second floor Blaise and Neville split away together. Hermione left them with Lucius in tow for the library to continue their earlier research. When they reached the front steps Madame Bones pulled Harry aside for a word and to set up an appointment together.

Filius and Snape said goodbye and gave a final bow to their guests. Harry stood back from the group, especially Flitwick. He had lived the past six years with a special band on his wrist, and to be honest, he wasn't keen on getting rid of one to see another in its place. He kept his thoughts to himself, though, and moved with the two men back into the castle proper.

Flitwick gave a squeak as he realized it was quite late in the afternoon already. "I must be off, Pomona has watched over the castle and grounds on her own today while we were solving the issue of the wards. I shall call the meeting to establish the castle's representatives tomorrow. I know it is short notice, but we must get things settled before the weekend is out, and it will be easier to gather the students this way."

Harry agreed, and knew that the castle herself was ready to welcome her representatives too. "That
sounds like a great idea, Professor." Snape said nothing, but for him saying nothing against the idea was akin to agreement, and so Filius went to relieve Pomona from her post, leaving Severus and Harry alone together.

Thanks for Reading!

Find me on Facebook at Petra Kitt. I have been writing non stop this past week and have a lot of good scenes floating around in my head that I would love feedback on.

A/N: I hope you enjoyed this chapter. It's one I have agonized over and changed many, many times.

Next up: All about Hermione’s cousin Miles! And after that more Snarry goodness... :)
Chapter 22: Miles

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein

You can add me on Facebook at Petra Kitt or https://www.facebook.com/petrakittywrites Adding me is a great way to ask me questions, give feedback and generally feed my ego to make me write faster. I've written 2 chapters of No Rest for the Weary because of comments on AO3. I also ask for suggestions when I get stuck between two paths, so go find me :)"
want me 'round anymore." His eyes watered, thinking of the day he got his Hogwarts Letter. The
day Hermione had fixed everything and gotten him away from...them.

Hermione cupped his cheek softly. "Oh, sweet, no. I am so very proud of you. I know your…they
didn't react well to your magic, but I will always be here for you. Nana Jean wrote me on
Wednesday, did you get a letter, too?" She asked carefully, knowing his recent aversion to letters.

Miles DeLoach's parents had rejected the idea that their middle child was magical from the start.
They had never been told about Hermione's magic, only that she was accepted to a boarding school
because she was so smart. Knowing this, their shock was understandable.

Their throwing things at him to chase him out of their house was not.

It was Miles' saving grace that Hermione and her parents, Emma and Dan, lived only a mile or so
away from the DeLoach household. Miles had walked to his Aunt Emma's house, hoping that she
could help him, only to find she and Uncle Dan were at work later than normal—only Hermione was
home.

Hermione was curious about the knock on the door, but happily welcomed her small cousin. As soon
as he'd crossed the threshold, he'd begun crying, thankful that he'd been able to make it and finally
feeling the great pain radiating through his arm as the adrenaline left his system. She noticed how he
favored his arm and gasped, taking a moment to breathe slowly until her eyes stopped glowing in her
rage. She had carefully held him as the story came out.

He told her everything from his first accidental magic, when he had made toys move on their own in
his room, up until an hour ago when his parents read the letter and realized that it was not an
elaborate prank. Miles had hidden his magic, thinking, like his parents, that it was witchcraft and "of
the devil" as they always said. When the letter came, and he realized there were a ton of other people
like him he'd gotten excited. The professor who delivered the letter, some lady name Vector, had
explained Magic and how Hogwarts worked before excusing herself.

When she finally left Miles had tried to prove he had magic after his Father told him to stop lying and
stop his prank. Miles got scared that they weren't listening to him and their faces looked so mean.
He'd levitated his teddy bear downstairs unconsciously and that was when things got worse. His
mother had screamed and his father roared that he was an abomination. Freak. Monstrosity. His
mother had thrown the burning pot she's been cooking with at him, and it had seared his elbow and
upper arm with pain as he ran out the door.

Hermione, wanting to distract him and surprise him, asked if the Hogwarts letters were still written in
dark green ink. He'd wiped his wide, wet eyes, but couldn't understand how she knew that. The
letter had been ripped up by his mother, Eloise, as soon as the Professor had left their house.
Hermione had hugged him again and whispered, "You are not alone, sweet."

She had called him "sweet" as a joke since he was little when had asked her for a candy every time
they saw each other. It had stuck after a few months, and was now her name for him, though they
had seen very little of each other since Hermione's letter came.

"You're magic too?" He asked in a half whisper. She smiled and held out her hand, a wandless
bluebell flame in her hand.

"I am a witch, and you are a young wizard." She stopped, closing her hand around the flame when
the front door opened. It was her mother and father, home from work.

"Mum, Da, Miles is here. He got a letter from Hogwarts today," Hermione told them both. Emma gasped. Emma and Dan had gone their entire lives without knowing about Magic until Hermione turned eleven, and one letter brought to them by a Hogwarts Professor had changed their lives.

It wasn't until just before Hermione's third year that they learned how she came to be a witch. Dan's family was a squib line of Rowena Ravenclaw. The first squib child had been cast out and married a muggle without telling her of his lineage and history. The knowledge had been lost through the years until Hermione took a Lineage Potion at Gringotts.

The summer after “The Basilisk Incident,” as they called it, Harry had insisted that any Gryffindor student who got money from the basilisk sales would get their own vault. Gringotts policy was that any new vault owner had to take the potion to make sure they did not already have a vault waiting in trust to them.

When Hermione's potion began spelling her lineage on the potion she had almost collapsed. Heiress to the line of Rowena Ravenclaw via Father, Daniel Granger. Hermione had no idea, and knew her parents were unaware as well. When she showed the results to her parents that night, her Father's only response was, "Well...will you look at that..."

Emma's surprise now was because Miles was her sister's son. He was of no relation to Dan. She smiled at the irony, and wondered if there was a surprise waiting for them if they took a look at Miles' father, Dorian's family, but she didn't think lightning would strike twice this time.

Emma and Dan both moved to hug their nephew, but Hermione stopped them. "He's hurt, Mum. Aunt Eloise threw a pan at him...while it was still hot. I need to go upstairs and get a healing potion."

Miles began sniffling and wiping his eyes again and Emma pulled Miles over to look at him carefully. "Well, then. It's a very good thing that you're a wizard. Those potions don't work on me or Uncle Dan, but Hermione's told us they'll be able to fix you right up. Better than morphine." Miles smiled slightly and tucked his head in the crook of her neck, needing comfort.

Dan's fists clenched as he realized just why the boy's face looked so red. He had thought it was from excitement, but now it was clear now that the child had been crying, and probably had bruises forming from whatever those cretins did to the poor child.

He knew Eloise and Dorian very well, and this sounded just like something they would do. They were fanatics when it came to showing just how "normal" and "perfect" their little family was, and religion was only one portion of their fanaticism. Dorian's family was Catholic, but Dorian and Eloise took the religion to a new extreme. They'd even named their daughter Rosaria after the Rosary. Emma and Eloise were complete opposites, in every sense of the word, which was probably the most ironic thing because they were identical twins.

While Emma and Dan were getting the full story from Miles, Hermione was writing a letter of her own to Harry. She alerted him to what had happened and that they may need back up getting him emancipated or custody given to someone else. She opened her window to the tree in her backyard and held her arm out, waiting. Within a few seconds the owl Hermione had gotten for her parents, Simon, landed gently on her arm and took the letter from her with a soft hoot. She petted him softly before saying, "Take this to Harry, please." Simon took off with a nod of his head and Hermione leant back inside to find healing potions and Burn Salves.
"Mya? Mya...Earth to Mya!" Miles shook his cousin's arm to get her attention.

Hermione came back from her thoughts with a jolt. "Sorry, I got distracted. What were you saying?"

Miles huffed and rolled his eyes as only a pre-teen can. "I was saying I got Nana's letter. She said the paperwork went through and Aunt Emma got my...well she got them to sign the custody papers. Aunt Emma and Uncle Dan got custody of me. Oh! And she said that since you're already 17 that Aunt Emma named you my Magical Guardian! Isn't that neat, Mya?"

Hermione smiled and ruffled his hair. "It definitely is, sweet." She looked up to see Ron watching them with a small smile on his face at the family scene happening next to him. There was relief in both of their eyes. Muggle-born and Muggle-raised students generally had no Magical Guardian named, and so their Head of House or the Headmaster was generally named Magical Guardian. Hermione had suffered much from having Minerva McGonagall named her Magical Guardian without her consent, and she would gladly keep Miles from experiencing anything like what she had.

Ron winked at her, then got a confused look on his face as he finally looked at his surroundings. He mouthed "where's Harry" at her, looking pointedly at the empty chair that he normally sat in. Hermione took on a puzzled face as well. The confusion turned to worry and understanding as she noticed someone else was missing from dinner as well: Professor Snape.

Thanks for Reading!

*First, before anything starts, I have no issues with religion. My former roommate is Catholic and I've been to Mass several times. Dorian DeLoach was modeled after a fanatic here where I live, hence the description.

**Ariel Night:** I do like the animagus idea. It keeps the whole "Pride" theme. However there is a glitch. You said that the curse had been around for decades, ever since McGonagall started teaching. But we know for a fact that James, Sirius, and Wormtail have non-feline animagus forms. However, they didn't go to school so long ago that they wouldn't be under the curse as well. Perhaps you can say that the animagus curse was newer, so that way it's added after Harry's parents graduated. Anyway, love the story!

Thank you so much for your review. I know it seems weird, and wrong, but I actually wrote that on purpose. It's going to start being explained (if it isn't fully resolved) in a chapter coming up soon. I was actually wondering if anyone would catch it. One thing to remember: no one in that room knew those three were (illegal) animagi but Harry, Hermione and Neville, so some cover up was necessary. It will come up again though!

A/N2: As you can see this chapter was at the request for more information about Miles, and also leads us in to what happened to Snape and Harry. It's scandalous, I promise! Also, keep a look out for a side fiction (No Rest for the Weary) that is all about before the spell breaks!
Magical Bonds

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 23: Magical Bonds

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein

Flashback scenes are in italics

I guess no one really liked the last chapter? I got maybe 1 review about it...While Miles isn't a hugely major character his family will play in later, and I really wanted to draw a comparison between him and Harry of canon. How things change when abuse is spoken of and not swept under a rug. Anyway, back to the story, and I think there will be a lot more happy fans now.

Sunday morning came earlier than anyone had expected it to. It came especially early for one Harry Potter, who woke to an unfamiliar room and no recollection of how he got there.

Harry put on his glasses as he tried replaying the day before, hoping to jog his memory. He remembered the wards, the Chamber of Secrets, taking on his animagus form, saying goodbye to the guests and Flitwick while Severus had watched...Severus. He sat up and looked around the room, finally noticing all the Potions paraphernalia.

He was in the Potions Master's quarters, and with that realization Harry's memory started to come back with a vengeance.

"I see you have finally deigned to join the rest of the responsible population of Hogwarts in leaving the Land of Nod, Mr. Potter," came a silky voice from the other side of the room. Harry realized with a start that he was on a couch, a cozy, green blanket over him. He looked to the direction of that deep voice to see Severus sitting at a small table with a cup of tea. "If you are so inclined, you may join me before the meeting is to start," he offered, though his voice was tight, so Harry thought the man must have been regretting the offer already.

He never realized that the reason for Severus' tight voice could be his trying to hide a reaction to the sleep rumpled look Harry was currently sporting. Not to mention Snape was trying to convince himself once more that he should be having an adverse reaction to having any feeling other than annoyance for a student.

Harry stood and tried to straighten his clothes as best he could, looking for his robe as he did. "I... um, I don't want to impose, Profe-..." he started, but Severus cut him off with.

"Nonsense. Sit, Mr. Potter. There is a cup of coffee already waiting for you."

Harry started at his comment, "How did you know I drink coffee?" It wasn't served in the Great Hall where he was able to drink it, but Harry took a cup every morning that he could convince a House Elf to bring it to him.

"Nonsense. Sit, Mr. Potter. There is a cup of coffee already waiting for you."

Harry started at his comment, "How did you know I drink coffee?" It wasn't served in the Great Hall where he was able to drink it, but Harry took a cup every morning that he could convince a House Elf to bring it to him.

Snape smirked, "If you are anything like your mother was at your age then you probably won't regain thinking capabilities until after a cup of coffee. Also, the House Elves know you are here. Since I do not drink coffee and it was brought with my tea service I rightly assumed it was for you." By the end
Harry was sitting in his jeans and T-shirt at Severus' table, taking his first sip of coffee.

"Mr. Potter," Severus started with a half laugh, but Harry stopped him.

"Harry. My name is Harry. Didn't we go over this? I'm fairly sure we did. Twice. Damn, I hate the crash I get from Rejuvenation potions. It's worse than a hangover." Harry's eyes widened as he realized what he'd just said, and to his Professor of all people. Harry felt it odd that aloud, he was Professor, Sir or Snape when Harry only referred to him as Severus in his head.

Severus had to lift his napkin to wipe the corners of his mouth to hide a smile. "Yes, well, hangovers aside, you also weren't in full control of yourself either time we discussed your name and I wasn't sure if the...offer still stood." He laughed at his own joke, but Harry didn't get it. Instead, Severus went on, "Harry, then. May I ask, where did you find such an...interesting shirt?"

Harry looked down, not remembering what shirt he had thrown on under his robes the day before. He blushed profusely when he realized he was wearing a joke shirt the Weasley Twins had bought him when they found out about his...proclivities, or more to the point his choice in partner when practicing those proclivities. It was a custom-made red shirt with gold writing on it saying "I'd let you handle my wand any day!"

They had made a few different raunchy shirts for him like the one he was wearing and gave them to him as a birthday gift.

Harry was mortified and let his head fall, forehead thunking soundly against the table. It was only when he heard the outright laughter from the man in front of him that he looked up. His laugh was...mesmerizing, just like his voice. It was hearty and rich, and you knew when you heard it you had better listen for you may never hear it again. It made him sad to feel that he was witnessing a once in a lifetime moment in reference to this man's laugh, and Harry promised himself that he would go to great lengths to make this man laugh again.

Snape was laughing at him, and at that moment, Harry felt like he wouldn't mind making a fool of himself to hear that laugh again.

"Uh... Yes. It was a gift," Harry stuttered out finally, laughing at himself. "The Weasley Twins thought it would be a great idea to use a muggle t-shirt printing company to make t-shirts with different quips only Wizards would understand on them." Harry continued sipping his coffee, remembering something very important from the night before as he did.

"Oh no...I can't believe I did that." His head hit the table again, this time with the crack of glass accompanying the thunk and a whispered spell. "Oculus Reparo."

"Coffee finally working, is it?"

Harry nodded his head without lifting it. "I'm so sorry. I really didn't mean to fall asleep in the middle of you talking, I swear, Sir."

The day before had been a very emotionally and physically draining one. This, combined with Harry's earlier use of a Rejuvenation potion and the energy expended in his animagus form, meant that Harry fell asleep while he and Snape were talking of fairly important matters...

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Flashback
“Sir, I...was wondering something, and hoped we could discuss it openly. Together,” Harry told the
man as they stood in the deserted hall together. Severus gave a short nod and walked away without
comment to his quarters. It was not until they entered the room that he deigned to say anything, not
trusting himself.

“Tea?” Snape asked, snapping his fingers for a House Elf, knowing they would key into his rooms
and made a tea service based on the occupants.

"Kippy is bringing Master Snape and Master Harry teas, Sir,” Kippy said happily. "Is Master Snape
or Master Harry needing anything?" Harry had already seen his favorite biscuits on the tray, so he
declined anything more and the elf popped away as quickly as she came in.

They sat in armchairs in the living room, letting the task of making tea and fixing plates occupy them
for some time while Harry got his thoughts together. He tried to figure out how to broach the subject
without offending Severus, but decided Gryffindor brashness was probably the only way he would
get through the discussion. Harry took a bite out of his favorite Caramel Chocolate biscuit and
gathered his courage.

"Professor, I was wondering something. Yesterday, while we were waiting on Mr. Malfoy to arrive I
felt this...I'm not sure, but I felt something. I wanted to know if you felt anything as well?"

Severus could barely contain his anxiety. This is what the boy wanted to know? This! Severus had to
calm his rapidly beating heart, a heart he had never been sure would ever beat for someone again.
He had to stop and remind himself of something very important: Just because Harry had felt the
bond did not mean he wanted it to exist. Severus decided to see what the boy knew before talking
about any "feelings."

"Tell me, what do you know about Magical Bonds, Mr. Potter?"

"Harry," he reminded the man absently. "I assume you are ignoring any bonds formed by spells?"
Severus nodded. "Well, I know that there are multiple types of bonds that can tie people together.
There is the Sympathetic Bond, where people with sympathetic magic can bond so that they can cast
spells in tandem. Some of the Pride have this bond."

Severus was surprised to hear this, but motioned for him to continue. "There's a Twin Bond, like the
Weasley Twins have, though I think the Patil twins have one too, so those may come in different
flavors of their own." Harry thought back to Hermione's lecture on bonds, but he'd not been paying
close attention when it deviated from a bond one of his lions held. "Um...isn't there a Marriage
Bond, and a Soul Bond, right?"

Severus nodded and rose from his chair, walking around the room to let off some of his restless
energy. "Yes, though the term Marriage Bond is a misnomer. A Soul Bond is a bond that is usually
consciously taken." Harry was starting to yawn a bit as he listened to Severus' deep, mesmerizing
voice. "It bonds two lives together, and is typically included in Wizarding marriage ceremonies. In
muggle marriages 'until death do us part' is used, but it is not just a pretty line to be recited in
Wizarding culture."

Severus paused, wondering how to express this next piece and feeling his heart contract as he realized
just how much time he'd lost with his bondmate, how long ago they should have had this
conversation, and how much hatred they had shared instead of the mentor/student relationship they
could have shared while Harry grew to adulthood.

"The Unity Bond, also called a Marriage Bond, is the final bond. This is a bond that muggles found
out about early on in history. It is what created the "love at first sight" story in muggle literature.
Hence the erroneous title of Marriage Bond." Though he knew the name came not because it was created at weddings, but because it inevitably led to one…and what a scary idea that was.

He laughed at himself and his sudden sentimentality before he continued, "It is a bond that is a combination of the other three bonds as happens only semi-regularly in the Wizarding world. The Unity Bond links two people's lives together if their magic is powerful enough and so sympathetic to the partner's that both party's magic reaches out on its own to create to catalyst for the bond. It creates a relationship so deep between the two that it is easy to feel as if they had been together since birth. This bond forming, the catalyst is what you felt yesterday. It is...permanent, Harry..."

Snape had felt as if his blood was replaced by ice, his heart stopping on a beat when he got neither reply nor reaction to the shocking profession. Disappointment and understanding hit him when he turned in the midst of his last sentence to find the young man asleep on his couch, body already sliding down the back under its own weight. He sighed, telling himself it was for the best before he grabbed a blanket from the back of a chair and removed the hideous and offending glasses from Harry's face.

Severus spelled the lights off and the fire low, realizing it was too late for him to get any work done before bed. He knelt beside the boy's head to fix the blanket and couldn't help running his fingers through Harry's hair, surprised to feel the spark of their magic reacting when his fingers touched the teen's skin. Without thinking he pressed a small chaste kiss to the boy's forehead, stifling a groan at the feel. Harry must have felt something too for he moaned in his sleep and turned on his side, pushing his back to Severus.

Severus took that as a sign, though he knew the boy was not aware of what had happened. He stood and quietly went to his bedchambers to think about all that occurred that day and get some rest.

"My apologies. I swear it wasn't on purpose, Sir," Harry said again, still wondering just what it was had missed in their discussion.

Severus shrugged, acting more nonchalant than he felt. He had decided, during the sleepless night, that he would not tell Harry about the bonds, instead he would let the teen come to his own decision. Harry had only just been freed from the machinations of two adults only to find himself with another type of bond that was again out of his control. It would leave him feeling helpless if he was told of its existence rather than finding and coming to terms with it on his own. Severus had a feeling that the lion in Harry knew of the bond, hence his forward behavior the day before, but that information probably hadn't been pushed to Harry's conscious mind just yet.

"Yesterday was a trying day, and you have just gotten to a point in your life where you no longer have to look over your shoulder for fear that someone who should be caring for you is instead trying to harm you. I do not blame your body for finally shutting down." He stood from the table. "Really, it is telling that you would feel so comfortable in my quarters as to fall asleep. I suggest that you ask your Ms. Granger about bonds and only come to me when you've understood what it means." Harry was puzzled, but Severus went on before he could say anything.

"Now, we have precious little time before the meeting today, and you need put on something a little less suggestive, brat," he said this as he walked past Harry, smirking again as he heard a third and final thunk come from the table.
So, what do you think about the soul bonds? You have an A, B, C or D-All of the above kind of system. I know things are moving slowly, but want the story to seem real. Two people who have seemingly hated each other for years do not automatically just into bed together. So, think of this as step one. Things will get much easier and faster once Harry learns his side of the bond, and there’s a secret that will come to light soon regarding Remus. Things pick up from here, for sure.

No Rest for the Weary is now up! You can find it on my profile. It will be updated less often than TPH, but still fairly regularly as I get more chapters written.

Chapter End Notes

As always, you can find me on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/petrakittywrites for updates, comments, suggestions, feedback and just to chat.

Next up: The return of our favorite Hatchling!
Chapter 24: The Malfoys

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein

A/N: There is no Remus and Tonks pairing past or present in this story. I'm working with the original pairings that were planned when I adopted this story, so I'm sticking with that. That means SS/HP and LM/RL, for those who have asked about a LM/HP pairing.

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Early Sunday Morning

Lucius was shaken awake by a little hand pulling his comforter and a little voice saying, "Daddy way-tup" again and again.

It had been almost a decade and a half since he'd had to translate three in the morning toddler speak, but the message was clear this time. Lucius rolled over and looked at his son, so angelic with his light blond curls, big grey eyes and oversized t-shirt for pajamas. Lucius and Draco's things would be arriving later that day, and so they had improvised with one pajama set. Draco had the shrunken top and Lucius wore the bottoms.

Lucius scooped the boy with a crook-of-the-arm-beneath-the-bum swipe and pulled him up into the bed. "What is it, little Dragon?"

Draco rubbed his eye with his tiny fist. "Thirsty. Bad Dream. Bad Mummy hurted me." Lucius felt his heart freeze before he remembered that he had control this time. Things were different this time. Lucius hugged his son closer before he chuckled at the thirsty comment. He leaned over and grabbed the glass of water from his own nightstand. Like Father, like son. He held the glass for the sleepy boy to take a sip then set it back, pulling Draco down and into his side. "It was only a dream my Dragon. No one is here but you and me. Sleep. It will be morning soon, and we shall go see everyone."

"My Hawwy? Unca Sev?" He said though a yawn.

"Yes." Lucius rubbed his son's back in small, soft circles, lulling him to sleep as he had done so many years before. He watched his son breathe deeply for a while as he made a final decision. Gingerly, he separated himself from the toddler and stood, moving quietly to a desk that had been set up. He took a sheet of the plain parchment from the writing desk and wrote a short but matter-of-fact missive to Gringotts.

By order of Lucius Abraxas Malfoy:

Entrance to any vault bearing the name Malfoy shall hence be restricted to one Lucius Abraxas Malfoy and his heir, Draco Lucius Malfoy. Any Malfoy funds which have been moved in the last week by any other than the two so named are to be treated as stolen and the perpetrators left to Goblin justice. I humbly request that any paperwork that may need to be signed be brought to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry if possible.

In addition, Narcissa Ermine Malfoy (nee Black) is to be struck from the Malfoy ledger on charges
of Child Abuse, Neglect and Endangerment.

May your gold flow with abundance,

Lucius Abraxas Malfoy

Lord of the Ancient and Noble House of Malfoy

He took a simple candle and dropped a large dollop on the bottom before making one imprint of his Lordship ring. He then pricked his finger and left one drop of blood fall on top of the imprint. This infused the imprint with his magical signature and gave proof to the claim and vault changes. Lucius knew Narcissa could not resist trying to bankrupt him, and would see that the letter was delivered to Gornuk. He wanted that particular Goblin in charge of this matter for two reasons: they had spent a very emotionally charged day together in which the goblin showed a deep caring for children, and two, Gornuk would be able to lay claim to his whereabouts for the day, namely not at Gringotts.

Lucius sealed the missive and moved to open the window. He whistled a long flowing tone, nodding to the owl who answered his call. He gave the letter to the snowy owl and sent the beautiful creature off with a, "Take this to Gornuk at Gringotts."

With that problem no longer troubling him he finally rejoined his son in pleasant dreams once more.

Lucius was woken once again a few hours later by a knock and a squeal of "I get it!" He groaned, pushing his hair out of his face until he remembered that those two sounds together were not good to hear first thing in the morning. He jumped out of bed, not bothering to throw on a shirt or dress robe as he ran to stop his curious son. "Draco Lucius, back away from that door!"

He, thankfully, grabbed Draco as he was turning the door knob, inwardly cursing the fact that guest rooms were not hidden behind portraits that were warded very specifically as to who could open them. He was lecturing Draco on opening doors to strangers when Remus knocked again on the slightly open door. "Um, Hello? I was wondering if you needed any help with things, the meeting is being held right after breakfast today and I. I..." He broke off, unable to say much as he finally caught a glimpse of the Malfoy family.

Lucius stood a few steps in front of the door in a pair of black sleep pants. Only black sleep pants. His hair was sleep tousled, created a halo of white blond hair around his head, the long locks accentuating that he was not wearing a shirt. The only thing blocking Remus' view was the little tee shirt clad body of Draco. The boy in question set his head on his father's chest shyly, Lucius' well-muscled arms holding him beneath his bottom. He looked at the new man, then back to his Daddy. "Who dat?"

Remus blinked at the child before gaining his wits back, "My name is Remus Lupin."

Lucius was fighting and winning the battle of the blush in two directions. Not only had he been the one caught half-dressed this time he was also feeling very appreciative of the man before him. He was wearing a set of robes matching the Gryffindor House, and they were definitely cut to flatter his lean physique.

He was trying to keep his face neutral, though he couldn't help but think that turnabout truly was fair play and it was his turn this time. He had essentially "walked in" on Remus half-naked and now the man had walked in on him in the same predicament. He looked between his son and Remus and made a quick decision. "Lupin, would you mind watching Draco for a few minutes while I dress?"
"Ah...no, no problem. I love children," came Remus' response. He took Draco from Lucius, surprised the man let him anywhere near his son, but happy nonetheless. He set the boy on his hip, remembering fondly a time when Harry was even smaller than this, but just as sweet.

Lucius walked back to his bedroom though he could feel the werewolf's gaze searing the skin of his back. He knew he was fit, and looked good. He had kept in very good physical shape the same as Severus over the years, especially since the Dark Lord's return. Healing was much easier when in peak physical condition, he had found.

As Lucius closed the door to change Remus looked to the little one in his arms. "Well, you must be Draco, it's very nice to meet you. Harry has told me a lot about you," he said, which was technically true. Harry had written home to him and Sirius over the years about many things, one of them being Draco. His letters usually mentioned whatever scheme the Syltherin had cooked up to annoy the lions, but it was typically a 14-16 year old Draco that the letters talked about.

Harry and the Pride had been nothing but accepting of him ever since Remus had let slip in Harry's third year that he knew about the Moribus, and had even lifted his sleeve on one occasion to show the band of energy surrounding it. It didn't hurt that Remus had been a link to the father Harry had never known. Remus had been a gift from the gods for the Pride.

It was one of those funny things in magic. Things never happen quite the way you expect around Dark Creatures. The curses they lived under all their lives changed circumstances, sometimes for the worst and sometimes for the better. When Remus Lupin, age 11, entered the Gryffindor Common Room for the first time with his three new roommates, he was not expecting to have another curse put on him.

In fact, the wolf was furious. The wolf side of Remus fought the Moribus for a year and a half before it started finding cracks. The spell was too powerful to fully break, but funny things happened around Remus Lupin...and his roommates were, in the case of the Moribus, beneficiaries of the werewolf’s constant subconscious magical use.

Remus was the one to walk the Golden Trio through their animagus forms, and it was only through his quick actions that Harry had not lost control many times throughout the year. The dementors had shocked his system worse than others and made his work harder and more intense.

Draco looked quizzically at the new man, patting Remus' chest with his tiny hands. "My Harry?"
Remus smiled at the name, and nodded as he walked to the couch, sitting and moving the boy to sit in his lap. He winced as Draco bounced excitedly and sat up straighter to keep him from knocking the wind out of him. "Yes. I knew Harry as a baby, and then I had to go far away, but I got to see him again a few years ago. We have been very good friends since then. Harry looks to me like a father, I suppose."

Draco gave him a deep look. "You take care of Harry?"

"I try to, when he will let me, yes."

Lucius walked back into the room only to choke at Draco's next words. "You my Papa?"

Remus' eyes got so large he thought they would pop from his head. "I..um...pardon?"

Draco gave the man a look as if to say "My logic is obvious, how are you not following?" Draco sighed, not seeing Lucius leave his room at that moment. "My Harry is big brother and you his Papa. So you my Papa too. I gots a Daddy, so you can be my Papa."
Lucius chuckled behind Remus, and Draco looked up with a beatific smile before raising his arms. "Daddy, up!" Lucius lifted the wayward child with a roll of his eyes that made the werewolf relax a bit. "What is this I hear about a Papa?" He asked his son, going on with, "Am I not good enough?"

Draco pouted at his Daddy. "Nuh-uh. You's the best Daddy ever!" He pointed to Remus with a matter of fact look. "He Harry's Papa and Harry is my big Brother so dat mean he my Papa too. That's what happened to Bay."

Remus gave him a curious look as he stood. He felt too vulnerable to be sitting around while Lucius stood. As he did Lucius translated for the man. "Blaise Zabini. His mother remarried after Blaise's father passed on, and they had a daughter, Elizabeth a few months later. We tried to explain that even though Raphael was not Blaise's father, only Elizabeth's, Blaise could still call him Dad. If I remember correctly we were explaining this concept to him around this age the first time around. It was a situation unique to Blaise, but I think he took it to be a universal truth."

Draco had wiggled down from his Daddy's arms while the men talked and went looking for his Prongslet. He found him with a squeal of delight and brought it to Remus. "My Harry gived me this."

Remus was so surprised to see the little stuffed animal he had bought so long ago again that he didn't even register kneeling to Draco's level or correcting him. "Gave, not gived. Harry gave me this. Did you know that I was the one who gave this to Harry when he was even younger than you?" Draco shook his head in wonder. "I did. It didn't have this on it, though," he said, pointing to the embroidered words. "His Mum was the one that sewed this on him. That was what we called him. Harry's Daddy could turn into a deer, and we called him Prongs, so Harry was our Prongslet."

Lucius watched his son interacting with Lupin and felt a piece of his heart break at the sight. This was the kind of childhood Draco was supposed to have. He was supposed to be open and unguarded. There was something nigling in the back of Lucius' mind about that last statement, though he couldn't bring the memory to the forefront of his mind. He stopped trying to force the memory and noted the time.

Lucius was loath to break up the scene between Draco and Lupin, but they needed to go soon. "Draco, come here. We need to get you dressed." Draco looked between his Daddy and new Papa and handed Prongslet to Remus before toddling off to wrap himself around his Daddy's leg.

Lucius smiled, remembering this game and took careful swinging steps, careful not to dislodge the boy while walking a few steps across the room. "You're welcome to stay, Lupin. We will only be a moment," he called over his shoulder.

After that Lucius grabbed the boy and swung him up with a laugh, entering the boy's room and getting the little terror ready for the day.

He returned to the living room with Draco in another set of transfigured clothes, a simple pair of grey pants and a white button up shirt that made the boy look so sweet. He insisted on being held as they walked out, and smiled, knowing he was going to see his Harry and Uncle Sev soon.

"C'mon new Papa! It's time to go see peoples!" Draco said with a laugh.

Thanks for reading!

Please let me know what you think! I was dying without more little Draco in my life, so this chapter came to life from that.
Next up is the School-wide meeting and naming of the Representatives!

I know it was a shortish chapter, but it's the last in the break between action/information set up chapters. Next we return to more of the action part of our plot.
Hogwarts' Representatives

Chapter 25: Hogwarts' Representatives

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein

Sunday Morning, Breakfast

Harry stood outside the Great Hall after changing into his nicest formal robes. He had black dress trousers and dress shoes, a white long-sleeved button up shirt with a black vest on and buttoned up to the top. His over robe was a rich, deep green. He was startled while dressing by a blur of orange passing out of the corner of his eye, but relaxed when he realized it was only Crookshanks.

The cat looked like a hero back from war. He was scruffy and had a few pieces missing, but there was just something about his that made everyone love him. Harry gave him a scritch behind the ears and left the tower, preparing himself for the full assembly today.

He got to a hallway right off from the Great Hall when his isolated walk was finally interrupted. "Mr. Potter, I see you clean up well when you put in some effort." Severus was leaning against the wall waiting for Lucius, but delighted in finding the brat alone too. He gave the teen a long once over, liking what he saw. He'd decided to put the guilt out of his mind. He had a bondmate, and that was more than he'd ever thought he'd receive from another. He would not touch the young man until he understood the nature of the bonds, but until then...well, looking wasn’t illegal, now was it?

Harry looked over at the dark man, salivating at the look of him in a few less layers of robes. "You as well, Professor. Ah..." He realized he'd probably just insulted the man and tried to backtrack. "I mean, uh, that you clean up well, that is."

Severus smirked at him. "I understood, Harry. You did not hurt my sensibilities by throwing my comment back in my face." Severus noticed the boy had a smudge of dust on his cheek and moved forward slowly. "May I?" He asked as his hand lifted.

Harry wasn't sure what was happening, but he couldn't stop staring into those eyes. Depths without end. He purred when Severus' hand touched the skin of his cheek and softly wiped something away. Harry whined softly when he pulled away, and surprise lit Severus' feature.

The dark man took a step back and addressed the teen. "You'd best get into the hall, breakfast will be ending soon."

Harry nodded, but didn't move, so Severus placed a hand on his back, propelling him forward. The spark that jumped between them lit both their bodies with desire. Harry didn’t know what else to do on his own so he ran away. While he was not a blushing virgin by any means...this was something new and he had no idea what to do with himself.

He walked into the Great Hall and smiled as he saw Miles sitting between Hermione and Ron. "Hey Miles, how have you been?"

Miles grinned at his cousin's friend around a mouthful of French toast. He chewed and swallowed quickly and said, "Good, Mr. Harry."

Harry ruffled his hair from across the table before sitting. "Just Harry, Miles."
Miles nodded, they'd been working on getting Miles to call him Harry for a few weeks now, but it was still a work in progress, the boy was much too polite sometimes.

Harry sat at his normal place at the table and grabbed a glass of juice. He was nervous and excited that Hogwarts would finally be getting the leaders she deserved, and only sighed when Hermione set a plate before him. "Eat. You know how you get, Harry."

He sighed and nibbled at the fruit on his plate. Hermione continued glaring so he shoved a piece of French toast into his mouth to make her happy. She gave him a nod and returned to her conversation with Miles about his Charms class. Ron stood and made his way to the back of the room to talk to his father at the table that had been set up for the few outsiders who had been invited for the meeting. Oddly enough Neville was in the back with his Gran as well.

Harry shrugged, knowing he'd find out why soon enough and returned to his breakfast. He ate quietly, content in listening to his Pride enjoy a shenanigans free breakfast until a high-pitched squeal of his name stole his attention once more. He tensed at first until he could place the voice. He knew there were many children in the castle and all of them knew him very well, but he had to convince himself that it was only Draco. Tell himself that disaster had not befallen the hatchlings in the Chamber.

Harry turned on his bench just in time to catch a run-away Draco with Prongslet under his arm. He lifted the boy into his arms as he stood, and looked for Lucius. He could feel the eyes of the students and staff on him, but brushed it off.

He smirked as he saw Lucius, Remus and Severus in the Great Hall doorway, all three looking very dapper and matching with their respective Houses. Severus was wearing his customary black, though Harry thought he detected a glint of silver and green embroidery here and there. Lucius was resplendent in dark blue robes, a single design of bronze at the hem of them. Remus had a set of burgundy robes on, gold etching the bottom. Arthur walking over to join the four men. He wore black dress robes like Severus, though his were decorated with yellow embroidery.

Harry tilted his head with a smile and a nod as he noticed all of their robes had a similar cut. It seemed Hogwarts was already taking care of her men. He looked at the chattering little one in his arms and nuzzled his nose against the boy's head. "Good morning, Hatchling. How was your first night in your rooms?"

Draco bounced in his big brother's arms, "Good. I fell asleep in my bed, but I had a bad dream, so I slept with Daddy after that. Then this mornin' I met Papa and...and den we got dressed and came to see Uncle Sev and you!"

Harry was confused. "Papa? I didn't know you had a Papa?" He was careful of his phrasing with the child.

Draco grinned. "Uh-huh! Daddy said 'Lizbet's Daddy can be Bay's Daddy even though he's not Bay's real Daddy, soooooo that mean you Papa is my Papa! And he has to be a Papa 'cuz Daddy is already my Daddy."

Harry knew he was missing something, but for the life of him couldn't figure out what it was. Thinking of something he asked Draco, "Is your Papa here, little Dragon?"

Draco nodded. "Uh-huh! He's dere! Right next to Daddy..." He said it as if it should be obvious, and to Draco it was. The little boy pointed to Remus and waved when the man turned his head when he felt eyes on him. He could see Harry's flabbergasted expression and shrugged as if to say "He's three, what can you do?"
Harry resolved to ask Remus about all this later, but he could feel the little boy's stomach grumble and sat with him. A muggle booster seat with a built in sticking charm, mostly likely brought by Winky from the Chamber, popped into view on the seat next to Harry and he strapped the excitable toddler into it. Hermione had already fixed a child friendly plate of finger foods for him and they all enjoyed his company.

Hermione was careful to apply a household charm she knew that would repel stains from cloth temporarily, but did the motions underneath the table so she didn't scare the child. He was already slightly comfortable with Hermione, but, with the exception of Heather, women were definitely not his favorite people to be with.

They chatted for some time, and Draco greeted Ron with enthusiasm when he returned, remembering the funny boy from before. Harry especially loved watching Ron's spit-take when Draco had to explain, again, about Remus's new name.

Clink. Clink. Clink.

The student body looked to the Head Table to see Professor Flitwick standing on a pedestal to address the school. He cleared his throat as the students settled down.

"As you all know, changes have come to Hogwarts. I will not go into the why, I believe our Ms. Granger has covered that sufficiently. Today we look to a future that is bright and prosperous. For too long Hogwarts has been divided from within, and today that stops. I understand that there have been many things going on at Hogwarts that were beyond our control or understanding, but now we must unite. I will not pretend to have known about the goings on at Hogwarts, quite the opposite is true. I have known about the events within the Gryffindor House for only hours more than you all have."

The students were surprised to hear this, but quickly settled again.

"Hogwarts is your home. Your House is your family. Those are the words we have made strides to live by, but now, I challenge you. Do not limit your family to your House. Families are large and reaching. They are always growing, and so you should as well. Now, if the ones in charge of this change would come forward to explain the changes to us."

Harry looked up and down the Gryffindor table silently signaling whom he wanted on the dais with him. Hermione, Heather, Ron, and Neville rose while Colin used the distraction to slip into the shadows, just in case. Hermione freed Draco from the booster seat and held him as they walked to the Head Table.

Ron took lead over the explanations as the other three would be presenting representatives.

"Hogwarts is our family, that is true, but it's a very big family. Luckily I have a bit of practice with those." The students laughed with him. "One thing I've learned is that everyone has their own perspective, and everyone's opinion is important. So, the new structure to Hogwarts will reflect this. As you've probably felt in the last little while, the castle’s magic is thick and rich now. It has already accepted and welcomed her representatives, so today we will introduce you to the adult representatives of Hogwarts, then they will announce their choice for a student representative."

Ron looked at the others nervously. "Okay, well, sorry, I missed a step." The students laughed again and Ron ran his hand through his hair nervously. "We have a system inside Gryffindor House, and
we’ve adopted something similar. There will also be two Champions, one student and one adult, so I guess I’ll give her the floor.”

The students look around curiously. Her? Her who?

The energy in the room built with tension as everyone whispered and tried to figure out just what Ron had meant, then relaxed slightly as they felt a warm energy flow over them. It moved through the room, stirring the air until finally swirling around one person in particular.

Lady Longbottom stood at the back of the room, holding herself with proper grace and decorum as the air around her moved and swirled.

Ron, being the announcer, spoke once more. “You are charged with overseeing the castle, protecting her in the political realm, and settling any disputes among the House Representatives. You are the voice of wisdom and reason, and are without prejudice or bias. Do you accept?”

“I, Augusta Miriam Longbottom, former Heir Regent to the House of Longbottom do accept this task.” Augusta Longbottom made no long speech, nor took long to think. She was needed, and that was enough. She would do her duty, and if it helped others, so much the better.

A feeling of warmth and love enveloped the older woman as she sat, and Hogwarts turned her magic to her next Champion. It moved again, touching each child in its wake until it reached it’s next Champion.

Harry took a step forward so he stood alone on the platform, swaying in the warm caress of the castle’s magic. His face was neutral as he listened, though inside he was thanking the castle for her approval.

Again, Ron spoke. “You are charged with overseeing the castle, protecting her in the physical realm, and settling any disputes among the Student Representatives. You are the voice of wisdom and reason, and are without prejudice or bias. You will protect the castle’s children as your own. Do you accept?”

Harry fell to one knee at her words, so like that night so many years ago. He knew what honor had been bestowed upon him. He knew he could do the job. He had been for years, but now he could do it for the betterment of the entire school, not just his Pride.

"I, Harry James Potter, do accept this charge on my honor. For Hogwarts."

With his acceptance came a glowing white light surrounding the boy. Many gasped, wondering what Hogwarts was doing to their friend but soon realized it was not Harry but the floor before him that was glowing.

There, on the floor was a sword with a small piece of parchment lying on it. It read only:

Take this, my Champion, that it may serve you in time of need.

Harry was very surprised to see the Sword of Gryffindor again. When Harry summoned the sword from the Sorting Hat in his second year the sword defaulted to his ownership, just as a magical beast became property of the wizard to slay it. Dumbledore, however, saw no need for a mere tool to have such a powerful weapon and had locked it away from the world. Harry was in awe that Hogwarts had seen fit to return it to him. He stood and conjured a rig to hold the sword to his hip until he could get something made.

Harry stepped forward as he felt Hogwarts encourage him to do. He looked to Neville and nodded
his head to his Gran. Neville grinned and went to her, escorting her to a chair on the dais. "Hogwarts is home to many of the Founders' Heirs. We are all in Gryffindor due to circumstances beyond our control, but we stand by our school, not only our Houses. Each of us has chosen a representative and offered it up to Hogwarts. She has approved our choices. So, now, I would like to call up the adult Representative and have them announce the student they would like to work with."

Harry lifted a hand and gestured to the Slytherin table. "As Slytherin's Magical heir I present to you Potions Master Severus Snape, representing the Slytherin House." Cheers and claps were politely distributed around the room, though many were surprised to see that the Gryffindors were not the most somber about the choice.

Severus walked to the Head Table with his general dramatic flair, turning sharply when he reached Harry and Augusta. He bowed to them before turning to the student body. "I would ask Blaise Zabini to step forward."

Blaise had to be pushed from his seat to get him to move. He was astounded. Of all the Slytherins and he was chosen? Blaise stood before his Head of House, trying to get his brain to work right.

"Blaise Alexander Zabini, do you accept this role as Student Representative of Slytherin House?"

He nodded before saying, "I accept." The Slytherins cheered their Housemate and the two moved to the back of the platform. Harry gestured to Hermione to announce her representative.

Hermione stepped forward with Draco in her arms and bounced him, whispering "Look there's Daddy." She raised her voice just after to say, "As Heiress of Ravenclaw's line I call forward Lucius Malfoy."

A collective gasp of surprise rang out through the Great hall. Whispers of "Death Eater!" were heard. But Lucius kept his head held high.

He walked forward to grumblings of unease from the House of Ravenclaw and when he got to the dais he bowed to Hermione before taking Draco from the girl. "First," he addressed the students, "I would like to say something. Like Hermione, I was a displaced Ravenclaw when sorted. My family pressured me to accept no less than Slytherin House, and so I argued the Hat into my sorting, not its own. Just because I was not in the House does not mean I think any less logically than you all. This is a time of change and acceptance, and I ask you accept the choices of someone much wiser than us all: Hogwarts. Now, saying that, I need you to accept something else. Hogwarts has given me two charges to accept. Elizabeth Zabini-Mkapa and Luna Lovegood. Please step forward."

Harry and Hermione exchanged a look, but Harry shrugged. Hogwarts had accepted, and who could fault her. Both girls were exemplary Ravenclaws in different ways. However, Hogwarts knew that one of the charges would be indisposed in a few months for some time and thought ahead to find a replacement who would work well with her.

The two girls made their way up the stairs to the platform and Harry reached down to help Elizabeth. Her gait was a little off, but she was getting better at walking normally with the concealment charm on her belly. Her glamour was holding, though, which was great for the girl.

Lucius bowed to each girl and started the ritual, "Elizabeth Belladonna Zabini-Mkapa, do you accept the responsibility of student representative for as long as you are capable?" He asked with a look in his eye that said his wording was purposeful and he knew her secret.

"I accept," she said in a soft voice, her dark eyes glinting in the light.
Luna, Elizabeth's antithesis, was bouncing with excitement as Lucius turned to her. "Luna Celeste Lovegood, do you accept the responsibility of student representative for as long as you are capable?"

"I do!" She said, and skipped off to the back of the stage with Elizabeth in tow.

Neville stepped forward, the Hufflepuff table next. "As an Heir of Hufflepuff I present Arthur Weasley as the representative of Hufflepuff."

The Weasley patriarch began his speech similarly to Lucius as he heard some grumbles. "Just as Lucius shed some light on the past, so will I. The tradition of Weasleys being sorted into Gryffindor was not started with me. I was sorted into Hufflepuff with my wife many, many years ago. Madame Sprout can attest I'm sure." Pomona gave a nod of agreement and the students settled down again.

"Hannah Maria Abbott, step forward please."

Hannah gaped similarly to Blaise and was also nudged forward by her Housemates. She reached the dais in record time and relaxed as Arthur gave her a smile. "Hannah Maria Abbott, do you accept the task of student representative for the House of Hufflepuff?"

"I...I do—accept." She stuttered slightly.

They stepped out of the way together and Ron gave his father a hug in congratulations. Heather took her spot in the center. "As one of Gryffindor's Heir I call Remus Lupin forward for House Gryffindor."

Remus walked to the platform to the cheers of the older students. They remembered him as a kind teacher who was good at his job and fairly unbiased to the House system. As he climbed the stairs he met Heather and Harry with a hug. Harry, unable to leave the moment too somber, whispered to him, "Father of my heart...or should I call you Papa, now?"

Remus chuckled and whispered back, "None of that from you." They smiled and Remus went to the middle of the platform. He stood before the student body and Remus lifted his choice up to Hogwarts, as all the other men had done before calling out the student's name.

Remus took a breath.

Thanks for reading!
Chapter 26: Laying Down the Rules

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein

"Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnegan, you have been called."

Shea and Dean looked just as shocked as Blaise had, and they too had to be pushed out of their seats. They walked forward, looking Remus in the eye as first Dean was asked, "Dean Michael Thomas, do you accept the responsibility of representing the Gryffindor Pride?"

Dean, knowing his Alpha was watching, looked to Harry and when he got a proud and accepting nod from his leader, his blessing, he grinned. "I accept."

Seamus took Dean’s hand as Remus turned those golden eyes on him. “Seamus Samuel Finnegan, do you accept the responsibility of representing the Gryffindor Pride?”

Again, his gaze moved to his Alpha, who gave his nod of approval. “I accept.” He felt the magic swirling around him just as it had for Dean, their connection making the experience even more heady.

Roars and cheers of triumph rang out from the Gryffindor table, the loudest from Ginny. A few moments later Harry stepped forward with one hand raised. They quieted immediately.

"Professor Flitwick, if you would?" The tiny professor approached him with the pouch of ward bracelets. "If the Adult Representatives and Champion would step forward." Harry gave Ron a look and had him take Harry's place as Madame Longbottom, Severus, Lucius, Arthur and Remus all stepped forward.

Ron began his spiel, having been informed of the events of the day before by Hermione. "Yesterday the wards of Hogwarts were cleansed and updated. In this pouch are bracelets that alert the wearer of any breaches in the wards. Each of the six before you will wear one."

Flitwick had finished handing them out, though Harry was a bit hesitant to take his. Hogwarts surrounded him in warmth as he put it on his left wrist, wanting to erase the memories of the Moribus band and make new associations with Hogwarts wards. Harry finally picked up the final band, still unsure how they would get them on, but Hogwarts already had a plan.

When Harry did touch the band it started to glow and levitate on its own, hovering over his palm. He looked over to see that all six bands were doing the same thing.

The glow grew brighter and everyone in the room was tensed, waiting for the worst, but the relaxed as they felt Hogwarts around them. It was a brighter feeling, more distinctly welcoming, and warm… like coming home. The bands lowered until they went through each person's wrist to surround it before the glow dimmed to nothing.

The students clapped at the impressive display before Harry stepped forward once more to quiet them. "We have a few new changes in staffing to announce."

Professor Flitwick took over in the announcements. "Yes! Now, as you all know Albus Dumbledore and Minerva McGonagall are...no longer with us as Professors. The Adult Representatives will
replace Dumbledore as administrator of the school. Professor Snape will be working alongside Professor Aurora Sinistra and in a few months the Head of House for Slytherin will be handed over to her. As well, Remus Lupin will be taking over as Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor. He will also be the official Head of house for Gryffindor."

The students all clapped at this. "Yes, yes, so exciting!" Flitwick continued. "Also, I would like to ask Lucius Malfoy if he would consider a reviving the full course of Magical History and Wizarding Culture as Professor. It seems that within the previous wards was a spell to trap our resident ghosts here against their will. When the spell was removed our Professor Binns promptly chose to join his family in the afterlife. All of our others ghosts are accounted for, so please thank them for their service to the school when you see them."

Lucius blinked at the sudden offer, then smiled. How could he say no to a steady job that would allow him and his son a legitimate reason stay within the castle. "No considerations necessary, I accept wholeheartedly."

The little man clapped with excitement. He turned back to the students. "We are still looking for a replacement Transfiguration Professor, but as soon as one has been found you will all know. Until then please use your class time in a progressive fashion within the Great Hall. Finally, with young Mr. Malfoy's accident it has been decided by the students, with the blessing of the staff, that Terry Boot of Ravenclaw will step forward as this year's Head Boy. Congratulations, Mr. Boot."

Harry, seeing that Flitwick was winding down, stepped forward to make one last announcement. One that Ron and Hermione had pressed him to give before they even knew of his Champion status.

"Yesterday, Hogwarts was saved from great peril at the hands of one who was supposed to be protecting us. Dumbledore wove curses into the wards, but he was not successful thanks to a goblin from Gringotts. Because of his fast work we have all been saved from a terrible fate. This goblin also updated the ward scheme at Hogwarts. These new wards will finally allow Hogwarts to do her duty and protect all of us."

He paced on the platform. "This will also mean tightening of some rules." The Slytherin, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff students groaned, but there was silence from the Gryffindor table. "These are not new rules, only a stricter enforcement of things we all have been getting away with for years that never should have been allowed." Snape, in the background, could be seen barely hiding a smirk of glee. "They are for your own safety, and to violate them is to put yourself and others in danger, which I will not stand for. Copies of the rulebook will be placed in your common rooms."

A few students squirmed in their seats, and a few whispers could be heard, but for the most part they fell silent again as Harry went on.

"The are a few things as Student Champion of Hogwarts that I need you to understand, rules you need to keep in the forefront of your mind. In return I offer alternatives to what you may feel you have lost. I have had these ideas for ages, but never felt our administrators would be very receptive. There is to be no spell casting in the halls. Instead we will be cleaning up abandoned classroom and fitting them for students to use. No one is allowed into the dorms of the opposite sex. At all. Socialization will happen in common rooms, and inter-house common rooms will soon be available."

Harry's eyes flitted from emerald to jade and back for a moment at the next thought. "Do no harm. That is the final thing I want to say. Do not harm your fellow students. Hogwarts is your home. You House is your family. That is what we are told when we enter these Halls. I say that is rubbish. Hogwarts is your home and your family. Do not limit yourselves to only those people in your House for you will miss out on many relationships you'll later wish you had found."
Severus watched his brat throughout the entirety of his speech, for Harry was his brat, he just wasn't consciously aware of it yet. Harry was a force unto himself with his tall stature, glowing eyes...and the power. Severus would swear later that he could feel the magical power emanating from his body across the dias. He watched the Slytherin table as well. He could see more than a few converts to Harry's side. They knew that while Harry was not Dark, neither was he wholly Light. He was the Leader of neither fanatical side, the leader they could join and never be prosecuted for a neutral leaning.

Severus also saw the few eyes of the Death Eater children who were too well indoctrinated to do anything but try and fail to hide their hatred. Their looks transferred from Lucius to Harry, though Snape had kept enough distance from both as to still be up in the air. His "role" as spy was well known to the children of Death Eaters, and Snape frequently played on that card. He also knew that if he was to do anything to protect his brat he would need to retain his Death Eater status for a lot longer.

As Harry's speech wrapped up he invited the students to mingle, and was not surprised when his House dove right in. They had years of experiences to make up for and friends to find. Harry looked around when he felt a presence enter his personal space, only to come face to face with Severus. Harry fought his blush down and looked into the dark man's eyes. "Professor."

Severus smirked at the teen, seeing his nervousness, said only, "You did well." With that he turned and walked off to speak with Aurora about the Slytherins.

Hermione walked up with a hyper Draco. "Harry! Look! Look!" Draco showed Harry his Prongslet. "Papa say he got dis for you a long time ago." Harry thanked his friend and took the little one from her. She smiled knowingly and went to talk to her friends.

Harry nodded. "He did. You remember what I said about keeping him with you always, right?" Draco nodded seriously and Harry tapped his small nose softly. "Want to go talk to some people with me?"

Draco bounced in his arms with a "Yes! Yes! Yes!" and Harry laughed at him. He did look so much like Cyrus at times. It was mostly the blond hair and large eyes. Cyrus' had been green, and Draco's were grey, but they both shared a certain amount of innocence as well as a jaded edge that could creep in at certain times. An edge no three-year-old should have.

Harry looked over the room and his gaze came to rest on Hermione talking to Susan Bones. He remembered Severus' earlier comment and wanted to make sure he did not forget again. He went up to the two girls, saying hello. "Ladies. Hermione, I wanted to ask if I could borrow your book on Bonds later?" Hermione looked at him with dawning understanding, but hid it and told him he could. Harry smiled and let them get back to their conversation as he mingled with other students, saying hello to many he had seen often enough but rarely had positive interactions with.

Usually they were faces in a sea of students to him. It was always hard for Harry, he'd had so many depending on him that he had little time for those outside of Gryffindor, especially those not in his year. He could at least name the people in his year since he had classes with them at least once a week.

In addition, he found, especially around the Slytherins, that any interaction was driven to harsh
words and hexes due to the constant shocking from the Moribus.

Harry was truly surprised how many people gave him quiet waves, and calls of hello, but did not accost him unduly. But there was always one.

That student, Anthony Goldstein, tried to accost him verbally as he held Draco. With a malevolent yell of, "Hey, Potter!" Anthony came up to him from behind and grabbed his arm, the one not holding Draco. Harry spun automatically, wrenching his arm from the grasp and only just stopped himself from rounding his body and using the momentum to kick the boy's head in.

Harry immediately saw Neville beside him and handed Draco to his friend. Neville turned Draco so he could not see what was going on and whispered into his ear that everything was okay. Harry, pissed almost beyond words could barely stop himself from hissing. He glared at the boy with his jade eyes, finally able to bite out, "Do. Not. Touch. Me. Goldstein. You've had your warning with me once before. I will not tolerate you provoking anyone today. Either remove yourself from my presence or you will be removed by me."

Goldstein sneered, knowing all eyes were on him as he drifted back into the crowd, saying only, "Watch yourself, Potter. We'll be talking soon." Harry glared and his fists clenched of their own accord. His pupils went to slits in his anger, but he said nothing, only turning to take Draco back with a nod of thanks.

He resolved to have Heather tighten security on Elizabeth. Ever since the first attack Heather had kept close to Elizabeth, but the mindset that 'you are doing more than enough' and 'no one needs to stay alert at all times' was what got Elizabeth into her current predicament. Harry looked around for Heather he noted that she was already with the other girl and sent her a smile. Harry could feel the looks of surprise on the faces around him as he entered Slytherin territory some time later.

He took a seat in the middle of the table near most of the seventh years and a few sixth years who elected to remain seated. He sat Draco in his lap and gave introductions for the child's sake. He was careful in what names he used, not knowing if he would remember these people as children.

It was especially difficult to lie to the child about Blaise, who was sitting with Neville on one side and Daphne Greengrass on the other. They convinced him of what a weird coincidence it was that he also had a friend named Blaise.

Daphne's brother came by at sat on Daphne's other side, and that niggling feeling of familiarity hit Harry once more. If Harry didn't know they were in different years he would swear they were twins with their blond locks and rounded eyes, though they differed in color. Daphne's were green while Damon's were a slate blue.

Harry was confused when, after a few minutes, Daphne had tears in her eyes. Harry pulled a white handkerchief from his pocket and offered it. She took it and dabbed at her eyes, answering his unspoken question. "Draco just reminds me of my littlest brother. He...died very young. He was only two, almost three when he...left us." She gave a quick look to her other brother, Damon who was sitting next to her.

Harry looked oddly at her before kindly asking, "What was his name, if I may ask?"

Daphne startled, but tears were running down her face. She wasn't coherent as she tried to say it.

It was Damon who started to answer him. He'd barely gotten out "Cyrus" and Harry wasn't sure he'd even heard correctly because at the same time the doors to the Great Hall slammed open to admit a screaming and enraged Narcissa Malfoy.
"Where is my son?! I demand that my son be given to me. Right. Now!"

Thanks for Reading!

I hope y'all are enjoying the story up until now and have taken a look at No Rest for the Weary. If there is anything I have mentioned in TPH of things that have happened in the past that you would like to see expanded on in No Rest, please let me know. I'm looking for scene ideas to add to what I have written and especially need things that would have occurred 3-6th year.

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Draco began crying as soon as he heard his Mother's voice. Harry saw Remus standing behind the woman, and he guessed correctly that Remus had been the one to allow her access to the castle. He could not reasonably nor legally deny her access to the school while her son was in residence.

Dozens of students at the Slytherin table rose to shield Draco from his mother. While many knew nothing about Draco's past it was clear to anyone watching that the boy did not want to see or have anything to do with his mother. Lucius and Severus both walked straight to Harry, putting him behind them. Severus whispered into the teen's ear, "Leave this to Lucius, he was expecting this confrontation, just not here. Protect Draco, leave the rest be."

Harry reluctantly nodded, and moved slowly and carefully backwards into the crowd to mask his and Draco's presence. The students were talking loud enough to cover the sound of his whimpers as Harry calmed him. He cast a light muffliato around them to allow sound in, but not out. He stopped near Hermione and Susan as he listened to the confrontation.

"What are you doing here, Narcissa?" Lucius said calmly.

"You know why I am here, Lucius. I want my son, and I want him now." She was mad with rage, almost spitting her icy eyes could cut glass, and her hair was crackling with energetic rage.

Lucius drew his haughtiest mask to the fore, eyes narrowed in challenge. "You have no say over this matter. Leave, woman, and do not return."

Narcissa walked forward until she was within ten paces of Lucius. In her mind, all she had to do was threaten him with his precious ring and she would have the boy. The Dark Lord would be ecstatic with having the boy again, and she just knew he would jump at the chance to rear him to his exact
specifications. Draco would make a great heir for her Lord, she just knew it.

"I would not pull such a high tone with me, Lucius. For you surely are not enough of a man to be Lord Malfoy." The students gasped at her audacity. "I own you and your precious title. You will give me my son, and beg my forgiveness for this attitude of yours. I may forgive you if you grovel just right, dear husband."

Lucius sneered in disgust at the woman. He noticed out of the corner of his eye as a new figure stepped into the Great Hall, one he immediately recognized. "Putting on airs are you, Cissy?" He raised his hand showing the Malfoy Lordship ring on his middle finger. "You have no hold over me, woman." He fought to mask his language with the entire school watching him.

Narcissa screeched in rage and pulled her wand, immediately casting the Darkest Curse she knew, an organ-melting curse, but Lucius and Severus were ready.

So was the Pride.

As Narcissa began to cast Lucius conjured a brick wall to shield himself and those around him, knowing instinctively that she would go for the Dark Arts. Severus conjured a semi-corporeal shield over the students to shield them from the debris. At the same time Colin and Dennis moved into position.

Colin pulled a paralytic potion from his belt and Dennis coated his needles before sending them flying with his wand. It was an operation they always had in reserve for when a lion lost control in public. Dennis hit true, sending the needle into her breast where the paralytic took immediate effect into the bloodstream as well as storing in the fatty tissue there. Narcissa dropped instantly, not even realizing she had been taken down.

Ron, Seamus and Dean moved forward as Lucius cast an incarcerous on her. He knew if he did not say something there would be no way to save his reputation from being tarnished and retribution taken, maybe even against his son. "Narcissa Malfoy is guilty of theft of the Malfoy Lordship ring. As such she will be struck from the Malfoy ledgers as wife to the Lord Malfoy and by order of the Lord of House Malfoy. In addition she is under suspicion of Child Abuse and Neglect. As such guardianship of her son is granted to his father, by Order of the House of Malfoy." With each proclamation the ring gave a golden glow, proving his claims as true and his orders to be carried out by any who served the House of Malfoy.

Gornuk, the guest who had just arrived to Hogwarts for this purpose cleared his throat. "I think I may help you in speeding up this process, Lord Malfoy. I have the paperwork you requested."
Lucius gave a feral grin and bowed to the goblin. "Thank you for this, Gornuk. I will sign them now, if you would follow me." Lucius walked to the closest cleared table and sat, taking the Blood Quill that the goblin handed him. The students gasped as he signed his name flawlessly with it over and over. Most of them knew from experience the pain that accompanied the use of a Blood Quill, but were in awe of how Lucius showed no pain. He signed Narcissa's rights to his home, vault and son away, pending pensieve proof.

With the last i dotted, the papers rolled themselves up and burst into flame. "They will appear in our records, Lord Malfoy," Gornuk said. He held out the phial in his hand for the Lord and waited while Lucius compiled many memories he had of Draco's first childhood, and deposited them as evidence. The Goblin corked the phial and pocketed it.

Lucius nodded with satisfaction. "Thank you Gornuk, take the typical bonus from my vault for yourself in thanks."

Gornuk gave a slight bow, asking, "If that is all? I expect a parcel delivered to Gringotts if justice is to be met, Lord Malfoy."

"Yes. It will be done. Well met, Gornuk," Lucius said before looking through the crowd for his son while Gornuk left for Gringotts to settle the vaults.

Harry was waiting, and when he saw the blond Lord looking over the room he moved to his side. Draco reached for his Father and hid his face in Lucius' neck.

"The Pride will take care of your ex-wife. What would you have us do with her?"

Lucius thought about it for a moment. He remembered Severus telling him about the Pride's punishment for Pansy, and with a sly glint in his eyes said only, "Go wild."

"Potter," came an old, growly voice from the wall some time later. Harry, who had been talking with a group of Ravenclaws looked up to see the caretaker, Argus Filch.

"Yes, Mr. Filch?" Harry said, trying for polite puzzlement.
"Call up your repre-whatsits. Need you to do some of your magic," he sneered. "I got me some information yeh might need." He looked wary, but determined and so Harry told him they would meet him in the room right next to the Great Hall. He rounded up the Reps and the other Champion and they proceeded to the hall, all wondering what the squib caretaker had to tell them.

Filch relaxed as much as the ornery man could when the group of six walked in. "I got some information on Dumbledore you people may need to see. I know a lot about that memory thing you do, I just need one of yous to pull the memories from me."

Severus stood to take lead and directed the man through the memory extraction. When he finished Filch brought out a metal...thing from his pocket. "Dumbledore used this to keep me 'ere against me will. I want it destroyed, and I want to leave this place."

Filch's audience was surprised, though not that Dumbledore would trap someone within Hogwarts. Instead, they wondered just what it was about this man that he was trapped here.

Severus levitated the metal trinket, it looked similar to a metal sphere with a choke collar around it, each link of metal digging further into the surface.

"I wasn't always like this you know," Filch growled. "I attended 'ogwarts same as any other of yeh, but that man." Filch spit on the floor. "Cast a spell on me, 'e did. Bound me magic because I found out about 'im and 'Gongall's plans, I did, early in me second year. Threatened them with Aurors, for what good it got me. He bound me magic and shipped me off. Told them all I was sick, getting treatment. Then, 'round twenty-five years ago he brings me back, pulls that contraption out and says it's a "man'fest" of me magic, and he'd be controlling it. He cast spells on it and things would happen to me. Imperius spells and the like."

Everyone in the room was horrified. This was what the former headmaster was capable of, this atrocity! Severus began casting diagnostic spells, getting more confused by the minute. "The device is a conduit. Most likely Albus' prototype for the wards he used. It focuses the spell and drained his magic, but only to the point of keeping him a squib. His magical signature and core stays in this device until Albus wished to use him for any reason."

"Professor," Harry started. "Is there any way to reverse the transfer?"

Severus looked pensive for a moment. "I do not know. It will take time and research to determine if it is possible."
Filch nodded, knowing the hope was for the young, and he no longer had any. "Don’t bother. Live most me life without it, ‘d rather die without knowing it again if yeh don mind keepin’ yer noses out. I jes’ want to leave this infernal place. You can fire me or I’ll quit, but either way 'm not staying here longer than I haveta."

Everyone understood, but it was Harry who thought of the logistics. "Do you have anywhere to go? Any friends to rely on?"

Filch flinched. "No. The old man never paid me more than knuts on the galleon, and those went to keeping meself clothed, since you rotten kids ruined most of my possessions with your pranks, you did!"

It was Harry's turn to flinch. He'd never been a fan of the old caretaker, and had pulled no stops when the Weasley Twins pranked the castle from time to time. He never thought of how hard it would be to clean a magical castle full of pre-pubescent and pubescent teenagers without any magical help. It must have been awful.

"There is a woman, Arabella Figg. She is a squib in the town of Surrey. Go to her and tell her I sent you. She will help you, and I will see that you are paid for everything you have earned, Mr. Filch." Harry ran his hand through his hair, trying to quell the anger inside him.

"Does she like cats?" Filch asked.

"Adores them. She has a never-ending supply of kneazles. Mrs. Norris will be thrilled with a whole houseful of kits to ride herd over." Harry, seeing that Filch seemed to agree with that plan, called out, "Kippy."

For the first time, Argus Filch felt like things may be looking up for him. He looked at the House Elf as it appeared and happily called to it, "Pack me things, Kip. Mrs. Norris and I are leavin’ today."

The little elf smiled at his friend and blinked out. Arthur stood. "If you wish, I will take you to the edge of the wards and call the Knight Bus for you. I know where Arabella lives. In fact, I think I will send her an owl while we wait for Kippy to pack and find Mrs. Norris for you." With that he left the room for the Owlery, needing air.

Meanwhile, Severus and Lucius continued to study the magic container. Lucius was the first to
speak. "I think we need to bring in Ms. Granger and her spell crafters on this one, and maybe even Bill Weasley and the Goblins as well. Croaker, if he swears on his magic not to take this with him when he goes. This is Dark, Severus. Beyond even my theoretical knowledge, and the Unspeakables would kill to get their hands on it."

Severus was about to respond when the door opened to admit three teenagers currently trying to stifle laughter. Harry looked up at their arrival.

"Report."

Ron stepped forward as leader of the team. "We're done with her. We set a language spell on her, one of Mya's. She will think she's speaking English, when, in reality, she'll be speaking ancient Macedonian, and until anyone figures out a way to break one of Mya's creations, she'll be stuck that way. We took her through Passage 4 and apparated to Diagon Alley. We took her to Gringotts and left her on their steps and gave her a little enervate. She should be regaining a little bit of feeling in her limbs now, but the Goblins took great pleasure in seeing her left on their doorstep for once. Oh." Ron pulled a small box from his pocket. He passed it to Lucius. "It's everything she had on her but the robes on her back. We levitated it all out and into the box since some of it felt dark."

Lucius took the box to examine later, but was too tickled to stifle his laughter. It seems he’d have no need to ship his parcel to the Goblins after all. Draco, who had been playing in the corner during that time wanted to know why his Daddy was laughing and so called to him. "Daddy, up!" His arms raised high.

Lucius moved to his son, looking down at him. He’d been thinking back to Draco’s first childhood and trying to remember all the language lessons they had implemented to build his manners and vocabulary. "Be polite," he said, remembering this prompt easily enough.

Draco pouted, but knew this game. "Up! Please?"

He lifted his son into his arms, rubbing his small back. "What do, Daddy? Why funny?" Draco asked in a cute voice.

"Mr. Weasley is very funny. He gave me news that made me laugh." Draco laid his head on his father's chest, rubbing his eyes.

"Where Papa?"
Remus choked and sputter on air, so surprised was he at the question. He'd thought that Draco would have forgotten about the name already. Draco leaned up and looked at him, laughing at the funny color his face turned. When Remus finally got his breathing back under control, though not the blush lighting his face, Draco held his little arms out to the man.

Remus gave a questioning look to Lucius who nodded. Remus took the boy from him and held him, twisting at his hips to rock the babe as he used to do when Harry was fussy. Remus moved to a quiet corner so the others could continue conversing as he rubbed Draco's small back softly, patting him in a soothing manner. Before too long the yawns turned into snores and the boy was sleeping deeply in Remus' arms.

Augusta Longbottom, having sat quietly and watched the drama around her unfold, decided that things had quieted enough for her to demand some answers.

"You." She pointed at Seamus. "You're the Finnegan boy, I presume?"

"Yes Ma'am."

"Go get my Neville, Mr. Finnegan." She said in a no-nonsense tone before turning back to the adults. "I want to know what's been going on in this school, and I want to know now."

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Thanks for reading!

Next chapter is the return of the soulmate/bond discussions, more information about "The Pride's Children" I have hinted so much about and the introduction of what will be your next favorite OC. I hope you all are enjoying this journey!

Chapter End Notes

My Mac hard drive has malfunctioned. Luckily I use google docs to work between my tablet and laptop, so nothing was lost. Unfortunately that means I am reliant on my husband's computer for updates, so *if* they are late, this is why.
Unity Bonds and the Council's Children

Chapter 28: Unity Bonds and the Council's Children

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein

A/N: Anyone who writes their own stories will know what I mean. Declan started as a random child I looked up a name for, then four hours later I looked up to see I had a huge backstory for the kid, so, yeah. I love Declan.

This is the last chapter before things get real deep, real dark, real fast. So, prepare yourself :)

Sunday Afternoon

Harry was glad to be done with the assembly. Draco was asleep in his father's room, and Heather was with Elizabeth. Hermione was doing rounds, but she had given Harry the book on Natural Bonds before she left with Terry Boot. Harry, knowing that something was happening with Severus, but not what, decided that finding the information was priority number one.

He sat in his room, bed curtains spelled with a sticking charm as he opened the book to Unity Bonds. It was the only bond he could remember listing, but not hearing anything about from Severus.

The case of the Marriage Bond, or Unity Bond, is a rare and astounding one for it unites two beings in all aspects. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this bond is the most powerful, and can only be accomplished by magically powerful wizards and witches. This bond combines a Sympathetic, Telepathic/Twin and Soul Bond. The circumstances surrounding this bond's formation are astonishing indeed.

The Unity Bond will only occur between two powerful magical beings with high magical reserves. The catalyst for the bond begins when two beings' magic reaches out to the partner. This combining of magic itself creates a bond and connection so deep not even death can break it.

While the bond is not fully set until penetration and orgasm has been achieved together and by both parties, many who have experienced a Unity Bond say that some changes take place immediately. Those bonded in this way feel drawn to their partner. The bond does not, itself, change the feelings or opinions one may have for another, but the closeness that one feels because of the bond typically leads those within the bond to lose any past feelings of animosity.

Few beings have ever reported having a Unity Bond, due to the intimate nature of such a bond. A few bonded mates have come forward, though no one of extreme note. However, it has been speculated that Nicholas and Perenelle Flamel share this type of bond.

Harry read the passage over and over. He couldn't believe that this had happened to him. He knew, without having to think, that without the Moribus they would have created this bond much earlier, perhaps he would have had a good relationship to build on with Severus, now that he was legally an adult.

Harry knew that Severus knew all of this about the Unity Bond, and wondered at his reaction, or lack thereof, really. He knew he needed to speak to the man, not just agonize over what-ifs, but he couldn't bring himself to face him. Not with his mind as jumbled as it was.
Creating a plan in his head, Harry rose from his bed, changed into jeans and another t-shirt without looking and took off for Remus' rooms. He knocked on the door, surprised when the man opened the door slowly and peaked out. "Oh, Harry, hello. Did you need something?"

Harry nodded. "Mm. I was wondering if you would accompany me to the Chamber to check on Ronan, Elsbet and the children. I know it's getting close, so I thought you could look in on Declan."

Remus gave his agreement and they walked on together. Remus quickly noted Harry's unease bordering on frustration. The wolf was close to the surface with the full moon being only a few days away, and it could almost smell the worry on him.

"Is something bothering you, Harry? I know it's been a rough few days, but you know you can always come to me."

"I know. I...well, do you know anything about Unity Bonds?"

Remus was surprised at his question, but nodded. "Yes. It's one of the most powerful bonds that can occur. Very rare as well. What brought that up, Prongslet?"

Harry smiled at the nickname. "I...um. I think my magic made one."

Remus stopped dead in his tracks. "You what?"

Harry flinched. "When the Moribus released, my magic was lashing out, filling me again. I think when it reached out, someone else's reached back. I know I felt something and, well, they did too...I think. I just didn't know who to turn to. I needed to clear my thoughts, and I thought of you and the kids."

Remus tried to think of what to say. "May I ask who the other party is?"

Harry shook his head. "Not until I talk to him."

"Him?"

"Him."

"And you're okay with a him?"

Harry blushed. "Very, especially the him I got."

Remus was puzzled, trying to narrow down his mental list, but was drawing a blank. He was surprised that Harry's tendencies ran that way though now that he thought on it, he shouldn't have. It was one of the few topics they did not share for fear of their faces exploding from excessive blushing. "Well, good on you, Prongslet. We'll figure things out, just like we always have, right?"

Harry made a small noise of agreement as they reached the entrance. Harry got them through the tunnels and to the Day Care doorway. He opened it with the password: "Council's Children."

The Chamber and tunnels were dreary, with only stone and mortar decorating the walls, but they were no longer putrid with standing water. In contrast, the children's portion of the Chambers was an explosion of color and sound. Harry opened the door to see the children running around, playing games of tag and hide and seek.

It was only a little after noon, so the kids were playing until nap time began, getting out the excess energy they felt while fighting off that sleepy feeling of a full tummy. As soon as the children saw them they squealed his name and ran to him, attacking his legs and begging for hugs.
Harry knelt and gave each one a squeeze, asking how after them. Samuel, a boy left on the streets at seven, had recently been fit with glasses so he asked the boy how they felt.

Marissa was an orphan new to the center, having been transferred when her magic manifested a few weeks before. He asked how she liked the new center, and smiled when she gave an overjoyed "It's 'mazing, Mr. Harry!"

He talked to others of the new little ones, happy that they were taking well to the new atmosphere, as well as a few kids who had lived inside the Chamber for a few years now. A lot of the girls asked when they could come to the common room to play with Draco again, and Harry told them, "Soon, I promise."

Remus watched with a smile on his face. The boy was a natural with children, had been since before Remus met him again in Harry's third year. Remus had had a hard time coming to terms with Harry's past, and put everything he had into keeping the London Center safe when he left Hogwarts.

He would spend hours in the streets helping in anyway he could. Remus would move from giving out meals to searching for abandoned children. He had worked his magic, literally, to find homes for the abandoned children after he lost his job. With Harry's help he found good people, some homeless themselves, and gave them jobs caring for the kids, running soup kitchens, and generally making life on the streets better. He couldn't help everyone, but he tried.

As the children mobbed Harry, Remus saw Declan sitting in the corner and moved to sit with him. Declan was his personal find and the one child he kept close personal tabs on.

Flashback

August 20, 1997

It was two days after the full moon and Remus was in pain. The Pain Relief potions worked well, but there was only so much damage they could mask after a werewolf transformation. Remus didn't know why, but he felt compelled to get out and check on the children he'd found recently. He'd written Harry about them, but hadn't heard a reply just yet. He guessed Harry was inside the Chamber getting the latest transfers settled as he did every year. They had a good crop of eleven year olds at the London Shelter who had gotten their Hogwarts Letters, so they would be freeing up rooms for the ten-year olds to transfer.

Remus couldn't help but laugh as he remembered the look on the Hogwarts Professors' faces. They came to deliver the letters, and had no clue that they were visiting the same building. Hermione, using her knowledge of Muggle postal workings, had listed the building as an apartment complex. She then made a giant batch of polyjuice potion and had members of the Pride pose as parents. They told the teachers that they were from abroad, and had found this magic-friendly apartment complex through word of mouth.

According to the "owner," a polyjuiced Ronan, he was a squib who knew that with the influx of magical couples that he could make some money in creating housing for them close to the city, and it was a plus to offer a place where the children could interact safely.

If the professors got too suspicious they may have their memories fixed to reflect nothing out of the ordinary, but that had only happened a few times. Oddly enough, Mya was exceptionally good at memory charms and it was only when Sinistra came to deliver them that they had to worry. She was
a true Slytherin and too analytical for anyone's good. Harry always said they were lucky that Severus was too ornery to have to deliver letters.

Shaking his thoughts away, Remus apparated to the abandoned building he had seen more than a few children hanging around. He disillusioned himself and started to scope the perimeter. It wasn’t until he reached the back of the building that he heard the crying.

Remus quickly released the spell and stepped forward softly, trying for silent steps. Despite this he couldn’t hold his gasp of surprise and horror at the sight before him.

He was so tiny, but there was so much blood. He had long gashes down his face and arms, his limbs bent at awkward angles, though nothing looked broken. His clothes were torn, barely covering his body as he shivered and sobbed.

Remus stepped forward and froze. He knew what had happened to this boy as soon as he stood close enough to smell it on him.

The boy was a werewolf, only recently changed. Remus guessed that two nights ago was the boy's first transformation, and he wasn’t yet strong enough to heal from it with any expediency.

Remus moved forward carefully, making calming shushing noises as he lifted the boy into his arms. He saw the boy tense before his eyes rolled back in his head, and Remus was thankful. Moving him would be painful, as would healing him. It was better he not be conscious for it.

Remus sat beside the boy before he nudged Declan with his shoulder. "It's okay to interact with them. You won't hurt them as long as you remember your own strength."

Declan pulled his knees to his chest, knees wrapped around them. He laid his cheek on his knees as he looked to Remus. "I can feel it getting closer. The moon."

Remus nodded. "That's normal. After a few more changes you'll know the phase of the moon by how close the wolf feels. You won't be alone this time, same as our last transformation. I'll always be with you, Declan. We'll have a potion to help us this time, too."

Declan looked wary. "Promise?"

"I swear it."

Declan scooted closer to the man who had helped him so much recently and laid his head on the man's arm. Remus moved slightly, wrapping said arm around the little one's shoulders. Declan sighed as his head lay on the man's chest. It felt good to be safe again.

He'd been bitten during the full moon in July, then left to fend for himself during his first transformation. His family had gone camping in Scotland under the full moon. It had been a normal family outing for the young couple and their five-year-old son, but they had no idea what had waited for them. Declan’s parents had been killed, but the werewolf had only bitten his leg and left him to die or live through the toxins entering his system.

He'd lived, though only barely. He'd been found by the police and taken to a nearby hospital. They'd patched him up and sent him to live with an old uncle in London. The uncle was kind, but Declan knew something was wrong as the full moon grew closer. He'd run away just before sun down and cried as he changed into the werewolf form that had plagued his nightmares so. He had hidden in an
abandoned building he'd found a few days before. The change was so painful he could do nothing but whimper. Not even move. He'd passed out during the slow change back and hadn't awakened until a few minutes before Remus found him.

Declan had been so scared. Terrified that he'd been taken, kidnapped, but to his surprise he'd woken up in a small cot, bandaged and warm. He couldn't believe his luck, but he was also suspicious. It wasn't until he saw Remus and the man explained that he was a werewolf too, bitten when was he was only a few months younger than Declan that the boy began trusting again.

Remus had talked him through the changes in his body, past and future, and told him about a place he could go. He told the boy about magic, and that they both had magic--Remus had checked the boy for a core while bandaging his wounds. Declan agreed to go to the children's center when he was healed as long as Remus would come with him.

Declan was transferred to Hogwarts within the week. They'd spent their first transformation together the month before in the Forbidden Forest.

Harry wiped his brow with a comedic "whew!" as he and Elsbet got the last child down for their naps. He smiled and gave her a pat on the back before going to find Remus. Harry wandered through the rooms, smiling at the children sleeping in their beds and cots. He was proud of his work, and proud that he was finally able to help so many like himself. Children left to fend for themselves a decade or more too soon, some beaten in their homes and left with running away as their only option. Some dumped on the streets like unwanted trash rather than the cherished soul they should have been treated as.

Harry entered the playroom and smiled at the sight before him. Remus was sitting with Declan's head in his lap, the boy sleeping deeply as Remus softly ran his fingers through his hair. Harry moved to Remus' other side and sat softly. "You know, I've never seen Declan so at ease as when you're with him, Remus."

Remus couldn't look away from the child. "He's a special one, Harry. Reminds me of myself. So young, terrified of the changes inside, terrified of what you can't control. Afraid to interact with others for fear of hurting them..." He trailed off, lost in memories, but eventually said, "Did you know I wouldn't have had friends at Hogwarts if your father and Sirius had not insisted that I go everywhere with them. Said it was no fun with only the two of them and Peter. ‘What’s the point of breaking rules if our conscience isn’t there?’ I believe he told me. I was their conscience of course, as they felt they had none. I fought them for a while, but eventually gave in."

Remus paused then softly, under his breath, said, "I would've hidden out more if I'd known what effect I had on them."

Harry frowned at him. "You didn't know, Remus. How could you? And, I don't think they would care if they had known. That's just how they were. Plus," Harry grinned. "Without you they would've called themselves the Musketeers and that's just sad."

Remus laughed. "That is true. Sirius would have wanted something symbolic, James had no imagination for names, and Peter would've gone with whatever someone else wanted."

Remus closed his eyes as he thought about his friends, and the effect he had truly had on their lives by being a Dark Creature.

It wasn't well studied, but there was one thing that was most prominent about Dark Creatures: things never came out the way you planned when one was around. McGonagall never planned on this
when she cast the Moribus on him, never guessed that Remus' wolf would rebel so quickly or fiercely.

The wolf fought the magical binding put on his human body from the first minute until it was finally completely erased. It tried using brute force, but the wolf got smart when that didn't work. It used the dark aura to put a kind of magical padding over his human brain. It acted to protect the body from the behavioral restrictions, or so Remus thought. If it was true, then the Moribus was just as vicious and would tear at the protection almost as soon as it was laid down. But there was no way to prove it. It could be the wolf just attacked part of the spell outright and started winning on some level. No one knew the true nature of a Dark Creature's powers.

The constant battle that the wolf put on was why Remus always took so long to heal, why the damage was always so noticeable, and why he was always so wan looking. His body was in constant battle, almost like a cancer patient battling against their own cells. It also started affecting Remus' roommates. The constant presence of the Dark Creature's powers in a place where the spell was already dampened began twisting pieces of the Moribus within them.

It caused James, Sirius and Peter to have animagus forms that were either prey or foe of their House's feline forms. It made Peter nervous and cowardly, constantly pulled between his rather scared nature and the brave lion's tendencies. It broke him. The constant pull between his Slytherin tendencies and the Gryffindor heroics left Sirius constantly angry. He attacked the Slytherins out of jealousy that they were able to be themselves, and he could not.

The Moribus made James a bully outside of the common room, but inside he hated himself for it. The anger he tried to hide, the jealousy of the other houses—that they were not under this personal torture, it struck any time he left the common room. This hatred fed the wolf's aura, and by his seventh year, James was able to temper himself outside the common rooms at times. This ability to control himself got Lily Evans to finally give him a second glance.

Declan whimpered in his sleep, another nightmare about the werewolf who bit him hitting his subconscious. Remus noticed him whimper, his small thrashes, and made soothing noises to the boy. After a few moments he calmed and fell into a new dream. A better dream. One where it was Remus who took care of him, not Ronan and Elsbet, and he sighed in contentment as it filled his mind.

Thanks for reading!
In another part of the castle the resident Potions Master was waiting impatiently for his Gryffindor. He wondered if the brat had read about the bond as he hinted, or if he had forgotten in the excitement of the morning. He decided pacing his quarters would be unproductive and only serve to make him more and more impatient. He grabbed a book from his shelves, and began to read about transmogrification of plants and animals for potions. He had to force himself to focus and soon found himself interested in the topic as it spoke of a potion he had played with recently.

Severus was surprised when he heard a knock on the door to his rooms. Few people knew which portrait entrance was his. Usually students went to his office, which triggered a ward to alert him so he could slip into his office via a side door and pretend that he had only been making them wait for a dramatic effect.

Severus rose, wand in hand, and went to the door, opening it. He shielded his body with the door in case spells began flying, but none were forthcoming. Instead a tall, dark-haired, green-eyed figure stood in his doorway.

"Pot-. Harry." He remembered that he'd shown the boy to his quarters, and asked the only thing on his mind, "Have you read?"

Harry nodded solemnly, trying to read the Potions Master, trying to find even a hint that any feelings he held were reciprocated so he didn't make a fool of himself. "I did. You said to return when I understood, and while I don't exactly understand why, I do know what happened. I...um, may I come in, Sir?"

Severus blinked and opened the door further. "You may. Tea?"

"Mmm. Please."

Severus called for a tea setting from Kippy again and they sat. Severus sat in his customary armchair while Harry took the corner of the couch closest to him. Harry felt awkward, unsure of what to say or how to broach the subject. Severus made their tea and handed Harry's cup to him made perfectly. They sipped at the drink, eating a biscuit or two before Severus began the conversation.

"You say you understand what but not why this bond has formed. What did you mean?"

Harry took on a look of shyness, his self-confidence for once fleeing him in the face of this challenge. "I guess, I mean, well, why me, you know?"

Severus felt his face contort into resigned hurt at the offensive question, but it was quelled as the boy continued. "I mean, what is so special about me? Wizarding society either sees me as their Chosen One or abhors me for some new reason I'm not privy to, but really I'm just a street rat that got lucky."

Harry looked up to watch the older man through his lashes. "But you...you're more."

Severus calmed himself and closed his eyes. For as much as Harry looked like James Potter, the
boy's personality was as far from his as could be. "You are very powerful. In terms of magic and charisma. Your magic is some of the strongest Light Magic I have ever seen. This is why you are so good at Defense, it is also why children are so drawn to you. I have an affinity for Dark Magic."

He saw Harry tense and shushed him. "Let me explain, please. Light and Dark do not have the meanings you think they do."

Harry nodded and Severus continued. "Everyone is born with a Light or Dark Magic Affinity. The affinity typically runs in families, but there are some born with an opposite affinity for different reasons. Light Magic, as I said, is a grouping of spells and rituals that are defensive and protective in nature. It does not, as people think now, mean that it causes no harm. Spells currently called light like Bombarda could easily kill someone if cast on their person, but the Ministry has made an arbitrary list of "light" spells and Dark Arts. There is another example of a light, defensive spell used in warding, but if it overpowered it can act to vaporize any foreign matter, even people, that try to cross the ward line. Light Magic can kill."

Severus stopped to refill his cup, and allow what he'd just said to sink in. "Dark Magic, in turn, is a group of spells and rituals that are used offensively or that need the intent of ill will to cast, like with the Killing Curse. Dark Arts are not exclusively Dark Magic, but most of it is. Things like the Unforgivables are Dark Arts and Dark Magic; however, some of the Dark Arts spells are purely defensive. Rituals like your mother did to save you are Dark Arts. She knew when she started the ritual casting that it would protect you, but at the cost of her life. Lily was very in tune with Light Magic almost as much as you are. Conversely, James had a special way with Dark Magic, he was able to take spells generally deemed light by the populous and turn them for harmful uses. Your dogfather was the same. I can understand, now, that they could not control themselves when it came to Slytherins, but you have to understand that they were not kind with their gifts."

Harry understood, and did not argue the man. Severus continued. "I have explained this as I doubt your Introduction to Magical Theory class came anywhere near this topic. Information on Magical Affinities has been limited by the Ministry for longer than you've been alive. I say all of this to say that in order for a Sympathetic Bond to occur the partners must have opposing magical affinities in similar power levels. That is why our magic was able to create the catalyst. Your Light Magic reached out to my Dark, and it sparked the first layer of the bond."

Severus rose from his chair, moving around the room. "If...If you have no desire to further develop this bond, I will understand and give you the space you so need. It is barely formed, and easily broken." He wasn't sure if that was true, but he'd done impossible things in the past. Because his back was to Harry he did not see the teen's horrified face at the prospect of breaking the bond. "I am not a nice person, and I am a hard man. I do not fault you for being adverse to conti-

Severus broke off as he felt Harry's hand on his shoulder, pressure sure and even. He turned to see an emerald-eyed teen with a hard edge glinting in those eyes. He was angry that the man was already pushing him away, shutting down any opportunity for them to be together before they had even begun. He growled softly at the man. "Stop deciding this for me. I want this. A full bond with you."

Severus couldn't believe it and took a step forward, hoping to intimidate the teen into the truth. His voice rose with a passionate anger as he spoke. "Do you? And why, pray tell, would you want to throw your life away to fulfill a bond with me? A man who is old enough to have fathered you, a man who is neither nice nor kind, I will not coddle you, nor can I offer you more than I am. Why, Harry?"

Harry smiled, surprising the panting man. "Did you know Ronan Prewett started dating Elsbet when
she was 45 and he was only 28. He'd just left Muggle University when they met. Now, he's 35 or so and she's in her early 50's, but they've made it work. Severus, we're wizards. An age-gap of twenty years or so here or there isn't going to make a huge amount of difference in the long run and Ronan has shown me that age is literally just a number in the Wizarding world when we live decades past our 100th birthdays.

He considered a point for a moment, holding up his hand slightly to show he was thinking. "I know there may be some contention because you are a professor, but I know the school rule book states that bonds fall under a law unto their own. I just don't know those specifics, so I don't think it is as big of an issue. As to the other?"

Harry sighed and looked into his eyes, trying to convince the man that he was baring a piece of his soul here. "Well...I'm not used to kindness or coddling. I don't want to be treated as a child, I never was one. I'm independent, and can take care of myself. All I want is someone who cares about me for me, not for the titles I have, or the gold in my vault. Someone who understands that I have a lot of people who I am responsible for. I need someone who will understand that sometimes my priority list will change, and they may not always be number one…"

Severus opened his mouth to comment, though to say what he wasn't sure but Harry shook his head. "Did you know that being around Dark Creatures like werewolves can dampen the Moribus?"

Severus shook his head.

"They do. My third year, I spent all the spare time I had with Remus. He didn't tell me about the dampening, he didn't know at the time, but we figured it out together. That year my hatred for Slytherins in general was lessened, and something strange happened. Do you remember that was the year I melted more cauldrons than Neville."

Severus remembered. "Yes. You were constantly daydreaming in my class, and I assigned more detentions in that class alone than my previous two years together. I also recall that you were easily able to create an adequate sample of every potion during the detentions I assigned for makeup work."

He gave the teen a look of suspicion.

Harry held a look of chagrin. "Yes, well, I was only able to concentrate when you left the room. I was constantly daydreaming about you in class, out of class, during meals… I almost set Ron on fire during Charms. I couldn't help it. The Moribus didn't affect my thoughts and actions towards you as forcefully from that year on, you know? I think the bond started forming then, but with my magic bound it couldn't reach out to you with enough power to make any difference."

Severus gave him a pensive look, thinking. "That is...unexpected, I must say. Inside he was, confused but hopeful. The brat had not hated him as long as he thought, and there was hope for them in that. "I suppose you are trying to tell me that you are not as averse to this bond as I originally suspected."

"Mm. I'm not opposed at all," Harry said, as he looked Severus over from their close stances. Severus had shed his robe earlier and was only wearing a white button up shirt with the sleeves rolled up a few times and black dress trousers. His feet were bare, which Harry found unbearably sexy in that moment as he realized he was seeing his Professor in his own space. A relaxed and at home Severus without the barriers that he put on for the outside world.

Severus, in turn, looked the teen over as well. Harry had truly grown up over the years. He was at an almost even height with Severus, though Severus had an inch more at most. His dark hair was just as messy as it always had been, but it was the eyes that were truly the window to Harry. He said
everything in his eyes, and at the moment Severus was scorched by those eyes. He was wearing another pair of hip hugging jeans and a t-shirt, though without the graphics the last one had.

Severus’ gaze returned to his face and he looked deeply into those eyes, mesmerized as he drew out a questioning, "Indeed?"

Harry, instead of answering, leaned forward, bringing their lips together in a small kiss. "Indeed. I want you." He spoke in a whisper against the other man's lips, waiting for him to take advantage, but realized the older man needed an invitation to take what he so wanted. "Kiss me, Severus," he whispered, then mewled as Severus kissed him with the fervor of a starved man all at once. And he was, starved for someone to share in a heated passion.

Their lips moved, melded soft and damp together, a hint of tongue against a lip teasing and enticing. They lost track of time, it could have been seconds or minutes as their kisses dragged on. Eventually they drew apart.

Harry rested his forehead against the man's chest as they both took a moment to breathe deeply. Severus, eventually, wrapped his arms around Harry and moved them both to the couch. He sat and pulled the slightly smaller man onto his lap.

They sat together for a few minutes before they were kissing once more, though neither could say who moved first. Harry purred low in his throat as he felt his lion roar in approval, and Severus lifted his fingers to Harry's chest, fisting his hand in Harry's shirt. Harry, in turn moved his fingers up the buttons of Severus' shirt, opening them and unable to stop himself. He needed to feel his mate's skin, and he was not going to wait.

"Take it off."

In another part of the castle Neville was sitting in the Room of Requirement, a starry night on a hill the landscape around him. He lay on his back with Blaise next to him as they watched the stars and talked.

Flashback

Neville had spent a while trying to discuss the events within Hogwarts with his Gran. It took a long time to convince her that what he said was truth. It was when he mentioned his Father and any strange mood and personality changes after his first year that she quieted. She began truly listening at that point and he was able to describe what Dumbledore and McGonagall had been scheming under the noses of everyone. He was careful to mask some details like the torture and threats that they sometimes endured, but Neville thought he could see the understanding in her eyes. She knew. He didn't know how, but she knew.

Having finally filled in his Gran of the happenings with Hogwarts, and successfully convinced her that he was unharmed, he then had to calm her down and keep her from going straight to the Founders' Dungeons to finish Dumbledore off. Instead he showed his Gran his animagus form, feeling his confidence swell at the pure joy and pride in her eyes. "You are a treasure, my boy," she said as she softly pet the panther's ears. "I am sorry for doubting you these years."

Neville changed back effortlessly and knelt at her feet, giving her hands a slight squeeze. "You
couldn't have known. There is nothing to forgive."

Soon after the adult representatives had gone together to see that they each had their own rooms for overnight stays in the castle and to set up the Offices to their specifications. Arthur left soon after to escort Argus Filch to his new home.

Neville had left the meeting room to find Blaise waiting on him. He knew he should look for the Greengrass siblings, knowing that what he'd heard earlier was very important to Harry, but he also knew that he'd missed six years with his friend. Neville decided to be selfish for once.

The two had gone to the Room of Requirement, Neville choosing the room this time. They had lain beneath the stars as Neville told Blaise why. This was the room Neville always conjured when he needed a moment of peace, and he wanted to share that peace with his old friend.

As they talked they told stories. Some focused on their childhood times together, some on school memories, and some on dreams. It was then that Blaise first rolled to his side. "Neville, can I ask you something?"

Neville turned as well, looking curiously at the other boy. "Yeah, you know you can."

Blaise, looking slightly nervous closed his eyes as he leant forward and kissed Neville. Neville gave a squeak of surprise that he would later deny, and closed his eyes as well. This was familiar, like coming home.

The two boys scooted closer to each other, lips brushing before lips parted to allow more. The air around them became thick and heavy and they couldn't stop even for a moment to breathe, they were so desperate for each other. It wasn't until they parted, panting for air, that they said anything. Neville looked deeply into Blaise's eyes, trying to read something in his expression. Soon enough he found what he wanted and smiled.

"I don't think I quite understand your question. Maybe if you try asking it another way?"

Blaise gave him the happiest smile Neville had ever seen and they moved together once more, their kisses interspersed with small breaths so they could stay together longer.

"Take it off."

It wasn't until Harry felt hands at his waist tugging at his shirt that he realized Severus had spoken. He had thought something similar and as his shirt was pulled over his head and thrown, he pulled at Severus' shirt as well. "You too. Off."

They both groaned at the sight of the other and Harry planted a foot on the ground as he quickly turned and straddled Severus' lap. He moved down the man's legs, kissing the man and running his hands over the chest before him. Where Harry's muscles were defined, Severus' were lean and wiry, but the man was fit. His fingers brushed over Severus' chest as the man leaned forward and nibbled on the teen's neck. A gasp and a hiss of pleasure filled the air that was heavy with delicious tension.

Harry felt excitement shoot through him as he listened to the gasps that fell from parted lips, his own and Severus'...until the one gasp that wasn't.

Severus hissed and grabbed his left arm in pain.
The Dark Lord had sent his summons.

Thank you for reading!

Please let me know what you think, and “Sorry, not sorry” for the cliffhanger. I couldn't bring myself to change it once the thought entered my mind. Please don't kill me? :)
Chapter 30: Two Calls, One Fight

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein

A/N: The Voldemort I write earns his title, so you are forewarned.

Harry was sitting by the fire in the Gryffindor common room worrying and trying not to move. Mya had watched him come in, having just come back from rounds. She knew immediately that something was wrong, could feel the magic sparking along Harry's skin. The lion was close and Harry was having trouble remaining calm as he sat by the fire.

Mya looked around and saw Ron, Seamus and Dean chatting at one of the tables. She went to them, face grim and they immediately stood as they saw her, question in their eyes. "Harry is tense, unstable," she said. "Take him to the training room and challenge him. I'll be with you to take the lion, but I can't take him alone magically. He needs to vent something, I just don't know what could have happened to push him again so quickly."

The boys all looked grim but determined. Ron looked at Harry, seeing what Mya had mentioned, then around the room as well. "Call Neville with the Master Coin. We're going to need him to talk Harry down. He's always been best at that." Seamus and Dean nodded, both rolling their shoulders and neck, gearing up for the fight to come. Even together, and at full strength they were no matches for Harry, but they were better at strategizing than their friend, so they needed to bring their A-game.

Mya put the message to Neville in her coin and nodded at the response. "T-minus 10 minutes. Enough to get Harry sequestered and fighting. Let's go."

The four seventh years moved through the quickly deserting common room. The other students knew that look on their faces, had seen it before, and knew to keep out of the way until Harry was out of range.

Mya moved crouch in front of Harry as the boys grabbed his arms. The surprise gave her enough time to swipe both of his wands and move as the Ron and Dean lifted Harry by his arms and drug him to the training room, struggling as he was. Expletives flew through the air as he cursed them, asking them, "What the hell do you think you're doing? Put me down, dammit!"

Harry kicked out, hitting Seamus in the hip, but the boy merely grunted and fell back one pace. As they entered the training room Mya spelled some of the more deadly weapons away so the walls held only padding and dulled, training swords. She warded the room so only she and Neville could open the door from either side as Ron and Dean let Harry go. He was panting, trying to calm himself and failing. Hermione threw him his secondary wand, which he caught without looking.

"You're losing control, Harry. You can duel us by weapon, spells or claws. Either way you will get this out. Do you hear me?" She called to him. He was still looking at the floor, and refused to respond.

Ron, seeing that Harry was not going to throw the first anything decided for him, "Densuego."

Harry stepped out of the way of the spell, but cast nothing. Dean and Seamus leaned closer, casting in tandem, "Everte Statum!"
Harry flicked his wand, but could not combat the double power and slid back into the wall. He still did not cast back until Mya caught him unaware with a whispered "Anteoculatia!"

Antlers grew from his hair and Mya put on her best sneer. "Look, it's a Prongslet."

With that Harry lost his cool and entered the fight as his friends wanted. They were ready, though with Protego charms on the tips of their tongues. They spread out, having already erected stones for cover, and kept moving. They refused to give Harry an advantage over their numbers and pushed him.

Their spells flew around the room causing boils and cuts to spring up on the walls where they landed. Stones used for cover exploded or were thrown back with the power of the curses, charms, and jinxes.

Mya's strategy was to make him lose his footing in any way, so she cast a variety of spells from tripping jinxes to Glacius spells on the floor. She even threw a Locomotor Wibbly or five.

Seamus was in charge of annoying curses. He threw Bat-Bogey hexes, Herbifor, Furnunculus, Langlock, and even a Melofors. Dean threw up the shield charms to protect them both.

Ron, in contrast to his friends, threw the more dangerous spells because his aim was best and power levels fairly under control. He was throwing low level spells like diffindo, confringo, expelliarmus, and stupefy.

Because of this Ron was the first target Harry took down. He slipped forward on Mya's ice floors, but used the momentum to twist and hit Ron with a stupefy. As soon as he went down Harry went after Mya. He tracked her around a stone, dodging her tarantallegra and hit her with a Petrificus Totalis. She went down and Harry turned his sights on Seamus and Dean.

He pulled a sword from the wall, wielding it with his left hand and wand in right as he strode forward. He knocked them back with a Ventus Duo that kept them from getting the right angle to revive the two that were down. Dean sent an accio to a broadsword while Seamus set up similarly to Harry.

Dean held a pure Light Magic Affinity, being proficient in defensive Magic only, but he made up for this in his sword work. Seamus was the opposite, being truly devious with magic, especially anything to do with fire.

The three dueled, two on one. Harry parried with Dean and protected himself against the spells by mentally holding a nonverbal protego. Dean hissed as the sword butted against his arm, too dull to cut, but enough that it would bruise later. Harry grinned, moving in for a kill, figuratively speaking as his jade eyes sparkled. He used his wand to transfigure the sword into a bouquet of flowers and stunned the boy while dodging Seamus' latest line of levicorpus spells. Seamus saw his friend go down and took cover behind a stone. He countered the spell on Mya, but signaled her to stay still.

Harry turned, throwing his sword and growling as the door opened. It was a disheveled Neville who had arrived later than he had planned. He stood and watched as Mya changed and launched herself at Harry, knocking him down and rolling.

Severus Snape had never been so uncertain as to what he would face after being called as he was now.
After throwing Harry off his lap and out of his rooms with some trouble he had transfigured his robes to the Death Eater style and conjured a mask. Only his years of spying allowed him to know all the details of a mask well enough to create one of his own.

He walked to the edge of the wards and focused on the Dark Mark, apparating to the place it was calling him to. He looked up to see Riddle Manor, and was surprised, since Voldemort had taken over Malfoy Manor recently. He entered the house and went to the "throne room" as he called it in his head, locking down on his Occlumency shields and pulling up some recent memories to show only annoying students in annoying classes.

"Ah, Severus. You have come to me. I was unsure of you with the recent happenings at Hogwarts." Severus knelt at the doorway to the room, face blank of all emotion.

"I will always answer when you call my Lord. I am sorry it took me a few minutes to get away from the snivelling populous that is the staff of Hogwarts." He affected a sneer he did not feel. "I have much to tell you, my Lord. I only awaited your summons."

Voldemort looked curiously at the man before him, feeling happy, or as happy as an insane megalomaniacal sociopath can be. "Tell me, my serpent. Come to me."

Severus rose smoothly and stood before the Dark Lord. "Dumbledore has finally shown his true colors. It seems he and Minerva McGonagall have kept the lions in thrall, but their efforts were bested on Friday and all their work lost. They have been tried, sentenced and imprisoned by the Ancient Magics of the castle. McGonagall and Dumbledore are as good as dead. The Light has lost its leader."

He lied slightly at that, not mentioning that they would rally far stronger under Harry, but instead kept "Dumbledore is as good as dead" running through his mind. The men shared a sadistic smile, and Severus had to hide his shudder at having anything in common with the hideous, inhuman figure before him.

"How…interesting. A thrall…yes I am quite familiar with it." He said in his sibilant voice. "Gellert warned me of those two, you know. Said they were greedy, but very...unimaginative, unlike the others of us. Nothing I was not cognizant of."

He rose, walking around Severus, delving into his mind to see the memory. Severus brought up the battle, seeing McGonagall and Dumbledore fall. "Excellent. Very good, my servant. Now, I have a job for you."

"Anything, My Lord."

Voldemort pulled a list from his robes. "This is a list of all the future students planned for Hogwarts around Britain. Circled are the addresses of the Muggle-borns. I need you to mark any who have siblings within the Castle. My plan cannot unfold if any are alerted to it too soon, my serpent."

Severus read over the list, memorizing names as he went, wondering what this madman could be planning to do with children. He marked the children as asked before looking to the maniac. "May I ask, My Lord, what plans you speak of?"

Voldemort stroked his chin before nodding. "You may. My Death Eaters have been very busy you see. Come Severus."
Harry changed as soon as he realized what had happened and he and Mya began fighting, though not with claws nor teeth. They wrestled, pushing and rolling, trying to pin the other in a show of dominance.

It was like watching a game of "Whoever is on top wins," big cat style. Ron, Seamus and Dean joined in on the play after Seamus patched the other two up. Ron took the form of an orange tiger, Dean the form of a leopard and Seamus a jaguar.

Together they tumbled and nipped, rolled and pushed with their paws until they ended up in a pile of fur, tails and limbs. Harry, feeling his rage and concern fall to a manageable level, nipped his friends and moved off to change forms. Mya could feel his rage had gone and all that was left was fear. She nodded to the other boys and they all changed as well.

Harry lay on the ground in defeat, feeling the worry overwhelm him again. Mya joined him in their human forms as Neville came over. He sat down with them and picked up Harry's head, setting it on his lap. Ron, Seamus and Dean sat nearby.

"Talk to us, Harry. Please?" Mya said, rubbing her hand up and down his back as his eyes swam. He took a deep shuddering breath, fighting the worry and self-flagellating thoughts away.

"He's been summoned. Severus. I was with him. I...I can't get my head cleared enough to pull on the connection to him, and it's pissing me off. The what-ifs are driving me insane!"

Neville said nothing, looking with surprise to Mya who only watched the boy before them. "How deep is the bond, Harry?" She asked, making him sigh. Leave it to Mya to figure things out without saying.

"Unity Bond."

"And...did you..." she blushed. "Is it consummated?"

Harry laughed. "No, you prude, we haven't done anything. Yet." Harry sniffed in faux derision at her, but caught something and sniffed again, the lion was settled, but his senses were still on high alert. "But I do think our Neville has done something."

He looked at Neville who was blushing. Ron and Seamus laughed at their friend's face. They'd asked him about all the time he'd been spending with the Slytherin yesterday. Harry explained to everyone in the room what Severus told him about Light and Dark Magic, and they were very interested in it.

"So, you found your Light partner, Neville. It's Blaise, isn't it?" Neville nodded, turning even redder. "You smell like Dean and Seamus. You've got Sympathetic magic. Congratulations, mate."

Neville was in awe, knowing the basics for sympathetic magic from watching Seamus and Dean explore theirs over the years. He knew that it didn't take consummation to manifest it completely like the Unity Bond apparently did, but it did require some kind of connection. He'd have to tell Blaise about this next time they met, hopefully in between more kisses like they had shared earlier.

The Dark Lord led Severus down to the dungeon level of Riddle Manor. Where before there had been the typical stone, iron bars, dirty water everywhere and chains hanging from every wall, it was now set up to look more like a modern jail house mixed with a Hospital. Instead of cells with chains there were cells with cots each holding two adults and at least one child. Some were moving around;
others were strapped to the beds. Some looked crazed while others were lethargic, one would think
them dead if their chests did not rise and their eyes not blink every few minutes. Still others were
grotesquely mutilated and disfigured by spell work.

It was not what Severus was expecting, especially when the Dark Lord began telling him what he
was seeing. "Each of them are Muggles," he hissed. "Taken in the night by my followers. Filthy
things, Muggles. Nothing more than creatures to use and toss aside. We have created spells, testing
them on these foul creatures. Here," the Dark Lord pointed to a Death Eater casting on a man. His
nose and mouth soon were encased in what appeared to be a bubble head charm, but it was
dischored.

"It's a take on the Bubble Head Charm, My Lord?"

"Very good Severus, yes. However if has been modified. Instead of containing pure oxygen it
contains either trace amounts of cyanide or it contains only cyanide in its gaseous form. Gellert told
me of its uses during one of his experiments, and I decided it was worth further research."

They watched as the man began having trouble breathing before he started giggling in a crazed
fashion. "Aah, only traces for this subject. Pity. Monica will cancel the spell when the seizures begin
and take notes of the effect it has on the subject."

Monica turned and smiled demurely at the Dark Lord, giving a small curtsey. The two men
continued through the facility, eventually entering a potions lab. Inside was hot, muggy and he could
see the corpulent figure of Horace Slughorn slaving over three cauldrons. The man was scared,
jumpy and obviously kept against his will. He wore rags that might have once been robes, and he
was very pale.

As Severus looked him over he thought the man quite slim in comparison to his former figure, but
wasn't sure as he hadn't seen the man in years. Slughorn stuttered through a greeting, but the Dark
Lord silenced him with a look.

"Here, my serpent, is where my special project is being carried out for that first group of Muggles.
Horace here is brewing a special potions for me, aren't you?"

Horace stuttered out a "Y-y-y-yes, Of c-c-course"

"Yes. Now, we must be off, Severus."

The Dark Lord turned and moved back to the door. As his back turned Slughorn quickly shoved a
slip of paper at Severus, fear in his eyes. Severus took it quickly and slipped it into his robes before
silently as he followed the deranged leader from the lab.

Severus rose from his kneeling position some time later. He listened to the Dark Lord's final words
with ice in his veins. "You are dismissed Severus, but please tell Lucius I expect his company soon,
my serpent."

Severus bowed, "I will make sure he is alerted to your desires, my Lord." With that Severus walked
out and apparated back to Hogwarts, hands only slightly shaking.

Spells:

*Densuego* (teeth growing spell), *Everte Statum* (to throw backwards), *Anteoculaia* (turns hair to
antlers), *Her bifors* (Causes flowers to sprout on a person), *Furnunculus* (Causes Boils), *Locomotor*
Wibbly (causes legs to wobble), Langlock (Locks the tongue to the roof of your mouth), Melofors (Locks your head in a pumpkin), Ventus Duo (Blows air to knock people back)

I got all of the spells and descriptions from the Harry Potter Wiki

A/N: Please take a look at No Rest for the Weary if you enjoy The Pride's Hatchling. Some things there will be coming into play here, and you're going to want some of the backstory involved that doesn't quite fit here in the later years of the TPH world.
Harry was sitting in bed trying to read when he looked to see a note magically arrive on his pillow. He knew the house elves delivered inner castle mail, but grabbed his wand to scan it just in case. He found nothing enchanted on it. Harry opened it quickly, a small smile of relief on his face.

*No doubt you have worried yourself senseless and are even at this moment planning some reckless rescue mission. Save your hero-complex for another expenditure. I write to you that I have returned, unharmed. We will talk on the morrow.*

*Go to sleep, brat.*

S.S.

Harry put the letter away in a box in his trunk and got into bed, knowing he would finally be able to sleep now that he knew Severus was safe.

The next morning Harry walked into the Great Hall to a surprise. The four long House tables had been replaced by several round tables spread throughout the room. Each table had around eight chairs, though not each table was filled to its capacity.

Harry looked down the Head Table and sighed when he saw Severus sitting there eating his breakfast and talking to Lucius who held a sleepy Draco against his chest. Harry noticed that Hagrid was also at the Head table and gave the half-giant a smile. He caught Severus' eye and gave him a nod, before moving to a table where Blaise, Neville, Mya and Ron were seated. He noticed Seamus and Dean at another table with Luna, Colin and Dennis.

He sat with his friends giving them a sleepy smile. "Morning." They responded in kind and chatted over breakfast until class fast approached. The seventh years had a double session of Potions first thing and made their way to the Dungeons, everyone feeling like different people from the last time they had made this trek. As they entered the room they noticed Snape leaning back against his desk, arms crossed over his chest. His eyes wandered over them, though they lost a bit of their venom when they passed over Harry.

"Sit down and take out your parchment. It seems that since half of you cannot create a viable Dreamless Sleep Draught that we will need to revisit the topic of Sleep Inducing Potions. Now, who can tell me what went wrong in the potion?"

Not even Hermione had her hand raised as they all looked at one another. Eventually Harry's hand lifted higher. "Yes, Mr. Potter."

"The lavender sprigs were missing."

"Indeed. Can anyone take this further?"

Hermione, seeing what she had missed earlier, was called on. "Because the Lavender within the potion was never added the pH of the potion became unbalanced and changed any effect the sleeping agent would have." Severus nodded.
"You are both correct. Instead of lavender, Mr. Crabbe retrieved Polygonum Root, which upsets the pH balance and actually reverses the aging process in wizards. The potion only reverses anything as long as it is fed by an energizing source, for this the other ingredients of the potion." The students pondered this and a few gasps rang out. "I see you understand. Had the potion held any other wrong ingredients it would have reversed Draco's age past birth and he would have died."

Severus whirled dramatically and spelled the board behind him to start writing directions. "Hence the reason why Mr. Crabbe has been expelled from my class this morning. By seventh year you should all know to double-check your ingredients, and if you are incapable of this by now I will not suffer you in my classroom. Is this understood?"

Because the seventh year schedules were so hectic in preparation for the Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Tests (N.E.W.T.s) they had few breaks during their weekdays.

During their only break of the day the seventh years would be staying in the Great Hall to do self-study. Hermione was bouncing in her seat in excitement as everyone began coming in. Seeing the two people she wanted, Hermione moved to the Head table to speak to Madam Longbottom and Professor Snape for some time.

Harry gave the same group from breakfast a questioning look, but only Ron answered. "She has a suggestion for the new Transfiguration Professor, but won't say who."

As Hermione returned to the table the boys only stared at her. "No," she said. "I'm not going to jinx it."

They huffed, but knew better than to push and spent the remainder of the time talking to Blaise about Animagus transformations, though their knowledge and advice was very much about after you had achieved the first transformation. Blaise didn't mind, nor did the other seventh years who had joined them to listen in.

They left shortly after for their first lesson with Lucius as History of Magic and Wizarding Customs professor. As class began Lucius was leaning on his desk much as Snape had been, making the students smile. This was a class for the entire year, and so Lucius addressed them as individuals, not by House.

"I remember from my school days that this class was a prime opportunity to catch up on sleep. I will, unfortunately, be depriving you of this opportunity from here on out." The students gave a nervous laugh. "I am guessing that little has changed since I was a student and by my notes you should be learning about your 67th Goblin Rebellion and probably learned little else."

The majority of the students were nodding and giving Lucius their undivided attention. "I am here to teach you about Wizarding History and Customs, things that you will need before you leave these hallowed halls, especially if you wish to stay to move in Wizarding Society."

Lucius moved to the board writing, Feudal Muggle England. "Who can tell me about Feudalism in Muggle England and why I bring it up? Mr. Weasley."

Ron leaned forward at his desk. "Feudal England was a hierarchy system used in regards to land ownership from a King to simple Serfs. It is important because it was based on the workings and systems of Wizarding Britain."

"Correct, 5 points to Gryffindor. Land Ownership is but a first step in process of becoming a Lord and holding a seat on the Wizengamot, though one cannot sit until their 30th year. Just as a Lord of
feudal times would rule over their household, so too can Wizarding Lords rule over their House and all those who share its bloodline. Serfs and peasants at those times were under the direct control of the Lord, answering to his rules and declarations. Though it is not practiced in the Wizarding World, it is actually legal under the rules established in the 1200's that any rules writ and posted for a House by a Lord will stand, any who cross that rule are subject to his Law.

"This is your first Wizarding Customs lesson. I urge you all to do some research into your history. Brew a bloodline potion, go the Gringotts, anything, but find out. Blood does not acknowledge your ignorance of its past, only magic. Now, what is the first sign that you are in the presence of a Lord? Mr. Boot."

"A Lordship Ring or Heir ring."

"Correct, 5 points to Ravenclaw. A Lordship ring is one that gives control over an estate to the current holder. It gives them magical control over their house, it's belongings, the vaults tied to the family, and control to write rules as you see fit. Rarely is this last privilege exercised, but you may see it. What is the purpose of an Heir Ring? Mr. Longbottom."

"An Heir ring is a ring or insignia given to mark the Heir of a House in the case of multiple male children or only female children who are born to a house. In the case of the former the best-suited child is given the mark of the Heir, in the case of the latter a girl is named Heir Regent and holds the insignia and her last name to be given to the first-born son. The named Heir will keep their ring once given the Lordship ring until they chose their own heir."

"Very good. 5 points to Gryffindor. Who can tell me why this is important?"

A few hands sprung up. "Ms. Bones."

"Protection and alliances are both sought through the holder of the Lordship ring."

"Correct. 5 points to Hufflepuff. For those of you who are lost, I want you to pay particular care to this assignment. Talk to your classmates and learn about this. The worst thing you can do in the Wizarding World is to ignore nonverbal, cultural cues. You wouldn't want to lose a job or family prospect because you spoke ill of the wrong person."

Lucius cast a tempus and nodded. "I want all of you to write 12 inches on Lordship rings, their prevalence, power and do some research. Does your family have one? If so which Houses and how closely related to the current ring holder are you. Do you have one? If so, which House. No one else will see these if you do not want them to be seen. It is due in two weeks, so use your time to research more than the surface."

Lucius waved his wand, sending copies of a small book around the room. "Before our next class have this read. It is a book of basic etiquette for Wizarding society. Class dismissed."

The students were more excited after this class than they had ever been about History of Magic. Professor Malfoy was very interactive and asked questions that took thought, not rote memorization of dates and battles. They all went back to the Great Hall for lunch, then to their remaining classes.

The entire afternoon saw Harry fidgeting and growing more anxious to speak to Severus, to find out just what had happened and check for himself that the man was uninjured. Harry was overjoyed when, at dinner that night, he saw Draco sitting next to his father making grabby hands at him. He smiled, walking to the boy at the end of the Head table and picking him up for a small nuzzle. "Hello little Hatchling. How was your first day at the center?"
Lucius had agreed, after seeing the area for himself, that Draco would have a much better time there than sitting in his rooms with an elf for company. Remus had been the one to suggest Ronan and Elsbe't care, and Lucius was grateful.

Draco’s eye lit up at the question, and he rambled on about his day. "Fun! I colored and played and Mr. 'Onan is nice."

Harry laughed. "And Ms. Elsbet, how did you like her?" Harry knew if anyone could slowly help this child it would be the Prewetts.

"She's pretty...and nice. She didn't hurt me like Mummy always did. Bruver?"

"Yes, Hatchling?"

"Is Ms. 'Lsba always nice?"

"Mmm. She is. She wouldn't hurt a flobberworm even if it grew teeth and bit her."

That made Draco giggle and he laid his head on Harry's chest. "Otay. She teached me and the other kids today. It was fun." Harry smiled and rubbed his back.

"I bet you'll have even more fun tomorrow. Tuesdays are spaghetti days. Have you ever had spaghetti?"

Draco looked up and made a face, trying to wrap his mouth around such a weird word. "Sagedi? What sagedi do?"

Harry tucked his hands under Draco's armpits and tossed him into the air and caught him. "You'll see tomorrow, little one. Now-"

But he was interrupted by Severus standing to take Draco. "Mr. Potter, I do believe you need to seat yourself for dinner. We have a few announcements before we begin." There was warmth in his eyes, even as his sarcastic tones rang out. Severus reached out and lifted Draco into his arms, simultaneously leaving a note in Harry’s chest pocket.

He gave it a significant look and turned back as Draco was saying, "Uncle Sev! Lookit!"

Harry smiled and went to sit, this time with Hermione, Neville, Blaise, Susan, Ron, Lavender, Seamus, Dean and Ginny. They were cramped, but enjoying themselves as dinner began.

Halfway through the meal Madam Longbottom stood and gathered everyone's attention. "First of all I am sad to announce the retirement of Argus Filch. He has decided to take an extended vacation and we send him off with warm regards." The students were perplexed. They had never heard the man spoken so well of, but they knew stranger things had happened in the castle, so they took it at face value as children are wont to do.

Augusta continued, "Now, we told you all that we would inform you when a Transfiguration Professor has been found. Professor Flitwick put out a few feelers over the weekend, and with the help of friends we were able to find a qualified teacher that most of you have already met. Viktor Krum has recently finished his Transfiguration Mastery and will be using an international portkey sometime this week to transfer to Hogwarts and begin as the new Transfiguration Professor." There was a smattering of applause, and Ron gave Hermione a strange look of surprise with a hint of jealousy.

"That was your grand idea? I didn't know you still wrote each other..." His voice betrayed him to
those listening and Hermione blinked at him.

"He wrote to me and to Harry when he completed his apprenticeship. You remember all the news when he was too injured to continue with Quidditch and went back to his studies? He was just informing us he'd finished. That's all, Ron."

Harry made an "Mmhm" noise as he nibbled on some fruit and Ron lost all the negative emotions swarming in him. "Sorry, Mya. Just...you know."

Hermione did know, and was proud of him for fighting the overwhelming emotions he got under the Moribus. It was hard for him to fight the emotions that swamped him when they'd overridden his logic for 6 years.

"Could've used some of Viktor's dodging skills with that snake, couldn't we, Ron?" Seamus said jokingly. Mya gave him a curious look.

"Whatever for, Seamus?"

Before Seamus could say anything Ron had shoved a roll in his mouth with a, "Shut it, Shea!" He froze though, feeling Mya's glare on him as she realized Ron was hiding something.

"Ronald Weasley. What snake is he talking about and why were you dodging it?"

Ron paled. "Um, well, you see..." he gulped and looked to his friends. Dean took pity on the boy. It was clear that Shea was too busy munching on the bready goodness to bail out his Captain, so after the silence got too tense he explained the situation.

"Ron's injury the other night was from Nagini. She was in one of the rooms we had to enter. The snake's dead, though, so nothing to worry on, Mya."

Susan laughed gleefully, which surprised everyone. "Oh, that's wonderful! Auntie will be quite happy to hear of the beast's demise. Did you know they've had Auror trainees on snake watch for weeks now? All part of 'training' these days."

Blaise was also laughing. "No one has mentioned anything about it in the dorm, so I'm not sure if Snakeface even knows. None of the parents have written about it yet if he has said anything."

Everyone gave him an odd look and he shrugged. "My Mamma is neutral, so is my step-dad, but you'd be surprised what the children of Death Eaters will say inside the dorms. They're not all willing to follow in their Mummies' and Daddies' shadows if you know what I mean?"

Neville was the first to speak up. "Slytherin does not mean Dark, just as Gryffindor does not mean Light. It's the people who matter, and the people who decide the paths they take."

Harry nodded and while everyone was talking pulled out the note Severus had slipped him.

Meeting, 8 pm, Lucius' rooms. Bring in Weasley Twins and top Pride members, especially Ms. Granger, your Team and any Strategists.

S.S.

Harry looked up from the note to Severus who nodded. Harry tucked the parchment away and cleared his mind while organizing. He ate with his friends, and enjoyed their company throughout
dinner. When they moved to rise from their chairs Harry signaled them to wait for him before they moved to the common room.

He looked at Blaise and Susan, deliberating. "Blaise, Susan. I have to ask you something. There is a meeting tonight, an important one. I want you both there for your perspectives, but I need to know I can trust you both with the information that we give you. I need your solemn swear that anything we say tonight is kept in that room unless I give you leave to bring someone else in. Do I have it?"

Blaise, having spent the last few days catching up with Neville and being brought in just a few of the strange things that happened around Harry Potter, gave a sigh and pulled out his wand.

"I, Blaise Alexander Zabini, do solemnly swear by my magic to keep the secrets of Harry James Potter until given leave by him."

Susan took longer to think. When taking the closeness she had with her Aunt, the Head of the DMLE, into consideration it wasn't that odd. Harry, realizing this said, "Susan you will be allowed to talk to your Aunt about this just as soon as I tell her this weekend, do not fret on that."

Susan smiled, her answer much easier now.

"I, Susan Sarah Bones, do solemnly swear by my magic to keep the secrets of Harry James Potter until given leave by him."

Hermione gave Susan a squeeze around the shoulders, "Welcome to the Pride. Hang on for a bumpy, bumpy ride."

Susan paled slightly, only now realizing just how deep she'd thrown herself if Hermione Granger was the one cracking jokes.

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**Thanks for reading!**

Check out my profile and the the latest of plot bunnies to plague my mind come to fruition. I'm stuck on one part in TPH, so I tend to leave it be and write something else. NAMELESS is what came out.

**Next time on TPH:** We see the reactions as Severus shows everyone what he witnessed in Riddle Manor, more Lucius/Remus goodness, and finally the first clue in the connection between No Rest and TPH.
Harry, Ron and Hermione walked out of the common room with their teams, leaving Lavender in charge of the lions for the night. Seamus, Dean, Colin and Dennis were unsure of what the night would hold, but ready for anything. Heather and Ginny felt similarly, but were excited for what was to come.

Neville made sure that Blaise and Susan were meeting them near the corridor connecting Lucius' rooms and the Gryffindor Tower. The Weasley Twins followed after the students, wondering just why they would be needed, but glad still to have a bit of time with their favorite people.

The students all joked around with the each other to mask their own unease, but Harry could see it in their eyes clearly.

Having everyone in their party, Harry led them to the door of Lucius' new quarters, knocking softly. The door opened to Lucius' sitting room and a kind "Welcome," was given by a disembodied voice. Soon after, Lucius poked his head around the corner of the dining area with an upside down Draco in his arms soon after.

"My apologies. I have an unruly Dragon to tame and rusty skills with which to do it." Draco squealed at the sight of the students, and wiggled.

"Downdowndown! Daddy, down! My Hawwy!"

"Be polite."

"Peeeeease down!"

Lucius hid a smirk and turned his son right side up as he set him on the ground and let him tackle his favorite Gryffindor. Draco, more content now that he had his big brother near, started looking at the other big kids. "Who that?" He asked Harry, though he knew a few of them.

The Twins, being the outgoing pranksters they were, stepped forward.

"He's Gred..." One started.

"He's Forge..." The next finished.

"You're Draco. Nice to meet you!" The held their hands out, crossed, and each shook one hand of the toddlers. It made Draco laugh, which was their point. They then introduced the rest of their party as they walked past, including Mya who gave the boy a kiss on the forehead as she moved to help Lucius with a tea set.

The teens, Lucius and Draco gathered around the many couches, newly conjured thanks to the Weasley duo, and waited for the others to join them. They arrived shortly, with an extra in tow.

Severus and Remus arrived at the door nearly at same time but from different directions. Severus had a few books in hand, while Remus carried a small child on his hip. The child was resting, his head
against Remus' chest as they traveled. At Severus' raised eyebrow Remus shrugged the shoulder not bracing Declan softly, answering the look. "This is Declan, he is why I asked the batch of Wolfsbane you sent to me to be slightly larger."

The darker man looked to the child then back, an unreadable glint in his eyes. He gave a small nod and held his hand out allowing the man to walk first as they moved to Lucius' door.

With everyone gathered and tea handed out, the meeting began.

Severus looked to Harry first. "I need a pensieve or a projector crystal if you have any way to embed a memory into one."

Harry looked to Mya with a frown, but she shook her head. "We have one, but we have no way to extract the memory to put it back." She told the room. "In a case such as this I wouldn't recommend holding only a memory of watching a memory. You have no emotional connection or intuition from it, and things are too high stakes to lose that."

Severus nodded, understanding. "Lucius would you retrieve your pensieve?"

The blond man consented. The Malfoy house elves had brought their things early that morning, and his pensieve was never far from his reach. He passed a sleepy Draco to Harry's lap and went to retrieve it.

Severus in turn, moved to face the Twins. "I have a note that I want decoded and analyzed. It is a list of ingredients with what I assume to be the goal written, but I want another set of eyes." The twins held the hands out eagerly. Potions, while not their forte, were a passion. They dabbled in many different types and ingredients and would be a good choice of "fresh eyes" on the list that worried him so.

Severus avoided looking at Harry as he thought about the night before, not wanting that part of the night included in his memory they group would view. He dropped it into the bowl as Lucius set it down and looked at the group. Draco was nodding off after the excitement of the day.

"Lupin, put Declan down with Draco in the nursery and call Winky," Severus said quietly. "This will take some time, and I need your eyes and knowledge."

Remus rose, looking to Harry, his right arm held out to take the boy before settling both boys in the nursery with the happy elf.

He returned to stand between Lucius and Severus, taking their hands as the entire group students and adults alike prepared themselves to enter the pensieve as one.

"Prepare yourselves." Severus said and they lowered their faces to the shimmering liquid.

Being ejected from the memory was startling and brought about a flurry of movement.

Susan couldn't move beyond dropping to her knees where she had stood.

Hermione was crying into Ron's shoulder as he held her.

Blaise and Neville were wrapped around each other, shocked.

Fred and George held hands, the other resting on the shoulders of the Creevey Brothers as all four tried to process all that they had witnessed.
Seamus and Dean held Ginny as she cried, so disturbed by what she had seen. The boys held hands, sending calming energy to the other and the girl.

Harry couldn't move, so stunned by what he'd seen. He knew that his arms were wrapped around Heather, comforting her, and he felt Severus behind him with a hand on his shoulder. He could feel, somewhere deep in him, a turmoil and need that was not his own, and knew without thought that Severus wanted to comfort him. The hand, gentle but firm on his shoulder, was the only public expression he could give, though.

The teen looked behind him, but those black eyes were focused elsewhere. Harry turned to see a dark and light head move to the nursery, both men unable to deal with what they had seen except to physically make sure their charges were as they had been left. Harry started to speak, but found no words to express anything.

Severus used the hand on Harry's shoulder to guide him to the couch, feeling no jealousy rising in him that he held the girl, Heather. He made his way around the room, settling the teens, conjuring handkerchiefs for the girls, pushing waves of understanding and compassion to the men, for they were.

He looked at the Bones girl as she sat so still in shock, and he could think of nothing else to do. He scooped her from the ground, knowing what was running through her head. Any one of those people could have been her family. They had been her family not too many years ago, and to see with your own eyes the conditions, the hell they had lived before their deaths...it was too much for anyone, let alone one so young.

The dark man was not used to comforting others and it was a relief to him when Neville held out his arms, having known the Bones family for years, and knowing the pain of losing family so young.

Severus settled the girl into Neville's lap, knowing she was unaware of being moved except to wrap her arms from one neck to the other. Severus stepped back and called for Tinker to bring a tea service and calming draughts from his personal stores. They were brought within seconds and Severus administered them to everyone there.

Soon after, Remus and Lucius had returned from the nursery, faces grim, but determined.

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This could not be happening.

That was the one phrase running through the mind of Lucius Malfoy as he was pushed from the pensieve. He saw the children falling apart around him, but could think of nothing but getting his son and running.

Anywhere.

He didn't care where they went, but he was getting out of Britain with his son at all costs.

He knew someone was following him and assumed it to be Severus. He cared not. He walked as fast as he dared into the room and went straight to his son, still sleeping peacefully. He ignored the elf and her inane chatter completely as he pulled Draco from his cot and relaxed somewhat at the feel of him in his arms.

Alive.

Safe.
His thoughts ran in circles and he could think of little else but keeping this precious child in his arms safe. It was only a movement out of the corner of his eye that stayed his wand from magicking every one of his belongings into a trunk. He looked and froze at a sight he was sure mirrored his own.

Remus Lupin knelt at the side of the only other bed in the room, running his fingers through Declan’s hair soothingly. He had a wild look in his eyes and was trembling, which reminded Lucius idly that the full moon was close, but it was only a fleeting thought. Lucius rocked his son quietly, watching the other man soothe himself similarly.

"Running won't help, you know. I tried it once. Ran away to faraway places, ran away from war and loss and death and it still follows you. Still haunts you. The guilt never goes away either." Remus looked at Lucius as he spoke. "When Harry's parents were killed and Sirius sent to Azkaban so suddenly...it was all so sudden...and I had nothing. He took Harry away from me. Did you know that? Dumbledore knew that I would take that baby. I would have cared for him with all I have, but he refused to let me near him. Refused to tell me where he had been taken."

Lucius was silent, only able to listen to the man as he spoke. He felt that restless urge driving him to run settle just a little with every word.

"I lost it all. My pack, my family gone because of him. I tried...for months I tried to find Harry! I searched everywhere, but eventually the guilt got to me and I ran. I was so ashamed of myself. I didn't protect my pack, and I punished myself for it every. Single. Day." Remus could feel his wolf close to the surface, rising to protect, to defend.

Remus leaned close to Declan as the babe whimpered in his sleep. The man ran the back of his fingers against Declan's cheek, telling the boy, even in his sleep, that he was near. "But I realized, when I came back, that I had only been hurting Harry more. By running I had left him to defend himself on his own. I will not run from this now, Lucius, and neither can you."

Lucius settled Draco back in his cot, idly casting a silencing charm over both boys before standing tensely near the werewolf. "Excuse me?"

Remus' eyes glowed amber. "You cannot run from this Lucius. I know. I can see the fear, the need, in your eyes, but running will only leave them vulnerable. They need you, Lucius. Those men and women out there are just that, they left childhood behind long ago. They stand to fight this, and so will you. For the sake of your cub and your pack. You will stay."

Lucius wasn't sure what to say as he watched the man before him. He felt his spine stiffen and took a step forward, unsure. "And what if I refuse? If I chose myself and my child over you all?" He said the words, knowing in his heart that they would never come to pass.

Remus smirked, the wolf giving him confidence, eyes taking on a golden hue. "You won't. You are a brave man, Lucius Malfoy. A strong man who covers his true intentions behind too many walls to count, but you are brave, and you will not leave them. You crave this, their need of you, you thrive on the control."

Lucius ran, moving to the closet to get away, to continue the efforts to pack his child's things...a task he was losing heart in, but Remus simply followed behind him. He spun the golden haired man around and faced him, amber eyes glinting. "Tell me I am wrong, Lucius."

They stood chest to chest as Remus pushed up on the balls of his feet, lips brushing over Lucius' own before he whispered, "Admit it!"

Lucius felt the whisper of breath on his lips and licked them softly, his eyes fluttering shut at the feel
of a warm body so close to his own, one he could truly feel and not the wisp of skin that women usually were. He pressed closer in the haze that covered his thoughts. A whisper of, "Yes..." crossed his lips and dipped his head just enough to press his lips to Remus' own.

It had been years since he'd been able to indulge in someone who shared his persuasion, and he was too strung out, his emotions too wild, to pull away. Remus could not control the growl in his throat as the wolf roared, loving the scent of the man before him and wanting to conquer him, make this man his.

Their lips crushed together in a fierce kiss, tongue and teeth and passion warring, but Lucius surrendered with little fight, only a few nips. Remus hummed at the victory and slowed their kiss, their lips moving with slow sensuality rather than passion and the air in the room heated with their passion.

Remus slipped his fingers in the belt loops of the man before him, tugging their gyrating hips together tightly. Both groaned in pleasure and ground against the other. Hands roamed under shirts, seeking more skin with each passing moment.

They panted, their kisses becoming fierce and with one motion Remus had the button to Lucius' trousers opened. He slipped his hand down, dragging nails against sensitive skin and tugged on the hard member that filled his hand. Once, twice, rhythmically pulling the man closer and closer to the edge of sanity. The werewolf leaned forward and bit Lucius' ear, growling, "Let go, Lucius. Come for me."

And he did. With a bitten lip, a choked off groan of pleasure he spilt his seed of the hand on him, shuddering with pleasure long since felt except by his own hand.

Remus, smelled the sweet scent of his prey's release shuddered in a similar fashion, he came, softly biting his own hand as it rested on Lucius' shoulder. Their groans and panting breaths echoed in the room and the men stood, leaning against one another, holding the other up on shaking legs.

Remus was the first to move, lifting his hand from the wilting member it held and eagerly licking the salty juices from it. He growled in pleasure before twisting his wrist, cleaning them both with magic.

"You won't run, Lucius. They need you, and more importantly, I need you and I think you need me, too. Let go of your fear and come with me, together we will take this madman down. For good this time."

Lucius, having regained himself, nodded. He was unsure of what had happened, but did not regret the encounter. Remus was a handsome man, if world-weary, and it was no hardship to be near him. He knew how outspoken he had always seemed to be about Vampires, Werewolves and the like and cursed his wife for those every single day.

He looked to the werewolf, who seemed to be regaining some control over himself if the new blush and darker eyes were any clue. "Let us go, Mr. Lupin."

"Remus. After...all that, call me Remus. I'm sor-"

Lucius held up a hand. "No. Do not apologize for an act of comfort, a reminder of life, between willing adults."

Remus looked into his eyes, and saw something that set him at ease. "Ready to rejoin them?"

Lucius turned to the door, dropping the silencing charms from the children as he gave them both one
"I do it for him. Everything I have done has been to protect that child. It was not enough, before. But I swear now that he will be safe, and loved this time around. I couldn't live with myself if I failed him again. Let us go, Remus."

They walked from the nursery, determined to protect their family who sat waiting for them to return.

Thanks for reading!

Let me know what you think!

Next up is something brand new I've added (and a lot of bloody goodness!)
Pride Justice

Chapter 33: Pride Justice

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein

WARNING: A lot of blood and gorey stuff happening within. The FF version is censored, but the AO3 version contains the full scene.

It was to silence that Lucius and Remus returned. The students were huddled together, giving comfort and taking it. The men sat, taking their own tea as they pushed themselves back into focus. They gave a nod to Severus when he looked to them. It was time to begin.

"Fred, George. Here is a copy of the parchment Slughorn gave me. I will say nothing else and let you both analyze it." Severus handed a slip of parchment over and turned to Hermione. "Ms. Bones." She did not stir. "Ms.-" He broke off and moved to the girl, kneeling beside the couch.

"Susan. Susan, look at me." She turned to him, still in slight shock. He thrust a list into her hands. "This is the list he gave me to look over. I need you to look it over, figure out who their siblings are and compile the list. It is imperative that they be moved as fast as possible, without this leaking. You have the best contacts to get this done." Neville, seeing that the girl was still processing things looked to Harry, asking, "Permission to join this task force."

Harry looked up at that. He replayed the last words spoken, catching up to the events. "Granted. Blaise as well. Ron, Seamus, Dean, Colin and Dennis. Enter the memory again. I want a compiled list of how many people are in there, both sides, and a rough layout of the house. Anything of significance, put it down. Go."

Lucius and Remus moved to join this group. "I have the best chance of figuring out important details from what he has said," Lucius remarked. "And Remus can focus on the experiments. Something seems familiar about them, so we will give them a closer look."

With this Harry's mind kicked into gear. "Mya, priority one?"

Hermione's analytical brain was such that it processed faster than others, so she closed her eyes and spoke. "Priority one: decode Slughorn's note. Priority two...remove the Dark Mark from Lucius and Severus without killing them. Priority three: You have to finish the Hunt somehow." She broke off with a look. They knew a lot about the Horcruxes, had a few in their possession, but not all. There was more to do on that project. "I need to see the memory again, Harry."

Harry shook his head. "Not yet. Work with the details that stand out, they are there for a reason."

Harry turned to Heather and Ginny. "Work with Mya, compile your research on Project D-5 and let me know if you need anything from the Chamber. I want a progress report as soon as you're done." They nodded and moved off to a table near Blaise, Neville and Susan to work.

Severus, who had held his tongue thus far, stopped them. "I will concede that Lucius is in need of
the mark's removal, but you will not pull me from this so soon, Mr. Potter. I am the only way to receive information from that demented excuse for a human being, and we cannot lose any advantage we have."

It took Harry a minute to process that and he cursed the Calming Draught for muddling his thoughts. The first thing he registered was the sting of hearing his surname again from that smooth voice. The next was that Severus wanted to remain in the line of fire, no matter the reason. "No," he ground out through his clenched jaw.

Severus was not surprised by the response and continued, moving to face the teen chest to chest. "You have no say in this matter. I will not give up this advantage. It is the only thing that I can provide you, and I will not have the only forewarning we may have taken from us. It is too valuable!"

"No say? I dare say as your bond mate I have equal say in this matter, dammit! He will kill you! What help will you be then, Severus? Huh? What good will you be to me dead? Do you realize that any injury to you will hurt me that much more? I cannot..." Harry growled as the scenarios swam in his mind. "Don't do this, Severus," he whispered, unable to even meet the man's eyes. "Do not do this to me."

Severus cupped the cheek of the man before him then watched that same hand with trepidation as it slid back to his side. "It doesn't matter, Harry. Until there is another way it will not matter. I will get you any information I can, and I will continue until he is dead. I refuse to die under his wand."

Fred, knowing that something was happening between the two, but unsure what, interrupted them. Everyone in the room had heard the outburst between the two, but strange things always happened around Harry Potter, and this wasn't weird enough to comment on yet.

"Um, Harry mate, sorry, but George and I have a read on the potion. We need you and Neville to look it over though."

Harry scrubbed a hand over his face and turned away from the man before him, too upset for words. He grabbed Neville's attention and they moved over to the twins. Neville immediately recognized the base of the potion, but was puzzled. "This...it's an advanced potion for creating a magical core in a plant, well, no." He followed an ingredient with his finger. "It enhances the magical potential of a plant. It was used a long time ago to give magical properties to muggle crops. But..."

Harry nodded. "It's been altered. Here and here." He looked at Severus, seeing validation of his theory. "It's been modified to work on mammals, hasn't it?" He asked in a dead voice, not seeing how this would be necessary.

Severus nodded. "It has. A similar potion was used to give magic cores to muggle felines to create Kneazles. I believe your Weasley Twins used a derivative too on hedgehogs to create Pygmy Puffs. However." He paused, trying to figure out how to word his next words. "This potion, in its enhanced form, is strong enough to affect humans, especially children."

It was at this time that Lucius returned from the memory of his own choice. "Susan, Blaise, bring me that list. Now." He stood close to Severus and had him start circling names as he had the night before. "Any child marked is safe. It is the ones without siblings in the castle that are at risk. He said as much. 'My plan cannot unfold if any are alerted too soon.' The first time a student in the castle goes too many weeks without a letter from home they will alert the authorities. Susan, Heather, Hermione. I need you to focus on the uncircled names. Are there any that are familiar?"

The three girls moved over, examining the list. Heather was the first to recognize anything. She
gasped and backed away from the list, tears swimming in her eyes. "Harry! Shelter C. He has three names from C."


The Stag moved off as fast as it could and Harry closed his eyes, focusing on the spell. He would know when the message was given and he would not relax in the slightest until it had.

Blaise was staring off at the ceiling as these events unfolded, lips moving repetitively and his eyebrows furrowed so deep as the wrinkle his forehead. "Hey, guys. What do you think he meant by ‘I am quite familiar with it’?"

“Who’s familiar with what?” Ginny asked.

“The Dark Lord. When Snape mentioned the spell McGonagall had Gryffindor under he said ‘I am quite familiar with it’ in that creepy voice of his...It struck me as weird since no one outside of your group was supposed to know until well...shit happened.” He shrugged, but watched their faces, hoping he wasn’t reading something more into this and wasting time.

What he wasn’t prepared for were cry of pain from the Head Lion as he held his head and the snarls of seven very pissed off lions coming to the same conclusion at the same time. Severus moved to Harry's side as the young man clutched his head with a cry of pain then a snarl of rage. Harry grimaced as memories came back to him, an old and enlightening conversation in the Chamber of Secrets with one very young Tom Riddle. He snarled along with his Pridemates as they yelled.

“Those bastards!”

“THEY did this!”

Susan, who was still out of the loop mentally, and not feeling as wary of the lion’s rage as the others just looked confused and asked, “Did what, guys? Either the calming draughts are making me fuzzy or I'm just too far behind to follow this line of logic.”

Harry held up his hand to stop the others’ rants after calling for a pain potion from Lissy. As he felt the terrible piercing pain in his head fade he addressed Susan’s question.

“Blaise has pointed out something we’ve been wondering for a while. The essential question of ‘why’ someone does whatever evil they do. Voldemort’s evil is at a level unexpected from the minimal severity of his childhood. Heather and I endured similar if not worse and we turned out just fine. But now we know. I’d bet money Voldemort knew of their methods of insanity because they’ve used any one of them on him. Son of a bitch!” Harry slammed his hand down on the table next to him, his magic following and the force cracking the top.

He turned abruptly, unable to handle the rage boiling in him. Once more those meddling fools had caused him pain, heartache and struggle in life and he was done.

"Bye bastard."

“Lions with me, we’re getting our answers and putting an end to this. Tribunal in the commons. Pride Justice will be served tonight.”

Wide, eager eyes and pale faces they all ran out the door, save Neville who stayed behind to alert the team inside the pensieve to their latest developments. Severus followed behind his brat without
“Tinker!” Harry called out as he stalked through the halls.

The little elf appeared by his side, his little feet moving as fast as he could to keep up. “Master Harry calls?”

He slowed his stride before coming to a stop. “Yes, sorry. Tinker, I need you to go to the Founder’s Dungeon. Unseen. Be prepared to come to Gryffindor commons with McGonagall at my next call. Leave Dumbledore for later. We’re going to hold a formal tribunal.”

Tinker wrung his hands, eyes shifting once…twice. “Master Harry…I’s just wondering where the wee ones will be?”

Heather nodded to him when he looked her way. “Heather will keep all those who do not wish to partake of the atmosphere as well as the first years. Thank you for bringing that to my attention, Tinker.” He tried to smile, but his temper was still too short. The little elf bowed and popped out of sight as the lions continued their trek to the Tower.

Ron’s team met the group just before they reached the portrait. They had Lucius and Remus in tow, the other students sent to their dormitories for the evening. As soon as the door was open Harry ran to his room, searching his trunk for a very specific box before grabbing it and returning to the coliseum modeled room. Though, where before each section held two students, now they held four to five.

The circular ring made in the center was larger, and there were more students present, or so Severus believed. Soon though, Harry signaled to Dean to quiet the crowd in their stands and took his mark, one hand raised.

Slowly the students fell silent, and Harry spoke in a grave and serious voice.

“For a few weeks now we’ve discussed what we should do about our fallen owners. Death, dismemberment, torture, etc. Now, evidence has come forth. I ask you be patient and allow justice to be served. For the Pride present and past. For Hogwarts.” Harry felt the weight of Gryffindor’s Sword materialize at his hip and grinned ferally. Hogwarts took care of her own. “First I must call Heather Jameson forward to call forth a writ of law on this, Gryffindor’s Territory. In this, her word is law.”

Heather stepped forward eagerly and opened the box Harry presented to her. She surveyed the many and varied rings before finding hers and slipping it on her left hand middle finger. “As Heir Regent of Godric Gryffindor I say to you that this night the Pride of Gryffindor shall reap justice where such awaits, and give way where innocence rests. On my lands, on my name, so mote it be.”

“Tinker!” Harry called, already shedding his robe. He watched as the thin and dirty form of his ex-owner fell from a few feet in the air to the ground, dead center between the stands where the student body sat. Every student of acceptable age had opted to stay, despite warnings that things would be quite gruesome.

Harry watched with a malicious grin as the older woman recognized her surroundings and got her
bearings about her. Her face contorted from a tired façade to the enraged snarl that he was so fond of. Pissing this woman off gave him joy like little else ever had.

“Welcome back to the Lion’s Den, Minnie-Dear! We are just so happy to receive you. Sorry for the lack of refreshments…it was a short notice visit. I’m sure you understand.” He ridiculed her with his sweet, honey-dripping tone. She’d used the same tone with them during Umbitch’s reign, and he just had to return the favor as he circled her vulnerable form.

“I’m sure you remember my pride. Everyone save the littlest are here to watch the entertainment, namely you. But first, I have a few questions.”

“You do not question me, boy! I am your leader!” She growled at them, trying to work her small hands out of the magic dampening cuffs surrounding them. “You will remove these infernal things at once, or so help me—”

“What, Minnie-Dearest? So help you? You see, I don’t quite think that’s how this works. I do recall many times we have asked for help, only to be met with curses and threats, pain and Unforgivables. So!” He clapped his hands and twisted his leg to slam the forward momentum built up into her back with a mighty kick. He watched her fall forward onto her face as he laughed. “Let’s get started shall we?”

Harry looked around the room at the avid viewers to his macabre show and decided to give them a chance to play.

“One shot. Summon whatever she has used on you and let’s get started. *Immobulus,*” he cast on the witch and kicked her over onto her back. He conjured a handful of leaf bladed throwing knives, holding the up to the light and watching them gleam.

“Are you going to move, Professor?”

No reply was heard.

“Oh, such a blatant display of disrespect!” He said loudly as he shoved the first knife through her palm and into the floor, using magic to lengthen the metal and ensuring its continued stabilizing presence. He could hear cheers and brays of laughter at the irony of the situation from behind him, but paid it no mind. He continued berating the woman for her silence, her disrespect, her unfathomable stupidity…anything he could recall being punished for. With each new thought came a new blade until she was covered in the small blades that now held her to the floor. Every move would be excruciating…if she could move.

And with that thought he released her and called for their first years. He held up a hand to silence his lions and watched the small yearlings enter the room, beckoning them over.

“Pride justice is such that we will individually do nothing more to her than she has done to us. Is there anything you wish us to enact on your behalf, sweetings?”

He gathered their attention, not allowing his glamour to fall from the woman. To them she appeared trussed and slightly less pierced than she currently was. He refused to scar the sweeter of this group with their revenge, but as he waiting he could see a few calculating gleams. While Harry had tried his best to keep this group out of the thoughts of his esteemed owners, Harry also knew that there were times he couldn’t be everywhere, especially during classes.
One hand raised tentatively. “Yes, sweeting?” he said softly, crouching down to her level. The girl’s lip trembled and she waved him forward, whispering in his ear. He nodded, making soothing noises to her and gave her a soft hug. “Consider it done, Mari.”

Harry snapped his fingers and watched as a human shaped puddle of water formed over the woman. He could see small chunks of ice in it showing how cold it was, and with a snap of his fingers he watched it slowly but surely settle on the frozen form of Minerva McGonagall. It was just barely thinner than she, which made the feeling of drowning ever present, without the inability to breathe every now and then. He released half the power on his immobilizing curse wordlessly and watched as she tried to twitch and escape the torturous puddle.

She was just a touch too weak to truly do more than churn the water and sink the blades piercing her deeper. When Harry turned back it was to the snarling grins of his yearlings. They all nodded in a very satisfied manner and, after their year leader took Mari by the hand, left feeling much better than when they came in.

Once the yearlings were away he snapped his fingers to release the water over the floor, letting all but the water soaking the almost blue figure of the woman evaporate and disappear.

With a snap releasing the silencing spell on the old hag he knelt by her head and began asking questions. He wanted answers for what he and his comrades had been put through for their greed. He wanted everything…and for every half minute of silence from the woman he gave one student target practice.

"What did you do to Tom Riddle when he was a student here?"

Silence.

"Second years, ready yourselves. Move closer if needed, because the first person to hit me gets seven hours of mandatory target practice with Seamus."

The kids shuffled forward until they stood at a comfortable vantage point.

"Number one, fire."

The first of the second years threw their favored sharpened chopsticks, embedding it in the Cat’s thigh.

"What did you do to Tom Riddle when he was a student here?"

Silence.

"Number two, fire."

A miniature mace ball flew through the air, landing on the prisoner’s shin with a solid thwump. She refused to make any noise of pain, biting her lip till it bled until that point when she screamed long and loud with suppressed pain.

"What did you do to Tom Riddle when he was a student here?"

"Imperius Curse...," came the growled reply.

"And what did you Imperius him to do?"

Silence.
"Number three, fire."

A bright pink dart embedded itself between two ribs.

"Very nice, Jesse."

Again, Harry asked, "What did you Imperius Riddle to do?"

He waited, prepared to call for the next second year, when he heard McGonagall speak.

"Dabble in the Dark Arts. Research. Dumbledore began before he even started Hogwarts, but he
inducted me my fifth year! He was our play thing, our toy to experiment on just like we've done to
you, you fucking brat! We made him delve deeper and deeper before his core was even fully formed
just to see what would happen. He was going to be our new Dark Lord to control!!"

"But you couldn't control him, could you?" Harry said, his voice very deadpanned. "He was stronger
than you could even think to be. He broke your controls, didn't he?"

The cat said nothing, but began laughing derangedly. "We cursed him for it!! HA! He had to return
to us or lose his sanity and look! He CHOSE THIS. HAHAAH! Chose to delve so deep that he lost
his sanity completely! Lost his very soul! We won!"

Harry silenced the crazy bitch and allowed the remainder of the second years to take aim as he
thought about what he had heard and the memories he'd recently regained.

When they finished Harry took down the silencing charm, glad to see sanity and pain back in the
bint's eyes.

"Tell me about your plans for this generation of the pride."

Silence.

"Third years in place. Number one, fire."

When Harry had the answers he needed, he turned to the third and fourth year groups, and gave
them the same opportunity for personal revenge.

It wasn’t until after the fourth years had finished that he started asking questions about the answers he
only wanted. And even then it was until Dennis retaliated with a nerve sensitizing potion poured
over her that he began to enjoy himself.

Harry watched through jade eyes as the broken woman before him twitched, bloody from head to toe
and wheezing from what he guessed was a punctured lung...or maybe a bloody trachea. He no
longer cared what was wrong with the woman, for listing what he hadn’t broken would be much
easier.

Nothing.

He lowered his long, furred body from all fours to a regal pose and licked at the blood on his claws
and paws. His tail swished happily and lazily back and forth along the floor and every now and
again he gave a rumbling roar just to see the bitch flinch and grimace in pain.

Years. For years they had tormented Tom Riddle. They knew of his background, his precarious
position between the Muggle and Magical worlds and they exploited that and him. As another student McGonagall had helped Albus control him and force him into “Extra Training” and “Magical Tutelage.” They’d tortured him as Harry had been with spells and weapons, and when he escaped they allowed it, knowing that he would have to return to Hogwarts at some point to keep his sanity.

And return he did, to tell them that he had circumvented their plans and to watch their backs as he took control of the Ministry. Dumbledore had tried to bind his magic when he became too strong for them, then and there, but was unsuccessful. Indeed it had only driven Tom Riddle even further into the Dark Arts.

And when Dumbledore knew that he had a spy from Voldemort in his midsts, he had forced the Trelawney fraud into spewing a false prophecy to manipulate them all further. He had nothing to lose with his powerful Order and two year-old candidates for martyrdom fitting the bill of the chessboard he created!

Harry came back to himself as he felt the wolf approach his side. He turned his head to watch the man, a low rumble sounding as his familiar hand moved toward the side of his face. He closed his eyes and leant into the caress, the warning rumble becoming a purr in an instant.

“Harry…you need to finish this.”

The lion gave the caring wolf a look before inclining his head regally and shifting back to his human form. He felt his friends gather behind him and waved Neville to his side. “You have been affected by their machinations just as much as I. I concede to you, Neville Longbottom, justice if you so desire.”

With a surprised gleam in his eye, Neville watched his Alpha step back from the prone form at the center of the dias. Justice. For him. For his parents. For the Pride.

Neville walked up to the bloody, eviscerated mass and, leveling his wand at her neck, said clearly, “Diffindo” and ended it. “For the Pride.”

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**Thanks for reading!**

Please let me know what you think!
After Tinker volunteered to rid his lions of their kill nothing more was said on the matter. Each and every student put it out of their minds, and even then Heather told Harry that she had even seen a drop in Dreamless Sleep assignments since the Tribunal.

It had taken a few days for the lion's Den and her Pride to return to normal, but they did. School and extracurricular activities had helped them settle once more...as had having even more children in the castle. Harry and Heather had been particularly busy making sure their shelter students were taking the evacuation well, and that the Prewetts had the provisions they needed to be able to care for their added numbers. They'd been unable to talk to Dare and his charges due to the tight class schedule.

With Heather and the reason for those additions fresh on his mind, Harry decided that another meeting was probably for the best. He asked through Remus if he thought it a good idea, and when the wolf volunteered his quarters it was settled.

The same group gathered one week from their first gathering and Harry started them off on the path most were very curious about.

"Heather. I need the D-5 Report."

Heather, hearing her Alpha's voice, took a deep breath. "Project D-5 has been compiled and reviewed. As far as more information goes, my team needs access to Slytherin's journals. Especially the ones on Dark Spells. We need to know what books Voldemort built this from, and with his penchant for the dramatic and his thoughts on Slytherin's superiority I'm guessing he built it from Slytherin's knowledge."

Harry nodded. He looked at the three girls, Hermione, with her fabulous research skills and tenacity, Heather, with her dedication to helping, and Ginny, one of the Pride's most powerful spell casters. Together they were the spell crafting team that had given a tremendous advantage over McGonagall and Dumbledore over the years.

"Crafting Team with me. We're going to the Chamber." He looked at the others. "Neville, Gred and Forge. I want you all to look at the potion again, I want to know its potency, distribution and brewing details. Blaise and Susan, conjure a map and place a pin where these students live, I want to see if there are any patterns. Ron I want you and your team to continue on your work from this past week. Keep going with the viewing crystals of each muggle family in that first group. I want any identifying features marked. Lucius, Remus, if you would, look over the D-5 project set and see what other avenues you can explore?"

He turned, and saw Severus, making a split second decision. "Severus, with us." The dark man nodded and they left the room.

Inside Slytherin's library the four set about on a wild search, not knowing what they were truly searching for besides a miracle. They pulled journals, diaries, manuals, anything they could get their hands on until Harry got an idea. He moved to the door of Slytherin's Chamber and hissed, "Open!"
He walked in, an idea spinning in his head. When you find something truly noteworthy you keep it
near you, protect it at all cost, but it never occurred to Tom Riddle that he would have company.
That his own actions would grant his enemy the ability to enter what he saw as *His Domain.*

Harry won his title as Magical Heir of Salazar Slytherin when he didn't succumb to the Killing Curse
as a baby, and only reinforced his superior rank in winning again in the Chamber. Magic never took
age into account, and by living when Voldemort did not he had won the right to be Slytherin's heir
through conquest. There was no other blood heir to take the title, so Harry was left with a legacy,
including his Parseltongue abilities.

He looked around the room housing Salazar Slytherin's bedthings. "*Slytherin's tomes, come to me.*"

He waited, as books from every corner flew to him, stacking themselves on the table next to him. He
heard a knocking sound, though, which made him curious. He followed the sound to the bed, and
pinpointed it to a warded drawer in the shelves about the headboard. It was a beautiful headboard,
with an ornate series of shelves and hidden compartments. Harry waved his wand, casting a ward
detector, and frowned.

"Severus, I need you," he yelled to a sigh from the man and giggles from the girls. He blushed as he
realized the alternate meaning to his words, but thought on it. "Actually, I need Mya too. I've got
Death Wards."

The two entered, moving to the cabinet. Severus allowed Hermione to cast first before he cast his
own diagnostics, though because he knew Voldemort's spells of choice he cast something a bit more
specific. As he felt the magic around the ward and watched the readout he cursed. It was a curse that
would pull and twist the magic of any individual touching the cabinet, killing them.

"I know what this is," Severus said. "I know how to take care of it, but you must promise me to stay
back. Both of you." He gave Harry a look before turning back to begin.

His eyes closed and Harry watched with appreciation as the man's magic rose around him, wand
waving and mouth moving as he chanted. The cabinet glowed white with the density of magic
working in and a black mist rose from the spot as Severus began panting with effort. Finally the glow
dimmed and Severus lowered his wand, shoulders sagging just a tad after that.

"Tell it to open, brat. The curse within it is has been taken care of." Hermione grabbed a chair for
him and he sat heavily. The spell took a lot of power as well as precision to cast without having the
curse follow your magic and take hold.

Harry moved forward hesitantly. "*Open. Slytherin's tomes, come to me.*" Harry watched as a small
and very old hand-bound sheaves of paper flew into his hands. As soon as the tome touched his skin
he screamed in pain, his head feeling as if it would split open. He grabbed his head, book still in
hand as he was unable to release it. With one last grey and tilted view of the room, he blacked out.

Matteo Dare was having a rather trying day. It was a few days since his friend, boss and Alpha had
sent word that he and his charges were under a mandatory emergency evacuation of their Shelter.
He'd had minutes to round up all of his charges, 15 preteens, and make ward dampening bracelets for
them as they gathered their running-sacs—a knapsack every one of them kept hidden in case of such a
situation. Once he'd made each of them an amulet he grabbed his emergency portkey from a loose
ceiling tile and had them link arms.

"Hold onto the blanket and your partner with everything you've got!" He had impressed upon them,
before activating it.
"Safety!"

It was truly the worst ride of his life. The portkey was set to dump them a few meters from the wards guarding the castle, and it did. Luckily the amulets had allowed his charges to actually see a castle, rather than the delipidated building most non-magical people saw.

When all of the children finished retching Matteo had led them into the outside entrance to the Chamber of Secrets—their new, hopefully temporary home. He’d later written of their safety to his Alpha in their messaging book, but had received little more than a 'will visit asap' back, which was not unusual.

That had been a few days ago now, and while things had definitely calmed, he was antsy. No one had come down yet to fill him in on just why the Code Black had been called.

Matteo understood, more than most, just how much trouble and drama the Pride dealt with on a semi-regular basis; however, he was usually the one helping to call the Codes, not the one carrying them out. Before he’d been named Head of Shelter C he’d been the lead child finder, going around the streets to find and follow any leads on magical and squib orphans and bring them to the Chamber. He also worked to build a rapport with the street kids, handing out blankets and clothes to those who wanted to stay independent, and taking others to the Shelters around Britain for a warm meal and place to sleep, a place to be safe.

Matteo didn’t think he wanted to be on this side of enacting Codes again in the future.

He walked through the quiet halls of the Chamber after helping Ronan feed all of the children and setting his older ones to their studies. Just as he had told Harry all those years ago, he was letting his charges do their jobs free of supervision. He liked to see just how much they could do on their own, or without an adult to turn to for easy answers.

It encouraged independence and positive self-esteem, and though his kids had independence in spades, they were very much lacking in the self-worth department.

Much like, he thought, another little lion he had once cared for everyday. It was with that thought in mind that Matteo felt his heart clench. He took off running when he heard a familiar scream light the air. The scream of his little lion.

Severus would swear that he lost every drop of blood in his body at the sound of his mate's scream. Heather and Ginny ran in, eyes glowing at the sound, but Hermione stopped them. "Don't touch him. Whatever you do, you cannot touch him or that book." She looked at Severus as she dropped to her knees as close to her Alpha as she could. "Do something!"

Severus cast the lightest diagnostic he could, but frowned. "Nothing is wrong with him...I...Expecto Patronum. Find Lucius. Tell him to come to the Chamber. Emergency."

They watched the ephemeral animal bound off and stood, watching the Boy-Who-Lived-To-Find-Trouble. Ginny was the first to look off, her head tilted as she recognized something was off.

"...Foot steps?"

"Whuh?" Heather grunted back.

"I hear footsteps. Shit. The Daycare is right down the hall!" She spoke just as a wild eyed man turned the corner into the room. His long black hair was tousled and wind blown from his fast pace, his chest heaving as he regained his breath. His silver eyes glowed like molten mercury.
"What happened?" The man demanded. "I could hear Harry's scream from down the hall!"

The girls and Severus were quiet, though only Severus' kept his wand aloft, surprise in his gaze as they all recognized the man before them. It took Severus longer to fit a name to the slightly older face of his former pupil, but his companions helped.

The girls flew to the newcomer's side, hugging him happily with the knowledge that he could help safely embedded in their minds from all of their years together.

"Maddie!"

Lucius had just stepped from the pensieve for the second time, having needed a refresher on the events the previous week. He and the others had a good layout of the Manor drawn from the memory and Lucius' time spent there over the years now. Ron and his team had just finished their work when the doe entered the room. It was bigger than a normal doe, taller. It appeared fragile, but was indeed a very strong spell-animal. It trotted up to Lucius and delivered its message and the man looked up. "Remus, can you open the chamber?"

The man nodded. "I can."

Lucius grabbed his hand and took off, yelling, "Stay here," over his shoulder to the students. "Watch over Draco and Declan and do as Harry told you." As soon as the door shut he ran as fast as he could, not answering Remus as he asked again and again why they were running. Remus got them through to the Chamber.

Ginny, hearing footsteps once again, ran from her spot next to Maddie and Harry to the doorway and ushered the men inside. Heather and Mya both heard Remus' growl and their eyes widened. They stood as one and rammed their shoulders into Remus' chest, stopping him. "NO! You can't touch him, Remus."

Severus calmly explained the situation. "We were looking for Slytherin's tomes. Harry called for them in Parseltongue, and all but one came. This one was warded in the cabinet. The Dark Lord's death ward. I took down the ward and he called for it once more. As soon as it touched him he screamed and fell unconscious. He has not moved since."

Lucius ignored the occupants of the room as he looked the boy over, noting the pale complexion and the furrowed brow. He thought through what he knew of Slytherin's magic, and magical tomes. Getting an idea he cast a specific diagnostic and sighed.

"He'll be okay. It's a knowledge transfer spell. Anyone who touches the book who is of the Slytherin line in any way will trigger a transfer of information from the book to the holder. It is painful, but it will not harm him. He will be out until the transfer is over. Each Founder had an object that would transfer knowledge in this way. Ravenclaw's diadem, Hufflepuff's Goblet, and Gryffindor's gauntlets. Apparently Slytherin's was this specific tome."

The others in the room calmed at this, though Severus had slowly moved closer. He sat and lifted the boy's head to rest in his lap now that he knew it would not harm either of them further. He stroked the head softly, waiting. Hair so wild shouldn't be so soft. It defied understanding.

"When he wakes he will be disoriented. From what I've read it may take a few weeks for all the information to fully assimilate. Instead it will pop up at random times, as if he'd just remembered something he learned years before. We should move him back upstairs for now and wait."

Severus nodded and rose, lifting the body in his arms. He was still too light, too slim from the years
of abuse and malnutrition during his peak growth years...years that he would probably never recover from fully...which reminded him, he had some revenge to take. The rights of a bond mate were few, but seeking reparations on a bond mate's behalf were included, and thankfully, the Wizarding World knew nothing about a statute of limitations.

He felt the presence of another at his side and cast a suspicious glance over. It was Matteo Dare.

"I can carry him, Professor, if you wish. I don't mind. I am used to carrying Harry to the healing rooms," he said softly, eyes only on Harry's prone form in his arms.

He sneered.

"I am not so incapable, Mr. Dare, as to be unable to carry my own bondmate to safety." And with that he stormed away, just a tinge of green covering his mood as he left the surprised man in his wake.

Thank you for reading!

A/N: If you have no clue who Matteo is, please see No Rest for the Weary for reference. He will be coming into play in TPH from here on out.
Chapter 35: Sleeping Harry

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein

A/N: There's a bit of a time jump in this chapter.

Friday,

October 31st

Matteo Dare stared at his Alpha. He was not upset, nor truly worried, but he was frustrated. All at once his life had been chunked upside down and the one man he trusted to give him answers, not to mention the same man was his boss, was unconscious.

And had been so for two weeks now!

It wasn't that Matteo was incompetent to decide himself, but some things needed the Alpha's touch, like where to set up the next Shelter and who was talking lead in Harry's absence. He and Ron had been taking the roles on as needed, as they had both served as Harry's seconds, but the Pride was getting anxious over any news.

And then there was the whole situation of Harry's bondmate...

"Really, little lion? Snape?" He asked to no avail.

He watched Harry's eyebrows furrow and imagined the response he would have gotten.

"What do you man, 'Snape?' It's always been him, Maddie. Since before the Moribus broke, before our lives went to hell when Snakebreath returned. It's always been Snape."

Matteo laughed at himself, moving back to his own native accent. "That's exactly what you'd say, little lion. I know you too well. I just wish you were awake to actually answer me. I like knowing my genius is warranted, you know?"

Matteo sighed over this as he readied Harry for stretches. He'd been coming in twice daily to move his Alpha's limbs and keep them from atrophying as he had done for the man many times in the past.

He could feel Harry's muscles fight him at times, yet help move further than he was pushing at others. It was a strange state his little lion was in. Not quite sleeping, yet not awake either.

And no telling when he would come back to them.

"How long is this supposed to continue, Lucius?" Severus ground the words through his clenched jaw. He was sitting at the boy's bedside, elbows on knees and head in hands. "You said hours or days. It has been weeks."

The blond man looked curiously at his friend. "Calm yourself, Severus. The boy is fine."
Severus growled at him. "He is not fine! If he was fine he would be moving around, speaking, getting into mischief and trouble. Not...not lying there! How much longer is this to take?!"

Lucius turned his back to the man, running his fingers through his own disheveled hair. It had taken only two days for Severus to lose his temper over this event, another day after that for the truth of the Unity Bond to come out, and a day after that before Molly arrived.

Harry had been out for almost two weeks now. Two very long weeks after the transfer began. The Adult Representatives and Matteo, when his schedule allowed, took turns watching over him during that time. It had been a trying time as tempers flare while waiting and watching the young man who was too often incapacitated in his few years of life.

After Arthur's explanations of "long nights at the office" became too frequent Arthur told Molly of all that had happened. As he had expected, she refused to leave her childrens' sides for days. She watched over Harry for the hours that everyone else had class and work and made sure to see the twins, Ron, Ginny, and Hermione as often as possible.

Molly would watch over Harry, spelling food and nutrient potions into him and making sure his limbs were moved to keep him from getting stiff. He moved of his own accord at times, rolling onto his side as if he was just sleeping off a long night.

She also helped to keep the peace as Severus' tended to be unhappy when he found Matteo alone watching over Harry. He could see the non platonic look in that silver gaze and he was not happy about it. The look in Matteo's eyes hurt him. He could remember seeing that look in school between James and Lily their last year.

James looked at Lily like a blind man seeing the sun for the first time. Just as Matteo had looked at Harry when he first entered the room and saw the young teen. It made Severus' want to steal his brat away forever.

During this time Molly was the one to teach Lucius how to care for werewolves in case they returned worse for the wear from the full moon transformation. It was unnecessary this time as both were pleasantly surprised that neither came back overly injured, only a few scratches from their tumbling and playing in the woods. But they also knew that anything could happen.

For this second transformation together Remus had taken Declan with him to his home. It was a secluded, wooded area with no one around for miles. Sirius had bought it for him when he left his teaching post at Hogwarts for full moon nights.

They took the Wolfsbane Potion and Declan was surprised how much easier the transformation was this time around. Their first time with Wolfsbane had been better than the first time without, but having it routinely in their system made things easier each time. Wolfsbane enabled him to keep his mind, but that did not mean the wolf's mind was fully suppressed. Instead both were present.

Declan was in charge of thoughts and desires while the wolf was in charge of action. They were better able to coexist for that night, and the nights leading up to the next full moon as both remembered having an easy transformation the last time. Remus had hoped for that kind of harmony with his wolf, but after the years under the Moribus his wolf was aggressive to any but its own kind. The transformation seemed easier now, though, whether that was due to the Wolfsbane, the Moribus' absence, Declan's presence, or a combination of the three, he was unsure.
Remus smiled as he watched Declan play with his friends in the Center. He was a happy little boy, and so brave. He watched as Declan played with Draco, teaching the smaller boy the joy of legos.

It was almost scary how easily they had come together. From the time they woke the day after the memory viewing until now they had been near inseparable. Declan had taken to asking to go home with Draco every few nights, and Lucius was having as hard a time guarding his heart from the wolf child as Remus had.

Remus smiled and gave both boys a hug, laughing to himself as Draco insisted on calling him Papa still. It had caused some ruffled fur when Declan had first heard, but with the full moon rising that night there hadn't been time to talk about it. Remus was waiting for Declan to bring it up to him, wanting him to voice his feelings of his own accord. Remus was trying very hard to give Declan every measure of control and independence that he could.

He signed both of them out with a bucket of legos and they returned to the castle proper, first going to check on Harry before dinner. As he reached his room he saw Lucius stepping out of his door. Draco squealed and ran ahead yelling, "Daddy! Look look!" He held a red lego in his hand, though Lucius had no idea what he was looking at.

"Very nice, little Dragon." He looked up and smiled. "Hello, Remus. Come to see about Harry?"

"Yes. I just came from the Center. Declan and Draco have found legos, and have decided to become architects." Remus smiled, and laughed at the look on Lucius' face. "Legos are muggle toys that you can use to build things with blocks. Lots and lots of blocks." He shook the container in his hand for emphasis. "Just don't step on them, otherwise they are harmless."

Lucius tucked that information away for later. "Do you mind if I check on him with you? The transfer seems to be slowing, so I dare say he should awaken within the day."

"Sure, please come in." Remus unlocked his door with a pulse of magic through his hand into the portrait of a blooming field.

They walked in to Molly bustling about, happily chattering away. "Oh! Remus, Lucius! He's awake. I just sent Severus back in with supplies. Harry's got a bit of a headache, and seems a bit disoriented. Here, leave the little ones with me, I'll set them with a small snack and some play time."

Molly kept the smile on her face as the two men went into Remus' guest room and she set the boys on a pallet with spill-proof juice and their legos. She was surprised the children had such fun with toys like that, though entertainment was entertainment, and after the last few weeks she'd accepted a lot worse.

She hadn't believed Arthur when he first came home with wild stories of binding spells and evil headmasters, but the twins had come home with him and shared their memories with her using the viewing crystals. She had cried and immediately gone to the floo.

She knew her babies were okay, but needed to check on Bill, Charlie and Percy. She stuck her head in the floo almost before the powder changed the flames, but she was too harried to think that through. She was absolutely relieved when Bill answered, saying he had spoken to his brothers and agreed when she asked him to come over.

The twins were the ones to explain their newfound power, and Bill said he was most grateful to be his own master again. He promised to come to dinner soon and had returned to his apartment. Molly contented herself with a letter from Charlie soon after, and the twins added a recording crystal of their explanation to Bill. She hoped her sons were faring well and said as much before sending the
A few days later, when Arthur told Molly of the Slytherin Tome and Harry, Molly had been beside herself again. He didn't even need to ask Molly if she would look after Harry until he woke, she was already packing a bag of knitting things for Hogwarts.

She settled in a guest room in Remus' quarters, provided by Hogwarts herself, and watched after the lad just as she had for all of her children. She decided to start a light snack for the men.

Severus' attitude had taken a downhill turn since Harry had been bedridden. He was acerbic, volatile and quick to pissy-ness. Few took notice it until he actually took points from his Slytherins in his anger one day. He and Harry had not spent enough time together for a true bond to form, especially for an emotional or a mind link to form, and so Severus was unsure what was truly happening to his bond mate, nor how to fix it.

Now he sat on the bed, Harry cradled in his lap, as he spoke in low even tones. He ignored the other presence in the room in favor of explaining why Harry felt as he did. His hands ran over Harry's back soothingly.

"...Yes, that's correct. The wards were down, we just never expected a knowledge transfer spell. You will feel odd, like you know something, but it's just out of reach. You'll remember things at odd times. Just accept it and move on. The less you force the memories to the forefront of your mind the faster they will show themselves."

Harry sighed, his head resting on the man's chest. "How long have I been out?"

Severus laid his cheek on the teen's head, not caring that the two men in the room watched silently. "Today is October 31st."

Harry started to tense, but his muscles betrayed him. Severus had used his groggy state to get potions into him to help his wakefulness more, but also to ease the transition from coma to walking as fast as possible. "I've been down for over two...weeks?! Who...what...I need Mya! And Ron. Now. Where are they?"

"They are fine, little lion. I've been keeping watch," Matteo said from the corner he had been banished to every time Severus' came in. He watched Harry sigh and the tension flow out of the smaller body.

Severus frowned down at the boy, a bit of jealousy rising. "They are at dinner, no doubt stuffing their faces with a book and horrible table manners respectively. Calm yourself, brat." Severus resumed rubbing his back and felt the teen melt somewhat. "Your lions are fine and perpetrating a tenth of their usual dunderhead-ish behaviors. Lupin has looked in on the Pride and the seventh years have kept a tight rein on your lions. Just as they have every time you end up in some infernal trouble, no doubt."

Harry glared at the man, but there was no heat in his eyes. Indeed he was having a hard time keeping his eyes open. He yawned, "I need them, Sev'rus. Gotta m'sure...all...not dead...Maddie check...safe."

Small snores came from the boy as he hit full unconsciousness and the men in the room smiled. They were surprised Harry had stayed awake as long as he had, and knew sleep was coming. Though Harry had appeared to be asleep for the past two weeks he had actually been gathering and
compiling information. His body was rested, but his mind was exhausted.

Severus continued to hold him, letting the physical contact ease the one-sided strain he had felt for days now. The strain on their barely formed bond. While it was still forming they needed to have at least some kind of contact everyday, but without Harry consciously working to build on the bond things had gotten strained. He just hoped that it would ease some now that Harry had been released from the transfer.

He looked to see Remus and Lucius whispering together in the doorway as they had done for some time now.

"If you two are done gossiping, I do believe we should alert the lions that their leader is awake." He said with his eyebrow raised for perfect sarcastic effect.

Matteo rolled his eyes as they all looked in his direction. "Fine. I'll get Ron, Neville, Heather and Hermione and bring them back from the feast."

Remus rolled his eyes at the man, and moved to the door. "Molly seems to be making food, so I will alert her that we shall all be eating here."

With that they left, leaving the two Slytherins together. Lucius watched his friend with a knowing look. "A Gryffindor, Severus. Fate truly must carry a grudge against you." He smiled as he said it, wanting to tease his friend as he had since he'd found out about the bond.

"Oh? A fine one to talk, Lucius. The resident Gryffindor Werewolf? Tsk tsk. What would your mother say?"

Lucius laughed. "She'd say have at. It was Father who always carried the Malfoy mantle of Pureblood or die." His eyes were grim as he spoke, remembering. "It was him, you know. He cast every spell that led to this. Mother tried, I know, but there was little she could do until I had secured an heir of my own. Damn that man and his machinations."

Severus nodded, letting his friend vent as he had many times over the years.

Flashback

Abraxas Malfoy was a hard man. First generation Death Eater, and pureblood snob. He'd married, as life was want to set up, one of the nicest and unprejudiced women he could have ever met. She was a French witch from Beauxbatons, and it was an arranged marriage.

Lucius had grown up learning tolerance and a love of magic from his Mother. Dark, Light, it did not matter. Magic was powerful and wonderful and only by learning more would one grow that magic. Lucius had stayed far away from his Father, and was loath to be in his presence more than necessary.

Lucius had lost hope for a lifetime of learning and enjoyment of magic when he stepped onto the 9 ¾ Platform. Abraxas had taken him by the scruff of the neck just before he boarded the train and spat in his face.

"You will be a Slytherin, boy, and don't forget that. There has never been a Malfoy outside of Slytherin, so I suggest you find some ambition in that know-it-all brain of yours. You wouldn't want anything to happen to your Mother. She expects a Slytherin son, and would just die to hear anything different. Do. I. Make. Myself. Clear?"
Lucius, at eleven had found a core of strength and nodded, keeping his face the practiced blank mask his father was accustomed to seeing. "Of course, Father." He turned as soon as he was released and walked away.

If it was a Slytherin his Father wanted, then that is what he would get. He could learn in any setting, and would. He would learn many things from his classmates and his House, including revenge.

Lucius shook his head of the memories and turned to the door, needing air. "Excuse me while I check on the boys," he said without conscious thought.

Severus smirked at the retreating back. The man was a goner, his entire being lost already to the hearts of two werewolves of all things. He didn't know it, but Severus was observant, and he knew Lucius better than any other. He had given and taken comfort these last two weeks and they had planned many things during their time, including their covers for the Dark Lord.

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Thanks for reading!
Deceiving the Dark Lord

Chapter 36: Deceiving the Dark Lord

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein

A/N: This chapter is a flashback/time-jump backwards at first then we go back to present time when Harry has just woken up.

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Flashback

The first weekend following Harry's last adventure in the Chamber had arrived. As it was finally Saturday, Lucius sat at his kitchen table eating with his son and their guests. Declan and Remus were becoming steady figures in his life and rooms lately, and he could find no complaint. They were kind and quiet, their very natures alike. Both were still recovering from the full moon on Thursday, but

Draco was the opposite. He was loud, spoiled and too inquisitive for his own good. He'd already gotten into several bouts of mischief when his Daddy's back was turned.

At this particular moment Draco looked bored, but his mischievous mind was planning. He squirmed in the booster seat he always seemed to be strapped to for meals these days and smiled when his Papa reached over and released him from the contraption with a nudge to Declan that they were to go play in Draco's room. Draco took the older boy's hand and pulled him out of the kitchen and into the bathroom, wanting bubbles.

He put a finger to his lips as he shut the door and Declan gave him a weary look. "Draco, we're 'sposed to play in your room, not here."

Draco pouted. "Bubbles."

"Bubbles?"

"Yea! Watch dis!" Draco turned the water to the bathtub on and squeezed the special soap into the water to create an explosion of soap bubbles flying in the air. Both boys were in awe of the bubbles and giggled as they jumped around to pop them. They had been at it only a few minutes when Remus and Lucius heard the water running and ran to see what was going on.

As the door opened Draco ignored the adults, still jumping.

"Draco Lucius, what have I told you about playing in the bathroom?!!" Lucius scolded as he picked up his son. Draco was unfazed and used the new height to pop more bubbles with his uncoordinated hands.

"Bubbles, Daddy!"

Lucius groaned, the hand not holding Draco moving to squeeze the bridge of his nose. Remus was laughing too hard to say anything to that, but spelled the water off and sent a scourgy at the tub. He saw Declan standing in the corner and held his arms out for the boy. Declan smiled tentatively before he ran to Remus to be picked up, knowing by the man's face that he wouldn't be in a lot of trouble.
Draco, seeing that Declan was being held too, clapped. "Bubbles Decan! Bubbles!"

Declan popped one of the bubbles as he rested his head on Remus' shoulder and made the smaller boy laugh harder. It made Declan's heart feel lighter to hear Draco's carefree laugh, and he knew he would put himself in more trouble if only to hear it, and feel that same joy. It was hard for him to remember that there were fun things left in his world, but being around Draco made laughing a little easier.

The adults were busy cleaning the room when Lucius hissed in pain. His mark was burning and Draco was crying. The residual dark energy from the Mark was right against the baby and he cried at the burning feeling it gave him. Lucius moved Draco to his other arm at once as he moved to the nursery, placing Draco in the cot and sending a patronus to Severus. Their plan would have to be put into effect early, but they were determined to pull off this deception for as long as it took.

Remus watched with grim eyes as the man conjured the robe and mask he needed. Lucius looked from his son to his...friend. Remus was a friend, now. He kissed Draco's head and ruffled Declan's hair as the wolf-child squirmed down and attached himself to Lucius' leg. He was a perceptive child and knew something was very, very wrong. Remus moved in, lifting the child again and giving Lucius a pat to the shoulder as the only comfort he knew how to give at the moment. He was scared and knew things were very precarious.

"I'll watch them. Go. Be safe." Remus whispered and watched as the blond man walked away with a grimace.

He met Severus in the halls and they moved quickly to the edge of the wards before apparating to Riddle Manor as their marks both dictated to them—Severus had been called as well.

As they entered the house they followed the usual route to the Throne room and knelt at the doorway to be acknowledged. They waited only a few moments, but it felt like years before the first hisses came from the room.

"Luciusss, Severuuss, how nice of you to answer my summons." The Dark Lord called in a deceitfully calm tone. "Rise, my serpents. Come to me."

The men stood, heads bowed in mock reverence as they knelt and kissed the hem of the robes of their 'Lord.' Lucius had long ago tired of this ritual, for any true pureblood would present their Lordship ring to be revered, not their robe hem.

"Tell me, Lucius, about your letter. I have read it, but I want to hear the tale from your lips."

Lucius looked up to the level of the Dark Lord's knees and began speaking.

"I was summoned two weeks ago from Dumbledore's office for an issue regarding my son. Upon arriving I found he had been returned to his physical and mental self at age three. I watched an argument between Harry Potter and Dumbledore, and made my claim in Potter's defense in order to further watch the events within the castle. When Dumbledore was dismissed I then ingratiated myself by playing up my wayward wife's hand. She has abused the boy in the past and somehow they found out. I played off that I was an unwilling partner in my marriage and to you to gain their trust. Because of this move I was permitted to attend a "Council" meeting of the Gryffindor House. They decided to offer me a position in the governing of Hogwarts, but I had no time to think on the matter. I felt any position inside the castle would only be to your benefit, My Lord, and accepted. I was also offered a teaching position and accepted for the same reason. It is History of Magic, and gives me to teach your history, My Lord."
Voldemort watched his follower with his demented red eyes. "You have done well, my servant. Your position in Hogwarts pleases me, as does your report. You say the brats do not suspect you?"

"No, My Lord."

"Excellent, my serpent. I am pleased. Crucio."

Lucius trembled and tensed at the agonizing pain filling every cell of his being. His muscles locked and he bit his cheek, refusing to scream. He was only held for a few seconds before the spell was released. "Continue to please me, Lucius or that will be like a caress to your body."

Lucius gave a subdued nod to the madman, locking down his mental shields and pushing the remaining pain into a dark corner of his mind.

"And your wife, Lucius? It has been quite some time since I have seen Narcissa. Quite some time."

Lucius affected a saddened expression. "Dead my Lord, by Goblin hands. She tried to take my son in the presence of one, in return they kidnapped her for their beastly ways."

Voldemort rose and walked out of the room without a word. He wanted to continue plotting, and had the information he needed from these particular servants. This gave them both permission to leave. They left and apparated back to Hogwarts, giving thanks to anyone who would listen to still be walking. Lucius needed Severus' help, but it was infinitely better than the alternative.

Oct. 31

Severus and Lucius looked up as Matteo, Ron, Hermione, Heather and Neville stepped into the room, going straight to Harry's side...or as close as Severus would allow them. They could scent a possessive mate from a mile away and kept their distance. Heather, ever the Gryffindor, and being the most fearless when it came to their group asked, "How is he?"

Severus sighed and settled the boy on the bed once more, knowing he needed to put another round of potions into his bond mate. "He woke for a few minutes, asked for you four when he was told how long he'd been out, then fell back asleep. True sleep, this time."

The four students along with Lucius and Remus watched the teen, seeing little difference, but trusting the Potions Master. Severus spelled a few potions into him and tucked him in before they all left the room. Lucius invited the students to join them for dinner as theirs had been interrupted. Ron immediately agreed, still trying to overcome his immediate responses to food. The others agreed as well after a moment.

Dinner with a three-year old was an odd thing. Dinner with a three-year-old Draco was worse. The child was picky and spoilt, prone to fits and throwing food, especially peas. And squash. Peas and squash were aberrations so awful they were not even mentioned in the Malfoy quarters, let alone seen.

Molly had not gotten the memo and that was why, fifteen minutes later, Lucius was waving his wand to dispose of the child size handfuls of half-squished peas that had been grabbed and thrown in the toddler's rage.

The students were trying hard to contain their laughter while Declan tried his best to scoop spoonfuls away from the younger boy when he wasn't looking, to the grateful looks from the adults. Once every pea had been disposed of Draco was able to see the chicken on his plate and happily nibble on it while constantly asking, "Where my Harry?"
This was to the eternal aggravation of his Father who had explained it to him five dozens times a
day, every day for two weeks now that Harry was sleeping.

Hermione decided to change the subject quickly, and mentioned the first thing to come to mind. "Has
anyone seen the report about the health crisis cases?"

Lucius was very curious about this. "What health crisis?"

Hermione bit her lip, wondering why that was the first thing to come to mind. "Um...well, it's
actually been in the muggle news recently. A new strain of smallpox has gotten around.
Apparently...well, they say it is immune to the vaccinations, and it's highly contagious. The Muggle
Prime Minister said they were working on a cure even now. Not sure how much of that to believe
though..."

Neville looked curious. "Smallpox? What is that? Is that like Dragon Pox?"

"Um maybe? I'd have to do more research. Smallpox is a muggle disease that causes fever, body
aches and a rash with bumps all over the body."

"In the Wizarding World it's simply called 'The Pox,' Mya," Matteo chimed in. "It is actually cured
with a spell. Hufflepuff's own ghost, The Fat Friar, cured many a Muggle with it in his day. I've seen
similar in the news, but I haven't read up on it too much as I get too busy with Shelter life."

Molly chimed in. "I heard tale the other day of a few children near Ottery that'd come down with the
Dragon pox. Poor dears. They'll be up and about with a few potions and some rest, but it's a nasty
little ill to catch. My boys never came down with it, though Ginny almost did. Turned a bit green
after spending the day with the Lovegood girl after she'd had it, but no other symptoms."

Hermione looked curious. "That's...interesting," she said which made Ron groan.

"Interesting, she says. Nev, why do I feel an impromptu Library run in my future?"

Neville kept quite as Hermione smacked Ron's arm, making him yelp. Molly laughed at them,
reminded of herself and Arthur when they first started dating.

Dessert could not come fast enough, though Neville was less than happy with the splatters of ice
cream in his hair as he left that night. It was a simple and easy fare of vanilla ice cream, which
Hermione had introduced Molly to over her summers with the Weasleys. Ben and Jerry were now
household names at the Burrow—nearly as precious as her own children's.

Armed with a cleansing charm to the head the four students left for their dorms, or rounds for
Hermione. They walked back together, chatting easily about classes and how happy they were to
have Harry awake again.

They were excited about many things. Matteo was working to set up Shelter C in a new safe house,
and they were very excited as Viktor Krum had finally arrived a few days before. He had quickly
taken over the transfiguration classes. He was a strict teacher, but loved showing off the latest
innovations in Transfiguration Theory, especially for the seventh years who he knew would be
taking their NEWTs soon. He was teaching them a few muggle physics laws that had revolutionized
the way spells were created in terms of transfiguration and especially conjuration of animate objects.

"You know," Ron started. "I was thinking about something." The others gave him their attention. "I
was watching the memory play back yesterday, and something Voldysnorts said was interesting. He
mentioned a Gellert. They only Gellert I've ever heard of is Grindelwald, the last Dark Lord before
Moldyshorts. D'you think they've gotten together at all? Traded notes or something?"
Ron stopped as he realized that his walking companions had frozen a few dozen paces behind him. Neville was pale and Hermione was shaking. Ron walked back to them slowly, not wanting to upset them further. "You think I'm right?" Both nodded their heads.

"Gellert," Neville began, "was once a popular name until Grindelwald took control. Then it became a taboo name. There was no taboo on it, but no one in decades has used that name. I...don't want to think what damage could be wrought from a combination of those two." Neville scrubbed a hand over his face. "Gran tells me about those times, you know. It was...horrifying. The muggles were at war, killings everyday in the Magical side. Strange...creatures popping into existence...demons. And Grindelwald was running the show in both worlds. His obsession with watching the muggle world destroy itself is one of the few things that kept him from becoming too powerful."

Hermione nodded. "Hitler was his little experiment of what would happen when muggles were given power. The reports...they're awful. I've shown you, Ron, and yes, I think you're right. I. We need to do some research. I need to work on something else for a while."

Ron looked at his girlfriend with an odd expression and moved to pull her into his arms. They were very rarely expressive with the other in public, but Mya was too keyed up for him to do otherwise. "The spell removal not coming along very well? I heard Ginny cursing up a storm the other night."

Mya nodded with her head against his chest. "I can't..."

Heather spoke up. "We're closer. Now that we have Professor Snape and Professor Malfoy to talk to about the mark, it's easier, but it's so hard to figure out just how he wove the spell together. There are so many spells involved and there doesn't seem to be a workable pattern in the casting. It just seems like he just put them in as he thought of them without any thought to the craft behind it." She sighed, then laughed when Neville cracked a joke.

"Too bad you can't just cast a \textit{Finite} at it and be done, right?"

"If only things were so simple," Heather said with a sigh of longing. "C'mon, I have "Rise and Fall of the Dark Lords" in my room. I'll grab it and we can do some research."

They moved on, walking towards the tower as they had been before, all deep in thought, unaware that they were no longer alone in the hall.

\textbf{Thanks for reading!}

If I went on it would be left at an action cliffhanger, so I decided to stop here to spare your hearts. :)
Chapter 37: Him

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein*

It was plain and simple to anyone who noticed that he had the best of luck. Unfortunately, few people ever really looked his way, but then again that was just part of his good luck at work. Here he was out for a little stroll and what appears before him?

Four little Gryffindors all lined up in a neat little row, just for him.

He bit off a dark laugh that bubbled up and thought about what spells he wanted to inflict them with. Especially the bitch, Heather. She'd been keeping what was his from him for too long. He decided she'd be his first target. Get her out of the way so his sweet ex-girlfriend would be unprotected once more.

Ripe for the picking.

He moved into the shadows with a curse on his lips, casting almost silently, but not quite non-verbal.

It was that little whisper that gave him away. One of the lions hit the deck as a black and electric blue spell whizzed overhead. Wands in hand, the other three turned with backs to each other and covered the area. Ron, the highest in rank of the group, called orders.

"Neville, other form, now. Scent them out, maim, don't kill. Mya high, Heather low. Stunners and cutters. Search and seize. Go." They spread out, one girl to each side and kept to the shadows as well, seeking out the wizard who dared to try attacking them with their backs turned.

He was unprepared for the military fashion in which they moved and was glad for his disillusioned position. It would buy him time. He recalled his favorite family spell that released a grenade like explosion of cutting curses. He sent one at the feet of each person and the...was that a panther?!

Neville, in his animagus form hissed ferally and showed his fangs at the explosion at his feet. He growled and leapt over it, hunting down the person who dared try to hurt him and his Pridemates.

He watched warily as the animal came closer to him and hatred rose in his soul. He moved from his place inside the alcove and watched as the panther paced closer, using his nose to find the enemy. His face contorted in an evil smile as he thought of a spell no one would know how to counteract. The spell especially 'for enemies' that he'd found. He waited for the beast to get close and pointed his wand at its face.

"Sectumsempra."

Elizabeth Zabini-Mkapa had always roamed the halls of Hogwarts at night. It was just what she'd always done. It was her favorite past time when she missed home, when things were hectic, when she needed air. Was being the operative word.

Elizabeth had not roamed the halls for months, not since that day...during the last spring term. That
day in January when...he came along. They were in different Houses, different years, so when he first introduced himself she was curious. She had seen him around school, of course, and heard about him through others, but never something concrete. They soon began dating, but things went sour quickly.

When she first met him he was a gentleman, sweet and caring, always asking how she was and if she was comfortable. They had sex a few times, but it never felt right, it was never good for her like the other girls said it should have been. She started pulling away from him, and things changed for the worst that fateful April. He was too manipulative for his own good. A true wolf in sheep's skin.

When she started standing up for herself, telling him that she wasn't interested in him anymore he got possessive, angry and jealous. He refused to let her be near her friends, and isolated her from everyone he could. He'd pressured her, manipulated her, and when she'd had enough, had finally, officially broken things off, he'd stalked her, threatened her, and generally made her life miserable any time he caught her alone.

So she had stopped going anywhere without someone with her, especially Heather.

Going to the professors hadn't helped. She went to the Deputy Headmistress as it was an inter-House issue, but McGonagall told her to talk to Dumbledore. He in turn told her to make a better choice in suitor next go round.

As if he would let her date someone else.

Elizabeth fell pregnant in March, but she didn't know until the end of June. She'd broken off her relationship in May, when he'd started becoming violent, but she thought all the signs that should have been so obvious to her as red flags were just stress related.

He was a violent sort, though not where anyone would notice, and it scared her. Especially that day. The last time she'd been trapped alone with him he threatened to throw her down the stairs if she didn't come back to him. He'd backhanded her hard enough to rattle her sense and cut her cheek with his ring, and that was when she cursed him and ran to Gryffindor Tower for the first time.

It wasn't until she found out about the baby over the summer break that she'd begun really wondering what she was going to do to get him out of her life. He had no idea of her condition, and she would glamour herself to the nines to make sure he never did. She was due to deliver the baby over Christmas Break, and the Pride members had sworn to protect her when Heather had told them.

Elizabeth had not wandered the Halls of Hogwarts in months, but tonight the baby was restless and she needed air. Her roommates were starting to notice things, and she couldn't allow anyone to know.

She paced a bit, rubbing her belly in small circles to calm her sweet child, her eyes drifting to the dark landscapes outside the windows. The night called to her, it always had. She leaned against the stones of the castle and watched the sliver of moon sit in the night sky, watched the quiet stillness of the grounds at night.

It was then she heard the howl of a feline in pain, the whisper of Dark Magic and a pained cry of "No!" Elizabeth, sensing she was in the wrong place and the wrong time, ran. She'd hidden in the first alcove she'd seen, and stepped right into a pair of invisible arms.

"Well hello, Elizabeth dearest. Just couldn't stay away from me could you, my sweet?" Elizabeth froze at the voice in her ear, the arm wrapped too tight under her bust. "You've been avoiding me, little bitch, and I won't stand for it any longer."
He didn't realize his disillusioned body became visible as soon as he laid hands on the girl, but he didn't care. He stepped from the alcove and laughed at the sight before him. The panther was a boy again, Neville Longbottom, and currently blinded by the wounds across his face. He was writhing in pain just as he should be.

He laughed as he noticed Heather and Hermione casting healing spells one after another on the boy, making sure to keep Elizabeth in front of him as a shield. "Poor, wittle Wongbottom. Got a bit of fluff in your eye, have you?"

Ron, assessing the situation, stepped between the girls and their enemy as they pulled Neville out of the fray.

"You've been warned before about your behavior. Let the girl go and drop your wand."

"Or what? Gonna call your guard dog? Haven't seen hide nor hair of Potter in weeks. Did he die? Please tell me he did. That would just make. My. Day." With each bit off word he pushed his wand harder into Elizabeth's neck. It angered him that he had yet to elicit any reaction from the girl, and promised himself he would break her. Soon.

He moved his arm to get a better grip on her and broke a glamour with a cry of pain from the girl. "Ooh, look what we have here. You're pregnant? Hmmm. Seems my little bitch has hidden something from me." He said as he wrapped his hand around her jaw. "We're going to have to have a talk about this, aren't we?"

Elizabeth closed her eyes, refusing to respond to him, only calling out in her mind to anyone who could hear her unspoken words.

He shook her. "Aren't we?!"

Ron paled. This complicated matters. He placed a *muffliato* spell up for a second and said quickly, "Hogwarts, we need your Champion." He took it down and stalled as he tried to find a way to end the situation without Elizabeth coming to any harm.

"Let her go, Goldstein."

"No...I don't think I will." He looked behind him at the clear stretch of shadowed hall. "Here's what's going to happen, Weasley. You are going to walk down this hall with your little friends. Might want to see about Longbottom's face, he looks a bit peaky. Then, when you are gone, I am going to walk the opposite direction. If I see any hint of you or your housemates, I kill her. Understood?"

Ron took a step forward but stopped when Goldstein placed his wand under Elizabeth's jaw again. "Don't think I won't kill her, Weasley. This bitch is mine to do with as I please, and I think a bit more blood is in order before the night is done." He lowered his wand to her side, aiming at her calf.

"*Diffindo.* Wouldn't want her to think she could ever get away from me, now do we?" He asked over the pained cry from the useless sac of skin in his arms.

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Severus was making the last checks on Harry, continuing to ignore the figure in the corner, when the teen suddenly sat up in bed. His eyes were wild jade and his magic swirled around him in a frenzy as he snarled. In an instant his pajamas melted away, replaced seconds later by his armor, the same armor he'd worn to battle Dumbledore. Though it was quick, the sudden sight of his naked bondmate gave Severus a start. Harry growled low and jumped from the bed, running through the room,
though Severus, after a moment to come back to himself, was hot on his heels.

"Potter! Harry, what are you—stop this! Stop this instant!" He called after the boy, but it went unheard.

The older man watched as Harry ran like a thief with the Crown Jewels. His calls for Harry to stop were to no avail. Suddenly, as he watched, the boy disappeared in the shadows of the hall, Matteo quick on his heels with a quiet, "shit!"

Severus was left alone, panting and running to the same spot. He ran his hands over the walls, but there was nothing. Nothing to tell him what had just happened, until a gust of air moved his hair and the castle's familiar magic moved around him, pulling him forward. Trusting that the castle knew what it was doing, he followed.

The dark slytherin melted into the shadows in that instant, the pull of Hogwarts' magic surrounding him.

Multiple screams rang out through the hall at the same time.

Elizabeth screamed as the cutting curse hit her calf, blood pouring from the wound. She moved her jaw as he adjusted his grip to silence her and bit his hand as hard and deep as she could. His scream of pain was music to her ears as he released her and she limped to the side of the hall. Ron, seeing the opening, cast, "Immobulus Maxima!"

Anthony Goldstein had turned to grab at Elizabeth as the spell hit, freezing his motions. At the same time a throwing knife flew through the air and embedded itself in the inner wrist of his wand hand, causing his wand to fly away with the momentum. His screams were silenced by the immobilizing spell, but they would have been great screams of pain as the slow acting paralytic on the daggers burned slowly through his veins.

Harry growled from his position in the shadows and stalked forward. "You little piece of shit. What did I tell you, Goldstein. One chance. You took advantage the last time I was out of the castle to prey on Elizabeth, and I did nothing because she asked it of me, but no more." Harry's magic swirled around him, as green as his eyes and as feral as he felt. He moved forward and took Goldstein's wand.

"Priori Incantatem."

He watched as the last ten or so spells were read out above the parchment and made sure to read them. "Tsk, tsk, Goldstein. That is seven Dark spells, illegal as well, and that's only what you haven't already wiped." Harry looked down at the unmoving figure before him and pushed his magic into his voice. "By the will of Hogwarts, as Her Champion, I hereby expel you from her halls on grounds of casting illegal and Dark spells within her halls and with the intent to harm other students." Harry growled. "I will see you turned over to the DMLE for this, Goldstein."

The boy paled before Harry hit him with a stunner, knocking him unconscious to be dealt with later. He had students to protect.

As Harry did his job Matteo moved over to the very pregnant girl and began helping her. Harry looked over his Pride, for he'd long since considered Elizabeth one of his own, calling out, "Report."

Heather looked up, prepared to snarl at the next person who came near her as she worked, but
calmed as she saw her Alpha. "Explosion of mild but deep cutting curse, healed. Need scaradicate salve in the next few hours, but not urgent. Urgent matter: unknown dark curse to facial area. I have blood flow stemmed, but the wounds won't close."

Severus watched her unique brand of healing with no small bit of awe. She had her hands placed on the boy's abdomen and pushed her magic into him to use as she directed. He looked at the wounds and cursed.

"I know this spell. Back away Ms. Jameson." He held his wand aloft and slowly began chanting, "*Vulnera Sanentur*" again and again to heal the cursed wounds. The blood seemed to move back in time, slowly traveling across his skin to return to his body, the skin knitting itself back together. There was a slight ridge left across Neville's right cheek from his nose to jaw, and a ridge through the middle of his right eyebrow. The scars left were only slightly raised, and would leave only leave a small hint of being there. It was impossible to completely remove traces of curse scars.

The boy had been lucky. The cursed wounds struck just millimeters above and below his eye, leaving him blind only from the blood pouring past.

Severus moved back, and let Heather and Hermione continue to heal the smaller wounds on him. "He needs blood replenishers, but should otherwise be fine." He turned and moved to Elizabeth, helping Matteo as he calmed the girl. Severus cast a healing spell on the cut to her leg as the other man softly spoke to her, drawing her mind away from what had happened and onto slowing her breathing. The wound would heal well, it was deep, but a precise laceration.

"Ron, stun Neville and levitate him to our Healing Room. Hermione, help him. Heather check Elizabeth here, then take her with Ron." He moved forward as he spoke, wanting to make sure the girl was okay. He ran his hand over Elizabeth's hair.

"You know better than to wander, especially when I was not here. You know better, Elizabeth."

The girl in question nodded her head, tears streaming down her face as she sobbed, burying her face in Matteo's shirt to hide from her friend and protector. He held her, feeling his own lion fall away as he watched his little lion return to himself as well.

Harry was losing the fight to stay conscious. As he stood with the pregnant witch sobbing into Matteo's chest he knew two things:

One, he was about to pass out. Again.

Two, Severus was there to keep him safe.

"Trust me, my child."

If magic had a voice, that's what it would have said to him as Severus felt himself pulled into the shadows. Literally.

Severus closed his eyes. There was only darkness surrounding him, but he knew he was moving. The feeling was disorienting, so he closed his eyes, trusting Hogwarts to take him where She wanted. He could feel Her, guiding him and proud of his trust in Her. When the feeling of motion stopped he remained still, listening.

He heard Harry, and slowly started piecing things together. "What did I tell you, Goldstein. One
chance. You took advantage the last time I was out of the castle to prey on Elizabeth, and I did nothing because she asked it of me, but no more."

Snape stepped across the shadow to an alcove and kept watch over the students. He was worried over Harry's state. The boy would be running on adrenaline alone at this point, and fumes of it at that. He waited, after healing the Longbottom teen of his own curse. He knew at some point that Harry would run out of fumes. He keeping an eye on them all, and when he saw his bond mate fall, he was there.

He caught Harry, lifting his slight weight in his arms, as Matteo stood with Elizabeth. Both men watched the girl wince and limp as her calf continued the healing process, but Matteo solved the problem by lifting her into his arms, much to her protest that she could walk.

"Please allow me to help you, Ms. Elizabeth." He said, and she settled with a soft whine.

Severus sent Heather ahead to work on Neville as Goldstein's body floated behind him by a wandless spell.

At the Lion's Den Severus was allowed entrance, as was Elizabeth without any fuss. They moved to the Healing Room with ease, the lateness meaning there were few out of bed.

As soon as Severus walked in he was in awe of their healing room. He'd been shown the door during Lucius' stay inside the Lion's Den, but had no reason to enter it. He moved quickly to a bed and set Harry upon it as Matteo settled Elizabeth in another. The prisoner was put on a third with the accompanying binding and incarcerating spells. When Severus again focused on Elizabeth he ran a diagnostic scan over her and frowned.

"Come to me tomorrow, I will make you a prenatal nutrient potion to counteract some of the vitamin deficiencies you have. Muggle prenatal care is fine, but you are a witch, and your magic use creates a few deficiencies that muggles cannot account for."

The girl gave him a watery, "Thank you, Professor."

"You are welcome. You are safe now, Ms. Mkapa." He went to a cabinet and poured a half-measure of calming draught into a phial. "Taking a half-measure is fine on occasion. It will not harm you or the baby in small frequencies. I will have some pregnancy safe potions for you soon. Please do not hesitate to come to me or any of the Representatives if you need something, understood?"

She nodded, the only thing she could do when faced with such an intimidating yet soothing voice, and took the potion, drifting off almost immediately as the adrenaline crash hit her system. Before she went under Severus ran a soothing hand over hers. "Your brother will always stand by your side, Elizabeth, do not be afraid to tell him." She nodded, her eyes drooping more with every second passing.

"Will...'omise..."

Severus turned and looked around the room, proud to see Ron standing guard over Harry as the teen slept deeply. He was less happy to see Matteo moving to sit beside his little mate, but said nothing. He saw that the girls had Neville's care under control and that Goldstein was the last to be taken care of. The young man was still unconscious, but he was taking no chances. Severus made a split second decision.

"Hogwarts, I am in need of assistance. I need a room to store Mr. Goldstein until authorities can be called in the morning."
Severus watched a door materialize on the side wall of the room and bowed to it. "My thanks." He levitated the body of the wayward student and tossed him in with a flick of his wand as the door opened. It shut of its own accord and he grinned maliciously, already composing the letter to Amelia Bones in his head.

Turning back to the students he wished them a good night. With a slight pause he moved to Harry, growling low in his throat at the sight of another man so close, literally and figuratively, to his mate.

A mate he had only a tenuous bond with.

He watched Matteo lift his hands, showing he meant no harm. His wrist twirled and Severus glared as a small *Muffliato* dropped around them.

"I'm truly not trying to move into your territory, Professor. Harry is just my former mentee and current Alpha. Nothing more."

Severus said nothing, only waiting and watching a blush creep over the silver-eyed man's cheeks.

"Seriously, Professor. I would have more *inclinations* towards Elizabeth than Harry, the fairer sex and all that," he mumbled.

Severus simply nodded and moved back to his little mate. He cupped Harry's cheek for a moment before walking out, pausing only to say, "Best not to let Ms. Mkapa's brother hear, if your choice of example proves anything of those *inclinations*, Mr. Dare."

He never looked back on his trek to the dungeons, both relieved that his perceived competition was nothing of the sort, and determined that he would have time with his bond mate and soon...even if he had to give his brat a detention to get him to sit still for a moment.

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**Thanks for reading!**

**Sorry for the delay, work and health have been difficult, but here is the latest chapter. Next up the DMLE comes to visit.**
Amelia Bones walked into the Great Hall of Hogwarts with a flourish, trailed as she was by her three Auror detail. She had gotten the letter from Severus early that morning and made the trip as soon as she was able. She was curious, as the letter was vague and only asked in explicit terms that she "bring an Auror and herself to Hogwarts in an official capacity."

She saw the looks on the faces of the adults as she walked in and realized something very grave indeed must have happened if Arthur was present when he too should have been at the Ministry. She was met at the door to the Great Hall by Madam Longbottom, Arthur Weasley, Severus Snape and a sleepy looking Harry Potter as soon as they saw her.

"Madam Bones, thank you for coming so quickly," Augusta began.

"Madam Longbottom, Mr. Weasley, Professor Snape, Mr. Potter. Thank you for inviting me. The letter I received spoke of an official matter. I'd like to hear more about this, maybe in a more private setting?"

Harry was very eager to get out of the Great Hall and subsequent questions about his whereabouts the past few weeks. Writing it off as one of his normal escapades as a stay in the Hospital Wing was keeping most people at bay for the moment, but it wasn't likely to hold under pressure.

"Yes! There is something we'd like to show you, and I think today would be a very good time to hold that meeting we spoke of." Harry said, giving the woman a shrewd look. "I do apologize, but I've been a bit... indisposed since we last spoke, and was unable to follow-up until now. I have no classes for a few hours, if you are not opposed, Madam?"

"Not at all, Mr. Potter. Lead the way." They and the Aurors made their way to the Gryffindor Tower, with ease. As they reached the Fat Lady she gave Harry a measuring look.

"Come to rid my rooms of that horrid boy?" She sniffed in mock disdain. She was more upset that her prized Gryffindor had spent his nights outside of her watch over the last few weeks than that they were housing Goldstein inside her rooms.

Harry, knowing how protective their portrait was, smiled and bowed before her. "I have come with the cavalry to rid you of any and all evil, Madam. May your walls be ever free from harm."

The Fat Lady blushed and waved his words away. "You're a flirt you are, Mr. Potter." She swung open to admit them and closed tightly after. Severus gave his bond mate an exasperated look. Flirt indeed. The boy was dead on his feet, but still acting as if he'd not been processing an entire grimoire of information the past few weeks.

"Last night," Severus began in a no-nonsense voice. "Approximately one half hour after curfew Anthony Goldstein of House Hufflepuff attacked no less than five students from various houses. Upon capture his wand showed signs of Dark and illegal spells having been cast before and during the ambush. He cast with intent to injure, if not murder, held a student hostage and threatened to kill
said student as well. He is currently being housed in a room that I requested of Gryffindor Tower."

One of the Aurors, a Gawain Robards, interrupted him with a laugh. "Whatchu mean a room you requested? You can't just go 'round asking for things and poof, there they are!"

Madam Bones glared at her subordinate. "Silence, Auror Robards. You forget your place, and where you are."

Robards looked around the room as Severus continued. "As I was saying. Mr. Goldstein is currently immobilized via a potion, which will keep him unconscious but alive until the counter is given." He held out a phial of liquid to the Head of the DMLE, which she took and pocketed. "He has been expelled from the school, but the charges placed against him warrant arrest, and the new Representatives of Hogwarts feel it is high time the DMLE was allowed to prosecute students who commit felonious offenses warranting said action."

The castle's visitors were stunned at the offenses listed, and that they were finally being given access to Hogwarts. Amelia had fought for access since Susan's first year when her niece came home for summer break with wild rumors of trolls, homicidal professors, and murdering students. She fought again and again every year after, but to no avail. To now be given this open, unsolicited invitation into the school was a blessing, and very surprising.

Amelia bowed her head shortly to the group. "The DMLE thanks you for your trust, and we are dedicated to aiding the school in any way we can."

Severus raised his head back in respect, knowing how to play the game of politics. "We thank you for your help and promise that the isolationist reign of Albus Dumbledore will be no more."

Kingsley Shacklebolt and Nymphadora Tonks, the other Aurors to visit the school in Amelia Bones' detail both gave a start at this, but made no other move at a steadying hand signal from Arthur.

Harry, seeing the lull in conversation, moved on. "He's in here." He led them through the common room to a hall and into the door at the very end. Once inside he saw the looks of awe that the Gryffindor House would have a Healing Room. Even Arthur and Madam Longbottom were surprised. Harry ignored them for a moment to move to the door holding Goldstein. "He's on the other side of that door."

Amelia waved a hand to Kingsley and the tall black man moved to retrieve the assailant. He levitated the body out and set it on one of the Healing Room beds. Amelia moved forward and fed the potion to him, waiting for the young man to awaken. She spelled handcuffs on him and attached them to the bed rails as he began blinking his eyes to clear them.

All at once the boy seemed to remember the events of the night before and he froze. It wasn't until he recognized some of the people in front of him that he began moving, and when he did he thrashed on the bed, trying to get away.

Harry moved to the side of the room to keep himself calm, and allowed the adults to do their work. Had anyone but Amelia Bones come to see about the incident he would have scoffed and dealt with the bastard himself. Harry had little respect for people in power, and even less for people who bought their power. Amelia Bones was a powerful person, but she earned her title, and was genuinely concerned with the students of Hogwarts—even if only because her single remaining family member was housed there ten months out of the year.

Severus moved back to stand with Harry. He'd seen first hand the damage this student had created and was unwilling to set a bias against him. He knew he would not be able to hold his tongue if the
boy started telling lies, and he wanted Amelia to pull the story from him herself.

Severus saw how pale Harry was already and pulled a replenishing potion from his robes. "This will not give you the crash that the other versions may cause, it will instead quicken your core to replenish itself and your energy stores."

Harry gave it a wary look before taking the potion and downing it with a grimace and shudder at the taste. He pulled a chair from the wall and sat with the older man, ready to watch the show that was about to unfold.

No less than a half-hour later, and no few threats of trial by veritaserum, Anthony Goldstein was taken away by Auror Robards. Goldstein knew that with the Gryffindor's pensieve evidence that he could be sent to Azkaban, if only for a few years. He was adamant that he'd done nothing wrong and wanted legal counsel before he would speak to anyone. He would work hard and hire the best lawyer possible to see that evidence against him never be submitted.

He'd get Elizabeth back, and that bitch would pay.

As soon as he was apparated away by Auror Robards, Amelia turned back to the group. "He will stand trial in front of the Wizengamot. Everyone present that day will be asked to attend."

Severus nodded and started to speak before Harry interrupted. "If the Chosen One was to send in pensieve evidence of his crimes, could we avoid the trial?" He asked wearily. He did not want Elizabeth's name drug through the mud with this type of case, nor any chance that someone could question her about her ability to care for her baby. She'd been through too much and deserved a break—and if Harry could use his name to get it for her, well it was a price he was willing to bear.

Amelia watched his face. "I believe something can be arranged for a pretrial viewing and a decision about whether to move on from there or close the case could be made." She could give him no more than that.

"Accepted." Harry, feeling that there was no time like the present as his core began working to regenerate and fill him with more energy, moved to grab a few empty vials and pulled the memories one after another after another. Seven vials were filled for the Head of the DMLE and witnessed as sealed by the three Aurors.

"Simply give us warning of the time and date, and I will make sure the students involved are present if a trial is still needed," Severus said softly. He looked to the anxious aurors and Order members behind her. "I do believe that everyone present has the right to hear Mr. Potter's story, for one reason or another."

Harry agreed. "Yes. There is a meeting room down the hall we can adjourn to?"

Amelia gave a shrewd look at her aurors, but dismissed her anger. She'd had suspicions that Order members had infiltrated her ranks over the years. The only thing staying her tongue was that she had never asked these two personally of where their loyalties lay. "Please lead the way, Mr. Potter."

Arthur and Augusta, having heard the tale, moved to excuse themselves, but Amelia kept them back. "I think that you will be pertinent to the second portion of this meeting. Would you mind staying?"

Neither opposed the woman and the group adjourned to the meeting room of the Lion's Den. Mipsy and Mopsy popped in as soon as they sat. "Master Harry, can Mispys and Mopsys be getting anything for yous?"

"Tea and biscuits, please."
When everyone had been served, Harry began speaking. "It began every year on September first with a corrupt Sorting Hat who doesn't know it's been manipulated, and a greedy Deputy Headmistress who wanted only one thing: the Enslavement of the House of Gryffindor for her own personal army..."

By the end of his story Tonks was in tears, Amelia was speechless, Kingsley had hexed a hole in the wall, Harry's hands were shaking, and Severus drank far too much tea in order to keep his silence. Arthur and Augusta were both wavering between tearful regret and mind numbing anger, both having finally gotten the full story, unedited by their children or ward.

"The reason for this sudden restructuring of Hogwarts was due to the spell breaking. We knew that with their hold over us broken, and with Hogwarts' help, we could get our justice and change the school for the better."

"How did it break?" Arthur finally asked.

Harry blinked, not expecting that question. "Um...I'm not sure. We have theories, but we will never be completely sure."

"Theories then," Augusta barked. Harry smiled at her, liking her brusque manner. It left little room for the foolishness that being politically correct brought with it.

"Well, the first theory is that because I finally have possession of the Gryffindor lordship ring. I—," but he was stopped by the sounds of surprise from everyone in the room. He waved it off without thought. "It's Heather's by blood right, but she gave it to me to hold in trust until she has a son to pass it to. You'd understand if you met her, but Heather doesn't care for the power or responsibility that comes with politics."

Those who had met the girl nodded, and Harry moved on, one hand running through his mess of hair.

"So, the idea is that I was able to break the spell because McGonagall was going against my wishes as the Lordship ring holder. I'm not partial to that theory because if it were true the spell would've broken before McGonagall cast it this year, and it would mean a lot of other things would have to be in place. It's too complicated to work." The adults in the room looked at him with shocked glances, still all thinking along similar lines: Harry Potter held the Lordship ring of Godric Gryffindor and Salazar Slytherin...

Harry scrubbed a hand over his face this time, still not noticing their shock and awe, though he would have laughed had he glanced over at all. "The second theory has more to do with the spell's effects and is generally more accepted in the Lion's Den. It's based on the seventh year students' ability to overcome the stereotypes we are forced to perpetuate and believe.

"When Draco was de-aged we all saw that he was afraid and moved to protect him. We felt compassion for and protective of a Slytherin student even though we were hard-wired to hate them. We think that the spell had been weakened by Hogwarts enough for a Gryffindor to feel kinship to a Slytherin, which is against the nature of the spell.

"This broke the connection that McGonagall's crystal had on us and forced a build up of magical energy inside the crystal focus. This overloaded the crystal, shattering it, and consequently broke the spell completely."
The adults in the room were awed at his logic, and he noticed. He gave them a cheeky smile. "We have no less than five students who can eventually trace their families back to Rowena Ravenclaw, and they've thought nonstop on this since it happened. They actually came to me this morning about it."

"And where are Dumbledore and McGonagall now?" Shacklebolt asked in a rough voice.

"Minerva McGonagall is dead." He stated bluntly and refused to elaborate. "Dumbledore is still kept in the dungeons, with a grate for wastes and food delivered twice daily by a House Elf. They pop the food in without setting foot near the cell themselves." Amelia was reminded of her reason for asking Arthur and Augusta to stay.

"Excellent," Amelia said with a sharp glint to her eyes, choosing to focus on the later part of that bit of information. "Do you remember, Mr. Potter, that you asked me how you could go about deposing Albus Dumbledore from his illustrious positions? I have an answer for you."

Harry and Severus both sat up, very interested. "Go on."

Amelia smiled. "As you know, Dumbledore holds position as Chief Wizard of the Wizengamot. That position is easily handled. We have letters of summons sent to the Wizengamot seat holders who are of age, once you touch the letter it sends a notice of acceptance. If you accept and do not show up for your seat without sending prior warning, your position is lost."

Harry looked skeptical, which prompted Augusta to speak. "It seems too easy to work, Mr. Potter, but you must think of the past to see why it is so important. In times of war leaders who held family seats on the Wizengamot had their time split between political and physical warfare. They were commanding soldiers and proposing laws. To accept a date and time for a Wizengamot session meant you promised to put a hold to fighting for that day. If one were to accept the date then use that time when the other commanders were moving politically to kill their men...he would be dishonored and removed from any political holdings he currently had, including any family seat or vote."

Arthur, knowing Harry's caustic view of the Wizarding World's governance, added, "And we all know that isn't the strangest of laws the Wizengamot just happened to never take off the books."

Harry gave a nod. "So all we have to do is slip him the next summons letter and make sure he touches it?"

Amelia nodded. "Yes. The summons will appear in the Headmaster's Office, as Dumbledore has not changed it to be anything else. From there you would simply slip it to him and wait."

Harry's eyes held an evil glint. "Perfect. And his other holdings?"

Amelia was less sure, but Kingsley put in his two cents. "With one title of power comes another, so will one fall as others are taken away."

Harry gave a small nod. "I'm sure I can create a few other problems for Dumbledore along the way."

Severus snorted with surprise at the thought that came to mind. He looked right at the young man, saying only, "Go wild."

Thanks for reading!
Next chapter features more Snarry, more Draco etc. I understand most people want more fluff, but I do have a plot. So...be patient, it's coming.
Tell Me

Chapter 39: Tell me

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein*

Snape looked up from his desk at the knock on his door later that evening. He smirked, knowing who it was and barked, "Enter." He watched Harry trudge in, a slip of paper in hand as he sat in the chair in front of his desk. He went back to his paperwork, using the angle to hide a smile and let the other man stew.

Harry, himself, was a jumble of emotions. One part mad, another part calm, another part confused. He'd been sitting at a table with a few of the third years, asking about how they felt, if anyone was having issues with their animagi, when a letter popped onto the table next to him. He frowned at it and checked it for hexes, teaching the students as he went, but it was clean.

He groaned when he opened the letter. Bastard.

\[
\text{It seems, Mr. Potter, that you have} \\
\text{garnered a few detentions through your} \\
\text{absences and missing work. You will come to my} \\
\text{office tonight after your evening meal.} \\
\text{Do not be late.} \\
S.S.
\]

\text{Bastard.}

Harry supposed it could have been worse...Ron had once lost points for breathing too loudly, so at least this was fairly legitimate. He wondered why the man didn't just ask him to come down, rather than excusing it with a detention, but then thought that having a detention as a cover was probably safest all around. Especially when visiting Slytherin territory.

Severus, feeling the silence had gone on long enough, looked at his bond mate. "Do you know why I truly asked you here, Harry?"

Harry raised an eyebrow, feeling cheeky. "I'm irresistible and adorable?"

The corner of Severus' lips quirked, though he stifled the smile that wanted to come out. "Not quite."

He stood and moved around the desk, smirking as he saw and felt those emerald eyes given him a long once over. "The bond we started making has sat idle, and it is weak. I thought you would like some time together to...talk and if nothing else the more time we spend near each other the stronger the bond will become. As it is Saturday you have a later curfew, so I thought we could spend some time working on this, if you are amenable?"

Harry could see how much it took Severus to say this, and he realized that though he'd carried a slight flame for the older man for a few years, it had only been a few weeks for Severus to turn his personal opinion around.
Harry stood and hefted his backpack, moving forward to close the gap between them. He slowly took the older man's hand and shivered at the feeling it sparked. "After you..."

Lucius was sitting in his office grading papers when a knock sounded. He called for the person to enter as he finished the last few lines of Parvati Patil's heritage paper. Once finished he put his quill away and looked up to see the nervous face of his delegate, as they were now calling the student representatives.

"Ms. Mkapa, how can I help you?"

Elizabeth bit her lip and, knowing that her Professor knew of her secret, dropped the glamour to rub soothing circles over her burgeoning belly. "I...I'm unsure of who I can trust, Professor. With Anthony's arrest it is sure to get out about...my c-condition, and I don't know what to do."

Lucius looked her over. "You haven't told your parents." It wasn't a question, but a statement. "Nor your brother, I assume. How far along are you?"

"Tomorrow is 33 weeks. I'm due around December 20th." She ignored the comment on her family. It hurt too much.

"33 out of 40 correct? My apologies, it's been quite some time since I've been near a pregnant witch."

Elizabeth relaxed some and nodded. "Yes, Professor. I...I don't know what to do...about anything really?"

Lucius steepled his hands before his face, elbows resting on his desk top as he thought. "What do you not want, Ms. Mkapa. Sometimes it is best to rule out the unsatisfactory paths before looking at those you have available."

Elizabeth closed her eyes. "Um...Well, I know I want to continue the pregnancy. I had the option to...t-terminate before, but I couldn't. I...I just don't want Anthony anywhere near my baby." She heatedly whispered, wrapping her arms around her bump.

"Are you willing to fight for your child?"

Elizabeth froze, wide-eyed for a moment before she nodded. "Anything."

"Good girl. You need to tell your parents and you need to go to the Ministry to alert the Department of Underage Magic about your pregnancy. Because of the stressors involved with a baby a student is allowed to use magic away from school if she becomes pregnant. Regardless of if you want to, you need to have complete access to your magic to protect yourself. The Goldsteins are an uppity, but rising pureblood family. They are obsessed with power because they currently have some smidgen of self-importance. They will not stop until they have enough power, and in their case enough will never come. They will try to punish you for Mr. Goldstein's arrest and expulsion, and they will probably try to take your baby. You must contact your parents, Elizabeth."

By this time Lucius had risen from his chair and moved around his desk, he knelt before the girl, holding one of her hands as she cried in her distraught state. Softly, so she didn't notice, he called, "I need a House Elf to go to the Slytherin dorms and bring me Blaise Zabini immediately." She didn't hear through her sniffles and sobs, and slowly began to calm as he waited.
Finally, incredulously, she gave in. With a voice scratchy from sobbing she conceded. "I'll tell them."

"Good girl. You'll feel better for having shared this, Elizabeth. Ms. Lovegood and Ms. Jameson cannot carry all of your secrets for you, you know."

She blinked at this, unsure how he knew that Luna and Heather were her only friends, her only confidantes…A knock on the door shocked her from her thoughts and she bit her lip worriedly.

"Enter!"

They sat together on the couch. Severus graded essays with a small lapboard floating over his lap, his red ink flying at a slightly slower pace than normal as his inner frustrations had been drained as soon as Harry had taken his hand an hour earlier.

Harry lay with his head resting on Severus' thigh as he read the book for his History of Magic class. He'd been reading Hermione's notes, but they had actually become supplementary to the book rather than the other way around—unlike Binns' class had always been. He was making an effort to catch up, but it was hard. Three weeks of Wizarding etiquette was a lot to take in. It didn't help that he had to keep forcing his focus on the book.

He could feel the bond in the back of his head. It was bigger, stronger and asserting itself already. It told him subtle things, like how Severus was near, and that he wasn't hurting, but that was the extent it had reached so far. If he concentrated he could feel the bond and how it connected him to the man next to him, like a golden rope tethering their souls together.

Harry thought it rather amazing that something so pure could happen to him, for he was the opposite of a pure being. He was a killer, a fighter, he had blood on his hands and his conscious. He'd stolen and used every ounce of cunning in his body to stay alive and keep the other kids alive while he lived on the streets. He'd done what he could, pickpocketing, stealing food and clothes…it just never seemed enough when lives were on the line.

He thought back over the years, and couldn't believe the luck he had fallen into when those officers had hauled him back to the Dursley house. He'd hated them at the time, but without them he'd never come to find his trust vault. It was that money that allowed him to go to Hogwarts, since he'd been able to set Heather up handsomely, and with that he'd given the street kids a chance at survival.

He knew that he'd suffered under McGonagall's reign, knew that his taking care of Heather had come at a cost, but that had rarely bothered him so much as watching his housemates suffer under her. He knew tyranny, he knew pain, he knew sacrifice, and he was the caregiver. Harry was the one who took care of other, he always had, and it was ingrained in his psyche. To watch helplessly as McGonagall threatened his Pride, to swallow his rage as his sister was sorted into Gryffindor, and have no way to warn her about what would happen...that almost killed him.

So he'd submitted on the outside and schemed inside his house. Gred and Forge's pranking had grown in their maliciousness and targeting under Harry's guidance. He was able to show them tricks from the streets to cover themselves while still hitting their target. He showed them how to pull small tricks on the students as a whole to cover their real prank.

Harry remembered once, when Gred and Forge had just invented the portable swamps. They'd sold them to anyone with a spare sickle, made sure to get caught by McGonagall, have their stores confiscated. They'd then bought back their extras from Pride Members and set them off inside the
They gave her their most innocent looks as they suggested that to say they were the perpetrators was akin to saying she was an incompetent Head of House in front of the entire school. She backed off with some talking down from Dumbledore, and the Twins were celebrated as heroes in the common room that night.

Harry grimaced as he remembered the events that followed the next night. It seemed that Dumbledore being stuck in his office for a few extra hours gave him time to pin down a new area to force Harry into for Horcrux Hunting. It was a nightmare he never wanted to return to.

Severus, for his part, had finished grading and had watched his bond mate for the past few minutes. He found it fascinating to feel the shifts in emotions that young man felt while nothing showed on his face. There were a myriad of emotions, but it was the ones that currently hovered on the edges that worried him, especially when he saw the flash of pain cross that stoic face.

"Tell me." Severus said simply.

Harry started and jumped slightly, looking up and back slightly to the man's face. "Huh?"

Severus' lips quirked. "I can feel your pain and betrayal, brat. Tell me what caused it?"

Harry closed his eyes, wondering just where to start. He took a deep breath in and out through his nose.

"What do you know about Horcruxes?"

Elizabeth rose, her glamour falling right into place as the door opened. She moved and put Lucius between herself and the door as she started to bid her Professor a good night. She stopped as she heard his voice.

"Lizzie? What's wrong? Are you okay?"

Elizabeth looked around Professor Malfoy to see her half-brother. "Bay? What are you..." She trailed off and gave a heated look at the Professor.

Lucius simply looked at her knowingly. "Tell him."

Blaise looked confusedly between them. "Tell me what? Lizzie?"

Elizabeth felt tears swimming in her eyes and looked at the ground. Blaise walked forward, almost running into his professor in his haste. He took his baby sister's hands in his own, but frowned as she used the hold to push him back.

"I...You know how I was so secretive over the summer? Drove Mamma nuts, you know? I...Bay." Her voice broke. "Please don't hate me." With that she looked away and dropped the glamour and charms that kept him from hitting her baby bump.

Blaise was speechless. Pregnant. Lizzie. Baby. Lizzie was just a baby. She can't be having a baby. She's too young...No. "Lizzie. Lizzie-love, talk to me. Please..."
She said nothing. She couldn't find her voice, and if she had...she was too emotional to be coherent.

Blaise looked up at Lucius, the first lucid thought dawning on him. "Did you do this? Did you do this to my sister?!

Lucius blinked at the boy, then thought of how it may look. "No, Mr. Zabini. I found out only yesterday, and only because of my position as a Hogwarts Representative."

He nodded, accepting his words. Lizzie had not moved, so he pulled her closer, his hands running through her dark hair. "Sweet. Lizzie-love. I need you to talk to me...Lo ti amerò sempre, Sorellina. Do not doubt me."

Elizabeth broke down, her knees giving out in her sobs. Blaise dropped with her, leaning his back against Malfoy's desk as he pulled his distraught sister into his lap, holding her while she cried as he had done before for many, many years. He whispered soft words, moving in and out of English as he comforted her, but telling her the same thing over and over: There was nothing she could do to lose his love.

As she calmed down Blaise continued to rock her, hand rubbing small circles in her back. "It will be alright, piccola. We will get by. Can...can you tell me who?"

She shook her head, but as she did he was thinking back, trying to remember if she'd dated any. It was then it hit him. Blaise growled lowly, his arms tightening around her. "He did this, didn't he. It was that asswipe Goldstein."

Elizabeth nodded softly against his chest. He squeezed his eyes shut when one thought popped into his head: Neville. Neville had sent his a letter this morning canceling their date, said there'd been a rogue student in the halls, but he was fine. "He...what happened last night, Lizzie?"

Elizabeth looked up at him in shock. There hadn't been an announcement of Goldstein's actions as it was the weekend. The students would be told on Sunday night of his expulsion only. She looked into his eyes, seeing worry and love...

"He attacked the Pride. Heather, Hermione, Ron, Neville and Ginny. He...I heard someone yell and hid, but he was there and...he, he was going to take me. But Harry showed up and he and Ron made sure he was taken away. I'm okay. I...Harry expelled him. He's not here."

Blaise nodded harshly. "Good, because the minute I see that fucker, he's dead."

Elizabeth gasped at his words and scrambled to her knees, straddling his legs. She took his face in her hands, forcing him to look at her. "No. Bay, Bay. Look at me! You can't. I need you. You can't kill him, Bay. You'll go to Azkaban and then where would I be?! What would Mamma do? Hmm? Or Papa?"

Blaise glared at her and her logic but his arms unclenched. "Did he force you?"

"...What?"

"Did. He. Force. You?" He looked at her bump pointedly. "Answer me, piccola."

"No. It was...We were together, but I broke up with him not long after. He just...he got angry when I wouldn't stay with him, so I kept away even more." She looked at him with tears gathered in her eyes, whispering. "He scares me, Bay. He's going to try to get my baby, and I can't let him. She's
mine." Elizabeth wrapped her arms around her baby bump protectively.

Blaise touched her belly tentatively. "We'll talk to Mamma and Papa tomorrow, Lizzie. He'll never get near you, I promise." He kissed her forehead gently. "I promise."

"What do you know about Horcruxes?"

To say Severus "went tense" at that question was an understatement. The fire roared in the grate and his body went as still as a petrified ghost. "How do you know about Horcruxes? They are the Blackest of all Dark Arts. It is taboo to speak of them."

"Dumbledore."

"Elaborate, brat. Now." His eyes were hard as diamonds in his anger at the ex-headmaster for even saying such a word to Harry, let alone explaining one!

Harry, though, could only feel and hear the anger and it put his hackles up. His eyes flashed jade, his pupils contracting. He shook his head to throw the anger away, but still a growle escaped him. He stood and moved back from the couch and into a protective crouching position.

Severus, realizing what he was projecting, held up a hand. "Calm yourself. I am not angered by you, but by that meddling bastard of a man. That he would dare to blacken you with such knowledge is maddening."

Harry slowly returned to himself and gave a self-depreciating laugh. "Ha. Knowledge. If only it stopped at knowledge. Dumbledore has forced me on Horcrux hunting missions for...oh a year now? Yea, seems right. He figures out where the Noseless Wonder is hiding a soul shard and drags me off to find it and destroy it. Seems the little bastards like me and the curses on them don't affect me as badly as they do others." Harry looked around the room for a moment before snagging a biscuit. He needed to keep his hands busy.

Severus returned to his seat, unsure of what to do with the information except wait for more. He motioned for Harry to join him on the couch and continue his explanation.

"My second year, when the Chamber of Secrets was opened, it was all due to a Horcrux Diary possessing Ginny Weasley. What most people don't realize is that I wrote in that diary too. It never affected me. Hell, the damn thing liked me. It pulled me in it like a pensieve and I came out no worse for the wear. I destroyed it with a Basilisk's Fang, stabbed it through a few times and all."

Severus realized that if one was destroyed in his second year and they'd been hunting for a year after that... "Dear Merlin. How many?"

"...Seven. He made seven. But there's only two left out of our grasp. I destroyed the Diary, Dumbledore found a ring that he made me retrieve earlier this year, Mundungus sold me a locket he stole from Headquarters that turned out to be another, then there was—"

"Wait, what do you mean Mundungus was stealing from headquarters?"

"Heh... Severus, that man is as dirty as a Scottish bog. He's been stealing things out of Grimmauld Place for me since Sirius died. Dumbledore wouldn't let me in the house, thinking that I'd leave the Dursley's and hide there. He put up a ward that kept me out unless he brought me through them himself." Harry laughed at this and grabbed another biscuit.
"So, I got my revenge. I opened an account and gave Maddie open access and had him buy all the trinkets Dung snuck out with and to be kept in the shelter storage. I convinced myself it was a foolish thing to give someone open access to my money, then order them to buy my own inheritance, so *Moribus* wouldn't zap me. Did you know, I haven't gone back to Little Whinging since I was eleven, but that coot never even thought to check on me himself. He sent Order members, Gryffindors of course, to check on my compliance, and none of them would turn on me for him. They say 'no news is good news' and it was for everyone involved. The Order didn't have to snitch on me and Dumbledore was never any wiser."

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to contain his mirth at these revelations. His only thought was for his own sanity: *Do not trust any Gryffindors lead by Slytherin's Heir. They were bound to be sneakier than the Slytherin House in its entirety if only because one expected a Gryffindor to act as such!*

Translation: *Lo ti amerò sempre, Sorellina:* I will always love you, little sister.

**Thanks for reading!**
Severus gained his sanity back in small measures, enough to continue the conversation, at least. He reached over on a whim and pulled Harry onto his lap. He smirked at the squeak the younger man gave off, but kept himself from laughing. "You were listing the horcruxes you have found..." He steered the conversation back to their original topic easily.

"Mmm." Harry replied as he wiggled to get comfortable, turning to straddle Severus' legs and lay chest to chest with the man. He ignored the blush and twitch from the older man as well as the under his breath comment of, "Brat."

"Well, the Diary was destroyed, Dumbles sent me in this dilapidated hut for a ring, Dung got the locket, I got the cup from the Black Vaults over the summer, Ron and his team killed the snake. I think we have a lock on one other, but the last one is still a mystery."

Severus watched him, one piece of information still missing. "How did you find the cup?"

Harry looked away, tilting his head to lay his forehead against Severus' shoulder. "Ginny. The diary possessed her in her first year and twisted her magic. Since then she's been able to feel when we get near one. She was with me, Ron and Mya when I went to put the darker trinkets Dung sold me back into the vaults. Ginny...she could feel it inside and pointed it out. According to the ledgers Bellatrix put it into the Black Vaults years before his downfall. I guess she thought it safe since Sirius and Narcissa were the only others with access. Narcissa would never interfere and Sirius never messed with the vaults, but that's only my theory. It was a foolproof plan for her, except Sirius named me his heir and Magic accepted me over her when he d-died. I disowned her from the Black Family and took the Horcrux with me once Ginny found it."

"And there's two more?"

"To find, yes. One of them is in the castle. Ginny's told us that much, but it's somewhere that isn't always accessible, we think. She only feels it at certain times, but we haven't pinpointed it. The last one...I have a theory, but I have to research more before I put it up for debate." He looked down at his knees, sadness and determination in his eyes. "We have the others ready for disposal, and I can do that now that I have Godric's sword back."

Severus gave him a questioning look, so he explained. "I stabbed the Basilisk through the palate which is where their venom sacks rest. It coated the sword and imbued it with the same effects. The sword Hogwarts gave me the other day...no, well the other week now, that was Godric's sword, but I immediately put it away. It's too dangerous to use, as any cut, even to one single layer of skin, would be fatal. I can't chance that when I am in a school full of innocents."

Severus inclined his head in understanding, hand moving up to thread through the teen's hair. "If that sword is stored away from the general populous what do you use?"

Harry purred at the pettings and stretched on Severus' lap. "The sword that comes when I call my armor is one made for my use only. It's balanced for me specifically. I could never wield someone
else's sword as well as my own. I just couldn't destroy the Horcruxes without Godric's sword. Nothing else was strong enough to kill the Basilisk, and no other sword is strong enough to take out the Horcruxes…"

Severus sighed, pulling his brat closer. Only he could talk of slaying a thousand-year old beast as if it was nothing. "I will help you, Harry. Finding these abominations, destroying them, anything. If you want to talk it through, I am here for you. Bond or no, I will be here for you. I...I have been shown in the last few weeks just how wrong I have been about you. Many times over. I am sorry for that. Truly."

Harry shook his head. "I'm okay. It's okay. I'm not used to kindness, Severus. It was actually kind of...grounding to have someone who didn't fawn over me then turn on me every other week. You were a steady presence for me. I could always count on an insult or two from you each class to keep me humble." He leaned back and gave Severus a smirk.

Severus tapped Harry's nose with a finger. "Brat. You've not been humble in front of me a day in your life. Nor were you prideful and arrogant as I have always said. You are independent and confident in your own abilities, and I mistook those for arrogance and willfulness."

Harry made a funny face looking at his nose as it was tapped, then shook his head. He leaned forward and kissed the older man to pull him off his tangent. "Enough seriousness and remorse. We were neither of us ourselves then. You saw what i was forced to show you and nothing more, just as every other teacher was. I will hold no grudge, Severus, if you'll kiss me." Harry remembered those kisses from the night weeks ago now. It had been much too long and he wanted more.

Severus looked into his eyes seeing no deception, no malice, no anger. Only acceptance and a shining glint of mischief. He leaned forward and their lips met softly, tentatively as Severus teased with light almost-there kisses. Two glides of lips, butterfly kisses, and Harry growled in response. He deepened their kiss, which Severus met with equal fervor.

Severus' arms wrapped around him as the kiss deepened, caressing Harry's back through his robes. He found his mind wandering, wondering what it would be like to feel Harry's hands on his bare skin again. The thought sent a jolt of arousal straight to his groin and he moaned into Harry's mouth, wrapping his own arms around the young man's waist. Harry's tongue licked at his lips and it took only that small invitation to take their kiss deeper. He opened his mouth to allow Harry in and almost fell from the couch when their tongues touched for the first time. It was as if he'd just had an electric shock it felt so intense. Harry was wriggling on his lap and just couldn't stop moaning.

Harry twisted his wrist, divesting them both of their over robes and shirts, and making Severus gasp at the view. He'd seen Harry shirtless before, worked on him in the Hospital Wing a time or two, but this was different. Severus' hands—his long-fingered, beautiful hands—trailed over Harry's skin, lighting his nerves on fire with pleasure. He shivered at the light caress and squirmed in Severus' lap. It was bliss. So much feeling, heat, pleasure, blood rushing and moans filling the air. Without conscious thought Severus twisted and laid Harry across the couch, covering him with his own body from head to toes and everything in between. The both moaned and Harry's hips pushed up over and over.

Gods, he felt so hard, so desperate. He tried to get as close to Severus as it was as possible to get. The warm weight on top of him, Severus' kisses, that tongue in his mouth, all were adding up to pure unadulterated bliss. Harry felt as if he was flying...falling.

Then Severus freed them both from the confines of their trousers, and Harry knew true bliss. It was in those hands. He melted as the pleasure flowed through him. Nothing had ever felt so good, so
right as Severus' cock against his and that long fingered hand pulling and pumping them both to climax. He had a stray thought and wondered how he would survive having sex with this man, if this alone melted his brain, but got distracted by Severus' tongue licking at his lips, teeth worrying his bottom lip as he moaned.

He suckled Severus' tongue, hard. His whole body tightened and then he felt it, that delicious ache in his balls, those shivers up his spine and he buried his head in Severus' neck. "Sev...Sev'rus. Please!"

Severus pulled back to look at those hazy green eyes, the pupils blown out in lust. His hand moved over them both, squeezing and pumping. "Come for me, Harry. Harry!" His eyes squeezed shut in pleasure and both cried out as they came.

Harry melted into the cushion, his cock twitching as he watched the older man lift his come covered hand and lick the emission from his palm. He groaned, eyes closing to keep that seductive sight from affecting him further. Severus' weight settled over him only seconds after a cleaning spell wafted over his skin. He smiled and wrapped his arms over the longer body. He leaned forward to rub his cheek over Severus' chest and closed his eyes.

Bliss. It was bliss.

Inside the Child Care Center a certain little Dragon was getting into mischief. Lucius had dropped the tyke off with Ronan for a sleepover with Declan while he and Remus finished a few tasks in their offices and made plans for later. As it was Saturday they weren't technically confined to their offices, but both felt that work would not get finished elsewhere. The agreement they had between them meant that children came first, then work before anything else could happen. Their relationship was a strange one, but it sufficed for them both. They pushed each other, and gave comfort when they could, and it was enough.

Draco had squealed in delight at seeing Declan and his other friends and immediately started playing house with them, not even realizing his Father had left. Samuel played as the Papa, Marissa the Mummy, Declan the older Brother, and Tasha the little sister.

"Can I play Sammie?"

The kids all nodded, cheers of "Yay!" and "Yea!" ringing out. They decided on Draco's part in playing house quickly.

"You can be the baby 'cuz you's the littlest," Tasha said, happy not to be the littlest anymore.

Draco, though, was not keen on this role. "Don wanna be a baby! I'm a big boy, not a baby!"

This brought an argument out between the kids, none of whom were older than six.

Declan watched from the back of the group, but finally said something to stop them. "You can be the dog..."

Draco jumped up and down with the other kids happily. "Yea! Yea! Woofwoof!" They all giggled and Draco wiggled his little bum like it was a tail. "Bark!"

Declan knelt next to his and pet his hair softly and the others did the same before Samuel stood. "Okay. I'm the Papa so that means I decide what we're doing, just like Mr. 'Onan does. I think we should go to the grocery store."
Tasha squealed. "Ooh! My family did that aaaaaallll the time before I came here!"

The family and their dog moved over to the grocery store set up in the playroom. Sammie pushed the pretend cart while Rissa grabbed pretend food. Tasha and Declan picked on each other and tickled each other, while Draco grabbed anything he saw in his mouth and shook it like he thought a puppy would. He crawled around, bum wiggling like a tail any time he remembered to do it.

Eventually Draco grabbed an old pillow and shook his head with it in his mouth, but he never expected it to go flying and hit Tasha's side. She grinned and it was a unanimous decision that playing house was over and a pillow fight was in order!

It was this that Elsbet walked in on.

The room was covered in feathers and stuffing. Elsbet groaned at the sight, immediately moving into scolding mode. Her voice was soft, but firm and brooked no arguments.

"What is going on here? Hmm? What is this mess?"

The kids froze at the sound, all looking around the room and realizing what they'd done. They murmured a "Sorry Ms. Elsbet."

They all moved to start cleaning the mess they had made, knowing the drill...All except Draco who was slowly, tearfully backing away. He was scared, and all he could do was wait for the pain to come. Bad Mummy. Bad Mummy was going to punish him for making a mess.

He sniffled, which started the tears to spill over his eyes as his back hit a corner and he sank to the floor, pulling himself as close as possible. If he couldn't see them, they couldn't hurt him, right? He hid his face in his knees, crying softly, quiet cries of, "Pease no, no hurt Dwaco. Pease..." falling from his lips.

Elsbet watched the small boy with tears in her own eyes. There were many children in her Center who had been abused, but none so young as Draco. She wasn't sure what to do as his father had never mentioned any techniques for calming him, but she didn't have to do anything. She watched as Declan ran to the boy and soothed him with head pettings. The boy wrapped his skinny arms around Draco and rocked him, talking to him about how he was safe, and there were no mean people in the Center.

"Harry wouldn't let any bad people in our rooms, Draco. It's okay, I promise. Draco. Don't cry Draco. I here, I protect you."

Draco's tears subsided slowly with this, and he bonelessly slumped over, his head resting in Declan's lap as he wrapped an arm around the older boy's leg. Declan looked up when he could smell the fear in the room dissipate. He nodded to Ms. Elsbet and watched her slowly sit a few feet from Draco, out of arm's length and softly talk to him.

"I won't hurt you Draco. See, I'm just going to sit way over here while Declan holds you. You like that, right? Yea. Declan's nice. He's only been here a few months, but he's right you know. Harry wouldn't let anyone bad inside the Center. Not me or Mr. Ronan. We never hurt anyone, especially children. That's forbidden here. Do you understand, Draco? No one will ever hurt you like your Mummy did. Ever. You're safe here, sweet."

Draco couldn't understand her, not completely. He was too young, too hurt, but he knew he felt safe. Truly safe. He looked between the woman and Declan and when the boy nodded he slowly, carefully crawled over to her. She moved slowly too, but only to open her arms.
Draco moved into her lap tentatively, and sighed when he got a small hug for his trust. He rested against the woman and was soon asleep, too tired to keep his eyes open any longer after the physical and emotional roller coaster of the last hour.

Elsbet smiled and stood with the small child. She twirled her wand with a soft *Reparo* to set the room back to rights. She looked at the children in the playroom. "It's bath time for the 6-8 year old boys. Go find Mr. Ronan in your bathroom."

Sammie, the only 6-year-old, ran off to join his group for bath time. Elsbet looked at the young ones left and got Declan's attention. "Declan, I'm going to put his cot in your room. You'll look after him won't you?"

Declan's chest puffed out at the idea that he was being given some responsibility to make sure his friend was okay. He would have done it no matter what, but it was nice to get praise and be trusted by his caregivers.

"I'll always watch over him, Ms. Elsbet. He's my person."

Inside the Gryffindor Common Room two familiar figures were fighting. Well, as much as two people can fight when one is being given the silent treatment. Hermione wasn't talking to him and Ron couldn't blame her, but that didn't mean he was going to sit idle and let her stew in her anger!

"I'm sorry, Mya. I didn't want you to worry, so I glossed over a few things. I'm sorry! You have too much on your plate all the time, and I couldn't stand it if I were the one to add to it!"

"*Add to it. Ronald Weasley you are my boyfriend! I thought we were a team, but apparently not. You are supposed to share things with me, but instead you lied to my face! How can I—Mmph...*"

Ron leaned over, taking her chin in his hand with a firm pressure, his lips slanting over hers. He kissed her until he could feel the tension drain from her body. "Calm now?"

She nodded, her eyes dimming from the glow that had taken over in her angered anxiety attack. He continued kissing her before pulling back. "I love you, Mya. I could not burden you with that tale knowing that the day's duties were not over. I am fine, healed completely, and it is in the past. I am sorry for keeping it from you, but I could not stand to overburden you. You take on too much, my love."

Hermione watched him, sensing only sincerity and no hint of deceit. She kissed him softly, chastely. "I understand. I forgive you. I...I love you, too." She took a breath, her thought coming back down from the high of that kiss. She took a big breath, ready to go back to her original argument. "But if you so much as—ah!"

Ron grinned, and pulled her up from the couch with an overjoyed "Whoop!" He pulled her against his chest for a deep kiss before throwing over his shoulder and taking off for some time together. The move was so sudden she squealed. He made no care of it and continued through the common room, returning the grins of his housemates, especially when Mya got indignant.

"Ronald Bilius Weasley! Put me doooooown!"
Thank you for reading!

A/N: Obviously I've changed canon here. Harry is not a horcrux, I have never been a fan of horcrux Harry, and it didn't fit my vision here, so there is the diadem still missing and another Horcrux made. As I will be showing Voldemort and Harry are connected, but it is a weak link. It can be pulled on, but it is subconsciously like in Harry's dreams. It also takes a lot of power to do, hence why he always seems exhausted after visions, and why it took Voldie an entire year to send Harry a disjointed vision, it was all his power could muster at the time.
Saturday,

December 6, 1997

Things settled, as they are wont to do in life, and the day to day workings of Hogwarts continued with only a few minor glitches…the most notable being the Pride's inability to fully analyze the Dark Mark's composition. To get close enough to it with specific magic would alert Voldemort of their work, and that was the last thing they wanted. Lucius and Severus had been left to their own devices with letters of updates going out once a week to the Dark Lord to preserve their covers.

In that time Hermione's team continued working on the Dark Mark issue. Hermione, Heather and Ginny always sat at what was referred to as the Crafter's Table. It was set back and warded to where the three girls could work on their spell crafting without a risk of anything backfiring and hurting someone, nor could anyone listen in on their brainstorming sessions.

They were currently working on their an Advanced Warding theory, but soon Hermione was crumpling her parchment and growling in anger.

"Ugh! We've got to figure this out, ladies. We need to know what these spells are, all of them. I've racked my brain and picked Professor Malfoy's for weeks on what this thing can do, but even he doesn't have the Dark Arts expertise for that. And then we have to figure out how to counter them all..." She laid her head on the table in frustration, muttering under her breath, "and Merlin help us if there isn't a counter to some of these abominations..."

Heather felt similarly and groaned. "How could he even cast all of this together?! It's like...like...Ugh!"

She couldn't find the words, but Ginny, who was looking out over the common room, spoke. She'd been watching Crookshanks play with some string lying about an idea came to her. "It's like he just made a ball of yarn."

Heather looked at her incredulously. "What?"

"No, look. It's as if he literally strung one spell and another together then balled them up like yarn. Mum does it when knitting something big. She'll take one spool and start the needles. Once she's used most of the yarn she'll take the beginning of the next spool and tie it to the end of the first. This way she can keep going without running out mid stitch or having an uneven line. It just looks like
"Okay, I follow you so far..." Hermione replied, head tilted to the side as she imagined what Ginny was saying.

"Okay, so he ties each spell to the one before while casting. Then he places it on their arm underneath the branded mark. See, it explains why we can't make this spell work like a ward scheme!" Ginny was getting excited as things began to connect in her mind. "They aren't settled like wards. I'd bet you galleons that he never studied spell crafting or wards. Why should he when he could overpower the spells he knew to make them work. It works with everything we know of this monster! Even Professor Malfoy said he always takes over someone else's home as a base of operation and recruits followers that have a specific gift. Like a ward master, or the home of someone with wards already in place!"

"But how do we end the spells? And we don't even know if he cast these in Latin or Parseltongue! There's just too many variables here," Hermione groaned.

"Occam's razor," Heather chimed in.

"What?" Ginny gave her a look like she was losing her mind. Was that even English?

"Occam's razor, Ginny. What if this is an Occam's Razor."

"Heather, you lost me. What the hell is an Occam's Razor? Is it like one of those sharp pointy things the Muggles use to shave with?"

Hermione looked between the two and waved her hand excitedly as she her mind started making connections as well. "Occam's Razor. Basically says that in a problem with multiple possible solutions the one with the least amount of assumptions should be used. If you're not sure go for the easiest solution." She looked up as it registered with her too. Occam's razor. "What if Neville was right? I know we can't Finite the Dark Mark as a whole, but what if we break it down and Finite the components."

Hermione's eyes lit up and the other girls smiled when the saw it. Hermione had an idea. She stood quickly. "Where is Harry?"

Heather tilted her head. "In Remus' quarters with the Representatives and Champions. They're going over the details for deposing the Coot before the Court Case comes up. They want to make sure all the plans are in place for next year in case our evidence isn't enough."

Ginny giggled, thinking of what Gred and Forge had told her. "The twins are getting antsy and are ready for a bit of payback. We may have to warn the Champions and Reps soon."

Hermione shook her head. "Later. I need to talk to them, now."

The girls nodded and followed her to Remus' quarters, minds focused once more on Project D-5. Heather knocked twice as they arrived and they were admitted with curious looks. Hermione stood between Heather and Ginny for her report. "We may have a breakthrough on D-5, Harry." She gave a pointed look at Madam Longbottom, but Harry waved it away as he leaned into Severus' side.

"She knows, Mya. Everyone is up to date on everything we know."

Hermione relaxed, but Ginny gasped at looked at her father across the room, fear in her eyes. "Everything?" She asked, her voice trembling. Arthur, seeing his daughter so distraught, stood and pulled her into his arms.
"It's okay, Gin. I know why you couldn't say anything. I'm not mad." He rubbed his hand over her back soothingly as he'd done since she was a small child and she calmed slowly.

Hermione moved on with a deep breath when her friend returned to her post. "We think that the Dark Mark is resistant to counter spells because it is not set up properly. We think he simply strung a bunch of spells together and pushed them into the brand rather than setting up an actual schema for it. You know how most people feel about spell crafters..."

Lucius nodded. "'Those who can, cast, those who can't create another spell.' Our esteemed thorn did indeed follow that line of thinking. He's said it to me before."

Hermione smiled, happy for any validation that she was on the right track.

Snape was curious. "Where can you go from that bit of information?"

Hermione frowned. "It isn't going to sound feasible, but hear me out." She explained their idea and the proponents backing it. "My idea is this: we need to develop a diagnostic spell for Severus to cast via a crystal. If he uses his own magic the signature could be traced back to him. With the crystal it will only come back as Hogwarts' magic, which isn't exactly traceable. Voldemort has developed a knack for Dark and Black Arts and Severus knows how his mind works. With this he can eventually see the order of every spell woven into the Mark. From there we've determined a fairly simple approach." Hermione bit her lip. "It sounds silly, but I really do think it will work. Voldemort is arrogant, and has shown that he believes his spell work too powerful to overcome."

Harry nodded, getting excited. He waved her down from her ramble. "I understand, Mya. What do we need to do?"

"Harry, this is where you come in. I know you told me you have a Unity Bond with Professor Snape. Can...have you developed the Twin bond, yet?" She watched the two look at each other before Harry nodded, a blush coming over his face. She gave him a knowing look and he stuck his tongue out at her before answering.

"It's...in the process..."

Hermione sighed. That made things easier. "I believe that if Severus casts the diagnostic and links to you he can tell you the spell to call forward. Revealing spells won't work the normal way. I think you'll have to cast in Parseltongue. If you can skim the surface of the Mark using a Revealing spell in this way Severus can tell you the spell, call it forward so it will glow. It should bring up either the first or last spell cast and you will have to break it, and then the next spell in order will appear and you will break it, and so on. You'll have to counter them in the order or reverse order that they were cast. I don't really know which. But when the diagnostic brings one forward you will cast the counter curse that Professor Snape tells you or a *Finite Incantatem* at it, but everything must be in Parseltongue. I...We really believe it will end the spell, but you'll have to do this on each spell twined into the Mark one by one. The Mark will not release the hold he has until every single spell is gone."

Severus was frowning, trying to envision what could go wrong so that could prepare for it. "And how do you propose to keep the Dark Lord from interfering while Harry is deconstructing the mark?"

Hermione bit her lip and worried it softly. "Um...well, I hadn't gotten that far, but do you suppose Draught of Living Death on the person bearing the mark would suffice?"

Severus thought carefully. "That just might work, Ms. Granger. Very good, all three of you. 10 points to Gryffindor. Each."
Harry rolled his eyes, at the man.

'How generous of you, Severus.'

'Brat'

Saturday,

December 20, 1997

The Winter Holiday came quickly and uneventfully to Hogwarts. The students had settled down into a routine with their new professors, the professors had settled down to a routine with their new colleagues.

The Delegates, as they were called, spent many hours with both their Housemates and their Representatives talking about how to carefully set up new policies. Rules like not allowing the opposite gender into a dorm hall and no spell work in the corridors had been reestablished and enforced, but there were other issues at Hogwarts to be dealt with. Once the other Houses heard of the Council system inside Gryffindor they put their own versions into place. While not run nearly as well, they helped create equality in the houses among the older and younger students.

Inter-House Common Rooms were set up on the fourth floor west wing and students were usually found there outside of classes. Prefects were mixed together and given an initial assignment of common room rounds or curfew rounds for the week. When Sunday rolled around they then traded with the two students of their year group to make it even.

The Hogsmeade trips had had no hiccups thus far and most everyone was gearing up for Christmas, including Severus Snape who had been forced to put up an actual Christmas tree for his bond mate. He'd not decorated a Christmas tree since his own childhood so he made Harry and Draco decorate the thing while he and Lucius spelled Draco's presents wrapped and hid them away from the tyke. Severus had already bought Harry's gifts and put them away where he would not find them.

December 20th marked the first day of Winter Hols and Elizabeth's due date. She was currently settled inside a private suite in Hogwarts with her parents and brother due to the recent Health Crisis happening in both the Muggle and Wizarding Worlds. She had told her parents the day after Blaise was told, and they had taken the news well enough. Belladonna and Raphael were happy that she was unhurt and excited to be grandparents—though they had hoped their children would be a bit older first.

Belladonna, though, had to be put into a body bind when she first found out about her abusive ex-boyfriend. She'd raged through the room and sworn to anyone who was near that he would pay for what he had done to her bambina.

It was only when Raphael held her close, whispering of promised vengeance lowly in her ear did she become calm. That was the funny thing about the Zabini family: No one messed with a Zabini family member and lived long enough to die of old age. Blaise's biological father could attest...well, if he were still alive. Belladonna Maria Zabini was quite a forced to be reckoned with.

Once she was calm Belladonna immediately started planning for her first grandchild with an eager glee. She had started to shoo her son and husband away so they could talk girl to girl, but stopped when Elizabeth suggested Blaise go visit his boyfriend.
The one his parents didn't know about.

To say that Blaise got an earful of indignant Italian was an understatement. After she was calm enough to move back to English so her husband could follow she asked her son the only thing she could think of.

"Are you ashamed of your Mamma? Your Papa? Is that it Blaise Alexander? No? Then you thought we would love you less for loving another boy? Is that why you kept this from us?"

Blaise covered his head as he sat before them both, hating that he'd disappointed them.

"No! I just...It's a long story, Mamma. I didn't want to jinx this. Not when I finally got him back!"

"Back? Who is this boy, my Bay?"

"Neville. Neville Longbottom. I...He was under a spell, that's why he avoided us. He didn't hate us, nor his Gran. He just...couldn't come to us, but now he's come back to me, Mamma. Papa, please believe me, I'm not ashamed of either of you, nor my sorellina." He smiled at Elizabeth as she blushed and hid her face. She thought her parents knew, she hadn't meant to cause trouble for her brother.

"I've only gotten him back for two months, and part of that he was injured." He grimaced as he said it, and gave his Mamma the rest of the information before she pulled it from him by force. "Anthony Goldstein cast a Dark curse at his face, point-blank range almost. He lost his sight while he was healing, only a few days really, but it's been hard for us both."

Blaise remembered those days, the long days inside the Gryffindor Healing rooms, helping his friend get around while he was unable to even open his eyes. Heather covered them with gauze to prevent any strain to his face while he healed. They'd never seen the curse before, but Severus seemed to know how to handle it, and after a few days of rest, food and blood replenishers he was okay to remove the gauze and return to his normal routine. Though, if Blaise had had his way Neville would be in a padded room only he could enter so he was safe, but that idea had been shot down fairly quickly.

With his Mamma calm once more the men left the women to their planning and moved to walk around the grounds in a companionable silence. They had made this walk many times since that day, oftentimes with Neville joining them. The Zabinis visited their daughter each weekend since November began and made sure she was happy and healthy.

They were also the ones to tell her that the Wizengamot had seen her case and deemed a full court hearing still necessary.

Dear Ms. Zabini-Mkapa,

*It is at the discretion of the Wizengamot to inform you that a pre-trial has commenced and more information is needed. We understand this is a difficult time, but hope to give both Mother and Father of the child a fair trial.*

*A date has been set for the first of February nineteen ninety-eight at nine in the morning. We hope to see you there.*

*Secretary for the Wizengamot,*

*Mafalda Hopkirk*
Though they had viewed the hours of pensieve memories from the Pride members they could not order a full interrogation of Anthony Goldstein via Veritaserum because of his family's new Noble status. They were only told by a source inside the Ministry that it was to be held in strictest confidence since the case involved the affairs of minors and an unborn child.

Fred and George Weasley had never in their lives been a fan of school, and why would they? The idea of non-focused learning was fairly off-putting in the first place. Who truly cared about History of Magic? Apparently nobody of importance since it wasn't even an OWL or NEWT class. Not to mention schools were a veritable smorgasbord of people to prank, and yet getting caught in any prank was punishable.

So they just didn't get caught.

In their esteemed eyes, finding the Marauder's Map was a sign from Merlin himself that they were meant to stir up trouble inside the hallowed halls of Hoggy Hogwarts, and when the ghosts themselves pick you to side with, you knew you were in the right. It had taken a few months that first year to get enough ideas and supplies together for the massive prank wars they had planned, but begin them they did. They just weren't quite careful enough in who they targeted, mainly the Errant Eejit, the Felonious Feline and the Greasy Git.

It wasn't until Harry Potter came along that things started getting more interesting. He paid for their supplies upfront after making them promise to prank the Professors only when they as a House determined it safest and most effective. Gred and Forge immediately agreed once it was determined that students and other adults were A-Ok and geared up day and night creating new ideas. It was then that things like the portable ecosystems, skiving snackboxes and extendable ears came to fruition.

It was in honor of that small boy who thought that adults should never be free from retribution that they schemed now.

Dumbledore would know exactly what hit him and never be able to do a damn thing about it.

Gred and Forge had taken the floo from their shop to Hogwarts for the day and immediately stopped by the kitchen. They had recently received a very important bit of gossip concerning an invitation letter from that prat of a brother Percy, and were preparing to make sure it was "hand delivered" to their favorite eejit extraordinaire. They called to Tinker and laid out their plan, amazed and a bit terrified to see the house elf with a malicious grin.

"Tinker be doing all the things, Masters Weasleys. Tinker be wanting revenge on the bad man for years, but Tinker be unable to stop him."

Fred nodded. "We understand. We were the same way, you know? But now we can all have some fun. So, do you think it'll work?"

Tinker nodded. "Yes, Masters Weasleys. It be working."

They grinned and left the supplies with Tinker. Who knew what a limited recording crystal, a few skiving snackboxes cooked into his food, and a couple of different ecosystems dropped in each day could do to the illustrious Ex-Headmaster, but they were about to find out!
Thanks for reading!
Chapter 42: Holidays at Hogwarts Begin

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein

A/N: I am American and Christian, as such I have only ever celebrated Christmas so I apologize for skimming over any details of the Holidays mentioned to focus on Christmas in the coming chapters.

Dates will be given from here on out to keep things straight in your head and mine :)

Saturday Night,

Dec. 20th

Severus Snape's Quarters

Harry was daydreaming again. His mind turned round and round, thinking about Yule and Christmas, family and friends and how freedom would make the holiday that much sweeter this year. He thought about that Christmas story that the kids in his primary school always wanted to hear. It was read a thousand times at the Center for the little ones, but of course as he dallied he put his own spin on the catchy rhymes. He couldn't think of anything to make it fit after the first few lines, so just started making it up with anything that came to mind.

'Twas four nights before Christmas

and all through the Castle

the Pride, she was stirring

and oh, what a hassle

it was for the eldest

who spent their long days

caring for teenagers

and teaching them ways

to control their instincts

but still find joy

in romping and playing

and chasing mousy wee toys.

"Ow! Dammit Severus, what?!" Harry rubbed the back of his head where he'd been hit with a book by his Bond mate. Severus only gave him a baleful stare.
"You drifted off again, Harry. I was saying that the Twin Bond may have settled a few weeks ago thanks to your...actions..."

Harry smiled cheekily, feeling rowdy. "'Actions.' I think I like calling it that." He slid off the couch and knelt before the older man, hands moving up Severus' legs enticingly. "And can I give you a little action, now?"

Severus rolled his eyes and took a firm grip to his raging libido, trying not to think of those red, lush lips of Harry's on his again. "Focus, brat. And sit back down. Now, while the Twin Bond is in place we still need to work on the sympathetic bond in order to cast in tandem. As you know from working with Finnegan and Thomas as well as Zabini and Longbottom, this isn't something that physical or sexual encounters will fix." He paused, taking a deep breath and plunging ahead.

"So I wanted to ask if you would like to spend your nights here in my quarters over the break. It has been approved by the Representatives, considering our bond, but I want this to be your decision, Harry. You are free to say no if you wish to stay in the dorms..."

Harry was...well, struck speechless. Stay in the Dungeons. With Severus. No sneaking back after hours, or being kicked out when things got too hot.

Severus took his hesitation as a way to get out of it and began to backtrack stiffly. "Do not think that the offer is a way to pressure you into-"

"Yes."

"Excuse me?"

"Yes. I want to. Stay, that is. I want to stay with you for the break." Harry grinned at the surprised look on the older man's face and decided to replace the look with another. Harry took that face in his hands and pulled them closer together, lips covering another. He sighed into the kiss and pulled back softly, nuzzling their noses together. It was a sweet gesture he'd grown to use when he felt safe and comfortable, happy.

Severus wrapped a hand around the back of Harry's neck and pulled him until their lips were together once more, tongues dueling, and passions soaring. Harry pushed at Severus' shoulders until he turned and lay across the couch then straddled him and laid his lithe body over the professor's. Feeling Severus' hardness against his belly he shimmied down the Slytherin's body and pulled at the button to his trousers, licking his lips all the while.

Severus stopped him though with a few words. "Get your arse up here. Knees by my head. I want to taste you as well, brat."

Harry shivered with pleasure and anticipation and moved as he said, both taking the other into their mouth at the same time.

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Sunday,

December 21

Winter Solstice

With Harry in Snape's quarters, Heather and Neville visiting the Zabinis and most of the elder Pride members gone for the Hols it was left to Hermione to train any of the cubs who were coming into their forms.
This year they had the help of a potion. Hermione had long been reading up on muggle research into Puberty and Hormones. With those notes and a bit of potion work with Harry they had been able to create a potion that would signal the body of the drinker to produce hormones like gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH) and follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH). These would in turn signal the sex organs to produce estrogen and androgen. It was first designed to give the students under the Moribus a controlled form change. They could choose to take it during the summer break of their second year or winter break of their third.

Wizarding physiology pushed back the average onset of puberty to closer coincide with their magical stability. Whereas in muggles puberty ran between 10 to 15 years in boys and 9 to 14 years in girls, for Wizards it was pushed back three years. The end of puberty, and therefore the arrival of full sexual maturity, didn't occur until after students came into their full power and inheritances—usually around 17. This was why students having sexual intercourse or getting pregnant were the exceptions to the rule, rather than the norm.

Hermione held up one of the phials of purple potion to the light. This potion was made in the Chamber's potions lab and brought up when there were breaks from school. Today being the Winter Solstice, she thought it a good day to use the potions and teach the kits about their new forms so that they would have the entire break to gain control over themselves. There would be minimal peer interaction with other houses to contend with, and no interactions with goading teachers either. They could learn about their forms, themselves and what they could and could not handle all without having to come a hair's breath of overdosing themselves on Calming Draughts.

In the back of her mind she still hoped that the spell breaking would break the forced transformations, but she was always one to hope for the best while preparing for the worst.

Knowing that they would have no foreknowledge of the student's forms she pulled in Parvati to help. While Hermione was a Lioness and the female Alpha of the Pride, it wouldn't help her if any of them had any kitten form. She would need all of her energy to focus on the big cats and their aggressive natures when faced with fear of the unknown. She couldn't look after tiny kits as well, so she grabbed Parvati whose form was a grey Abyssinian, if she remembered correctly. Hermione had trouble keeping up with ever Pride member's form. The big cats were easier to remember, but once you got smaller than knee high you were a kitten and that was that.

Hermione pulled herself out of her thoughts and looked at the third years before her. She knew how they felt, though her change had not been scripted and pre planned as theirs would be. She handed the potions out and watched them line up against the wall.

"Okay, cubs. This potion is going to tell your body that there are puberty hormones in your system. If the spell's effects are still in place you are going to take a feline form just like the rest of us. If it isn't then nothing should happen, okay? I know this is hard, sweetings, but I want to make sure that if you are going to transform you have time to explore and not worry about class starting in 15 minutes, or how you'll control any new emotions when Professor Snape starts snarking."

She bid them all sit on the floor and sat with Parvati in front of them a little bit away. "Now, we've gone over Animagus theory plenty. I know you know how to change back, but putting it into practice is harder. Don't. Panic. Especially anyone who has a big form, the bigger you are the harder it is to pull yourself back. Also, you know the rules, there is no laughing or making fun of someone else's form. None of us can control it."

She watched the little ones look at each other. She knew this bunch was a good set. They were close, and protective of each other, just as they should be.

"Okay. Parvati is going to take all the forms knee height and smaller to the other training room,
unless you are small for your size and I tell you otherwise. I will try to note any specific species I see, and you can do some research on the form when we get back to human forms. When you are ready to try returning to your human self, come nudge me or Parvati. We will take you to the changing room so you will be able to transform and put clothes on without showing anything you don't want to, understand?"

Parvati giggled, remembering this part from her own theory lessons, and watched the wee ones blush. "Don't be embarrassed, we've been right where you are at one time or another, and hey! Maybe you won't need to worry about it at all, eh?" She smiled, trying to stay positive.

Hermione agreed. "Yes. So, is everyone ready?" She saw a bunch of nervous heads nod. "Okay, then. Bottoms up, sweetings."

"What news do you bring Wormtail?"

Inside Riddle Manor a hissing voice could be heard. Nagini had been missing for months, and no Death Eater had returned with useful information...until now.

"My L-lord, it seems Dolohov's son found Nagini's dead body in the wings of M-Malfoy Manor in O-October and b-buried it in the Malfoy Gardens. He was h-hoping no one would notice, I think..." In actuality Wormtail had found the great dead beast and told the trainee to dispose of it to save his own hide. Wormtail employed every tactic in the book to stay alive, and throwing someone else under the Dark lord's wand was not too low for him.

"Where is he? Bring him to me, now!" Wormtail bolted, and returned moments later with all the training Death Eaters in tow.

The Dark Lord looked over the trainees as they were led into his receiving room. They knelt before him then moved to stand in a semicircle around him.

He watched them squirm and shake as he glared at them.

"Berwyn Dolohov. Ssstep. Forward."

A tall, lanky boy, no more than 20 stepped forward. "M-m-my Lord?"

"Avada Kedavra!"

The thud of the body hitting the floor was the only sound in the room.

"No one can hide or keep secrets from me. Do you understand? I know all, my servants. Dismissed."

He watched them all but scramble from the room like ants. "Wormtail."

"Y-yes, my Lord?"

"Take the body to his Mother, and bring me Antonin. The Dolohov family has much to pay for. Send me our resident potion maker for his report before you go."

Wormtail bowed and showed his usual deference before running like the vermin he was. The Dark Lord was not choosy with his servants, only that they fulfilled their tasks. It was more important now than ever that he boost his ranks and begin his final experiment. He would be all powerful, and soon if his Potions Master had any care for his life.

Voldemort was brought from his thoughts by Horace Slughorn's entrance. He watched as the man's
legs gave out a few dozen feet from him, but cared not. "Your report, Horace."

"Aah, y-y-y-yes, My L-lord. Your p-potion is s-s-s-successful, as you wished. It is, um, only viable in l-l-liquid form, so far, m-m-my Lord."

Voldemort hissed in anger. "And what good does a potion do with muggles, you disgrace?"

"In-injections! My Lord, the muggles have these things, injections. Vaccines! They are said to be more trusted by the ignorant masses. My sources have told me so."

Voldemort grimaced inwardly, remembering such from his own childhood, not that they would know about that. "And the core boosters?"

"F-finished my Lord, as you required. Disguised as muggle ph-pharmaceuticals. " He shook in fear as he spoke, hoping to be spared any pain for his troubles. It had been many months since he'd been brought to this infernal place and put to work making devious and insidious potions then making them in forms Muggles could take. Liquid medicines for injections, pills, syrups. He'd created them all and perfected the formulas, with only a theory as to what they could be used for.

Horace Slughorn knew three things about the potions he had been creating for sure: how to make them, that he never wanted to know what effect this sociopath planned for them, and that he would probably not live long enough to see their desired effect come to fruition.

He was right.

"Very good, Horace. Your notes are kept as ordered?"

"Yes, My Lord."

"Good. Your work in creating a new strain of smallpox was very good, Horace. It is too bad that your presence here is no longer required. You have outlived your usefulness. Avada Kedavra."

At the lowest level on the castle there existed a man being punished for his heinous crimes. He lived chained to a wall with only a few feet on either side of him for movement...if he was allowed to move. He had long since lost his "partner in crime" but still he plotted the demise of his captors.

Today he was imagining all the dark curses he could inflict upon the Pride of Lions. With his eyes closed Albus Dumbledore never noticed the ornately sealed letter drifting through the air, nor did he see it pop from existence after lightly brushing his arm. Had he done so his mutterings and screams of indignation might have sounded louder when a portable swamp or three fell from the same spot right on top of him.

It was comical how mud can move so descriptively. It can ooze, drip, pool, puddle, creep, and move in any number of ways-and it did them all from atop Dumbledore's humiliated crown.

A crown of slime.

Tinker kept the recording crystal activated as he one by one dropped the swamps in, letting them pop up from different points until they filled the tiny room. He masked his cackling laugh as the ex-headmaster fought for breath and was drug into the slowly sifting mud and debris, the trees taking up any room the old man could have used to keep his nose above ground.

He snapped his fingers softly, watching the water dissipate and the mud harden around the man's lower chest. Then Tinker lit fireworks and let them zoom around the small space with glee. He knew
he face hurt and with a start realized it was from the malicious grin he carried...but the little elf couldn't bring himself to care. He lit more and more watching them zip around, bashing into the elderly man's face, chest and ribs, leave burns on his skin and even set his clothes on fire for a time.

With one last snap of his fingers Tinker pushed the walls in a foot of so, making the caked mud close in higher and press the air from his lungs until it was close to impossible to breath. Then, hearing one last glorious wheeze of a breath being taken in then exhaled and in again, Tinker stopped the recording crystal and took it to his new favorite Masters Weasley to show them his handy work!

Thank you for reading!

Hopefully this chapter helps to answer some questions! And, no that is not all you will see of Dumbledore, just a peek!
Chapter 43: Wee Babes

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein.

Hermione watched with bated breath as the group took their potion. There were thirteen students in all, a large group as Gryffindor had been accustomed to since McGonagall's reign began. She watched this close-knit group drink their potion and couldn't help the anxiety that welled in her chest.

They didn't deserve this. None of them did, but this group was one of the closest knit and sweetest to come through in many years. The phrase "Wouldn't hurt a fly" was never truer than with these students. Hermione and Parvati both knew this and hoped that someone, anyone would hear a desperate plea for mercy.

And mercy they got, unexpected though it was.

The first student to change was a little girl, the smallest of the group. As her body folded, melded and morphed it was not a tiny kitten she became, as they all guessed when she began shrinking. She was now a teeny, white baby bunny.

The students watched and cheered loudly, tears and hope shining in their eyes as they waited for their own bodies to acknowledge the hormones. Hermione was frozen, holding a hand to her mouth to stifle her sobs of joy. Parvati was openly crying, though that quickly ended when the next two, both boys, changed and the elder students realized suddenly that were not equipped to deal with random animals running around the room as the other students morphed and shrank one by one.

"Oh no!" Hermione exclaimed as she looked at Parvati, then back to the animals scurrying through the room. "Shoot! Um...uh! Collars and leashes? 'Vati, conjure collars and leashes...No! Play pens! Make partitions and separate them! Oh no! Is that an iguana?! Ugh!"

Parvati laughed and waved her wand small partitions popping up, it created short two to three-foot walls arranged for pens. Parvati grabbed the little ones and placed them inside individual pens as she could catch them. The bunny was easy to catch, and the owlet as well, but she steered clear of the scurrying iguana...and the little snake.

She conjured a glove quickly as she saw a tiny little hedgehog, not sure how to handle it. She settled it into a pen and sighed as it just made a tiny squeaky noise and wandered around. Not a porcupine, then. She laughed at herself.

Hermione, in a fit of panic, grabbed the fake Galleon from her pocket and sent a message.

*All Gryffindors in the area to the training room*

Parvati, who was actually having fun rounding up the little tykes looked at her friend. "Calm down, Mya. They're just wee babies. And you know these kids, they'd harm themselves before they'd harm someone else. Just take it as a sign of their true animagus forms."

Hermione looked unconvinced, but Parvati pointed something out. "Look, they're none of them..."
predators. All small, like their human sizes, all cute as can be, and none of them have claws except Mikey, but he's a lizard, so I think we're safe. Don't muggles usually keep lizards as pets?"

Mya nodded. "Um...yea, Miles’ brother had one. They love sunbathing. Maybe we can make a heat lamp for him?" She trailed off as she felt more than heard the pounding of feet coming closer to the room. She watched the animagi all run from the vibrations and smiled. Sweetings, all of them. Hermione went to the door, opening it and stepping out into the hall.

Cries of "What's wrong?" "What happened?" "Are they hurt?" "Where's the healer team?" rang out, but Hermione quieted them with a raised hand.

"We have a new crop a animagi within the Pride." Applause was heard, though a few faces were locked in a grimace of pain and sadness. Hermione went on. "We now have a bunny, a puppy, a seal cub, a panda cub, a hedgehog, an iguana, a duckling, a hatchling, an owlet, a vixen and fox pup—yes the twins have the same form—a polar bear cub and a prongslet. The curse still took them at puberty, but their forms are based on their personalities."

She felt a tear sliding down her cheek and brushed it away. "I...It's a step up, and maybe the next batch won't change at all..." She blew out a deep breath, pulling her emotions back in. "Okay. I need all of you to come in and help me situate them."

Hermione opened the door and ushered them in with their assignments. "Colin and Dennis take the Fuller twins, the fox pups, and situate them in Partition A. Talia take Leighton the panda cub to Partition B..." She looked around. "Whoever isn't afraid of snakes...yes, Brodie, take Sinead to Partition C. Joseph you're Carys' tutor right? Good the duckling in Partition D is yours. Conjure a small pool of water for her..."

She continued doling out student helpers for the new animagi and smiled as she wandered through the rooms that the now solid partitions made. The older students were talking to them about their own transformations, about the baser emotions and feelings they remembered and how to search through their bodies for their cores.

"You feel that, right Missy? Yea? Good!" Parvati held the owlet in her hand, brushing a finger over the downy fluff of feathers and talking to her. "Now, there's gonna be tugging feeling, almost like you're pulling yourself in and then pushing out again. It was very weird at first, but now it's normal. Let me know when you feel comfortable trying, okay? Just give me a peck or two. It'll take a couple of tries to get the timing right, but I know you can do it."

When, an hour later, the first third year was able to pull back to their human forms, Hermione finally felt like things were looking up and left the tutors to their work.

"I can't believe it worked! You're brilliant, Mya!" Ron smiled from his seat next to Hermione. He reached over to cup her cheek in his hand. He was exuberant in his praise for his girlfriend. "The potion, getting the kids back to human. Brilliant!"

Hermione blushed, but pushed the praise off. "It's just what I do, Ronald. Now, can we get back to work?" She looked around the table at Blaise, Neville, Ginny, Ron and Heather as they all worked on their individual projects.

Ron blushed with her and nodded, not realizing how he had gotten away with himself. He turned to the group, and made sure he had their attention. "Yea. Um, well. I was doing some reading—"

Blaise snorted. "Sorry, just still wrapping my head around that one."
Ron mustered up a half-glare for the Italian. "Yea, yea. I know my reputation precedes me outside of the common room. Now, I was reading about Grindelwald. I know it got lost in the Goldstein problem, and getting Elizabeth back to rights, but I wanted to follow-up on it." Everyone nodded, and seemed intrigued. It was one of those things that had been on their mental to do lists, but dropped in the day-to-day hustle and bustle of getting Hogwarts back up to snuff.

"From what I read and after talking to Vic- uh, Professor Krum, it seems like Grindelwald was a nasty little bugger," Ron continued. "He went to Durmstrang, and was kicked out. Expelled. Can you believe that? The people who willingly teach Dark Arts were disturbed by this guy. He had a real problem. A lot of people say that he would've been the darkest of Dark Lords, surpassing even Moldywart if Dumble-dipshit hadn't gotten his sparkly purple knickers in a twist by someone getting more powerful than him."

Neville groaned at this one. "Didn't need that image, Ron!"

Ron snickered. "Anyway, what's interesting is the time line. I wouldn't have figured it out without Heather's comment the other day about being glad that Krum wasn't the Grammar Nazi that McGonagall always was. Grindelwald and the Nazis had similar rise and fall dates, similar base of operations, and similar sick and twisted modus operandi. If Snakebreath is talking about experiments he got from Gellert he's going to be talking about the Nazis, and those...they were sick bastards."

"Language!" Heather growled, seeing some firsties sitting near the fireplace. They couldn't hear them through the Silencing Charm on them, but it was the principle of the matter. "What would Harry say, hmm?"

Ron paled.

Harry was currently oblivious to Ron's plight as he took a deep breath and stared at the entrance to the Slytherin Common Rooms. He felt, after putting it off for so long that he needed to finally have a conversation with Daphne Greengrass. He touched the strap to his backpack and sighed again before hissing, "Open."

The portrait of the snake hissed something back to him, but it was covered by the creak of the portrait as it opened. He took a step inside, glad to see the room nearly empty. He saw neither Daphne nor her brother, only a few second and third years.

"Um, hi. I was wondering if you could go to the 7th year floor and ask Daphne Greengrass to come down?" He asked one of the girls politely. She eyed him a bit warily before rushing off with a soft, "Okay."

He waited for some time as the other students stared at him, though it wasn't long before Daphne came down the stairs with the second year. He smiled and nodded his head to them. "Ms. Greengrass, I was hoping we could talk a bit. Are you busy at the moment?"

"Harry, you can call me Daphne, you know this, and no, I'm not busy. I'd be happy to talk with you." She saw the nosey looks on the younger kids' faces and settled her arm in Harry's elbow, turning them both and walking out the door. She snickered as the portrait closed and they continued on. She could feel the awkward tension in the boy and grinned. "How is your bond mate, Harry? Good I hope?"

Harry relaxed at the question and smiled. "He's good. Severus is enjoying the Hols, and being
'dunderhead, if not brat, free,' his words. I'm staying with him for the break, working on the bond and all. I just came from there, but he kicked me out to give himself some peace." He laughed softly, showing there were no hard feelings at the action.

In truth Harry had been pacing his floors and muttering while trying to decide whether or not to ask more of Daphne and Damon about their littlest brother. He couldn't get it out of his head after Damon had said something about a little brother named Cyrus who looked like Draco, and he'd been putting it off for far too long.

She made a happy noise. "That's great, Harry...Hey, have you seen Pansy Parkinson lately? It seems you Gryffindors did something right. She's been downright civil lately to everyone, even the Hufflepuffs! Looks like whatever you did worked like a charm..." She trailed off then gave him a shrewd look. "You know, I don't think you asked me out to talk about Professor Snape or Pansy, though. What's on your mind?"

He grimaced, thinking of how hard this would be. "Um...You know about the Room of Requirement? I'd like to wait until we get there to talk about this...particular subject."

Daphne looked at him quizzically, but made no move to walk in companionable small talk, talking softly about classes and classmates, rumors that had gotten around and other inconsequential things. Never straying to important or heated subjects.

Harry walked the path in front of the door asking for a comfortable sitting room, and entered with his companion, hoping and asking for strength for this conversation. As they sat a tea service popped into existence on the table and Daphne quickly had tea and a plate of biscuits set out for them both.

"What's wrong, Harry? We're not the closest of friends, really, so this isn't a social call. Why did you ask me here?"

Harry scrubbed his hand over the back of his neck in frustration. "I...um, well, I wanted to ask you about...well about your little brother."

"Damon?" Harry shook his head. "Oh, C-Cyrus. I guess I did mention him once."

"Yea. At the naming of the Reps and Delegates. I was...curious about him. You mentioned he looks a lot like Draco?"

Daphne smiled dreamily, looking off at a corner. Her eyes were wet with unshed tears, but still she smiled. "He did. He was so small, but the happiest baby. He had these green eyes that just told you everything about him. How he felt, what mood he was in. I remember once he walked around the house with his eyes closed all day. He bumped into table and walls, but he didn't care. Mother caught him stealing a cookie, but later when she called him out about it she said that she could see it in his eyes, so she wouldn't lose her vantage point to catch him again. He decided that he'd just try to steal another, but if he kept his eyes closed she wouldn't know."

Harry smiled, his eyes closed in pain for only an instant. He was relieved that she was still looking off at a painting on the wall to distract herself and hadn't seen. "You...um. You said he died young?"

"Mmm. He died very young. Only three. Father said he got really, really sick, but he wasn't strong enough to fight it. It...his body and magic weren't enough to save him because the illness was so quick." She sniffled softly. "It was all so sudden...But..." A tear fell down her cheek. "I...well, I just never understood how he could have died! We didn't even know he was sick!"

She wiped her cheeks angrily. "And after the funeral it was like he'd never been born. Father refused
to let us even say his name in the house." She growled softly. "Like I would ever forget My Cyrus. He was my baby. I was too young to remember when Damon was born, but when Cyrus came along Mother was too tired to care for him all the time. I knew it and I took most of the responsibility from her. He was my baby more than anyone else's. He loved me most."

Harry was torn at hearing her story. Did he tell her, for Harry was almost certain that his Cyrus and her Cyrus were one and the same. Did he tell her that her brother had not died by an illness, but was cast off to die at the hands of a street thug. Cast off because he was a squib... Cast off by his own parents to die. Did he tell her that it was his, Harry's, fault. Or did he let her continue thinking of her baby brother as he was, a sick baby who just wasn't strong enough. He felt like his brain and heart were tearing each other apart, slashing at the other with poisoned daggers, but finally he decided what he would do.

"Daphne, I need to show you something."

Daphne was puzzled. Show her what? What was going on..."Harry—"

He cut her off and reached into his backpack to pull out a small picture frame. "I need to tell you something very important, and I don't know how else to do it, okay?" He passed the picture frame to her and watched the play of emotions over her face. The frame showed two boys, one scrawny with black hair and vivid green eyes, the other a small boy, with green eyes and a big grin. He was dirty, his cheeks dusted with dirt, and his clothes a bit ragged, but he was happy.

Surprise, recognition, denial, anger, sadness...they all flickered over her face before her blank mask slammed down.

"This...this is you...and Cyrus?" She said with no small wonder. "He's older...How?"

"Yes. It...The picture was taken a few months after we found him. We thought he was almost four at that time. This one..." he handed her another frame, swallowing hard to push the lump in his throat away. "This one was taken about a month before he died." It was a picture of a six or seven-year old boy. He hair was still blonde, but lighter, sun bleached. His green eyes were alight with mischief and his smile easy on his face.

"We found him on the street when I was seven or so. We, that is Heather and I, we were street rats until our Hogwarts Letters found us..." He smudged the truth, but didn't let his voice give him away. "Cyrus...He was cut up, weak, and in constant pain, like he'd been put under a few rounds of crucio. We didn't know what that was then, but I found him and brought him to Heather to try to heal him. He came through, though it took a few weeks. He was a happy one. Didn't matter how many nights we went to bed hungry, or cold, or wet, he just smiled the next morning."

Harry stared at his knees as he talked, trying not to look at the girl before him. He could hear her breathing hitch, and knew tears would be running down her face. He couldn't look at her, couldn't see that pain that mirrored in his own heart.

"One day...One day when I was ten and Heather nine, a warring gang found our hiding spot while Heather and I were out trying to get some money or food, anything. They...they shot Cyrus and another girl, Natasha. It killed them instantly, and when they did I killed them. My magic lashed out and killed them for what they had done to my little brother and sister." His voice broke with his pain, but he continued through his story, not allowing his pain to keep Daphne from the story. She had a right to know. A right to know how he'd killed her little brother. Hadn't protected him well enough.

It was then, as he fell deeper into that spiral of self-loathing that a soft, feminine body tackled his. He fell from his chair as he overbalanced, but laid under her, waiting for the blows to fall.
They never fell.

He opened his eyes to Daphne sobbing on his chest. She was talking, saying something but he couldn't understand. He didn't know what to do, how to console her. Without thought he raised his hand and rubbed her back softly. He held her as she cried, unsure and awkward as he did it. He rubbed his hand up and down, up and down her back, not touching her anywhere else until she was coherent.

Thank You for Reading!

Next up is the Dark Lord's plans, and something special for Daphne. I recommend reading Chapter 8 of No Rest for the Weary beforehand. You won't misunderstand anything, but it will help with one thing if you do.
"Daphne...I'm sorry. It's my f—"

"Harold James Potter, if you so much as dare to apologize to me, I swear to Merlin I will cut you!" She panted and scrambled to her knees to stare at him. He didn't move. Said nothing. Harry felt that correcting her on his name at this point would probably lead to his death, so he waited. Only nodding to her for her to continue.

"I...I don't know how to feel right now. I just found out my baby wasn't truly dead, and died sometime else, somewhere else. I'm hurting, Harry...but I know I have you to thank," her voice was soft, broken.

Harry flinched.

"Thank you for watching over my baby brother when I couldn't. I'm sure...I'm sure you kept him alive and happy for as long as you could. It wasn't your fault, Harry. That blame rests on my parents for abandoning him in the first place, and I will have my revenge for this."

Harry blinked at the sudden change in the girl, but she ignored his reaction. "You said he was cut, and hurting? I'd bet you every galleon they have that Father put him through a ritual. I remember, during those days, how tense everyone was. Cyrus never showed any signs of accidental magic. I swear to you, if I find out he put my baby through that ritual I'll kill him."

"R-Ritual?"

Daphne pinned him in her gaze. "It is a ritual to see if a child has magic. Ingenious really, since it will come within hand's breadth of killing any non-magical being to go through it. Centuries ago that was how squibs were taken care of in pureblood families. Now, they are simply kept as a family secret, or sent off to the muggle world to learn a trade since they can't inherit."

Harry nodded and looked awkwardly at their positions. Daphne looked down, realizing she was straddling the boy and scooted back with a small squeak of surprise now that her emotions were once more under control. "Harry, I..." She looked into his eyes and the emotions there stole her breath. Pain and the haze of memories clouding his vision. "Thank you, for telling me about my brother."

Harry nodded once and pulled something from his pocket. He held his fist out until Daphne held her open palm beneath it. Once she did he let a small black stone fall into her palm.

"Turn it in your hand when I leave, and don't let go until he says it's time. After that you must let go or he will be in pain. Come find me in the hall when you are done." With that he rose, moving through the room, ignoring her questioning look. He was in pain, and memories were overtaking him.

As he closed the door to the Room of Requirement Harry analyzed those feelings. He was hurt and angry and scared, but they weren't quite the emotions he thought he would experience right
Severus had been summoned. Again.

Severus was enjoying his afternoon to himself. No dunderheads. No hormonal teenagers. No twinkling lunatics. No crazy cat ladies. No haughty Slytherins in love with werewolves. No wound up, anxiety-ridden bond mates...

He frowned at that last one. He wasn't sure what had Harry so tense, but he knew that pacing the dungeons would solve nothing and proceeded to kick the boy out with orders.

"Fix whatever it is you broke, then come back." Slam went the door. His lips quirked as he thought of what the look on Harry's face might be, but had only given a half-laugh, a breathy exhale, really, and gone to his labs to brew and relax. He had just bottled the first phial of Calming Draught (which in addition to calming him when taken, also calmed him while brewing) when his Mark began to burn. He hissed a few choice four-letter words and began to move. He grabbed a small piece of parchment writing only:

_I was called. Do not worry, go to your dorm._

_Yours,_

_S.S._

He refused to alert his bond mate too soon through their connection and worry him, so he pulled some magic around it to smother it so less information could leak past. Severus moved carefully through the halls and grounds, only donning his gear once he was out of sight of wandering eyes. He put on the mask and apparated away, thankfully to Riddle Manor once more. If something went wrong Lucius would know where to find him, at least.

He entered the throne room with his usual ritual, unsurprised to be the only one summoned. He'd been called alone for quite some time now, and had grown used to it. He much preferred being alone to having an audience. An audience could join in on the tortures he faced, or they could watch him even closer, see any minute shows of falsehood. Yes, better to be alone with a madman than to face him and his rabid pack.

"My Serpent. Rise. I have much to show you." The Dark Lord rose from his gilded throne, and began leading Severus without any further instructions to the dungeons as he had before. The door opened to the cells, and they moved through another door at the end. Inside was a group of five Death Eater trainees, as marked by the sheen of their masks that lay on the floor. All were standing against the wall. They were pale and being monitored by the woman from before, though he'd forgotten her name.

"Severus, my faithful. Tell me, what better way is it to celebrate the Yule season than with a glorious triumph?"

"None, My Lord."

"Yes. Yes. You see the muggles in this cell? They are the family of a mudblood at Hogwarts, come down with some...misfortunes." He hissed a laugh at his own joke, his lips quirking in a terrifying facsimile of a smile. "They believe they have been given an injection for smallpox, and the pills to ward it off as well, but in truth it is all part of my experiments."
The Dark Lord waved his hand, opening the door to the cell and canceling the silencing charm they had previously been under. Their whimpers sounded through the stone room with echoes. The family of five was put in a body bind and levitated out of the cell onto beds. They were pale, tears leaking from their eyes until Voldemort stunned them all. Severus was helpless, and watched as Voldemort faced him once more, still gloating.

"Gellert and I had experimented with a new potion to spark magical cores in Muggles before I killed him. It is very simple you see." He said as if explaining something very complex to a child. "First we give them a potion that a friend of yours created. It was all unwilling and under duress, of course. I'm sure Horace would send his regards if he could." Severus frowned inwardly and chalked that reference up to one less member in the Potion Master's Guild.

"The potion has been changed to serve as Muggle injections and pills. The injections and pills create the base for my plans, Severus. You see, Gellert Grindelwald was a great man. He watched those filthy Muggles kill themselves in the name of war, but all the while it was really his experiment. He wanted to see if it was possible to give someone a magical core, to create magical beings from a sack of worthless muggle flesh. I have succeeded where he failed, Severus. Once the catalyst of the potions are in place..." He pulled his wand and concentrated on the Death Eaters. "I simply pull magic from my followers into myself..." He turned his body from the limp beings now slumped against the wall to the writhing, seizing muggles on the examination tables. "Then I push that magic into these beasts. And thus, a few more magical being have been created. I have created them."

Severus was stunned, but his "Lord" was not done. "Check them, my Serpent." It was well known that Severus had some medi-wizardry training to go along with his Potions Mastery, and so he moved forward, casting diagnostic charms. His back was to the maniac, and no one else in the room was conscious. He let his mask slip for a moment in terror. While this was a great accomplishment, he had no idea was the Dark Lord was planning to do with this development.

"Okay, so we have a lead on this Gellert, and what the plans could be with His Noselessness, but I don't understand something," Blaise said. "What is so bad that muggles could come up with? I've never heard of these... Not-sees?"

Hermione grimaced. "Nazis. N-A-Z-I. Muggle German military-political group who took over in the 1940's. Umm...gods, it's been years since they drilled this into us at Primary school. Think Death Eaters with Arysans, white people with blonde hair and blue eyes, being the equivalent of purebloods and Jews, Gypsies, Handicapped people and gays all being Harry Potter. They'd round them up like...like cattle and take them to areas called Concentration Camps where they were killed or experimented on. Or they'd go to work at internment camps where they would be worked until they died, usually within months to a year."

Her voice was deep, hoarse with emotion, and tears swam in her eyes, but she never let them fall. Anger, and passion took over as she spoke. "Adolf Hitler was their leader. It was said that he never killed a single soul himself, but he still had blood on his hands. Hitler and his followers killed over 12 million people. Indiscriminate killings. It was senseless, and all because he felt that anyone not of Aryan descent was sub-Human!" She screeched, unable to stop herself as hatred and disgust filled her.

"It's just like him. Just because his father was a muggle and left him, therefore all muggles should be put to death, nevermind that he's a halfblood! Hitler wasn't even an Aryan either! It's because of pig-headed, prejudiced people like them that good people die! Everyday!" She was screaming by the end and Ron jumped up, pulling her into his arms as she fought him, struggling to get free.
Slowly...slowly she calmed, and panted against his chest, her arms by her side until they lifted the hug him back.

Not once did a tear fall from her eye. She wouldn't allow it.

Severus ran the diagnostic charm, and was amazed to see the results forming. Typically he could get a sense of what was wrong in a muggle when using magical diagnostics, but these were no longer muggles. A parchment paper popped into existence and began detailing their injuries. One, the father, was dead from the shock to his system, and he told the Dark Lord as much.

"Congratulations, My Lord. It is true. The man is dead from shock, but the others are truly magical. You have done the impossible and created a magical core where there was none, My Lord."

He turned and, feeling it necessary, knelt before the disgusting man. He shivered in disgust as he felt those long, bony fingers on his head, but kept his face blank, long cursing that anyone seeing the Dark Lord alone was forced to remove their mask. Masks were reserved for hiding your identity from others, and there was no hiding from Lord Voldemort.

"Of course it is true. I am Lord Voldemort, Master…No, I am The God of Death and Magic!"

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Monday,

December 22nd

Early Morning

It was hours later before Severus was released from the madman's presence and allowed to return to Hogwarts. He was under strict orders from his "Lord" regarding two tasks: first, obliviate the children whose family he had made magical this night, and second, to integrate himself further into Harry Potter's life and trust. Severus had a small smile at that when he thought on this night later. The only way he could even get closer to Harry was to seal their bond with sex, and he wasn't going to push on that front. Yet.

He was currently sitting on his couch, his brat's head in his lap. It seems Harry had gotten his note, but refused to obey. Severus had entered his quarters to find the young man asleep on his couch, a pillow wrapped tightly in his arms as he slept and dreamt. He had laughed quietly and, in his exhausted state, simply lifted the other man's head and sat. He gently laid Harry's head in his lap and fell asleep himself, one hand buried in that wild hair. He'd deal with reality at a later date, but for now he wished to join his bond mate in the Land of Nod.

The Malfoy family's rooms were empty, everything still but for the swirling of memories inside the large pensieve. They had been inside for only a few minutes, though it felt like hours inside the magical bowl, when the memory ended and all hell broke loose.

"Son of a bloody bitch!" Heather screamed as she popped out of Severus' pensieve memory from the night before. She ran out of the room, leaving everyone else stunned. The same group from before
had been brought in once Declan and Draco had fallen asleep to view the memory of Severus' calling. They were better prepared for what they viewed this time, though Hermione had gone deathly still once the muggle family had been brought out.

The Weasley twins snickered at some unsaid joke between them, their crush on the ever-grounded Heather a badly kept secret within the Pride. Even Harry was perplexed at Heather's behavior, but unable to think on it as he heard Ron frantically calling Hermione's name.

"-mione! Hermione! Mya! Mya look at me!"

She was almost catatonic, and it was Severus who finally got to her where Ron could not. He waved the young man aside and knelt before the crumpled girl as her knees had given out long ago. "Ms. Granger," he started in his low, soothing voice. "I know why you are distraught, but you need to come back to us, now. You are of no use like this."

Ron growled lowly at that, but stopped as he saw Hermione blinking softly, then faster, coming back to herself. "Rosaria," she whispered, where few could hear. "He...Reid?"

Severus grimaced and nodded. "Yes, Ms. Granger. He has Mr. DeLoach's family. He sent me back to obliviate your cousin so he cannot alert any authorities as to their missing status. He plans to release them in a few weeks, but I'm not sure why."

Hermione sniffled. "She'll kill them. Aunt Eloise will kill those babies and herself before she continues living as a witch. Mark my words. She threw one child out without remorse, and now that Uncle Dorian is d-d-dead...she'll kill them."

Harry's eyes hardened at this and he growled. "I won't let her, Mya. They're magical, so they can go to the Shelter. I will make sure someone picks them up, even if I have to post someone at their house today to wait for them. I have the resources to do it."

"He's right, Mya-dear," Matteo chimed in. "My new Shelter is almost done and they are the correct ages to join my team. I will pick them up myself at first mention of their release and take care of them as I have each of you." He spoke softly and soothingly, trying to bring her back from her panic.

Hermione, feeling numb, just wiped her cheeks and nodded. It was then that Heather returned, banging on the door like the police at a drug raid. As soon as the door opened for her she stormed in, eyes burning with a vengeful fire, hair flowing behind her as she stalked forward.

"That son of a bitch already has those meds on the Muggle market!" Heather growled as she returned to the room, newspapers in hand. "I keep a subscription of muggle newspapers to see what's going on. I knew something felt wrong when I read it, but I couldn't place it. Look."

She set the newspapers down to read, and every face paled as they did.

**WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION CONCERNED FOR BRITISH EPIDEMIC**

Beverly Sterling,

Journalist

*Monday, December 1, 1997*

In a startling report today, World Health Organization (W.H.O.) leaders announce their concern for the epidemic of smallpox in the United Kingdom caused by a new, never before seen strain they are now calling Strain X. Researchers say that, "there hasn't been a strain this volatile in centuries, and
the infection rate is close to 60 percent."

Smallpox, a disease characterized by a bump-like, fluid-filled rash over the body, is not deadly in itself, but complicates other bodily functions if not dealt with. This new strain is said to be more volatile because it travels through the nasal and oral orifices into the body and attacks respiratory and digestive organs as well as the skin.

"Strain X is one that has given researchers some issue," says Donna Lancaster, W.H.O. researcher. "It is extremely slow-moving. Normally a strain this deadly would kill in days, but this moves slowly, deeply. It is impossible to catch before the onset of symptoms."

When asked how citizens should protect themselves she says only this: "Pray for a vaccine, and soon."

When asked on the street, most people say they are afraid to go to new areas in fear of catching this troublesome Strain X. In recent polls of the populace 63 percent they would take any medicine or vaccine as soon as it was created. 34 percent say they'd like to see some proof it works first, and 13 percent say that God will take care of them, so they do not need human medical intervention.

Either way, this reporter thinks that something's got to give and soon. With the death toll rising by the minute, we may surpass 100 dead in a few short weeks. If this is our outlook, I fear things could become dire very quickly.

-For more on Strain X, and what doctors are saying see PAGE 9

"Shit," Neville moaned softly.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION: HELP IS ON THE WAY FOR BRITISH POX

Beverly Sterling,

Journalist

Tuesday, December 16, 1997

W.H.O. Leaders announced on Monday, December 15 that, "a vaccine is being created to inoculate and vaccinate anyone who has yet to be infected, or has been infected for no more than a week. Medicine to counteract the various symptoms is also in development."

Leaders hope to see these products through their trial runs and on the market soon for the betterment of the quality of life within the United Kingdom. They say that when the new medications are released they are best used together. Dr. Chan, the director of W.H.O. stated that, "The medications are best taken together. First, get the vaccine, then begin a regimen of pills to block any and all viruses from taking hold of your body as a host."

When asked about the quick manufacture of the vaccination and their current naming by the masses as a "miracle cure" they had only this to say, "When it comes to protecting any citizen, time is no issue. We have worked day and night and built off former strains to save lives." Leaders say their teams of researchers have worked tirelessly, though no names were given for thanks.

Newly named W.H.O. Spokesperson, Donna Lancaster spoke Monday afternoon on the importance of vaccination before an infection sets in, and to avoid contact with any infected persons as Smallpox is carried through the air. She hopes to see these miracle cures on the market as soon as possible, and gave high praise for their effectiveness in In-House Trials.
"Double shit," Blaise echoed as he finished the second article. "I'm not sure what vack-eye-ns, injections or peels are, but I'm guessing it's the muggle equivalent to potions?"

"Yes, Blaise," Remus said, too stunned to correct his pronunciations.

Lucius wrinkled his brow. "Severus, how probable is it that they've created these potions in two weeks?"

Severus frowned, but it was Heather that answered. "Impossible. A potion, maybe, but vaccines and pills take time, years of study and trials and observations before they are released to the public in case there are long-lasting side-effects. Muggles can't just "create" new potions or medicines as they call them. They must be tested and go through rigorous trials, be documented and published. There are regulations, and none of them can be filled in just two weeks, or even months!"

She'd felt something was off about this since she read it, but hadn't brought it to anyone's attention. It was a gut feeling she had, but nothing factual. Now, though, she knew why her instincts cried foul play.

"You-Know-Who has these W.H.O. people on his side, doesn't he?" Susan asked in a small voice.


Ron, who wasn't completely up to date on Muggle politics like Harry, Heather and Hermione were, asked. "I'm guessing they're a big deal if they're the ones he's got promoting this potion?"

Harry chimed in. "Think Unspeakables meets Wizengamot for all health issues around the entire muggle world."

All of the wizards who were not up to date on muggle conventions had eyes so wide you wondered how they didn't just roll out of their sockets.

"Triple," said Fred.

"Shit, indeed," finished George. It was a sentiment echoed around the room.

Thanks for reading!
Susan Bones watched as everyone huddled among themselves in the Malfoy rooms, each drinking a cup of tea to soothe their nerves. Ginny sat between Dean and Seamus taking comfort in their presence, and didn’t she look so small between the older boys...Her eyebrow raised as it occurred to her that the Weasley girl had been between the two the last time they gathered like this.

Harry sat with his leg pressing against Severus', and next to them on the couch was Lucius who had long before taken Remus' hand in his own. Blaise pulled Neville down next to him as soon as they'd served themselves, his head now resting on the Gryffindor's shoulder.

Ron commandeered an armchair and had Hermione on his lap, arms wrapped around her as she worried her lip; their teacups lay forgotten on the side table. Fred and George had Heather seated between them, a worried look on each face as they tried to distract her in any way possible.

Susan wondered about that relationship, and Ginny's with the two Gryffindors, but held her tongue. She ran through the information they had gotten so far, and tried to compile it in an organized fashion like Auntie had taught her since childhood. Ron, with his analytical mind, was doing the same.

Harry, seeing his face contorted with such fierce concentration asked, "What do you have, Ron?"

Ron cocked his head at him, intent on focusing on the details, rather than emotions for the moment. "Just compiling what we know for sure: Voldemort has a plan, which he got from Grindelwald and Grindelwald is responsible for Nazis. Voldemort had Slughorn create a strain of Smallpox, and a cure. Is it really a cure, though? The suspected cure floods muggle markets because they can't cure it with a spell. Which leads me to wonder if Strain X is magic resistant? Is it possible to save any of the Muggleborn's families with the spell to rid us of smallpox? So, assuming the cure is not truly a cure, only a distraction… it enters the body and acts as a, I don't know, a frozen catalyst for a magical core. Voldemort sets the reaction off by pulling from..."

"Wait. How did You-Know-Who pull the magic from those people in the first place?" Susan asked in the silent room.

"Huh?" Fred grunted at the question. He scrubbed his hands over his face then looked up at the Hufflepuff girl. He'd gotten lost in the memory of the pensieve viewing as Ron ran through their overview.

"You-Know-Who pulled magic or energy or something from those five Death Eaters, right? Then he pushed it into those Muggles to create their cores. Please tell me I understood that correctly." She pleaded.

Lucius inclined his head and laid it on the back of the couch. "You are indeed correct Ms. Bones. He pulled magic from the core of his followers. He was able to do that thanks to a spell entwined in the Dark Marks. It is a one-way connector from us to him, and he can pull on it at any time, possibly to any degree he wishes. It is one of the major factors in our haste to remove it as soon as we can."
Susan inclined her head then jumped as a growl echoed through the room. Harry, who had been the one growling at that news, stopped as Severus sighed and pulled the younger teen into his lap. They wrapped their arms tight around each other and the growls tapered off. The Weasley Twins were the next to speak up.


"Do we do,"

"Now?"

"We wait," Severus announced to the otherwise silent room. There were no cries of dissent, nor murmurs of agreement, only silence out of respect for an equal. "We wait for the Dark Lord to release the DeLoach Family, and we remove the children from the woman's care. We wait to see how the Muggles react to the 'miracle cure' the W.H.O. is pushing. Until such time as a few more factors have come to pass we cannot do anything.

"We wait because to move on anything right now will mark my death for certain as a traitor. We wait, and we formulate plans for every eventuality. Until we know exactly why this has happened we cannot pull anyone from duty as a Death Eater, and until we can remove these accursed marks there is little point in carrying the hope of having a chance to be removed from active duty."

The words were met with small nods, and a few questioning faces. Finally, after much internal deliberation, Blaise garnered some courage of his own, thinking that as a Slytherin he would be least likely to be cursed for asking something of this nature. "Sir? I was…curious as to why you took the mark to begin with." He looked to Lucius. "Both of you."

The teens in the room perked up, the Gryffindors at least knowing that they had long been promised this story from Lucius, but things had gotten in the way of the telling in the past few months. The two older Slytherins looked between themselves and came to a silent understanding.

"It started before our births," Lucius began. "With my Father and Severus' Father, though for different reasons. My Father was Housemates with the Dark Lord, who I've been told," he looked at Harry, "went by Tom Riddle. They were both in Slytherin for some time before Riddle graduated; however, when he came to the Slytherins with his proposition of returning to the 'Olde Ways' my Father joined immediately. He was tired, even then, of the Muggle world interfering in his life, and wanted the Magical and Muggle worlds completely separated, including denying access to Muggle-borns who wished to straddle the line, so to speak, and live in both worlds.

"He wanted them to be forced to remain in the Wizarding World once they decided to attend Hogwarts. The group Riddle amassed was focused on purging Muggle influences from the Magical world, which was not in itself a bad thing." He held up a hand to any comments he could see forming on the teens' faces.

"That isn't to say," he continued, "that their methods were right or productive. They were not."

Severus nodded and looked at each of the students stoically. "There are many reasons that the magical and muggle worlds are as separate as they are now, and many are in support of a more defined separation. Take Mr. DeLoach's family for instance. His parents are not in the minority of reactions when muggle parents are faced with magical children. Miles was lucky to only be thrown from his residence, and few are ever that lucky."

Harry snorted from his position on Severus' lap, and the older man rubbed a hand over his arm soothingly before continuing.
"My Father was a muggle, my Mother a rebellious pureblood daughter set on defying her parents. She chose to have a one-night stand with a man that turned into a pregnancy and marriage. My Father was abusive, and a drunkard. His actions, combined with the abuse I got under Dumbledore's reign of 'Anti-Slytherin' measures...Well, it is easy to say I was driven head first to the Dark Lord's service, though that excuses nothing.

"I was enticed with his rhetoric of protecting muggleborn and halfblood children from their despicable muggle parents, and I truly believed at that time that muggles were horrible beings. Only two muggles in my life had ever shown me kindness, so what was I to think of what was happening to others who lived the same or worse situations to what I had. I believed that my friend Lily's parents, those two muggles, were the exception to the rule of how nasty muggles were. You must also remember that I lived much like Harry has. I was ridiculed at school and home, and once I attended Hogwarts I left only for summer holiday, and no more."

Lucius nodded. "I, being a pureblood and the son of a Death Eater, was not enticed to the Dark Lord's side, but rather thrown in with no option of escape. My Father talked up the Veela heritage that had long since died out in my family line, and made promises he could not keep. He promised me to the Dark Lord before I ever graduated, and on my graduation day I was taken to be marked. For a magical inheritance the change typically occurs at 16 or 17, but some inheritances of magical creature blood, like Veela, are dormant until the wizard or witch hits their 21st year. This allows for the magical inheritance and influx of power levels to adjust and settle before the body is thrown into another uproar."

Lucius felt a warm hand move into his own and his lips quirked into a small smile. "A few years later things came to a head when it was clear my inheritance was not going to manifest. My Father and I were tortured, near to death, for the lies that I had never perpetuated. My Father eventually convinced the Dark Lord that I would be a perfect political weapon when married to Narcissa Black. She would be first in line of her sisters for the Black Fortune, and my Father promised that he could get Regulus 'out of the way.' Sirius had already been disowned by his Mother at that time, and was not an issue in anyone's eyes. However wrong we were, it is what we thought. And so I was married off to that pathetic excuse for a witch within a few weeks and placed inside the Ministry as an advisor to my Father." He took a deep breath and Severus continued.

"Meanwhile I was left alone at Hogwarts to be ridiculed by both my own Housemates and the Marauders on an hourly basis. It drove me past my breaking point and I was easily moved to a real consideration of this Dark Lord and his goals. It was during my seventh year, a few months before graduation, that I came across a Hufflepuff first year in the halls. She was tiny, much smaller than her Housemates, but then they all looked tiny at that age that no one said much about it. It was right after the Easter holidays and she was limping, spots of blood trailing after her on the stones. Her robe was dark, but it glinted in the light from being soaked in blood. I called out, trying to get her attention, but she collapsed before she could even turn." Severus laid his head back on the couch, eyes closed and face set in a mournful grimace.

"Candida Soren, was her name. She was so pale. No one else was around, so I picked her up...she barely weighed anything, but I took her to the Hospital Wing. Madam Pomfrey and all the teachers worked on her for hours. She didn't make it. Her Father had beat her, and...worse. The infection from her wounds had finally reached her heart." Severus was tense, voice low and gravelly as he spoke. "All I could think was that he had been abusing her because she was a witch.

"The story was never released, her death never revealed to anyone. She died because Dumbledore refused to allow anyone to know. St. Mungo's Healers were never called in, even when it was obvious that our Matron was incapable of handling the case alone. Dumbledore announced the next day that her parents had pulled her from school due to a new job placement for her Mother, as if that
mattered since she attended a boarding school," he scoffed.

"When the Dark Lord came to me, speaking so passionately of the separation of Muggle and Magical, I joined immediately with that scene so firmly in my mind, and my back still aching from my Father's last parting gift when I gathered my things and left for the last time. I was promised a patronage in my Potions Mastery, and a like-minded, understanding crowd of my peers. It was probably true at one time or another, but after some time the Dark Lord became what you now know, and he lost whatever drive he once had, if he even intended to go through with his original plan."

Lucius sighed. "He didn't intend anything. Each follower was given a different story to pull them in, but it was never about them. It was about Tom Riddle feeling superior over all others, over all of his men and the Wizarding World. We just couldn't see that at the time. It took me years to see past my indignation and position, and you your rage to see the truth."

"And the others? Have they seen the truth?" Neville asked quietly.

Lucius shook his head. "A few, maybe, but rarely has a follower had the haze over their eyes shattered like Severus and I have. Most were promised power in one form or another, and many were actually given that so long as that power was used to further the Dark Lord's goals. But, being given your part of a deal with restrictions has made people less that amenable to the Dark Lord over the years, and when combined with being hexed and cursed whenever we are near, well-" He broke off as the door to the nursery creaked open and two sly wee ones padded out, rubbing their eyes. Draco, having woken up to hear his Father speaking had roused Declan and gotten the older boy to lower the baby gate that kept him from rolling out of bed…or escaping.

Draco squealed in happiness as he saw everyone and ran forward to the living room in his duck covered footie-pajamas. "Daddy! Papa! I's awake…" Lucius opened his mouth to question the toddler but stopped as the child pouted and gave a passing try at a glare to Severus.

"Unca Sev! That's MY Hawwy! Wet go!" Draco whined and, without letting them answer, pulled on Harry's pants leg. Seeing that no one was moving to give him what he wanted he then used the strong material to simply climb up the boy's leg and into his lap. He wrapped his little arms around the older boy and buried his head in Harry's neck, legs folded under his body to either side of the teen's lap.

"My Hawwy," he mumbled petulantly. Harry couldn't stop his soft laugh, and instead focused on rubbing his hand up and down Draco's back to settle the little Prince once more. He watched Declan climb up onto the couch between Remus and Lucius in his own footie pajamas covered in puppies. The little boy looked between the men and he wondered which would give better hugs tonight. Lucius reached over first and pulled the young boy up for a hug and snuggle, knowing that Remus was still a bit overwhelmed with the revelations of the night. He settled the boy just as Harry was holding Draco and as Declan gave a small sigh of relief from his comfortable position he melted every heart in the room.

Thank you for reading!
With Christmas just around the corner it was decided, though with much reluctance on the parts of the Gryffs, that everyone would take a break from the drama surrounding the Noseless Wonder. Instead, they would all appreciate the families that they had found and made, and enjoy Christmas together—many for the first time. The Weasleys had taken over the room given to Arthur as the Hufflepuff representative as they decided to spend Christmas at Hogwarts. Matteo had taken his teens to the new shelter and had them all settled in and ready for Christmas.

There were few problems troubling Harry, but one was how much time he had been spending outside of the Den. He knew that they would have to begin thinking of a replacement Alpha for after he graduated, but until then he would need to name one of his Beta males as his acting Alpha for when he was with Severus. After a few days of thought he officially named Ron as acting Alpha to the Pride during his absences. There were no dominance fights, and everything went on smoothly from there.

There was much fear, followed by joy and happiness on December 24th for one very small reason: Draco and Declan had disappeared from the watch of their babysitters inside the Den. The Lions were frantic until someone thought to look inside the Animagus training room. They all knew it had been reserved for the newest batch of changers, and no lions would be inside. Instead, they walked in on Draco and Declan both giggling and rolling in the groups of wee kittens and ducklings. Draco was sitting with Declan behind him, holding the smaller boy's hand and telling him, "See, Draco. Soft. You has to be gentle or dey run from you. Soft and gentle. Like dis."

Every heart melted as they watched the werewolf cub softly pet the bunny in front of him before the owlet hopped forward and into his hand for pets as well. Draco was holding his Prongslet stuffy out nose to nose with the teeny fawn that sat uncoordinatedly in front of him. The fawn nuzzled the stuffed animal and gave it a tiny lick, inciting a mass of giggles and laughter from Draco.

The students shut the door and let the babies continue playing with only the sound dampener inside lowered to hear any distress calls. They never let on that the trip inside was unplanned since all of the elder lions and Alphas were out of the Den…much to their relief!

The lions in question were all congregating together in order to finish wrapping gifts as they had done for years. Toys, candies and puzzles were wrapped in Christmas paper to be sent to different shelters for the orphaned and abandoned children housed there. They always wrapped the presents by hand, and sent them late Christmas Eve in order to help the kids believe that they were cared for, even if only by their caregivers and Santa's Little Owls as they called them.

While they normally wrapped inside the Den, they felt they needed a few hours break in order to let...
the little lions gain a bit of freedom and autonomy for themselves. It was unhealthy for them to always look to their Alphas and not think for themselves, and so Harry and Hermione typically spent time away from the Den on purpose…especially now as there were no compulsions to make staying outside such a hard to handle situation.

Hermione was the first to broach a subject that had been plaguing the teens for a while now. "Harry," she said tentatively as she saw his fierce concentration in getting the tape out without letting go of the wrapping paper he had already folded perfectly.

He grunted in response.

"Have you put any thought into who will take over as Council Alpha when we graduate? No one would take the title of Alpha from you, but the Council needs a leader…"

All wrapping stopped as each Pride member turned to Harry, curious about this as well. Harry, though, continued with his gift before setting it aside and leaning forward, elbows on the table. He rested his hands on his forehead, fingers tangled in his wild hair as he sighed. "I have. And I'm afraid I'm no closer to an answer than you may be. I was hoping we could all discuss this together. Make decisions as a group, you know?" They all nodded, but waited for him to continue.

"My first instinct is to name Heather as the female Alpha," he raised his hand as the girl in question opened her mouth. "But! Give me a minute, eh? But I have a feeling she would tell me to put my suggestion in a place where even magic can't reach…Am I right?"

Heather sniffed primly, but nodded. "You are. I…I don't know that I will have time for the responsibilities, Harry. I…um. Well, Madam Pomfrey has offered me an early apprenticeship to coincide with my 7th year. I will work with her each day when I am not in class. It's so I can take a true apprenticeship at St. Mungo's after graduation." She looked up through her lashes to see the smiles and grins of everyone in the room. Hails of congratulations fell upon her and she blushed at all the attention before waving it away.

"Enough of that! Now I, for one, think that if anyone can keep that Den in a working order it's Ginny. Am I right? Just with keeping these three alone in line," she pointed out Ron and the ever present Twin terrors, "she has enough experience to qualify for the job!" She paused, before a thought occurred to her, and her gaze returned to Fred and George.

"Don't you two have a job somewhere, or, I don't know, a shop to run?"

The lions laughed at the sheepish look that fell over the Twins' faces. Fred, with his rakish grin, answered first.

"Who says,"

"We aren't?" George continued.

Ginny, the first to catch what they implied leaned forward and grabbed George by the collar and yanked, growling as she saw the chain around his neck. "Time Turners? Really? What is so important that you'd draw on your cores to work and be here?"

"To be with our lovely Heather, of course!" George commented. "Really what else compares to this specimen of beauty?"

Harry growled as Fred reached over and took his sister's hand, disregarding that Heather popped said hand herself with a rosy blush. "What's the real reason, boys? Meetings are tonight for gifts, and you could have been here then, yet you used the Turners to be here early. Why?" He laced his voice with
a low grumble, letting them know he was not angry, but curious...and still coming to terms that their pursuit of his little sister serious. It was going to be watched carefully if he had anything to say about the matter.

The Twins shared a look before grinning like the cat that ate the canary...which is a better visual when one hadn't seen the take down and devouring actually happen, or when it wasn't a cat eating a canary cream and becoming said bird.

Fred reached into his pocket and brought out a deep blue crystal, one reserved for them as a viewing crystal. He held it in his hand, angling it towards Harry as a visual truce gift. "This is why we were here early, but you can't see what it holds until tonight as it is your Christmas present from George and I." He stuck his tongue out before sliding the crystal back to his pocket and standing. George soon followed and they dramatically swept from the room after rounding the table and kissing Heather's cheeks, one on each side, at the same time.

"Fare thee well, fair maiden ours!" They called before moving into the Entrance Hall to only Merlin knew where.

"Well..." Heather sighed softly.

"Well indeed," Ginny echoed. "Looks like all that crush business was quite serious...Well, as serious as Fred and George can get."

This made Heather blush more and go back to wrapping intently, grumbling, "you have noooo idea."

Hermione, seeing Harry's eyes shift, called his attention back to the task at hand. "So, we have our female Alpha, what about the male?"

Harry grunted and pulled another present to his station before running fingers through his hair again. "It has to be a current 6th year, but," he looked to Ron, "back me up on this. It can't be Colin."

Ron nodded in agreement. "He's got his own team to care for, and is happy there."

Harry continued. "So, I was just going to throw around names, see what we all think. Jack Sloper, anyone?"

Ginny huffed. "The tosser who hit Angelina in the mouth with his Beater Bat? Pass. Even he can't blame that on Moribus."

Calls of "agreed" came from the table.

"Okay," Harry said. "Geoffrey Hooper?"

"Whiner-extraordinaire," came Heather's comment and agreements from others.

Harry groaned, wishing he could just pull Colin in, but he knew that the younger boy would want to stay on and head his own team for missions. "Well, what about Andrew Kirke?"

Surprisingly, this was met with positive murmurs rather than complaints.

Ron was the first to comment saying, "Not the best flier when Mya's around," they snickered. "But he's not a bad bloke. Strong willed, but with a mix of team player. I like it. Also a good strategist."

Hermione, after glaring at Ron, inclined her head in agreement. "He needs some self confidence, but who of us doesn't when faced with us 7th years as we are?"
"I can work with him," Ginny said. "We've got a good rapport in our study group, so this should work well."

Heather grinned. "As long as Shea and Dean aren't gonna give you the jealous act for working with another man might as well go big and work with the 6th year hottie, eh?"

Ginny blushed and hit Heather's arm with a soft "shush you!" as it became Ron's turn to growl. Ron knew of the budding relationship between his teammates and his sister, but he didn't like hearing about it.

Hermione, having watched them all with an exasperated look just shook her head. "Oh, boys like either of you are ones to talk about relationships, Mr. I'm-Bonded-to-a-bloody-professor and you my own boyfriend!" She glared at Ron who decided the best thing to do was back away slowly...

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**Wednesday,**

**24 December 1997**

During this meeting of minds and tempers, Severus Snape was having his own meeting, though one of less pleasant means. Having retrieved the home address of the Dursleys, Severus had decided that enough was enough. He'd felt a niggling in the back of his mind, and after careful consideration had chosen the procedure he wished to use to exact his revenge.

Severus walked to the first phone booth he could in Surrey and phoned the police, a spell on his vocal cords to change and make his voice higher.

"Defense Ministry, Surrey. This is Officer Avery. What can I do for you?"

"Yes, my name is Samwell Solitus with the NSPCC. I have a case on my desk that I need some help with. It seems a family in Surrey, Little Whinging to be exact, had a nephew in their custody that they have neither reported lost or missing, nor have they registered for school in recent years. The case was recently picked up after the child's first and only teacher reported that when she called the Dursleys to ask about him they responded that he had no idea what she was talking about, and had never heard of a nephew. Since the phone was answered by her former pupil, she knew that she had the correct number, and something was not right."

"Yes, Sir. Would you like me to transfer you to missing persons?"

"No, actually. I need a pick up team. The family has been out of compliance on the child's education. Up until now we couldn't do anything, but with the Education Act we have the right to fine the family. It's been 90 days, and the child in question has not been seen in 11 years now. I made a house call to find the door open and the family murdered in their home."

"Can you give us the address, Sir?"

"Number 4 Privet Drive, Little Whinging. The Dursley Residence."

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It was with glee that Severus dropped his glamoured voice and continued walked away from Privet Drive. His earlier plans and spells were all coming to fruition, but as Severus rubbed at the pain in his
chest, he still could not help but feel that this task was going to leave a heavier blow to his heart than he had anticipated.

Thank you for reading!

Next up is a chapter I think most people have been waiting ages for, the Dursley's retribution.
Chapter Summary

If you cannot stomach the warnings, skip this chapter and wait for the next.

Chapter 47: The Takedown

Winter Hols 1997

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any characters therein.

WARNING: Torture, perverted, bloody and stabby stuffs within. Mentions of child abuse.

Tuesday,

23 December 1997

Late night

Under cover of night Severus entered the Dursley house undetected. After checking for wards and feeling none he knew that things were going to be much simpler than he originally thought. He snuck inside and to the kitchen, putting drops of blood on the bottom corner of the doorframe to the back yard and sending an aging spell at the area. He then moved and did the same in strategic areas around the bottom floor.

He moved to make sure that the cupboard under the stairs looked just as it did in Harry's memories, the baby cot mattress was there, blood stained and tatty. His drawings claiming the tiny cabinet to be "haRRy RooM" and the broken toys on the small shelves. He also noted the industrial chemicals kept in there, but he could not look for long. Upon opening the door and feeling the dark and oppressive magic wafting in from the floor he knew something was very bad about this house. He quickly closed the cupboard door and leant against it. There were very few things that gave off such a feeling of pure hatred, and Severus would bet his spleen that Dumbledore had put compulsions on this house.

He looked around before seeing a door that had no outlet and moved to it, casting several unlocking charms at it. The deadbolt and utility lock both clicked open and Severus moved the door to feel the same oppressive pressure on his core and see a set of stairs leading down to a basement area.

"Lumos Maxima."

While his imagination had taken off, he found not the chains and torture chamber he'd expect of a dungeon, but something potentially far more insidious.

Inside one area of the sterile basement were six items that immediately caught his eye: a small couch, a telly, a VCR, a box of tapes, a bottle of lubricant, and most heinous of all, a baby blanket. Severus slowly made his way to the box first, a feeling of trepidation, foreknowledge that whatever he was
soon to find was going to try to break him…and he was right. As he bent down he used a levitation spell to lift one of the tapes and what he read nearly stopped his heart:

Title: Little Harry at 3

Filmed By: VDursley

With a start, Severus felt his chest tighten. He couldn't breathe. With utter reluctance Severus moved and used the end of his wand to press the "play" button on the VCR. He watched, requesting leniency for his brat from any deity or being that would listen.

He watched for what felt like hours as a tiny version of his brat sat in a tub, splashing hesitantly in the water at the direction of a deep-voiced man behind the camera. The boy was on display as the bath held no bubbles. Only the look of confusion and reluctance on his face belaying that this was not a cute home video, but something quite a bit darker.

Feeling the air move around him brought Severus back to the realization that his magic had started to manifest his visceral anger into motion. He stopped all of his thoughts, pushing them behind the walls of his Occlumency shields and took a few thousand deep breaths. There seemed to be nothing sexual being done to his brat, only taped. He hoped that Harry's recollection of being too vile to be touched by his relatives due to his magic had been the practice from the start.

Without thought he turned off the machine, put the tape down and walked out of the basement room. A new thought forming in the back of his mind.

Earlier today he wanted only to plant evidence that the Dursleys had harmed Harry and have them brought up on negligence charges, if not abuse. He had plans to reroute their prison bus to Azkaban via some nice confundus charms, but now…

Now they would receive their true retribution.

Wednesday

24 December 1997

Severus checked his new glamour charms as he prepared himself for the coming hours. He stood at his same tall height, but with a stockier build. His blond hair was thick and cut short, and clothes a dark gray muggle business suit. He chose no outstanding features, but something very blendable in the quaint and quiet neighborhood of Little Whinging.

It took no time at all for his first person of interest to appear, one Dudley Dursley, trudging through the streets from another house down the way. As the young man approached Severus simply stunned him. He moved closer, peeling the fatty eyelids back and casting legilimency in order to see what he wanted.

Memories of a fat child and a skinny waif entered his mind. Seeing the chasing, punching, kicking, and tormenting flash across his mind, Severus grit his teeth in anger. Visions of a whale of a man instructing his son on how best to injure his mate, despite Dudley's reluctance changed to a hard-eyed little boy who took pleasure in pleasing his father. Untill…
He knocked on the door of Number 4, gathering his rage to him as he waited.

Vernon at first opened the door then, after taking in his Wizarding robes, turned a agonizing shade of plum. "We don't want any of your kind here, you freak! Leave before I call the authorities!"

Severus watched his huge, hanging jowls tremble in his blustering rage and suppressed a laugh at his expense. This nasty muggle thought to intimidate him? Ha.

Vernon moved to slam the door in his face, but Severus was faster, sticking his shoulder and hip in the path of the door and using some wandless magic to stall its movement. He let a bit of his Dark Aura escape his body to intimidate the whale before him. "You will let me in Muggle or I will force you back. Choose. Wisely."

Severus watched as the terrified man and woman behind him pale before they moved back. "Go sit on your couch before I decide I am tired of this nice act and just kill you." He would eventually kill them, but best not to let them know that. Yet.

They did as he said, Vernon was trembling and making his excess fat jiggle still while Petunia kept glancing at the house phone. He notice the look and, with a flick of his wrist, released his wand and cast a bombarda at the thing, watching as the hope seeped from her eyes before subtly putting bodybinds on the Dursleys. He walked in front of them and let his glamours melt away. He saw with satisfaction that the horse faced woman recognized him and grinned spitefully at her.

"Hello again, Petunia. It has been such a long time since I was forced to see your ugly veneer. How sad that I must endure it again now, but" he sighed "needs must." He twirled his wand through his fingers and paced before the animals on the couch, pulling out his most vicious Death Eater persona and aura.

"I'm sure you're both wondering why I am here, and I must say it will be sweet vengeance to say. I am here for Harry. You do remember the nephew you abused and abandoned? You see he is mine now, and because of that I am calling for vengeance in his name. He'd never come for it himself, he's too busy to bother with that, but I? I am a vindictive bastard and I will be making sure that you pay for what you have made him suffer when he was an innocent child."

Severus bent over, staring Petunia directly in the eyes. He roughly and crassly searched her memories for instances of cruelty to his brat. he watched Petunia hitting a tiny Harry with a hot frying pan, swinging at him with all manner of garden tools, slapping him, starving him, cutting his hair with razors, forcing him to take scalding showers if they allowed him to be clean at all, teasing him with food before shoving him to his cupboard. One right after the other.

As he viewed each scene he cast from within her mind "poen diderfyn" a welsh curse he'd found used with the Black Mind Arts to cause unending, mental pain. It was a slow, torturous pain from within that caused physical pain to manifest and it had no counter curse. As he withdrew he heard the bitch begin screaming and silenced her before, with a grin, he levitated her. He tossed her magically into the cupboard under the stairs and slammed the door causing her immobile body to slam down from one wall to the other, overturning the industrial chemicals held inside. The same bottles he may or may not have vanished the lids off of. He could hear a sloshing sound from within and with a gleam in his eye turned back to play with his next target.

Severus moved towards the massive lump of fat sat upon the couch. It wasn't that bad of a couch, really. Very soft and a delicate floral pattern...but that wasn't going to stop Severus from soaking it in this man's blood with glee.

With quick, efficient movements he invaded the lard's mind, pulling forward the memories he
wanted. Beatings, burnings, cuttings. Vernon with a video camera following Harry from his cupboard in naught but a diaper, Harry in the bath, changing clothes, cooking, playing in the yard, all before age five. He watched as Vernon beat his brat for his magic, for summoning a bottle, and even for lies the son, Dudley, had created.

With a heavy heart he watched as Vernon strapped his mate down and lit a candle, telling Harry what he would do as he waited for the wax to heat. When it was suitably scalding he turned the taper over and ran the molten wax down his spine, letting the wax seal the burn down the young boy’s back. Then he repeated his actions, but horizontally across his shoulder blades. He burned a cross into his back, sealing in the constant reminder of his freakishness. He then proceeded to whip the boy with a belt to remove the wax. That was the same night Vernon had then disposed of his nephew like forgotten trash on the streets of London.

With a growl Severus exited his mind, not needing any more than that. He looked around the room and, with a malicious look spotted just what he wanted: a red taper candle. With a flick of his wand and in complete silence he stared the other man down and waited for the wax to melt. He used magic to keep it gathered and hot next to the flame.

When he felt there was a suitable amount gathered Severus undid his *immobulus* and silencing charm on the fat man's head and tilted it back, holding the chin still with harsh, digging fingers. Then, with Vernon held in the correct position he preceded to do to him what he had done to Harry.

He crush the hot wax and flame against the forehead and drug it down the line of his nose and lips. He enjoyed the screams of fear, pain and pure agony like the smoothest of violin concertos.

Then, when enough gathered again he ran it horizontally across his cheekbones, avoiding the eyes. He wanted the filthy muggle sighted until the very end. Throughout the process he said nothing, letting the pleas, screams, whimpers and groans speak for themselves, even louder in the otherwise silent room.

When Severus was finally satisfied with his work he transfigured the same candle into a sharp serrated knife and tilted it about, letting the light catch and glint off of it. He enjoyed seeing the fear return to Dursley's eyes, as he ran it over his clothes and skin, trying to decide what to cut first. Subtly he released the strength of the immobilizing spell on his victim by about half.

"Hmm. Lets just see how much I can peel off of you before you die. How does that sound? No?"

Severus let the screams wash over before he used a spell to seal the man's mouth shut. The muffled screams made his skin crawl in pleasure. This was going to be so fun. Slowly Severus brought the knife down and cut away the skin at one of Dursley's multiple chins. "I suggest," he purred, "that you stay very. Very. Still."

Vernon jerked, pressing the knife deeper into his body. Severus used the movement to plunge it in and leave it there, transfiguring another knife from a coaster as he spoke. "Or not. Oh well. Not like there is a scarcity of utensils when one is magical." He moved to transfigure everything around him into different size knives, cleavers, pokers and related sharp objects. When he had a suitable variety of stabby things he proceeded to push them into Vernon's shitty body, transforming him into a human knife-cushion.

"You know, muggle, in my world, I am a world renown Potions Master. I work with entities both alive and dead and harvest parts for a living. Have done so for many years. Luckily enough for you, I know just what body parts a living thing can do without before dying from a lack of blood or oxygen. I'm going to be very careful with you, you utter bastard. Because you deserve this. Every.
Fucking. Second."

By the end he stabbed a new knife in with each impassioned word.

After a few hours of stabbing and slicing off bits and pieces of the corpulent man Severus finally lost interest. The muggle had lost consciousness a few times, but had quickly been brought back with a new application of pain and magic. He watched as Vernon struggled for breath from his punctured lung and perforated bowel. He'd be dead within an hour if left alone.

Luckily, Severus had other plans.

With one wave of a wand he cast and *accio* on the knives, sending the behind him to embed in the wall. He watched as each wound slowly seeped blood before he finally met Vernon's eyes once more.

"This is only a fraction of the pain you inflicted upon my soulmate, and for that I will see you cursed. An existence of torment, remembering only these hours here with me." Severus muttered the words to make this wish a reality before grinning one last time. "Rot in your existence, Dursley.

"*Sectumsempra!*"

And with that the elder Dursleys were no more.

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**Thanks for reading!**
Harry Potter paced the floor of his bondmate's quarters worriedly. He had not felt the call of the megalomaniac extraordinaire, but he did not know where Severus was. He'd been gone from his quarters all hours of the day and night for a while now, and Harry was getting feelings he didn't know what to do with them.

It was as he was pacing and over thinking that the man in question returned.

Severus winced inwardly as he saw his brat pacing the floor of his rooms. He had not had time to clean up fully after his time in Surrey, and had hoped that Harry would still be eating at this time.

"Brat. What are you doing here at this hour?" He asked tiredly.

"What am I doing? You have been gone constantly, sending me both the most upset and evilly gleeful feedback over the last day or so and you have the audacity to ask why I'm here?" His voice climbed the decibel charts and a growl entered the sound.

Severus, for his part, simply blinked at the young man before moving to his bed and bathroom, needing to get cleaned up and changed. Cleansing charms only went so far.

"Where are you going? Severus!"

"If you must know I am going to shower and rid myself of the bodily fluids covering my clothing. Now, if you will excuse me I am in no mood for your childish behavior. I do not have to explain myself."

As he turned he felt a hand grasp his arm and spin him. He met the jade eyes of his bonded and with a start, felt a wave of something bombard against a barrier in his brain. Slowly, his eyes unfocused as he pulled his barriers down and could feel a wave of emotions not unlike his own, but still alien. Other. Feelings of hurt, distrust, sorrow, anger...

*Harry*

'I worry for you'

Severus could feel the thought move through his consciousness. It was the not the first to finally make it down their bond to his mind, but was the first to come complete with a matching emotion. A sure sign of a growing bond.

"Do not worry for me, brat. I have been doing something of my own volition. I was not called, nor in any danger." He finally said aloud, calming and giving what little explanation he was prepared to
give at that moment. Vile as they may have been, Severus had still taken two lives, and for that he would feel a weight on his conscious.

Harry just tilted his head and waited, watching his professor and bondmate carefully. He could feel the emotions coming down his side of the bond, the loudest ones being guilt, satisfaction and exhaustion. He decided to wait and make no assumptions, shutting down that jealous part of his mind before it began. With his out stretched hands Harry began to pull Severus' robes from his shoulders.

"Then I guess we should get you clean, then, Sir."

With that Harry pulled at his mate's clothes, growling at the many, many buttons lining the outer layer of clothing. He only got seven or eight of the annoying buttons before he simply spoke through the bond.

'Get the clothes off, Severus'

Severus smirked haughtily.

'Impatient Brat. Patience is a virtue.'

'One I don't have. Now off or I start tearing your very expensive articles of cloth with my claws.'

Harry met Severus' glare evenly and without his usual smirk as they entered the bathroom. Finally, Severus' lips moved and both of their clothes disappeared with a whisper of magic.

Harry in turn used his magic to focus on the water and spelling it on and warm, glad he had done it before the sight of his naked partner took away the last vestiges of his intelligent thought.

Steam filled the room as they simply looked at one another. Both men stood tall and slender, one lightly muscled, the other toned just a tad more. Long, lean torsos gave way to flat tummies and quickening members. One body was tan, another milky white with streaks of red littering the skin now and again. Evidence of a mess not even a cleansing spell could tackle. As the young man caught sight of this his eyes returned to face Severus' gaze.

Onyx met emerald as Harry took the first step back into the hot water and beckoned the older man to join him. Passion and understanding filled his eyes and actions as Harry immediately moved to the soap and he lathered his hands. Little by little he ran his hands over every inch of his mate's body, washing him clean. As the soap rinsed away he left small, lingering kisses on new skin, leaving trails of heat and absolution.

With the rest of Severus' body out of reach after his belly and back, Harry slowly slithered down the slytherin's body to kneel before him, a playful gleam in his eye.

Censor

Left then right, front then back, Harry washed down the hard thighs and muscled calves, avoiding the one area he knew Severus wanted him. He grinned, chuckled even when a growl escaped the other man as he thoroughly washed the man's delicious backside. He looked up, opening his mouth to ask a question until a long fingered hand slipped into his hair and pushed him forward on to the cock twitching in front of his face, red with blood and dripping precum after being so thoroughly ignored.
'You will suck, you tease'

Harry grinned around the cock in his mouth for a second before he began to lick the throbbing member in his mouth. He bobbed his head like a good little cock sucker and ran his tongue around the head with every upstroke. He relished the groans and moans of approval at his work, stroking himself with his other hand as he gave his partner as much pleasure as he could.

'So good...'

With a thought Harry took his hand from his own hard cock and wet it in the sloughing water before inching it back to Severus' entrance. He ran his finger around the puckered rosebud, sending a questioning feeling to the older man in their bond.

'Yesss.'

Harry felt himself twitch with the enthusiastic response and worked the finger in further and further, stroking until the first, then second knuckle worked past the tight sphincter.

His mouth tightened and tongue moved rhythmically over the hard shaft in time with his finger, slowly as he search for that place just inside the male body. He moved a little but at a time until Severus gasped then groaned, his hips jerking forward roughly and precum spurted onto Harry's tongue, making him moan as well.

'So delicious. Your cock is perfect in my mouth. C'mon Sev'rus. Come in my mouth. Give me all you got.'

Severus, hearing this direct in his mind growled and tightened his grasp on Harry's head, fucking that glorious mouth for all he had, moving between heaven in front and a delicious torture behind. He could feel Harry crook that blasted finger and the pleasure receptors in his brain lap it up like cream. His stomach muscles tightened and his balls grew taut as he roared his completion to the only other occupant of the shower.

'Swallow, brat. Take in my essence, and don't let a single drop spill.'

If thoughts could growl, these did. Harry shuddered and couldn't control himself and that sent him right over the edge, coming in his hand, over the shower floor, so keyed up was he.

They were quiet, each letting the other settle their thoughts as they dressed once more and sat for tea. It was near four afternoon and both of the dark haired men had forgotten to eat in the excitement of their earlier activities. While Severus had been busy with the Dursleys Harry had been visiting with Matteo and his charges.

Neither was very sure of just how to broach the subject of their afternoons with the other until Harry, with his ingrained Gryffindor brashness said, "So how was your afternoon? I spent mine talking with the teens and Maddie. They are all settled in the Shelter and ready for the holidays. They have a tree up and are decorating it tonight with the things I had sent to them."

Severus growled lowly and narrowed his eyes, but kept his feelings to himself. While he knew in his mind that Harry and Matteo had nothing going on he was jealous of how deep their relationship ran. It reminded him of what he and Harry should have had, had the meddling idiots running this school not interfered in everyone's lives for their own gain.
His aristocratic face moved to a blank, but wary state as he replied, "I paid a visit to your former relatives. It is not quite as lively in Surrey as it once was. Though your cousin was left to continue his miserable life."

He watched his mate's face like a hawk after as he sipped his tea, watching for any signs of hurt or betrayal, though he expected none.

Harry, for his part took the information in stride. "Hmm. Was it very gruesome? Their deaths?"

The slytherin in him was screaming for caution, and said only, "They were very befitting of their treatment of you."

Harry nodded and set his teacup down before scooting down the couch to lay with his head on Severus' lap. "As long you are satisfied in your revenge, I am fine. Who knew you could be the 'White Knight' type, sir?"

Severus clenched his free hand in Harry's hair and gave it a tug.

'Brat.'

In another part of the castle there was a great fuss being raised by one particularly fierce little Dragon. The problem?

Draco's Christmas pajamas and Declan's Christmas pajamas did not match.

Remus had come to Lucius and Draco's quarters with his own young boy in tow just before dinner. He and Lucius had taken to spending a lot of time together since their first personal, and very hot interaction. They'd come to learn more about each other, their mutual love of children and teaching, learning and the fierce protectiveness they held for their hatchlings both young and older.

Not to mention the very hot and very mutual pleasure they found in the other.

Remus, who had loved and lost before, was quite content with the moseying, languid fall into love he could feel himself taking. While Lucius, who had never loved anyone or anything besides his Dragon was very confused by the feelings that gripped him at odd times.

Both men were brought back to reality of their thoughts— more a mental escape from the current tantrum happening— not by more screaming, but a loud and high pitched coo by the same demon spawn who had been screaming only seconds before. They turned from their spots in the kitchen making dinner to see just what could make the child make such a noise to see Declan, previously in Santa Puppy pajamas now in the same blue and white icicle pajamas that Draco wore.

Lucius gaped at the two while Remus knelt down beside the, in turns, smug and happy children.

"Declan? Did you change your pajamas?” Remus asked in a quiet, soothing voice. He watched the 5 year-old nod his head as he held the thick material away from his little body, staring at it in a joyous awe.

"Draco wanted us to match, so I wished really, really hard so I can make him happy and now we's matched. Is that bad?” He finally asked softly, just a bit of trepidation entering his voice.

Remus smiled reassuringly at him. "It's not bad at all. You did your first bit of magic, and that means
you get a reward. Is there anything you want?" He asked, knowing they had plenty of Christmas presents for both boys and hoping that something would fit.

Declan looked between Remus and Mr. Lucius, a thoughtful look on his face as he felt Draco petting his new sleepy clothes softly and cooing.

Finally, in a voice so soft only Remus could truly hear because of his werewolf attributes, he said, "Can I be your's now like Draco?"

Elizabeth paced the floor as her back and belly twinged now and again. She knew these were not contractions, merely preparations by her body for them, but they were annoyingly painful nonetheless.

She could see her brother and his boyfriend practicing tandem spell casting in the corner behind Godric's warding stones, and was happy for them both. She'd always known something funny was going on with those lions until this year. She remembered Neville's visits as a child, his closeness with Bay, then how it all changed after one week of their first year. She thought back on how weird her friends Ginny and Elizabeth could be sometimes, how secretive they got...but after a while she just accepted their weirdness in silence in return for their protection from Anthony.

She sighed and rubbed the small of her back again and sighed, forcing her thoughts to turn from that line of thought to something more...constructive.

"Lizzie!" Blaise called out as Neville put their warding stones away. "We were thinking about getting food from the kitchens. Want anything?"

She took a step to the side to turn, then gasped as she realized her knee was giving out and she was falling forward. Her eyes scrunched up and she wrapped her arms around her baby, only hoping to protect her bump before she heard two voices together call, "Arresto Momentum!"

Tentatively, Elizabeth opened one eye to see the ground coming closer, but very, very slowly. She was being lowered to the ground rather than falling to meet it.

With great trepidation Elizabeth took her arms from her baby bump and onto the floor, keeping herself raised up slightly as the boys finally set her down and released the spell with a yell and rapid patter of running feet on tile floor.

"Ohshitohshitohshit, Lizzie! Are you okay? You're not hurt,right? I'm so...We're s-mmphm-"

"Is the baby alright?" Neville added after Elizabeth simply nodded and covered Blaise's mouth with her hand.

"Shush Bay. I am fine! You two got to me in time and with a tandem spell as well! I could feel both of your magics wrapping around me as I fell. It was very weird," she added, her little nose scrunching up just a bit.

She could feel her back twinge again and sighed in relief when the wards moved to allow entrance to someone. She smiled to see her Mamma and proceeded to shoo her brother and his boyfriend out of the door.

"Leave me be and in peace. I have girl thing to do, and you two are dragging me down with all your manly ways. Shoo!" She waved them out with a laugh and leaned against the closed door.
"So how long can it take from the first contractions to labor? Because this baby is definitely getting ready to come, Mamma."

Thanks for reading!

Again, full chapter is on AO3. Add me on facebook at www dot facebook dot com / petrakittywrites or under the name Petra Kitt for pictures/ descriptions, questions, comments, and questions from me about what readers want to see in my various stories.

I only have a few more pre-written chapters, so updates will be slower from here on, but we are drawing near the climax, so enjoy the ride! And if you enjoy my writing I have another story I write on the side, a Harry Potter, LOVELESS cross over (with the fighter system only, no characters) you may like.
A soft shuffling whispered through the Gryffindor Boy's 7th year dormitory as one of its occupants and one visitor quietly snuck out in the wee hours of the morning. The two boys were intent upon having their first Christmas together since childhood alone in their favorite place, which only the Room of Requirement could give them.

Blaise, who had never summoned the room before walked back and forth thinking to himself.

'I want everything we lost returned to us. All that time and our special place. I want it back.'

He watched as a door covered with an elaborate iron design appeared and opened it, eager to see just what the room would give him and his lover.

They entered, confused at what they were seeing.

Trash...everywhere?

Piles and mounds of lost things, trash and furniture, like a hoarder's junk room had exploded out into the main floor and multiplied.

Neville and Blaise stared at one another then the room, then back.

"What did you think about as you paced, Blaise?" Neville asked.

Blaise blushed and mumbled quietly, "Getting back lost time, but I didn't think it would create this!"

Neville nodded and moved to exit the room just as he heard giggling and low voices coming their way. His wand descended into his wand with a flick of his wrist and he moved to stand in front of Blaise, waiting for the intruders to show themselves.

"Ssh! We don't want to get caught!" A male voice whispered, sounding quite familiar to Neville.

"Right. If Ron finds out he'll kill both of you," Ginny giggled back as she, Dean and Seamus quietly crept up the stairs and down the hallway.

Neville relaxed and smirked, lifting a finger to his lips as he looked back at Blaise. He motioned them back into the shadow and waited until the trio came closer before casting a tripping jinx at Dean silently.

"I do believe your tipsy whispering gave you away," Neville said as he walked out of the shadows, a red faced Blaise behind him, trying not to laugh outright. Neville gave Dean a hand up as Seamus
moved forward to clap him on the back and Ginny stared, wide-eyed at the door to the Room of Requirement.

"Good one, mate," Dean told him. "Didn't even sense you."

"Yea. Right passed us, right, Gin?" Seamus added, but to no response. "Ginny?"

The red headed girl stood still as stone, starting transfixed upon the wrought iron door. Her face was pale as moonlight and her fingers shook as she leaned towards the door, as if drawn against her will to move closer.

"Ginny?" Dean moved closer to the girl, wrapping an arm around her shoulder and looking at her face. He could see her lips moving repetitively, the same thing coming from her mouth. He leaned closer, putting his ear near to where he could hear any sub vocalizations, trying to understand what had spooked his girlfriend when he heard the one word he hadn't wanted to hear from her ever again.

"Horcrux."

Dean froze as he registered the words and without hesitating looked to Blaise. "Get Snape. Now!"

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There was only truly only one thing Remus missed about bachelorhood, and that was sleeping in on his holidays. Luckily for him, and Lucius, now that Declan and Draco shared a room their mornings came a few hours later than when Draco was left to his own devices, namely crawling into Daddy and Papa's bed as soon as his eyes opened.

Lucius woke early as he was wont to do, but remained still, searching the bed for his son and his...lover's charge. They had yet to discuss anything permanent with regards to each other or Declan, but Lucius hoped to rectify that today. He could feel his awareness split between the betrothal bracelet in his jewelry box and the man beside him whom he wished to bestow said gift upon.

He smiled mischievously as his bed partner stirred and set a ward to alert him if the boys left their room. Slowly, he moved beneath the comforter to lie between Remus' legs.

He divested the man of his sleep pants with ease and took the soft, but hardening cock into his mouth with pleasure. He wrapped his long-fingered hands around Remus' waist and held him still as the feeling of a warm, wet mouth over his most sensitive member permeated his dreams. A low, dark moan let him know he was doing well and Lucius sucked lightly until he felt the undulation of hips between his fingers. He kept things soft and smooth, not wanting to awaken the other man just yet, and rubbed his own hard cock against the bedsheets as his partner's obvious pleasure made him just as hot.

He bobbed his head, one finger moving between his lips to get wet with saliva before moving down, past the taut balls to that little patch of skin just underneath. He rubbed the perineum and bobbed his head, cheeks concave with the force of his suction on Remus. He forced a grin down at the loud moans and whimpers of pleasure and ran his tongue over the silky skin of the cock in his mouth, loving the taste of precum that filled his mouth.

He could feel Remus' jerks become less smooth by the second as he sucked harder and heard his name fall from those beautiful lips. He swallowed around him as Remus filled his throat with cock and cum, a sharp cry and panting breaths filling the air.

When Lucius had finished milking every last drop from his lover he pulled off with a sound pop and
licked his lips as he smirked and stared into the dazed eyes of his lover.

"I love you."

Elsewhere in the castle similar activities were taking place between many other couples. Christmas Day was a time of joy and elation and togetherness.

It was an aspect of the togetherness that Harry decided to explore with his soulmate. After getting up quite early to use the loo Harry found the lube he had hidden for this occasion underneath the counter. He cast a cleansing spell he had found, and shivered at the tingling feeling in his bottom. He scooped the slick with two fingers and slowly, carefully prepared himself.

This would not be his first time bottoming, but it had been quite some time since he had. When Harry felt he had done enough he carefully crept back into Severus’ bed chamber and slid under the comforter at the bottom of the bed. He slowly crawled up until he could slide between his lover's legs and licked his way up the long, hard member already waiting for him.

Harry found it quite amusing that his snarky lover's body was being so accommodating. He waited until he felt Severus tense as he awoke before kissing his way up the pale, lanky body to a meeting of lips. Whispered words of contentment and pleasure filled their ears as long fingered hands gripped his grinding hips.

Emerald eyes met onyx, one set closing and the other widening as Harry lined his hole with Severus' dripping tip below him and sank down upon it, impaling himself only an inch before those fingers gripped tighter.

Harry moved his hands and held his hands over Severus', leaning back and letting gravity pull him to his goal with a self-satisfied groan. He rolled his hips happily as he heard the curses fall from Severus' lips, his hips snapping up in response.

"You sneaky little brat..."

Harry leaned down, kissing Severus for all he was worth, only breaking it as the man rolled them quickly, and without separating their undulating bodies.

Harry stared up into eyes as black as night and moaned helplessly at the feral passion in them.

'Oh yes...Fuck me.'

'Mine.'

'Yours. Always.'

Harry settled his feet on the bed and thrust up against him at that, sending visions and fantasies of just what he wanted Severus to do to him straight to his lover's mind. He groaned as, instead of doing as he wanted and fucking him through the mattress, Severus slowly pulled out of him.

He whimpered and tried to wrap his legs around Severus' waist to keep him from leaving him...then cried out as hips thrust forcefully against his backside.

'Yesss. More.'

Severus grinned as he heard the incoherent babbling within his head and began slowly pulling out of
the supple body beneath him before thrusting in roughly, over and over again. He kissed his little lover, lips traveling to his neck and nibbling, leaving little love bites remaining as proof of his passion.

Severus moved in and out, rolling his hips and relishing every cry of passion and pleasure falling from his brat's lips. He'd never thought he would feel such wondrous pleasure, but Harry always managed to surprise him. He felt the small heels digging into his hips every time he tried to pull away, and pushing him harder for each thrust.

'Do you like having your arse reamed, brat?'

'Fuuuuuuuck. Gods yes. More, Sev'rus.'


With each word he gave a particularly hard thrust into the younger man, one hand wrapped around Harry's cock, stroking him in time with his own movements. He could feel the overwhelming pleasure begin to take over his mind, and wanted Harry cumming before he let himself lose control. He could see the control leaving his lover with every word and began to push his own thoughts into Harry's mind, pleased when it took only three more strokes of his hand and cock to bring the younger man to climax.

He groaned as he felt the rippling muscles surround him even tighter and gave himself over, cumming hard and fast with a cry of Harry's name coming from his lips.

Panting breaths filled the room as the two lovers lay one atop the other in bliss. Their eyes remained closed, faces in the neck of the other as they regained their breath and sanity, not to mention feeling in their legs. Both noticed the lights shining brighter in the room, swirling around them, but it was a few seconds before either remembered they had been in an unlit room moments before. Harry blinked and nudged Severus and they both watched the glowing gold aura connecting their bodies.

"I take back the 'Knight in Shining Armor' comment," Harry said breathlessly. "Knight in Glowing Armor fits much better."

"If I am the Knight, that makes you my very useful Squire, does it not?"

Harry stretched languidly, eyes still on the pulsing glow surrounding them. "Mmm. After that I'd rather be your well used sheath if I could have a choice."

Severus gave him a questioning look until Harry glanced at him, then down his body. He groaned and rolled to his back, throwing one arm over his eyes and another around Harry to pull his close.

"Your perversions know no bounds, do they, brat? Those fantasies you bombarded my senses with were downright lurid," Snape drawled as the glowing dimmed bit by bit making Harry pout.

"Lurid? If anything you're the lurid one, with that liquid sex voice of yours. And besides, you loved every single one of them. Don't even pretend that those didn't make your cock-mmph!"

Severus covered the younger man's mouth with his hand. "Ssh. Hush and listen."

Harry stopped trying to bite the hand covering his mouth and listened for once. There was a dull thudding coming from the hall, no. The living room? Maybe?

"Someone's banging on a door. Who knows you're down here?"
"My Slytherins," Severus replied. "As well as the adults who live here." With that Severus muttered a spell to rid his clothes of their wrinkles and dressed quickly, Harry only a step behind him as they went to see what the problem could be. "They all have an alternative way of contacting me, and it has not been used."

Harry nodded and felt for his coin, not feeling anything and pocketing it once more. As they came upon the door Harry fingered his wand and watched as Severus opened the door, to an out of breath Blaise.

"What, Mr. Zabini, may I ask could be of such importance that you stalk my quarters rather than using your emergency call?"


Harry frowned. "Why didn't Dean just grab me over the galleons? He knows I've been here."

Blaise shook his head. "Don't know. Just know. They're scared out. Their minds. Ginny just keeps saying. One word over and...over. But I don't know what. It is. Just that Dean got scared shitless."

"Language," Severus snapped before looking to Harry. "Can you shadow us back?"

Harry's eyes widened in shock. "How do you know about shadowing?"

"Hogwarts is not only favorable to you," Severus said, before adding. "You and Mr. Dare did it in front of me the night Goldstein attacked, and Hogwarts allowed me to follow by the same mode. Now, can you do it?"

Harry nodded once with a glance around the room. "Come on." He walked to the shadow, sending a pulse of magic to the corner where the shadows were deepest. "Hogwarts, please take us to our friends."

He motioned Blaise forward. "Just step in like it's a floo that won't twirl you like candy floss."

"Flo-what?"

"Just go!"

He shoved Blaise in, then motioned to Severus, but didn't shove him as he went willingly. Finally he joined them, jumping from the shadow atop the 7th floor nearest the Room of Requirement.

"Report," he called, seeing Ginny surrounded by her two boyfriends, each with their arms around her and on the arm of the other as she stood there, mouthing one word again and again. He knew this look, and his stomach sank. This would be a fight.

"Move," he growled at the two, his eyes flashing jade as the boys' shifted as well. They slowly, and with much reluctance, moved back from their girl, a lip raised the only sign of their displeasure as the worry pushed their felines to the forefront.

Harry ignored all others and focused on Ginny. He got into her face, hands on either side pushing her hair back. He lined up her eyes with his and let his Alpha Aura pulse. "Come back Ginevra. Now," he growled at her, before backing away and seeing the life come back into her eyes.

"Report," he called before the reality of the situation could cloud her judgement with fear and self-disgust.
"Horcrux. Inside."

"Come. Show me."

Ginny nodded, raising a hand to stop her men from arguing with her and moved forward briskly. She yanked the door open and moved in, following the familiar call of the shard of a man's soul who had once possessed her. She crept forward and to the let, feeling the ice ener her veins with every step. She knew Harry had her back and it was the only thing driving her forward.

On and on the piles of trash were passed until finally, upon rickety old table, sat a rather unflattering bust of an old warlock, but was what sat atop the warlock forehead that drew everyone's attention.

"Is that it, Ginny?"

"The tiara, yes." She replied in a voice thick with longing and pain. Her arms ached to grab it, pulled beyond temptation to obsession, but she fought.

"It's not just a tiara," a new voice spoke from behind the group.

"Luna?" Harry questioned as he watched the tiny blond skip towards them, a serene look upon her face. "Why are you here?"

"It's Rowena Ravenclaw's lost Diadem," she continued without acknowledging the others, even Harry. "Hogwarts has been it's fortress for too long. She wants it and the others out of her. The Death Magic taints her so. She says it is time, Harry. She has given you the tools necessary to complete as much of the task as you can."

Behind her the Gryffindors gasped, having caught on to what she was alluding to. Severus held his tongue, but Blaise was too confused by the odd Ravenclaw to stay silent.

"What's Looney Lovegood on about, Neville?"

"Destroying Voldemort's soul, of course," Luna answered for herself.

"Her name is Luna, disparage her again and you'll answer to me, Zabini," Harry said harshly. Blaise took a step back, glancing at his boyfriend who in turn just shrugged back at him.

"Luna," Harry said, directing the attention back to the task at hand. "Hogwarts wants this going down tonight?"

"Mmhm! She's just been waiting for you to come back to her Room." She looked around the piles of trash in the room, eyes hazy and unfocused. "It must be finished in the room where the others are kept."

Glancing around at the others in the room, Harry thought for a moment before making a decision.

"Dean, Seamus. Take Ginny back to the Den. Get a Dreamless Sleep from Heather, and -"

"Harry, no! I can do this!"

Harry growled and turned to the girl. "Yes, you can. I am not questioning your abilities. But I refuse to put you through standing in the presence of five soulshards gathered in one room. I have never taken you there, nor will I ever. Go to the Den and recover. That is an order from your Alpha. I will not chance your wellbeing."

With great reluctance Ginny fell back. She wanted to come with them, but also knew that she felt ill
from the presence of one Horcrux, let alone being in the room with three of them pulling at her mind and consciousness.

"Boys, gather my teams, then meet me in the Chamber proper. Will a half hour do?"

"We'll be there in gear and ready."

"Good. Tell Mya to bring the venom, I have an idea."

With that Dean, Seamus and Ginny took off, prepared to do as their Alpha bid. As Harry turned back give Neville his assignment, namely dropping of Blaise at his dorm and preparing the chamber a turtle patronus came sliding into the room, poking its head out of its shell as soon as it came to a stop.

Harry recognized it as Heather's and a tension filled him as he waited for her message.

"Lizzie's in labor. The baby is coming."

Harry and Blaise both stared at the fading patronus, their shock at the abrupt message only surpassed by the next comment from the spacey, blonde occupant of the room.

"Wonderful! The babies are coming!"

"BABIES?!"

Harry raised his hand before chaos and questions could take over.

"Blaise, you need to go to the Hospital Wing. Warn Madame Pomfrey and Heather. Let them decide whether to tell Elizabeth now. I do not want her more stressed than she already is," Harry said, trusting Luna's intuition as he had since meeting her. She knew things, and after some of the warnings she had given him he knew to take her seriously.

Blaise opened his mouth to argue, wondering just why they should believe some crazy Ravenclaw, but one look from Harry silenced him. He gave Neville a quick apology and a kiss before taking off.

"Severus, you're with me. Luna," Harry turned jade eyes on the girl. "Join us? I would appreciate your presence."

Luna smiled, but shook her head, her eyes becoming startlingly clear as she gazed into his own. "I can't. This is a task only you and your Pride can accomplish. No one else. You must overwhelm the dark, and not let it engulf you."

Harry nodded, something niggling in the back of his mind, and he made himself drop the train of thought. He'd lived through too many headaches the past few weeks trying to chase down information from Slytherin's Tomes to continue forcing it.

"Understood," he replied. "Thank you." He leaned forward and hugged the girl, grateful for her presence and her message from Hogwarts. He turned back to the diadem and grinned. The idea had finally come to the front of his mind. He conjured an unbreakable box, one with a slide-close top. He used his hand to push the ugly bust over and quickly set the open box over the diadem, shutting the lid tight like it was a disgusting bug to trap and throw out.

With that done and a nod to Severus and Neville he set off for the Chamber of Secrets, ready to finish off the only good thing Dumbledore had ever brought into his life: a way to make Lord Voldemort vulnerable right under his missing nose.
Thanks for reading!
Chapter 50: Piece by Piece

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any of the characters therein.

Parseltongue

Harry looked around his assembled team in the main room of the Chamber, his closest friends all in battle ready gear. Even Severus' clothes had been transfigured, though he was not happy about the tight fitting cloth. His arms crossed over his chest and his eyes showed his displeasure to Harry, though he looked just as fierce to the unknowing Gryffindors who joined them.

"Expecto Patronum!" Harry called, smiling and petting the regal stag that came galloping out of his wand and back to bow before him. "Go to Ronan and Elsbet, tell them the Chamber is in use and to go into a soft lockdown for a few hours."

The stag lifted from its bow and turned, taking off through the wall towards the Daycare guardian's quarters.

"Okay. Ron, Hermione I need you awake and ready. Ginny found another horcrux, and the word from Lady Hogwarts is that she wants it and the two stashed here gone. Tonight." Harry informed them, watching as the last vestiges of sleep left them with the information Seamus and Dean had neglected to tell them.

Hermione held out the small vial of black oily liquid she had brought with her. "The venom you requested." Harry took it quickly and called for Seamus, Dean and Ron to dismantle their weapons. "We only have one weapon that will hold the venom without disintegrating." Harry motioned to Gryffindor's sword in the scabbard by his side. "However, I only want the Sword used as a last measure. I want minimal interaction with these artifacts. So, we are going to go after the three we have one at a time. I'll call them forth in their unbreakable containers and we'll go from there. If Salazar's information is still correct," Harry tapped his temple, "The venom will take care of things for us. but if not, Ron, you are going to wield the Sword."

Ron gaped at his Alpha, dumbfounded. "Pardon?"

"You heard me. Neville, I want you on Gryffindor's Warding Stones. I need Seamus and Dean ready to cast whatever of the soul shard remains out of this plane and I need you protecting them while this happens."

"Understood." Neville moved to set up a healthy perimeter where he could establish the stones and move them when needed.

"Okay. Let's..." Harry stopped and grinned, rubbing his temple as solutions halfway floated to his brain. "Finally. That's been bothering me for an hour now! Okay. Slytherin to the rescue for us." He grabbed the box holding the diadem and placed it in the center of the room. "In your positions. Hermione, by me. Severus, I want you behind the ward until we know what will come of this. The
last Horcrux I took out was...volatile, the say the least."

Hermione nodded, remembering the damage from that time, and moved. She watched Professor Snape reluctantly move back, though his eyes seemed distant.

Harry nodded to himself and checked Ron’s position with the Sword near him. Perfect. Slowly he conjured a long, metal pole and used it to push open the slide top box just a touch. He waved Hermione to his side. "I need a small hole cut from the top and given to me without damaging it structurally. Can you do that?"

Mya glared at him exasperatedly. "Really, Harry? This at least is child's play." She pulled her wand from the wrist holster and began waving it in a semi circular pattern, first the top, then the bottom, then once all around. Harry watched the box for any movement or change in magic, satisfied when a small circle appeared in the top of the box, right where he desired it. He watched his friend twitch her and up in small measures, lifting the piece cut out up and out from the box. He took it as she floated it his way and grinned.

"Thank you. Go back behind the ward now." He said without looking away. He used the pole to close the box and his magic to seal the seams. Slowly he signalled Ron at the ready and uncorked the Basilisk venom. He slowly lined up the bottle and hole and poured a good measure in, and quickly sank the piece back into the top and sealed it as well.

Gradually the box began moving, vibrating and screaming. Harry slid himself back on the smooth worn floor and covered his ears as a burning smell and the sound of sizzling and inhuman death cries reached his ears. His wand was lifted and ready, should anything happen, but after a minute the box slowed and ceased moving. Harry waited a minute more before calling for his bondmate.

"Severus. Scan."

Severus moved forward with a scowl and knelt beside the box, running diagnostic scans. He felt nothing dark coming from the box, nothing magical about it. "Clear."

Harry said nothing and pushed the box across the room to be dealt with later. "Okay. Now the cup.” Harry began the same process of conjuring a slide top box, unbreakable and impervious. He slid the top to Mya as he moved to the glass case the Hufflepuff Cup Horcrux was kept in. Harry looked at the gleaming golden cup, the handles on either side and the badger etched on the front amid leaves. He waved his hand, vanishing the glass and quickly trapped the cup inside the box as he had the diadem, making sure not to touch it and reactivate the Gemini spell on it. When Mya finished her task he slid it into the groove and encased the Cup.

Harry sighed in relief as he ran through the same process as before, on edge still as things seemed to move too smoothly for them. He began pouring the venom in, and capped the box, sliding away. It was only seconds later that he realized nothing was happening as it had with the diadem.

"What's wrong?" Dean called. "Shouldn't it be moving and all?"

Harry nodded, thinking, but it was Neville who spoke. "It's too dense. The cup has more weight and material to it, you're going to have to add more Basilisk venom to it, Harry."

Harry held up the vial, the only vial of venom outside of their Gringotts stores, to the light. "We won't have enough. The cup is three times or more the weight of the diadem. There isn't that much, nor do we know what is inside the box now."

Harry looked around at his friends, thinking until his eyes set upon Severus with an idea forming.
'Want to chance a tandem spell with me?'

'And what harebrained scheme has your feeble mind come up with now?'

'Aww and here I thought I had some pretty good ideas. I took care of the diadem didn't I?'

'No. You got the idea from Slytherin. It was a tactic far too neutral for you to have dreamed up.'

"They're doing that thing again, aren't they?" Hermione whispered to Ron as she walked to stand beside him.

"Yea. Seen Shay and Dean get that same look in their eye, then they go all quiet. Bloody annoying, it is."

'So will you do it?'

'You've yet to mention what spell you wish to conjure, and considering the circumstances I surmise you wish to cast Fiendfyre.'

'How smart you are, lover. I regular Sherlock.'

'Impertinent brat. How do you suppose we counter if it proves to surpass our current level of control?'

'Seamus and Dean can lift the glass case over it, let it choke itself out magically. Like regular fire does without oxygen.'

"Fine," Severus said aloud, which made Harry whoop aloud.

"We're doing something new, guys!" Harry called as he brought back the vanished glass case and handed it to Seamus and Dean. Then, as everyone gathered around he explained the plan.

Harry stood with his back to Severus' chest, their right hands outstretched and clasped together as they prepared to cast tandemly. Seamus and Dean stood at the ready with the glass, Ron had the Sword in hand, and Neville and Mya were safe behind the Warding Stones monitoring the situation carefully.

Severus began casting as Harry focused on controlling the dripping flames coming from Severus' wand. He meticulously gathered and crafted the powerful flames until a giant flaming snake formed. Harry watched it slither forward and guided it, whispering in parseltongue as it wrapped around and around the Cup. When he had guided his soulmate's fiendfyre where he wanted it he shifted his eyes to Seamus and Dean and watched as they floated the glass case over the burning snake and held it aloft.

Carefully he signaled Severus to keep a tight reign on the fire and countered the impervious and unbreakable spells on the box containing the Cup. They watched as the box slowly began to dissolve beneath the corrosive elements of the basilisk venom still inside, and the rest of the wood catching fire from its nearness to the fiendfyre. He waved the glass forward and Seamus and Dean settled it in place.

Harry again took control of the fiendfyre and stared the hissing snake it formed down.
There is a soul within there. It is yours. Devour it.

Harry watched as the snake pulled back before snapping and sinking its red hot fangs into the metal, again wrenching a screeching cry from the soul shard within. The human occupants of the room watching with fascination as a black, inky mist rose from the cup, pressing and smearing against the glass container before being sucked into the fire and fighting its way out once more. He could see the enchantments around the glass were failing, a weak spot in the glass beginning to fold under the magically intense heat of the dark fire.

"Hold it steady, guys." Harry ordered and was satisfied when he could feel the combined magic of Seamus and Dean keep the glass whole. With a surge of panic he could see that it wouldn't be enough and prepared to try splitting his attention between the fiendfyre and the glass when he saw the other glass container float its way towards him. He couldn't stop to think about what it meant, except to see it settle around the failing glass and contain the fiendfyre and soul shard for a while longer.

Little by little the cup melted and was devoured by the fiendfyre beast until only ash remained. None of the black mist resurfaced, and the fire slowly choked out from having nothing to fuel it, dying. They waited a few moments to be sure all embers were distinguished before Harry felt his knees give out in exhaustion, grateful for his lover catching him before he hit the hard floor. Seamus and Dean slid down the wall until they could sit, all four breathing in great gulps from the mental and magical exertion of joining magic to keep the fiendfyre controlled and the glass container in place. Harry looked over to his friends to see Hermione in a similar state and surmised that she had been the one to step in with the second glass box. He watched Ron go to her without hesitation and turned back to his own partner.

Severus stood as stoic as ever even as he had an arm around Harry, his left hand holding the younger man steady and taking some of his weight. Harry wiped the sweat from his brow and watched the others do the same, only now realizing how hot the room was after the fiendfyre's presence.

Harry was about to turn to the group, ready to determine what to do next with Slytherin's Locket when a movement from within the glass container caught his attention. A tiny wiggle from within the ash caused the ashes to part, revealing a small grey snake with burning red eyes making its way out of the bottom of the pile.

"What is that?" Ron asked, having caught sight of the movement as well. "A snake? Those...bloody hell those eyes!" He took a step back, as did the other students save one.

Harry nodded and moved forward until he knelt before the glass box and touched a finger to it, contemplating what he looking at.

"Ashwinder," Severus said impatiently. "A snake that rises from the ashes of a fire. Has your education been so faulty with that half-giant that you know not of the Ashwinder?"

Harry waved a hand back at the surly man, knowing his acerbic tongue was spurred more by exhaustion than true anger. "We do know that, Severus. The red eyes were just not a welcome sight after what was destroyed in there. Plus, it isn't well known that Ashwinders can be formed from a fiendfyre." Harry tapped his temple again, telling the others that the tomes gave him the knowledge.

"The real question is do we let her lay her eggs inside the glass or in the chamber? She's only got an hour."

"Let her go." Hermione suggested. "The glass is structurally unsound. We should just let her get to where she wants to nest and leave her be. Besides, the gain in potions ingredients will be worth it as long as she and her hatchlings understand not to go near...well the hatchlings." She said with a small
Harry rolled his eyes good naturedly at her and turned back to speak to the snake who had come to the glass edge and risen up to meet the emerald eyes of the speaker. After a few exchanges they both nodded and Harry tipped the glass back enough for the Ashwinder to escape.

"She'll be in the abandoned room off Slytherin's Chambers. She's agreed to leave any humans alone in return for the safety of her nest."

They all watched the snake slither away before turning back to the situation at hand. One Horcrux left, and only a Sword and too little Basilisk venom to take care of it.

"We need a new plan."

"On your marks," Harry called from behind the warding stones where he, Severus, Seamus and Dean were recovering. Neville stood at the ready by the locket, ready to toss it to Ron when Harry spoke.

"Ready," came three voices and Harry called for them to begin.

Quickly, Neville did as he was supposed to and tossed the locket by the chain toward Ron who brought the tip of the Sword of Gryffindor down onto as soon as it was still before his feet.

Every tensed as they watched...the sword scrape down the enchantments surrounding the locket and keeping it closed, narrowly missing slicing a few of Ron's toes as it came to a stop.

"Shit. Harry, it's still spelled shut!" Ron called as he shuffled his feet out of the way of the sword. Harry sat forward and took a deep breath. He looked at the serpentine S, inlaid with glittering green stones covering the front of the locket. He concentrated on that S, and thought of the newest snake within the Chamber as the locket began to vibrate and clatter on the floor as the diadem had within its box. With a sibilant word Harry commanded the locket to open and the golden doors of the locket swung wide with a small click.

Everyone watched with pure horror as the locket opened wide revealing a blinking eye behind the glass windows, dark and handsome as Tom Riddle's eyes had been before he turned them scarlet and slit-pupiled as the Ashwinder's had been.

Harry saw Hermione turn her head away for a moment before stopping and facing the monstrosity before her, and say, "Finish it, Ron!"

But Ron was frozen in a vision as the black, inky mist rose once more from the Horcrux, preying on its destroyer's most secret weaknesses. Ron was ensnared in a vision where the Moribus was never broken, and he was still seen as the dumb, lazy friend. The deserter. Known only as "Harry Potter's Jealous Friend" and not as his second in command outside the Den. Where he was ridiculed by his Professors for his laziness and lack of wits.

It wasn't until a soft, familiar body wrapped around his from behind that he broke from the thrall and heard his girlfriend's encouragements to finish the Horcrux, kill it once and for all.

With a mighty roar he lifted the Sword of Gryffindor and, with all his might, ran the locket clear through. He could feel a dark energy gather and a cold, biting wind whip around him and Mya as the screaming soul reached a crescendo. He dropped the Sword and turned his back, covering Mya's
body with his own as well as reaching up to cover his ears before his eardrums burst.

Then, with no warning, silence befell the Chamber of Secrets and the room was still.

Harry scooted forward and grabbed the ward stone. Dean slid the other to him and he pocketed them, rising from the ground to see what was left of the Horcruxes. He watched Neville give Ron and Mya a hand up, both standing to fix their hair and clothes from the damage the windstorm caused. He motioned Severus forward, asking him to scan the Locket before he went any nearer.

It was clear of all dark magic.

Harry sighed in relief and cast a scourgify on the locket, cleaning it of the blood and eye goop covering it. He closed it and fit his head through the long, tarnished chain, tucking it into his shirt without comment. Neville grabbed the box holding the Diadem remains, and Harry motioned his friend to open it and check the contents. He slid the top off and picked up the diadem in tact, if a bit corroded.

"How?" He said and lifted the jeweled headpiece from the container. Everyone stared gobsmacked upon the diadem before looking back at the remains of the ashes that used to be a fine golden goblet.

Everyone was asking the same thing, but it was Harry who found an idea. "Maybe it was a goblin-made piece? Like the Sword of Gryffindor." Harry reached forward and took the diadem, turning it in his hands and studying the piece. He could see no distinctive markings, save the inscription of 'Wit beyond measure is man's greatest treasure', and resolved to ask around when he had the time. He put it back in the container and handed it to a very eager Mya, knowing that they'd never see the thing again outside of her research into it. He hoped something good would come from the enchantments he still felt within the diadem.

"Share," was all he said as Mya took the box, holding it close to her bosom. With that done, Harry looked around his comrades and could see their fatigue, physical, mental and magical. He looked around the room once more and called the night to an end.

"Get some rest, and sleep in. Someone will call us when we're needed, I'm sure."

The other Gryffindors grumbled their agreement and returned to their beds, all too tired to celebrate their victory together or separately. Each one fell into their bed, except in the case of Mya and Harry who fell into their partner's beds. and escaped into misty dreams.

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**Thanks for reading!**

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Chapter End Notes

So, those of you who are friends with me on Facebook saw that I’ve had a pretty rough week. A teacher at the school where I work passed away a week ago and the rest of us were left in the lurch and hurting. Trying to get the kids settled (middle school, so easier said than done) and back to normal has been rough, and left me exhausted. I literally had 3 sentences to write in for this chapter and couldn't bring myself to do it without making everything depressing. Hopefully things will return to normal soon.
Pain. Pain is proof that one is alive. Pain is the sacrifice given to bring forth life, and in giving up one's life. In the dense darkness of night a life was brought into the world, more precisely in the early hours of 26 December Elizabeth Mkapa-Zabini gave birth. Even after the first feeding and a much needed nap for Mum and babe, she still refused to announce a name until her favorite members of the Pride came to visit her.

Once they heard the news, it was impossible to keep them away. Despite most of them having only a few hours rest Harry, Hermione, Ron, Neville, and Ginny all rushed to the Hospital Wing as fast as they could from their respective resting places. They had each received a note from Blaise which, in typical silent Slytherin fashion, read only:

Baby is here. Lizzie wants her Pride protectors.
-Blaise

Mya, being the early riser of the pride, found the note first and sent her patronus to wake Ginny and Harry after waking Ron and Neville with whom she happen to be sleeping in the same room as. Thankful that the halls were cleared for the winter hols, they met in the Entrance Hall and tried to wake each other by playing a small game of tag, chasing each other around until the Hospital Wing was reached. It was only then, and after years of scolding from the Hospital's Matron, that they slowed to a power walk and quieted down to a small roar.

As soon as the door opened for them they cut the chatter down to whispers, not wanting to disturb anyone, namely the new mum, who may be sleeping. Madam Pomfrey, while not happy they were there, allowed it so she could finally finish her paperwork.

The Matron, due to the nature of the court case coming up shortly, had decided to hold off on sending anything to the Ministry for a few days. No one wanted trouble, especially from the Goldstein family, and the longer it took for them to find out about the new birth, the better.

Ten fingers, ten toes, a dusting of black hair and a beautiful button nose. The precious bundle in pink was being held in her mother's arms when the lions stepped in. At once those who had been privy to Luna's comments the night before were confused and looked around the room for another bundle. Neville looked to Blaise, who shrugged back when Heather finally spoke up from a seat next to her best friend.

"There was only one baby," she murmured tiredly. "Dunno what Luna was on about, but I've been checking on Lizzie for ages, and there's only ever been the one babe."

Harry shrugged. "Who knows what Luna ever truly means." The others agreed, and focus returned to their newest member. "Now, I for one want to know how you're feeling, Elizabeth."
The girl in question smiled softly, eyes never leaving the baby in her arms as she rocked softly. "I'm okay. Sore, but happy. So happy to finally have my little girl."

"Have you named her?" Ginny asked.

Elizabeth smiled and nodded. "Adalyn. Adalyn Jamie." She finally looked up, beaming at Heather and Harry. "My Noble Usurper. Named after those who helped me take back control over my own life, and her godparents. If you want, that is?"

Heather nodded to her friend with tears in her eyes, speechless. She'd never known when she had taken on Jameson as her last name that three years later she'd meet a scrawny little boy named Harry James and later have a goddaughter named for them both. It was overwhelming to her how fate aligned itself from such shitty beginnings to create this beautiful day.

"Of course!"

In a creaking manor hundreds of miles away sat a crazed megalomaniac sitting upon his throne. He did not think himself crazed, nor maniacal, but simply a Dark Genius. Others who disagreed did not remain around long enough to voice their opinions.

The man sat, spindly legs crossed at the knee, and one elbow on the arm of his gilded chair. His chin lay in his palm, leg twitching idly as he stared down at the mangle figures of his most recent experiments and the dead bodies of low level followers he had sucked dry of magic. There was no one near consciousness to see him, so he had relaxed his rigid posture while deep in thought.

Usually he would only split magic transfusions into thirds. One third stayed in his giver, while one third went to each of two muggles who had been given their inoculations. Apparently his newest and most useless troops were so magically low that giving a third of their magic had not been enough to spark the cores within the former muggles.

So naturally he just had to give half to each of the new magicals. What good was one weakling when compared to two new magicals. Their blood was not so genetically tainted as to curb the core growth, and they had proven to be quite the storage units for large cores. He knew, with his own influx of muggle blood tainting his veins, that what society whispered about purebloods breeding themselves out was true, but neither did he care. His power base was established, his coffers filled, and his reputation suitably demanding. He had no care now for loyal followers.

With this new process he, the Dark God Voldemort, was systematically building an army of magicals, all completely under his control with the help of loyalty potions and liberal use of Imperius curses.

Voldemort thought of all he could do with his magic cows, and wondered if he could use some of the first test subjects to as givers for the next generation of new magicals. He knew he'd have to get rid of the children, their cores had proved to be too small for harvesting. He cared not if they lived or died, just that they be rid of them to make room for new subjects while their new camps and barracks were built. He thought about those very handy gas showers Grindelwald had spoken of, but thought better as his incompetent followers seemed to only have the ability to finish one mission each millennia, but he would look into it. Who's to say he could not have a construction team taken and turned within the week? What fun it would be to have these men building day in and day out, resting only in shifts as his compound expanded.
With that in mind Voldemort yelled out for Wormtail to join him. "Bring me the oldest of our magic cows. I want to play a little game." With that the sniveling excuse for a man fled. He grinned maliciously. "And you!" He waved to one of the weak underlings who had just stirred, barely managing to survive his culling. "Clean this room and dispose of the bodies immediately. I tire of their presence."

Many weird things went on in the Slytherin dorms. That isn't to say that the other Houses did not have their fair share of odd occurrences, because Gryffindor would hold exhibits A-Z and a few thousand numerically labelled after that. But Slytherin House would come in a late second.

Being underground, even below the dungeons and the Black Lake did strange things to the students of the Snake house before the hierarchy of blood was even established. The eerie green glow cast into the room was only one part of the oddities within Slytherin, but as Harry was about to find out, it wasn't the only.

Harry had received a letter from Daphne Greengrass about returning the Resurrection Stone, which she had kept in order to allow Damien and Astoria know the truth. Now, though, she knew she needed to return it before she let herself drown in the past so she had written Harry, thanking him and asking him to come to the Slytherin Dorms. It was as he was opening his presents from friends and family that he began contemplating a reply to this missive.

He laughed as he saw the Twins had given him and Severus both a box of their latest creations: sex toys for the wizard-inclined wizard. The man immediately put the lid back on the box and twisted its wrist, making both boxes disappear. Harry pouted, looking around for his new toys, and crawling over to straddle Severus' legs as he sat on the floor. He knelt up, resting chest to chest with Severus, his hands braced against the chair arms on either side of Severus' head.

"I have a gift for you," he stated nervously, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a small box. It wasn't wrapped, Harry knew if he had wrapped it he would have gone insane from being unable to triple check the gift was still inside. He leaned back and thrust the box forward into Severus' hands. It grew as he handed it over, the shrinking charm receding.

With a suspicious look at the box after the last one he had opened, Severus took the lid off and just stared at the little black books stacked neatly inside. He had seen these volumes before, the day of the wards being reset.

Inside Salazar Slytherin's personal Library.

"While I do appreciate the thought, I regret to remind you that I am not able to read written Parseltongue." He looked up at his partner, blinking once at the shit eating grin on the young man's face.

"Good thing I made a translation spell, isn't it?" Harry said as cheekily as he could.

"Brat." Severus replied, then gestured to the tomes. "Well?"

"I want my gift first!" He said incredulously. "I know I won't see you for ages once you start reading those!"

Severus nodded, knowing what he said was true, and thankfully he had found a gift that would cause
the same reaction, he hoped.

With a wave of his wand, Severus took a glamour off an old cherry wood Hope Chest that had been in the corner of his quarters for a few days now. "That is for you," he simply said and watched his young partner's ass sway with avid appreciation as he crawled over to the chest.

Carefully Harry opened the chest, careful of the creaking hinges.

Harry looked inside the chest, curious to see what looked like a well organized school trunk. Inside sat a woman's robe, a dirty Quidditch uniform and several books, some of which he had his own set of. School books.

Everything inside was musty and old, but well preserved. With shaking hands Harry reached inside, grabbing the first book he could and opening to the first page to read,

\[ \text{Property of Lily Evans} \]

It was written in the uncoordinated hand of a young pre-teen, and with his own shaking hands, Harry turned the book over to read \textit{Standard Book of Spells Year 1} on the cover. He blew out an unsteady breath and looked up at Severus with questioning eyes.

"Continue looking, I believe you will find other items to peruse," he simply said before motioning him back.

He obeyed, and looked, seeing, oddly enough, the same book on the right side of the chest. He frowned, wondering why his Mother would have two sets of such a simple book, but he knew why as soon as he opened it.

\[ \text{Property of James Charlus Potter} \]

\[ \text{Heir Potter} \]

\[ \text{If found, please return to owner} \]

The words were written in a scrawling, practiced hand, not one of a child. Harry guessed that one of his grandparents must have written it in for his father. He lifted a few other books from the right side, setting them on the floor neatly to find another set of robes, a few scarf sets, and even a Gryffindor tie.

The left side was packed with similar items, but of a more feminine nature. He could see how each layer of robes and books led to the next year level of Hogwarts' curriculum and smiled. It was a memory chest of his parent's school years.

On the inside of the Hope Chest's lid was a letter, sealed with \textit{Lily & James Potter} written on the outside. He pulled it off and opened it, reading the decades old card.

\[ \text{Dear Lily and James,} \]

\[ \text{We hope to find you well this holiday season. Your Father and I have been agonizing over what to get you so soon after your Wedding, but when an idea hit me (and James' mother was so accommodating), I just had to make this for you.} \]

\[ \text{You know we've kept your room as it was since leaving that first year, and so I decided a memory box might be something you would enjoy. Well, now I understand just how smart you must be. All those books! Dear me. I know I wasn't able to make a Hope Chest with you through your teenage} \]
years as I had with my Mother, but we make do.

So, now, on the Christmas of your 19th year, I want you to have this Hope Chest. It may not be filled with bed linens and cookbooks, but instead your robes and school books. The memory of those years will serve you just as well. Dorea sent over James' things as well when we realized just how much room was left, and put a charm of some kind over it so it will be as good as new for years to come.

There are a few mementos of your childhoods, before Hogwarts, at the bottom, but for the most part it is filled with your school items in each year, and the photo albums you made each summer.

I do hope you enjoy this, dear, and come to remember these years with fondness, despite all the travesty going on now. Give James my love, and take a pinch for yourself, sweet child.

All our love,

Mum & Da

For hours after Harry picked meticulously through the Hope Chest, reliving his own years at Hogwarts alongside his parents. He'd asked and been told that Severus found the trunk during his visit to Privet Drive, and given how much time he'd spent away the past few days, Harry accepted the answer as truth. Once they were both suitably thanked and thankful Harry gave Severus the translation spell so they were both equally engrossed in their gifts.

It was during this time-engrossed as they were in old information-within Severus' quarters that the Bloody Baron made himself known by moving through the wall to float in front of them solemnly.

"There is a disturbance within the Slytherin dorms," he said airily. "You may want to look in on them, or not. I'd prefer their deaths, but the decision is not mine." He floated through the room listlessly, fading in and out as he seemed to await Severus' response.

Harry, for his part, just sat back and blinked owlishly at the wall that had just been used as a ghostly door. "You know," he started. "I know Nearly Headless Nick is a rather useless ghost, but the Slytherin ghost is truly a piece of work, Sev'rus."

He got no response other than a baleful glare from both man and ghost as they followed the spirit to the common room.

"Have you alerted Sinistra?" Severus asked the ghost as they walked.

"I did, but she is hampered by her long journey while I am not. She asked to alert you while she took a shortcut." The ghost answered in its deep voice. Harry wondered about the gaping hole and blood stains on the ghost, but thought better of asking such personal questions of a being not bound by doors.

As they approached, Severus touched a finger to the entryway, making it appear transparent so he could see within. From the non-reactions of those inside Harry assumed it was only a one way image transfer. After being very impressed by the spell and making a note to tell Hermione about it-despite Severus saying it was a charm only usable by Heads of House. He looked inside to find anarchy and chaos.

A not so proverbial line was drawn between two sides, with only a small pocket of bored looking students sitting on the sidelines, unwilling to join whatever was taking place. One side held most of
Slytherin's first through fourth years and a handful of seventh years as well as the bound and gagged lumps of a few boys who were in an age in between. On the other side were the remaining students, all screaming for their compatriots back and for vengeance.

"Let them go, Greengrass! They have a job and you and your family are going to pay when the Dark Lord hears you have intervened!" One boy screamed at the opposing side, but Daphne and Theodore Nott, the leaders of the opposition just smiled serenely at them and stood guard silently over the traitors respectively. Daphne twirled a wand through the fingers of each hand, though Severus thought they looked a bit too long to be her own before she stopped, stuck one behind her ear and broke the other over her knee lighting fast.

It took a minute for Severus to comprehend just what he was watching, but in that time Daphne proceeded to break two more, and Theo joined her. The noise within the room grew louder, mostly that of the gagged boys at their feet, leading Severus to assume the wands being snapped were theirs.

"Sir, I don't think you should be here," Harry stated. Obviously with mention of the "Dark Lord" and "jobs" assigned to the students Severus would be placed in a difficult position.

Severus quickly and easily cast his patronus, the lithe doe trotting around them before taking her message. "Tell any of the Faculty leaders that their presence is needed at the Slytherin dorms immediately." He shook his wand as it spark, cursing his growing core. Since the consummation of their bond, Severus and Harry both had seen a growth in their cores as well as in magical strength. Harry thought it was very cool, until Mya accused him of illicit acts with Seamus after blowing up the third spell target in a row. Severus had not taken kindly to the retelling, making mention of a flayed Irishman at even the thought of him "rubbing off on" his bondmate.

"Hopefully they'll get the message faster with classes being out," Harry said softly as they watched the power struggle continuing inside the green tinged room. As young as they seemed, every student was either Pureblooded, and taught neutral and Dark spells from the cradle, or they were halfbloods who worked hard to stay out of the limelight until their repertoire caught up to their peers.

As the older students crept forward, unable to cast for fear of hitting their brethren, the younger students would cast at them without fear of missing their target. They simply needed to keep their own protectors-namely Daphne and Theo, but also the other seventh years-safe.

Daphne continued in her silent and systematic destruction of their hostages' wands, throwing the remains in the Common Room fire with glee. They would never get those remnants back, she would make sure of it. In her mind, they deserved death for their actions, but since she'd caught them before they could act she was giving them some leeway-mainly by destroying their wands earnestly and in such a way that they would never find a wand that fit just right.

It was as the last wand was broken and burned that Severus heard steps approaching their position from the main stairwell. He turned, greeting Professors Sinistra and Flitwick as well as Madame Longbottom with his own not-so-hidden schadenfreude. He let them see through the transparent wall after sending Harry back to his quarters-because the situation was volatile enough without Gryffindor's Golden Boy/Voldemort's Undesirable Number One around.

With an agreed upon plan of action Severus opened the entryway, taking much satisfaction in the paling and gaping faces around him. He was not unaware that his brat had decided not to follow his directions, and was even now standing outside the entryway, hissing in Parseltongue to the Snake engravings at the ceiling to allow him to see inside. Severus could feel just how close he was and hear the sibilant hisses as harry began thinking in Perseltongue, but put it from his thoughts as he turned to his newest form of entertainment: terrified students.
"Just what is going on here?" He asked and paused just enough for dramatic effect in the tense silence. "Would anyone care to explain to me what you dunderheads could find so utterly entertaining that I was alerted by our House Ghost whilst in the middle of a Faculty Meeting?"

For a time no one dared say a word, then, all at once utter chaos erupted as everyone tried to explain their side before the other had the chance to paint their side that of the sympathetic cause.

Thank you for Reading!
Previously: Lucius licked his lips as he smirked and stared into the dazed eyes of his lover.

"I love you."


Lucius' Quarters

Remus Lupin sat on his lover's couch in the dark. There was nothing wrong, per se, but he was feeling overwhelmed.

Well, it wasn't a bad thing, all things considered, but still Remus couldn't decide what he should think about the last twenty four hours or so.

Love.

It wasn't that Remus was starved for affection. His parents had been kind, and attentive, even after his...accident. He'd had friends and lovers in his time. Even during the darkest of years after Sirius' incarceration he'd had people to talk to, fleeting though they were.

But none of that prepared him for this. Love, from a young boy who relied on him. A child that he should have had in Harry, until that was taken from him. Love, from a man who should peer upon him like mud beneath his boot.

Yet, he had no clue what to say to either of them. He was a werewolf. A placid one, by far, but a werewolf nonetheless. He could not adopt Declan, not magically. His status eliminated that option with no margin for questioning. Nor could he adopt by muggle means. He had no papers, nor did the boy, for that matter. He had little means with which to prove his worth in the muggle world...and yet.

"Can I be your's now like Draco?"

How did one answer that? How do you tell a child that his perception is wrong because he sleeps in a shelter for other orphans. Or that he cannot be adopted because of the same affliction he had, and that any inkling of his furry little problem would mean a life of being watched by Ministry Officials. A life of never being allowed in Hospital, being avoided on the street and taken in for "questioning" after full moons for petty crimes in areas you were nowhere near.

An uneducated life where no school nor tutor would have you the minute you were found out.

Remus shook his head and the melancholy with it. He could feel the tiny, delicate chain around his neck. It was virtually weightless, but felt infinitely heavier. It wasn't the chain itself, but what lay on it that kept his focus.

A betrothal ring—the Malfoy betrothal ring to be exact.
**Flashback**

Lucius licked his lips as he smirked and stared into the dazed eyes of his lover.

"I love you."

"I...What?" Remus stammered, trying to bring enough blood back to his brain to comprehend those three little words as his chest bloomed with something he hadn't felt in years.

A tiny tendril of Hope.

"I, Lucius Malfoy, love you, Remus Lupin," Lucius said, a tiny, smug smirk upon his lips. He knew his lover was addled, but to see such a bright man taken so far from just his mouth...it was a heady power.

Still Remus couldn't process. "I'm sorry? Love. Did you say love?"

Lucius simply nodded and, using the tiniest ounce of power, summoned his wand to him. "Accio Little Blue Box," he said with little emotion, catching the small trinket box as it soared to him.

"You know," Lucius started, not waiting for Remus to catch up to him mentally. "As a boy, I was told to expect an arranged marriage. I never thought to have love, nor affection, merely enough sexual exchanges to beget an heir and a spare, then take a lover of my own."

Lucius never looked away from the sandy hair man above him. "I never took one. A lover, that is. Narcissa was an insanely jealous woman, and any liaisons I had were one-offs in remote areas. I would never call them lovers. Until you."

"I...Lucius..."

"I grew up never expecting to find love, but I have. It simply took my son, my heir, being de-aged to see that what I needed was to find someone who could love the best part of me with no reservations. Draco is the best thing I've ever made. No amount of atonement will make up for my wrongs, but to find someone who will stand by me regardless and love my son as his own..."

Lucius trailed off, lost in thought, but still Remus didn't have words. He was stunned, even more so when Lucius slid from the bed, kneeling by the side and pulling Remus to sit facing him. Remus gave his hand as it was pulled, unsure of what could be happening until Lucius lifted the ring box.

"Will you be mine, Remus? Will you love my son as your own, and allow my to love the son-of-your-heart as mine?"

"I...I, Lucius, I can't. The laws..."

"The laws be damned, Remus! I am Lucius Malfoy, and you are for all intent the Godfather to the Boy-Who-Lived. Laws will change. I want to know what you want."

"Yes, of course I want you, but-"

"Good." Lucius barreled over his buts, lifting the betrothal ring and conjuring a long chain for it. "The style may not be to your liking, but it is a Malfoy ring, imbued with defenses befitting the station of its wearer. I'd ask you keep it close to your skin, but I know you're an intelligent man."

Remus nodded as the chain settled into his palm, his fingers being moved by Lucius' t close around the jewelry. It was light for all the ring meant to him. It weighted him in spirit if not physically.
"I...Really?" It was all he could think.

Lucius smirked once more, his Slytherin side purring for the cunning use of the situation to get the desired effect. Lucius leaned up and forward, kissing Remus long and hard. "Yes. Truly. If you would have me and my son, we will be your's. It cannot be publicly known, not until He is taken down, but you will not be my dirty secret."

"I...I need a minute, Lucius. I...shower." And with that he ran. the ring left on the bed sheet next to Remus' pillow.

Remus ran a hand through his still damp hair.

He couldn't believe this could be his. He had done nothing but be himself, and a part of him could not believe that "himself" was enough to gain someone's love. Who would want him? A poor werewolf. No family, few friends, and mental baggage to fill a department store.

But he loved. As much as he did not want to admit to himself he could not fathom a life outside of all he had gained in the last few months. A life without Harry and Declan, little Draco and Lucius...it hurt. Remus had lived through a harsh life of pain and humiliation, condemnation. He'd been poor in money and soul many a day, living in squalor and through loneliness. But he had lived. He'd never given in, though depression had taken him to the knife's edge more than once.

And yet...

Of all he'd seen, this. This would break him. Losing this would be the death of him.

Then why are you out here, alone, when everything you've needed is in the bedroom? A voice whispered to him. Stop being a coward and take it.

Remus rose from the couch before his fears took control of him once more. He walked to the bedroom, pushing the door open softly, his eyes immediately drawn to Lucius as he sat at his desk. He looked...vulnerable, was the first word to come to Remus. He was bent over, elbows on his thighs as he stared at the betrothal ring's chain hanging from his hands, swinging softly. The silver ring glinted in the soft light in the room. It occurred to Remus that the oval grey-blue gem topping the ring almost perfectly matched that of Lucius and Draco's eyes.

With a shaking breath Remus moved into their room, his pajama bottoms riding low on his hips, scars on display as he knelt in front of his lover and covered Lucius' hands with his own. He looked into the jewel-tone eyes and searched for something. What he didn't know, but he found something that steeled his resolve.

"I love you," he said simply and tilted his head to allow the chain to slip over it, only smiling as he felt the ring touch his chest, the warm glow of love and protection radiating through his limbs the second it settled. "For every day we have, I will love you, Lucius."

"Just what is going on here?" Severus asked, then paused just enough for dramatic effect in the tense silence. "Would anyone care to explain to me what you dunderheads could find so utterly entertaining that I was alerted by our House Ghost whilst in the middle of a Faculty Meeting?"

For a time no one dared say a word, then, all at once utter chaos erupted as everyone tried to explain their side before the other had the chance to paint their side that of the sympathetic cause.
"Professor! Help us!" One of the girls beside Daphne yelled before casting at a boy who had crept too close.

"Snape!" A Death Eater in Training called gruffly, hand outstretched as if asking "what are you going to do about these madmen?"

"Shit! They brought Longbottom." Another whispered, though not quiet enough to avoid detection.

"MMPH!" One of the hostages tried saying.

Severus need only say, "Silence."

The room grew still as no one dare even move, fearful of drawing their former Head of House's attention.

"Theodore Nott," Severus called his Prefect's name.

"Yes, Sir?" Theo called, but did not move, keeping his wand trained on a vicious girl who had been reaching for something in her cloak only moments before.

"Explain."

"Daphne and I acted on our duty as Prefects to keep the Slytherin House contained and out of illegal matters, Sir." Theo said simply. He sent a hex at the girl, as her fingers twitched, an *incarcerous* knocking her back in braided rope wrappings.

"And what illegal matters would that entail, Mr. Nott?" Severus asked coolly. He refused to give either side any inkling of how his loyalties or appearance thereof would fall. He needed all options available to him.

"It seems *their* Master set them a mission for the Winter Break." Theo waved to the opposition. "Bring the body of the de-aged Draco Malfoy to Him, dead or alive, and kidnap one Harry Potter. It seems that while they could not write home with as many details as they would have liked, enough got back to the Odious One that he charged them with a feat even he could not complete. Every child of a Death Eater received the missive, but they never imagined that their spawn could be independent." Theo laughed bitterly.

"We refuse to join the Halfblood Maniac!" A cheer rose up behind him from the rebel children. "We've played along with this scum until today when these three decided to push their timetable and hunt down the little Malfoy. So, we took them down."

Another *incarcerous* flew, this time from a wee second year to a fifth year that crept too close to him.

Severus could feel the fury boiling in a corner of his mind as Harry watched the proceedings. He also knew that the anger was not for the charge on his life, but for the danger Draco could have been in.

*Stay yourself. You cannot enter. Not now, lest you ruin all our plans. Go to my quarters or calm yourself.*

He projected to Harry, but did not stay long enough for the no doubt colorful reply.

"Mr. Flint," Severus called forth Marcus Flint's younger brother, Antonin. "What do you have to say?" He could see that the younger Flint looked to be a ringleader, the way his fists clenched every few seconds.
"He's lying, Professor. T'ere be no letters. Why would the Dark Lord give us such? We're jus' children, tryin' teh finish our schoolin' and wha'not." He slathered on his oliest smile, forgetting his accent momentarily as he thought that Snape was the only adult in power in the room. It was the Slytherin Common Room, after all. " Couldn't we solve this in house, Sir? It's just a case of miscommunication. I'm sure they'll understand better just what could be at stake here if you told them…They could even write home..."

No one noticed Aurora stepping to the side, hand against Hogwart's stones as she cast, "Petrificus Totalis Maxima!" Her wand swept over the right side of the room, wafting over Daphne, Theo and their band of vengeful rebels.

As she watched the Death Eater children grin maliciously, all hands going for wands and no doubt Dark Curses while their enemies were unable to defend themselves, she remained in place and cast a similar spell to before over the left side of the room, this time maximizing the effects of a "stupefy!"

She watched as each of them dropped like flies, uncaring of the odd angles and uncomfortable poses many of them fell into. She saw the approving look on Snape's face. "Never thought I'd need to use that this quickly..."

"Nor will you ever need it again, I imagine," Snape replied. "Being Head of House comes with perks, but as always there are drawbacks to Slytherin no one else has to contend with."

"Ah, but Severus, it is not only Slytherin students who have in-fighting," Flitwick said. "I've used that spell myself many a day! Oh, the curses a Ravenclaw can find! Some would put your Slytherins to shame! Why, one year after a particularly nasty fight over study tables..."

"I've heard of that used in Gryffindor House, as well," Augusta chimed in, cutting Filius off in order to save them from an hour long story. "And my late Husband was the instigator of such a fight in Hufflepuff House that it was used there as well. Merriweather used it in my day after Quidditch wins to get his House to actually sleep."

Snape only gave a nod that he understood before turning to the wreckage in the room, though he could feel amusement in the back of his mind at that last tidbit. All he could do was think about the paths before him and how to navigate from here.

On one hand he could toss the little blighters out on their ears, send them home to Mum and Da, but then his position would be for naught with the Dark Lord. Alternatively, he could toss them in a dungeon. Merlin knew they had plenty of extra oubliettes and catacombs, but talk would start when only a third of Slytherin House's upperclassmen returned...especially since none of them had ever left the grounds for break.

It's time to retire, Severus. You know it. Come home.

Severus hid a shiver at hearing Harry's words inside his head, only a whisper as he shadowed away, preparing for what Severus knew had been coming for weeks now.

It was time to remove the Dark Mark, once and for all.

The streets of London were foggy and cold that night. The children were scared and hurting, but they were free. They didn't know why they were free, and at every turn they gasped and flinched, hoping for something, anything, to tell them they were finally safe.
Their parents were gone, taken by the men who had kidnapped them all. The white masks and long black cloaks starring in each of their nightmares alongside the injections and doctors who tormented them daily.

As the eldest, though not the biggest, Rosaria knew she had to get herself and the others warm and dry and safe. She was barely nine, the youngest of her siblings, still dressed in the red and white polka dot dress she had on after school the day she'd been taken. The children gathered to her, looking to her for comfort and guidance. Anything to keep their fears from taking over.

Rosaria had long been separated from Reid, her oldest brother who had been her strength those first few days after they were taken. But the bad men had quickly noticed and taken him away from her. She'd had to grow up, become the big sister to the little kids she'd been kept with-that or lose her mind with the fear as they had been on the edge of.

But that was then. In the nasty cells filled with despair and fear. Now she was free. They were free and they were once again starting to feel fear. Rosaria had not been to London very often in her nine years, but her Mother told her tales of kidnappers and rapists and men who preyed on children in alleys.

But after the last few weeks all she could think was...well, bump those men. She'd faced worst in those cells. She'd faced her nightmares, but now she was free. Nothing bad could continue to happen, could it?

She gathered and pushed and pulled the children around her, getting them all off the side street and huddled together on the sidewalk until she could figure out just where they had been left. It was dark out, but she remembered the men around her making her push herself, push with all her soul to make miracles happen in the cells.

If ever she needed a miracle, it was now.

With all the concentration in her tiny body, emaciated from weeks of malnutrition, she pushed and pushed, feeling like she was exerting every last ounce of her being in making something happen.

She just wanted to be safe and warm.

She heard the gasps and sighs of relief from behind her, and saw heat rising from the concrete beneath their bottoms. They huddled and grew warm, covered behind a few garbage bins.

It was here that the windowless van stopped and the men swarmed them, grabbing them all before they could even make a noise.

**Thanks for reading!**
It wasn't going to work.

Rosaria kicked the man who held her as he climbed into the van. She could hear his grunt and the other adults shushing her friends... then everything went black. She blinked her eyes and realised there was something blocking all the lights outside and tested the grip of the man holding her.

She could hear her deep, anxious breaths, and those of her friends...feel the tension in the van rising. Finally, she could stand it no more and felt her ire rise. She knew the man's arm was near, holding her shoulders to his chest.

So she bit him as a light above them flickered on.

"Raah! Ow, goddammit! Let go! Sonofabitch, ow!" The man shouted through clenched teeth. She refused, until the retribution she expected came.

She did not expect it to be a simple bop to the nose.

Rosaria felt her jaw fall open in shock. That was it? No torture, arms being wrenched, hair pulled? Nothing?

The arm, bleeding slightly, moved from in front of her face to pet her hair-while simultaneously getting out of reach of her canines. "Ssh. A little snake in the grass, you are. Calm. Ssh. We're trying to help, child." The man continued petting her, which should have pissed her off but began to comfort her against her will instead.

"Who...Why should I trust you? You've kidnapped us!"

The low, molten voice came from her left and she looked up into icy blue eyes that captured her attention and soothed her nerves. They were eyes that looked into our soul and smoothed everything over, left you feeling seen. Her bristling nerves softened further as she saw the five year old Madilyn safe in his arms. Something buzzed in the back of her mind, but refused to surface past the frayed ends of her nerves. His long, black hair looked silky like her brother's.

She shook her head of the thought of her lost brother and glared until the man did more than laugh at her.

"We rescued you, little firecracker. The boss has had us watching for a group of children for days. As soon as we felt your magics surge we came for you."

Her heart froze. "Magic? You've gone round the bend!" She could see the whites of widened eyes all around her. These men couldn't know about what happened to them. They'd lock them up! Experiment on them even more! "There's no such thing as magic!" She turned her head and tried to bite the hand that moved into her peripheral vision.
"It's real, little snake. Everyone in this van has magic. You, me, all of us." The man holding her from behind shifted and she tried in vain to wriggle free. "Sssh. We are gifted with magic. We may not know your story, but I need you to take me at my word that we are here to take you to safety."

"I don't believe you!" Rosaria screeched, squashing the hope flaring up in her heart before it could take root. She felt the man holding her move, but heard only a whisper before the dark van lit further. She saw before her the tip of a stick, lit as if holding a tiny light bulb. She'd seen these sticks before, though this one was lighter than the ones the bad people had used on her and her friends.

Rosaria quieted, staring at the light until her eyes burned, watering dangerously. Light. On a stick. It had to be magic. Her thoughts began to spiral faster and faster as realizations she had kept at bay all this time reared their ugly heads.

Magic was real.

It couldn't be.

It had to be, but oh, did it hurt.

Mum said magic is a tool of the Devil. Mum said magicians died terrible, awful deaths for using it.

*Were these people devils?* Did she care? They seemed nice. Nicer that those other people in the dresses had been…

But if magic is real...did that mean she was a magician?

Was she evil now?

If magic was real, then happened to Reid?

*What happened to Miles?*

And with that thought, the mass of what if's flooding her mind focused on that one thought and Rosaria DeLoach broke down in tears.

Matteo Dare groaned as he felt more than saw the little girl in his lap crumble to pieces. He knew from Harry's missive that whatever these children had gone through was horrific, but none of them had been given more information than that a group of muggles were being held by the Death Eaters and Voldemort. They had been keeping a watch on magical fluxes in muggle London after finding seven or eight boys in an old warehouse days before. What information that could get out of them led them to believe that more groups of children would be appearing in the coming days.

But with no more information than that they did their usual rounds and kept a closer watch for magical children just as they always had.

Matteo and his crew had never expected to find a dozen or more magical children huddled in the alley while on a food run. The van they had taken was one that they gutted of its interior. It had no seats belts, not even seats-there was only open space from behind the front seats. They were driving as slowly as possible, every adult scared of what could happen if the van was hit. He could see his friends holding their charges as tight as possible, though none had as fiesty an armful as he.

He wrapped his arms tighter around the little spit fire, hoping that if he kept her together physically it
would give her strength to pull whatever pieces she had lost in her ordeal back to the forefront.

She was so little. They all were. Starved and malnourished, their joints were swollen and faces too thin. Matteo imagined that he would be able to count ribs on more than a few of the kids, and none of them looked to be older than eight or nine.

Sometimes he hated his job. Not always, but some days were much better than others.

Rescuing abandoned children was the highlight of his day, but he knew the next few weeks of building trust and ensuring their care would be accepted were going to be tough ones. Measurements were always put in place to ensure the children could not leave the safe houses until they truly knew how much they were wanted and loved by the staff…

And by that point they no longer wanted to run away.

He hoped that this group took to their magic better than the group they'd found in an abandoned warehouse days before. Even after careful, one-on-one tutelage in magic and its uses he still had a few refusing to acknowledge that they had any.

He was already getting tired of ordering new household items with how he many found exploded by untapped cores creating emotional accidental magic. Pillows and cushions…even a toilet and shower door had taken the brunt of a child's emotions last week!

And now they had a whole new crop to start teaching.

Severus paced the offices with his fellow leaders and Heads of House as the stood over the unconscious bodies of the Slytherins. They had taken those named by Theodore Nott as partaking in Voldemort's instructions and had them in custody fairly quickly. Harry knew it was not all of the marked Slytherins in the school, Crabbe and Goyle for one were marked, but refused to take part in hunting down their friend. Dark Lord or no, it was Draco who gave them a purpose in day to day life, and they honored that.

A ward currently kept the leaders and Hogwarts Champion alerted to any who fought the charms keeping them asleep while they deliberated on where to go from here. Remus and Lucius had been called to the former Headmaster's office-thankfully it had taken little time to transfer Declan and Draco's care to Winky for a few hours.

Harry lounged in an arm chair, a coin in his hand as he called all those he needed to him, not worrying about the plans made by the adults around him. They meant well, but he trusted in his team to get him through. The idea was set in his mind regardless.

They would get the Dark Mark off of his lover and it would be before the cretins out cold in the corner awoke. By crystal or brute force he would have his way. Harry clued into the conversation going on as his friends were called into question.

"I understand much research has been put into this topic," Augusta began. "But what proof do we have that this is feasible? Books and clever logics are fine, but against the impossibilities that magic can create? I have to wonder if this is safe!"

"You question decades of Hogwart's finest, Madame," Harry said softly, rising from his chair. "You forget that the Ravenclaw lions have been researching this since it the existence of a Dark Mark was made aware to the public. I made a team whose direct focus was Dark Mark research, including
muggle and magical forms of bonding, as soon as I took charge of the Pride. We've had our best on it, and have made great strides since Lucius Malfoy was added as a source of information."

A knock sounded upon the door, stopping Harry from further speaking. He was not angry, but neither would he stand for anyone disregarding the hard work and effort of his lions.

Hermione and her team stepped into the room accompanied by Neville, who held their crystal trunk in his hands. He gave them a small smile from his position before giving them a rundown of their situation.

"The Slytherin Death Eaters and children of Death Eaters made their move. We must make ours in return. I want the Dark Mark off those who I call mine by morning light, understood?"

His Pridemates gave their agreement in a nod and stood ready for their orders.

"We're going to the Chamber of Secrets," Harry said authoritatively. "Assemble all you need and plan for all eventualities."

"Harry?" Mya began calmly. "We have no tests to make sure these theories will bear fruit. I-"

"You question me?" Harry's eyes flashed.

"No, Alpha" Hermione said calmly, head tilted to expose the side of her neck, but no more. "I want to know what your plan, as I cannot see you putting forward your own mate as our first tester!"

Harry blinked at her, surprised that she had not already seen the particulars of the path he had chosen. Maybe he was making logical leaps the others could not see.

"Oh, no. Of course I wouldn't do that to him...or Lucius, for that matter." Harry grinned and gestured to the sleeping bodies of the 7th year Slytherins that had been separated from the others. "These conveniently of-age and marked Death Eaters have been subdued by our side. We needed Death Eaters with Dark Marks in order to test our theories, as well as perfect our technique and now we have them."

Arthur looked at the uniformed students then back at Harry, a shocked look in his eye. "You would use them? Delegate mere children as pawns on which to practice? As if they are sheets of paper to draft upon, Harry?"

"No," he said. "They are no 'mere children.' They, each of them, are adults who have made their own decisions in life, one of which was to give their life source to a madman. I am rectifying this decision on their behalf, regardless of their thoughts. This is a War, Mr. Weasley, and I will take any tool I can out of the hands of their Master. If, in the process, I give them back their futures then so be it. I should think they would thank me for my service, but that would mean having expectations of those who have none for themselves."

Thus saying he turned and moved out of the office, tired of having his motives questioned. His soulmate's life was at risk and he had a clear path before him. No course would stay his foot, not even if he had to destroy lives to get there.

As long as he walked out with his lover and life intact, he would bear the burden of anything it took to get to that point.
Severus watched his bondmate prepare himself to enter the Dark Mark of the Jr. Death Eater before him. Antonin Flint, ring leader of the Hogwarts Death Eaters, was still and pale on the table. His body was strapped to a slab of rock at arms, chest, stomach, hips and legs. His navy robe sleeve torn to reveal the inky mess of a Dark Mark upon his arm. Severus watched the mark coil and writhe and grimaced internally. This was the mark of a madman, one he had once willingly followed. A man he had given his trust to. A Lord he could follow until he darkened and twisted to the creature they now opposed.

Severus questioned, in moments like these, whether he could truly say he possessed a sound judgement. From one raving Master to another, he had transferred his loyalties between two evils of this world. Servitude from one man had been cut, severed by his bondmate of all people. But still his soul held the mark of damnation just as black as his forearm. The smudge that develops like a callus for a worker, but for him it was a distortion upon his very being. A survival mechanism that kept him sane and relatively safe, if lonely. One that pushed away all those who cared for him, lest he make the mistake of gaining even one more Master.

He did not think his soul could take much more.

Severus glanced over to see Harry with a powerful red crystal in tow. He lay his hand over the Dark Mark and felt the connection to Harry flare to life.

But then again, with a love this pure, who was he to decide if he was worthy or not.

'Ready for this, Severus?'

'Always.'

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Thanks for reading!

A/N: So sorry for the wait. This chapter has been giving me some big issues, but as soon as I started the chapter after this one got mad that I deigned to skip it and just poured out of me!

If you're friends with me on Facebook you've seen all the work issues going on in my life. Thankfully they're fairly settled. Now I just have a big move in 2 weeks (new house and out of an apartment) and putting in an application to join a teacher preparation program. Wish me luck!
Enough

Chapter 54: Enough

*Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any of the characters therein.*

‘Harry’s thoughts’

‘Severus’ thoughts’

Harry sunk his conscious magick down, deeper and deeper into the Mark of the dark haired man laid prone before as with Legilimency, he could see into the magic of his surroundings, though now he was faced with spells, not memories.

Colors surrounded him in ropes of sickly hues, writhing around him in a constant thrumming push and pull. A battle between the body and the outside force controlling it. The colors were oddly bright, fluorescent even, but in a sickening way.

The greens and yellows, blues and violet hues spoke of disease and a feeble attempt to heal my the magical core of the man.

Harry watched the writhing ropes twist in on themselves as the registered his presence. He backed off a touch, then began reaching slowly for the part of his mind held by Severus. He wanted no more contact that a simple wisp of conversation would hold for fear of the interacting magics. No one needed to give Voldemort a leg up in this endeavor.

‘Where do I begin, Sev’rus?’

Harry sent a mental image of what he saw and felt, hoping after when limited practice they had, that it would come through as clearly as he needed.

‘Ah, I see. I want you to begin identifying at the weakest spell point. It will be in the bottom left quadrant, a pale lemon strand left attached at only one point. That, I believe is a locator spell for apparating.’

‘I see it.’

Harry counted down from five before pulling on Severus’ gathering magic, thus focusing the diagnostic charm. He waited, knowing the readout would be lengthier from within that anything their previous attempts had given them.

‘It is done,’ Severus eventually told him. ‘Now speak to me the Parselmagic diagnostic.’

Harry grinned, knowing that even if it was inappropriate at the given moment that his beloved Potions Master had no self-control when faced with his sibilant tongue.

‘Haas shasahth.’ Harry hissed the sensual phrase over and over, slowing the syllables until Severus was able to speak them correctly.

Severus repeated the spell aloud and Harry pulled the second diagnostic charm within his
consciousness, guiding the spell in its tainted glass colored glory towards the flailing mass before him.

Again time stretched as the diagnostic was created, but eventually it finished. Severus sounded pleased as he responded.

'The registries have combined, showing us where we will find our attachments. It is a better situation than we could have hoped for. The spell we will come to first is indeed the apparition locator. Your first counter will be Inveniet Finite. I will cast, you shall focus on placement.'

'Yes, Sir! Ready and in focus.' Harry felt that if he had eyes in this realm of magical existence then they would have narrowed in focus behind his round-rimmed frames. In the back of his mind, more on the left this time, Harry could hear Severus calling the counterspell. He felt the energy gather via the crystal, pass through Severus into his body. It flashed from the center of his chest, up his spine and down his arms before flowing straight into the Dark Mark beneath his hands. Harry directed what he could, the power behind the spell stronger than he imagined it would be. He watched as the cleansing silver of the counterspell met the sickly yellow of the locator, then subtly a inky, black wave of surrounded it, helping to corrode and eat away at the countermagic.

Harry could see the countermagic failing under the onslaught of this Dark magic. Even with the combination of Severus' magic, his magic and the focusing crystal it was a close battle between the two entities.

But it wasn't going to be enough.

Enraged, harry reflexively pulled more from his own core to flow into the spell, ignoring the clash of something from the left side of his head as he watched the new magic obliterate the locator and the Dark entity.

And the next spell attached.

And the next.

Harry watched with growing horror as the spells began to self destruct…

One

By

One.

Link by link the spells began to eat away at themselves, the reaction only speeding with each successive spell. Like ash from a flame the spells disintegrated to nothing, falling away into nothingness as growing ever closer to the last connecting point of the spell: Flint's magical core.

Harry could feel pressure on him as he fought to separate his consciousness from the landscape of the Dark Mark as little by little the destruction moved closer to the dimly glowing center of Antonin's core. Harry tried to put up a block, a wall of protection, anything he could think of to stop the blackness from annihilating the man's entire core…

But it wasn't going to be enough.

With one final thought, a last pardon, Harry wrenched his consciousness back just as Severus physically yanked him back behind Godric's warding stone.
No one could look away, would look away as the young man upon the stone table seized harshly, body fighting the restraints holding it, once...twice...three times before settling. The body lay on the stone slab listless and unmoving in a way only the dead can be.

Antonin Flint was no more.

Nothing was said as Harry paced the Chamber, unable to still his mind or body over what he'd just done.

Blood once more covered his hands. Not physically, but he could feel it. The slick and tainted richness, red with iron that wrapped around you, holding you prisoner. It drug you down to the depths of your soul, demanding payment for its being shed.

Many times over he had shed blood, knowingly and unknowingly, but never in such a manner. Never by falling for the tricks of a madman in this way.

Harry knew this was not something he could have worked around. None of them could know that such a failsafe was in place.

But he should have seen that that bastard would try something. He was Harry Potter, savior of Wizarding Britain to most, keeper of the magical orphans to others, friend to few.

Guilt, turmoil, roiling waves of emotion rose over him, overwhelming his defenses. He knew his Occlumency shields were crumbling, just as he could feel his chest seized tight by the iron bands of the blood spilt by his own hands.

He'd miscalculated.

Oh, how he had miscalculated, and it had only cost a single life. No matter his choice in life, Antonin Flint had been human. He'd been a despicable human, but still a man who had had the choice to continue on taken from him.

He'd let his need to accomplish something finally in this war, his pride in his team and his invincibility as Harry Bloody-Fucking Potter get to him…

This misstep had cost him more than he ever imagined it could.

Panic set its roots deep as branches of thought spiraled out, setting their boughs upon more far reaching consequences.

He was unsure what to think, how to still the errant thoughts driving him to insanity, but there was always one to come back to haunt him. One thought he could not rid himself of, no matter how he tried to logic his way back to a stable sanity.

One thought to drive him over the edge:

*How could he ever save Severus now?*

He was supposed to protect those around him, not cause more death. Harry could feel his lion surging forward as his thoughts spiralled down further and further. With a scream of frustration Harry lost the battle against his animagus and transformed violently.
Severus watched as his soulmate stalked through the room as he stood, pensive over the lifeless body of the student cum Death Eater. His mind circled over and over on one single thought.

*It wasn't going to be enough.*

The crystals were not strong enough to withstand the amount of force Harry needed to channel to break the spells binding anyone to the snake faced bastard. Indeed the one they had used lay in shattered fragments on the ground. It was a setback, but that was not what stopped them.

There was a failsafe built into the Dark Mark. One which they could never have anticipated. Severus, in his ruthless curiosity, was prepared to sacrifice more lives if only to find out how it had been done, but never would he intentionally put his bondmate in such peril of being caught again.

With his mind elsewhere Severus did not realize how wound up his mate had become until he heard the screaming roar of a lion both in his mind and ears. Jade met ebony, more words spoken in their gazes than anything spoken could ever dare to convey. Severus growled as he realized just what had thrown his mate into such a spiral, and his old feelings of satisfaction at having killed Harry's relatives flared to life once more.


>'End this useless drivel, brat.'

Severus made eye contact and kept it steady as he waited for the lion before him to return to the present.

>'You could do no more than any of us, yet with what is arguably Britain's finest minds in one place we were unable to do a damned thing. You are not at fault. Lay blame at the Maker of this disaster and walk away, Harry. We will find a way to live with the Dark Marks in tact and continue on our paths to destroying the Dark Lord.'

In his feline form emotions were muted, softer, but still the Alpha could feel pure desolation chilling its way down his spine, reaching every cell of his body. He was calming after feeling the return of his bondmate to his mindscape, but he could not focus on the words spoken to him right now.

With the desolate feeling came a startling clarity that this situation had no ending without further increasing the death toll by his hand. Either he continued in experimenting, finding any possible way to disarm the Dark Mark, and killing a few in the process…

Or he left the life of his soulmate in the hands of Death through inaction.

There was only one choice he had, he could not live with himself otherwise.

With Severus knelt before him Harry transformed himself back, panic attack passed and his resolve once more returned. His eyes were diamond hard and dead to the emotion he could see in his pridemates' eyes. He knew that either path brought death, and he refused to allow the death to touch those he loved.
He would take this Mark away by morning, no matter the toll. This was why he was Alpha, this was why he was fated. He could make these decision for the sake of others that he could not face on his own.

With a hand on his knee, and a steel rod around his spine Harry stood tall and proud, his jade eyes remaining as he looked to the remaining Death Eaters.

"It is our deaths or theirs. We try again."

Four bodies. Seven crystals. Five hours.

Four bloodless, markless, useless deaths. Seven of the most powerful focusing gems the Pride had access to. Five grueling, devastating and defining hours.

They had a half-answer, but it was less than they hoped and more than they wanted.

The failsafe to the entire Mark lay in the links between each individual spell. It was set with the burning intent that no one would ever be able to leave the service of its caster. Coming in to this, the Gryffindor Lions thought that were fairly well prepared to battle the known spells within the Mark. The Siphon and locator, the spells that caused them such pain and pulled them to Voldemort's side. The insidious nature of the Mark was well known, but this went far beyond their imaginations.

While they knew that the Siphon spell was embedded within both the wizard's magical core and the Dark Mark- the Mark that so happened to be an invisible link, a conduit straight to Lord Voldemort- they had no idea just how deep that conduit ran. Now, with the research they had conducted on their unconscious Prisoners of War it was more than apparent to those in the Chamber that they were wholly unprepared to combat the malintent of the Dark Lord's ingenuity with their normal repertoire.

An idea came to them, via Ron's strategical mind, while waiting for Harry to return to them.

"I think we're going about this too nicely," Ron murmured. Every eye focused on him at this, some incredulously, some in a half-glare. Ires were raised around the room as the trials and deaths continued. Four bodies littered the wall, and still another was in the throes of death as Harry pulled himself out.

It had been a harsh battle to convince everyone present that the trials were necessary, and those on the fence wavered more with each wrong turn. Harry himself never wavered after his first breakdown, but even he could not ignore the growing pile of death.

Ron, realizing he had spoken aloud, looked back at those in the room. "What? We're supposed to be combatting this big evil badass, but we're just playing by the rules. I think if we're going to go against his spellwork we need to fight fire with fire!"

"And how do you propose doing such a thing?" Lucius asked in a hiss, his nerves shot through as he sat, unable to make himself engage any further. His chance, his one chance at freedom was slipping away bit by tiny bit. He couldn't be expected to remain civil, could he?

"Cut him off at the knees," Ron stated. He looked at his father, eyebrows furrowed. "What was it those things you work on...testers? Tisters? You know, the bread thing. Whenever it starts sparking you have to cut the ickletricity, right?"

Mya, who was leaning against her boyfriend groaned at his utter mangling of her home technology.
"It's a Toaster, Ronald. And electricity. You'd think…" She trailed off as his idea began taking root. She scrambled up, running to Harry who was taking long breaths in the corner, away from the others. She knew he needed a moment, but this was too much.

"I've got an idea! We just need to cut the power and vacuum away the debris!"

Harry stared into her eyes, searching for something, he didn't know what, but after a moment he gave a single nod.

"Bring me the next Death Eater."

Augusta was the first to stop them, demanding to know what they meant. "I can't understand you, girl. You speak of muggle terms?"

Mya nodded, her mind further gone. "It's just MSE. Easy enough to interpret."

The adults spluttered at her offhand comment while the students who knew the joke chuckled, too emotionally exhausted to do more.

"MSE?" Lucius asked, too tired to pull the acerbic nature of his voice to heel.

"Muggle Standard English, I call it. I want Harry to try again but now he's going to cut off the spells from the Core then use the crystal to siphon the spell work and its implosions away before they can destroy anything important." She looked at Ron with a raw sparkle in her eye. She truly believed that this could work. "We're going to use the bastards spells against him!"

Harry steeled himself. There was no room for error this time. Without thought or doubt Harry tossed back a Pepper-Up Potion and let the bitter liquid work on his system. With renewed energy he sank his consciousness into the Dark Mark for the fifth time that day. He felt Severus connect to him and together they poured every ounce of energy the crystal could muster into cutting the spell linking the Mark to the Core he faced.

Black and gold clashed and fought, rolling in on each other until finally, just as Harry had lost hope in ever completing his task, the gold overwhelmed and obliterated the inky blackness.

Harry gasped, or he would if magical essence could gasp, and relayed the events to Severus. He could see the magic gathering in the failsafe of the freeform spell work. Harry heard the Siphon cast in the back of his mind and swiftly swept his focus over the ropes of disgusting magic, making sure to cleanse the entire area of the infecting magical signature that Voldemort used.

With a bit of awe, Harry watched as the magical core of the now ex-Death Eater crept forward, the weak magic coming out like a rabbit from its burrow to take stock of the landscape. The grey, dull color of the host magic slunk through the area once held by the Dark Mark. It pressed against Harry tentatively, then gave him a push out as if to say "thank you, but you need to leave now."

Harry could feel amusement fill him, though if from the magic's attitude or just from the elation of having accomplished this one goal...he didn't know for sure.

All he knew was he would be keeping his promise. He was going to save his Severus.

Nothing was going to get in his way now.
Thanks for Reading!
I'm alive

So, yes, I am alive.

I had to take a hiatus as I worked towards getting my teaching certificate while teaching at the same time. Middle school too.

I know. I'm a masochist.

But, as of this past March I am a certified teacher. I plan to reread my work and continue them all.

Thank you to everyone who continued to leave comments and encourage me. I have read them all, even when I was swamped or so low that all I could do was work and sleep.

You should be seeing new chapters soon. I've never forgotten the ending I wanted for The Pride's Hatchling, so we should be there soon.

Love,

Petra

End Notes

Thanks for reading! Please leave a comment and let me know what you think!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!