**Something Past Survival**

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**Summary**

After the war, reconciliation between enemies is necessary to create a better future, one that is only possible if one embraces the past. Begins during the final chapters of Deathly Hallows, ignores the epilogue. Will eventually be Harry/Draco.

**Notes**

Several people have asked me to post Something Past Survival in a more public location than my LJ. The final movie inspired me to do as they asked. It is a WIP, but 93,000 words have been posted on my LJ, with another 6,000 just about ready to post, and another 60,000 words wait in the wings for me to catch up to those future scenes.

This chapter is based on the novel, and uses dialog from the Deathly Hallows. The movie played out quite differently.

Harry Potter, his friends, his enemies, and the lovely world they live in all belong to JK Rowling. I'm just visiting.

Comments are always welcome. I find they inspire me to write further, knowing someone else cares about the story.
May 1, 1998, shortly before midnight

The Dark Lord was winning. There was no way Potter and his band of incompetents could recover from this massacre. Which meant, before the final victory, Draco had to find a way back into the Dark Lord’s good graces, such as they were. Draco had failed too many times. He had failed to kill Dumbledore, had not identified Potter and the Mudblood when they were brought, captured by someone other than the Malfoys, and the Malfoys had failed to keep Potter imprisoned. Draco had not been putting his will and attention into the Dark Lord’s assignments, and it showed, but he could not fail this time. The only thing he could think of that would mitigate the wrath the Malfoy family had earned was to deliver Potter to the Dark Lord personally. So he, Crabbe and Goyle hid in the corridors, disillusioned, looking for Potter.

None of it was as he expected. None of it was glorious, and the Dark Lord’s whim decided who could lord over the others, instead of inherent superiority. It was not based on skill or bloodlines or breeding. Draco despised his aunt’s lack of self-control, Pettigrew’s cringing, and the Dark Lord’s rants. His father had taught him better than that; he knew it was necessary to keep a cool head, to show that he had control of himself, and could control others That he was superior.

Draco had become good at presenting a calm, cool exterior, showing to the world that he was in control. Except with Potter. He hated that about Potter. How is it that the dratted “Boy Who Lived” always broke through Draco’s mask, causing Draco to lash out with no more control than a hippogriff? He was pureblood, in control, destined to be on the winning side.

All of them—all of the Dark Lord’s chosen—had bowed before him, had kissed the hem of his robe, had done his bidding. He was going to create a world for them based on the values Draco believed in: that pure-bloods were better than others. That pure-blood wizards needed to keep themselves apart from the mudbloods and half-bloods, to hold to their history and heritage and traditions. Draco was proud of those traditions. He was proud to be a Malfoy.

He was starting to question whether the Dark Lord would value those traditions. He had been shocked this past year to discover that the Dark Lord was a half-blood. How could he value the pure-blood traditions if he was not one himself? But, for good or ill, the Dark Lord was winning. And the Malfoys had to find their way back to the winning side.

It was necessary to be the winner.

Suddenly, as if summoned by Draco’s thoughts, there he was: Potter, with Weasel and the Mudblood. Right near the entrance to the Room of Hidden Things. They were intent on something, not noticing as Draco grabbed the door before it closed. He waited until they got inside a bit, and then peered inside. He knew this room. It was the room where he had fixed the vanishing cabinet that had allowed him to let in the Death Eaters at the end of last year, in the failed attempt to take over Hogwarts. As soon as the trio had passed the first shelving stuffed with forgotten keepsakes, Draco, Crabbe and Goyle followed them in.

Draco gestured for Crabbe and Goyle to remain silent, and, surprisingly, they did. They had both been acting rebellious, of late, as the Malfoy star waned. That would soon be righted. But for now, he wanted to know what Potter was up to. There was a reason Potter had returned to Hogwarts, after running away and hiding for weeks on end, and as much as Draco would have liked to think it was
just to be in charge of the battle, garnering attention and glory, Draco was no longer sure that was who Harry Potter was.

“Accio diadem,” Granger said. Draco looked to see if anything came flying toward her. Nothing did. He was not surprised, this room had its own ideas. Over the past months he had encountered the room’s unique sensibilities, sometimes to his benefit, and occasionally preventing him from progressing on his project. That one had succeeded. Not that the Dark Lord had recognized him for it, not after he had failed with Dumbledore.

“Let’s split up.” Potter said. “Look for a stone bust of an old man wearing a wig and a tiara. It’s standing on a cupboard and it’s definitely somewhere around here.”

What would Potter and his flunkies be doing searching for a bloody tiara, when the Dark Lord was about to invade Hogwarts?

He followed the sound of Potter’s voice, always keeping one of the towering shelvings of detritus between them. When Potter got far enough away from his friends, Draco gestured Crabbe and Goyle forward. Potter was scanning the walls of items, muttering to himself. Draco followed him, quietly, stepping carefully around the junk on the floor, keeping just enough distance. Potter reached out toward something. Now that Draco knew what Potter was after, he stepped forward, Crabbe and Goyle stepped in front of him, protecting. At least they still had those habits ingrained. “Hold it, Potter.”

Potter spun, wand out. Draco felt a surge of hate.

“That’s my wand you’re holding.”

Draco pointed his wand, his mother’s wand, at Potter.

“Not anymore!” Potter panted, grasping it still tighter. “Winners keepers, Malfoy.” Draco raised an eyebrow at the schoolyard taunt. Potter always seemed to live as if he believed those childish maxims. No wonder the Dark Lord was winning.

“Who’s lent you theirs?” Potter said.

“My mother,” Draco admitted, and as expected, Potter laughed. Idiot. It took a skilled wizard to use another’s wand successfully. He had worked with it for weeks, and had mastered the wand. Mostly. He had hated being so out of control of his magic.

“So, how come you three aren’t with Voldemort?” Potter asked, saying the name in that way of his, as if the Dark Lord were something distasteful.

“We’re gonna be rewarded,” Crabbe said. Draco could have kicked him, but he dare not take his attention off of Potter. “We’ve decided to bring you to Him.” Crabbe continued. Why did minions always feel it necessary to discuss their plans with the enemy?

“Good plan,” Potter mocked, and Draco seethed.

“So, how did you get in here?” Potter asked. As if Potter knew better about this room than he did.

“I virtually lived in the Room of Hidden Things all last year. I know how to get in.”

“We was hiding in the corridor outside,” Goyle added, uselessly. “We can do Diss-fusion charms now.” Way to go, Goyle, reveal your strengths, such as they are, to the enemy, Draco sneered to himself as Goyle continued. “And then, you turned up, right in front of us, and said you were
looking for a die-dum. What’s a die-dum?” Goyle’s face had an appalling look of confusion on it. Draco shuddered. Idiot.

“Harry.” The Weasel’s voice came from across one of the towering rows of bric-a-brac. “Are you talking to someone?” What a bloody genius.

Crabbe spun, pointed his wand at the 50-foot mountain of random things between them and the Weasel, and shouted “Descendo.” The top of the towering pile of books, robes, broomsticks, treasures from decades of students and not a few teachers, tottered, then started to tumble, thankfully away from them, into the aisle where the Weasel stood.

Potter shouted the Weasel’s name, and Granger screamed from a distance. Potter raised his wand and shouted, “Finite!” The wall stabilized.

Crabbe lifted his wand to repeat the spell, but Draco grabbed his arm, and pushed it back down. “No!” Draco said. “If you wreck the room, you might bury this diadem thing.”

“What’s that matter?” asked Crabbe. “It’s Potter the Dark Lord wants. Who cares about the die-dum?”

Draco spoke in his most patient voice, his “I am surrounded by idiots” voice. “Potter came in here to get it. So that must mean— ” Draco prompted.

“Must mean? Who cares what you think?” Crabbe turned on Draco. “I don’t take your orders no more, Draco. You and your dad are finished!” That was it. Draco ignored the feeling of loss, fighting to hide the hurt those words caused him. He kept his face cold, superior. That was why they had to deliver Potter to the Dark Lord. If even Crabbe, who had stood by him since they were children, was turning against him, distaining him, Draco needed to do something drastic to regain position. He needed to do this.

“Harry! What’s going on?” Weasley’s voice came across the tower. Unburied. Pity, that.

“Harry?” mimicked Crabbe. Harry lunged for the tiara on the bust of an old wizard. Crabbe brought up his wand. “Potter! Crucio!” The curse missed Potter, but hit the bust, and the bust, wig, and tiara all went flying. The tiara dropped out of sight.

“Stop!” Draco cried, hoping the tiara was not lost amidst the detritus, annoyed that Crabbe risked both Potter and the tiara. “The Dark Lord wants him alive!”

“So? I’m not killing him, am I?” Crabbe yelled. “But if I can, I will. The Dark Lord wants him dead, anyway. What’s the diff?” Crabbe tugged his arm away from Draco’s restraining hand. Draco would now have to fight Crabbe and Goyle to bring Potter to the Dark Lord. Draco would not let anyone get in the way of his goal.

A red stunning spell burst from behind Potter, and Draco pulled Crabbe out of the way. “It’s that Mudblood! Avada Kedavra!” Crabbe aimed at Granger. Granger ducked, and the curse passed her harmlessly. Potter fired a stunning spell back at Crabbe, face contorted with fury. Crabbe ducked, knocking the wand out of Draco’s hand. The wand rolled out of sight. Draco felt its absence as curse after curse flew between Potter, the Weasel and Granger, and Crabbe and Goyle.

“Don’t kill him! Don’t kill him!” Draco yelled at Crabbe and Goyle.” Those idiots were ruining it, they were going to take this away from Draco. He scanned the floor for his wand. If he had it in hand, he would have stunned them all, Crabbe and Goyle included.

Crabbe and Goyle paused for a second, and Potter’s “Expelliarmus” whipped Goyle’s wand away
into the debris around them. Goyle leapt toward where it went, tripping over some forgotten treasure. A second stunning spell came from Granger’s wand, and Draco ducked out of the way, Weasel missed Crabbe with a body bind, and Crabbe retorted with an AK, missing the Weasel. Those two needed to learn to take the moment to aim, or they’d never succeed in duelling.

Draco ducked behind a wardrobe, feeling the loss of his wand more strongly than ever. Granger stormed toward them, stunning Goyle, who collapsed on top of a pile of books.

Potter ignored Draco and Crabbe, searching a pile of junk. “It’s somewhere here! He glanced to Granger. “Look for it, while I go help Ron.” But Granger screamed, and Weasley and Crabbe were running toward them full tilt. Fire bloomed behind them. What had that idiot done?

“Like it hot, scum?” Crabbe yelled at Potter, as if he did not realize the fire was behind him as well. The walls of junk were catching fire, even stone, even metal. Draco recognized the curse with horror. Who in their right mind would cast Fiendfyre in a room full of junk, while they were still inside?

Potter shouted “Aguamenti,” as if that could stop Fiendfyre. The jet of water billowed into steam.

Draco grabbed Goyle, his stunned body heavy and awkward, but he shouldered him and ran. Crabbe passed them, not carrying anyone, and the two trios ran toward where Draco hoped he remembered the door to be, or at least away from the fire.

The fire blossomed into the fiends from which it got its name, serpents and chimeras, dragons and all sorts of beasts. They rose and fell, jaws of flame snapping at their heels. Potter and his friends had disappeared, but at this point, Draco didn’t care, scanning the walls, trying to peer through the aisles between the walls of burning junk, trying to find the grey square on the wall that was the door out of here.

The fire encircled them, and Draco adjusted Goyle on his shoulder, climbed an uncertain pile of debris, up and away from the flames at their feet. The air scorched his lungs, the fire blistered the skin of his legs under his robes. He pulled them up and gathered Goyle into his lap. He searched for a path out of there, a path not already engulfed by flames searing the air. He gulped air, feeling his lungs burn with the heat. The fire was all around him. He would not be the winner here. The fire came closer, burning, and Draco screamed.

Draco Malfoy was going to die.

But above him, he saw movement, someone on a broom, skin blackened with soot, except for twin circles around his eyes. Potter. What was Potter doing? Was he so intent on that tiara that he would fly into this inferno? But Potter fastened his gaze on Draco, and turned his broom toward him. He flew close, hand outstretched, and Draco, unbelieving, raised a hand for his enemy to grasp. The slick sweat on his hand caused Potter’s grip to slide away, and Draco knew Potter could not lift both his and Goyle’s weight. But Draco could not make himself let go of Goyle’s stupefied form.

Another broomstick flew into view. It was Weasley and Granger, riding double on the broom. Somehow, Weasley’s fiery hair did not succumb to the soot that covered the rest of them, it still shone out to rival the fire around them.

“If we die for them,” Weasley shouted, “I’ll kill you, Harry.” But they two of them flew toward Draco and Goyle, and between them grabbed Goyle and hoisted them onto the broomstick, then lurched drunkenly toward the door.

Draco wiped his hands on his robe, ignoring the pain of blisters breaking open, and reached once
again upward, scarcely daring to hope that Potter would come back. But he did, grasping Draco’s arm and helping him climb behind him on the broom. Draco fastened his arms instinctively around Potter’s waist, holding tighter than he ever had to anything. Why had Potter come back? Draco would not have, had the roles been reversed. Draco needed Potter, needed the Dark Lord’s reward, but Potter did not need Draco Malfoy. Why had Potter come back for the ones who would turn him over to his enemy to be killed? Draco shuddered, held tighter still to the black haired body in front of him.


“What are you doing, what are you doing? The door’s that way!” Panic made Draco’s voice pitch high in an undignified scream, but for once, he did not care. But Potter flew toward a piece of jewellery flung high into the air by the fire monsters, Potter reached out toward the cursed diadem for which he had come into the room, and with the seeker skills that had always outstripped Draco’s by just that much, reached out and caught the diadem away from the open jaws of a fiery serpent, and then turned to aim back toward the now open door.

They flew out of the door, too fast to stop before crashing into the wall opposite the door in the corridor. The broom splintered, dropping both Draco and Potter onto the floor.

Draco tried to breathe in the fresh air, tried to ease the burning in his lungs, but his attempt was interrupted by a burst of coughing. The others were also coughing and panting. Everything hurt.

He grabbed something to help him sit up, only realizing afterward that it was Potter’s hand. It felt warm. Draco dropped it suddenly, looking around. The Gryffindor Trio surrounded him, and Goyle lay to the side, unconscious.

“Crabbe?” It was all he could choke out, already knowing the answer “Crabbe?”

“He’s dead.” Weasley spat, as if it were a victory.

Draco subsided into silence, shaken. He had known Crabbe since he could remember, since they were children. Vince and Greg had always been there, brought by their parents to Malfoy Manor for social events and meetings with the Dark Lord. Draco shuddered. It was all falling apart.

He was too stunned to feel grief, too shaken to feel much of anything.

A loud bang shook the walls and floor of the corridor. The ghostly shapes of the headless hunt charged through, screaming. Draco started at the sound, the movement, and became dimly aware of the din of the battle surrounding them. Screams, yells, the buzz and whine and explosions of spells hitting and missing. It was happening, right now, it was happening.

Draco slumped. He had no wand, no way to redeem himself in anyone’s eyes. He saw the same defeat in Goyle’s face, but avoided his gaze. Goyle was also wandless. Neither of them could make a difference now. It was over.

He was vaguely aware of the Trio making plans, checking in with each other, babbling nonsense, but he could not bring himself to care. The thing Potter had gone back for, the diadem, dangling from Potter’s wrist, smouldered into a dark flame and broke apart. Served him right, Draco thought out of habit. He tried to make himself focus on what they were saying. The Mudblood was prattling on about Fiendfyre, and Weasley took a pot-shot at Crabbe for casting it, but Draco could not gather the energy to respond.

The corridor suddenly became crowded, with Death Eaters and Weasleys casting curses and hexes at
each other. Draco felt decidedly unsafe. With the Death Eaters near, it was not safe to be anywhere near Potter. A hole erupted in the side of the castle, proving Draco’s point. He watched as giant spiders crawled in through the hole. Numbly crawling over to where Goyle lay, Draco grabbed him, lifted him over his shoulder with a grunt that his father would have disapproved of. Malfoys do not grunt. Half carrying, half dragging his friend, Malfoy left the hole, the spiders, the Trio, the Weasleys, the fight.

But he could not escape it. Death Eaters, students and teachers were on all sides, furniture galloped around, blocking his way like a herd of sheep. Goyle was too heavy. Draco could not carry him and escape, so he tucked his unconscious friend in an unused room, hoping that the battle would not intrude there. He needed to get out of there. He made his way to the entrance hall, dodging curses, ducking spells, climbing the stairs toward escape. Just when he believed he would make it, he found himself jerked backward by his robes, lifted into the air like a child. The man who had grabbed him wore the mask of a Death Eater and a sneer.

I’m Draco Malfoy!” He pleaded. I’m Draco! I’m on your side!”

“Draco Malfoy. How lovely.”

Draco’s eyes widened as he recognised the voice. The Death Eater was not from the Inner Circle, and Draco did not remember his name, but he did remember the man screaming and pleading as Lucius cast Cruciatus. He could not remember what the man had done to warrant the Dark Lord’s displeasure… Draco knew too well how easily one might garner such treatment. A wrong word or glance. A failed mission.

The Death Eater firmed his grip on Draco’s robes with one hand, and raised his wand to Draco’s neck with the other. “You are no longer protected.” The man’s deep voice snarled. Draco turned cold.

Suddenly, the red light of a stunning spell came from nowhere, and the Death Eater collapsed. Draco fell on top of the Death Eater, turning to look this way and that, his face glowing with relief, looking for the one who had saved him. Just as suddenly, a fist impacted with his face, and the Weasel’s voice grated, “That’s the second time we’ve saved your life tonight, you two faced bastard!”

Draco collapsed onto the stunned Death Eater, his lip split and leaking blood, his head aching from smoke, from the noise, from all that was going on, from Weasley’s fist. He crawled off the Death Eater, and scuttled away, out the main entrance door and down the stairs leading away from the castle, out into the grounds. He darted toward Hogsmeade, away from the battle.
The Battle Part 2: Running

Chapter Notes

Chapter 2, for your reading pleasure!

Disclaimer: Harry Potter, his friends, his enemies, and the lovely world they live in all belong to JK Rowling. This chapter is based on the novel, and uses dialog from Chapters 31 through 36 of the book The Deathly Hallows. (The movie dialog was quite different.) Any dialog you recognise belongs to JK Rowling.

Comments are always welcome. I find they inspire me to write further, knowing someone else cares about the story.

The Battle Part 2: Running

May 2, 1998

Draco sat knees up, hidden by bushes. If he had his wand, he would have cast a Disillusionment charm on himself, but the bushes would have to do. He could hear screams, shouts, and explosions. He could hear the crunch of rock on rock as the castle fell apart.

There was movement in the distance, flashes of light. His parents were out there somewhere. Maybe. His godfather. His Slytherin friends… well, comrades. And here he was, no wand, no hope, no future. He had cast his bet and lost. Draco put his head on his knees.

A closer sound drew his attention. He ducked downward, but curiosity got the better of him. It was Potter, Weasel and the Mudblood. Again. They were everywhere. Weren’t they supposed to be fighting in the battle? Some hero, the battle raged behind them, and they were running away. Bloody Perfect Potter, leaving the battle.

Draco did not quite believe it. Gryffindors didn’t run away. They didn’t even strategically retreat. They charged in, as if the world were offered to them on a platter, as if the only outcome could be the one they sought. So maybe the Scarhead was not running away. Maybe he was running toward something.

Draco suddenly needed to find out what that was.

He waited until they passed, then crept after them. Fortunately, they were intent on where they were going, not even checking around them. He heard Potter shout “The Whomping Willow,” and the three pelted toward it. Draco crept behind them, running from one bit of fallen castle to another, from bush to tree. Potter moved purposefully, and Draco did not try to keep up so much as he tried to keep the trio in sight.

There were open stretches between him and the Willow, where Potter was headed. Draco followed his progress. The blond was almost beyond caring if he was seen, but he had to find out what Potter was up to. He could not quite explain why, not even to himself. His own life did not to matter much anymore, except to himself. He could have no effect on the battle around him. His wand was out of reach, his parents were not powerful enough to protect him at present. The Malfoy aura he had
leveraged for so many years, that he could have used to gain followers or to create an influence, was tarnished.

“No longer protected.” The Death Eater’s words echoed in his mind. He was not significant here. He hated that. But in times like these, you found out what was significant, gathered knowledge, tracked the action. And you used what you learned.

Potter was significant. It was likely that the Dark Lord would kill him, but Draco could see Potter had a plan, he moved forward with a purpose, and did not hesitate. Draco wanted to know what it was that Potter meant to do.

The Whomping Willow started thrashing as the trio came nearer, and Draco wondered what Potter thought he was doing. But Granger yelled something about being wizards, and with a swish and flick of her wand there was a flash of motion and the tree became still. Even with all the battle noise in the background, it suddenly seemed silent. Draco realized that the Whomping Willow had always created its own wind, and now it was still. The sounds of the battle suddenly seemed sharper, and somehow both closer and more distant, as if the scale had expanded.

How had Granger done that? How had she known to do that? Draco pushed down the admiration before he could feel it. It was just more evidence she was a know-it-all Mudblood.

He watched from the cover of a large, flat-topped piece of granite jutting from the ground, where he and Pansy had sat in his second year, practicing banishing spells by flicking wads of moistened parchment back and forth to each other. They had allotted points if the wads hit instead being caught by the spell of the other’s wand. Draco tried to remember the last time he had felt so carefree. It had been a long time. At least two years. Not since Potter put his father in Azkaban at the end of fifth year. Draco’s eyes narrowed as he watched them.

Potter, Weasel and the Mudblood threaded their way through the motionless, but still sharp twigs of the Willow, and somehow climbed inside. He waited for them to re-emerge. Minutes went by. A crash and shriek from the battle made Draco jump, but still he waited.

What if it was a portal of some sort? Had he just lost them, waiting like an idiot? Draco could not think of any spell other than a portkey or a floo to transport people. There had been no crack of apparition. He supposed the Willow could have had a portkey tucked at its base, but that seemed unnecessarily complex. Why hide a portkey when you could just require a spell or phrase or motion to trigger one, and carry it, instead? Finally, he crept closer, noticing a small, darker hollow at the base of the tree, between the ridges of two large roots. He stared cautiously, but he needed to learn what they were up to. He needed knowledge. He started to creep forward again.

A sound sent him scuttling back behind the boulder. The cold, dangerously familiar sound of the Dark Lord’s voice. “You have fought valiantly.” Draco knew the Dark Lord could not possibly be speaking to him. It did not quite sound like a Sonorus Charm, it was too – large, somehow, as it echoed across the fields. But it still felt personal. As if the Dark Lord were speaking to him. “Lord Voldemort knows how to value bravery.” And how to punish failure.

Draco shivered in the sun as the voice continued. This was the voice that had called for his Death Eaters to punish Draco, his mother, his father. This voice had required him to kill Dumbledore, knowing the pain of failure was death for his mother, maybe even his father. This was the voice of the one they had to please, that rewarded victory with power and failure with torture and death.

“You have sustained heavy losses,” the Dark Lord’s voice echoed. It sounded like he was speaking from several directions at once. “If you continue to resist me, you will all die, one by one.” Draco felt the cold granite against his back. A sharp edge poked unpleasantly into his shoulder blade. At one
point, Draco would have listened to the Dark Lord’s display of power with unholy glee, knowing he
and this powerful force were on the same side, the winning side. Knowing that Potter would die. *You
are no longer protected.* At any moment, the Dark Lord could have a Malfoy killed, or do it himself.

“I do not wish this to happen,” the voice echoed. Draco started, but then realized that the Dark Lord
was continuing his speech, not answering Draco’s thoughts. “Every drop of magical blood spilled is
a loss and a waste.” Yes, that is why the Malfoys fought alongside him. Every drop of pure blood is
precious. Blood traitors like the Weasleys didn’t see this, they didn’t see that the Blood and traditions
of magical families was something to protect.

“Lord Voldemort is Merciful.” Draco had seen that mercy. Draco had writhed under the merciful
Cruciatus curse, and seen his mother and father do the same. Failure was always punished.

“I command my armies to retreat immediately. You have one hour. Dispose of your dead with
dignity. Treat your injured.”

“I speak now to Harry Potter.” The voice continued. Draco glanced back to the Whomping Willow.
Still no sign of Potter. What were they doing in the tree? “You have permitted your friends to die for
you rather than face me yourself. I shall wait for one hour in the Forbidden Forest. If, at the end of
that hour, you have not come to me, have not given yourself up, the battle recommences. This time, I
shall enter the fray myself, Harry Potter, and I shall find you, and I shall punish every man, woman
and child who has tried to conceal you from me. One hour.”

Did the Dark Lord really expect Potter to just give himself up? Potter was annoying, and part of that
was that he did not give up. Even when it made sense to do so. That idiot meddled everywhere, and
threatening friends did not stop him. People could die all around him, and Potter would just continue
right on. Sure, he whinged about the people who had died. As if Perfect Potter was the only person
to have lost friends or family. But he would continue to fight, not considering the risk to others until
it was too late to save them. After seven years, Draco knew how Potter was.

Speak of the git, and he shows up. The Gryffindor Trio crawled out of the tree. They were covered
in dirt, which they tried to dust off with their hands, which only succeeded in getting the worst of it
off, and grinding the rest of it in more thoroughly. Maybe there was a tunnel or a cave, then. The
three Gryffindors ran back to the Castle, but Draco hesitated. He wanted to see where they had been,
what they had been doing. The Willow was still not moving, so Draco edged closer.

When he got to the perimeter of the branches, he paused. The Willow still held still. A slight breeze
jostled some of the upper branches, and a shower of loose twigs fell through the branches at him, but
most were caught by upper branches before reaching the ground. Even though it was not banging its
branches around, it still did not seem to want him there. Draco took a deep breath, and made his way
through the twisted branches, toward the indentation from which Potter and the others had emerged.

It was an opening. Draco leaned forward to see inside, wishing for his wand again for a Lumos spell.
But if he had his wand, he wouldn’t be here, tracking after Harry bloody Potter, he’d be fighting. Or
he’d have turned Potter over and would be basking in the rewards the Dark Lord offered, instead of
hiding from his punishments. No, not hiding, he reminded himself. Scouting.

He rested his hand on a protruding root to support himself as he leaned further, dislodging a twig that
was sticking out of a knot at its base, when suddenly the Willow started to move again. It started
slow, as if winding up, readying for a good throw like a chaser might ready to throw the Quaffle. Draco
did not fancy being a Quaffle. A large branch pounded into the ground right next to him, and
he quickly rolled over the root into the opening, managing to just miss another attempt of the tree to
pound him to a bloody pulp.
Retreating a bit more into the gap, he looked out to see the tree writhing and pounding, each thump of a branch against the earth caused the ground to shake and dirt to fall into his hair from the ceiling above him. This was not good. Potter had come back out the same way he had gone in. Draco hoped that was not because it was the only way in or out, because he did not see how he was going to get past these branches now. He was acting like a bloody Gryffindork, going in without making the escape route certain. Draco looked up. The ceiling looked furry, as root tendrils hung down from the soil above him, poking through the wooden slats that had once been a ceiling. They and wooden beams supported the ceiling, and Draco, eyes becoming accustomed to the dark, could see he was in a tunnel, stretching down under the base of the tree. The wooden supports arched over it every few feet.

Somewhere along this tunnel, or at the other end, was the reason Potter had come in here.

Draco started forward, forced to drop to his hands and knees after a few feet. The tunnel constricted, and he wriggled through the narrowest part. The tunnel was longer than he expected. Potter must not have spent much time at the end of it, if it took this long to traverse.

The tunnel got dark almost immediately, and Draco wished again for his wand. Another thing to hate Potter for. “Lumos.” Nothing happened. Of course not. Lumos was tied to the wand even more than most spells, and Draco had never been good at wandless magic. He felt a clump of dirt fell onto his hair, and he found himself wondering why he was doing this. Potter had left. He should be following Potter, not investigating places the bloody Boy Who Lived had passed on his way. But whatever was at the end of the tunnel must have been important. Potter had that stupid Gryffindor bravery thing, and as much as Draco hated to admit it, Potter was not a coward. Draco would have expected the bloody Boy Who Lived to be in the midst of the fighting, dying gloriously so everyone could put up a fucking shrine to him. Instead he had left the battle, he knew how to get past the Willow, and had crawled through this dirty, narrow, dark tunnel. Thus, it was not something that Potter did on a whim. Draco ignored the fact that he was crawling through the same tunnel, and had no idea why.

Draco brushed the dirt off his head, combing his fingers through his hair, managing to get most of the dirt out, but grinding the rest more thoroughly in. He grimaced.

He started forward again, bumping his head against a particularly low beam in the earth above him. He rubbed his hair again, aware that it was becoming grimy, and the dampness and pain said he may have cut his head against the beam. Just great. How long was this stupid tunnel anyway? He thought he saw something ahead, lighter than the dark that surrounded him. He crawled more quickly, and the ceiling of the tunnel started to retreat from above his head, until it was high enough that he could stand.

There was an opening, camouflaged in the back of a shallow closet, and a large crate stood in front of the opening, hiding it and him. Draco stood for a moment and peered through the opening between the wall and the crate. It was a room in a house. It was filthy, with debris littering the floor. It seemed to be empty. What was Potter doing here? Was there some secret stash of something? Potter did seem to be collecting things: that diadem—Draco shoved the memory aside, flames, the certainty he was going to die, Potter’s hand lifting him up onto the broom, his terror as he grabbed Potter and held on. Draco did not think he could look Potter in the eye anytime soon.

He edged past the partially open door, nearly tripping over a pile of black cloth. His eyes skittered over the mound. Not a pile, a person. Merlin. The familiar profile of his godfather shocked him, and Draco dropped to his hands and knees, feeling the older man’s face. Uncle Severus. The face was cold, and there was blood, so much blood.

Was this what Potter had come here for? Had Potter done this? Draco started to feel a burning of hate stronger than any he had felt before, and he grabbed his teacher and held him close. Severus’ head
dropped down over Draco’s shoulder, and he noticed what he had missed the first time. Bite marks. Draco recognized them. He had seen such marks before. Nagini. The Dark Lord had given more than one person to her, had displayed the damage she could create, made sure his Death Eaters understood yet another way he could punish those who disobeyed.

Nagini had killed Severus Snape. And the hate he had been feeling suddenly had a new target. Fucking Voldemort had killed his godfather. He had tortured his parents, sent Draco on a mission he could never have completed, and now killed Severus Snape.

When Draco’s father had been cold and demanding, Uncle Severus had given quiet, wry support. Draco had known him since he was a child, and knew how to read the dry humour behind the impassive face, to interpret the quirk of the lips. He had learned how to read his godfather’s emotions, when to face his anger, and when to run. He knew when he could smile at his wry comments, and how to see the pride that came through only when he had done something right. In the Potions classroom, Severus favoured him, but Draco knew that he was graded fairly at the end, based on his actual accomplishments. His father had to see the favour, had to hear the reports from the other Slytherins’ parents, but Draco recognised when his Godfather was proud, when he honoured Draco’s accomplishments.

Voldemort had killed him. He had left him behind, like a pile of rags. Snape had done everything that Voldemort asked, risking his displeasure only to protect Draco. Draco knew that now, having seen the results of his failure on himself, on his parents, and on Snape himself. Draco ran his hand near down Snape’s neck, finding the point just under the jaw, despairing and hoping at the same time. Severus could not be dead. He was too mean to die. He was Severus Snape and Snape was eternal.

The skin was cool, the body limp, but…

He felt something.

A pulse of blood, against Draco’s fingers. Slow, weak.

And another.
May 2, 1998

Draco’s gaze darted around. He could see nothing in the debris to help Snape. Feeling like an intruder, he searched his godfather’s pockets for something, anything, that would help. His godfather was a potions master, by Merlin’s dirty socks. He surely carried something. Anything. There was a bottle, but it was just for pain. He needed antivenin, he needed blood replenisher, he needed…

He needed to stopper death. Draco had learnt what his godfather meant, in that first amazing Potions class all those years ago. Snape had showed him the page in a potions book that detailed a potion that was almost impossible to make. He was trying to make a point at the time, Draco remembered.

He had been frustrated with Draco for spending time in class distracting Potter, instead of learning the potion himself. He had wanted to instil in Draco his own love of potions. He wanted Draco to know how many there were, and all that could be done with them. By then, Draco had stopped believing in Snape’s first-day speech, had challenged the older man to prove what potions could do.

Snape had showed him the book in which it was described, an old, leather-bound book with yellowed pages, and on one page was the potion, complete with ingredients and instructions.

Had his godfather ever made the potion? It was not much of a chance, but it was the only one he could think of.

Crawling through the tunnel again would take too much time. Draco dashed from the room, looking for a door to the outside. There were doors and windows, but they were all boarded up. Draco suddenly realized where he was. This was the Shrieking Shack! But he could not think about that now, or the rumour that it was haunted. How would he carry Severus back to the dungeons, let alone with no one seeing? He could not drag Snape through the tunnel. He could Apparate if he had a wand. He could not Apparate into the castle, but he could get to the clearing where he and Snape had met before going to Death Eater meetings. The thought of the meetings, of Snape serving the Dark Lord, faithfully, year after year, made Draco furious. This was how his godfather had been repaid.

He needed to get back to the castle. He needed a wand.

And there it was.

Snape’s wand.

Wonderingly, Draco picked it up. He had used his mother’s wand since spring, after Potter had taken his. It had never felt quite right, but this, holding his godfather’s wand, felt… wrong. He felt like he had intruded into his parents’ bedroom. Like he was holding something private, something personal. “Lumos.” The tip of the wand flickered, as uncertain as his voice. Draco took a deep, steadying breath. “Lumos.”

A brighter flare came out of the tip of the wand. It felt odd, like he was casting a spell through Severus himself, like he was using Snape’s body as a wand. Draco shivered. He cast a lightening
charm on the older man, and then crouched down and pulled one of Snape's arms over his shoulder, turning to hoist him onto his back. Leaning forward, Draco took a step to make sure he had a firm grip. Even lightened, it was awkward. Severus was significantly taller, and his knees bumped into Draco’s calves, his body dangling down Draco’s back. It was undignified, but Snape would never know. Now for the challenge. Could he Apparate with Severus’ wand? Did he have any choice?

He had learned to Apparate years before he had been allowed to take the stupid ministry classes. His father had insisted. He had not been allowed to do it where anyone could see, but his father had told him that he needed to be able to escape from difficult situations. This, however... Apparating with someone else’s wand, carrying that person, was dangerous. Perhaps…

He held Severus’ hand in his wand hand, arranging it so Severus’ fingers touched the wand as well. It felt, less invasive. As if Severus were sharing, instead of him intruding in the other man’s absence. Draco took a deep breath, straightened, and Apparated with a loud crack.

It worked.

There were no sounds of battle; the one hour cease-fire was still in force. The quiet was punctuated by cries of discovery, of sorrow as bodies were discovered, of anguish as the injured and dead were recognized. Draco did not pause to listen.

There was a short walk from the apparition field just past Hagrid’s hut to the Slytherin dungeons and Professor Snape’s quarters. Draco and Snape had used it before, a side door that was charmed to recognize only those who were current students or faculty in Slytherin. Draco sprinted toward it, trying to keep Snape’s lightened body steady. He held out Snape’s wand, said the charm that would open the door, and hurried inside, frustrated at even the brief amount of time to navigate Snape’s body awkwardly through the door.

Draco was glad that Snape had never moved to the Headmaster’s quarters, that he had held on to his rooms in the dungeons. He was likewise glad his godfather had given him the password, threatening dire consequences if he ever used it for anything short of an emergency. He couldn’t imagine getting his godfather’s body any further than the man’s dungeon quarters.

Snape’s rooms were dark. Draco pointed the wand at the sconces along the walls and lit them. Making his way to the sofa, he deposited Snape on it and, as if freed from a trap, sprinted toward the room off to the side where Severus kept his potions and supplies. Again with his godfather’s wand, feeling a little less awkward each time he used it, Draco unlocked the door, pushed it open and, with a quiet “Lumos”, scanned the room. Reaching out to the various bottles lining the shelves that covered the walls from floor to ceiling, he grabbed a tall blue one, a clear round bottle, and a square red one. Blood replenisher, antivenin, and a potion to support heart function. None of that would do any good if Severus wasn’t alive for the potions to course through him, however.

He needed the potion. *Put a stopper in death*. Severus would have made it. He would not have been able to have the recipe in hand and yet resist trying it.

Draco scanned the walls, looking for something misplaced, something… His father had taught them both this trick, hiding through misdirection… There. A long, red bottle on its side. Severus would never allow even that much disorder in his private stores. Draco reached toward the bottle, but then stopped himself. That was too easy. That would likely be a trap. He followed the mouth of the bottle, followed line of sight. It pointed to a small clear bottle that appeared to be empty. Draco made to pick it up, but it was stuck, as if affixed to the counter. That would be it. But what would be the mechanism? He reached and removed the stopper.

As soon as he did, the stopper grew, changed colour. It elongated and became reddish. Clever.
Draco carefully put the stopper in the red bottle on its side, causing a segment of wood panelled wall, together with the shelves covering it, to swing slightly ajar. A flush of pride, both in himself for figuring it out, and in his godfather for going beyond the obvious, filled him for a moment, but Draco did not have time to indulge it. Draco pulled the now revealed cabinet door aside, to expose a cabinet twice the width of his shoulders, and three shelves tall. Shelves covered the back of the hidden cabinet door, as well as the back wall, making the storage double deep. Draco scanned them. They were meticulously labelled in Severus’ square lettering: illegal potions, potions with rare ingredients, and potions that were virtually impossible to make, except by a master of Snape’s competence.

Draco just needed the one. He scanned the shelves, feeling the urgency, seeing Snape’s body in his mind. He could be dead already. Snape said the potion had to be administered within a set amount of time. An hour? Half an hour? Draco could not remember. If only he could remember what the potion was called, he would take the risk. It was a strange name, almost as if it called on the Muggle deity. He visualized the page, saw the list of ingredients in his mind, saw the faded handwriting on the page, and then, as if accidentally, glanced upward to happen across the name of the potion. Godot. The potion was called Godot. Snape had laughed when Draco asked why, but wouldn’t tell him.

He had to find it. Snape had to have made it. It had to be there. Draco’s felt anguish rising as he scanned bottle after bottle. His breath was short and shallow with tension, his eyesight narrowed to see just the labels, Gestalt, Gethsemane, Grimoire… no, back. He had it.

Snape had made it.

Draco reached out, carefully, and picked up the bottle, afraid to drop it in his anxiety. He carried it carefully out to his godfather on the sofa, afraid he would spill it despite the stopper in the top.

Dosage. Draco did not have time to find the book with the recipe and dosage. He might already be out of time. He knelt by his godfather, unstoppered the bottle, and shook a drop onto Severus’ lips. He reached for the older man’s neck, searching for the spot where the pulse had thrummed, searched. There was nothing. Draco pulled down Severus’ jaw, opening his mouth, and poured a drop directly on his tongue. Nothing. The pulse had stopped.

Frantic, Draco poured a full swallow’s worth of the potion directly on the back of Severus’ tongue, stroking the front of his throat, hoping it would cause the swallowing reaction like it did for animals.

“Swallow. Swallow. Please swallow…” Draco muttered a desperate litany. But the older man lay still. Draco pointed Snape’s own wand at supine man’s throat and shouted, “swallow, damn you!” A spark of uncontrolled magic rolled like lightning off Draco’s skin, down the wand, and burst with a bright yellow light at the potion master’s throat, leaving behind a circle of burned skin.

Severus Snape swallowed.

He coughed, sputtering some of the draught back, dribbling it across his lips in a smear of red spittle.

And then Draco’s fingers felt it. A slow bump against his fingertips. A pulse. Slow, too slow. Draco reached for the next bottle. He needed to get the poison out. He poured the antivenin into Severus’ open mouth, then with Severus’ wand, cast a charm on the open wound on the potion master’s neck. He saw the poison stream out, and then the dark, oxygen-starved blood.

Next potion: an organ strengthening potion, for the heart, lungs, liver. Draco poured half of the small bottle in.

Severus’ breathing steadied, the pulse became more regular, the time between heartbeats became
Draco wanted to close the wound, but he was not controlled enough using another wizard’s wand, especially not this wand, and did not want to risk doing more harm than good. He could scarcely believe he hadn’t caused damage in the spells he had cast. Only the truly desperate would use another wizard’s wand, let alone something delicate. He had needed to work for weeks to get his mother’s wand to behave, and she was surprisingly compatible with him. Holding his teacher’s wand, Draco still could not help but feel like he was intruding. Severus Snape was extremely protective of his privacy, and Draco was using one of the most intimate tools a wizard owned. Now that Snape was breathing regularly, Draco did not dare use the wand directly on the other man’s body again.

But the older man was dangerously white, and the wound was still leaking blood. It looked clear of venom, so Draco used the wand to rip two strips of cloth from his burned, debris-torn, dust-covered robes, and spelled them clean with a Scourgify. He wadded one to press against the wound, and the base of the neck where it met the shoulder, and bound the other around the wadded cloth and under the opposing shoulder.

When it looked like the blood loss had slowed, Draco poured the blood replenishing potion into Snape’s mouth, and watched with wild, crazed joy as the other man swallowed. Everything he had used, every bit of knowledge on how to use these potions, and on what they did and what to watch for, was due to the man lying before him. Draco was merely an instrument of Severus Snape’s knowledge and skill. This time, Draco found he did not mind.

Still, Severus needed more than Draco could offer. Without a wand under his control, Draco had done all he could. Much as he wanted to stay and stand guard until Severus got better, his godfather was not yet safe. If Draco were to just sit here, it might be only to watch as he d–

No. Draco needed to get a healer.

Draco activated the floo in Snape’s sitting room, but then paused. The Hospital floo might well be active, but Draco rather doubted that he’d be welcome, if he burst through. Chances were he’d be at the end of several curses and hexes if he did. Asking for help for Severus Snape was not likely to provide much in the way of results. No, he needed to do it another way.

With one last look at Snape, Draco took his teacher’s wand, and carefully cast a disillusionment charm on himself. He could feel the tingling of magic flowing on his skin, letting him know that it was working. Still holding the wand out, Draco left Snape’s rooms and ran toward hospital wing. Would they be using it as such? Draco ran, cursing that he could not Apparate here and that the Floo was as good as closed to the likes of him.

The path from dungeon to hospital was not the clear path it once had been and his progress slowed as a result. While the dungeons were still fairly clear of debris, the ground floor and first floor were covered in chunks of rock burst loose from the castle walls, portraits that had fallen off those walls, some shrieking to anyone that passed to set them aright, some empty as the occupants crowded elsewhere, presumably to watch the battle. Draco did not want to see the bodies, bloodied, left behind like litter. He stepped over them when he could, and did his best to avoid looking at their faces lest he recognise a schoolmate, a teacher. Even if it were someone from another house, he was not sure he could bear it.

Well, maybe if it were a Weasel. But Draco’s stomach twisted at even that image.

When he had repaired the vanishing cabinets last year, he had only imagined The Dark Lord’s army
of Death Eaters marching through, victorious, cowing the idiots that supported Dumbledore. He had imagined them cringing, recognising the superiority of the Dark Lord and the pure-blood way of life. He imagined the recognition he would get for being the one to make it happen. But after awhile, there was no illusion of victory, only a desperate attempt to save his parents’ lives. Even then, he could not have imagined this battlefield, nor could he now equate it with his school. This—carnage—this was not noble, this was not victory. And it should not have happened at Hogwarts. Hogwarts was for students to learn, to taunt each other, and compete with one another. It was for them to grow into their power. For all that Dumblebore was a daft do-gooder a few candles short of a cake, for all the ways the school had treated Slytherin like the squib stepchild no one wanted to talk about, Hogwarts was still – Hogwarts. A place where Dumblebore had offered Draco a second chance, even while the old man was at the end of Draco’s wand. Hogwarts was where Draco had the chance to learn, to excel, to show off what he was capable of, albeit coming in second to a bloody Mudblood. Draco’s father had never forgiven him for that.

He climbed the stairs to third level, the staircase suddenly lurching sideways as he neared the top, and he had to wait for it to settle before he burst off it, into the corridor. He could see sky. The walls here had been crushed in places, jagged edges with large openings. Pieces of the ceiling had come crashing to the floor. The direct path was blocked, so he made his way around, down another corridor, nervously across a bridge high up above the middle courtyard.

There was no one alive in the corridors, but he could hear that the battle had started again. Everyone was outside, and the Dark Lord was shouting something about Potter. The sound of the response made Draco wonder what had happened. But he couldn’t think about Potter now, he had to get to the Hospital wing.

As he got closer, he saw people again, ahead of him, in the main corridor to the hospital rooms. Some people carried bodies, others helped friends as they limped along, with burns, cuts, broken limbs, or disfigured body parts.

Now that he was here, Draco needed to be careful. He could still feel the charm on his skin, causing eyes to look away. No one important here. He knew anyone who saw him would see different features than his, would not see his begrimed white-blond hair, or face or body shape. Nevertheless, Draco ducked behind a statue, into an alcove in the wall, out of the way of the people milling about the hall.

They were all against the Dark Lord. And while Draco knew he could not fight for the—for Voldemort (for he was no longer a lord of any sort, dark or not, that Draco wanted to follow, after what he had done to Snape), no one else knew that. If they were to see past his Disillusionment charm, not only would he not get what he came for, he would get a first-hand experience in a lovely array of hexes and curses, and possibly a reserved room with all the amenities at Azkaban.

Unless Voldemort won. And Draco had no idea what Voldemort would do with him. Nor, at this point, did he want to know. His only concern right now was getting the best healer he could for his godfather.

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer: Harry Potter, his friends, his enemies, and the lovely world they live in all belong to JK Rowling.
Comments are always welcome. I find they inspire me to write further, knowing someone else cares about the story.
Aftermath Part 1: The Healing

Chapter Notes

Thanks to ivyingarden, who beta read this chapter and continues to encourage me to write!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Aftermath Part 1: The Healing

May 2, 1998

He saw Madame Pomfrey pass the door several times, issuing orders to people who had volunteered to help, students too young to fight in the battle, or adults trained as Healers. He did not recognize the adults who were being consulted as healers. Perhaps some had been sent from St Mungo’s. That would be a good thing; Draco doubted that Madame Pomfrey would willingly leave the hospital wing to help Snape if she were the only healer available. But if there were several from St Mungo’s, he had a chance.

Waiting until there was a brief lull in the bustle into the hospital rooms, Draco checked to feel the slight prickle on his skin that confirmed the Disillusionment charm was still active, and emerged from behind the statue. He ducked into the same room he had last seen Madame Pomfrey enter. She continued to a small office through a door on the far wall, and Draco followed, closing the door behind him.

“What luck!”

“I need your help.” Draco dropped the Disillusionment charm. He held Snape’s wand ready, but did not point it at her.

Madame Pomfrey turned around, looking calm, but Draco had seen her jump at the sound of his voice. He opened his posture, trying his best to look unthreatening.

It hurt to see her glaring so coldly at him. She had always been kind to him when he had come to get medical attention. Of course, he had come for medical attention often. He didn’t admit to anyone, least of all Madame Pomfrey, that he liked it when she fussed over him.

“You will have to wait your turn, Mr Malfoy.” She cast a cold gaze at him, glancing up and down. “There are people in far greater need than you.”

For a second, Draco could not figure out what she meant. He was not severely injured. Then he chanced to catch sight of himself in the mirror behind her, and noticed that his skin was red and blistered in places, from the fire, and he had cuts and scratches and the occasional bruise scattered across his arms, and face, and probably his legs as well. He was filthy from crawling through the cave, his hair was lank and darkened with grime, and had Severus’ blood splattered on his robes, especially on his shoulder where he had been carrying his godfather. Draco had not stopped long enough to be aware of the pain. Now that he had, the burn from the heat of the Fiendfyre stung.

“You don’t understand. It is not for me.”

“You dare to come here for help for one of your Death Eater friends? After they have sent patient
after patient here? Your schoolmates are dying! I swore that I would care for all who needed it, but when I see the lives you people have destroyed…”

Draco had never heard her quite so emotional. “It’s Headmaster Snape!” He interrupted her.

“Snape!” Madam Pomfrey spat. “After what he let into Hogwarts! You were here this past year… do you seriously expect me to leave here where good, brave people need my help, to help that murderer?”

“I don’t care what Professor Snape has done, or not done. But the Dar — Vol-Voldemort tried to kill him. He almost died. He could still be dying. Please, you have to help him. Please.” Draco was proud his voice did not crack, but the need was clear in his voice. He told himself he was letting the emotion through to get his way, but he if he were honest with himself, he thought it would have broken through anyway.

Madam Pomfrey stared at Draco. The coldness in her eyes did not abate. After a few minutes, she blinked, and a shudder ran down her body. When she returned her gaze to him, she squared her shoulders as if making a decision. “Where is he?”

Draco suddenly had a thought. “You won’t turn him in?”

“I can’t promise that!” A look of pain crossed her face. “He murdered the Headmaster. He will have to be held accountable for his actions.”

Draco’s head ticked back stubbornly. “I can’t take you to him if you’ll only turn him in. You know he won’t get a fair trial. They’ll send him to Azkaban. Death would be preferable to the Kiss.”

“We don’t have time for this. Either lead me to him or let me return to my other patients.”

“Just promise me…”

“What?”

Draco could not think. He had so little to bargain with. The Dark Lord had taken the Dementors away from Azkaban. It was possible the Ministry would not be able to round them up again. But Draco did not want to rely on what was possible. Maybe he could Obliviate her after she healed Snape. Draco looked at the wand in his hand. He did not know if he could trust his skill with it for such a delicate spell, much less against a woman who had been kind to him when few others were. He knew he would do what was necessary, but… he hoped it would not be necessary. When did he start relying on hope? He felt very foolish when he continued.

“Just promise me you’ll give him a chance.”

Madame Pomfrey paused, searching out something in Draco’s face.

Her voice was a bit softer when she agreed. “Yes, I can promise that. Now where is he?”

Draco relented. His godfather needed care, and he was not skilled enough to give it. He just hoped the man would forgive him. “In his rooms. I left him there. I could not close the wound; I don’t have my wand anymore.” He noticed her gaze at the wand in his hand. “This is Professor Snape’s.”

Madam Pomfrey turned to the freestanding wooden cabinet along one wall, opened the door, and pulled a few bottles from its shelves, together with winding bandages, a notebook, and a few other items Draco did not recognise.
“Well, come on then.” She grabbed him by the wrist, leaving him no time to recast the Disillusionment charm, and dragged him out of the office and into the larger room they had passed through. At the sight of Draco, wands came out, pointing directly at him. It was unnerving to be in the middle of a circle of bristling wands.

Madam Pomfrey ignored them, pulled him to the open hearth in the room, grabbed some floo powder from a pot standing near it, and tossed it in. The flames burst green. “Professor Snape’s Rooms,” she murmured so quietly that Draco was sure he was the only one that would hear. She stepped in, and Draco was pulled in with her by the firm grip on his wrist.

He steadied himself from the spinning of floo transport, wiped the soot off but leaving smears of soot and grime on his clothes and arms. He imagined what his father would say to such a display, but there were things more important than the Malfoy bearing at present.

Severus lay where Draco had left him, but his breathing was more ragged, and his skin seemed flushed, feverish.

Madam Pomfrey let go of Draco’s hand, either ignoring him or forgetting he was here, and held her wand over Headmaster Snape’s body, casting diagnostic spells.

“I am not doing this for you, or for him, but for the sake of my oath.” Madame Pomfrey commented to him abruptly. “What did you do to him?”

“It wasn’t me!” Draco protested.

“It mean, what did you give him?”

Draco hesitated, but knew she would need to know to help Professor Snape. “I found his potion of Godot.” Draco whispered. And then antivenin, and—“

“Why an antivenin? What happened?”

“It was Nagini. She bit him. I believe Vo- Voldemort commanded it. For her to kill him.” He sounded incoherent even to himself.

Madame Pomfrey glanced sharply at him, and then dropped her gaze to make a notation in her medical journal. “Continue.”

“After the antivenin I gave him a blood replenisher. And an organ strengthener.”

“Be more specific, child. Which antivenin? Which blood replenisher, which organ strengthener?”

He told her the dosages and the specific potions, detailing each drop and attempt, indicating each phial as he spoke. She made a few more notes in her journal.

“Let me see those.”

He gathered the bottles she had indicated from the table and gave them to her.

Madam Pomfrey’s eyes widened at the Potion of Godot, as if seeing the bottle with its label awakened her to what it was, where Draco’s words had not. “You gave him this? You realize what damage you would have done if he his injuries had not been fatal? Are you sure—” She asked him.

“His pulse had stopped.”

* * *
Madame Pomfrey paled. She had not agreed with anything Headmaster Snape had done this last year, and even now found it difficult to believe that the man she had worked with for 18 years had become the man she saw this past year.

She had thought she knew the man. He came to her when he was spying for Albus, whenever the punishments from He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named exceeded the potency of the potions Severus had on hand. They would talk, and he would confide what he could. Not the details that were reserved for Albus and the Order, but his own concerns. He never spoke directly, instead only obliquely mentioning how events around him and his own actions affected him, but she knew that speaking with her was part of why he came to her, sometimes even when he had potions to relieve his pains and heal his injuries.

She had been shocked when she discovered he had killed Albus. She knew Albus was dying, of course. She knew of the curse. She and Severus had worked together to retard its progress. But its effects on Albus continued to get stronger, and Albus continued to weaken. When it was discovered that Albus was dead, that Severus and young Malfoy had disappeared, she did not know what to make of it. And then poor Harry said he had seen Severus kill Albus. That Severus was a murderer.

Poppy had felt betrayed, as if their friendship was merely a part of the ruse, part of a dark plan. But after the funeral, she had a chance to think. Albus had been dying, and she knew he would sacrifice anything to see Voldemort’s evil set down. Even his own life. It was possible…

So when the school year began again, and Severus returned to be Headmaster, she hoped he would come to her as before. To confide, in his oblique way, the pressures he was under. But Severus never came to see her. He stopped talking to her the day Albus died. And the behaviour Severus allowed as headmaster—she could not juxtapose that picture with the man she had known.

She kept to the hospital wing that year, rarely venturing out. There were violent injuries to be healed, more than in even the clumsiest of Quidditch seasons, significantly more than the average, even skewed by the Potter boy’s all too frequent visits in past years. There had been Crucius victims in her infirmary. In a school! Cast by teachers, sometimes by students! And regretfully, Poppy had decided that Severus was not the man she thought she knew. The Severus she knew would not have allowed that to happen.

But He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named had tried, had nearly succeeded in killing him. Why would he want to kill such a staunch supporter, one who had betrayed everyone he knew for the sake of his master? The thought gave her just enough pause to re-awaken her sense of duty.

She knew that for the Godot potion to work, the waiting had to be almost over. It needed to be administered at the point of death to, to stop it. He had been close. It did not bring back life, merely prevented death. If administered too early, it could cause permanent damage, locking the spirit of the person between life and death. Administered at just the right time, it stoppered up the rip that let the living out. Madame Pomfrey had heard Severus’ opening day speech enough times to know exactly which potion he meant when he said “put a stopper in death.” And she would have to pull that stopper out. But first, she would heal the body.

She pulled aside the clumsy wrapping around shoulder and neck. Directing her wand at it, she cast a spell. “There is no venom left in the wound,” she commented.

* * *

Draco recognized the other two spells she cast, one was to knit the skin together, and another was a general diagnosis. He had been on the receiving end of those spells many times.
Draco sat at the edge of Professor Snape’s chair, a large chair upholstered in leather dyed forest green. When she cast, he could see the wound closing, could see his mentor’s chest rising and falling. Relief washed through him at the even breathing. He felt like a marionette that had just had the strings cut, sagging onto the chair, breathing heavily.

“He may be out for a few hours. I will need to cast another spell on him, one that will balance his magical energy again. It has been… disturbed.”

Draco nodded.

“For this spell to work, Mr Malfoy, he needs to be left completely alone. You may not return for at least four hours, lest you cause him irreparable damage. And you will need to leave his wand. The spell requires it, for the best chance of success.”

Draco did not want to be wandless again. He knew he could not keep this wand, but the thought of being out in the battle without a wand again made him deeply nervous. But it was his godfather’s wand, and Snape needed it. Draco knew all too well the unbalanced feeling of being without his wand. Reluctantly, he bypassed Madame Pomfrey’s outstretched hand, and placed the wand on his godfather’s chest, adjusting the older man’s hand so it held the wand in place. He lifted his own hand, but did not step back, looking down on his godfather, noticing the even breathing with a slight glimmer of relief. But Snape did not look good in any other way.

“Headmaster Snape will still be here when you get back. And either he will be alive or he will be dead. Either way, there is nothing more you can do. It is time for you to leave.”

“But—“

“While you stand there, you delay me from doing what I must do. Your risk his chance of survival. And I have other patients that need my skills.” She nodded at the fireplace through which they had come, making it clear that she would be leaving as soon as the spell was cast.

Her tone may have implied ‘more worthy’ patients, patients that had not been Death Eaters. It could have been something else entirely. Draco felt a burn of emotion that might have been anger, but could well have been something less righteous that he could not recognise.

“But—”

“It is not a spell to interfere with. There can be no other magical fields in the room while the spell balances his. Go. Now.” Madame Pomfrey pointed at the door, and her stance made it clear that she would not do another thing for the Headmaster while Draco was present.

He exited the room, pushed out not by magic but by the force of her will, and Madame Pomfrey wasted no time in waving the door closed behind him. He could feel the gust of air against his cheeks, as he turned to get one more glimpse of his godfather before the door shut. Had he been a few inches closer, the door would have hit him in the face.

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer: Harry Potter, his friends, his enemies, and the lovely world they live in all belong to JK Rowling.
Comments are always welcome. I find they inspire me to write further, knowing someone else cares about the story.
Aftermath Part 2: A Malfoy Reunion

Chapter Notes

Thanks to ivyingarden for all the help making this a better fic! She patiently helps me brainstorm (with some great ideas to throw into the cauldron), is fabulous with canon, has a knack for language, and keeps at me to "write write write".

Note: This chapter follows book canon (except for the one element I have changed). For those who have only seen the movies, the Malfoy scene during the battle at the end of Deathly Hallows 7.2 played out differently.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Aftermath Part 2: A Malfoy Reunion

May 2, 1998

Draco felt lost. It seemed as if one of the pillars of his life had just been pulled away. Snape had been steady, even at those times when his father was not. He had pushed, supported and protected Draco. Snape was driven, and drove others. He was cold to almost everyone, but Draco had seen both fire and affection in the man’s eyes.

He had nearly died. Despite all Draco had done, his godfather could be dying even now, and it was out of his hands.

Exhaustion washed over Draco as he stared at the closed door. There was a battle being fought, he could hear bits of it. He felt no desire to fight in it, not for either side, even if he hadn’t been wandless.

A slight prick of obligation made his stomach clench. His parents were wandless too, and it was – at least partially – because of him. He was the one that took, and then lost, his mother’s wand.

He felt the sudden need to find his parents. They would be here, Voldemort would not have left anyone behind. Everyone had been needed, to fight in the battle, and to witness the Dark Lord’s victory. The students who had received the Mark had received last minute alerts by a pre-arranged code, telling them to be ready to take part in the battle.

He probably should avoid being caught. But without a wand, he could see no way to do both: to find his parents and to stay safe. He thought briefly about finding some of his Slytherin cohorts for safety in numbers, but the memory of the Death Eater’s words earlier made his position clear. He was not protected. Neither side valued Draco Malfoy. That was going to be their mistake, he promised himself.

He had no wand. However, he was a Malfoy. He would not cringe.

He squared his shoulders, pulled his head up, and looking straight ahead, and walked away from his godfather’s suite, not seeing where he was going except to avoid obstacles. He did not look anyone in the face. At first there were few people, but once he left the dungeons, the halls became more crowded. He paid no attention to the startled gazes, the nervous wands following his movement. He
just kept walking. When he climbed the stairs to the main floor, he heard cheering. His godfather might be dying, despite all Draco had done to heal him, and there was cheering. There was a quality to the cheers that told him that it was not Death Eaters cheering. He supposed Voldemort had been defeated. Draco was too numb to feel anything at the thought. Potter had probably killed him. Again. Potter would probably be cheering with the rest of them. Was probably being cheered by the rest of them. Potter had won. And by this, Draco knew he had lost.

Draco suddenly turned toward the tumult. If they were cheering, that means they were rounding up Death Eaters, those they had not killed, those that had not escaped. Draco did not want to escape just then. He needed to find his parents. *Let there be something left of my life.*

***

As he got closer to the Great Hall, from which jubilant noise could be heard from several corridors away, Draco found it harder to avoid obstacles, in this case, people. He kept his walk a determined stride, different than his usually lazy amble. He was going into the heart of enemy territory.

He was not sure what he expected. The jubilation, yes. The crowds of people, students he knew, Aurors in their distinctive robes, other adults he knew from his father ranting about them. A whole mess of Weasleys. They were all pounding each other on the back, hugging each other, clustering around a dark haired person Draco would recognize in his sleep. They were touching the bloody Boy Who Lived as if he were a fucking god, as if his mere touch was equivalent to spells of protection and abundance, all rolled into one.

A small group were unceremoniously carrying a body off through a doorway Draco had seen the teachers come through for meals. Voldemort was dead. Severus was alive (he hoped), and Voldemort was dead. Draco recognised the pasty, green-tinted skin, and wondered how that creature had managed to sway people of value, people like his father. And at the thought, he saw them. His parents. They sat at one of the house tables, which had been shoved toward one end of the room, their heads bent, holding each other’s hands. His mother’s left eye had been blackened, bruises stretched from her eye, down her cheek, to meet up with one spanning her neck and disappearing beneath her robes. His father, normally so elegant, had scratches and cuts that had not been healed across his face had hands. They both looked somehow broken.

A wash of hatred and fury flowed through Draco, burning his skin as hot as the Fiendfyre had. No one had the right to make his parents look like that. And the worst part was, it wasn’t Potter’s group that had brought them low. It had been Voldemort.

He remembered his shock over midwinter and spring holidays, at the way his parents behaved around Voldemort. His father, once he had finally been broken out of Azkaban, cringed and bowed before him, kissing the hem of Dark Lord’s robes. His mother just bowed her head and did as the Dark Lord asked, acting the hostess for the Death Eaters who came to give reports and receive instructions. Draco knew they were being punished for his failures. Every Cruciatus inflicted on his father, Draco felt. Voldemort had used his parents as hostel keepers, taking the manor as his own. His parents had let him.

Each injury, each curse, each degradation had made Draco that much more desperate to return to the Dark Lord’s good side. Then Draco had found Snape. Seeing his parents broken like this, seeing how Snape had been attacked by the very Master he followed, it all became clear to Draco. Voldemort had no good side. Voldemort used people, and cared for no cause but his own.

Voldemort had used them up and spat them out. And his parents had *let him do it.*
As Draco made his way with accelerating footsteps toward them, he found himself convinced of one thing. He would never again let another choose his way for him. He would never give his will over to another.

He stood in front of his parents, close enough to touch them, not saying anything. It somehow did not matter if anyone saw him. No one was paying attention anyway.

After a moment, his mother, then his father, looked up. Their eyes widened, and he was grabbed, pulled toward them, pulled to sit with them, in a gesture he would never have expected. The hands that grabbed him, the arms that hugged him, they were his father’s.

* * *

Draco saw the approaching group first. The crowds had started to disperse, Potter had disappeared. No other Slytherins were in the hall. No Death Eaters were here, except for the three of them. Draco guessed it was their turn. Three people in Aurors’ robes approached, a tall bald, man with rich, dark skin, a shorter man with sandy hair, and a smaller, round faced woman.

He touched his father’s shoulder. Lucius looked up, straightened his shoulders, and stood up. His mother remained seated, her posture becoming erect as if she were lifted by wires, lifting her face, uncaring that she revealed the darkly mottled bruising to the light. Draco felt a fierce glow of pride, as his father and mother gazed with cool dispassion at the oncoming Aurors. This was what it meant to be a Malfoy.

“Mr Malfoy, Mrs Malfoy, Mr Malfoy,” the Auror in front said, nodding to each of them in turn. The two Aurors behind him had their wands at the ready, but not pointed directly at the Malfoys. The one in front also had his wand out, but at rest. Draco did not fool himself that the man would be incapable of bringing it to bear at the least provocation.

“Shacklebolt.” His father said the word with absolute calm. His voice was empty, and Draco heard something that he had never heard before. Underneath the calm, his father had given up. But the façade still held. Habits of a lifetime gave his father the patterns of “how to deal with members of the government.” An outsider would not have noticed. But Draco did.

“I will need your wands.” Shacklebolt gestured, and one of the other Aurors, the younger, round faced woman. She looked like she’d have been more suited to running a florist shop, or teaching children too young for Hogwarts. Her face was steady, however, as was her hand as she held it out in calm expectation. Shacklebolt looked pointedly at his father’s walking stick. Of course the wand was registered; it was not a secret wand. Lucius Malfoy nodded and offered his dragon-headed walking stick as if offering food to a guest, as if it were a point of courtesy.

Shacklebolt tipped the serpent’s head of the walking stick, and looked inside. “Your wand is not here, Mr Malfoy. I’m afraid I must insist—”

“The Dark Lord took it for his own use, some time ago. He saw no… need for me to have it.” Lucius’ voice was quiet, seemingly devoid of emotion. But Draco heard the thrum underneath. His father was in there, not just in the calm of the voice, and the pride that made him stand tall, but in the fury that Draco knew to listen for. It was buried deep, but still there. Draco could hope.

“And your wife’s? And young Mr Malfoy’s?”

Draco kept the scowl from his face with great effort. Young Mr Malfoy indeed.
“My wife does not have hers on her at the moment. I believe my son—“

“It is gone. Most likely burnt.” Draco looked at his mother as he said it, and because he was looking for it he saw the momentary pull on her features, as she took that in. Draco knew how it felt to lose a wand. To have his own wand not only taken, but destroyed, would have devastated him. Potter still had Draco’s, was using it. There was a chance, a remote chance, that Draco could get it back. His mother’s pale, bruised face became impassive after that slight twitch.

“And what happened to your wand, Mr Malfoy?” Shacklebolt spoke directly to him for the first time.

“Potter took it. That’s when my mother lent me hers.”

“Well then. My apologies, but I must verify that you do not have wands in your possession.” Draco’s father’s eyes glittered like ice, and his mother went still. “By your leave…” Draco moved away from the table, keeping his eyes on the Aurors and his parents. His mother rose with quiet grace, and joined her husband. Shacklebolt pointed his wand to each of them in turn, and spoke a charm. Nothing happened.

“Thank you for your cooperation. I’m sure you understand, we cannot leave you to move freely around the school. As you did not actively fight against us today,” the emphasis in the man’s voice on the last word indicated his certainty that none of them were innocent, “we have arranged for you to be detained without extreme discomfort. If you would follow me.” Shacklebolt turned on his heel and walked away, the two other Aurors gestured with their wands for the three Malfoys to follow the black Auror.

They would have time, later, to react, once he could figure what the proper reaction was. At least they were not being separated. They were being treated respectfully, which Draco did not expect.

The room to which they were lead was a classroom, but one that had had the windows charmed away, and the door warded to prevent entrance or exit without knowledge of the password. Several of the desks were transfigured into comfortable chairs, and one table had some water and bread. Prison fare, perhaps, but it looked fresh.

“This is only temporary, until we find more appropriate accommodation for you.” The sandy haired Auror’s face twisted as he spoke. He paused. “We are making arrangements for you to be detained comfortably, here in the castle, although it may fall short of your standards.” The Auror sneered. “Until we have time to do so, you will have to make do with what this.”

Draco felt the wards engage as the door closed. There was a sense of being enclosed, as if the airflow had ceased. Draco repressed the momentary claustrophobia.

Lucius Malfoy turned to his son. “What can you tell me?” Draco saw the light of his father’s eyes. He was there, he was engaged.

“You saw more than I did, I think. Were you here when he— when the Dark Lord was killed?”

“We saw it. We even heard it. Do you know why Potter was able to vanquish the Dark Lord, Draco? Do you know what you could have done if you had followed through, even once?”

Draco looked at his father, surprised. Ah, so it was going to be this game. Part of him was glad his father was capable of the intensity in his voice, even if it was aimed at him. The emptiness he had seen increasingly over the school holidays had receded for a bit. Draco would gladly take the vitriol if only to have his father engaged with him again for a little while longer. His father. Strong. Angry. Malfoy.
“The Dark Lord had the Elder Wand in his hand, Draco. He expected to be able to use it. But do you know why it did not work? Harry Potter knew you had disarmed Dumbledore. You disarmed the old fool while he was holding the Elder Wand, did you realise that, Draco?” His father’s voice was quiet. “You could have picked up that wand, Draco. You would have been its master. But when you allowed Harry Potter to take your wand, you allowed Harry Potter to become master of the Dark Lord’s wand. You allowed Harry Potter to be master of the Elder Wand.”

Draco felt himself grow cold. It sounded like his father was blaming him for Voldemort’s demise. And his mother just sat there, looking at him, with that impassive face.

Something twisted inside Draco. He could not bear what Voldemort had done to his parents, to Snape. The cold in the pit of his stomach suddenly burned. “I’m glad.” Draco said quietly. “If I had even a little to do with his destruction, Father, I’m glad.” He saw his father’s face pale, even further than the already white features. He saw the eyes tighten.

Draco continued, looking away from his father’s eyes, afraid of what he might find there, but unwilling to stop what he had to say. These thoughts had been growing on him for a while. He had refused them, fought them, avoided them. He had made unreasonable vows and promises, and ignored what he had come to understand.

“He was not worth following. He was not worth having Malfoys follow him. He had no control, he acted on his emotions. What kind of purebloods are we to follow that? He tortured his followers even more than his enemies. And why? Because we let him. Because we were nearby! I saw him cast the Crucius curse on you, and on mother! You accepted it, and still followed him.”

“Are you finished?” Lucius Malfoy’s voice was flat. Draco had not heard the cold intensity in his father’s voice, or the power he imbued in just those few words, in all the time Voldemort had infested Malfoy Manor.

“For the moment. Father.”

Lucius approached his son. “I will overlook your… lack of respect, as well as your lack of insight. You lost sight of our long-term goals. I will overlook it, because you have expressed an excellent strategy for getting out of this. Lucius’ hand gestured to encompass the windowless, locked and warded room they found themselves in. “You will say exactly that to the Aurors, and to whoever is in charge of this school. You will say whatever you need to say to keep your place here. We find ourselves in an unfortunate situation, but it will not last. And Draco. Do not speak with such disrespect for me, or my choices, ever again.” His voice was quiet, almost dead. Draco heard the thrum.

Draco could feel his father’s breath with each word, in tight, intense bursts against his cheeks. Lucius turned his back, and selected one of the tables to sit on, the wooded benches being too low to the ground for one to be able to sit on them with any dignity, and the upholstered furniture that had been transfigured from desks and chairs were not only too low, but also too …deep, to be able to regain an upright posture once one had seated oneself in them. When he had arranged himself on the table, he turned to look back at his son.

“We came to the battle hoping to find you, and you were not there. Where were you?”

Draco could not tell if his father was asking after his son, or asking for information, or gathering something else to use against him.

“I was following Potter. It was in my mind to capture him and bring him to the Dark Lord, at first. After my—your,” he nodded to his mother, “wand was burnt, I followed him for information. Some
way to help the Dark Lord’s cause, to cause him to look upon the Malfoys with favour again.

“And how did my wand come to be burnt?” His mother’s voice was deceptively calm.

“Crabbe cast Fiendfyre. It got out of hand. He… he burnt in it.”

Lucius closed his eyes. “I shall tell his father, if I get the opportunity.” Narcissa came to sit next to her husband, and placed a hand on his back.

When Lucius opened his eyes, the spark of his personality had receded, his eyes revealing nothing, empty.

* * *

**Interlude – Severus Snape**

*MAY 2, 1998*

Severus Snape was irritated.

He was not dead.

That was probably the worst of it.

In addition, he could not move. There was an irksome buzzing around him, but he was not sure if it was heard by his ears or in his mind. He ached, and had pains. That last was not unusual; the Dark Lord did not hesitate to use the Cruciatius Curse liberally. It was probably the only liberal thing about him.

The echo of pain in his neck was not as severe as he would have expected, if he had expected to feel anything at this point. He had fulfilled his role, had informed the Potter brat what he needed to know – and here, Snape cringed to think of the brat having access to those memories. It had been necessary; it had been the only way to get the information to the boy by that point. Potter could not fail to recognise the silvery blue quicksilver fluid; he had certainly had familiarity with it from invading his privacy. But would Potter do as he was supposed to and view his Potion Master’s intimate memories? Would he do as he was supposed to and submit himself to slaughter? Snape doubted it. It was one thing to charge with Gryffindorish foolhardiness into danger, where he could rely on being fawned over it later. It was clearly another thing to give himself over to an enemy to be tortured and killed, with no rescue in sight, and none to watch but other enemies.

How had Potter gotten there, at the critical moment? Why had Potter been there? The boy had the stupidest luck. Find the most dangerous spot, and Potter would be there. Naturally, other people would have to save him. Only this time, if Albus’ planning came to fruition, no one would be there to save his precious Golden Boy.

He did not know what to think of that. He would not have expected it. Albus used Potter as ruthlessly as he had always used Severus himself. Potter had been set up as thoroughly as Severus had. Snape felt a deep unquiet at the thought of having anything in common with James Potter’s son.

Snape was exhausted. He could not open his eyes. He could feel the buzzing against his skin, in his ears, in his mind. He retreated from it.
Disclaimer: Harry Potter, his friends, his enemies, and the lovely world they live in all belong to JK Rowling.

Comments are always welcome. I find they inspire me to write further, knowing someone else cares about the story.
Aftermath Part 3: After the Storm

Chapter Notes

Thanks to ivyingarden for all the help making this a better fic!

Apologies for the delay in posting this. Life got busy for awhile.

Note: This chapter is the first of the story that happens after the events of The Deathly Hallows.

Aftermath Part 3

May 2, 1998

Harry, Hermione and Ron descended the stairs from Dumbledore’s office. Harry could not imagine it being anyone else’s office, even though he knew Snape had used it all last year, and someone else would be using it next year. Harry found himself reaching to touch the gargoyle as they passed, as if for luck. The gargoyle permitted it.

The sounds of the battle had given way to sounds of celebration. They came in distant bursts, partly from the great hall, but also from some of the towers, in echoes of freedom. Occasionally, Harry heard a cry that did not sound like celebration, but he did not have the energy to consider the cause of those.

Peeves swooped by, still singing, but this time it was something along the lines of “really most sincerely dead…” Harry wondered where he had heard that before. Peeves must have run out of his own invention. That alone made the day one for the history books, even if there had not been that other matter.

“He’s really dead.” Harry said quietly.

“Yeah.” Ron said, satisfaction evident in his voice.

“You did it, Harry.”

Harry put his arms around his two best friends. “We really did it. We three, and Neville. And everyone.”

“I bet there’s a party in Gryffindor tower.” Ron commented, wistfully. “It’d be nice to see everyone.”

Harry knew what Ron meant. After months on the road, with only each other for company, the noise and colours of the Gryffindor common room would be… welcoming. Besides, Ron was due for some recognition. He had destroyed a Horcrux. As had Harry, and Hermione, and Dumbledore, and Neville. Without any of them, they might not have won the war.

“Let’s go,” he said.

The fat lady let them in without even a password. The noise level doubled as they passed through the
hole behind the portrait. Neville was there, with something that looked to Harry like crepe paper draped around his head, patches of his skin the fresh pink of newly healed burns. Harry winced at the memory of the sorting hat, and Neville, burning. He was glad Neville was none the worse for wear, and had the odd fond hope that the sorting hat likewise survived.

Past and present students filled the common room: he recognized Lee Jordan, Oliver Wood, and Seamus Finnegan. Ron was the only Weasley. There were fewer girls, but Harry saw Angelina and some girls from other houses: Hannah Abbott and Luna, among others. A lot of DA members were crowded into the room.

The noise redoubled as people saw the three of them, and they were half-deafened by the cheers and whoops.

For all that it was early morning, there were bottles and barrels of Butterbeer, and random bits of food that had either been summoned, or brought by house elves, or squirreled away from care packages.

It felt good. The noise, the people, most of whom he knew and had worked with, it all felt right. He and Ron grabbed some food, Hermione grabbed a sofa, and the three collapsed into it and ate, letting the noise wash over them. They were home.

Half an hour later, the noise was unabated, the party was in full swing, with food, and drink, and Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes, but the three heroes lay asleep, heads lolling on each other’s shoulders.

* * *

Molly Weasley found the three of them later that day and woke them up just enough to bundle them through the Floo back to the Burrow, overriding Harry’s indistinct protests that he did not want to intrude. Harry blearily wondered if the Burrow had been connected to the Floo Network the whole time, even with all the restrictions, or if Arthur had somehow managed to reconnect it after the battle.

He woke the next morning to the clatter and aroma of Molly cooking, and the rumble of Ron’s snoring. He did not quite remember climbing the stairs to Ron’s room, but he was back in the familiar camp bed, and was wearing a pair of pyjamas. It seemed to be morning, but he felt rested. Was it still the same day?

Harry put on the robe that was usually left on the hook near the cot for him, taking comfort in the idea of a robe left just for him. He shambled down to use the loo, and a quick cleansing charm on his teeth made him feel slightly more human. He wondered briefly where his rucksack was. Somehow, it was always more satisfying using a toothbrush than the charm. He speculated on whether the charm could be modified to leave his mouth tingly and minty, like toothpaste.

By the time he got downstairs, Mr Weasley, Ginny, and Charlie were sitting at the breakfast table, and there was enough food set out to feed the entire order, and their relatives. There were bangers and eggs, oatmeal, toast, grilled tomatoes and onions, kippers and pumpkin juice. Mr Weasley looked up from the Prophet and gave Harry a warm, welcoming smile.

“Look who’s finally awake! Good morning, sleepyhead!” Mrs Weasley commented as she levitated something that smelled sweet out of the oven. Harry sat at one edge of one of the identical wooden benches on either side of the table, next to Ginny. She glanced at him, as if she wanted to say something, but then looked back down to her breakfast, as Mrs Weasley, with several flicks of her wand, put some of everything onto a plate for him.
“There you go, Harry dear, eat up.”

The smell and clatter of breakfast brought down more people than Harry had ever seen in the Burrow, with the exception of Bill and Fleur’s wedding.

“How long did we sleep?” Harry asked, a bit sheepishly.

“Well, you slept almost twenty-four hours, I think, Harry. You must have been worn out. Ron and Hermione both woke up for a bit last night, just long enough for dinner, but we couldn’t wake you. We decided you needed the sleep.”

Harry nodded. He had not felt this rested since – well, since he could remember. This last year had been particularly gruelling, but he had never had the chance to truly rest. Whether it was chores at the Dursleys’, or nightmares, or his scar burning with pain whenever Voldemort got angry, fear of returning to the Dursleys’, or grief at way too many deaths… The grief was still there. But… Voldemort would not cause any more deaths. Harry no longer needed to dread the future. He only needed to grieve the past. That was enough. Harry did not know how he felt. The grief was heavy. But there were no more expectations on him. That was a particularly light feeling. The conflicting senses left him empty. Waiting.

They ate in silence, to the sound of cooking and the crinkle of the Prophet. Hermione came down and sat near Mr Weasley with a murmured “morning” as she ate absentmindedly and she scribbled notes on a parchment near to hand thoroughly preoccupied. The feather of the quill occasionally tickled across her face and she scrunched her nose at it. Harry briefly smiled to himself. Hermione never changed. They had just returned from months on the road, survived torture and imprisonment, then ‘vanquished the Dark Lord’ in a pitched battle; they had not been in school all year and thus had no homework, but Hermione found something to take notes about. Somehow, that was comforting.

Percy appeared a bit later, and perched tentatively at one end of the bench, away from Harry. His movements were tight and careful. He kept his face lowered as he served himself small portions from the dishes near him. It looked to Harry as if Percy were trying to make himself as small and unobtrusive as possible. It was quite a change from the Percy that had tried to foist his views on everyone, so certain he was right.

Everyone fell silent as George entered. He sat unseeing as Molly put a full plate in front of him. Harry wished with all his being that Fred were there, and that the two would pull a prank, even on Percy. The silence was unbearable.

Fortunately, Ron lumbered down the stairs not too long after that. “Breakfast!”

Hermione looked up at that point. “Mrs Weasley, I can guarantee you that Ron thought of your cooking quite fondly—“

“And frequently!” Harry added.

“—While we were on our search.” Hermione finished.

Ron flushed a deep red, but still heaped his plate full with some of everything within reach. “Mum’s a good cook!” He said defensively.

“You three never had a chance to tell us what you did all these months.” Molly Weasley started.

So they told her, and the rest of the Weasleys, of their trip, Of the café and how they were almost caught. Of breaking into the ministry, and running into Mr Weasley while under Polyjuice. Of almost getting caught again, at Grimmauld place. Of moving camp each night. Of Hermione researching. Of
her clever bottomless beaded bag. Of Bathilda Bagshot, and how she was really Nagini. Of how joyful it was to hear Potterwatch on the wizarding wireless. Of being captured and held at the Malfoys’, and how Dobby set them free, and the price he paid.

By unspoken agreement, they did not speak directly of the Horcruxes. There was a reason that such magic was hidden, not even written about except in the rarest of rare dark books. They did not talk about the time Ron wasn’t with them. It had hurt them deeply, but he had come back when it really mattered. Harry had known that Ron was a hothead from early on, and more than any of them Ron spoke and acted without thinking. But there had been too many hurts and losses to hold onto one more.

“I think I am glad Molly and I didn’t know all of this at the time.” Arthur commented. We were very concerned about you, but I think we’d have been terrified if we knew the full extent of the danger you were in. Thank you for telling us.” He gave the three a significant glance. “Later, perhaps you would share more than the bare bones. When Miss Granger and I return from the Ministry, I will very much like to hear details.”

Harry looked up from his plate. Hermione was going to the Ministry today? He was going to ask when Mr Weasley stood up, glancing at the Weasley clock, where his hand pointed to “Almost Late” “Miss Granger and I should be off.”

“Arthur…” Mrs Weasley started, her eyes fixed on her husband as he cast a worried glance at George, still sitting at the table, staring unseeing at his barely touched breakfast.

“Molly, now more than ever, I have to go in. There is so much to do to recover from what You-Know-Who did. If we ignore it, even for a few days, those who believe like him, and those who simply wish to take advantage, will ensconce themselves back into places where they can do the most harm. I don’t want to leave you alone…”

Mrs Weasley stood straighter, wiping her hands down to smooth the fabric of her robes, the call of duty giving her strength. “No, you’re right. We’ll be fine. There are heroes of the battle here to keep us safe.” She rested her hands on Ron and Hermione, as if by that touch they could strengthen each other. She deliberately spoke as if it were physical enemies that haunted them, enemies they could fight off, instead of the inner demons that Harry saw flicker intermittently in each of their eyes. “You and Hermione will be fine. We’ll see you both this evening.” She smiled with a false brightness. The battle was over, but none of them were ready to mourn, not even George, who was clearly too numb to grieve.

Harry was familiar with this. When you were not ready to grieve, you just went about your daily tasks. You filled the day with what needed to be done.

Mr Weasley stepped over to squeeze George’s shoulder. “Yes. We can talk more later. Do you need anything before then?” His words could have been in response to Mrs Weasley, but Harry thought perhaps he was talking to George instead. A slight shake of George’s head, so small he might have missed it if he had not been looking, was all the response that Mr Weasley got. It occurred to Harry that maybe Mr Weasley was really talking to himself, in an attempt to reassure himself that his family would still be there when he got back. That it was ok to go and do the job he needed to do, even if he and his family needed to grieve. Harry hoped that Mr Weasley could get George to talk. It would help both of them.

Harry suddenly understood all those people who tried to get him to talk about Sirius’ death. Pushing wouldn’t work until George was ready, but it hurt to see him staring at nothing like that. Harry tried to pretend that it was different, because the Weasleys could all share their grief and how much they missed Fred, but Harry knew that no matter what it felt like at the time, no matter how alone he had
felt in his grief, other people mourned Sirius. At the very least, Remus did. Harry could not think about Remus right now, without wanting to go outside and howl for all that he had lost. His parents. Sirius. Now Remus. Nothing left of family. But the Weasleys had survived. All except Fred, whose very existence had brought mirth and light. And he did not want to think about that either. It’s over, he reminded himself. These were the last deaths that Voldemort could cause. Voldemort had taken the last of Harry’s family, but not the last of his friends. They were almost a family. And that would have to be enough.

He hoped none of the Weasleys felt the tearing anguish he had felt for Sirius. Somehow, while Fred’s death hurt, and was just wrong, it was not the same for Harry as when Sirius died. Perhaps because it was not his own stupidity that caused the final battle. Or perhaps the fact that Sirius had been a tie to his parents is what had made Sirius’ death hurt so much, and still did, if he let it. Or perhaps now Harry was just numb, after all that had happened. Perhaps it would all hit him later.

As Hermione and Mr Weasley flooed out, Mrs Weasley banished the food scraps from the dishes and started flicking the dishes over to a basin where a brush scrubbed industriously across each one in a flurry of bubbles. Ron reached over to pick up the Prophet that his father had left behind, scanning the stories. Harry began to gather the serving dishes with food on them, but Mrs Weasley waved him to sit down again. “You just sit and relax, Harry dear.” She cast a stasis charm on the food still on the table (“I expect you’ll be hungry later”), and cast something like Aguamenti on the dishes in the basin, only it rinsed them in steaming hot water. After a quick drying charm, she flicked them back into the cupboards.

After the dishes were done, Mrs Weasley shooed them upstairs to shower and dress for the day. Harry did not know what had happened to his clothing, or, in fact, anything of his except what he was wearing, his wand, and his cloak, so while Ron took his turn in the shower, Molly had Charlie find some of the twins’ old clothes for Harry. Ron had been too large by the time they were ready to be handed down, so Fred and George’s old clothes had been stored away, in wait for just such a need. Despite the fact that some of the clothes had previously belonged to Percy (he could see the carefully sewn-in name tags in some of them, the stitches so neat Harry thought they must have been done magically) and some even to Charlie before that, the clothes were in better shape than what he usually got handed down from Dudley. Harry imagined the hand-me-down paths based on size: from Charlie, who, according to the pictures on the walls, had had a seekers build before he went to work with dragons, to Percy to Fred and George, and from the more sturdily built Bill to Ron. Somehow imagining it gave off waves of family that made Harry homesick for something he had never experienced. Why hand-me-downs in the Weasley family were redolent of love, and in the Dursley family reeked of hate and disdain, he could not figure. That was just how it was.

None of the clothes were not in the latest style, but wizarding culture moved slower than Muggle culture, so clothes from ten years ago were not unusual. There were even a few tie-dye shirts that had been imported from Muggle culture, and a pair of tie-dye trousers that he could imagine Fred wearing, but would never consider himself.

Harry took his turn in the shower and donned some of the new hand-me-downs, which fit better than anything he had ever worn except his school robes.

* * *

Molly obviously thought they needed a day or several off, for she did not have a list of chores for Ron as she usually did.

It was good to spend time with Ron, with nothing more important to do than get to lunch on time. Ron’s orange room made Harry feel nostalgic. It felt like a lifetime had passed, since they had last
been here. But now they were back, as if they were still children. They talked Quidditch, they played chess (Ron won), they avoided anything serious. It cropped up anyway.

“Do you think the Cannons will make the finals this year?” Harry asked, because he knew Ron could talk for hours about the Cannons. He put down a card.

They were sitting on the floor in Ron’s room, in the narrow space between the beds. After the last time playing exploding snap, when the quilt on Ron’s bed caught fire, they had been forbidden from playing on the bed, the sofa, or any other flammable surfaces. It occurred to Harry that the wooden floor might be considered flammable, but Ron told him it had been sealed and charmed against any number of things, from insects to fire to warping. Harry wondered why the quilt had not likewise been charmed, and Ron did not have an answer.

Ron looked at the card as if trying to decide if it contained some secret mystery, then picked one from the pile. “Is there going to be a season this year? In the Prophet this morning it said the Department of Magical Games and Sports would probably have to be put on hold for the time being. Most of them that worked there supported You-Know-Who.” With all the stories in the Prophet about the end of the war, trust Ron to read the one involving Quidditch.

“What are they doing with them?” Harry had avoided thinking about this. He warily picked up the card Ron had discarded, noticing the edges were looking a little crispy.

“I dunno. You think they’ll lock them up until something can be decided? I bet the Ministry cells are packed. There hasn’t been time for trials, and they can’t just ship them all to Azkaban… there’d be too many. Besides, no one can tell yet who was an out and out supporter, and who was just trying to keep their jobs. After all, dad still worked there.”

Harry remembered the awkward encounter with Mr Weasley while they were trying to get the Horcrux from Umbridge. “Umbridge is in a cell, right?”

“She’d better be.” Ron agreed.

The card he picked up exploded, setting off his hand. Harry grinned and counted his points.

* * *

It was wonderful to have a day off. A day with no Horcrux hunt, no battle. A day here! Harry thought back to all the years yearning to be at the Burrow instead of locked in his room at the Dursleys’ or trying to work through a chore list three pages too long. A day with no Death Eaters out for his blood, no Voldemort torturing people in his head, no searing pain in his scar. A day. Just a day, like a normal person.

Harry felt like his life had taken a day off. With Voldemort dead (and he still could not quite encompass that it was over), he did not have anything he had to do. Nothing was hanging over him. It was a curious feeling, partway between exhilarating freedom and numb shock.

He and Ron played a game of one-on-one Quidditch. They flew broom races. They switched off being Chaser and Keeper as each tried to get the Quaffle past the other and through the old Quidditch hoops that, according to Ron, Mr Weasley and Bill had assembled (and in places transfigured) years ago from bits of Muggle flotsam from Mr Weasley’s shed.

Harry pushed the old Cleansweep he had picked out from the Weasley broom shed as fast as he could, feeling the wind in his hair, then dived down toward the ground and pulled up at the last minute. He did not dare push it as far as he did his Firebolt, but he it felt so very good anyway. He
wondered where the Firebolt was, if it had survived the long fall in the escape from the Dursleys’, and was resting somewhere between Little Whinging and the Tonks’ house. That thought brought the image of Hedwig, in her last moments. His stomach clenching in sorrow, Harry flew faster still, as if to escape the sorrow, to escape the past.

Later, exhausted, they lay on the grass and gazed into the blue sky. White clouds lazed across the sky. It was too early for insects. The ground was still damp from spring, but Ron charmed the damp away from a small area for them. Harry felt like he was gathering a childhood full of experience in this one day.

When Mrs Weasley called them in for lunch, they stumbled into the Burrow full of the day and the fresh air and the energy of flying.

“You really should try out for one of the teams, Harry. You could turn the Canon’s streak around!”

Harry grinned. Ron could be so single-minded, but it was Ron. When they emerged through the boot room into the main room, Ron stopped, and Harry bumped into him. There, at the table, sat George. And then reality crashed down.

George sat in the same position as he had for breakfast. Harry wondered if he had moved at all since then. He stared at the table. Mrs Weasley had a look to her face, a kind of forced cheer. The table was laden with food. Harry imagined her cooking, and setting out food, stepping around George each time she went by, and George just sitting there, staring. No wonder her face looked like that.

Suddenly, Harry felt adrift. How could he have forgotten, even for a minute, those they had lost? Fred. Remus. Tonks. He did not know all the names. He had not checked. But he knew those three, added to his parents and Sirius and all the others Voldemort had taken from him and so many others, Wizard and Muggle, over the years.

They sat down to lunch, joined by Ginny and Percy. Somehow, George’s silence took over the room. Harry did nothing to fight it. The sound of silverware and glasses and chewing became louder in Harry’s ears, filling the space, as they each sat in their own grief. Mrs Weasley took out a handkerchief and wiped her eyes, then blew into it. Ginny patted George on the back, George showed no sign that he felt it. Percy made an aborted movement toward his mother, but subsided, sitting back down. He shrunk into himself, as if trying to make as little a footprint in his family as possible, as if unsure of his welcome. Yet Mrs Weasley needed something.

“Umm, are Mr Weasley and Hermione staying at the Ministry for lunch, then?” It seemed to Harry that with the ease of Floo travel, they might come home for lunch. Especially with – everything. Harry’s mind shied away from the thought. If he started thinking about Fred, about all of the deaths, Harry was afraid he would be in the same state as – as George.

Mrs Weasley roused herself, dabbed her eyes, and gave Harry a grateful look. “I expect they’re eating at their desks. Arthur often does that when things at the Ministry gets busy.”

The room fell to silence again. This time Ginny broke it, looking directly at Harry for the first time since he got back to the Burrow. Harry wondered at that, but did not want to think about why at the moment. “So Harry, what are you doing next?”

The question took Harry by surprise. He did not know why it should; it was the question he should have been asking himself all along. But in all the time leading to the final battle, he had not thought of his life beyond Voldemort’s death. Even his plans for becoming an Auror were based on the idea that he would need ongoing training to succeed against the Dark Lord.
He did not know if all the Death Eaters had been captured, but the danger to him had dramatically diminished. And he was not sure he wanted to spend his life painting one target on himself after another. He had done what the prophecy demanded. Now he was free.

But free to do what?

“I don’t know,” Harry replied. “I don’t think I am going to decide for a bit.” Mrs Weasley looked like she wanted to say something, but Harry spoke first. “All my life, it’s been about Voldemort. I need to find out who I am besides Voldemort’s number one enemy.” Harry remembered the posters at the Ministry. “I wonder if Mr Weasley could get me one of the Undesirable number 1 posters.” Harry gave a wan grin. “Now that I don’t have to hide from Voldemort’s government, I rather like the idea of being first at something!”

Ginny snorted. “You mean besides Quidditch, and DADA, and –“

“Stop.” Harry glared at her, but she grinned impudently back, and Harry thought that perhaps everything would be all right.

Nobody noticed the grin that flickered briefly on George’s face.

They ate on in silence, but it did not feel so awkward. Harry spent the time thinking. What would he do? He had not come to any conclusions by the time lunch was over.

* * *

After lunch, Harry helped, over Mrs Weasley’s objections, to clear the table.

“Ron,” Mrs Weasley started, after lunch was cleared away, I know you’d like to spend the afternoon with Harry, but Charlie needs someone to help with the charms for—” She broke off.

“For Fred.” Ron said, saying the name perhaps for the first time since the battle.

“It has to be a family member,” Mrs Weasley said, perhaps to Harry, as if to excuse taking Ron away for the afternoon. “I don’t want to leave you alone.” Harry looked at Ginny. “I need Ginny to help with the owls, to let everyone know.” Mrs Weasley said apologetically. She did not glance at Percy, perhaps knowing that the two had never quite gotten on, or at George, who would not be providing anyone company any time soon. George got up and went upstairs, not looking at anyone. A few minutes later, they heard a door close.

“It’s fine. I need some time anyway— I’ll just be in the garden.” Harry got up, climbed over the wooden bench by the dining table, and went outside. He felt the need to be doing something.

He thought about de-gnoming the garden, but that was more fun with other people. He remembered when Ron had taught him how, with Mrs Weasley reading out of that stupid Lockhart book. Somehow, that first time at the Burrow stuck in his mind, the memory as vivid as when he first lived it. He remembered them shouting at each other, and having contests about how far they could throw the gnomes. Fred always won those contests. He turned away from that thought.

The garden had been ignored… truthfully, it had never been a neat garden. But it gave Harry something to do. He crouched by a hedge to the north side of the burrow, and began to pull weeds. Even at the Dursleys’, when that had been one of his many chores, he had enjoyed weeding, assuming Dudley was not around and it was not too hot or too cold. It something to do that he could do without thinking. He could think, or he could not think. He pulled another weed.

After awhile, Percy came out, and began to pull weeds alongside of Harry.
Their progress was slow but as time passed, Harry could see a small weed-free section. Neither spoke for some time. Harry did not know why Percy had come out, but he did not want to disturb the pattern he had started, of reach, pull, pile, reach, pull, pile, by starting a conversation.

“I’m sorry.” Percy’s words were quiet.

Harry stopped weeding and turned to look at the only Weasley he had not liked. Percy’s face was flushed from the sun, despite the charm to prevent burning. Percy kept weeding, not looking at Harry. “I was wrong about you.” Percy continued. “You were fighting him all along, and I – I made it harder for you.”

Harry couldn’t think of anything to say to that. He was not sure he forgave Percy. On the other hand, he could not muster the energy to dislike him either. He turned back to weeding. “Okay.”

They weeded in silence some more. By the time he left, it would be as neat as the Dursley’s. He shivered at the thought. No, he would not do that to the Burrow.

“Why aren’t you at the Ministry?” Harry asked.

“I resigned my old job, you may remember.” Percy’s tone was dry, and Harry remembered that Percy could, in fact, make jokes. “Although no one currently at the Ministry knows I quit, what with the old Minister in a cell, I’m not sure they’d welcome someone who was Thickenesse’s assistant.” He paused. “I’m not sure I like who I’ve been, and working at the Ministry… may not have been the best place for me. It may have made me a bit of a prat.”

“Percy, I hate to be the one to tell you. You were a bit of a prat before you worked at the Ministry.”

Percy was silent for a moment. “Perhaps.”

“Who are you and what have you done with Percy Weasley?” Harry asked.

“That is the question, isn’t it?” Percy commented, tufting his nose in the air and affecting a didactic tone.

If nothing else, his experience in Voldemort’s Ministry had succeeded in transforming Percy into a human being. Harry grinned, and pulled a particularly long-rooted dandelion.

“Keep that. Mum can use it.” Percy commented. Harry vaguely remembered a few potions with dandelion parts, and set it aside. Right as he was reaching back for the next weed, there was a sharp pain in his arm.

Harry jerked his arm back to see a small, ugly face glaring at him, its teeth buried in his forearm. It hurt! Percy grabbed a rock and aimed it at the top of the gnome’s head, hitting it hard. The creature released Harry’s arm and went temporarily limp, and Percy, with a grin at Harry, grabbed it by its feet and swung it in a circle several times, before flinging it over the garden hedge. It flew in a long arc, coming to ground some distance out. The thump when the creature came down was satisfying.

“We have to do something about those gnomes. They’re getting bolder. Come in, let’s get that seen to.” Percy gestured to Harry’s arm, which had an incipient bruise developing.

Harry finally understood how Percy got to be a Prefect. It was not his slavish adherence to rules. Harry had never seen Percy being calmly competent before… he suspected his ego had always gotten in the way. Perhaps Dumbledore had seen this potential in the man beside him. Harry thought he might actually like this quiet, thoughtful, new Percy.
Disclaimer: Harry Potter, his friends, his enemies, and the lovely world they live in all belong to JK Rowling.

Note: In case you are wondering, no, this will not be HP/PW. This fic is about finding ways to live again, after the war, an reconciliation is part of that.

Comments and concrit are always welcome. I find they inspire me to write further, knowing someone else cares about the story. Please let me know what you think!
Memories and Preparations

Chapter Notes

Again and still: thanks to ivyingarden for all the help making this a better fic! She patiently helps me brainstorm (with some great ideas to throw into the cauldron), is fabulous with canon, has a knack for language, and keeps at me to "write write write!"

While this is at heart a Harry / Draco story, this chapter is Ginny POV. There will not be much of that in the story, but I wanted to explore certain things. I am interested in the culture as a whole, and some different slices of it. The next section will be Harry POV and then we'll catch up with Draco.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 7: Memories and Preparations

May 3, 1998

The whoosh of the Floo distracted Ginny from her task, and she glanced up from her list of Fred’s friends from Hogwarts. Ron would have been better at it, having spent more time with Fred and George, but he was needed at the family plot, setting the burial charms with Bill. Besides, Ron was mostly oblivious to what other people did. George would be still better. Anyone Fred knew, George knew. They had been in each other’s pockets from the start. No one had the heart to ask it of him, however, after seeing the blank gaze with which he stared out at the world. It hurt to see him like that. She would almost have been willing to be the subject of a prank, just to see the wicked grin on her brother’s face.

“Molly, dear, are you there?”

“Just a tic, Aunt Muriel. I’ll get her.” Ginny rose to go find her mum, hoping to prevent her aunt from –

“Ginevra! Ginevra, I’m coming through. Be a good girl and go tell your mother I’m here.” And with a green whoosh, Aunt Muriel was standing on the hearth apron. Ginny did not need to leave the room, to her dismay, as her mum must have heard the alert on the floo, and was coming down the stairs.
“Molly, dear, you must be devastated!” Aunt Muriel put the covered dish she was holding down on the table, and moved to pull her mum into one of her suffocating hugs. Ginny could smell the waft of perfume from where she stood. “How are you coping, dear? It must be awful for you. The boy never had a chance to grow up and be a proper man, how horrible for you never to be able to see him grow out of his heedless youth.”

Her mum’s face was turning red at the words, and Ginny saw her draw breath to launch a full diatribe, but Aunt Muriel continued before she had a chance.

Aunt Muriel snapped her bony fingers in Ginny’s direction. “Be a dear and fetch me a chair. I’m a hundred and eight years old, and floo travel is no better now than it was when I was young. Now, don’t fret. I have the owls arranged. I have placed the parchment order with the stationer, although I’m of a mind to find a new one. I don’t care if they’ve provided for the Prewetts and the Weasleys for over two hundred years, the clerk in the store was short with me. I told him I needed to examine the parchment…”

“Aunt Muriel…”

Ginny felt her mum used quite a bit of restraint. She watched as Molly Weasley actually stopped, took a deep breath, and did not start screaming.

“I appreciate your help, Muriel. Ginny has been assembling a list of Fr—“ She stopped for a moment, breathing as if running. “Fred’s friends. I still need to do the family. I have the genealogy book, it’s just…”

“I’ll take care of it, Molly. You just sit yourself down and rest. Where are the children? Ginevra, you are a good child, to look after your mother at a time like this.”

Ginny pushed her lips together. She would not scream at her aunt. If her mother could keep from shouting at her, so could she.

“Now, I have the Prewitt Genealogy at home, so I only need the Weasley Book. Ginevra, would you be a dear—“

Ginny answered by getting up and heading up the staircase, to the bookcase in her parent’s bedroom. She opened the wooden door and found the heavy, leather-bound book that had been
passed down in the Weasley family for generations.

The bookcase was charmed to withstand magic, not even an Alohomora or an Accio would pass by its small, specific wards. Her mum once told her that she did not dare keep the important books in the sitting room, with Fred and George around. Who knows what they might have turned into? The thought hurt. She couldn’t seem to go more than a few minutes without thinking of Fred. Ginny sat on the large bed, holding the book to her breast, and bent over it. Her face scrunched, but she could not seem to cry, right then. It hurt too much. Besides, they needed the genealogy downstairs. She didn't want to leave her mum with Auntie Muriel too long, and the sooner she got the book, the sooner she would go.

When she got back downstairs, Muriel and her mother were sitting at the big dining table, with a few pieces of parchment in front of them. Her mother looked about ready to burst, and looked up with relief as she heard Ginny’s footsteps on the stairs.

“Here it is Aunt Muriel. I appreciate that you are doing this.” Her mum’s voice was remarkably even.

“Now Molly, you just set this from your mind. I'll send the owls today. You can be sure the announcements will be done properly, with my good writing, just as I've shown you. I know it is not your doing that you were never taught a beautiful hand, although it's not too late for young Ginevra.” Ginny cringed at the thought of lessons with Auntie Muriel. “Well, that’s a topic for another day. I’ll be on my way, Molly. You look after your family. Floo me if you need anything, and I'll be here directly.”

The chances of any of them placing a floo call to Auntie Muriel to come over were slim. Ron would paint his room green and silver first.

The room seemed suddenly very quiet, now that the force of will that was Auntie Muriel no longer occupied it. Ginny took at deep breath, and caught her mother doing the same. It helped.

“Do you need me to do anything else, mum?”

Her mum scanned the room, seeming a bit lost. While Ginny was not as observant as her mother in this regard, she could not find anything that needed doing. Her mum had not even stopped to sit down for meals since the battle. And now, Ron and Bill were at the cemetery preparing the wards and blessings. Muriel had taken over the owls. There was enough prepared food to feed the Order and the entire Weasley clan, even with Ron at the table. Harry had gone outside to do something, or maybe just to be alone. She wasn’t sure where Percy was. George was—more lost than her
mother. She thought he had gone up to the room he had once shared with Fred. Her father and Hermione were at the Ministry. There really was nothing for the two women to do. “Mum?” Her mother had picked up a quilt that had been lying on the back of the couch and started folding it. The edges would not come together, and she unfolded it, and refolded again. Ginny moved to help. “There were some books next to the genealogy that had our names on them. I was wondering—“

“Oh! Those! Haven’t I shown you those? Come upstairs, Ginny. I want to show you something.”

* * *

They climbed the stairs up to the master bedroom, and Molly opened the cupboard. “Here, help me get this down.” Molly retrieved several books, each with a photograph on the front. They returned downstairs and sat on the sofa in the main room.

“This is your book,” she said, as she handed Ginny a photo album with a picture of her on the cover. The picture had been taken the last Christmas, and she had her Weasley sweater over her pyjamas. “Why this picture, mum? Why couldn’t you have picked one that at least has me dressed, and with my hair brushed?” She added the last as she noted that her hair was tousled from sleep and from just having put on a sweater.

“You look so cute. You are growing up so fast, but seeing this, I know that no matter how old you get, you will still be my little girl.”

Ginny grumbled. “Sixteen, mom. I’m sixteen.”

“Yes you are. And in a few months you’ll be seventeen. And I am very proud of you, growing into such a fine, and strong, and loyal young lady.”

Ginny winced briefly at the thought. She really did need to talk to Harry.

“And here is Ron’s, and Charlie’s. Oh, here it is! I only made the one for the twins. It always seemed that where one was, there was the other, so getting pictures of either alone was a feat. I figured that, when the time came, when they got married and settled down, I would duplicate the entire book for each of them.” Molly looked sad at the thought. “I guess I won’t have to, now. I should have done it from the beginning. Should have made it clear that I need both of them.” Her expression twisted into grief. “If only I had made two books.”
Reaching out over the books, she pulled her mother into a hug, the albums jutting into her stomach and one arm uncomfortably. She did not care. “It is not your fault. It is not any of our faults.” Ginny insisted. “It’s Voldemort’s fault, and he’s dead now.” She said that last with a vicious satisfaction filling her voice. The two held each other for a bit, and then Ginny loosened her grip. “So, show me the pictures. I want to see Fred as a baby.”

Her mum opened the album. There, on the first page, stood Molly Weasley, belly round, and large as a house. She looked young. “When I began to put this together, I figured I’d start at the very beginning. With two of them, I felt just huge. I was sure I couldn’t fit through the front door, every time I tried.” She turned the page. There was Arthur Weasley, sitting in a chair looking bemused, with two red-thatched white bundles, one on each arm. Their hair was even brighter than it became later, and looked almost like fire emerging from the white blankets.

The next picture had the two twins lying in one (enlarged) crib. They were holding hands. “They were inseparable, right from the beginning.” Molly commented, drawing a fond finger down one twin’s face on the photograph, then the other, as if she could caress them still. A few baby pictures later, the ubiquitous picture of babies in a bath (this one with two red haired babies, throwing bubbles at each other) had Ginny asking if there was one of her like that, and if so, could it please be destroyed. A few pages past that, they had reached toddlerhood, with the two each sporting a Weasley Sweater. “That was the first year I knitted initials on the sweaters. The twins were always together, and they so enjoyed being confused for each other. I played along. Never let them know I could tell. I decided to label them, for the good of wizardkind.” Her mum gave a half-smile, letting Ginny in on the joke. “But soon, George was wearing the F sweater, and Fred was wearing George’s.” The two of them had so much fun swapping sweaters that soon little Ronnie wanted one with his initial, and shortly after that I was making them for all of my children.” Molly smiled and hugged Ginny close to her.

In just about every picture there was such energy. There was the one of the young twins, at what must have been a picnic in the garden, having invented a game that involved children’s play-wands, and the tossing of the evening’s pudding in great arcs across the table, followed by one with both twins’ faces covered in said pudding. There were pictures of them learning to fly, and terrorizing the gnome population. There were pictures of them in their Hogwarts robes, poking at each other and making hand shapes behind the other twin’s back, and later pictures of them testing out various products and transforming body parts into those of animals, changing colours.

Ginny laughed at that batch. She had been pranked by their experiments so often that it was good to see them experiencing the charms and hexes they used. Fred had such a wicked grin on his face in one, as George had one arm transformed into a canary wing, and the other into a butterfly wing, and a distinctly baffled expression on his face.

“I guess they had not perfected that one yet,” she commented.
Neither mother nor daughter visibly reacted as George crept into the room, but when he quietly sat in a chair next to the sofa, Molly adjusted so the album could be seen by all three of them. George did not point and laugh, but he drank in the pictures, one after the other, of him and his twin wreaking their own brand of humour and havoc through the years.

Toward the end, there was a picture of the store front of Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes, with the two of them mugging for the camera. It was a publicity shot, part of their grand opening, which they had published in the Prophet and the Quibbler. For all that their mum had complained that the joke shop was not an appropriate way to earn a living, she had hunted down an original of the photograph, not a newspaper copy, to put in the album. She had even labelled it: “The Weasley Entrepreneurs.” Ginny met George’s eyes, and saw a bright glimmer of emotion. Ginny realized that her brothers never quite knew that their mother was proud of them. She herself had not known until that instant.

At the very end, there was a picture that Fred had sent from when he was in hiding with Potterwatch. This one was with Lee Jordan and Remus Lupin, which made Ginny wonder how Harry was feeling. He seemed fine when she saw him and Ron through the window, playing one-on-one Quidditch, but Harry could be a little too good at hiding his emotions. She really did need to talk with him, just... not yet. Ginny reached for another album. “What’s this one, mom?”

It was thicker and more ragged than the others, and had an oval wedding picture labelled “Molly Prewitt and Arthur Weasley”, in script that curved up around the bottom of the photograph. They were looking into each other’s eyes, smiling, and every once in a while Arthur would reach up and tuck a strand of red hair behind Molly’s ear.

Mrs Weasley moved closer to Ginny, and patted the sofa on the other side, so George could move next to her and not have to reach so far to see. She opened the album to show pictures, side by side, of baby Arthur and baby Molly. “I got Arthur’s pictures from his mum shortly after he and I got married. Cedrella came by and placed a huge box of them on the table, and gave me a lecture on the importance of family, and of recording family history. Of course, I already knew that, but she was Arthur’s mum, and I was just married, and I was not about to start something with her right then. She was a formidable woman. She carried herself as if she knew her own importance... which I suspect is part of how all of the Blacks were raised. It was her idea to start these. She brought her family album out, complete with commentary for each picture, and then brought out a blank one, this one, and we started putting the first pictures in together. I never took her for the crafts sort.”

Ginny tried to imagine her grandmother doing crafts, and failed. Septimus and Cedrella Weasley were more reserved than the family she grew up in, and she could not imagine them living at the Burrow, although she knew they had at one point. She remembered being told they passed it on to Arthur and Molly when Bill had been born.
Beneath the pictures were her parents’ names and birthdates. These were followed by pages with pictures of her dad’s childhood on the left, and her mum’s childhood on the right. One of her dad with his first broom. Then her mum with a mini potions kit, with the label “brewing hot chocolate in a cauldron.” All the ingredients were food, as regular potions ingredients were too dangerous.

“I loved potions, when I was little.” Her mum said, somewhat wistfully. “I wanted to go into medical potions. I had an apprenticeship all set up at St Mungo’s, when I graduated Hogwarts. They have a whole research wing for developing new potions. The apprentices start making the potions for the hospital, under supervision of course. This gives the Potions Masters of St Mungo’s the time to complete their own research.”

“You liked potions, mum? What happened?”

“Bill happened. Arthur and I got married a bit earlier than expected. A potions laboratory is no place for a pregnant woman.” Molly answered.

Ginny digested this. She had known that her mum got married fresh out of Hogwarts, but this was new information. Suddenly, her mother’s protectiveness of her only daughter made a bit more sense.

Why don’t you make potions now?”

“Who do you think makes the bruise balm, and the fever reducers, and all the droughts and elixirs in this house, young lady?”

“I thought you bought them. I never saw you making them.”

“I couldn’t make them while you all were awake now, could I? Potions can’t be interrupted, and I could not waste ingredients like you all did at school. One skinned knee, or one of your pranks,” she turned to give George a fond but exasperated look with that last, “one distraction and the potion is either ruined or exploding. Cooking is more forgiving. So while I was pregnant with Bill, I took cooking classes instead of the completing the apprenticeship. I get to see the results of my brewing whenever someone sits down at my table.”

“Mum, do you ever regret—” Ginny started.

Molly put her arms around her two children and pulled them close. “Never. Not one moment. I am
prouder of all of my children than I ever could be of any potion, any invention. Watching each of you stand up for what you believed in, despite all odds... you terrified me, starting so young, but never doubt that you make me proud.”

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer: Harry Potter, his friends, his enemies, and the lovely world they live in all belong to JK Rowling.

Comments and concrit are always welcome. I find they inspire me to write further, knowing someone else cares about the story. Please let me know what you think!
Chapter Notes

Thanks:

Again and still: thanks to ivyingarden for all the help making this a better fic! She patiently helps me brainstorm (with some great ideas to throw into the cauldron), is fabulous with canon, has a knack for language, and keeps at me to "write write write!"

Notes:

Finally! We have some Draco in this Chapter, as well as a glimpse of what is going on at the Ministry. I still have several chapters in the hopper from NaNoWriMo that just need a beta read, some britpicking, and a touch of revising before I can post. Britpicking and comments and critique are more than welcome on this chapter as well.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 8: Motivations

Ministry Report

May 3, 1998

Ron was still gone when Harry got back in from the garden. He and Percy had made quite a bit of headway, although there was still a lot to do. Still, it felt good to see the difference they made. It had been restful working alongside Percy. Harry would never have expected that.

They both went upstairs to get cleaned up, and then Percy retreated to his room, and Harry went downstairs, just in time to see Ron emerge from the floo.

Beginning her dinner preparations, Mrs Weasley soon had spoons stirring and knives chopping, as if it were a normal meal, despite the abundance of prepared food Harry had seen set aside with a preservation charm. She seemed happier this evening, but her face was not as expressive as he was used to seeing, and her gestures were subdued. These little things kept cropping up, the way Mrs Weasley would suddenly put her head on her arms, or look away from something, her gaze distant. The way the Burrow devolved into silence when it never had before. All reminders of what—of who was missing.
Mrs Weasley enlisted Ron and Ginny to help, much to Ron’s dismay. Harry tried to help, but she insisted that he had done enough, and he should relax. He wasn’t sure if he should feel relieved or left out. He hoped she was talking about the gardening. He did not want the Weasleys to start treating him differently. He did not want to be given leeway at the Burrow just because he had mastered the wand that caused Voldemort’s death.

Weeding the garden had been restful, releasing some of the numbness he’d felt since that night. Now they were all back together, and with George sitting there, silent, one where there should have been two, the calm Harry had gained in the last few hours left him. He wasn’t sure what he was feeling, but he kept wondering if he should be there while the Weasleys were mourning. They needed a time for family, and, much as the Weasleys had always done their best to make him welcome, he was very aware he was … something in between. Neither truly family, nor outsider. From the first Weasley sweater that first Christmas, he felt grateful for every gesture that welcomed him as family, every gift, every nag, every time Mrs Weasley had doled out task to them all indiscriminately, but nevertheless, Harry remained aware of the small differences.

As dinner got closer to being ready, Mrs Weasley allowed him to set the table. Harry was laying out the dinner plates when he heard the whoosh from the floo. His watch said it was around seven, and the Weasley clock listed all the Weasleys as being at home, except for Fred. Fred’s hand on the clock was still there, pointing between the home and in transit labels. Pointing at nothing. Harry’s throat felt suddenly tight.

Mr Weasley stepped through the green flames, followed by Hermione. They both dusted off the ash from the fireplace. Mr Weasley looked exhausted, but Hermione’s eyes were bright and excited.

“The Ministry is a madhouse.” Mr Weasley commented. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen so much activity there on a Sunday. So much to do, even more to undo.” He set his hat on the mantle, and kissed Mrs Weasley. “How have things been here?”

Harry tuned out as Mrs Weasley recounted the activity of the day, hearing vaguely as she mentioned both Ginny’s and Ron’s activities, getting ready for the funeral. He looked over to George, again sitting at the table. He sat down across from him, and George looked, actually looked at him.

“You alright?” Harry asked, immediately regretting it. Of course he was not alright. But George merely looked down at the table for a moment, then shook his head. Arthur turned a sad eye to his son, and gave him a squeeze on the shoulder. At first, George made no sign that he felt it. Harry felt just wretched. A minute later, George looked up at his father. Just briefly, but it was enough. It would take time, but now Harry knew that George would come back to them.

Mrs Weasley brought her husband a mug of chilled cider. “What’s been happening?” She asked. He sat at the table, and lifted the mug for a large swallow.
“Kingsley has made me his assistant for the time being. He needs someone he could trust in too many areas to count, and until the Ministry personnel have been screened, there are precious few of us.”

Mrs Weasley nodded as she brought out a tray of mugs for the others as well, with cider so cold that drops beaded on the outside of the thick earthenware mugs. “Good for him,” she said, with a marked degree of satisfaction.

“The holding cells are full.” Arthur continued, after taking another deep gulp of the cider. “We’ve even had to convert some offices into temporary cells, with appropriate warding. And there are some areas we still can’t access. Some of the questioning rooms feel so foul… I almost think you can still feel the presence of the Dementors in those areas. Or perhaps all the dark curses cast at prisoners have left their mark. Those rooms will have to be checked thoroughly before they can be used, which makes it even more difficult to find space for detainees.

“They left behind traps and curse wards in the Minister’s office—thank Merlin that Windling was there and saw it before Kingsley went in. It took over an hour to dismantle it.” Harry doubted he had ever seen Mr Weasley so animated as he spoke of the actions taken at the Ministry, not even when Harry had given him a Muggle transistor radio. Apparently, repairing so much that was broken was enough of a challenge for the man to let go of his pain for a few moments. Harry understood what that was like.

“We’ve had to block reporters from entering the Ministry for the time being. The Prophet reporters in particular kept getting in the way. One is in St. Mungo’s after tripping one of the curse wards.”

Harry wondered briefly where Rita Skeeter was. He would bet she was in the thick of things, exactly where she could do the most damage.

As Mr Weasley spoke, Hermione nodded vigorously at each sentence, bouncing a bit on the balls of her feet when he mentioned becoming Shaklebolt’s assistant. By the end of Mr Weasley’s narrative, she looked like she was about to burst.

Mrs Weasley took pity on her. “And how did you find work at the Ministry, Hermione?”

"Arthur says I can intern there all summer!"
Ron suddenly looked glum. “*All* summer?”

“Such a clever idea, Muggles have.” Mr Weasley commented, taking a bit of the roast Mrs Weasley had just set out, before she could bat his fingers away. “They allow students to work in their chosen field before they leave school. Get the feel for it and all. Molly, Hermione says the Muggle internships are like apprenticeships, except the intern—is that the right word, Hermione?” She nodded. “The intern is not bound to a particular person, or even an institution like St Mungo’s, but offered a job with more careful – oversight. They are designed to be – what is the phrase? — a learning occasion.”

Mrs Weasley turned to Hermione. “And are you learning?”

“Yes! It’s ever so exciting! I never knew how the Ministry really functioned. Of course, today was not a good example of it functioning well – Harry, it’s completely disorganized, especially since they are testing *everyone* there for Death Eater loyalties. So what happened with Voldemort won’t happen again.”

It gave him hope that he could find his way back, but was not sure what he would find his way back to. What was Harry Potter, except for Voldemort’s adversary?

“They’ve caught a lot of them already.” Hermione’s words broke Harry out of his thoughts. “Of course, they’ve checked for marks, and anyone who came in marked is in a cell.” Hermione continued. “There were a lot of no-shows. People who were in the battle, either at Hogwarts or the Ministry, of course, but also people who decided it might not be safe to come in for work at the Ministry with a snake on their arm.”

Ron sniggered.

Hermione ignored him. “They’re going to use this device, like the magical equivalent of a lie detector, Harry, to sort out people’s loyalties. There’s not enough Veritaserum to use on everyone, and there’s rules about when the truth potion can be used, so everyone who works at the ministry will be asked four questions with the device checking for lies.”

“What are the questions?” Harry asked.
“The wording is critical, right Arthur?”

Mr Weasley nodded. “There was a committee of Aurors and a few Ministry employees working on the questions. Everyone from the committee had to volunteer to an extensive Veritaserum questioning, first, and then they worked on the questions for most of the morning. There are, you know, a fair number of purebloods who believed following him was the only way to protect traditional wizarding culture.”

Ron scoffed.

“I heard that some of his early speeches were quite persuasive. Of course, they never made it to his inner circle, and we know who most of them are. They had to be fairly specific on the question regarding You-Know-Who’s aims and goals in order not to cast the spell too wide. The final version of the question was a bit of a compromise. Even so, it will flag some traditional wizarding culture purists, who may not have had anything to do with You-Know-Who’s criminal activities. We’ll have to follow up on a lot of people, I expect. We only got the questions approved by mid-afternoon.”

“So they’ve just started the questioning.” Hermione interjected. “And practically nothing can get accomplished until all the employees are checked. The ones that fail the test will get a more exhaustive set of questions, but will be detained until then. They are really trying to clean up the Ministry.”

Harry had mixed feelings about all the testing Hermione was describing. It spoke of a level of paranoia that made him nervous. On the one hand, it would have been useful to keep the corrupt wizards and witches out of the ministry in the first place. A more extensive use of magical checks would have certainly kept some of the worst injustices from happening (Sirius!), but he also had experience with the way the Ministry could go overboard in the name of ‘protecting the Wizarding World’. He and Molly Weasley, for example were guilty of casting Unforgivable curses - what would happen to them under Ministry questioning?

“So the Ministry is doing nothing other than check its employees for sympathizers?” He asked.

Hermione stammered for a moment, then looked at Mr Weasley.

“The departments were prioritised,” he said. “Some were tested first, or authorized for volunteer Veritaserum testing so that critical and emergency work could get done.”
“Arthur, did you?” Molly came over and laid a hand on his back.

"You heard he is acting Minister, now?"

Mrs Weasley nodded.

“There are repair efforts everywhere. Shops in Diagon Alley have been neglected, boarded up, and some of them will never reopen.” Harry got suddenly very sad when he thought of the way the bustling magical street had looked the last time he was there: with furtive passersby, beggars, and so many shops boarded up.

“After the battle, Aurors and Ministry workers opposed to You-Know-Who went in that same day to secure the Ministry. We were lucky it was a Saturday, so we didn’t have the full staff to worry about, but even so, You-Know-Who’s supporters in the Ministry did their level best to cause damage before leaving, sabotaging the areas they worked in, especially those who used tools that might have been used to track down the ones who escaped. Too many of them escaped before we got there. And of course Hogwarts...” Mr Weasley continued sadly. “The Ministry had to create a department specifically to direct volunteers to areas where they could be of use. Many of them are being sent to Hogwarts, as the battle did some serious damage to both its structure and its magic. There is some doubt whether it will be ready for the next school year.”

The thought of September 1st coming without a trip on the Hogwarts Express, not just for him, but for anyone, shook Harry, but Arthur just kept on with his litany.

“A new Department is being created to reunite and assist families that have been affected by his laws against Muggleborns. Hermione here has already started helping there. The irony is that those that You-Know-Who’s ministry caught will be easier to help. There are records for them. The ones that evaded registration will be harder to find and help.” Hermione’s face went still at Mr Weasley’s last words. Harry suddenly remembered Hermione’s parents, in Austria or Australia or something like that, not even knowing they had a daughter. But she knew the names they went by. Surely she could find them.

“I’ve been helping gather and sort through the records from the Muggleborn Registration.” Hermione added. “We have to find and free any Muggleborns and their families that have been held in Ministry cells first, but after that, we can start searching out and,” Hermione’s voice faltered for a moment, her eyes bright, “bring home the ones who were sent away to safety.”

“You’ll find them, Hermione. I know you. You can find anything, when you set your mind to research. With your help, they can’t miss.”
Hermione sent him a grateful look, but Harry did not miss the anxiety that it covered.

Suddenly, Harry felt ashamed of his day of weeding. Hermione had gone on the same Horcrux hunt that he had, and fought at Hogwarts, and here she was volunteering, doing something useful. She was not even searching for her parents yet, she was helping set up the infrastructure that would help lots of people find loved ones. Arthur had lost a son, and was still working to repair the damage the war had caused. And he seemed thoroughly involved in what he was doing, not just going through the motions. Harry had never heard Mr Weasley say so much at once. He wondered if no one had ever challenged him. Coordinating the efforts the various departments sounded like a lot of work, and important work.

If everyone else could find ways to be of real use, so could Harry.

The next morning, after breakfast, Harry returned to Hogwarts.

**Going Crazy – Draco**

*May 2- 4, 1998*

The three Malfoys had been taken out of the classroom and put into a sort of sleeping quarters. It had a small room with shower and WC, and a room with a table and chairs. There was only one bedroom with three student beds, but one of them went unused, and the standard bed curtains allowed Lucius and Narcissa some privacy. The room was plain, and the bedclothes and curtains were a neutral cotton, which was just as well for the summer. The rug was a Hufflepuff yellow, which had Draco wincing every time he glanced down. The furniture made no attempt to match.

The doors and windows had been warded and sealed, and only an Auror could unlock it. Their wands had of course not been returned – two destroyed and one out of reach. A set of toiletries had been provided, but without the aid of spells and the custom potions and salves to which they were accustomed, the three found it difficult to maintain their natural aristocratic presentation.

Food appeared three times a day, and while it was not as abundant or as diverse as the usual Hogwarts fare, it was of similar quality. The three soon learned to eat what was provided, as it would disappear if not eaten, and nothing would replace it until the next scheduled mealtime.
Days passed.

They had no parchment, no quills, not even a deck for exploding snap, much less a chess set. Draco would hear Lucius and Narcissa murmuring quietly to each other, hour after hour. More frequently, it was Narcissa murmuring to Lucius. Draco’s father spent too much of the time sitting, staring into nothing, barely reacting to either wife or son.

Draco spent the first several days frustrated and angry. He was not sure who he was angry at. There were so many to choose from: Potter for winning, Voldemort for losing, and for not being all that he promised, the Aurors, sometimes even his father for bending his neck to the man who killed enemies and followers alike. His father seemed to have given up. He was angry at the Muggles for – for existing. For all they had done to wizardkind throughout history. At the wizarding world for letting mudbloods in, changing their culture, drawing it away from the pure-blood culture he had grown up knowing. Each year, more of the traditions were neglected, or lost. Traditions he had cherished, overtaken by Muggle habits. Yule was becoming Christmas. When he was growing up, even the Malfoy family, which more than most other families kept true to wizarding traditions, celebrated both holidays, but Wizarding institutions such as Hogwarts had given way and ignored Yule entirely. His father had been livid in Draco’s first year, when the Hogwarts Express ran on the 21st, and they had to wait the evening ceremony until well after sunset that night. Just one more example of what they were losing.

The quieter magic of the Yule log, with its potential to evoke great change with small thoughts, was giving way to the flashy baubles on the Christmas tree. The Great Hunt that connected them to the magic of the land, allowing them to soak in the power of life and death, had been transformed by none other than Voldemort into Muggle-slaughtering revels. Why had he not seen that Voldemort was destroying the old traditions like any other half-blood, ignorant of what they were destroying?

Draco threw his empty soup bowl across the room, taking satisfaction in the way it shattered and splattered on the opposite wall. The room was suddenly silent. The quiet murmur of his mother’s voice had stopped, and Father, for once, was looking straight at him. "It was all a lie, wasn’t it?" Draco said into the silence.

His parents stared at him, waiting. Draco started pacing, his steps furious.

“I mean, what did you accomplish? You killed a bunch of Muggles and Mudbloods, so what? You didn’t even make a dent. The Ministry is in shambles, and we are not the ones rebuilding, reshaping what comes from this. Voldemort—yes, Voldemort!” Draco shouted as his father’s face took on that look Draco knew meant he would be corrected. After days of staring at the wall, the word
Voldemort stirred Lucius to nothing more than Death Eater etiquette lessons? “He is not a Lord. He was never a Lord. He was some fucking half-blood, who got the whole lot of us kissing his hem and cowering from the threat of Cruciatius. And he left no plan of what to do next. Was he planning on living forever?” Draco was so angry he was shaking.

“Yes.” Lucius’ voice was quiet. He bowed his head.

Draco stopped pacing and turned to look at him, startled into silence. “Well, that didn’t work.” Draco drawled, regaining his composure.

“Malfoys have always planned for the long term, he continued. “You taught me that! When did we start bowing and scraping to someone, a half-blood no less, who couldn’t even make contingency plans in case of his own death? He damned every pure-blood family in the cause! You taught me about plausible deniability! When did you stop listening to your own teachings?”

Lucius lifted his eyes and stared at Draco. His passive gaze infuriated Draco.

“You deluded fools! Did none of you have a backup plan? Of all the purebloods that followed him, followed you, not one of us can claim innocence!”

“This can’t be the end of it.” Draco paused in his tirade, breathing as if he had just finished a Quidditch match. “I will not end my days locked up in some room with my parents, with the same food day after day and no wine and the world falling apart and being reshaped by other people who don’t know anything, and hair that I can’t even comb properly anymore!” Draco grabbed at his hair, no longer smooth and shiny, but roughly combed without the benefit of proper conditioning potions.

Lucius’ eyes had his soul behind them for the first time in days.

“What do you propose?” His father’s voice was low, but Draco rejoiced in the sound of it. It was the sound of his father, quizzing him on applications of dark curses, quizzing him on politics and intrigue and how he would Slytherin his way to a goal. This was his father before his year of cringing at the Dark—at Voldemort’s hem. This was the man he could rely on.

“We need to get out of here. We need to be the ones rebuilding.”

“Not we, Draco.” His father rebutted. “You. I doubt I can recover the needed influence in the
climate that will be out there. Someone must pay, Draco, and I am the coin they will demand."
Lucius paused, his voice losing its strength. If you can keep me out of Azkaban, I would appreciate it. But I cannot redeem this family.”

The words stabbed at Draco. His father was always the one that led, that negotiated and bribed and intimidated his way into positions of power, from which he pulled the strings, and turned things his way. Last year was... an aberration. Voldemort was dead, and his father was no longer the Dark Lord’s slave. He could rise back into his power. His father did not give up. That was not who he was. He was strong, motivated, conniving, driven. He was not this empty-eyed, silent husk, speaking with a dead, defeated voice.

Draco considered the situation. He did not know which Death Eaters had survived the final battle. He doubted any of them would hesitate to kick his father when he was down, to describe his Death Eater activities in lurid detail. “You are not protected.” No, his father could no longer protect him. It was time for him to protect his father, as best he could. To protect what his father had taught him to value. Draco was in no position to bargain on behalf of his father now. Right now, his father was more damaging to the Malfoy family free than imprisoned. Draco flinched at the thought.

They could probably escape. They would have to live like refugees, exiled from the manor, from Wizarding Britain. If they did that, the chance that they could redeem the Malfoy name was minimal.

Draco was in agony, but he met his father's eyes.

“I can do it father. But…”

Lucius saw the regret in his son’s eyes, and nodded. “Do what you must.”

He had doubtless lost his home, his fortune, his standing and his reputation, now he would have to lose his father. The wounds in Draco’s soul would have brought Dementors running, but his parents had raised him to know the future of the family came first. He could do this. He would, even if there was nothing left of him at the end.

He set himself to plan. First, he would need to be seen doing good. To be seen helping the winners. He would have to establish connections, especially with those on Potter’s side. He started out the window, watching people scurrying around the Hogwarts grounds. Draco knew his first step.
Comments, critique, britpicking, etc. are all more than welcome. As a fellow writer said, they are the currency with which fanfic writers are rewarded for their work.

Your comments keep me motivated to write on. Knowing someone is reading helps, and the interaction that comes with comments and replies keeps me focused on this story.
Chapter Notes

Thanks: Again and still: thanks to ivyingarden for all the help making this a better fic! Also, thanks to rosskpr, who beta read this chapter, who is both meticulous and enthusiastic. Yay! Any errors after the two of them have combed through the work are from the author not paying attention!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 9: Return to Hogwarts

Back to Hogwarts

Monday, May 4, 1998

The Prophet was still delivered every day.

It amazed Harry. Work was in full force at the Ministry, though it was still a mess, and most likely would remain so for a while, from what Mr Weasley had said. Many employees were redirected, helping out in critical departments, while lower priority departments went on hiatus.

He only had to look around to see that Hogwarts was severely damaged. Mr Weasley had said that Diagon Alley was also needing repair. The Prophet, however, seemed unstoppable.

Wizards and witches all over Britain, including all those who had come to repair Hogwarts, gobbled up stories of the end of Voldemort’s reign. Harry had scanned the paper at the Burrow. He did not read the stories in depth, and he avoided looking at the pictures—too many of them were of him, and the rest were too vivid a reminder. Still, when a flock of owls came toward the end of breakfast, delivering news and messages to those working at Hogwarts, he watched people’s reactions to guess what the headlines were. It was odd to see so many owls in what was officially the summer holiday. The Sunday Prophet had reported that the Hogwarts school year had been declared to be over, almost two months early. Hermione had wondered about NEWTs, but the paper had not had details, just its usual conjecture.

Harry had arrived through the Floo in the Hogwarts Entry Hall in time for breakfast Monday morning and continued on into the Great Hall, passing the Aurors standing at alert facing the hearth. Having an open Floo connection into Hogwarts was risk enough, Harry supposed, without leaving it unguarded. Despite the fact that he was full from Mrs Weasley’s table-bending breakfast, served early enough to get Mr Weasley and Hermione off to the Ministry, Harry had found a place at a table and grabbed a glass of pumpkin juice. It wasn’t the Gryffindor table, which did not seem to have a
The house elves had straggled back to the castle, and meals appeared in the Great Hall, as abundant as ever. The tables were not in their customary places, as there were sections of the great hall that were cordoned off due to instability in the one wall that had been breached. All the house tables had been moved toward the High Table, which in turn had been shoved off to one side. The Gryffindor table had even been shrunk to half its length to clear the most damaged area. Harry supposed the house elves adjusted the preparations area of the kitchens to compensate for the different layout.

The noise level in the Great Hall was louder than Harry had ever heard it, even after Quidditch matches. Every seat seemed to be full, and Harry was glad to have a seat at what had been the Ravenclaw table, but was now crowded with witches and wizards Harry didn't know. He was certain they had all left school some time ago. Some of his age-mates sat at other tables, but none of the Weasleys, of course, and no Hermione. Neither Neville nor Luna was in evidence, or anyone from his year in Gryffindor. He wondered if there was anyone he cared to talk to. He wondered if he really wanted to talk at all.

Looking up, Harry let the noise wash over him. The ceiling was still enchanted, but it too was damaged, showing different weather from every angle, flickering in spots so that the stones of the ceiling were visible behind it. It hurt Harry’s eyes to look at it. He dropped his gaze back to the crowded Great Hall.

It seemed wizards and witches from all over had converged on Hogwarts to help rebuild, as if rebuilding Hogwarts would somehow fix everything else. It was here that Voldemort had been defeated, and it was here that the children of Wizarding Britain would again be educated. Hogwarts was the centre of it all, a place where there might be hope for the future. Not Diagon Alley. Not the Ministry. Hogwarts. Seeing all the other witches and wizards in the Great Hall, Harry doubted he was the only one to feel that way. But then, perhaps Diagon Alley and the Ministry were likewise thronged. Hermione certainly seemed to think so.

He sat back with a piece of toast, content to listen to the conversations around him and not take part. The rebuilding effort seemed fairly organized, from what he overheard. Many of those working to rebuild Apparated into Hogsmeade each day, but the rest had been assigned to one of the dormitories or guest rooms that were still undamaged.

Students, teachers, parents, townspeople from Hogsmeade, Aurors and Order members who had fought in the battle (and remained afterward) were joined by construction wizards, volunteers, and ministry officials. Added to all of those, a few prisoners who had not yet been transported to the Ministry for trial were held at Hogwarts, waiting until there was room. So prisoners, volunteers, and school administrators were all billeted wherever place could be found for them, either at Hogwarts or in Hogsmeade.

Message board were posted throughout the castle with various lists, tasks needing to be done, work crews, schedules, lists of things missing. It did not feel like school, more like a temporary village.

After breakfast, Harry found Professor McGonagall, already looking somewhat preoccupied by a small crowd of people, each awaiting her attention.

She saw him, waved him to wait for a second, and thanked him briefly for coming to help, before directing him first to put his pack of newly borrowed clothes in a room in Gryffindor Tower and then report to Filch. She turned to the next person, then called him back.

“Mr Potter, would you show Mr Enkelburst to the guest suite next to Sir Cadogan’s portrait? It’s not too far out of your way.”
Guest suite? He supposed he would see when they got there. As Harry proceeded out of the Great Hall and up the stairs toward the Gryffindor common room, he looked at the damage. Large sections of the castle were cluttered with debris, or had gaping holes to the outside. He had to wait while the stairway he was on moved to line up with an empty spot where the remnants of the landing hung several feet away, before moving on to another that Harry recognized as being fairly close to Gryffindor. Harry had become so used to the idea of Hogwarts as self-protecting, or at the very least able to repair itself, that it hurt to see all of this damage. It was clearly bad enough that the magic infusing the castle was not able to restore it, otherwise the teams of rebuilders would not need to be there.

The wizard who followed Harry, a short, cheery man with reddened cheeks, chatted amiably in faintly accented English as they walked, asking whether Harry had been in the battle, and making tutting noises at the damage. He told Harry he was a parent of a Hogwarts student from about ten years prior, but had not attended Hogwarts himself. Nevertheless, Mr Enkelburst declared he was excited to do his part to rebuild the Wizarding World. Harry wondered where the wizard had been during the battle, if doing his part had been so important.

They passed the hole in the wall that Snape had jumped through that night, and Harry stopped to gaze at the ragged opening, remembering the sight of the man flying away. It occurred to him that he hadn’t told McGonagall about what he had seen in the Potions Master’s memories. He wasn’t sure anyone knew to look for Snape’s body in the Shrieking Shack. One more thing to ask Professor McGonagall about. Harry turned back to continue on their way. Mr Enkelburst’s sudden gasp alerted Harry that the older wizard had caught a glimpse of his forehead. His slightly incoherent and babbling thanks made the rest of the trip to the wizard’s room uncomfortable.

“I can’t tell you what an honour it is to meet you! I must tell my son!”

“Here we are,” Harry interrupted. They had arrived at Sir Cadogan’s portrait. Harry made sure Mr Enkelburst could get in, and turned to escape.

“Oh, but you must come in for a moment, Mr Potter! Look! There’s a chair! I wonder… would you mind terribly if I took a photograph?”

Harry did mind, but his annoyance didn’t lend him the strength to refuse as it usually did. He sat instead, while Mr Enkelburst dug through his small carpetbag. Harry sighed, looking around the guest room. It was quite nice. There was a thick blue and tan patterned rug on the floor, and the dark blue bed-hangings were of a more luxurious velvet, rather than the woven hangings around student beds. In addition to the wardrobe, a dresser stood by one side of the bed, with a small tea tray ready and waiting for some hot water to be poured into the ceramic pot, and a pitcher of water and a glass as well. Harry had never stayed at a hotel, at least not one of the fancy Muggle ones, but he suspected that this room was nicer—more homey—than any hotel room.

After pictures were taken (Harry did refuse the request that he pull his fringe aside to showcase the scar), Harry escaped.

On the way to drop off the bag of borrowed clothes onto his bed in Gryffindor Tower, he noticed other witches and wizards being shown to their rooms. Harry shamelessly listened to the conversations between volunteers and their guides as he walked through the castle. The war had affected everyone. There was both hope and loss in their conversations, but mostly, what he heard was a need to do something, to be a part of what would come next. Their relief was palpable. In Mr Enkelburst’s babbling, and in the conversations that surrounded him, Harry sensed a belief that the future were again possible and that what they did just then mattered. It was as if they all paused at the top of a great hill, taking a moment to see where they were, knowing that the step they took next
would affect everything that came after.

It was good to be staying in Gryffindor Tower again. The bright red and gold colours were perhaps too energetic for how he felt, but they held so many memories. The tower was undamaged, and that fact by itself soothed him.

Harry assumed the house elves had come to clean it, but it still had the feel, and just a hint of the smell, of the school year. He could almost see Ron barging out of the shower, or Ginny sitting by the fire, her feet tucked under her, or Hermione reading on the couch. He could see Dean and Seamus playing Exploding Snap at the table in the corner, and Neville caring for his Mimbulus Mimbletonia by the window. It felt like coming home.

The Weasleys had said that Harry could stay at the Burrow, and Floo over to Hogwarts each day to take part in the repair if he wanted to, but there was still a part of Harry that could not face the constant awareness that Fred was not there and would never return. In the same way Grimmauld Place reminded him too much of Remus, of Sirius, even of Tonks, and of all those members of the Order he would never see again, the Burrow reminded him of Fred. Hogwarts was… home. Harry needed that. It reminded him of so much that was good in the wizarding world.

Besides, the Weasleys needed their own time to mourn. He had to pick up the pieces of his life, now that he knew he had one to live, and find a new direction. It had been fun to play with Ron the day before, but he realized that was an interlude. He was not a child, and even though he had never really had a childhood, he could not recreate it now. It was too late for him to truly become the Weasleys’ dark-haired son. They each had to face their own present.

Harry’s present was that Voldemort was dead. Really dead. The battle that had shaped his life until that point was over. He had completed the prophesied task, fulfilled his reason for existence. He had no idea what to do next. Working here would give him a chance to think, to forget himself for a while, and then, maybe, figure out where to go from there.

After dumping off his bag, he detoured to see Ravenclaw Tower, but it was set behind warning charms. He wondered where the Grey Lady was. He hoped the tower was not too damaged, and that he had not played too great a role in damaging it.

Harry had the chance to view several of the other guest rooms as he traversed the corridors. It was mostly the student volunteers who were assigned dormitory space, however, he overheard that the guest suites were filled to capacity, and several parents and recent students were being housed in the dormitories as well.

How, with the Marauder’s Map at his disposal, and with six years at Hogwarts, could Harry have missed the suites tucked in here or there, much less the entire corridor of rooms, clearly appointed for guests instead of students, past the entrance to Ravenclaw Tower? Glancing into these rooms brought home that Hogwarts was indeed a castle, and not just a school. It was not that there were many of them—there weren’t, but they looked like they belonged in a castle. The room he shared with the other Gryffindors of his year, with clothes strewn on the beds, and the trunks beside or at the end of each bed, and with the bed curtains the only privacy, was clearly a room for students. These were not.

He wondered if the Marauders had discovered all the places that showed up on the map before creating it, or if they had charmed it to show the whole castle. Harry already knew a few places that would not show on the map, such as the Room of Requirement, if it still existed. Harry, Ron and Hermione had never figured out if it was because the room was Unplottable, or because the map was incomplete. Maybe he would have the time to explore. Without Voldemort, and the regular school rules relaxed during summer, the only thing he’d have to watch out for was Filch.
The Great Hall was still bustling when he got back down, and there was a queue to talk to Filch, as well as a cluster around McGonagall. Lists posted on one wall also had clumps of people around them. He joined the group around McGonagall.

“Was there something else you needed, Mr Potter?”

“I need to talk to you about something. Privately.”

“I will be right back,” McGonagall said to the group waiting for her, and then drew Harry to the side and cast a privacy charm.

“Has anyone found Snape?” Harry asked.

McGonagall’s face twisted into a sour expression. “No. He is one of the few Death Eaters that escaped. I think he is the one I most wanted to see captured.”

“That’s not what I meant. He’s dead. I saw him die. I was wondering if anyone found his body. He doesn’t deserve—”

“Deserve? Harry, we deserve peace, and Albus alive, and traitors stringently punished. Severus – wait. He’s dead? You’re certain?”

“Yes! I think—yes. But we – I was wrong about him. I’m not sure I’ll ever really understand him, but he helped me. He helped me all along.”

“He killed Albus!” Her voice was ragged. She glanced at the milling group waiting for her. “I don’t have time for this right now.”

“Just—just send someone to the Shrieking Shack to get his body. He shouldn’t be left like that. There’s something you don’t know. Have you seen Professor Dumbledore’s Pensieve?”

“There hasn’t been time for memories, Mr Potter. I put it aside. I have no idea why it was left out, what that man was doing with it.”

“I’ll tell you… Owl me when you have time. I'll come see you. It’s important. There’s proof. I don’t really know what to think of him, but there was more to Professor Snape—”

McGonagall’s expression let him know her opinion of that. No proof would be enough, her tightly pursed lips told him. Harry would have thought the same. “Very well. Come see me. The password is Victory.” With a flick of her wand, the privacy shield was dispelled, and she turned to the next person waiting for her.

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**Learning to Fix what is Broken**

Filch was in his element, directing volunteer crews toward wherever they could do the most good. Harry queued up in the entry hall for an assignment, surprised that the volunteers from the day before came back after dealing with Filch, but the old caretaker seemed somehow subdued after so much of his bailiwick was damaged. He had a wounded earnestness that Harry had not seen in him before. It was as if the castle was Filch’s child, who was now at risk for its life. Harry hoped the state of the castle, as bad as it looked, was not desperate enough to justify Filch’s expression.
When he got to the front of the line, Filch gave him a perfunctory sneer, but sent him to check in with a tall witch who had more muscles than Harry usually saw on someone in the magical world. Without even a token glance to his forehead, she immediately directed Harry to join a group of witches and wizards clustered around a broken bit of wall.

First, they held short training sessions for those interested in helping with the reconstruction, and tested the volunteers afterwards on the Temporary Reinforcement Spell, and the more advanced Place-and-Balance Charm that would settle the stones back into place and reintegrate them with the magical structure that was Hogwarts Castle.

Over the course of the next few hours, Harry learned and practiced the spells he would use. Harry certified on the Reinforcement Spell, but could not seem to master the Place-and-Balance Charm. It involved connecting with Hogwarts, and the thought of connecting again with something so much larger and more powerful than he was unnerved him. He thought he could do it, since Hogwarts was home to him, something he loved and trusted, but every time he tried, it was as if he felt reverberations from his scar, reminding him what such a connection could become, and he lost control of the levitation and dropped the stone. After a few attempts, the construction wizards refused to let him try again, and used those that had succeeded. There were several students who had succeeded in the Balancing Charm, mostly from Hufflepuff.

Harry was assigned to the reinforcement crew starting the next day, and for the rest of the day, he was asked to clean up debris. So he worked on the castle, levitating stone blocks out of the hallways, and learning from the construction wizards how to reinforce the structure until they could rebuild.

The witches and wizards who came to plan the restoration amazed Harry. He was able to observe them as he worked, and their orchestrated movements impressed him. The crew leaders seemed to know exactly what they were responsible for, and they checked in with each other periodically, so news of the collapse in the Ancient Runes classroom got passed around, and the volunteers could be directed to work where they were needed.

He had rarely seen such efficiency in the wizarding world, and usually only in the swiftness of the owls from the Department that dealt with Underage Wizardry sent to chastise him. Harry realized that Hogwarts and the Ministry were most of what he knew of the Wizarding World. Maybe there were wizards who knew how to plan, to organize something other than a battle. It never occurred to him that there would be wizards who constructed things, and crafted things, even though he had seen them: Madame Malkin, Ollivander, and scores of other people he saw when he went to Diagon Alley. The wizarding world was perhaps larger than he had glimpsed. It seemed most of his closest friends and worst enemies were powerful people, from families of name. Many of them worked in government. Dumbledore, even while being headmaster of a school, had been head of the Wizengamot. Arthur Weasley worked at the Ministry, heading a department, and was now assisting the Minister. Lucius Malfoy seemed to do nothing but play politics, before his altogether too brief stay in Azkaban. Harry had known personally all of the Ministers of Magic since his return to the wizarding world. It seemed such a small world, where everyone knew each other, but perhaps it was not. He was surprised that he had never noticed before. That was one more thing to think about.

At Hogwarts, it seemed to be assumed that you would do something important after school. So many of his friends had Ministry connections, they could be assumed eventually to go into the Ministry, or possibly St Mungo’s, or in some way become part of the grand fight between good and evil. Harry suddenly looked at it from the Muggle point of view. Surely there was something other than government work, healthcare, education, or police work. Why didn’t any of his friends talk about opening a shop, much less working in one for a few years? Maybe he just never listened. He remembered how Molly Weasley had reacted when Fred and George opened Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes. Of course, that may have been because they did not finish their education. Harry realized
that he didn’t really know much about the families of the wizards he knew—except the Weasleys. What would Neville do, once he got his NEWTs? When would any of them take their NEWTs? There was too much to think about. It was all just too much.

He returned his attention to the work at hand.

Harry found himself perfectly happy to clean up debris. It was restful. Images of the battle receded, images of dead friends faded, concern for what he would do next dwindled. The rhythm of the work formed a cadence for his thoughts, and he sank into it.

The rubble had to be sorted. Larger chunks of stone could be reused, carved to fit their new positions with a precision only a master craftsman, or someone competent with a wand and the spells, could accomplish. It was nice to see this side of magic.

So much of Harry’s training had been in destruction, in war, in defence. Voldemort had ensured that. Harry wondered if the curriculum would be altered, now that Voldemort was dead.

Probably not too much. Even though they had a Defence class, it was just one class, focused on magical creatures. So much of his own Defence knowledge had been applied to defending himself from dark wizards, and he learned it working with the DA. He supposed few students had felt the particular urgency he had to learn Defence. Harry grinned wryly to himself. Maybe they’d get decent Defence professors, now that they wouldn’t be trying to kill him. Maybe.

He tried to remember who had said that there will always be another dark wizard. But not for Harry. He had had enough. Perhaps he could find a class somewhere on building something: a building, a sculpture, something.

There would be time, now, to decide what he wanted to do.

He wondered if he would be allowed to attend Hogwarts next year, to take his seventh year. Did he need to? Probably not. But he could not imagine taking a job offered merely because of his name and his scar. He needed time to sort things out. He wanted to be at Hogwarts. He would be able to be a student without constantly having to fear some attack. He was sure Hermione would want to return for classes, to get the best score she could on her NEWTs. Would Ron? They would be a year behind. Surely, with all the students that were kept out of Hogwarts last year, there would be others. He would not be the only one held back a year.

Harry suddenly realized he would be in the same class as Ginny. He wasn’t sure how he felt about that. He tried to remember the feel of her lips on his, that last day before he, Ron and Hermione left the Burrow. So much had happened in between. And when he returned… They hadn’t even talked much. He hadn’t really noticed it at the time, but … was Ginny avoiding him? And why hadn’t he noticed?

He thought back. She had turned her head when he looked at her. He poked at the thought, like poking at a wound. Did he still love her? Did she still love him? It was all just too much. Would he ever be able to feel for someone else what Ron and Hermione clearly felt for each other? Would he ever be able to feel strong emotions like that again? He couldn’t think about that right now.

For now, he would clear out the damage from the past. Sort the reusable chunks from the dust. Vanish the dust with a quick *Evanesco*. By the end of the day the wrist of his wand arm hurt from all the fine-tuned movements of the various spells, *Wingardium Leviosa*. The first spell he had ever learned, and it was so useful, here. The Vanishing Spell. He had learned that in Transfiguration, but was using it in reconstruction. And once there was a clean slate, a clean floor, and the holes in the walls were shaped to make it easy for the next team to place blocks, balance them, and seal the edges.
with yet another spell.

Partway through the afternoon Professor Flitwick came and worked alongside him. It was amazing to see the tiny man hefting stones 20 times his size with his wand and a phrase. Ever the teacher, when Flitwick saw Harry massaging his forearm and wrist, the professor gave him a few suggestions, this time about ways to ease the stress on his wrist as he cast. It helped, as his wand swished and flicked, and circled and jabbed forward.

The work was repetitive, but it was also relaxing. He could see the progress, and he felt as if he were giving something back to Hogwarts for the destruction that he had been part of. He fell into the routine of it, and the afternoon hours passed unnoticed.

So much so that he was surprised when it was time to go in to dinner. They ceased work early enough that Harry had time to shower the dust off his skin and the soreness out of his muscles.

He found a seat in the Great Hall, at the Hufflepuff table this time. It was kind of fun, sitting at the different tables. Perhaps tomorrow he’d sit at the Slytherin table. He thought about it. Perhaps not.

With a plate full of chicken, roast potatoes and mushy peas, he looked around the tables. They were not quite so full as at breakfast and lunch. He supposed some of the volunteers had gone home, by Floo or Apparition. But he recognized several students, scattered at the different tables. He thought about moving, to talk to someone he knew. He could see Terry Boot and Mandy Brocklehurst sitting across from each other at the Ravenclaw table, and Hannah Abbott at the shortened Gryffindor table. If it were Neville, or Luna, or any Weasley, he would have. Probably even some others. But Ron and Hermione weren’t here, and Ginny was at the Burrow, and it just seemed a bit too much. Besides, he was hungry. Maybe after he ate.

Professor McGonagall tapped her goblet for attention, the sound unnaturally loud. Looking closely, Harry could see she had transfigured one side of it into a bell. She stood up and looked out over the Hall. “Thank you all for coming to help. There is still quite a bit of work to do, but I have no doubt that we will finish it in time for the coming school year.”

Applause roared through the Hall.

“Over the next weeks, we will be making plans for the coming year. As these plans are finalized, we will be sure to let you know.

“We did not come to this point without losses. A list of services for the fallen has been posted in the Entry Hall and by my office. Know that those who have given their lives to this fight will always have our gratitude.”

McGonagall sat down a bit more abruptly than usual, and Harry caught sight of a handkerchief. After a moment, she got up and disappeared out the door behind the High Table. Suddenly he did not feel hungry. Nodding to the others at the table, he got up and left. As promised, the list was posted by the door to the Great Hall. It was on the same message board that Umbridge had used. The thought made him mildly ill.

The list was too long. Too many names. He did not recognise all the names, but he recognized some. Colin Creevey. Fred Weasley. Nymphadora Tonks.
He scanned the list again. Upon reaching the last name a second time, he turned, and started to run. He dodged around rubble, slowing down when it became clear that running was not safe, but still moved quickly through the castle, until he reached the stone gargoyle.

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**In The Headmistress’ Office**

*May 4, 1998*

“Victory.”

The password came out a bit raw, but the stone gargoyle moved aside, and Harry climbed the spiral stairs. It had been a victory, Harry knew. He, more than anyone, could feel Voldemort’s absence. It just didn’t quite feel like he’d hoped it would. After just one day of sifting through debris, and seeing exactly how damaged the castle was and how full the infirmary was, he couldn’t quite feel the victory of it. Seeing the list made it even less so. Over fifty names.

He was just as glad not to have to say Dumbledore’s name for the password. Harry had not considered it at the time he went to use the Pensieve, he was just thinking of it as Dumbledore’s office, Dumbledore’s Pensieve, Dumbledore’s … everything.

Harry wondered why it had worked. Had Snape used it as a password? What was he thinking, knowing he’d have to say the man’s name, several times a day? Was it some kind of penance? Before watching the Pensieve memories, Harry might have thought it was gloating, and perhaps the Carrows assumed that, if Snape had given them the password. He wondered what the teachers and students had made of it.

But that was not why he was here.

McGonagall lifted her head as he entered. “Mr Potter. Good, I’m glad you’re here. We were unable to find Snape.”

Harry stopped suddenly, as if he had run into a wall. “You had someone search the Shrieking Shack?”

“Yes. They found blood, plenty of blood, but no body. Are you sure of what you saw?”

“I was there! He gave me his memories, and then he died. I saw it.”

“He gave you—“

“They’re in the Pensieve. You—just—you should look at them. After you’ve seen the memories, I need them back. They’re … my responsibility.” Harry didn’t want that responsibility, but he also didn’t want anyone, even Snape, to be convicted unfairly. Once was enough. It seemed history was repeating itself, first Sirius, now Snape. But if his body wasn’t there… He didn’t want to think of what had been done with his body. He shook his head. He couldn’t deal with that right now.

“I need to talk to you about something else.” He perched on the edge of one of the chairs.

“The funeral list.”

McGonagall nodded, casting one last glance at the Pensieve sitting on a shelf behind the now closed
glass door. Harry felt bad for leaving it out. It felt disrespectful. He shook his head again. They had
been in the middle of a battle, taking time to put the Pensieve away would have been foolish. The
Headmistress turned back to Harry, putting both hands face down on the desk as if to close the
previous topic. “What about the list?”

“It’s missing a name.”

McGonagall sorted through a few scrolls on her desk. Of course she’d have a copy to hand. She
scanned it. “Who?”

“Remus Lupin.”

McGonagall’s eyes flew up to meet his.

“Oh, Harry, I thought you knew.

The Ministry took him – took his body.”

“What? Why?” Harry burst from his chair, more alert than he’d been since –

“It’s the law. Werewolves must be cremated. At a Ministry sanctioned facility.”

Harry felt like he had been stabbed in the gut. His parents had died before he could remember.
Knowing Dumbledore, baby Harry would not even have been permitted at the funeral. Sirius, falling
through the veil, left no body. No one had said anything about a funeral or memorial service. There
hadn’t been time after the battle at the Department of Mysteries, and it wouldn’t have been safe.
Then he had been stuck at the Dursleys’. Now it was Remus. He had not had a chance for a funeral
for any of his family. He was not going to give up on this one.

“Okay. No casket. But the ashes…”

“They use a magical fire, Harry. There are no ashes. Nothing is left behind. It is supposed to—”
McGonagall’s voice caught, then became very dry, devoid of emotion. “—prevent the spread of
infection.”

“They had no right!” Fury welled up, burning from Harry’s belly into his chest, his eyes glittering
fire. But he couldn’t sustain it. There were too many losses, he had given away too much, and Harry
just felt depleted. They had taken too much from him, The Ministry, Dumbledore, Death Eaters,
Voldemort… Harry was not sure if he had anything left to give. He needed just one thing for
himself, a funeral for his last ‘family’, something that was for Harry: not the Boy who Lived, not the
Saviour of the Wizarding World, just a boy who had never had the things others took for granted,
childhood, family, privacy. It was not right that Sirius had not had a service, and it was not right that
Remus was being denied one as well.

He sank back into his chair as if his strings had been cut.

“A memorial, then.” His voice was hollow.

“Harry, Remus has no living family, no one to plan one.”

Harry thought. The Marauders were dead. Tonks was dead. Harry’s heart contracted at the memory
of yelling at Remus to stay out of it, to keep himself and Tonks alive for Teddy’s sake.

Harry could not remember Remus ever talking about his parents. He vaguely remembered Remus
talking about when he had been changed, but he had mostly focused on how Dumbledore arranged it
so he could attend Hogwarts. Tonks’ mother, Andromeda, would be too busy dealing with the loss of her husband and daughter. Teddy was too young to care. He would care later, Harry knew, and Harry was not going to deprive Teddy the knowledge that he was at his parents’ funerals.

“There’s me,” he said.

He remembered seeing the bodies, Remus and Tonks, laid out side by side, as Harry ran to the Shack, intent on the battle, intent on his tasks. That was the last he’d seen them. A glance. A stab in the heart, to be set aside as he raced on. And then, the spirits from the Resurrection Stone, echoes of people he knew and loved, accompanying him to his death. Only it hadn’t worked out that way.

He might not know what direction he would take for the rest of his life. He might yet be too numb, to overwhelmed to even think about that. But he could do this. He had to do this.

“He deserves to be remembered.” Harry stated. “What do I need to do?”

Chapter End Notes

Comments, critique, britpicking, etc. are all more than welcome. As a fellow writer said, they are the currency with which fanfic writers are rewarded for their work.

Please let me know what you think!
Chapter 10: Complications

Captivity

May 5, 2009

The worst part of being captive, Draco thought, was that he had no wand. He was stuck with food the temperature that it came. If it was too hot, he had to wait for it to cool, and if it was too cool, there was not a thing he could do about it. His hair, made difficult by the stupid shop-bought cleaning potions provided, had to be combed. He couldn’t use the hair smoothing charm that he had created specifically for his hair texture. His clothes were wrinkled. Yes, he hung them every night, but he was unable to use the charm his father had taught him to make them completely wrinkle-free, so he would look every inch the Malfoy scion his father had raised him to be. Surely, he would feel more himself if he could only dress the part.

Aside from personal grooming, there was the issue of silence. Rather, the lack thereof. He was going to go mad if he had to put up with one more day of his mother’s soft murmurs to his father. No wand meant no silencing charms. This, in turn, meant no privacy. He knew his parents loved each other, but he did not need to be privy to the soft sounds of their affection, not that they were in any way indiscreet.

But the sound of kissing in these small quarters was louder than it had any right to be.

Worse, he could not be discreet. He was feeling healthier, despite the plebeian food and the lack of exercise, than he had all year under the—under Voldemort’s tender oversight. All of last year, every time he went home to the Manor, he knew that either he would be writhing under Voldemort’s wand, or his parents would be.
Hogwarts became an escape from pain, as neither the Carrows nor Snape inflicted the Cruciatus on the loyal. There had been plenty of other students that warranted their wrath. Even so, Draco was just now getting the full use of his muscles back, without the phantom pain that had shivered up Cruciatus-touched nerves. His wanted to enjoy some of that health, and he had a hand even if he had no wand, but he was not about to do so with his parents in the same room. There was such a thing as decorum. And the D—Vol—that stupid half-blooded bastard had not destroyed that in the Malfoy family.

Only, to look at his father, staring blankly as his mother murmured to him, Draco had to wonder. Shortly after their conversation the day before, his father had retreated into himself. The only time he seemed to come out of himself was to respond to Narcissa’s murmuring. Sometimes.

His mother had seen Draco’s bleak expression before he closed off his face. After settling Lucius on their bed and speaking quietly with him for a few moments, she came over to sit next to him at the table.

“Is he ill?” Draco turned to his mother.

“When the Dark Lord took Lucius’ wand, he took his power, Draco. We are wizards. All of your father’s intelligence, all of his cunning, it did him little good if he could not act on it. And without a wand, he could not protect himself.”

“We have other wands, in the vault…”

“The Dark Lord forbade it. He said that as Lucius could not be out doing his will, there was no need for him to carry a wand. He made one available for Lucius to use for raids, but for the rest of the time, The Dark Lord found … other uses for him.”

“Not—“

“No. Not that. We provided a base for him, and Lucius gave counsel as often as the Dark Lord would listen. But otherwise, Lucius became the target of his anger, more often than not.”

“And you?”
“As well. Not as often. I still had use as the hostess of the Manor. But Lucius… he has always been the force behind events. His strength was negotiating in the ministry, finding just the right place to apply pressure to accomplish his goals. He has always been vibrant, powerful, driven. Confinement was difficult for him, but it was even more difficult when he was not permitted to take action.”

Draco gazed over to the curtain-shrouded bed. “How long has this been happening? I never saw him like this.”

“He never wanted you to see him as less than strong. He focussed all his will to appear as you would expect when you came home on holidays. He did not want you to carry his burdens. Your father has more strength than any man I know. At his height he used it to succeed. This past year, he used it to endure. For it all to come to nothing… to have damaged our name to this extent… He is all too aware of his failings.” She stopped and reached out to take Draco’s hands, looking him directly in the eye. Her eyes were not exactly pleading, but he could feel how much she wanted him to understand.

“He needs me, Draco. More than he ever has. I do not intend to ignore you. If there is anything you need, you may come to us. You know that.”

She had taken a breath, and as if the air was filled with a revitalizing potion, her face took on more intensity than he had seen in it. Ever. “You are the most important thing in my life, Draco. You are my son. Ever since you were born, you have always been in my mind, influencing each decision. You can rely on that knowledge, and rest knowing that you will come first for me.” Her grip on his hands was tight, almost painful. She looked down at her hands.

“Lucius… he is aware what his decisions have cost us. That alone hurts him more than anything the Dark Lord could have done.

“I have always supported him in his decisions, and will always support him in my heart. It is likely he will be imprisoned, possibly even … executed.” Her voice was quiet and controlled as she said that, but Draco understood what she was holding back. “Once legal proceedings begin, it is unlikely I will be allowed to see him again, whether I am imprisoned or not. There is hope for you. Your actions while in school, and at home before that, the responsibility for them can be argued to rest with Lucius – by law.

“Right now, Draco, he needs me. This may be our last time together. You do understand?”

Suddenly, Draco could not object to the sound of her murmurs, or his father’s all too infrequent replies, or the soft wet sound of their kissing. He could not object to the quietly intense sounds he
heard late at night, when they thought he was asleep. He could not object to any of it. This time, however long there was of it, might be the last time for them together as a family.

So, he made sure they ate meals together at the small wooden table. One of them always had to sit in the chair that was too short, but they ate together, and there was conversation, and sometimes Lucius rose to the task and participated. Draco looked for signs of alertness in his father’s face, grasping those moments to converse. But mostly, he left his parents to their time with each other.

Instead, Draco spent his time planning.

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**Plans**

Draco knocked on the door to the hallway. There was no answer. He considered writing a note and sliding it under the door, but decided that between the wards on the door and the Auror’s unresponsiveness, he doubted it would go anywhere. Besides, he had no writing materials. The next time the house elf came, to remove breakfast dishes, Draco requested parchment and quill. He returned to the chair by the table to wait. He did need to write a note… two notes. One to the person in charge, most likely McGonagall, he thought, and the other to Madame Pomfrey. The house elf brought the implements requested with lunch. Apparently, the thought of Draco attacking the Auror at the door with a quill was not weighed as a serious risk. He took the quill and wrote.

*Professor McGonagall:*

*I would like the opportunity to meet with you. I will abide by whatever security measures you feel are necessary.*

*Draco Malfoy*

He considered what she might require in the way of security, but he knew she had the power in this situation. He would have to abide by her requirements to make any progress in his plan. If the Malfoys had any power at present, he would not need to abase himself at all. Circumstances dictated action. He played with the idea of addressing it to the Headmaster or Headmistress, but discarded that. Better to deal with the known than the unknown. Addressing to her by name gave him at least the strength of familiarity and history. Such as it was. If she wasn’t Headmistress, she was still a
This note is to inquire as to the well-being and current situation of the person I brought to your attention. I would be grateful for an update.

Draco Malfyoy.

He wished he could see Snape himself. He wished he could talk with him. He hoped he was all right. He hoped that he had been in time, that he had done the right thing to bring him to Madame Pomfrey’s attention. But wishes did not accomplish what planning did. He set aside his fears, his anxiety for Snape, the pain of the knowledge of what would happen to his family if he did not succeed, and also of the knowledge of what would happen to his family, to his father, if he did.

When the Hogwarts house elf brought dinner, Draco was waiting by the door. The Auror standing guard gave him a dark look, but did not interfere. Draco knew she was listening to every word that was said, but that actually worked in his favour. If the elf didn’t carry the message, perhaps Auror gossip would do his work for him.

Madame Pomfrey’s reply came quickly. Draco was surprised. He had expected her to be too busy to reply immediately. He was glad for it nonetheless.

Mr Malfyoy

The Healing is not complete. He lives.

Madame Pomfrey

That was not nearly enough information.
Draco waited. Draco planned.

He did not hear back from McGonagall.
The next day, he sent another message.

Professor McGonagall

I hear and see that Hogwarts is being repaired. I wonder if I could be of assistance?

Draco Malfoy

Not Dead Yet

May 5, 1998

Severus Snape awoke. Where was he? Hadn’t there been a battle? Albus would be wondering—no, not Albus. He was sure of that. There was no one he cared to report to just then. No one he wanted to report to ever again. He spared a moment to hope the boy succeeded. Hope, however, had no place in his life. The Potter brat had traipsed across the countryside doing who knows what, while the Dark Lord grew stronger: in followers too unobservant to realize what they were following, in political power in the Ministry. The battle could have gone either way, even with all Albus’ planning, all his own sacrifices. And there was no way to discover the outcome, except to open his eyes and discover for himself.

The rush of thoughts left him with an unaccustomed vertigo.

Carefully, slowly, he opened his eyes, surprised that he could do so. And then, he was surprised to find himself in his own quarters. Lying on the sofa in the sitting room. He had thought, he had sight, he must still be alive.

He was not in that damned shack of Lupin’s, and he was not dead. He did not even seem to be in more pain than normal. He turned his head, tentatively. An excruciating pain pounded through him,
starting at his head but not leaving any limb untouched.

Perhaps he was in more pain than normal. He rested for a moment, then pulled himself upward, using the back of the sofa for leverage. By the time he was standing, his head throbbed. He moved toward his potions store. The door was open. What’s more, his special cabinet was open.

He scanned the room, looking for something out of place. On the table, between the sofa and one upholstered chair, sat four bottles. He recognized them by the shape and colour of the bottles alone.

Oh.

Draco.

There was no one else that would know how to get access, and would have a clue how to use them. And care to do so. Once, Lucius might have cared. Recently, Lucius would have been happy to see him dead, Snape thought.

So Draco had brought him here, had broken into his locked Potions stores, and then left him alone. He would have to have a serious talk with his godson.

He found a potion for pain that would not interact with the four in his system. Swallowing a double dose, he stood very still until the ache receded. He still hurt, but he could function. Probably.

First, he needed to find out what was transpiring outside of his rooms. He looked around for his wand. He searched his robes, and the tables, in his Potions closet, and under the sofa cushions. And then he did a more thorough search. He found it where it had rolled, under the sofa on which he had been lying. He recalled a slight clatter just as he reached consciousness. His hands were certainly stiff enough to have been holding his wand all this time. He stretched each one until the knuckles popped.

He needed to find Draco. He needed to find out what had happened. He put on his cloak, lifted the hood over his head, flicked his wand at the smouldering embers and tossed Floo powder into the reawakened fire. “Headmaster’s Office,” he said, and stepped into the green flames. He could have done without the spinning, even for that short distance.

Even when he had become headmaster, Severus had maintained his own quarters in the Dungeons. Slughorn had found another room more to his liking, and there was no need for Snape to vacate the
quarters he had lived in for over 18 years, let alone move into Dumbledore’s room. It had been difficult enough, taking over the old man’s office. It had never become his office in his mind. The office belonged to the position.

It had been disturbed since he was last here. Parchments were stacked in relatively neat piles on the desk. He glanced at the top one. It was a funeral list. From the names, it was clear that the Dark Lord was not in control of the castle. But Potter was not on the list. Had the Dark Lord survived, then? Snape searched the room until he found it. The Pensieve.

The cabinet with the Pensieve in it was locked. After all he had done, had the brat not even bothered to look at his memories? He certainly had no compunction about it a few years ago. With a quick wand movement, the cabinet door clicked open, and Snape saw, with some relief, that it swirled with silvery fluid, and he could almost see a blur of Lily’s hair. He wanted to plunge in and see the memories, to see Lily in the clarity of the Pensieve, but there were other more pressing issues. The glimpse had proved they were his own memories.

So the brat had—in all probability—viewed them. Had he followed through? Potter was not dead. Had it all been wasted? Snape could not imagine going through this again in another ten years. He wasn’t sure he could imagine surviving another ten years. He looked again at the Pensieve. Fragments of his life, all leading to one place. A fury rose in him. All his choices. Every moment sacrificed, every Cruciatus endured, every time he crawled before that creature, every regret, every penance, laid out before the Potter spawn, to waste or use. And the brat was alive.

He was not sure he could have made Albus’ choices, to raise the boy for slaughter. Albus seemed genuinely to care for the brat. Severus had learned early on never to care for those you must use. You take care of your tools, but you never let yourself get emotionally attached. He knew Albus had done both. He knew Albus had come to care for him, as well, yet he used him as needed, throwing him back to the Dark Lord, asking him to endure, to commit unbearable acts, to bear them anyway. And he had.

Snape was not so minded to compare which sacrifice was worse: that which Albus had asked of himself, or that which he had asked of Potter. To sacrifice your honour or to sacrifice yourself. The sight of those memories, swirling in Albus’ Pensieve, brought both choices together in Severus’ mind. He did not want to consider it. It was a waste of time, when he still did not know the full outcome of the battle.

Severus considered taking the memories back. For the moment, while he could remember them, they did not stab at him. They didn’t press at him with urgency, nor with bile at the results of his choices. He was able to think more clearly, about things he had not let himself acknowledge. Maybe he would leave them there. For the moment. With only some of the important answers resolved, he needed his strength, but at the moment he could feel it draining away. He stumbled to the chair in the corner and collapsed into it. Just to consider where to go next.
In the Hospital Wing

May 5, 1998

Madame Pomfrey had never been so busy.

One of the volunteers had fallen from the wall he was working on, and despite the cushioning charm the crew leader had cast, the volunteer had ended up with a broken ankle. An *Immobulus* charm and a dose of Skele-Gro later, the ankle was tender but healing. Poppy did not have the luxury of making the volunteer rest in a bed, much as she might want to. Wizard space interfered with healing, especially with some kinds of spell damage, so she was limited by available space, and there just wasn’t enough. She sent the volunteer off with instructions to rest for the remainder of the day, and headed back to her office.

As busy as the Hospital Wing had been since the battle, she didn’t dare let the medical records lapse. Every potion given, every cure applied had to be noted, in case of later complications. Each potion had a duration-of-effect, and some needed specific timing for the next dose. It was also critical to avoid certain potion interactions. She had seen enough crises from that during her apprenticeship at St Mungo’s in the critical spell damage ward that she was very careful with those under her care. And while the transfer Mediwitches and Mediwizards from St Mungo’s kept their own records for the patients under their care, it was still her ward, and she checked the records of each patient in it.

As soon as she reached the door to her office, the insistent ring of an alert chime derailed her intentions.

She quickly moved to quiet it and gather some supplies. The reintegration spell she had cast to reunify Snape’s chaotic magical field could be disrupted by physical disturbance or interfering magical field. Prohibited from checking in on him by the nature of the spell, she had woven the alert that had just sounded into the reintegration spell, blending the magic of each spell into the other. As soon as she had set the spell, she activated a healer’s ward on Snape’s rooms, carefully balanced so its magical field was all on the outside of the shield, and sealed the room. She had not been back since, although she had been tempted several times. As powerful as this last-ditch spell was, she hated using it, if only for the fact that she could not check on her patient until it had run its course.
Gathering sanitized cloths, bandages, her notes, and some potion vials—her lips twitching at the irony of bringing potions back to the Potions Master’s rooms but not wanting to risk searching through his personal stores—she headed toward the dungeons.

“Madame Pomfrey!”

She turned to see one of the construction mages guiding a young wizard through the doors. He was covered in bleeding sores, and had his hand over his mouth as if he were trying to keep from vomiting. She remembered him... a recent graduate, from perhaps two or three years ago. He had been to the infirmary only rarely. Ravenclaw, if she recalled correctly.

“What happened?”

“He was helping shift debris in the classrooms on the main floor. He was doing fine, and I went to check on Alyce, who was dealing with an intricate load balancing issue. When I came back, he was on the ground, and was like this.”

“Come, let’s get you settled over here.” She guided him to a bed that had recently been vacated and reset. “Now, can you tell me what you were doing at the time?”

The wizard – Poppy tried to remember his name – took his hand from his mouth and tried to speak, only to spasm.

Poppy conjured a basin for him, and waited until he raised his head again. “Evanesco.” Poppy removed the liquid from the basin, but left the basin, just in case. “I’m sorry.” She told him. “I don’t dare give you potion to relieve your nausea until I know what you’ve been exposed to. Can you describe what you were doing when this started?”

“Wasn’t doing anything. Just moving the rock and dust, like he showed me.” The wizard gestured to his guide. “I started to feel a bit dizzy. I was almost done with the room—” he clapped his hand over his mouth again and heaved.

Poppy cast a few diagnostic charms. His magic was blotched with dark taint. She had seen this with particularly dark curses, but she could find no evidence of a curse. It looked as if the darkness infecting his magic was causing his flesh to decompose in places.
First, do no harm, she thought to herself. It was clearly painful, but not immediately life-threatening. Much as she wanted to relieve the pain, she first needed to know what ailed him. “What’s your name?”

The tight clenching of his stomach released him after a few moments, enough for him to draw breath. “Angus Thelbren.”

“Yes, I remember you now. Ravenclaw, weren’t you?” He nodded. Well, Mr Thelbren, I’m going to ask you to lie down. I know it will hurt a bit, but I am going to cast a charm to slow down what’s happening to you. It will cause you to sleep, and you don’t want to fall.”

He gingerly leaned back in the bed, and she helped him put his feet up, carefully avoiding any open sores.

With a carefully controlled wave of her wand, Poppy muttered a charm that would slow both his magic and his body processes. She needed to find out what this was. Who would know? Once she would have asked Severus—glancing down, she noticed the supplies she had let fall when she had been called over. Severus!

Gathering the supplies back to hand, Madame Pomfrey called one of the hospital ward volunteers to her. “I need you to keep an eye on Angus Thelbren here. If there is any change, any change at all, I want you to call for Minky to come get me. Understood?” A quick nod reassured her. “I’ll be back shortly.”

Just as she was leaving the ward, she heard a voice from her office—“Poppy? Are you there?”

Setting down her supplies again, Poppy returned to her office, hoping the floo-call would be brief.

Discovered

May 5, 1998
Minerva McGonagall climbed the stairs to the Headmistress’ office. She was tired. There was just so much to be done. First and foremost, as headmistress she was in charge of organizing the rebuilding. Filch had been a gift in that regard. He had taken over coordinating the floods of volunteers and ensured that the various tasks got prioritized and done. Somehow, this catastrophe had brought out the best in him. He had not been overtly cold or sneering toward the volunteers, so far. She had caught him stroking one of the walls, murmuring to the castle, and the sneer on his face had been replaced by a faintly wounded look if he thought he was alone, but she could not fault his organization skills. So for the most part she could turn that over to him, but it was still her responsibility to oversee.

In addition, the next school year needed to be planned. She needed to start searches for new teachers to replace the ones who had died or were imprisoned. She needed a new Muggle Studies teacher, a new Potions professor, as Horace had told her quite vehemently that he had had enough, and that his retirement was not to be interrupted again. She also needed a new Defence teacher, she needed to replace herself for Transfiguration, and Bathsheda in Ancient Runes had let her know she was sending her curriculum vitae elsewhere. She doubted that Dumbledore in all his years as Headmaster had ever had to replace so many Hogwarts instructors in one go. Inquiries had gone out but she was not satisfied with the quality of what she had seen so far for Transfiguration or Potions, and they were core subjects. She didn’t know whether she would be able to find someone competent for Defence, either.

In addition, she needed to spend time with the existing teachers, as the curriculum needed to be redeveloped both to clear it from Death Eater propaganda and change the focus away from wartime planning (which she had to admit had become the focus more and more as He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named grew in power). And the Hogwarts letters for the coming year needed to be rechecked, as well as those from the previous year, as she had discovered that the letters for Muggleborn students for that year had not gone out, although she had been sure the process was supposed to be initiated by the Book.

It was only May, and she was already feeling behind. She hoped she would get it all done in time.

It felt as if she shouldn’t be focussing on these everyday things when such terrible things had happened only a few days before. But if she didn’t do them, then Hogwarts might not start on time. She couldn’t let that happen. He Who Must Not Be Named had already caused too much chaos, without letting his reach extend still further.

When she opened the door at the top of the stairs, her heart faltered. A large, black clad body lay sprawled in her chair. Severus Snape. He appeared to be either dead or unconscious. How had he gotten there? There was fresh ash on the hearth… she had forgotten to change the wards on the Floo connection.

She carefully stepped over to him, wand out, and cast a quick spell. He was alive. Just to be sure, she
cast a binding spell on him, not trusting that a stunning spell wouldn’t kill him. She needed answers more than she needed his corpse. How was he still alive? Harry had said he was dead as he left the shack. Trust Severus Snape to survive. That is what he was best at.

With Snape safely secured, she turned to the fireplace and muttered a quick *Incendio* to reawaken the flames, then tossing in a bit of Floo powder. “Poppy? Are you there?” There was a long pause.

“Minerva, what do you need?”

“I have Severus Snape in my office, unconscious, I believe. Could you come through?”

“Oh! Certainly. He should not have been able to walk that far! Coming through.”

With a flare of green, Poppy was in her office. She cast several diagnostics on Snape, then turned to Minerva. “Was it strictly necessary to bind him?”

“Until I know for certain where his allegiances lie, I am taking no chances.”

“He’s unconscious. How much danger can he be at the moment? If I am to treat him, I’ll need you to remove the binding.”

“Let’s get him to the infirmary first.”

Poppy cast a diagnostic charm Minerva recognized from years of bringing students to the Hospital wing before casting *Mobilicorpus*. Her spell, gentle from years of use on patients, lifted the body from the chair, and straightened him out. Minerva transfigured a chair cushion into a blanket to lay atop him, covering even his face.

They couldn’t fit his hovering body through the floo, so Poppy released the spell, catching the man on her shoulder, his head draped onto her back in a grim parody of an embrace. Minerva helped her settle him so that Poppy could carry him. The binding helped keep stray appendages in. “He would hate this.” Poppy commented.

“I truly do not care.”
With one last glance to make sure nothing was hanging out, Poppy Disillusioned the body, then preceded Minerva through the floo into her office. She settled him into a chair for a moment to catch her breath.

Minerva cast a stern look at her. “You knew about this. You knew he was alive.”

“Yes.”

“You didn’t tell me.” Minerva kept her voice calm and without judgement.

“Patient confidentiality.”

“You know that doesn’t apply. He—”

“Minerva McGonagall, I did not hear you say that. I did not hear you suggest that I let my principles slide, just because you don’t approve of Severus Snape.”

Again casting Mobilicorpus, Poppy resettled the blanket over him. “I assume word of his survival should remain between us for now?”

“For now. I need to know a few things first. How did he survive?”

“Draco Malfoy found him. He said that the He Who Must Not Be Named killed him, using that snake Mr Longbottom killed.”

Poppy turned and guided the Disillusioned body carefully across the short distance to the private ward reserved for teachers and contagious students. After settling him in the bed, she raised the alert that signified contagion. That would keep people out. It would still need to be locked.

“Harry said the same thing.” Minerva commented. “It still doesn’t mean that Severus didn’t truly follow You Know Who. If he did… I’ll not hesitate to turn him over to the Aurors for a good long stay in Azkaban. And nothing will diminish the fact that he killed Albus, or that he allowed those—"
“He should not have killed Albus!”

Poppy nodded. “That does seem the telling point. He will have to answer for that. However, I meant this past year.”

“He was the Headmaster. If he really was working against them, he should have done something. Albus would have.”

“Severus Snape was not Albus.”

“No, he was not.” Minerva’s words meant something quite different than Poppy’s.

A Meeting with Andromeda

May 5, 1998

An owl came to Harry at breakfast. During the vacations, owls seemed to come all the time. They didn’t bother the volunteers while working, but all three meals showed a flock of owls to the tables.

Harry untied the message from the small brown owl’s leg. It still hurt to use any owl but Hedwig. She had been with him through so much.

The message was from Andromeda Tonks, replying to his request to meet with her. She had suggested that he come by that morning at nine, and let him know the floo address. He scrawled an affirmative and sent the owl back.

* * *

Harry used the Floo in McGonagall’s office. He never liked travelling by Floo. The only form of magical travel he enjoyed was flying. Floo travel left him dirty and dizzy, Apparating left him faintly
nauseous, and Portkeys had too many memories. But brooms had a limitation on how far one could reasonably travel, and the Tonks family lived closer to London than Scotland, from what he recalled. He had only been there the one time, and wasn’t sure he could find it again by broom. It was in a mostly Muggle area, he remembered.

He spun out of the floo and found himself in the Tonks’ parlour. Putting a quick hand to catch his balance until the dizzy spell subsided, he left a sooty smudge on the mantelpiece. Embarrassed, Harry cast a quick Scourgify to remove the ash he’d brought with him from his robes, trousers, the carpet beneath him and the mantle. One day he would understand how to floo. One day, he would get his Apparition license. Or maybe he should just hope that someone invented a better way to travel. He thought of the Wizarding World, and doubted it would happen any time soon. Perhaps he should ask the twins. The thought made his heart clench. It was so automatic, thinking of them as a set. They were creative, inventive; they would have come up with something. It might have turned everybody into a parakeet on the other side, but it would have worked without the discomfort of existing forms of magical travel.

The house was modestly sized, from what Harry could see. It wasn’t overtly magical, not odd like the Burrow or Luna’s house, and it was elegant, not huge and cold like Malfoy’s house, but even Harry could see that things went together well, that the owners were people of note. Petunia Dursley would cheerfully commit murder to have her house show such natural style. He hadn’t remembered noticing the last time he was here, but then, he’d had other things on his mind.

It was probably more Mrs Tonks’ bearing than the house itself, but Harry felt under-dressed in his robes, a bit too long for him—borrowed as they were from Terry Boot, who was volunteering at Hogwarts as well—and his trousers from the Weasley hand-me-down cupboard. He would have to check again with Hermione to see if she had managed to find the beaded bag, which had somehow gotten lost in the course of the battle. When he thought of all that was in there, he certainly hoped they found it. He was sure they would. Not to find it would be unthinkable. He turned to greet Andromeda Tonks, who smiled warmly and gave welcome.

A whimper came from the cradle next to her, and Mrs. Tonks lifted the squirming bundle out of it and into her lap. "Harry Potter, allow me to introduce Teddy Lupin."

Harry was amazed. Teddy was tiny, although Harry wasn’t sure how big babies were supposed to be. Teddy couldn’t be more than a month old, Harry thought, maybe less. And he was an orphan, just like him. Suddenly, Harry felt a surge of protectiveness toward the tiny human. He wondered if this is what Sirius had felt for him: the sudden desire that Teddy never feel unloved. That he always had someone to turn to, to ask questions of, and to show his childish drawings to. That he had someone with whom he could share all the little events in his life. And something more. Harry wanted to make sure that Teddy grew up in a world without the fear he had known. There would be no Dark Lords in Teddy’s future. Harry didn’t know how he could accomplish that, but he resolved to do so.

She arched an eyebrow at his expression. "Would you like to hold him?"

At Harry’s nod, she gently placed the baby in his arms. Teddy smiled, gurgling at him, his short crop of hair changing colours from green to purple to red and back to green. Harry grasped him into a hug, thinking of Remus, and Tonks, and Sirius, and all the people that he would have liked to be there for his godson. Harry rocked the small form, and hoped he and the woman before him, who he barely knew, would be enough.

When Harry looked up at Mrs. Tonks, his eyes were suspiciously bright. She nodded, and offered him a biscuit, saying "You'll do, Harry. We have a great many things to discuss."
"We do." Harry was learning to listen, and Mrs, Tonks apparently had some things to say. He took a bite of the biscuit off the plate sitting next to the tea set on the low table in front of him, and chewed it thoroughly.

“I want to talk to you about responsibilities.”

Harry gulped. This was not what he’d wanted to talk about. He was just getting out from under a task that had weighed him down since he first heard the prophesy. But, looking down at Teddy, he couldn’t but feel that this might just be something he’d be willing to take on. A little piece of Remus, and of Tonks, and someone that would grow up to be entirely himself.

"Responsibilities?"

“Yes, dear. It is my task to see to the funerals, and I need your consent.”

And as suddenly as the weight was placed, it was gone. Harry breathed a sigh of relief. "What do you need my consent to do?"

“You are the Black heir. Sirius left everything to you, including the responsibilities he himself ignored. I’m sorry, Harry, to have to ask you this, but do you intend to force me to inter Nymphadora with the Blacks?”

“What? NO! She’d have hated that!” Harry paused, mustering up the courage to ask what he had come to ask.

"But... I wanted to ask you something. About the funeral..." He paused again. "I didn't know about all the werewolf laws. And, Remus was the only one left of the ones who ... would’ve taken care of me if they could, when I was little. My parents died before I could remember, and there was never a body for my godfather. So, even if there isn't a body... I was wondering if we could remember him too. Remus, I mean. Along with Tonks.”

“That’s very generous of you, Harry. Are you thinking with your head, or your heart?”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you know, Harry, what it means to be the head of a magical family? I ask, only because you may not know, raised as you were.” The older woman set down her teacup suddenly. “Good gracious, you're head of two magical families!”

"I am?"

“Yes, Harry. You are Heir to the Blacks and Head of the Potters. You have a very important role to fill there.”

“Wait. You say I am Heir to the Blacks? I know Sirius left me his house and personal possessions, but—“

“Do you mean to tell me that you were never informed of what that meant?”

“Dumbledore came to me after Sirius’ will was discovered. He told me that Sirius had left me everything. He listed money added to my Gringotts vault, and personal possessions. We went through those at Gr—his house.” The habits of the past few years were hard to break, even now that he was one of the twenty-odd secret keepers for the Order’s erstwhile Headquarters.

Mrs. Tonks' lips twitched. “I know where you mean Harry.”
“We tested whether the house was indeed mine, but Kreacher had to obey me, so we knew it was. Dumbledore said that meant that Sirius had done the will correctly.”

“He was right. You would not have been able to inherit that house unless you had been accepted by Black as an Heir. That would have been some fancy spellwork on his part to open Black to you, all things considered.”

“Because I’m not a Black?”

“Oh, that part was not so difficult. Your great grandmother was born a Black. He would only have had to lay out the bloodline to have that accepted so that you could be his adopted heir. No, the difficult part would have been your mother. The Black family enchantments were woven with the Black motto in mind.”

“Toujours Pur.”

“Exactly. But, as the house allowed you to inherit, Sirius must have rewoven the family enchantments.”

Harry imagined Sirius, sitting alone at Grimmauld Place, researching how to turn the enchantments on his family line from their original purpose, just so that he could inherit. It was something he knew Sirius would have taken delight in, aligning his heritage with his own choices, and sticking it to his mother at the same time. Had he done that then, or even earlier, when Harry was still a baby, and his parents were still alive? But then wouldn’t Mrs Black have noticed? She would’ve been alive. He remembered the screeching woman in the portrait, and felt sure that she would have found out about the attempt to change the magics, if she had been alive at the time.

“Dumbledore ought to have known that for you to inherit the house, meant you also were eligible to inherit the House. He said nothing?”

It took a moment for Harry to parse the difference between house and House, but there was something in her tone that made the meaning come clear. “I guess he had other things on his mind. Voldemort was just getting going, since he had been revealed, and everyone was scrambling.”

“We’ll leave that aside for the moment. Done is done. The fact is, that you are now, or will be as soon as you accept your responsibilities, the head of two magical families. What do you intend to do about it?”

Harry had never thought about it. He was always aware of the Malfoys as a magical family, because Malfoy made such a big deal about it. And everyone had made a big deal about him, but that was because of the whole Voldemort vs. Boy Who Lived thing. But he was just Harry. He never noticed Arthur Weasley as having a special role other than being father to the Weasley children and doing his job in the Ministry and with the Order.

"What does a head of the family do?"

“As relates to our discussion, you could demand that Nymphadora be interred in the Black mausoleum, for the benefit of the family's magics. The head of the family makes policy for the entire family. So, should you allow Nymphadora's service to be elsewhere, the whole family will have to abide by your wishes. You have the right to command any living Black on any matters relating to family honour and magic.”

"I don’t understand."

“When wizards die, Harry, they are buried or interred with their families. Surely you knew that?”
This whole conversation was going so far afield from what he had originally intended. "Well, I suppose. But my parents are buried in Godric's Hollow. I don't think that was a Wizards-only cemetery. And Dumbledore was interred at Hogwarts. That was the only funeral I've ever been to, Muggle or magical."

"Dumbledore was different, Harry. Over the years, he channelled his family magics into Hogwarts. Abeforth doesn't believe in the old ways, so he didn't mind."

"I'm going to need help with this, aren't I? Nothing of this was taught at Hogwarts."

"Your aunt never told you?"

"My aunt told me that my parents died in a car crash. I first found out about the wizarding world when I got my Hogwarts letter."

"She told you—" A spark of fury lit in Mrs Tonks' eyes. "Were you even told you were the Head of a Family?"

"Well, I knew that my parents were dead, and that I had no other relatives or the Dursleys wouldn't have had to take me in. But—nothing like what you are implying."

"We will arrange for you to get the information you need."

"From where?"

"I'll have to ask a few people. Don't worry, I'll be discrete. I have been out of touch with the Black family, for obvious reasons, and I would not want to ask most of them. Narcissa might know..."

Harry looked up at the name. "Malfoy? No!"

"She is my sister. And although she is Lucius' responsibility now, she is and has always been a Black. That never changes."

Harry suddenly remembered Narcissa Malfoy lying to Voldemort for him, desperate for word of her son. Perhaps she was not as cold as he had always assumed.

Andromeda got a thoughtful look on her face. "She will have to be invited to the funeral. Not that I think she'd come, the way things are."

"Wait. Tonks was cast out, or disowned, or something, from the Black family. Right? Like Sirius? Oh! I'm sorry. You were too."

Harry tried to remember the Black tapestry, feeling horrible for bringing it up.

"Yes, well, my aunt was quite mad, Harry, but family traditions resonate deeply."

Harry took a deep breath. "Do you want to be part of the Black family again? Could I do that? If you wanted?"

Mrs Tonks voice was suddenly soft. "Oh, yes, Harry. You could do that."

"Do you want me to?"

"Let me first tell you what I would like for Nymphadora. Then you can tell me what you would allow. Then, I will explain how the wizarding world will look at all sides, and then, you can make an educated choice. Agreed?"
Harry nodded. “Yes.”

“As to whether I want to re-join the Black family or not, first let's see what you decide to do with regard to these other matters.”

Harry was feeling like he was being pulled in five different directions. He wasn’t ready for any of this. He had just come here because Remus needed a memorial—because Harry needed a memorial for Remus, as a symbol of everything he had lost. He only wanted to go to a memorial for someone that he cared about. He wasn’t ready for this level of responsibility. Suddenly he was a godfather, and the head of two families, with responsibilities that he had no knowledge of.

Harry took a deep breath. "That sounds like a good idea. One thing at a time, then. What would you like for Tonks?"

“Not the mausoleum.” Andromeda stated, her voice flat. “She was afraid of it her entire life.”

"I can see that. Even living in—" Harry paused, then realized it was somewhat idiotic to keep referring to the house obliquely, especially as it was no longer being used as Headquarters, and Voldemort was dead, and he owned it, and he either had to trust Tonks’ mother or not. “This is silly. The address of Sirius’ house is number twelve Grimmauld Place.” He continued more formally. “And even living there was no picnic.”

Mrs Black raised a quizzical brow at the phrase.

“The place was... unpleasant.”

“I can imagine. But besides that place, there is the Black family estate. I can’t imagine that is in much better repair than the place I remember in town must be, after all this time. The Mausoleum is on the estate.” She stopped, considered for a moment, and then set her teacup down on the table.

“She chose Remus, Harry.” Mrs Tonks continued. “Let her go to ash with him.”

"She won't be able to be with Remus' ashes... The Ministry destroyed them."

“Oh dear,” said Mrs Tonks. “I did not think those measures would be used. Why didn't you stop them, Harry?”

"No one told me until it was already done."

Her eyes flashed with anger. "They should not have dared. Harry, you will have to take my word for some things, and put your mind to learning others. That should never have happened."

She gazed at Harry, until he began to feel very uncomfortable.

"McGonagall said it was Ministry law."

“Family magic takes precedence, and the old cat knows it.” She paused.

“Do you,” she drawled, "care to make a point?"

Harry thought about it. The thought of that was... satisfying, although probably not for the reason she was imagining. Everything he heard about the werewolf laws was horrible. "I think I would." He could hear a matching, satisfied drawl in his voice, and wondered how he sounded so... conniving all of a sudden. He felt like he should twirl his moustache. He didn’t think he could deal with one thing more at present, though, as lovely as the thought was.
"I think that might have to wait until after the funeral… Won’t it?" Suddenly, Harry was unsure. The methodical pace of the Hogwarts clean-up had been very relaxing, and he was not ready for the furore and conflicting priorities of real life.

“No, I think you can make a point with the funeral itself, Harry. If you decide to do this, it will be a very powerful message.”

She sketched out for him a scenario in which Nymphadora and Remus would have the full wizarding funeral rites despite the absence of Remus’ body, but rather than Black family vault interment, she could be placed in a new, smaller vault on the grounds, with a plaque to commemorate Remus.

“With that action, Harry, you say 'The Black Family takes care of its own.' You will have paid full respect to the old ways, honoured a brave man, a hero of the war against Voldemort, and poked the Ministry in the eye.”

Her gaze softened. "Dora would have liked that."

Harry thought about it. Sirius had been one of Remus' best friends. And Tonks was his wife. But the Blacks had not taken care of Sirius, or Tonks. "Before I do that, thought, I think the Black family should welcome Tonks home. And Sirius. Can I do that after the fact? I mean, after ... you know…”

Harry was feeling like he had stuck his foot in his mouth... again.

"Sirius can't give his magic to the family, Harry. Not past the Veil.”

Harry’s stomach clenched at the reminder that Sirius was lost to him. He wondered if he would ever be able to think of the man without the wash of grief and guilt.

“But to remember him with a marker,” Mrs Tonks continued, “and as Head, to say all is forgiven? That would be appropriate.”

"I just think, it doesn't seem right to inter them on Black land unless they are welcomed back. Because then the family, the ones already dead, would not be ... oh this sounds stupid... kind to them." Harry remembered how important it was to have his family following him when he went to face Voldemort.

"So, if I welcome them back, will that let the land or the family, or whatever, know to – Merlin!” He interrupted himself in frustration. “This is all so esoteric, and I don't know what I'm talking about, but I have started to realize that the dead are still part of us, and we of them. In more ways than Muggles think. I just want for them both to be content.”

Harry flushed, embarrassed at his confused outburst.

"Harry, the Blacks are a proud and ancient House, and my aunt was a very determined woman, but I assure you, my gran would have been delighted to dandle Teddy on her knee, motto or no. That you are beginning to understand some things makes me feel a great deal of relief.”

"Oh." Harry wasn't sure what to feel. He still did not understand anything, but it felt like something had been decided, if he could only figure out what.

"So, are we agreed? I will undertake to have the tapestry repaired, if you can find a way to get it to me. You will allow us to honour the memory of Sirius, and the lives of Dora and Remus. The Black family will follow all the forms." She paused, then gave a definitive nod. "You have your answer, young man; the Black family, with you at the Head, is one to which I would very much like to
Harry did not expect that to feel as good as it did. He had offered because it was the right thing to do, but from the way she said it, her acceptance was an acceptance of him.

“That being said, there are a few other things we should settle. First, we should go see the Black family land, and inspect the small mausoleum. It has been a long time since I have been there, and I suspect it has also been a while since anyone has been there. It may not be in the best condition. We’ll have to see whether we can get it into a condition to bring Dora to. Also, you need to decide whether you will allow outsiders onto the grounds to attend the funeral. At one time, the Black family was large enough that there would be enough witches and wizards within the family to complete the rite. Now…”

“I would like to invite my friends Ron and Hermione. And the rest of the Weasleys, if they want to attend. There might be some others who want to remember Remus.”

“Yes, in that Order of Albus’. ” She paused, then quirked her lips. “Weasleys at a Black funeral on the Black estate. There will be some rolling about in the Mausoleum on that day.” Andromeda Tonks smiled, and for a second, he saw a family resemblance to Sirius.

“Once you officially accept us back into the family, I will be able to enter, and Narcissa and her son will already have that right. Others will be by your permission only. I will see to a guest list, and you should consider who you would like to invite. The invitations can be charmed to allow entry, or even charmed as Portkeys.

Harry grimaced at the thought.

“Yes, I have heard of your unfortunate experience with a Portkey. We can charm them with a phrase, keyed to the name of the recipient and a particular time, so that only upon saying the phrase, within a particular span of time, can the person on the invitation activate the Portkey. Will that be satisfactory?”

Harry nodded, grateful that she understood.

“Well then. The next thing for it, is for you to accept the Black family.”

“What do I have to do?”

“We’ll need the will. Either it contains the enchantments within the parchment, or it will give you a clue as to how to go about activating them.”

“Where would it be? I know Dumbledore saw it. Do you think he’d have put a copy in the Headmaster’s office?”

“If it is like most family wills, a copy would be filed at the Ministry, by Ministry law, and a copy would be filed at the family estate. The writer would put the original in a safe place. My guess is that Dumbledore may have seen the Ministry copy, or possibly found the original.”

“If Sirius wrote it after escaping from Azkaban, he would have been either on the run or locked up at Grimmauld Place.”

“If he was on the run, he could have put it anywhere. But he spent quite a bit of time at Grimmauld Place. I think that would be a good place to start looking.”

Harry hesitated. “While Hermione, Ron and I were out looking for what was needed to defeat
Voldemort, we had to stop at Grimmauld Place. We searched it quite thoroughly. As did someone before us.” Harry remembered the fragments of a letter that he had found there. Snape had gotten in. And Snape had been in love with his mother. Suddenly he wished he had stayed at the Burrow, weeding with Percy. Life had seemed so much simpler. He wanted a chance to finally be a child, or … just Harry, and here he was expected to take on yet another adult responsibility. Sirius had never done these things. Harry had never even known that Sirius was Head of the Black family, not really. So why did he need to do them? All he had wanted was a chance to say goodbye to Remus. A chance to have a funeral for someone he could pretend was family. Why did he need to become the Head of House for not only the Potter family but also the Blacks, only one of which he loved well enough to even call family?

But he had seen the wistful look in Mrs Tonks eyes, when he mentioned welcoming her, and her daughter, back into the Black family. It seemed such a little thing to do to give Mrs Tonks a measure of peace. She had lost her husband, and her daughter, and had been disowned from her own family. Besides, welcoming the two of them back would create yet another link with his godson, and in a way with Remus. Welcoming them into the Black family would give him back a family of sorts as well. And there was very little he would not do for that.

He didn’t suppose it was such a big thing to become Head of a family, since there were so few people in the family. In the Potter family, it was only himself. And in the Black family, it would be Mrs Tonks, who was more than competent enough to look after herself, and Teddy, who he was responsible for anyway.

So, for Remus, for Tonks, for Mrs Tonks, for little Teddy, and to help Sirius play one last prank on the Ancient and Noble House of Black, Harry would do what was required.

“Okay, first to Grimmauld Place, then if it isn’t there, to the Headmaster’s office. Why not just ask at the Ministry?”

“Have you been paying attention to what is happening at the Ministry these days?” Mrs Tonks asked him with a wry quirk to her lips.

“Oh. I suppose I’d just as soon let them get on with it,” Harry said, remembering the chaos Hermione described. “Grimmauld Place it is, then.”
Accepting Black

May 5, 1998

The Floo connection to the kitchen at Grimmauld place had never been closed. Part of that, Harry supposed, was the Fidelius Charm. If the Floo Network Office didn’t know the Floo connection existed, they could not shut it down. That, and Voldemort’s ministry probably wanted to catch someone trying to travel there by Floo powder. They could not shut down what they could not find, but they did have a watch on the Floo Network, and would have been happy to trap the trio if they had used the Floo. Harry was just as glad it had never been closed; he did not think a request to open a Floo connection to a building that was not currently in use would be high on their priorities, as busy as they were.

Enterim, Grimmauld Place through the Floo evoked memories, most of which Harry would just as soon not deal with. Memories of Sirius, of Dumbledore leading Order meetings, of Mrs Weasley cooking for the whole bunch of them, of Snape spitting vitriol every time he saw Harry. He tottered for a moment, dizzy from the Floo, then stepped aside for Mrs Tonks to come through, hoping that there was not some aspect of being a secret keeper that was unknown to him and would prevent her from getting through the wards.

She arrived successfully, to Harry’s relief.

“Oh, my. I have not seen this place for many years. It does look a little the worse for wear. People were living here?” she asked Harry with some disbelief.

“It was more a place to have meetings than a home. But yes, those who needed to live here did so.
For some of us, it was too dangerous to live in more welcoming surroundings.” He could not quite repress the bitterness in his voice. He avoided having to see the gentle look on Mrs Tonks’ face when a small, ugly creature launched itself at Harry’s belly.

“Master! Master has come back! Kind Master has returned!”

Mrs Tonks gave an astonished look at the small being. “Kreacher? That is Kreacher? What did you do to him?”

“Me? Nothing!”

“He was absolutely devoted to my aunt, and-- not so much to those who did not follow her views. You must have done something.”

“Oh, that.” Harry looked down, slightly embarrassed. Dumbledore had been right: Kreacher’s behaviour was a result of how he was treated. He didn’t like to think of the end results of his – and Sirius’ – behaviour toward the house elf. “I gave him something that belonged to Regulus. It was important to him.”

Extricating himself from Kreacher’s grip with a careful pat on the house elf’s shoulder, Harry stepped off the wide hearthstone flooring and continued into the kitchen, more out of habit from all the time the kitchen table had been the centre of the Order’s activities than any expectation that what they sought would be there.


“Shi—ummm, blast. Sorry, I forgot about that.” Turning toward the spectre, he whispered “I did not kill you.” The phantom exploded. For a moment, Harry wondered what Snape would have felt when he came and ransacked the house. He could not have said the phrase, not truthfully. And to lie about it… given what Harry now knew, he wondered if Snape could have spoken that lie. It was all too complicated. Between Dumbledore and Snape, Harry had been helped, hurt, praised and belittled, but worst of all, he had been used. He couldn’t think about it right then, maybe never.

“Harry, where do you plan to live once the Hogwarts repair is completed?” Andromeda Tonks’ question woke him to his surroundings.
“I hadn’t thought that far out. All I could focus on was Voldemort.” Harry was pleased to see Mrs Tonks did not flinch.

“Would you live here? If it were cleaned and made liveable?”

“Kreacher cleaned up the place really well last time we were here. And he’s a pretty decent cook,” Harry told her. “But I’m not sure I’m ready to live in Sirius’ house.” Everywhere he turned there was one more thing to consider, one more thing to take care of. Is this what being an adult was like? Suddenly, he missed his time at Hogwarts. He never got to finish. He wasn’t ready to give up the only home he had ever known, especially after missing the entire last year. He wasn’t ready to face all these decisions.

Kreacher hurried over. “Master? Kreacher is able to be making food for Master. Is Master needing lunch?”

“Not right now, Kreacher. I'm here looking for something, a piece of parchment or a scroll that Sirius would've spent time working on.”

“Oh! Kreacher sees Master Sirius, the bad boy who was never good to his mother, working, working many days on a parchment. Master Sirius wrote on many parchments. Kreacher sees him tearing and burning parchments and writing again, until Master Sirius had just one. And the bad Master Sirius used his wand on it.”

“That sounds like it.” Mrs Tonks commented.

‘Kreacher, do you know where he put it?’

The house elf wailed. “It is gone! Kreacher has failed Master Harry!” He looked as if he was about to start banging his head against the fireplace from which they had just emerged.

Mrs Black’s portrait in the entry hall hadn’t awakened yet, but if Kreacher kept up like this, it wouldn’t be long. Harry shuddered at the thought. “Shhhh, Kreacher, please don’t hurt yourself. Just tell me what happened.”

Kreacher turned from the wall. “Master Sirius put it away. Master Sirius was being clever; he hid it behind a board in the Master’s room. Kreacher saw him. Master Sirius cast a spell, and the
parchment rolled itself up, and he put it behind the wooden wall.”

Sirius’ room had been wainscoted. “It isn’t still there?” At Kreacher’s vigorous shaking of the head, Harry prodded, “where is it now? Did someone take it?”

“Master Sirius made a spell, and the gaps between the boards went away. But when Master Sirius left here...” Kreacher lowered his head. “Master Harry should punish Kreacher for what Kreacher did that day. Master Harry cared about Master Sirius and ...”

“Kreacher, stop.” Harry’s voice shook. He did not want to remember that his house elf, now so loyal, had once betrayed Sirius in the worst way possible. If Harry let himself remember, he was not sure he could be kind to Kreacher, and it was obvious that Kreacher needed kindness. “Just continue with the story.”

“Master is kind. The night Master Sirius was leaving this house, a few hours after he was leaving, the board was disappearing and the parchment was appearing and the parchment was flying over to the desk in Master Sirius’ room. Kreacher saw! But Kreacher did not touch. The next day the parchment was gone.”

“Who all were in the house the next day?” Mrs Tonks asked. Kreacher didn't respond.

“Kreacher, please answer the question,” Harry prodded.

“The white haired wizard, the long nosed wizard--”

“Snape was here that day?”

“Harry. We know Professor Dumbledore read it. It is reasonable to assume he was the one who found it, then. But now, we know he did not put it back.”

“So, to Hogwarts next?”

“Indeed.” She gave a firm nod.
After a quick face-only Floo call to the Headmistress’ office, the two of them stepped through the Floo with a burst of green flame. Harry landed on the far side with only a bit of a wobble. Okay, a stagger, but he had been able to catch himself. If he travelled by Floo several times a day, Harry wondered if eventually he’d be able to do it gracefully. Some witches and wizards seemed to do everything with grace and elegance. He remembered Lucius Malfoy’s cold grace. He could not imagine him ever stumbling out of a Floo. Was it a pureblood thing, or was it practice? By the end of today, with all the floo travel he’d be doing, he would get perhaps a glimmer of an answer to that.

“So, Mr Potter, how can I help you?” McGonagall rose from behind her desk as they stepped into the office.

“We’re looking for Sirius’ will.”

“What for? Harry, I assure you that the monies and properties that Sirius left you have been transferred to your name and vaults. What could you need from the will after all of this time?”

Andromeda Tonks drew herself up. “Minerva, I do not believe that is any of your business. The will should have been between Harry and Sirius Black, and whomever Sirius assigned as executor. But I will tell you that I am disappointed that Harry was never informed of his role and responsibilities as Head of the Black family.”

“What?”

“You didn’t know?” Mrs Tonks asked.

“It hadn’t occurred to me that he was. Albus told me that Sirius left everything to Harry, but I assumed that it was just Sirius’ property that he left, and not the Black estate!”

“Sirius was the last, living Black who had not married into another family. Even though my aunt burnt him off the family tree, he carried Black blood, and she did not complete the ritual of banishment, else he never would have been able to return to Grimmauld Place.”
McGonagall cast a cautious look at Harry.

“Yes, I told her. Voldemort is dead, most of the Death Eaters are in hiding or captured, and I sincerely doubt that she would suddenly decide to aid them after they have killed her family.” Harry looked over to Mrs Tonks, slightly abashed at himself for talking to the Headmistress that way, and also worried that he might have awakened her grief. Even though she had been very practical about the funerals, and about helping him, he could not help but think she had to be in pain. He knew he was. It was only managing all the practical details that kept him from going to his room in Gryffindor Tower, closing the bed curtains around him, and bawling. He didn’t want to bring up someone else’s pain, especially after she had been so kind and helpful, and had told him things that he needed to know.

But Andromeda Tonks looked at him not in grief and pain, but with a glimmer of pride in her eyes, as if to affirm that that was exactly the kind of strength she wanted from the wizard who would soon be head of her family.

“So you understand the need. The Black family has been without its Head for almost two years. While it has declined in the recent past, I will not see the family I was born to die out due to negligence.”

“I do see. But what do you expect Harry to do? And, if you will pardon me for being blunt, how does it concern you?”

“It’s the funerals,” Harry put in. “It started with the funerals. When I went to see her about Tonks and Remus, we ended up talking about quite a bit more, and –”

“Harry, there is no need go into detail. Suffice it to say, Harry has chosen to accept his role, and we need to clarify what is necessary. To do that, we need the document.” Mrs Tonks put in.

“I’m not sure where it is. I know Albus took it, but don’t know what he did afterward.”

“I believe I can help there,” a familiar voice added, causing Harry to startle. He had forgotten about the portrait.

“Albus. Good to see you again,” Mrs Tonks said, greeting him warmly. “I expect you have been listening in. I wonder why you kept such important information from Harry.”
“At the time, there were other considerations. It would not have been safe for young Harry to do what was required, and as the Black family had no ... active members, there did not seem to be much urgency. And the other obligations would have put him at risk.”

“Albus Dumbledore! You know very well you had no right to interfere with a Family matter!”

“He was underage, Andie. Who should I have consulted? Narcissa perhaps? Should I have checked with Bellatrix? They were the ones who had the right to make decisions at that point, and I was not going to let them, either of them, have that kind of leverage in Harry’s life.” Harry had rarely heard Dumbledore speak quite so vehemently, even when he was alive.

“You could have come to me.” Mrs Tonks spoke quietly.

“You will pardon my bluntness, Andie, but you were not exactly in a place to make decisions for the Black family, nor would the magics have allowed it, as Narcissa and Bellatrix were both alive, and Narcissa free. There was no overt suspicion on Narcissa Malfoy at that point. Her husband, yes, but Narcissa could have emerged blameless. And with Harry underage, she may well have ended up his guide. I could not take that chance.”

“It wasn’t your chance to take. You never did recognize the importance of family lines, Albus. Just because I supported you, Albus, does not mean I agree with all of your decisions. But that is two years in the past, and at the present, we have need of the will.”

“My boy, is this really what you want? Are you sure you don’t want to wait a bit before taking on such responsibility? I’m not sure you are fully aware of what this will involve.”

Harry gazed up into Dumbledore’s concerned eyes. “Then I’ll learn. It’s for Remus. And Tonks. And Teddy, my godson, who deserves to have all the advantages I can create for him.”

Dumbledore’s bright blue eyes started twinkling. Harry was not sure how paint on canvas could twinkle, but there it was.

“I understand, Harry my boy. I suspect even I underestimated your ability to love.”
Harry groaned. Somehow Dumbledore made it sound altogether too simple. It was not simple. But Harry supposed that Dumbledore was right that it was because he cared that he was doing this.

Dumbledore continued. “It is in the Headmaster’s—excuse me, the Headmistress’ library. There is a book by P Foote. It appears to be about various types of dogs.”

Harry looked up at the Headmaster in surprise. Somehow the fact that the book was so appropriate made Harry feel warm inside. Dumbledore had apparently put quite a bit of thought into it.

“If you hold the book in your hands, and say the phrase “It's a dog's life,” it will open as a box instead of a book. The will is inside.”

The will was still there.

I, Sirius Black, of the House of Black, do hereby bequeath all that I own, including monies, personal possessions, and all real estate, including unplottable and otherwise hidden properties, to Harry James Potter.

Harry Potter is the son of my heart and my mind. With this, I wish to state my intent, of heart and soul and magic, that the world should treat him as my son from this day forward. Should he wish to accept this, he may find the way home.

I give him all my love.

Sirius Orion Black

“Kreacher said it took him several days to write this.” Harry commented, wonderingly.

“He wrote the important things.”

Harry swallowed. Sirius had always made it clear that he loved Harry, from the first time they met. He said he thought of him as a son, but for him to actually offer to make it real was knowledge Harry would hold close to his heart.
“He wrote it as a scion of the house of Black,” Mrs Tonks commented, “which means, when he gives you all that he owns, he includes the Black heritage. So that is now confirmed. And he made it clear that he is magically claiming you as a son.”

“How could he do that? I mean, wouldn’t I have to be descended from the Black family?”

Dumbledore’s portrait interjected at that point. “Your father’s father married a Black, Harry. You and Sirius are second cousins through his mother, and third cousins through his father.”

“You and I are second cousins as well.” Mrs Tonks added.

It had never occurred to Harry that he had family other than the Dursleys, and they didn’t count. He had actual blood family, through his father. He sank onto the cushioned chair.

“Sirius didn’t say how to accept the Black Heritage.”

“He used the word home.”

“That wouldn’t have been Grimmauld Place.” Harry mused aloud. “He never thought of that place as home.”

“It was not the Black home. Orion and Walpurga lived there, but Arcturus, who was the last Head of the Black family, lived at the Black Estate. That is the centre of the family.”

“Mrs Black wasn’t the Head? Her portrait certainly acts as if she was.”

“No. While she was born a Black, and married one as well, it was Uncle Orion who was in the primary line. And his father outlived him.”

“So, we have to go to the Black Estate? Do you know where it is?”
“I do. But it is more than that. See this mark, right after the word home?”

Harry looked at the parchment. He hadn’t taken Ancient Runes, but he could recognize it as one. “Did Sirius take Ancient Runes? He didn’t seem the type.”

“He was very bright, without even trying. But he would not have had to take any classes to know this rune. Any Black would know what it is, and where it is. And this over here tells you what to do.” She pointed to a splotch of what looked like brown paint, flecking off the parchment.

McGonagall stared at it. “Sirius would never—“

“He would and he did,” Mrs Tonks replied shortly. “And you can keep your prejudices out of this discussion.”

The Black Estate

May 5, 1998

After a silent walk through the corridors of Hogwarts, including a couple of detours around debris and blocked passages, and across the grass and past the edge of the Apparition wards, Mrs Tonks took Harry by the shoulders, took a moment to get ready, and then Harry experienced the now familiar sensation feeling of being squeezed through a narrow tube. The next thing he knew, they were in an open field, bright with spring green. He took several deep breaths to try to quell the nausea, and after a few moments, turned in a slow circle to look around. The ground was mostly flat, with only the occasional hill. Over to the west was a wooded area, perhaps even a forest.

The fields appeared to stretch into the distance in the other three directions, and Harry wondered if they had arrived in the right place.
“Come here. We have to get through the wards first. She drew him over to stand on a circle of black soil surrounded by a low brick border. The weeds that grew everywhere else did not grow inside the circle. Taking a knife, she pricked a finger, and let her blood drip onto a stone on the other side of the circle from where they entered. Harry flashed back to Dumbledore, smearing his blood on the walls of the cavern where the fake Horcrux had been kept. He shuddered.

“It’s just for recognition, Harry. Don’t let other people’s prejudices get in your way. My blood will work for the first part. I may not be Black in name at present, but I was born so, and am Black in blood. You need to say the next part: ‘Toujours Pur. Credo.’ Mean it, even if you have to redefine what it means to you,” she told him.

Harry remembered what the words meant. He was not sure if he wanted to claim belief in that saying. Redefine it. Always Pure. He had rid himself of the taint of Voldemort’s soul. That was a purity he could believe in. He said the words fervently.

The air shimmered as if it were much hotter than an early day in May, and suddenly, in the near distance, a house appeared out of the rippling haze.

Harry was not sure if the structure should be called a house, a mansion, or what, but whatever it was, it was dilapidated and overgrown with vines.

“Those were grape vines. England is a bit far north for the best grapes, but with just a touch of magical attention, they could produce passable wine. With a bit more magic, the wine made a good base for several potions. It was nothing the Blacks would serve, of course, but it had its uses.”

They made their way through the overgrown field, and then through the overgrown courtyard.

As they reached the porch, Mrs Tonks brushed her fingers down the left side of the door, and gestured to Harry to knock. He did, wondering why he was knocking on the door of an empty house, especially one that was supposed to be his, which still boggled his mind.

The door clicked, and Mrs Tonks reached with the still blood-tipped finger, and pushed open the door.

The air smelled stale, as if the windows had not been opened in years, which was probably the case. Sheets of cloth were draped over furniture, and everything was very still. Harry felt like an intruder.
“Guests would come in through here, or through the Floo over there.” She gestured toward a huge, marble-lined stone fireplace. “Over that way is the dining room, and there was the men’s study.” She led him further in, and there was a parlour with faded lilac walls and green-hued tapestries and rug. There was also a huge stairway toward the middle of the room, a bit off to the left, which arched in a slow half-circle. “Upstairs is the master suite, guest rooms, and so on. There is another staircase in the back of the upstairs hall that leads downstairs again to one of the Black libraries, and another study.

Harry just looked around. The house was huge, but all he could think of was how much time it would take to clean. He wondered if they had house elves. Probably.

“When I was a little girl, my Great Uncle Arcturus was head of the Black family. He and Aunt Melania hosted the family gatherings. I was here for Bella’s Coming of Age. Of course, by the time Narcissa had hers, I had already been disowned.”

“What about yours?”

“That was the year they found out about Ted. It was not a pleasant year.”

“Oh.” Harry didn’t push. “So, what do I have to do here?”

“You accomplished the first test already. The House has accepted you as a member of the Black family. But to become Head, you will have to go deeper. The glyph Sirius drew tells us the next part. It symbolizes the core of the Black magics. Every member of the Black family is required to study it. We are brought to touch the glyph at birth, we begin studying its meanings at age seven, and learn of it within our own magics as soon as we are able to do so.

“You would not normally be asked to accept the Family until you had become familiar with the meanings of the glyph. As it is, the meanings will most likely flood you when you accept the family. But you will still need understanding. If you will allow it, I will undertake to guide you as you learn and understand what it is to be a Black.”

Harry thought of Sirius’ mother. Mrs Tonks had said she was insane. But so many people had said the Black family was irredeemably dark that he couldn’t believe it was just the one person. Mrs Tonks had been thrown out of the family, after all. Questions were tumbling over themselves in his mind, trying to get past his tongue. “I don’t know how to ask you this... Were you able to learn what I need to know before...?”
“It is required to learn it before coming of age. I did indeed learn what you need.”

“And will it be something I can... tolerate? It won’t change me, will it? I mean, I loved Sirius, and you and Tonks are both good people, but you were all cast out. If the Black family is the type to disown you, do I even want to take in its magics?”

“I can’t make that decision for you. Of course it will change you. All magic changes you.” Mrs Tonks stopped. She ran a fingertip along the back of a sofa, shaking off the dust. Turning to look out the window, she spoke, choosing her words carefully.

“The family magics themselves are neutral, Harry. They are about protecting the family, about the focus and drive of the family members. The flavour that drive takes on is up to the individual, and tradition in the Black family has certainly been dark, but the core of Black is learning. It is why the Black libraries are the best you’ll find.” She looked back toward Harry. “I won’t pretend that the Black family is anything other than a dark family. There will be parts of the Black heritage that you will find repugnant, I am sure. There will be parts of the magic you take in that you will have to transform before you feel comfortable with it. But the Black family once valued learning for its own sake, dark or light.

“Once you are the head of the Black family, you will be able to influence the interpretation of the glyph and our family motto. As head of the family, you will choose our direction. I believe I can trust your direction.” Her eyes grew stern. “I will also trust you to learn what it is to be Black before you start trying to change it. That will mean keeping an open mind about things you may have been trained to reject. Minerva McGonagall is not the only Hogwarts professor with her prejudices.”

“Are you talking about dark magic?”

“I am talking about learning about something before you accept or reject it. As head of the family, I will trust you to do your best by our family. Although I was disowned, I never stopped being a Black. The core values are written into my soul. I would hope that before you change our course, you learn about what you are changing.”

Harry took that in. He never liked it when people judged him, whether it was based on his ability to talk to snakes, or the whole Boy Who Lived thing. But dark magic had robbed him of his family and his childhood.

“Okay,” he said slowly. “I’ll think about it.” After a moment he continued, “What was Professor
Mrs Tonks lifted one of the cloth coverings that draped over a sofa and folded it. She cast a quick spell and the remaining dust disappeared from the sofa, revealing it to be a soft, pale green with deep purple throw pillows, and she sat, still holding the cloth, and gestured for Harry to do likewise.

“Sirius placed a drop of blood on his will. Family magics are private, Harry, but the will has what is necessary. The glyph gives one piece of information. The blood gives another.”

“So to become head of the Black Family, I have to…”

“Blood calls to blood, Harry. The Heartroom will make it clear by its configuration what you are supposed to do. But the blood on the will indicates that you will have to sacrifice some of your own. Enough for you to be recognized as carrying Black blood.”

Harry gulped, remembering the night Voldemort was brought back. The memory of being helpless, tied to a stone in the cemetery, threatened to overcome him. He took a deep breath. Why would Sirius do that to him? He knew what Harry had been through.

Mrs Tonks must have seen his face. “It is the way the Blacks have always done rituals of this import,” she said gently.

“How much blood?”

“That depends on what Sirius wanted for you and for the family. I expect the family magics will also have their say. I doubt Sirius would have wanted to burden you with six drops. Others amounts seem to apply. Nine or ten drops seem likely. Eight is possible.”

Harry stared at her.

“Did you never take Arithmancy?” Harry shook his head. “Did you ever study even the basic energy of numbers?”

“It wasn’t covered in any of my classes. Well, except for divination, but that never made much
“It should have been taught. It is one of the roots of magical theory, and has its influences everywhere: how many times you repeat a wand movement in an incantation, how many drops of something you add to a potion for a given effect. What is Hogwarts teaching these days?”

At least she didn’t blame him for not knowing, Harry thought. Hermione would know this. Harry grinned. She would have five books for him to read about it, if he asked. Which he might do, come to think of it.

“This is simplification, but it will give you a sense of it. One is unity and individuality, two is dualism, balance and partnership, three is communication, four is stability or creation, five is action and life, six is returning, reaction, responsibility, seven is thought and the powers of mind. Eight is sacrifice for the sake of power, as well as the paradox of change and constancy which you get in cycles; this also brings power. Nine is interconnection and transformation. Ten is rebirth. And of course nought is everything and nothing. The higher numbers create more complicated magics, but usually, simpler is better. The number of drops you sacrifice will influence the outcome, it will influence your role as the head of the family.”

Drops, Harry thought. He could deal with drops. “So how will I know…?”

“One drop at a time. You’ll know.”

Harry hoped she knew what she was talking about. He felt woefully underprepared. He just wanted to make sure Remus had a memorial, and that it was with Tonks. They were married. It was right. How could it go from something so simple to something so overwhelming? Learning about a family history, and not even the Potter family history but another one, which he was somehow related to, and was supposed to take over, to somehow lead. It didn’t make any sense. How could he be in charge of Andromeda Tonks? She was so self-assured, and not in the cold way that some purebloods were, but like she knew exactly who she was.

“Does it really matter to you? I mean, this is the family that threw you out.”

“I’m a Black, Harry. On the tapestry or not, I belong.” She inhaled deeply.

“When I married Ted, I married into a Muggle family. I know what Muggles have to offer, their unique ways of looking at things. But I am a Witch. Ted’s family was delightful, but the fact remains
they had no magical heritage. Harry, the feel of that magic uniting us during family ceremonies was one of the hardest things to give up when I chose Ted.”

She turned to face him, watching him intently. “I miss that, Harry. The comfort, the presence of the Noble and Ancient Magic. You can make it a proud House again, Harry, but first you need to know it.”

Harry looked down at his trainers. They looked shabby against the thick, deep green rug, even as dust-covered as the room was. The place, though dilapidated, was clearly once grand, part of a long tradition. And while Mrs Tonks had said he was related to the family, it didn’t feel real to him. Did that mean he really was related to Teddy? And to Sirius?

It felt like Mrs Tonks had higher expectations than just taking on the name of Head of the Black family and making a few decisions in that role so that Remus and Tonks could be remembered together, at the Black estate. Suddenly he felt like he had when he became aware of the expectations the wizarding world had of the “Boy Who Lived.” “I’m not trained in any of this. What if I make a mistake?”

Mrs Tonks looked at him with an expression he was not sure how to interpret. “No one expects perfection from you, Harry,” she said softly.

“Tell that to the Prophet.”

“Be that as it may, I don’t expect perfection. I just expect you to learn, and make your decisions with understanding. I trust your integrity for the rest.”

He doubted he would ever grow into these grand rooms. He was unsure whether he wanted to integrate the Family Black into his soul, after having just shed a dark soul. But for every Bellatrix in this family, there was a Sirius, or a Tonks. And he had said he would. Sirius had wanted him to do it. Mrs Tonks seemed to want this. It was for family.

Harry stood. “What do I do?”

“First we have to find the Heartroom.”

“Find it? Haven’t you been there before?”
“The way into the Heartroom changes.”

“Then how do we find it?”

“Come by the fireplace.” Mrs Tonks gestured to a spot on the floor. It didn’t look any different, but he moved to stand where she indicated. “Place your hand here, and think of your need to know the Black family. The room may not let me in. This is your task, as a candidate for Head of the family. Look for the glyph. Remember that acceptance goes both ways.”

Harry did as she directed, placing his hand on the smooth stone of the mantle. There was a slight bump where he placed his hand, and when he lifted his hand to look, he saw something that looked a little like the glyph on Sirius’ will, only incomplete. He gazed at it for a moment, and then replaced his hand. He thought of Sirius, of how much time he had missed, how many opportunities he had lost to get to know his godfather better. He thought of Tonks. He thought of a family he was related to, which he only knew from the outside.

The stone under his hand began to warm, and he could feel the bump writhing underneath his fingers. He imagined a hidden door opening, like a trick bookcase in a mystery story.

A tug behind his navel warned him, and suddenly he was in pitch darkness.

He jerked his wand from his robe pocket, berating himself for letting his guard down. Moody would have been disappointed. Just because Voldemort was dead, and most of his Death Eaters captured, didn’t mean they all were.

He couldn’t hear anything. He couldn’t see anything. He held himself very still and listened. The silence was absolute. No sound of breathing. His heart beat so quickly, he could feel his body shaking with its thrum.

“Mrs Tonks?” he whispered. No answer. Harry deliberately slowed his breathing back to something approximating normal.

“Lumos.” The darkness didn’t recede.
“LUMOS!” Nothing.

A tickling sensation pushed against his thoughts. ‘Protego!’ He thought the word automatically, falling back on habit. The sensation pushed deeper, making his hair itch. Or his skin. Or his brain. It felt like Legilimency, but bore as much similarity to Snape’s attacks as feathers did to bludgers.

“Acceptance goes both ways.” Mrs Tonks’ final words rang in his mind. He couldn’t think she had betrayed him. He wouldn’t think that of her. His stomach clenched in pain at the thought. Other people he had trusted had turned on him, but what did she have to gain? He was trying to get to the Black family Heartroom… and he ended up here. Perhaps he was where he was supposed to be.

Did he really expect the Black family ritual for accepting a new Head of the family to be tame? This was for Sirius, for Remus, for all the people he’d lost. This was to give back. He could do this for them.

Acceptance. He opened his mind.

Past thoughts and actions washed through him. His first memories, after that brief, painful glimpse of his mother’s last moments, was of bewildered hurt, when the Dursleys had not cared for him as they had Dudley. The hurt was buried under years of bitterness toward them, but underlying that was a child’s insistence that ‘family shouldn’t be that way.’ He re-experienced the joy at discovering the wizarding world. Events throughout his time at Hogwarts, and how he felt about various people.

There was prodding at his feelings toward Sirius: complicated, guilt at his death, anger at the man for making the wrong decisions, joy in knowing him. The prodding moved on and evoked his feelings about Malfoy, not so complicated, fury at what he had done, letting Death Eaters into Hogwarts, the memory of him stomping on Harry’s face in the Hogwart Express, amusement at the ferret incident. Yet... Malfoy had not been able to kill Dumbledore. Dumbledore had wanted to give him a chance. He remembered the fierce joy at beating Malfoy to the snitch, and the bitterness every time Snape had ignored Malfoy’s acts to sabotage Harry’s potions, taking points from Gryffindor. He remembered Malfoy’s face in the bathroom, crying. Perhaps Malfoy was more complicated than he thought.

Images of Narcissa Malfoy washed through his mind, one with her face twisted, as if she smelt something rotten, another with her begging for information on her son, repaying that information by lying to Voldemort.

He was drenched in his memories of the Weasleys, of his craving for family, tempered by his awareness that he was welcome, but not truly needed. He remembered the time spent at the Burrow,
and how glad he was when Mrs Weasley gave him tasks just like she did Ron and Ginny. His mind flowed through images of weeding the garden, not just because it gave him something to do with his hands, while his mind went blank, but also because it was something he could do for the Weasleys, who had done so much for him. He felt his motivations being evaluated, perhaps judged.

When the few interactions he shared with Mrs Tonks flowed through his mind, he realized he didn’t know her well. He had asked her if she wanted to be part of the Black family again because it was the right thing to do. She had lost people. She had lost all of her family, just like he had. But he could give a family back to her. He hoped she valued it as he did.

He was amazed at her strength, that she was here with him, instead of lost in grief for her daughter. He wondered how many times she had feared for Tonks’ life, in her time as an Auror. How did she do it? In her position he’d be raging. He remembered how he had been when Sirius died. It still hurt, but he no longer needed to lash out at everyone for daring to have sympathy. He knew he should be feeling something about Remus, about Fred, about so many others, but it was as if his capacity to grieve had been numbed. There was just too much. He just had to keep moving. Remus needed a funeral, Tonks needed to be by his side, at least in memory. Teddy needed… What Teddy really needed, he would never have. He had lost his parents, and there wasn’t anything anyone could do about that. But Harry could make sure that Teddy never lacked for a family that cared for him.

He hadn’t noticed as torches started glowing on the walls while he was caught in his memories. When the flow of images subsided, he found he had closed his eyes and opened them, wondering how he could have let himself close them in an unfamiliar place. The dim light revealed a small room. There was no door, no window.

He looked around the room. The entire room, the walls, the floor, was made of stone. On one side, a stone chair was carved into a pillar. On another, a shallow stone basin extended from the wall. The bottom of it was stained dark. Above that was the glyph from Sirius’ will.

He reached over to trace his fingers along the shape of the glyph, wondering what Mrs Tonks had meant about studying its meanings. After he did so, he realized how incredibly stupid it was to touch it. The percentage of things at 12 Grimmauld Place that had been booby trapped, cursed, or otherwise made dangerous had been rather high. He could not imagine who would want to live like that. But if Mrs Tonks was right, he was in the very core of the Black Family. It was either safer because of that, or infinitely more dangerous. When nothing seemed to happen to him, he reached out to touch it again. He could feel the curves of it, the edge where the carving came to a peak, the bumps and valleys. It was about the size of his hand, such that he could lay his hand over it and completely cover it, but just. It felt like stone, it looked like stone, but there was something about it that felt alive. Unless he was imagining it.

He sat in the stone chair. It was surprisingly comfortable, shaped to him, but not in such a way that he’d fall asleep. If he sat against it, his back remained erect, and his eyes naturally turned toward the
glyph. The room seemed smaller than it had when he first saw it. He could see the inside of the basin. The light above the glyph and basin flared higher, and he could see the flecks of brown that had accumulated in the bottom, and the brown stain that rose about a quarter of the way up the shallow bowl.

It became real to him why McGonagall had been so upset. He shivered as his mind flashed back to the cemetery after the last task of the Triwizard Tournament. The last time his blood had been used in a ritual, it had not turned out well for him. Or for Cedric. Blood magic was dark magic. The memory of that night pulsed in his mind, the high thin sound of Voldemort’s voice, Cedric dropping in a flash of green light, the rough stone of the grave marker they had bound him to scraping against his back as Wormtail sliced his arm open. That was blood magic.

Remus’ memorial could be somewhere else, Harry thought frantically. Tonks had never liked the Black Mausoleum—Mrs Tonks had confirmed it. Only… Andromeda Tonks had been cast out. She was alive, and deserved her heritage. Teddy deserved to know all of his past. *Sirius would not choose anything that would harm him.*

He took his wand, held his left hand over the basin, struggling to keep it from shaking. He took a deep breath, and another, until his wand was still as well. Carefully casting a cutting charm against the palm of his hand, he squeezed a few drops into the basin. He counted them: one, two, three...

When he reached nine, the glyph flared, and Harry felt as if he had been struck by lightning.

He could feel a current running through him, connected to the glyph, connecting outwards. Each time the current completed a link to something, there was a responding current, a sense of satisfaction, of wholeness. Parts of him were reaching, reaching, looking for an answer that never came. His veins, his nerves, all burned with an aliveness he had never experienced before.

Spots flashed in his vision, to be replaced by an image. It looked a little like the tapestry of the Black family tree, only there were no names, just flashes of light, patterns of energy. There were holes in the fabric, and he could see tendrils of energy reaching into the holes, writhing, searching. Crude stitching had been sewn around the holes, blocking some of the tendrils, but others got through.

It hurt. It felt as if he was draining away into the holes. He pulled back, and the pain diminished, but there was still the yearning to complete the fabric.

Knowledge, images flashed by too fast to comprehend. He felt surrounded by people, some familiar, some who felt as if they should be. He felt anchored, connected to a past so old it was as if he was rooted in living stone.
And suddenly, something changed, like a lock shot home, like catching a snitch. It felt like when he had successfully cast a fully formed Patronus the first time, when all the elements came together. A final burst of magic shot through him like electricity, and then it was over. Harry reeled. He realized he had come to his feet when the magic coursed through him, but his legs would no longer support him, and he collapsed back into the stone chair. The room was fully lit, and where there had been plain stone walls, Harry could see lines of energy forming patterns on the stone. As he rested, they dimmed, darkened.

What had happened to Andromeda? Mrs Tonks, he corrected himself, although an echo inside him called her cousin. Andromeda Black Tonks. She was part of his family. It finally felt real. With that thought, one of the rips inside him began to knit itself back together, and he felt just a little more complete.

The room suddenly got brighter, as a door that had not been there swung open. The light hurt his eyes. Andr—Mrs Tonks’ silhouette, glowing around the edges from the light behind her, resolved into her face and form as she entered the dimly lit room.

“How do you feel, Harry?”

After all that had happened, he expected to feel awful. He took stock. He didn’t hurt. Not physically, at least. “Fine. Only—full. Top-heavy. He stood up, and wobbled a moment, before the sense of being connected re-established. He belonged here. He could feel—he reached out across the connections, feeling the land around him, and sparks—he sat down again.

“Careful. Give yourself time to adjust.”

“I feel—larger. Or smaller. Like I’m part of something.”

Mrs Tonks’ face took on a wistful expression for just a moment, so quick he might have missed it.

“That’s what you were talking about, isn’t it? It’s the Black magical heritage.”
She nodded. “I think that’s all for today. Give yourself time.”

“But, the estate. The funeral.”

She joined Harry in the room. “I can take care of all of that, Harry. Your Remus Lupin will be remembered. Nymphadora will get what she needs to come home.” Harry’s eyes were on hers when she spoke. He saw it then. A moment of desolation. She had lost her daughter. She was doing all of this, planning funerals, helping Harry. He didn’t know how she kept going. But she took a deep breath and patted him on the shoulder.

She smiled, gently. “It will all work out. It will be easier for me, however, if you accept me back into the family now, and delegate me to work on your behalf, for what needs to be done.”

“What do—” Even as he began to form the words, he knew. He felt the hole where Andromeda Black should be. It was already mostly repaired. He reached through it. He could feel her, almost see her in flickering lights. “I need…”

“One drop each.” She took the same knife that she had used before, and nicked her palm, allowing one drop into the basin. The flickers that he recognized as Andromeda Black became clearer. He reached. She cleaned the knife and handed it to him. A small cut, a single drop, and with a flash, the hole in his mind was smooth cloth. She was part of the fabric.

Harry realized he had closed his eyes, and reopened them. The expression on Andromeda Black Tonks’ face was something he would remember for a long time.

As Harry followed Andromeda Tonks out of the Black mansion, she pointed out the huge old mausoleum. Harry distantly nodded his agreement that Tonks would not want to be interred there. It was difficult to pay attention to her words, or her hand as she gracefully indicated each feature of the estate that they passed. The vines cried to be pruned, and the garden wanted to be weeded, and there was an echo in the back of his mind droning on with flickers of parchment filled with numbers. The wards were weak in spots, and he found himself turning toward one of the weakened spots. Just a little of his magic, just link to the ward and send a little of his magic to shore up--

“Harry? Harry!” Andromeda Tonks called from further away than she should be. How’d she get way over there? “I should have realized. Harry, come here.” Her voice was soft and calm, as if she
were calling a skittish kitten. She reached for him. It was okay, she was part of him, so it was okay. He let her take his hand and pull him toward a corner of the house, where the black crest had been carved in bas relief. “Harry, I want you to look at the crest.” It was a pretty crest. It was his. He felt a sudden burst of warmth shining through him. He turned to smile at Andromeda. “No, Harry, keep your eyes on the crest. Feel how strong it is. Feel how old it is, how deep it reaches into the past.”

She was right. It was strong. The Black family was old.

“Now, Harry, I want you to remember your parents. What are their names?”

“James and Lily Potter.”

“Can you picture them?”

Their images, as he had seen them in the Mirror of Erised, as he had seen them as they walked with him into the forest, became clearer in his mind. And suddenly, he was alone in his mind. He was Harry Potter. He looked at Mrs Tonks, aghast.

“I’d forgotten about that. I deeply apologize, Harry.”

“What was that?”

“When you connect to the Black family magics, the needs of the family can become overwhelming. If your will isn’t strong enough, you can start to live for the needs of the family, instead of your own desires. Each of us had to establish our own will at some point while we were growing up. Before that point, our magic is not mature enough to connect with the family magics that strongly, but as our magic strengthens, so does our will. It usually happens toward the end of our time at Hogwarts that we establish ourselves as adults. That is why the age of adulthood in the magical world is at seventeen. That is when we have enough will to choose our own way, and not abide by either the will of another individual or another family.”

“I can think of several people that did not have the will to stand up for what was important. People who didn’t stand up to Voldemort, for example.”

“Were any of them Blacks?”
Harry thought. Sirius went against his own family to side with the light. Regulus resisted Voldemort even after being marked. Bella... Bella was just crazy, but she never wavered in that insanity.

“We learn to develop our own strength of mind early, as the Black family magic is one of the strongest of all of the families.”

“What would you have done if my will had not been strong enough?”

Andromeda’s sudden trill of laughter completely surprised Harry. “Harry, think of what you’ve done. Think of who you’ve fought. Do you think I had any reason to doubt your will? You were merely taken off guard. It’s been so long since I had to fight the will of the family, I did not think to warn you. I will endeavour to do better by you.”

Harry gave a lopsided grin in answer.

“We need to see the new mausoleum before we leave, if you are ready. Are you back in your head?”

Harry nodded. It almost sounded like he would need Occlumency just to keep his own mind. “Will this happen every time I come here?”

“No. As Head of the Family, you will always know what the family and the estate needs, but once you get used to it, and learn how to differentiate it from your own will and desire, it will merely be additional information for you to use. The Family should take your direction, not the other way around.”

“Oh.” Harry wasn’t sure he liked the sound of that any better. Family was about belonging, not controlling.

Andromeda must have seen the look on his face, because she added, “How that manifests will be based on your beliefs, Harry. I would not have asked to re-join the family if I didn’t trust you. I knew what it meant, even if you did not.”

Harry was not sure he wanted such trust. He did not think he had earned it, and unearned trust led to expectations that he would betray unaware. But Andromeda Tonks did not remind him of the readers
of the *Daily Prophet*. Her trust came from her own strength. He would... accept it. For now.

“So, there is the small Mausoleum. It was built by my Great Aunt Callidora, who married a Longbottom. When he died, her children were already out of the house, and she became estranged from her son. She decided to come back to the estate to live, but having lived at the Longbottoms, she could not bear the thought of the old Mausoleum, so here we are.

The building was beautiful. It was carved with vines on the outside. It was a bit overgrown, but once there had been a garden surrounding it. The flowers had all gone wild, and the new spring growth came through a mat of dead leaves and old stems. That could be fixed.

The inside was beautiful, full of sun and colour. “I think Tonks would be happy here. I hope Remus...”

“I got to know Remus quite well over the past year. He would go where Nymphadora is.”

Harry remembered the fight they had had, the last time he had seen Remus at Grimmauld Place. He wished...

“Remus fought to do what was right for Nymphadora, even when it wasn’t what she wanted or needed. At the end, he was by her side. I can’t imagine that he would not find a way to continue to be so.”

Harry nodded.

“So, if you agree, I will act in your stead, arranging the funeral and arranging for the Mausoleum to be put to rights?”

“Mrs Tonks, I couldn’t ask you to do—”

“Which is why I am offering. It needs to be done. We have both seen the death of our loved ones. I have done this before, out of necessity. I can do it again.”

Harry nodded.
“I’ll owl you with any questions or requests. Tomorrow or the next day. Wait—is there something special you want on Remus’ memorial plaque?” Harry thought about it, but felt too overwhelmed to come up with anything. He promised to think about it that night, and send her the information the next morning.

She nodded. “In the meantime, Harry, go and rest your mind.”

When they got outside of the wards, she Apparated them both back to Hogsmeade.

Chapter End Notes

THANKS:

Again and still: thanks to ivyingarden for all the help making this a better fic! She patiently helps me brainstorm (with some great ideas to throw into the cauldron), is fabulous with canon, has a knack for language, and keeps at me to "write write write!"

In chapter 10 and this chapter she went above and beyond, and role-played / helped write the dialogue between Andromeda and Harry.

Also, thanks to rosskpr , for beta work that is both meticulous and enthusiastic. She helped me catch several canon errors in addition to watching my grammar and asking plot flow questions, and her encouragement keeps me writing!

Any errors after the two of them have combed through the work are from the author not paying attention!

DISCLAIMER: Harry Potter, his friends, enemies, and the lovely world they live in all belong to J.K. Rowling. I play here.

FINAL NOTE: As always, reviews and critiques keep the creativity flowing! Let me know what you think!
May 5, 1998

The trip back to Hogwarts was uneventful. Harry could not believe how much the day had encompassed. It had felt like days of activity, but it had all happened in just over five hours: visiting Mrs Tonks, going to Grimmauld Place, returning to Hogwarts to talk with Dumbledore’s portrait and get the will, then going to the Black estate and somehow being accepted as head of the Black family, which Harry still had trouble coming to terms with, despite the thrum of connection that rooted him. Harry had returned way too late for lunch and too early for dinner. He changed out of his borrowed “visiting robes” and back into jeans and a t-shirt he had brought from the Weasley hand-me-down closet, then begged some food from the house elves in the Hogwarts kitchen.

He needed to think, and was too restless just to sit. The energy that had coursed through him at the Black family Heartroom had receded somewhat, but still made him too restless to do nothing. He returned to his work crew, asking for some work to keep his hands, or his wand, busy. They set him to sorting rock.

Two hours later, he was sweaty from the sun shining through the west-facing break in the wall, his back was sore from holding his arm just so for the wand movements necessary to shift the large stone blocks, and he thought he might be just a bit sunburnt, despite the fact he was working inside. He was no closer to sorting through his thoughts, but halfway through the pile of rock.

“Harry!”

Harry looked up to see Ginny standing in the doorway, her bright coppery hair glinting in the late afternoon sun.

“Gin! What are you doing here?”

“McGonagall told me how to find you. I had to ask Filch! Erm... can you take a break?”
Harry nodded. He flicked his wand several times, moving the fragments of stone blocks out of the path that had been cleared through the room.

“Can we go somewhere? Down by the lake?”

“Sure, Ginny.”

After he let the witch in charge of his crew know he was taking a break, he and Ginny walked in silence down to the lake. The afternoon had warmed, especially for spring, but the breezes felt nice after being inside four walls, even if one of the four had been open to the outside.

They reached a bit of grass that was not torn up from the battle, near the lake. Looking out toward the lake, if he was careful not to see the Quidditch pitch, the shattered-glass greenhouses, or the castle itself, or anywhere with torn turf, fallen stone, curse scars on the walls, ground, and trees… if he just looked out toward the lake, he could imagine that it had all never happened. He sat quietly, letting Hogwarts soak into him as he waited for Ginny to say something.

Ginny took a deep breath. Harry could hear the air of it as it moved.

“I need to talk with you about last year.”

Harry tensed. He had hoped this argument was over. It was moot. He had left her behind, for her own safety. For his own peace of mind.

“Ginny, I—” he started, but she interrupted.

“When you left, and we kind of broke up, we were both thinking it would only be until it was safe again.”

A strange wriggle started in the pit of his stomach. He couldn’t tell if it was excitement, fear, or something else entirely. *It was safe now. They could get back together.* Harry found himself wishing they were having this conversation in a few weeks. He wasn’t ready. He wanted her back. He had thought of her while on their search, watching her dot on the Marauder’s Map, imagining her playing Quidditch, studying, having a normal life at Hogwarts.
When the battle had come, his head was just too full to deal with anything else. Now the battle was over. But nothing felt the same. He had died, willingly, and he still hadn’t come to any conclusions about that. He did not know where he fit. Especially now, with the remnants of the Black family connections hovering just out of sight in his mind.

There were Family magics that belonged to the Blacks, that now belonged to him. That thought was beyond comprehension. Sorting rock had let it fade into the background, along with all the others that kept plaguing him. He had died! How could he become part of the world again? How could he hope to experience something as real as the grief he knew he should feel for those who had fallen? How could he be what Andromeda Tonks seemed to expect him to be?

His head was still too full. He was not ready to think about Ginny, or leaving her, or coming back. He wanted her back… just… not yet.

“Last year was hard,” Ginny interrupted his thoughts. “You don’t know how bad it was here. The Carrows were casting curses on us, in classes, in detention, sometimes other times as well. They had students learn dark curses by casting them on each other. The Slytherins would cast curses on other students as punishment for wrong thinking. Dark curses. Unforgivables.”

Harry couldn’t think of what to say.

“You left on your adventures, left me behind to be safe. Did you think we were safe here? The Carrion Bitch cast the Cruciatus eighteen times one morning in the great hall! I counted, wondering when she’d aim one at me. She did target Neville. Three times.”

Suddenly, Harry was completely present. “What? Didn’t anyone stop her?”

“I saw Sprout holding tightly to McGonagall’s wand hand. McGonagall looked fit to kill someone. Finally Snape came in. The bastard asked if she was done, as the screams were disturbing his appetite.”

Harry swallowed. He still didn’t know what to think about Snape. That was too complicated to deal with right now.

“Between the Carrows, Snape, and the junior Death Eaters, we were surrounded. And you weren’t here to fix it, like you always had been.”
“Ginny, there were things we had to do! If we hadn’t, Voldemort would still be alive!”

“I know that Harry! I need to tell you what it was like here.”

“Why? So I can feel worse that I wasn’t here to protect you?”

“Harry, stop. This isn’t about you. No one could have fixed it. We just needed to get through it. We had no hero, we just had each other. So we got to be the heroes ourselves. That’s what I was trying to say. I need you to understand what was going on, because there is something I have to tell you. But it won’t make sense unless you understand.”

“I understand bad times. There were bad times for us, too, Ginny.”

“I’m sure there were, Harry. But I don’t know, because I wasn’t there. You wouldn’t let me be there. And so I was here. When things got really bad, Neville got Dumbledore’s Army back together. We fought back.”

“Ginny, that was dangerous!”

“Of course it was dangerous. But it would have been even more dangerous to sit back and do nothing. Not physically, perhaps, although I doubt they would have been satisfied with mere compliance. They called my family Blood Traitors, Harry. Half-bloods, known Blood Traitors, we were targeted. Our only way to survive was to fight back. To reclaim our own truths. Like you did, with Umbridge.”

“Umbridge wasn’t a Death Eater!”

“Are you sure about that? The way she acted, she might as well have been working for You-Know-Who. The Carrows were like her, only unrestrained. And crazy. And the other teachers… Voldemort had the Ministry. He had the Hogwarts Board of Governors. We had all seen what happened to those who fought back. I could tell how frustrated McGonagall was, and Professor Sprout. Flitwick seemed even smaller than usual, like he wanted to be invisible. It’s surprising they let him continue to teach, what with the rumours of his non-human blood. Other of mixed-race were being killed, or sent away.

“It was horrible, Harry. We were always looking over our shoulders, not knowing who would report
us for some infraction, real or not. Detentions weren’t writing lines, or cleaning cauldrons. If you got
detention with one of the Carrows, you got cursed. Or whipped. Or whatever they felt like that day.
The other teachers were supposed to send their detentions to the Carrows, not that they always did.
McGonagall got caught once giving her own detention, and the Carrows … gave a demonstration. In
the Great Hall. Five students ended up in the hospital wing. There’s a flagellation curse, you see.
Madame Pomfrey had to use up an entire year’s supply of Skin Regrowth Potion. They made
McGonagall watch. Instructing her, they said, on the proper method of discipline to be used. They
offered her the chance to use the curse on a student, see, and she refused. So they got five students
instead, and bound them, and cursed them, over and over. We all knew it wasn’t the students they
were really punishing.

“So we figured, if we were getting detentions anyway, simply for our last names or our families,
we’d do something worthy of detention. We got together in the Room of Requirement and practiced
Defence, just in case you’d need us. We had to hide what we were doing, so we pranked the
teachers to distract them.”

“You what?”

“Neville had us writing graffiti: ‘Dumbledore’s Army, Still Recruiting’ and ‘We will outlast you.’
Luna had this habit of saying the most outlandish things, and getting away with it, because she
sounded so … so Luna. She could insult the professors in that distant way of hers, and make it sound
like she was saying the sky was green. But then her father published one thing too many in the
Quibbler and she disappeared at Christmas.

“It was awful. But the thing was, Harry, we were there for each other. Luna’s dad sent her potions
ingredients tucked in between treats when he sent care packages, and Padma and I brewed healing
potions. Whatever we could learn: bruise balm, nerve restorative potion, Skele-Grow, we brewed as
many of them as we could. Sometimes students were forbidden from going to see Madame Pomfrey.
The pain was supposed to be part of the lesson. She’d ‘accidentally’ leave her satchel full of potions
in a common room, after seeing to a student. She’d talk about what she would do for a student with a
particular ailment. And then a few of the students had to go into hiding, so we used the Room of
Requirement for that too, and snuck in food for them.”

“Sounds pretty bad.” Harry thought about all they had been through. He remembered what Neville
had looked like and tried to imagine Ginny like that, then decided he didn’t want to see her like that,
even in his imagination.

“The thing is, Harry, when things get that bad, you kind of have to rely on each other. Looking after
each other, we all got really close. Luna, Neville, and I, we were kind of the leaders… and…” Ginny
took a deep breath, looking out over the lake instead of at Harry. “Neville and I got close, Harry.”
It took a moment for that to make sense.

“We relied on each other. We healed each other. We were strong for each other.”

“You could rely on me, Ginny. You could always rely on me.”

“But Neville relied on me, too. He let me be there for him. I got to be the hero sometimes. We helped each other. Like you, and Ron, and Hermione help each other. Maybe even more so.

He couldn’t think of anything to say. Harry just looked at her, her bright shining, coppery hair, the light freckles on her face. The way her lips curved when she smiled. Or, as now, the intense look in her eyes, as she willed him to understand. Oh, he understood. He just wished he didn’t.

He had started to dare to hope for the future. Now that he had one. He could imagine a family with her. Not right away. He was too mixed up to do anything right away. But Ginny had said she’d wait. The Weasleys had always felt a bit like family, and ... Ron would have been his brother for real.

Ginny broke the silence. “Harry, you will always be a hero to me. You saved me. I will always love you for that, and for all that you are. But Neville let me save him. I didn’t realise how much I needed that until it happened.”

She stared at the horizon, where the sun was nearing the tops of the trees. “Are you okay, Harry? I mean... are you okay?”

“I dunno.”

“I just wanted to tell you before tomorrow. At the funeral. Neville’ll be there, and... I didn’t want to hide it from you. I love you, and I never want to lie to you.”

“Then why did you?” Harry knew his voice was harsh, and he didn’t know why he was asking it that way. There was a stabbing pain in his stomach, and it felt like he was going to throw up. “Why did you say you’d wait? And why didn’t you tell me when I was at the Burrow?”

“I tried to. But you looked so tired. And with George there, looking so empty... I just couldn’t.”
Harry, I’m so sorry.”

Harry stared at the water. It reflected the sky, only darker. The oranges building on the horizon looked like fire, turning the western edge of the water red and gold. Ginny sniffed. He turned to see her crying. He wanted to hold her, to make it better. Only it wouldn’t be better. “I—I’ll see you tomorrow.”

He got up and walked toward the Quidditch pitch. The deep furrows damaging the grass made him feel like he belonged. He didn’t turn to see what Ginny was doing. He couldn’t stand to see the face he had come to love crying because she didn’t love him enough.

Chapter End Notes

I really do not like character bashing. This is how I could imagine an ending for Harry and Ginny. I wanted something where both were in the right, and both were in the wrong. I never thought Ginny was right for Harry, but their relationship was hugely unresolved at the end of the last chapter of Deathly Hallows (ignoring the epilogue.) This was a conversation that needed to happen, for both of them.

Yes, this is a short chapter. The next chapter will be rather large.

Reviews are welcome and encouraged, as they encourage the author.

Thanks:

As always: thanks to my betas for this chapter, ivyingarden and rosskpr. Their help made these chapters better, between brainstorming, catching errors in grammar and canon, reviewing plot flow, and supplying encouragement to "write-write-write". Any errors after the two of them have combed through the work are from the author not paying attention!

Disclaimer:

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By the end of the next day, three more volunteers had been brought to the hospital wing with the same symptoms as Angus Thelbren. Poppy had searched her library for illnesses or curses with those symptoms, and quizzed the Mediwizards and Mediwitches on loan from St Mungo’s, but they were all as perplexed as she was.

She checked what spells those affected had been using, where they had been working, who they had been working with, and even what they had had to eat that day, but could find no pattern.

Mr Thelbren’s sores had continued to spread, and the other patients showed similar progression, despite her best efforts to slow their body processes. Poppy had consulted by fire call with a specialized Mediwitch at St Mungo’s that morning; the Mediwitch had referred her to a specialized diagnostic charm that tracked a patient’s magical core over time. It revealed that the dark shadows infecting his magic were likewise spreading.

Without a solid diagnosis, and contagion a real possibility, she had cleared one ward, despite the space limitations under which she worked, and moved all four patients to that ward, incanting a glowing contagion warning onto the door. With no guide as to what to do, she was forced to go back to basics.

She gathered together a strong pain relieving potion and an anti-nausea potion that would not interact with each other, and set them on the bedside table. If she could get his pain and nausea under control, she could begin to address the other, more severe issues. Before starting her tests, she cast a neutral shield between Mr Thelbren’s bed and the others in the ward, and then ran a few diagnostics on the man. Mr Thelbren’s sleeping body had cooled due to the slowed body processes, yet even that had not prevented the taint to his magic from starting to affect his organs. She had to act soon or it would be too late for him. Carefully, she unwove the spell that had slowed them, bringing him out of the artificially induced sleep.

He woke with a cry of pain and a burst of magic which rattled the windows and knocked one painting off the wall. It was not the guardian portrait, thankfully, just a seascape which emitted a
calming sound of surf (now slightly distorted). When she was fairly certain the burst would not continue, Poppy held his head and dosed him with the nausea inhibitor first, and then the pain potion when it looked like it would stay down.

The lesion on his cheek had blossomed into a magenta-stained bruise in just that short time. Dark lines were spreading out from the bruise, like roots seeking soil. Poppy cast a spell to retard the spread of toxins, but the dark lines only seemed to grow faster.

Looking at her with pleading eyes, Mr Thelbren whispered, “Help me.”

Poppy rewove the spells that slowed her patient’s disease, watching as he fell back under its effects, unconscious once again. She didn’t like feeling helpless. She had experienced that too often over the past year, and never wanted to feel it again.

She cleaned up from her attempt, and went to note the results in her files.

A knock at the open door interrupted her before she had made it halfway through the pile of notes on her desk.

“Poppy? Do you have a minute?” Minerva paused in the doorway, giving the Mediwitch the chance to invite her in or send her off.

She sighed, marked her progress on the parchment, and folded the protective cover over her notes. “How can I help, Minerva?” Even her voice was weary.

“I only wished to check how those volunteers are doing.”

"Minerva, I've never seen anything like it. It's like they've been cursed, but none of them were in the battle. It looks like dark magic, but I'm not enough of an expert in the field to know how to cure it. Hogwarts was always protected from the worst of it. Until this past year, that is. During which I was not allowed to do my job!” She emphasized the last three words with staccato precision.

"I know you did your best, given the circumstances. And don’t think I missed the potions you left in the common rooms... you are not a forgetful person. You did everything you could.” Minerva sighed, then gave a firm shake of her head. “That time is over, thanks to Mr Potter.” She said briskly. “Have you contacted St Mungo’s?”
"Of course. They say it's not a curse known to them. I can't think who else to ask."

“Albus had an extensive library. If you like, you could check in there to see if there is anything.”

The Suffering of Lucius Malfoy

May 7, 1998

Draco woke to the sound of his father dying.

Lucius’ breathing sounded like death rattling in his lungs, and he coughed so hard, that at the end of each paroxysm, it was as if the last bit of air was expelled, so that Draco strained to hear if he would draw breath again. When he finally gasped his next breath, the air in his lungs wheezed and gurgled.

Draco got up and padded over to his parents’ curtain-enclosed bed. It would be rude just to draw the curtains aside, so he paused as he touched the palm of his hand to the bland fabric. “Mother?” he called softly, so as not to wake her if she were asleep, although he doubted there would be much chance of that.

The curtains shifted to reveal his mother sitting with his father’s head in her lap. His face was red and blotchy, and he convulsed with another bout of coughing. He peered blearily at Draco and sneezed.

Draco was horrified. His father was clearly dying, and he had snot running out of his nose. He looked around – they had not been provided with clothes, so were left with what they were wearing that day. They slept in their underrobes, so as to keep their robes as smart as possible, and Draco could not remember what he had done with his handkerchief. Perhaps it was in his godfather’s rooms.

With a cringe, he went into the water closet and found some toilet paper. Shivering at the thought, he brought it to his mother, who gave it to his father without comment. The loud honking noise was something he never expected to hear from the man whose elegance he had so admired growing up. Such symptoms could be alleviated much more discretely – if they only had their wands!
His mother adjusted her husband’s head so she could stand, and went to open the wardrobe. “We need to get him to the Hospital Wing. Would you get the guard’s attention?” Her calm both infuriated him and reassured him. He did not feel calm, but, remembering how the guard had ignored him regarding his messages earlier, decided that could be put to use. It was plebeian, what he planned, but this was an emergency.

“Yes,” he told her. His mother closed the door behind him. He could make a commotion without disturbing his father more than was necessary. He pounded on the hallway door. They’d pay attention to him if he had to annoy them for the rest of the day.

“We need help here!” You contemptible morons, he thought. “My father is ill. He needs to go to the Hospital wing!” He pounded harder. Wait! Hadn’t Potter stolen one of their house elves? Dobbin or something? His father had ranted about the theft. If Potter was here, the elf might be. And Potter was just the type to be hanging around the school, basking in the adulation after the battle. Dobby! “Dobby!” he shouted. No one came. “Stupid house elf.”

He was about to renew his pounding, when the door opened.

“What do you want?” Irritation was clear in the Auror’s voice, but he kept his wand trained on Draco. He looked as if he wanted to use it. “This isn’t a hotel to cater to your whims, Death Eater.”

Draco swallowed his retort. He took a breath. “It’s my father. He’s ill. He could be dying!”

The Auror shrugged. Draco could just see in the Auror’s face what he was thinking. One less for Azkaban.

“He hasn’t been convicted of anything.” Draco said with a quiet intensity, although he feared that the upcoming trial would change the truth of that statement. For now, Draco needed every advantage to get his father what he needed. He feared that they would prefer his father die for lack of medical attention. “He didn’t even have his wand in the battle.” Lucius interrupted Draco with a paroxysm of coughing that could be heard, even through the door. It sounded like he couldn’t breathe at all. “Help him!” As the guard was about to close the door and turn away, Draco changed tactics. “He can’t very well go to his trial like that!”

The guard paused for a moment.

“Don’t you want him to be aware, when he goes to trial?” Draco swallowed. His voice was bitter
as he continued, “Don’t you want him to be fully aware of his humiliation? Don’t you want to see it? A Malfoy, to be tried like a common criminal?”

“That’s what he is!” the Auror hissed. “That’s what you all are! Oh, never fear, he’ll get his medical help. We don’t believe in torture, or withholding medical treatment. Not like you people did to my cousin, just because she was shopping in a shop owned by someone you people didn’t approve of. How would she have known? I can’t wait to see every one of you finally get what’s coming to you!”

The guard was shouting by the end, and another Auror ran up to check on the disturbance. At her inquiry, the guard muttered something that sounded insulting, but seemed to have gotten the message across. Either that, or Lucius’ well-timed bout of coughing just as his mother, now fully dressed, opened the bedroom door, made it clear to even the dimmest of Aurors that help was needed. The cough ended in a disturbing sounding gurgling choke. Now that his mother was in the room, Draco could turn his back on the Aurors to go check on his father, whose face was so flushed he looked like an angry Weasley. That alone was clear evidence his father had been cursed, or the world was about to end. Perhaps it was. At his father’s gesture, Draco handed him a cup of water. Hot tea would have been better, Draco thought, but the breakfast tea was all gone.

The new Auror took several moments to cast a battery of detection spells on both rooms, and then followed Draco into the bedroom. No Malfoy should be seen like that, but at least his mother had pulled the blanket over him. The Auror cast a few spells at Lucius. Draco moved protectively toward his father, but his mother gave a miniscule shake of her head. His father merely glared at the Auror, but didn’t say a word. Draco suspected his father’s throat was too sore for him to speak without need. He stepped aside so the Auror could do her scans. Apparently they told the imbecile what ought to be plain at a glance: his father needed help! Lucius was flushed, and his eyes were watering, his hair was tangled and sweaty, and there was mucous dribbling from his nose again. Draco was beginning to think a potion had been slipped in with the food, to humiliate them. Perhaps it was a curse, just now manifesting.

His father opened his eyes and croaked, “Draco. Where’s Narcissa? And what are you doing?” He had to pause for breath every few words. Draco’s eyes flicked up to his mother. Lucius’ eyes followed his glance.

“You need to go to the Hospital wing.” Draco didn’t say anything else. What else was there to say? His father leaned back and reached an arm out toward Narcissa, who took it.

The Auror ignored all this, and reached for something from a pocket in his robes—a thick, heavy bracelet. “He may need medical help, but I don’t trust any of you.” He went to affix it to Lucius’ wrist, but Narcissa held firmly to his father’s hand.
“May I see that?” It wasn’t a question, despite the inflection. She extended her free hand. The Auror held her wand on Draco’s mother, but allowed her to examine the bracelet. Draco thought he recognised it as one of the limiting cuffs used by the Aurors. His father made sure he knew what the ministry could and could not do to him. “You will need a second one. I am going with him.”

“It is not—“

“Necessary? Allowed? I am his wife!” Her cool glare dared the Auror to dispute her right.

“I am required to advise you that this bracelet has a strong stunner, which will be activated should you come into contact with a wand, or the bracelet’s controlling device. It is also charmed to activate if you range more than thirty feet from the controlling device.” The Auror spoke the words in the monotone of overuse. She looked his mother directly in the eye, her face hard. “I’m required to warn you, but I really wish you would try. I’ve seen them work. Stunners of this strength can damage the heart, is what I’ve heard. You'll really need the medical wing then.”

His mother merely slid the bracelet onto her wrist with the same grace and care she would have taken had it been one of the priceless heirlooms in her jewellery coffer at the Malfoy estate. Nothing broke his mother’s composure. She was the epitome of what it meant to be pureblood.

When she reached for the second bracelet, the Auror pulled it back. “I will put it on him,” the Auror insisted. Lucius glared at the Auror as she reached for his wrist. Draco caught the smirk on his mother’s face. His father might be sick, and he might be diminished by his experiences in the past two years, but he was no one’s doll, to be dressed. With a glance from his mother, his father relented and extended his hand for the Auror to bind with the bracelet. The effect was destroyed when his father broke into a new coughing spasm. Draco was pleased to see the Auror had been splattered. If a Malfoy must be subject to such humiliation, it was only fitting to share the experience.

Narcissa was not pleased by the way her husband’s needs were being disregarded.

Not only had the Auror affixed one of the Ministry’s limiting bracelets to her husband’s wrist, but she followed up by casting Incarcerous to bind his hands and ankles together with conjured ropes, and then, because he could not move on his own, levitated him off the bed with a Mobilicorpus, and
moved him out of the room with a overly energetic swish of her wand, flat on his back in the air, with his beautiful hair hanging down in uncombed tangles. Narcissa quickly pulled the blanket off the bed and draped it over him. She would grant him all the dignity she could, given the circumstances. The Auror gestured another to join them, leaving the guard to ensure that Draco, without his wand, did not escape a warded door. Apparently, two wanded Aurors were necessary to keep two wandless purebloods, one of whom was incapacitated with illness, under control. If she weren’t so worried about Lucius, she would be smirking at the thought. She moved to guide the floating body of her husband, as she did not trust the Auror to avoid the corners. If Lucius had been well, he would have been livid. Instead, he just looked miserable.

When they arrived in the hospital wing, Madame Pomfrey merely glanced at him briefly, and flicked her wand in a quick diagnostic, then indicated some uncomfortable looking wooden chairs off to the side. “Wait over here. I’ll be with you when I have time.” She had turned to the Auror who had accompanied them. “You will be able to wait?” The Auror nodded, taking an alert stance that took in both the entrance and the two Malfoys, as if Narcissa’s given word, which they had demanded of her, were not assurance enough. They did not seem to consider it relevant that she would not desert her husband when he was debilitated from illness. In fact, they didn’t seem to consider it of moment that he was ill.

“My husband—“

“—is neither the most important person here, nor the most grievously ill. He will wait his turn.”

Several other patients came in while they waited. They were scanned, given potions, or directed to beds for further assistance. Mediwitches and mediwizards scurried past several times, but paid them little attention. Narcissa’s anger rose each time, but she held her peace, forcing herself to scan the area. The white on white colour scheme only served to increase Narcissa’s agitation, as the white paint was tinted green, and the paint on the wooden chairs had a brown cast to it, and the bed linen were so white they made the rest drab by comparison. You could always tell the quality of care one would receive by the ambiance. Lucius had always donated generously to St Mungo’s, and the Malfoy family could be assured of a peaceful room, with calming, healing colours, and the best of healers.

Finally, Madame Pomfrey came over with a potion.

“What is it? What is wrong with him?”

“He has a Muggle flu. Perhaps he has been around too many Muggles in his... activities.” Poppy commented, her voice cold. “This draught is primarily non-magical plants, as the Muggle flu does not respond well to the magical variants.”
“My husband is ill with a Muggle disease?”

“He was exposed, and susceptible.”

“He…” Lucius began, and then coughed hoarsely. “…he is here and can hear you. Do your patient the courtesy of addressing him directly.” Lucius leaned back after the effort of speaking.

Madame Pomfrey turned to address her next comment to both of them. “Typically, wizards don’t get Muggle illnesses, as our magic makes us resistant. I’m surprised to see you with it. Have you been cursed or otherwise severely weakened?” Lucius gave her an impatient look. “I would not expect a wizard to catch this unless you had been without your wand for an extended period, and were then exposed, but as you were at your own manor, that seems unlikely.” At Narcissa’s hand gesture, Madame Pomfrey paused. “Unless…?” The Mediwitch’s voice inflected upward in a question.

“Neither of us have wands at the moment. My son had to borrow mine when he returned to Hogwarts after the Spring Holiday. Lucius’ was likewise unavailable.”

“That would account for it. In the meantime, it is not life-threatening. He will need to stay here long enough to determine his reaction to the potion, but then you may return to your rooms. Drink.” She addressed the last command directly to Lucius.

Lucius glared at the concoction in her hand, but after a moment reached out his hand to grasp it. She let him take the flask, and he examined it a bit more. “What’s in it?” He croaked.

“Echinacea, hyssop, liquorice, several other non-magical herbs.”

Lucius drank it warily.

They waited.

“Nothing’s happening.” Narcissa protested.
"It is a Muggle illness. It takes time to heal. As it doesn’t have magical components, it does not react well to a magical cure. You will have to wait it out like a Muggle would."

"How long?" Narcissa pressed.

"Muggles do not heal as fast as we do. They, however, have developed resistances to the illnesses they can contract. We have never needed to develop Muggle forms of resistance."

Lucius giggled. "Muggle resistance!" he croaked, his laugh turning into a cough.

Madame Pomfrey turned to Narcissa. "As I was saying, because it is doubtful that your husband has any non-magical resistance to this flu, it may well take longer or be more severe."

"Severe! Severe Severus could, would…" Lucius wheezed through a giggle.

Narcissa stared at her husband in concern. "What did you give to him?"

"It appears that your husband is one of those wizards who has an allergy. I will have to test—"

"Madame Pomfrey! We have another one!"

"Excuse me. I will have to get back to you in a moment, Mrs Malfoy. Keep an eye out for any further strange behaviours."

"He is already behaving oddly. Fix this!"

"I’m sorry, but this is an emergency." Poppy ran a scan over the new patient, who made a peculiar sound, then vomited at their feet. The patient’s face and hands had broken out in lesions. Lucius giggled again.

"Andre! Take this gentleman to the quarantine ward. I’ll be right there, just get him settled."
“My husband –“

“Your husband and his cronies did this!” Suddenly, Madame Pomfrey turned on Lucius. “All the death wasn’t enough? You had to cause more misery? What did you do? What is causing this?” The mediwitch’s voice came out desperate and angry.

Narcissa was about to protest that they had done nothing in the battle but look for their son, when Lucius giggled and sing-songed, “Dark Magic, Dark Magic leaves a mark.” He broke into a fit of coughing at the end.

“I can tell it’s dark magic, you buffoon! No one has identified the curse. If you know—” she turned to Narcissa— “if either of you know what was done to cause this, you need to tell me! I have fifteen cases already... that is the sixteenth!”

Lucius sneezed.

“What are the symptoms?” Narcissa asked.

“Vomiting. Lesions – over the whole body. Stasis only slows the spread of lesions, it does not halt them. Fever. There is a taint of dark magic in their magical field, but I don’t recognize the curse! Everything I do only seems to accelerate the symptoms!”

Narcissa restrained her shock. Lucius had no such compunction. “Your own choices,” he chortled. “Hit by your own curse! Albus Dumbledore’s folly, striking from beyond the grave...”

“Albus would do no such thing!” Madame Pomfrey declared.

“You all have!” Lucius’ hoarse voice nevertheless sounded like a three year old with a secret. “Every choice for the past two hundred years—” He broke into a fit of coughing again, trying to speak past the coughs. “E-ver-y choice! Now you see. We were right. We were right.” He sing-songed the words.

“I don’t have time for this.” Madame Pomfrey turned away to follow her new patient.
“I will tell you what my husband means. But first you must see him into a bed, and make him comfortable. And I will sit by him and tell you exactly what he means.”

“I must—” Madame Pomfrey gestured in the direction they had taken the man with lesions.

“Yes, yes, see to him. But if you want my help, you will come back to assist my husband immediately afterward. And you need my help if you want that man to live.”

Madame Pomfrey nodded and left without a further word.

Narcissa glanced at Lucius’ face. Mucous dribbled down under his nose, and his eyes were wet from the coughing. His face was blotchy. She wished, for the twentieth time this morning, that she had her wand. She turned to the Auror. “He needs a handkerchief.”

The Auror gazed at her impassively. She turned to scan the room. There was a table in the corner with various supplies. “Over there. There is a pile of cloth on that table. I need one.”

“I’m must stand here and guard Mr Malfoy. He won’t expire in the time it takes for the Mediwitch to return.”

She knew at least six different spells that would ease his suffering, and make his face presentable, but without her wand, could do none of them. She turned to the Auror, repressing her dismay at their vulnerability to their enemies. She was Slytherin. She would do what was necessary. Rule 2. “Could you at least do him the service of cleaning his face for him?”

The Auror smirked, but turned to cast Scourgify. Narcissa shuddered. It was much too vigorous a spell to use on the face. She could already see his face reddening further in response. She stroked a hand down her husband’s hair.

They waited.

Finally Madame Pomfrey returned and took them to a bed in a room with several others. Some of them were occupied. This was not St Mungo’s, she reminded herself, where their past donations secured them private rooms. This was a school. As much as she would have liked Draco to have private rooms were he to need care, there had been more important things to focus on: curriculum for example, and quality of teaching. Lucius had insisted that the Hogwarts curriculum had significant
flaws. And now, she had proof.

As soon as Lucius was situated, with a dose of something to alleviate his congestion (but not his fever, which apparently was necessary for the Muggle healing process), and a sleeping draught to ease his suffering, Madame Pomfrey turned to her. “That’s all I dare do, or it will interfere with the healing. Now what do you know?”

Narcissa did not prevaricate, despite the opening left for her. “When was the last time Hogwarts was cleansed?” She decided to start with the easy question.

“The house elves clean it every day, of course. Hogwarts is not unsanitary!”

“Not cleaned. When was it last cleansed? When did you last clear out the magic left behind?”

“What are you talking about?” Madame Pomfrey sounded exasperated.

“Every spell we cast leaves a mark. A bit of it is left behind.”

“It dissipates over time. It doesn’t harm anything.” Madame Pomfrey objected.

“How many spells are cast each day at Hogwarts? There are what, three hundred students, in addition to the teaching staff? The students practice magic daily. How would it have time to dissipate?”

“What does this have to do with—“

“You really don’t know?” Narcissa was beginning to get a feeling of foreboding. No, it went beyond foreboding. She had seen the lesions on that patient.

“If we knew—”

“So, students have been casting magic here, every year, every day. And it has never been cleansed while you’ve worked here. Hogwarts is so full of magic it may well have become sentient!”
Narcissa closed her eyes to compose herself. “It is certainly animate. I doubt the original builders intended the stairs to move, or the suits of armour to wander. The population of ghosts at Hogwarts is appalling! Do you suppose all of them died at Hogwarts? They were attracted by the sheer intensity of the magic at Hogwarts, free for use, to ground them more into this world. No wonder Hogwarts students are getting weaker.”

Madame Pomfrey bridled at that. “They are not—“

“They are. But that is not the point, at the moment. Last year, Draco wrote home about what was being taught. The Carrows brought dark magic back to the Hogwarts curriculum for the first time in over two hundred years. Did Amycus Carrow ever teach the students how to clean up after themselves?”

“I do not follow the specific lesson plans of each instructor, except insofar as it may cause students to need my service. The Professors usually alert me in advance so that I would have the supplies ready. And, to be frank, I had enough to do, what with the Carrows and Snape cursing students left and right. I have never seen teachers with such disregard for student welfare.”

“So, last year, dark magic was cast in a magically saturated environment.”

“Against the will of the responsible members of the faculty and staff.” Poppy bit the words out.

“And then, a few days ago, there was a major battle. In which many wizards and witches were killed, including one who had used magic stronger and darker than most of us can even attempt! And, to your knowledge, you still haven’t cleansed the castle?”

“What do you think the volunteers are doing?” Madame Pomfrey asked. Repairing the damage your lot caused.”

“Certainly not cleansing the castle, or you would not have sixteen patients at risk of losing their magic, if not their lives.” Narcissa’s voice was acerbic. She took a breath. The Auror at the door had his wand in hand, but was still pointing it downward. This was not the time to antagonize them.

She began again, speaking as if to a very slow first year. “All magic leaves its mark. Most spells, when cast, merely increase the level of magic in the ambience; what they leave behind is neutral. Some magic leaves a … residue that can be beneficial. It can be healing, or calm the emotions. One of the indicators of Dark Magic is that the magical remains that it leaves behind are…dangerous. It
can be damaging to living creatures, and can warp the purpose of charmed items. So it is necessary to cleanse the magic left behind. Those of us who have not forgotten proper wizarding traditions cleanse our homes several times a year. Our children can do it!”

“So it doesn’t need a wand?”

“How would it help to add magic? The purpose is to release the magic, to return the place to its natural state. Draco knows how. Frankly, any Slytherin except perhaps a few would know this, and would have done it all his life. Any pureblood who has not betrayed our traditions knows how to protect those of magical blood.”

“Just a moment. I will be right back.” Poppy excused herself, and a few moments later returned. “The Headmistress will be joining us. I believe she should hear this. In the meantime, what do I do for the patients I already have?”

“If they have not shown lesions yet, it is simple. A simple salt bath, with certain herbs added. Then a cleansing potion.”

“All of them have lesions. I have them under stasis.”

“That will only slow it down, and will accelerate their decay once stasis is removed. You need to remove them from Hogwarts and then drain their magic.”

“What?”

“Magic speeds up the infection. They need to be in an environment with no magic. Not Hogwarts, not Diagon Alley, not the Ministry, certainly not St Mungo’s. No magical home. They will need to be quarantined in a Muggle neighbourhood and left alone. They will need to take a specific tincture that will drain their magic, and they will need to take this until their magic has completely left them.

“No! I cannot believe that!”

“Once their magic is completely gone, they can stop taking the tincture and return to Hogwarts, or St Mungo’s, and there is a chance their magic will return,” Narcissa continued relentlessly. She repressed the shudder at the thought. Such carelessness. Such idiocy to ignore simple precautions, when the risk was so great. And what was worse, she and her family were imprisoned here, where
the residue from dark magic had never been cleansed.

The Headmistress walked in. “What do you need, Poppy?”

“You need to hear this.”

“What?”

“It may take a while to explain fully.” Narcissa began.

The Headmistress sat in a nearby chair, and folded her hands in her lap. “What do I need to hear?”

Narcissa repeated what she had told the mediwitch.

“So this cleansing will prevent further cases?”

“It will.”

“You say your son knows how to do this. He has volunteered to help with the repair effort. Do you believe he would be willing to be on a volunteer team to perform this cleansing?” the Headmistress asked.

Narcissa quailed inside at the thought of Draco exposed to such advanced taint, but reminded herself of his goals. “I trust my son. You will have to ask him if he is willing to accept the risk. But if he is, I can tell you he is more than capable of cleansing Hogwarts. With assistance. It is best done in groups.” She didn’t want to expose him to this. The taint here had apparently already progressed much further than she would ever let it develop at home. Although, considering the events of the last few months, her home was probably overdue for a cleansing as well. It did not have the sheer levels of magic in the ambiance that Hogwarts did. Malfoy Manor had no walking suits of armour, no moving staircases, and very few ghosts. Still the effluence from the fight that happened a few months ago when they had prisoners escaping, and the wrath inflicted by the Dark Lord onto his own would certainly need to be cleansed, now that the Malfoy family would no longer need to play host to whichever Death Eaters the Dark Lord saw fit to impose upon them.
Fortunately, a Dark Lord had not been vanquished on the premises. So, Malfoy Manor and the surrounding grounds would need to be cleansed, if they were able to return home, but it would not be so badly tainted as would cause what she saw in that patient. Narcissa both longed for the day they returned, and mourned, for it was doubtful that Lucius would return with them.

“What of those who have already been infected?” McGonagall broke into her train of thought.

“I have already explained to Madame Pomfrey what is necessary—“

“And I will not believe that is the only way to help them! To drain them of their magic!”

“What?” McGonagall turned sharply to look at her.

“It is their magic that is infected. The infection feeds on their magic. You can do nothing with magic that will not make it worse.”

“The stasis—“ Madame Pomfrey began.

“—only slows the progression of the illness, but will not stop it. When the stasis is removed, the magic used to hold the stasis will only feed the infection.”

“What is this tincture you propose?”

Narcissa told her.

“But that is a poison!”

“Indeed. Muggles discovered this poison, and used it to drain witches and wizards of their magic in the middle ages. Some survived. This is nothing to take lightly. But it is the only cure.”

“Do you have any proof of what you say?”
Narcissa repressed a sneer. She had expected this. “At the Manor. There is a book.”

“I will send someone to fetch it. Where—“

“They would not get past the gate. Malfoy wards do not treat intruders kindly. I will need to go.”

“And you will disappear. No.”

“I would not leave my son and my husband to your care. I doubt they would survive it.” She didn’t want to leave Lucius just now, but... She considered, and could not believe what she was about to offer. “You may send what Aurors you need to accompany me.” She knew the risk. They would have full access to the Manor once she let them in. She knew they would use whatever they saw against her family. But this was more than that. This was a chance, possibly, to return Hogwarts to the old ways. She had something they needed, and their need would open them to convincing. She had the key to Draco’s future.

After a pause, McGonagall nodded.

Malfy Manor – Narcissa

May 7, 1998

Narcissa resisted the urge to twist the bracelet on her wrist. Her captors felt it necessary not only to bind her with the cursed bracelet, but also to send along three Aurors. In a way it pleased her, that they felt such fear of her, one wandless witch. Her power had never only been in her magic, but in the force of her will. She was born of the old families, and had their assembled strength behind her.

It amazed her that she was about to usher three Aurors, of her own will and without prior preparation, into Malfy Manor. She knew the lengths she was willing to go for her family. It was as it should be, but she would never have believed that protecting her family would, at the same time, open them to such risk.

The Dark Lord had used it as his base, on and off, for the past year. Certainly, he had felt it his right
to quarter his Death Eaters there.

The state of the Manor cut at her heart. She had chosen the decor of the Manor, elegance to intimidate, offset by small touches, almost invisible to outside eyes, to make it a home for her family. She controlled the mood and desires of those guests who stayed there. Did she put them at their ease, in the forest green bedroom? Or perhaps she would make them aware of the honour of staying at the Manor, with any of a number of elegantly appointed bedrooms, accented in creams and gilt. Of course, there were the accommodations in the dungeon, but those were Lucius’ purview.

The Manor was her contribution to the Malfoy power. As its hostess, she controlled the Ministers of Magic as much as her husband did with judicious applications of galleons and subtle warnings. Then the Dark Lord came and destroyed what she had developed. He had infested the Manor with the likes of Greyback and Pettigrew, neither of whom were pureblood, neither having had even the benefit of a polite upbringing, for which she might overlook the taint in their blood. In doing so, the Dark Lord had undermined one of the gifts the Malfoys offered him: influence. Without the ability to host Ministers and Department Heads at the Manor, they were left with crass exchanges of galleons and threats.

It had devolved slowly, but with the presence of the Dark Lord a constant threat, she hadn’t dared let the criticism cross her mind. Instead, she merely planned around it, making up for the disadvantages wherever she could, with a soft or sharp word, or a delicate potion in the wine. Her choices were subtle: nothing that controlled a person, just minor suggestions that could be used to guide a person’s choices by one with the skill.

And now, the beautiful alabaster columns were smudged and splattered, the marble floors littered with their leavings. The cellars were worse. If the Aurors saw fit to examine those, it was doubtful that even her non-participation in the battle at Hogwarts would save herself or her son. She cringed at the thought of the wine cellars, bottles opened and discarded, spilled over with blood and whatever else leaked out of those who provided the entertainment at one of Bella’s gatherings. The fact that it was her own sister that was one of the worst of the lot disturbed her further.

How had it all gone so wrong? They were supposed to be protecting pure-blood values and traditions. When had it been a pure-blood tradition to drink out of the bottle like a commoner? When had it been a tradition to waste blood in mundane torture? Blood was sacred. Blood was their heritage, their power. She would have to have the elves, finally, clean the blood-sprayed walls and stained floors of the dungeons, now that the Dark Lord was no longer there to enjoy them.

Until this past year, she had never allowed one not of the family into her home without having ensured it was presentable. When Aurors and Ministers visited, there must be no sign of the arts that had been made illegal by short-sighted officials and zealots. And certainly, when guests of any sort were welcomed, they needed to be made comfortable, in a clean and refined environment. The Dark Lord had required the use of the manor, however, and her husband had complied. Perhaps that was
the *Alohomora* that opened the way for the risks she took today.

For here she was, pricking her finger on the sharp point at the gate to let those of the Malfoy family through the wards, in case of disaster when they might need access yet not have their wands. She was only glad that the point was disillusioned, so that the Malfoy use of blood as an emergency method of entry was hidden from the judgemental eyes of the Aurors.

The front walk and lawn were trampled. The front door had been scarred by one of the Dark Lord’s werewolf allies. And she had allowed this.

The entry, at least, had been cleaned. Perhaps the house elves had taken it upon themselves to make it presentable for her return.

She made her way to the main library. She did not run her fingers along the spines to find the book she was after. Such treatment would destroy some of the Malfoy collection, and could well lose her an arm.

In a long stride, she passed the public shelves, leaving the Aurors behind, and quickly turned down one aisle to touch three books in rapid succession, duck into the opening that cleared, and close it behind her.

She breathed deeply but quietly. One Malfoy secret, saved from the Aurors’ prying eyes. On the third shelf from the top, on the fifth case in, was a small, pale, leather-bound book.

She took it from the shelf. The leather was soft from age and handling, and was the colour of cream. She ran her fingers along it. There had been one like it at the Black Estate that she had learned from, but she had not been there for many years. She remembered studying her childhood copy: learning the runes, and learning to focus her will. That was the Black family book, with its own stories and secrets. The Black book was bound in dark red, and the leather was textured. The one in her hands reminded her of the Malfoy men: pale, dangerous, beautiful to look at, full of stories more complicated than outward appearance.

This was the Malfoy children’s book. She remembered teaching Draco, watching his young face scrunch up in concentration, before he had learnt to keep his face calm in the face of adversity. She opened it. There it all was, Wizarding traditions passed down from parent to child within each family, each slightly different, each followed in the name of generations. The reason for life was lineage. Each spell, each ward, each glyph of protection written in this book was in the name of protecting the blood. She would protect her child with her life. Any pureblood who remained true to the old ways would.
Swiftly, she marked the sections she wished to reveal, and then triggered the runes that would selectively show just those sections. Although she must open the Manor to outsiders who did not wish them well, she would not reveal more than was necessary. When she had protected all that she could, she went to the other end of the narrow hall of books, the most protected library of Malfoy Manor.

She activated the glass by which she could see past the door, painting the necessary rune with her finger. The Aurors were still seeking her in the area of her entry point. The magic used to conceal the private library also seemed to misdirect the controller on her bracelet: the Aurors were scanning the controller, and probably could tell she was close, but not her specific location. She could only surmise that they didn’t want to stun their only guide at the Manor—she had made it quite clear that they should stick close to her or the protections at the Manor might well trap them. She smirked briefly, but knew she had better return to them before they gave up and activated the stun rather than risk her escape, regardless of the risk to themselves. Tracing the rune on the door and focussing on her will, she felt it come ajar with a soft click. As quickly as she had entered, she left the narrow aisle, closed the door behind her, and moved halfway down the next aisle to protect the location of the entry.

Composing herself, she walked back to where she heard the Aurors, three aisles down. “I have what I need.” One of the Aurors jumped. He had been reaching to touch a book in the shelves.

“I wouldn’t touch that one, if I were you. Not if you like that hand.” The Auror jerked back his hand. Narcissa smiled.

Using every ounce of the skill she had developed in acting the hostess for both ministry officials and the Dark Lord, although not at the same time, she manoeuvred the Aurors out before they could snoop too much. She doubted they even realized they were being managed.

When she arrived back at the castle, the Aurors brought her back to their rooms, despite her request to see Lucius. She asked them to pass the message along that she had the proof the Headmistress desired. Once they had locked her in, fortunately removing the bracelet first, she brought Draco up to date on his father, as well as the opportunity she had opened for him.

Of Family Obligations
The knock at the door was followed, without even a courtesy pause, by the sound of a murmured spell to unlock it, and the creak as the door opened. An Auror came in and scanned the room with eyes and wand, before gesturing Minerva McGonagall into the room. Narcissa schooled her features into a pleasant blandness, before turning to face her visitor, still not quite able to decide whether she felt complimented or irritated by their obvious wariness toward her family. Did they imagine she would carve into them with the spoons that were furnished with their lunch, like a deranged Muggle?

As Headmistress McGonagall stepped through, she heard Draco barely repress an exasperated huff. He did need to work on controlling his presentation. No sooner had she thought that, when her son stood up, turned toward the Headmistress with a neutral, curious gaze. They both knew what the Headmistress was visiting about, and Narcissa had the book to hand, but Draco was within his rights to be annoyed. He had written several letters to the woman, and she had ignored them.

The Headmistress may have seen something of her, or more likely her son’s thoughts, for she turned to him. “I have received your messages, Mr Malfoy. I will address them in due course, but at the moment, I need to speak with your mother in my office, for reasons I’m sure she has discussed with you. I will have tea prepared for us. Please bring the book you retrieved, so we may discuss it. In addition, your sister – Andromeda Tonks – has made a request. I am to determine if it is one we can honour.”

Narcissa raised an inquisitive eyebrow, but Professor McGonagall merely waited. She searched the older woman’s face, which was cool but showed no other signs. After a moment, she nodded.

“I’m afraid, given the circumstances, I must again ask you to wear this.” The bracelet that Professor McGonagall held out was a solid band of silver with no apparent clasp. “It is not as extensively protected as the Auror detaining bracelet you wore earlier today, but it still has several features to ensure that you will return here at the end of our conversation.”

“I would not leave my family to your... care. I’m sure I’ve mentioned this?”

“Nevertheless, it is required. Be aware that it will stupefy under the same conditions as the Auror model, although perhaps not so vigorously.”

“That does relieve the mind. Your Aurors gave the impression that the device was potentially life-threatening. I, of course, would never expect such casual disregard for human life among your group.” Her voice was wry. The very fact that they did not teach basic methods to protect the
children against such a danger as they were seeing now made it clear that their oft touted values were only within their narrow view of the world.

Narcissa had already chosen her way, however, and there was no purpose served in indecision or debate. She stretched out her hand for the bracelet, and slid it onto her wrist. As soon as it touched her skin, it shrank to fit, neither too tight, nor loose enough to remove.

She gestured toward the door, as if she were the lady of the house, and the Headmistress passed through it, only to pause on the other side to wait as Narcissa exited their suite as well. With Narcissa flanked by an Auror on one side, and McGonagall on the other, they made their way to the Headmistress’ office.

Today, both on the way out to Malfoy Manor, and just now, was Narcissa’s first chance to see the full extent of the destruction of the battle. When she left for the Manor she had been focussed on her plans, on how to get in, get the book, and get out, without allowing the Aurors too much access. They could have pushed the matter, of course. She had needed to control each movement, each gesture, each word, so as to direct their choices without them being aware of it.

Now she had the leisure to observe her Alma Mater. It looked more like a battlefield than a school, even days later. She did not feel quite as horrified by the destruction here as she did by that at the Manor, but it still pained her. Hogwarts was where she had learned to love Lucius. This was where she had yielded her neck to his kisses. Even with a son almost grown, those kisses caused her body to tremble and yearn. Lucius was the only one she had ever considered. When she chose him, she chose his path, and put her skills and wit toward furthering his goals, knowing they walked their path together. She aligned herself with his family, and gave her heart to him. It was at Hogwarts that they had started their plans for a future together. A future almost certainly destroyed. A future she would do anything to reclaim for Draco.

The Headmaster's Office, Narcissa observed, had changed. She had last been here when Dumbledore had been in residence, with his garish gewgaws and ornaments. Of course McGonagall was in charge now. The office now was much more relaxing, if just as cluttered, now with papers.

The tea table stood to the side with a properly prepared tea and sandwiches, and McGonagall gestured her to sit, exactly as if this were a social call. Narcissa appreciated the effort. McGonagall poured the tea, and offered a sandwich. When they each had a plate and a cup to hand, McGonagall spoke.
“Your sister Andromeda lost her only child to the wand of Bellatrix Lestrange.”

Narcissa’s heart clenched at further evidence that her sister truly had gone insane. Much as she disapproved of Andromeda’s choice to marry that mudblood, her niece was still of Black blood, and the blood, at least, should have been respected, however tainted.

McGonagall continued with another shocking statement. “The funeral will be tomorrow, at the Black estate, by the wishes of the current Head of the Black family.”

Narcissa had not been to the Black estate since it had been closed six years ago. After Arcturus’ death, his widow and his spinster cousin Cassiopeia had managed to dodder around the old Black estate for another year. When they died, within a month of each other, there had been no one in the line and of the blood to leave it to, what with Arcturus’ son Orion dead, and his grandsons either dead, in the case of Regulus, or cast out and in Azkaban, in the case of Sirius. Various cousins and nieces and nephews who might have been eligible to lead the family had either died or married out, as Narcissa herself had, thereby transferring her first loyalty to her husband’s family. The estate had been sealed, and none but those of the Blood could gain entrance. Andromeda had taken her life in her hands to even venture there, cast out as she was, but apparently she had succeeded. But even more astounding was the latter part of the headmistress’ statement.

“There is a new head of the family? Why was I not informed?”

“You are being informed now. From what I gather, the transition occurred yesterday afternoon. Sirius Black declared Harry Potter his heir in name, magic, and blood.”

Narcissa tracked back the Black lineage. “Dorea Black married Charlus Potter. Yes, I suppose that would make him eligible. Still, I had thought that Draco…”

“You know the Black family better than I do. Which line had precedence?”

Narcissa considered. The Potter boy actually had a claim. Suddenly she realised: there was a half-blood head of house Black! Harry Potter might have the right to claim her allegiance, especially if Lucius and Draco—

She set aside the thought, lest the pain of it distract her from necessity. She knew she would have to include all possibilities in her calculations to ensure that the Malfoy family continued, but for now, the sacrifice she would likely have to make ripped her soul open. Each moment she could spend
with her husband was precious, yet even now she sacrificed those moments to create a future for her son. She would not have the luxury of Lucius’ presence for long, and she yearned to spend this time with the man she had fallen in love with all those years ago, and who held her loyalty to this day.

For Draco’s sake, and the sake of the family name, she would have to consider what benefit she could get. And having Harry Potter as the head of her family did have benefit, once the unthinkable happened. If he followed the rules, she would be able to call on him to provide protection and defence. She would use that, for herself and for Draco. She would use it all.

“Mr Potter will also be at the funeral, and it will also include a memorial for his mentor, Remus Lupin.” McGonagall broke into her thoughts.

Not only half-bloods, but werewolves as well. She could already sense the shaking of the Black mausoleum as the dead shuddered in their crypts.

“I will allow you to attend this funeral if I have your word, on your magic, that you will do nothing to disrupt it. Mr Potter and Mrs Tonks have been through enough, and have a right to their grief, and to have a memorial to their loved ones in peace.”

Narcissa looked down her nose at the woman seated before her. “I would not disrupt such an event, especially on Black land, regardless of my personal feelings. You understand little if you think I would even consider it.”

The Headmistress nodded.

“I would ask a favour, however. My son is also of the lineage. He has the right to attend as well. It would be of benefit to him, to be able to re-connect with my side of the family, however truncated it is at present.”

McGonagall pursed her lips. “Your son and Mr Potter have no need to ‘reconnect’. They have connected quite enough in their years here, and do not have the best history. Mr Potter doesn’t need his old school nemesis disrupting such a tragic occasion. Can your son abide by the same restrictions? I would expect the same oath of him, as he is of age to make it.”

Circumstances had constrained their choices. Narcissa did not want her son to risk such an oath. He still had trouble controlling himself, especially around Harry Potter. But if he could—if he could use the connection that now existed between Harry Potter and her line, they might just get out of this.
“Draco will behave. I will explain the need to him, and he will give his word.”

“Now that that is settled, I would like to see this book of yours.”

Narcissa took the book from the pocket of her robe, but held it in her hand. “This book is part of the Malfoy family heritage.”

“You may retain it. I would ask to copy any relevant pages, to assist in protecting the volunteers.”

Narcissa handed the book to the Headmistress. “You will want to look on page 26. That is where the rites of cleansing are contained.

McGonagall turned to the page as directed, and then proceeded to read. Her face grew pale as she read, as well it should, considering the ignorance that was being perpetuated at the school for which she was responsible.

Turning page after page, until she reached the end of the section, and indeed, the end of the parts of the book Narcissa had allowed for viewing, McGonagall read the words and examined the glyphs and drawings. She put the book down when she was done.

“Mr Malfoy, Draco Malfoy that is, knows how to do this?”

Narcissa looked at her coolly, "It is the first magic they do as part of the family. From the age of seven, our children share in the responsibility to protect the family and their home.”

“How many people are needed to do the work?”

Narcissa considered. “If time were not a concern, one person could do it alone. However, for safety and for speed, I would recommend no less than four in a group, but five would be preferable. More teams of five would speed the work, if you could find enough that know the process. The knowledge and skill of the members of the group are more important than mere quantity.”
“Would you be able to identify students that have this knowledge? There are several students among the volunteers, as well as among those detained here. Kingsley Shacklebolt and I have decided that incarceration at the Ministry, much less at Azkaban, is not conducive to rehabilitation of students who had come under – Tom Riddle’s influence.”

“Whose influence?”

The wry twist of the Headmistress’ lips warned her. ‘Tom Riddle was a half-blood who attended Hogwarts in the nineteen forties. He chose to change his name, to distance himself from his past. He died at Harry Potter’s hands on the morning of May second.

Narcissa leaned back in shock, certain that her face gave her away. She suddenly remembered something Draco had said a few days ago that had not made sense. He had been ranting, and she had been more concerned with Lucius at the moment. The Dark Lord, a half-blood!

She had known he was cruel to enemies and followers alike, and that he was a powerful wizard who excelled in the dark arts. She had learned that he was base and disturbed. But she had thought it was a known thing, that which sometimes afflicted pure-blood families, or those who are incautious with the dark arts. She thought that he valued what she did. He spoke of valuing wizarding blood. She remembered attending a meeting, while she was yet at Hogwarts, and listening to this charismatic man speak about the need to restore true wizarding traditions. How could he restore what he had never truly known?

She closed her eyes and gathered her thoughts. The Dark Lord was dead; her life continued. She had to focus on that.

The Headmistress had avoided saying “Your Master”, although she was sure that the older woman had thought it. She wondered at the circumlocution. Was she allowing for the possibility that Narcissa herself had not followed him? Or perhaps it was too much work to say “your husband’s erstwhile master.” She almost discounted the possibility that Professor McGonagall had used the name to convey information, or to acquire it. Perhaps she shouldn’t. The old witch knew something now that she hadn’t known before, as did Narcissa.

Narcissa took a sip of her tea, replaying the conversation in her mind, and returned to the Headmistress’ actual question. Giving the names of those skilled in the art of cleansing also revealed affiliations that should perhaps be kept silent, now that their opponents were ascendant. It was, nevertheless, necessary.

“Do you know the status of Miss Greengrass or Miss Parkinson? I would trust either of them, as well
as young Mr Nott, if they are in your…collection. I know them from long family acquaintance. The Zabini boy would be a good choice. He would have been trained when his mother was married into the Selwyn family.”

“You’ve only mentioned Slytherins.” McGonagall noted. She sipped her tea, but did not let her gaze waver from Narcissa’s face.

“There may well be other purebloods I could recommend, but I am not as familiar with all the families as I am with the ones I mentioned. "You've seen what happened to those people in the infirmary. Anyone who is not well trained in this task, and experienced enough that the work and the necessary caution would be instinct, stands to lose their magic completely. Can you imagine living like a Muggle?” Narcissa allowed herself a delicate shudder.

“Then why risk your son?”

“I trained him, using this exact book.” She picked up the pale book on the table and returned it to the safety of her lap. “I worked with him. The risk to him is not nearly as much as the risk to all of us if we allow undertrained witches and wizards, regardless of their house, to attempt it. You need someone who understands, in blood and bone, what the risks and consequences are. You need someone whose caution is ingrained, because they are familiar with the dangers of dark magic, and not just the rhetoric put forth by the Ministry and…certain other parties. If I had my preference, I would do the work myself. When my husband has recovered, he could do it—” The flicker of rejection in McGonagall’s eyes was exactly what Narcissa expected. “But you don’t trust us. I’m asking you to trust my son, or at the very least, trust my son’s desire to see a future.

When the Headmistress didn’t respond, Narcissa continued, “The children I mentioned are all Slytherin. I mention them because I know that their families practice the old ways. There are families that may also practice the tradition in other houses—I know of at least three in Ravenclaw, and another two in Hufflepuff. Whether their experience working with dark magic is extensive enough for me to trust them in the cleansing is not something I can confirm. In addition, while those in other houses than Slytherin might know the rites, I don’t know how well they would work with my son, considering the prejudice present at Hogwarts.”

McGonagall protested “The teachers at Hogwarts have always treated their students fairly.”

“The Malfoy family name protected Draco. I know this as well as you. But even so, most of the points deducted from Slytherin house were taken by you, Headmistress. I trust you will be more even handed in the future. Students recognize prejudice, and act accordingly.”
“Your son and his friends were far from innocent, Mrs Malfoy. I took points where I saw wrongdoing. Frankly, if all the wrongdoing had been accounted for, Slytherin house would have suffered greatly.” The Headmistress frowned. “Counting of points, is not the matter at hand, however. We were discussing the removal of the taint in the magic at Hogwarts. You would have me create an all Slytherin crew?”

"I would. Give the children a chance Headmistress. Their parents are imprisoned or dead, their funds tied up until the Wizengamot has its say. They have nothing but their heritage, and that is what will save Hogwarts."

The Headmistress considered. “How long will it take? Can the other volunteers continue to work?”

“There is no need to endanger them. A weekend’s delay will not matter, but each spell cast makes Hogwarts more precarious.”

The Headmistress nodded, making a note.

“The time required depends on the resources you have available. I assume you have a list of the...detainees currently at Hogwarts? Perhaps also a list of your volunteers? It would be especially useful if I could discuss it with my son. While I might recognise families that have practiced our traditions, Draco would know which students were skilled.”

McGonagall did not look pleased at the prospect of providing such information. Narcissa adjusted her hands in her lap to draw attention to the book she had brought, and gazed directly into the other woman’s eyes. Information needed to pass both ways for either of them to achieve their goals. McGonagall nodded. “You will have it.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks:
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Disclaimer:
Harry Potter, his friends, his enemies, and the lovely world they live in all belong to JK Rowling. I play here.
A Funeral for Colin Creevey

May 6, 1998

There were too many funerals. Each was carefully entered on a list, with date and time and place, posted near the Great Hall. The times overlapped, with each family making their own arrangements, and there was no way to attend them all. Harry felt a bit like he should. So many people had died. He thought of all those months they had been on the road, hiding, following false leads. Could he have done it faster? Would more people be alive if they’d made different choices? He didn’t know. What he could do now is pay his respects. He could mourn.

The Ministry’s notion to have one large service for the war heroes was politely declined by their families. Harry couldn’t imagine waiting while they talked of strangers, when all he wanted to do was remember those he cared about. Fred. Remus. Tonks. His mind went back in its litany of those he’d lost. No one wanted to have the memory of their loved one overshadowed by so many others.

A tiny seed of thought in the back of his head was horrified at the very idea of a common service for another reason, asking how the magic would return to the families if one Ceremony of Memory was supposed to suffice for all the losses. It would take some time to get used to the Black way of thinking. It was like having a little pureblood in his mind, making subliminal comments. Harry snickered for a moment at the image: the quintessential pureblood, looking like a tiny Draco Malfoy, standing on one shoulder, making comments, like half of the of the devil/angel pair he’d seen on one of Dudley’s programmes before Aunt Petunia had shut it off as being too freaky. Malfoy would certainly be the devil, no matter how pale his hair and skin. Harry tried to think who the angel would be. At one time it would have been Dumbledore. But as soon as he thought that, he realized who it would be: his mother. The thought of what she would want for him would influence him toward his best self, he thought.

The brief moment of levity left him, and he felt bad for laughing. It was a day to mourn, in a way he had not been able to before.

For now, Harry ignored the internal commentary. There would be time later, in his now obligatory lessons with Andromeda Tonks, to listen to it and decide whether it was...meaningful to him.
Harry had heard the other volunteers chattering while they worked, over the past few days. After the families declined having a joint service, there was talk of an official memorial in addition to the private ones, in remembrance of those who so bravely blah blah blah. That would come later, and Harry didn’t want to think about it.

Everyone deserved to have time to remember those they loved. That’s what he focussed on now, letting other thoughts and worries slide beneath the numb fog in his mind. He wished he remembered his parents’ funeral. Had he even been there? Knowing the times, and the way Dumbledore had chosen to protect him over the years, probably not. Had Aunt Petunia even gone to her sister’s funeral? He wished Sirius had had a funeral. He was determined to go to the funerals of those he had been close to, since for the first time in his life, it was possible.

Remus and Tonks’ funeral was not until Friday. Harry was a bit glad of that. As much as he wanted to remember them both, he wasn’t sure he was ready. Mrs Tonks made it sound as if he would have a role to play, besides just sitting and remembering. At Fred’s funeral, though, he could just ... remember, with the Weasleys all around him. Somehow, that felt safer.

Fred’s funeral was on the same day as that of several Ravenclaw students, and Colin Creevey. Harry knew that Fred’s was more important to him, but the idea of missing Colin’s left him feeling hollow. He suspected it was more than just the idea of missing a funeral. He had felt strangely adrift since talking to Ginny the night before. So many things had changed.

His entire focus had been on defeating Voldemort. He had pictured what life would be like afterward. He would be free to go places. He could see the ocean on a sunny day, without Horcruxes looming in his mind. He could visit the Weasleys, and he and Ginny could date like normal people, only that wasn’t how it worked. The Weasleys were mourning Fred, and Ginny had left him (never mind that he had left her first… he had planned to return to her, once the danger was gone), Hogwarts was damaged, and he was somehow expected to learn how to be the head of a pure-blood family—one of the more bigoted ones at that. It was all too much.

Harry wished he could just work on repairing Hogwarts and be left alone to think. The rhythm of the work was soothing, and he could focus on it, and let his mind drift. But the funerals were important, and he couldn’t imagine letting any of them pass. These were people who had fought with him, fought for him, fought to protect him and make it possible for Harry to do what he had to do. Despite the obligation he felt to all the others, he knew he would still not want to leave the Weasley family funeral or gathering, once it started. They were all the family he had.

So, early that morning, he went to see Professor McGonagall. He seemed to be doing that a lot lately. He really shouldn’t—he had a feeling she made time for him because of who he was— and he could see how much she had to do. Every time he saw her, it seemed she was surrounded by people
needing her decision or approval on something. For this one thing, though, he knew she could help. As Head of House for both students, she would certainly have a similar conflict. He really should have asked her sooner, but he had too much on his mind. Somehow, the little things kept getting lost.

McGonagall told him she planned on attending Fred’s funeral, but leaving in time to pay her respects at Colin’s. He suspected several others would be Apparating from one funeral to another like Professor McGonagall would be doing.

Harry regretted that he’d not had the time to get his Apparition license. He was not sure when he’d have time to take the test, or if the ministry was even in a state to administer it. Somehow, Apparition licenses seemed a lower priority than the housecleaning he knew the Ministry was undergoing. He’d make time soon, he promised himself. He wanted that freedom. He’d check with Mr Weasley if the testing centre was open. It didn’t matter in this case, he realized. He wouldn’t be able to Apparate, as he’d never been to either location, although he supposed the Weasley plot was close to the Burrow, and he could travel by Floo and then walk, if he were to skip Colin’s.

Apparently, he was not the only one with this problem. With the ease of frequent repetition, Professor McGonagall helped him arrange for two round trip Portkeys, one from Hogwarts to a place right outside the Weasley family plot, and one from there to the alley behind the church where the Creevey funeral would be. He hated Portkeys, but this one was under his own control, and he had the trigger phrase. He could stop at Colin’s briefly, to pay his respects beforehand. It would allow him to stay at Fred’s funeral and the gathering afterward, without feeling guilty about missing Colin’s.

Harry arrived early at the Weasley cemetery to help set up. The fields were the kind of emerald green you only get in the late spring, and the trees were in full leaf, again in that amazing green. The day was sunny. It was too bright for Harry. It should be overcast, or raining, the sky weeping for all those who could not. Harry had not cried since the battle. Not once. He wondered if he’d ever be able to properly feel again.

The Weasley family plot was not far from the Burrow, about halfway down the road toward the town of Ottery St. Catchpole. It was a smallish cemetery ringed around with spells of protection and charms to redirect the eyes of outsiders. Bill explained to Harry that the Weasley land had once included both the Burrow and the cemetery, including the green fields stretching from one to the other. Weasley land had nearly extended to the outskirts of the town. Muggle farmers now held some of the land, and small Wizarding cottages dotted the rest. Bill relayed this fact as if it was ancient history, of interest merely as a historical note. Harry wondered that Bill did not seem to resent the reduced land-wealth of the family. Ron had never mentioned it, which also surprised Harry, considering how bitter Ron could get about being poor.

He found Ron, setting out a scroll and quill on a table. He looked sombre, more adult than he did a few days ago.
“You okay, mate?” Harry asked.

“Yeah. No. I suppose.”

Harry wished he could think of something comforting to say. As many people as had died, he didn’t know what to say at a funeral.

“It shouldn’t have happened,” Ron blurted. “Fred could be a right berk sometimes, but he was still my brother.” He fell silent for a moment. “He should be alive. He was always so…”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed.

“He was there, and then he wasn’t. I should have done something.”

“I know how that feels, Ron. But you can’t think that way.”

Hermione came up just then. “Ron, your mum is asking for you.”

As Ron walked toward a cluster of redheads by a small stone building, Hermione turned to Harry. “How you holding up?”

Harry shrugged.

“We’ve missed you at the Burrow. I think we all expected you to stay there.”

“I need to get some things sorted in my head.”

“All right. Just don’t take too long about it. We care about you. Maybe we can help you get it sorted?”
“Not yet. It’s been a really busy couple of days.”

“Okay, Harry. Just so you know you can come to us.”

Harry nodded.

Someone who looked like a Weasley cousin brought folding chairs that had been shrunk for ease in transportation, and Harry and Hermione turned to help. After they had been unshrunk, Harry realized they weren’t exactly folding chairs, more like folding chair representations. They had legs and seats and backs, and collapsed when folded, but Harry doubted they were ever meant to be sat upon. Professor McGonagall arrived at the same time as the chairs. She explained, as Harry and Hermione helped levitate them and place them in gentle arcs on the grass, that they were constructs, designed to be easy to transfigure into anything with the approximate ‘chair’ function. After they were all positioned, she then transfigured them into elegant upholstered sofas and armchairs for the comfort of the attendees. The upholstery was in demure shades, and Hermione was taken with the jacquard print of black on black woven throughout. The effect of the black against the emerald leaves and fields was striking. And as he watched the attendees arrive and settle into the cushioned furniture, Harry had to admit the sense of the softer furniture, as it gave the mourners a chance to give and receive comfort.

But now that it was all set up, Harry had to go, so he could return in time for the service itself. He couldn’t see Ron. Catching Bill’s eye, he waved him over to let him know that he would be back, and then stepped out of the small cemetery and triggered the Portkey to an alley outside the Church where Colin’s funeral would be. It was an Anglican church in Exeter, Professor McGonagall had said, near where the Creevey family lived.

Harry pulled off the forest-green dress robe he had borrowed, folded it over an arm like a coat, and tugged at the Muggle suit he had likewise borrowed. For a change, the borrowed clothes mostly fit, and had been charmed an appropriate dark colour for the funeral, but he was unused to wearing Muggle clothes any fancier than Dudley’s cast-offs. He needed to check with Hermione if she had found the beaded bag. Not that his clothes were something worth worrying about—he’d be better off buying new ones, now that he had the freedom to wander around Muggle London, or even Diagon Alley—but he had stored other things in Hermione’s bag. He’d had his invisibility cloak rolled in a tight wad and stuffed beneath his robes that night, and the Map in the pouch around his neck, but the photo album Hagrid had given him was still in the bag, as were some treasured letters, and the mirror from Sirius. He was sure Hermione would have tracked it down after the battle. It had practically an entire library in it.

Harry shook his head to clear it. He could not seem to focus on anything, with his thoughts skittering from topic to topic. He felt as if he was watching his thoughts, his feelings, not participating, barely feeling.
He tugged again at the uncomfortable Muggle jacket, and pushed his way through the doors of the church. It was dark, and the windows were stained glass in muted colours. A low, droning music was playing. It was strange, with all the deaths he had seen, he had only once gone to a funeral, and he suspected that he was only allowed that because it was on Hogwarts’ grounds. He did not want to think about Dumbledore right now.

Every other time someone had died, he was too protected to attend, or there was no funeral at all.

Harry looked around. He could not remember ever having been in a church. The Dursleys never took him to the Easter and Christmas Eve services, not wanting to take the risk he might do something ‘freakish’ in public. And the Wizarding world… well, religion had never really come up at Hogwarts. It had never occurred to Harry to wonder why. He would have to ask someone.

The church had a dark wooden floor, and there was a red candle floating near the ceiling at the front. No, not floating. Harry saw that there were chains holding it up.

Rows of hard wooden benches lead the way to the front, where a small cluster of people stood. There were not many people in the church. Some were scattered on the benches, mostly near the front, where the coffin rested, presented waist-high on a pedestal. A man in a Vicar’s collar stood nearby.

Harry did not see very many wizards or witches here. A few Gryffindors from Colin’s year, and a Hufflepuff. Why weren’t there more? What must his Muggle family think of the Wizarding world, when so few people from Hogwarts came. How much did they know of the war? Of how and why Colin died?

Harry walked forward down the left side aisle. He could hear a low murmur of voices from those in sitting in the front pews, and standing near the coffin. Harry saw a woman with Colin’s features, but with darker hair, and a blond man by her side, and guessed them to be Colin’s parents.

“Mr and Mrs Creevey?” Harry asked softly.

The woman raised her eyes to him. She looked to be tearing her handkerchief in half, so tightly was she pulling at it.

“I’m sorry for…” Harry did not know how to finish that. But the woman nodded.
“Thank you.” She said. “I recognise you. You were the one—” Harry started to fidget. “He took all those pictures of you.”

“We were in the same house. At school.”

“He said you were famous. Like a hero. In your world.”

“It wasn’t just me. There were so many. Including your son.”

Mrs Creevey looked at him, as if pleading. Harry was not sure what for.

“Colin was very brave,” He told her.

They looked at each other. Harry did not know what else to say. He wondered how much she knew about the battle. Had Colin been at school? He was Muggleborn, it would have been dangerous. If it had been allowed at all. From what he remembered from the break in at the Ministry of Magic, Muggleborns were being rounded up. The image of the trials he had witnessed flashed through his mind. No, Muggleborns would not have been safe at Hogwarts at all. Maybe was he one of the ones that had responded to Neville’s summons. Harry was embarrassed that he had not thought about it up until now.

“He said he wasn’t allowed to go back to school. And he couldn’t go to the school nearby. He wouldn’t know any of the material covered before. He only knew the subjects from your world. And then your world just threw him out.”

“Our world was a mess. Hopefully it won’t be any more. And it’s because of people like Colin, that we were able to take it back. I know that doesn’t help.”

“No. But it is good to know. I am glad you came. I never really got to meet any of his friends.”

Harry felt awkward. Was Colin a friend? He had improved in the DA, and he had fought, when others had not. That counted. “I can’t stay long. There’s another – there are so many funerals.”
“Oh! Of course. I hadn’t thought…”

Harry saw she had suddenly realised why so few of Colin’s friends were present. He hoped that the overloaded funeral schedule was the reason. Harry suspected the Muggleborn might be overlooked in the chaos. But he did not want to mention that as a reason. He was not sure, and he hoped it wasn’t true. But he rather doubted that just killing Voldemort would change pure-blood ideology.

Harry wished he were better at speaking. “I wanted you to know that Colin mattered. To many of us. He was brave, and followed his beliefs with all of his energy. I was glad to know him.” Harry did not feel at all hypocritical in saying that. Colin had been annoying in his first year, but after he’d joined the DA, Harry had a chance to see him, like so many others, grow into his potential. And Harry was glad to have seen that. He just wished it hadn’t killed him.

Mrs Creevey nodded. She used her handkerchief, and turned to Mr Creevey, who put his arm around her and she leaned into him. Mr Creevey spoke up for the first time. “Thank you. And thank you for coming. It means a lot to us.”

Harry nodded. He looked at the small form in the coffin, smaller than a body should be at a funeral. Too small for a warrior against the dark. He turned and left the church. Outside, it was still sunny and bright, and his eyes stung and teared at the change. He ducked around the corner into the alley, put his dress robe back on, and triggered the Portkey to the Weasley plot.

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**The Funeral of Fred Weasley**

*May 6, 1998*

When he got back, more people had arrived, and the transfigured chairs and sofas were starting to fill up. He could not help but compare it to the emptiness of Colin’s funeral. Instead of being dark, quiet and sparse, this one was bright with sunshine, and crowded. The breeze felt cool against Harry’s skin, and it felt like a reminder of change. Some part of Harry hoped that it was. The hope broke briefly through the numbness. Perhaps it wouldn’t always feel like this.

The funeral would begin soon.

Ron and Hermione sat on one sofa, holding on to each other for comfort. Ron looked a bit lost, now
that he wasn’t doing anything. Molly Weasley held onto Arthur, her face red and blotchy, the handkerchief in her hand looked like it had been put to frequent use.

Harry looked around, trying to find a place to sit. Ginny and Neville were sitting together, hands clenched in each other’s. It was one more pain, added onto so many others. One more choice that had been taken from him. He didn’t even feel betrayed. He just felt alone. Harry couldn’t think about it. She had told him, so he wouldn’t be surprised, but it still felt like a sudden stab in his heart. He closed his eyes, breathing as if he had been running. He was here for Fred, he reminded himself. For George. For all the Weasleys. After a few deep breaths, Harry opened his eyes again.

There was an empty seat on a small sofa. George occupied the other spot. It was as if no one wanted to take the spot where Fred would have been, next to George. Harry greeted him and sat. George looked slightly more animated than he had been over the last week. Harry did not think he could stand to see George staring through him again, as he had every time Harry had encountered him since the battle. At least now it looked as if there were someone behind those eyes, a hint of the twin Harry had known.

Harry sat stiffly, not knowing how to give comfort, and not feeling like he had the right to receive it either. It was a bit like he was an intruder into their grief. With all those visibly crying around him, he just stared, going through the motions. Knowing, deep down, that if it had not been for him, these deaths might never have happened. He felt just – empty. He wondered briefly if the emptiness he had seen in George’s face this past week was what other people saw when looking at him. He rather suspected it was so, but he could not bring himself to present a more animated face to his friends.

Fred’s body was in a casket, just like at a Muggle service. But there, the resemblance to a Muggle service ended. There was no vicar. Instead, each member of the Weasley family came forward to cast blessing incantations on the body. Hermione had explained earlier that some were to keep the body from being used in the dark arts, and some were to aid the spirit in its future endeavours. In all the time Harry had been at Hogwarts, he had not seen these kinds of spells.

He supposed that if you grew up in a Wizarding family, you would learn this type of spell as a matter of course. Even a young Weasley cousin, too young to have received her Hogwarts letter, much less to have her own wand, held her hands out to the coffin and spoke her part of the incantation in a clear, childish voice, speaking each syllable with the care in enunciation that spoke of knowing something by rote rather than by understanding.

Various people got up to tell stories about Fred. Most of them were about what a prankster he was, but quite a few revealed the courage and conviction that lurked beneath the frivolity. Harry remembered many interactions with Fred, but did not feel right about telling any of them. He remembered the twins giving him the Marauder’s Map, and testing products from Weasleys’ Wizards Wheezes on first year Hogwarts students. He remembered the moment of rebellion when the twins left Hogwarts for good, in protest against Professor Umbridge. He remembered the two at Order
meetings, acting serious for a change. Mostly.

He remembered how important it had been to him, to hear Fred on Potterwatch. How it had made him feel connected. That he still had friends, that there were people out there thinking about him, people he knew. Of course he knew that Voldemort and his Death Eaters were thinking about him, a bit too much, and everyone who saw an “Undesirable Number 1” poster, but these were people who cared and supported him, knowing who he was. He remembered how suddenly it was not just Harry and Hermione and Ron, alone, trying to complete an impossible task. It let him know that they weren’t in it alone. That had helped.

There were more private conversations, such as when Fred gave him advice for his date with Cho, horrible advice of course. Even so, following it would have made less of a muck of that first date than Harry had made of it on his own. Something about speaking Russian, because girls always like the sophistication of a foreigner.

Harry realized he had been drifting, for people were starting to get up and walk to the front to say personal goodbyes to Fred. When it came to their turn, Harry numbly got up and followed George toward the casket, staying a little back to allow Fred’s twin some privacy. Harry could not fathom how deeply George must feel Fred’s absence. He had always envied the twins for their closeness, a bond so deep they could, and did, finish each other’s sentences. They could act in concert in a way Harry had never seen. When the two played as Gryffindor’s beaters, their movements could have been choreographed. And their sense of humour was certainly shared.

Harry had never had anyone that close. He doubted he ever would. Fred and George had been together literally since birth. He wasn’t sure whether to envy that George had had that closeness, or to be grateful he had never had someone that close be torn from him. He loved Sirius, but what he lost with Sirius was the potential for a relationship, potential for family that loved him and cared for him.

He looked at George’s face, trying to gauge how his friend was surviving it all.

And did a double take. George had a smirk on his face, as if he were trying to repress a wicked grin. He had the kind of twinkle in his eyes that the twins always had when they were about to perpetrate a prank of the first order. And he was reaching into the coffin.

He wouldn’t.

He was. From the seats behind them, George probably seemed as if he were reaching to take Fred’s hand in an expression of grief. Instead, George was putting something into Fred’s casket. And then
he took something out, and tucked it into his robes. If Harry had not been so close, he would have missed the whole thing. Harry took the few steps needed to stand right next to Fred.

“What are you doing?” Harry hissed quietly.

George looked at Harry, then held gestured with his finger as if he were about to raise it to his lips. “Shhh.”

Harry looked incredulously at George. He could not believe it. His own twin’s funeral and George was pulling a prank. Thunder gathered in his eyes, and he looked away from George to look at Fred in the casket.

Fred’s wand. It was …

“You didn’t.”

Fred and George had once replaced all the Gryffindor boys’ wands with prank wands they had designed. If a spell was cast through them, they would shoot sparks, or suddenly become limp, like spaghetti, or blow bubbles, or turn bright colours. The worst was one that would grow a mouth that would shout out insults. Harry became very familiar with these wands; they all had a tell-tale rough spot in exactly the same spot near the tip. Fred’s hands were crossed over his chest, and in his left hand, he held one of the joke wands.

“George!”

“He would have been amused.” George insisted quietly.

Harry shushed the little voice in the back of his head, and nodded.

Gather at the Burrow
Harry was glad there were no more funerals he needed to attend that day. It was good to join the Weasleys at their house to continue the storytelling and remembrances. Mrs Weasley had cooked enough for fifty, but only the family and a few close friends had been invited. He was sad to think of those who would have been invited, had they still been alive. Sirius, certainly. He and the twins had gotten to know each other well, while Sirius was stuck at Grimmauld Place, and the Weasleys were staying there for safety reasons. Dumbledore would have been there. Harry didn’t know how well Remus and Tonks had gotten to know the Weasleys... but they had all been at Grimmauld Place for a long enough stretch for it to be likely they would have been here too.

It was good to see the Burrow crowded with people Harry knew and liked. Even if he didn’t necessarily want to talk with them all, it was good just to let the conversation wash over him, as he found himself inundated with memories. Not just of Fred. He remembered Hermione’s buck teeth and wild hair in her fist year, and how bossy she was. He thought fondly on that. She had changed so much, and it was so good that she was still in his life. She was talking animatedly with Mr Weasley at the moment. Looking around, almost everyone was energetic. It was as if the funeral had released their grief, and they wanted to celebrate the fact that they were all alive, and the battle over.

Harry didn’t have that energy himself, just then. He kept seeing the hole where Fred should be. George was even smiling a bit, with the secretive smile that meant something was about to happen. Fred should be there to smile back. And when the prank happened, the two would smirk at each other and slap each other’s hands in the air.

Mrs Weasley was playing hostess. Even though there was plenty to eat and drink, she made a point of going to each person and checking whether they were in need of something. Her eyes were red, and her smile a bit over-bright, but Harry expected that having things to do was all that was keeping her from wailing.

Ginny and Neville were sitting in the midst of a group of Gryffindors from the twins’ year, but the two were mostly ignoring the group. They sat knee to knee on the sofa, hands clenched together.

Suddenly Harry felt alone. He was reminded why Ginny was not with him, because he valued her enough to send her away. But she had been in the battle anyway. She had survived, but all that he had done had not kept Fred safe.

Mr Weasley must have seen the look on Harry’s face, because he motioned Harry to follow him away from the others onto the front porch. It was quiet and dark, after the bright noise inside. “Harry, I wanted to thank you.” He said quietly. Harry winced. “I mean it. If you had not done all that you did, Fred would still be dead.” Arthur’s voice was ragged as he said that. He took a deep breath. “But at least now, his death, and all the other losses we suffered, were not in vain. Harry’s throat
clogged at hearing the words, as if his heart had come loose and lodged there, blocking his breath. He didn’t understand how he could feel both so loved and so alone, so relieved and so guilty, all at once. Mr Weasley patted him awkwardly on the back, and after a moment went back inside.

Harry stayed on the porch. He could still hear the conversation and occasional bursts of laughter, as someone regaled the others with stories of the Twins’ pranks. But he didn’t have to watch Ginny and Neville. He didn’t want to lose either of them as friends; he had few enough that really knew him. If he watched them right now, it would hurt too much, and he would get resentful. He wished he could wish them well.

He didn’t want someone right now. He doubted he could deal with sharing who he was with someone, when he wasn’t sure he knew himself. He had died, and unlike Fred, he had come back. Despite what Dumbledore said, he didn’t understand why he could come back, when none of the people he cared about could. Now he was here, and alive, but it felt like he was adrift. He felt like the person he was had died, and he wasn’t sure who he was now. He had come back to finish the task that had been set for him. He hadn’t been finished; now he was. His task was done. If that was all it was, then he had no reason left to stay.

Except that wasn’t all it was. He had really returned for all those people he loved: for Ron and Hermione, for Ginny, in fact for all of the Weasleys. Ginny had been there, a possibility, someone to return to when he was ready. Now she wasn’t. And without someone waiting for him, what was he? He had no purpose left.

Nothing measured up to what he had been. He’d never wanted it, but now that Voldemort was dead and the Wizarding World saved from his madness, who was Harry Potter? He didn’t want to live a life based on past glory. He wanted to be useful, to figure out who he was now and what he now had to offer.

Would he be able to do anything without his NEWTs? The decision to leave Hogwarts early had been the only choice he could have made. They had needed to find the Horcruxes, or Voldemort would still be alive. He couldn’t regret his choice even a little bit. But now, with his only skills being Quidditch and Defence, (the latter of which was not terribly useful without his NEWTs), he didn’t really know what to do next. Of course, he could bank on his name, but the thought of doing that made him severely uncomfortable. It wasn’t who he was. He knew that much.

He leaned back on the sofa on the front porch, and looked upward at the stars, listening to the murmur of conversation and stories from inside. For a moment, the emptiness welled up, filling him. Who was he when he was not the ‘Boy Who Lived’ or the ‘Chosen One’ or any of those idiotic names the press saddled him with? Who was he without Voldemort hunting him?

There was a sudden burst of laughter through the open window. Harry felt a moment of wonder. It
sounded like Fred. No, Harry realized, it would have been George. But that moment when it could have been… it broke through something, and the emptiness drained away. He doubted it was gone for good, but for the moment, he felt connected. With the stars shining in a clear, spring sky, and the warm breezes on his skin, and the murmur of so many living people in his life, he couldn’t help but feel things might just work out, even if he didn’t know how.

After a moment, he got up to join the others.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks:
Again and still: thanks to my betas ivyingarden and rosskpr. Their help made this a better chapter, between brainstorming, catching errors in grammar and canon, reviewing plot flow, and supplying encouragement to "write-write-write". Any errors after the two of them have combed through the work are from the author not paying attention.

Disclaimer:
Harry Potter, his friends, his enemies, and the lovely world they live in all belong to JK Rowling. I play here.

Other Notes:
This is one of the first scenes I wrote in this story, and it's been languishing as I caught up.

I know this chapter is a bit depressing. It’s finally starting to hit Harry that the war is over, and his purpose is as well. I think the grief is necessary before he can choose something new.
In some ways, it feels like the chapters up until this point have been winding down from the final battle. After the next chapter (which includes Remus’ and Tonks’ funeral, and a tiny bit of Harry and Draco interaction), I expect the flow to surge back up, with new things growing from the seeds that have been planted in the chapters so far.

As always, reviews and critiques keep the creativity flowing! Let me know what you think!
May 7, 1998

Harry had chosen to spend the night after Fred’s funeral at Hogwarts. He loved the Weasleys, but he needed to be alone, without so many reminders of grief. He was glad he went to the funeral, and glad for the reception after, with just the Weasleys and those they considered family. Now, he was equally glad to come through the Floo Network back to Hogwarts, to the solitude of Gryffindor Tower.

He curled around his pillow, thinking of Fred and George, and how it would now just be George. Somehow, losing one of the twins felt like the world was not as joyful a place. He hoped the signs of George’s returning humour meant that George would recover. Someday. To have defeated Voldemort and yet not have even one irrepressible prankster struck Harry as less than victory. His mind ran through the litany of the dead. His parents. Cedric. Sirius. Hedwig. Remus and Tonks. Fred. Mad Eye. Even Colin Creevey and Snape—one a minor irritation, the other a hate-filled creature, regardless of his motives—still caused a pain like someone had carved out his flesh. And there were others, those he did not know well enough to mourn. Yet he still mourned.

Voldemort was dead now, and the Death Eaters rounded up for the most part. He hoped at some point in his life he could convince himself the losses were worth it for the victory, but all he felt was that it should never have happened.

He awakened late the next morning, after finally having gotten to sleep in the wee hours. He hurried through his shower and made it to the Great Hall before breakfast was over, but only just. To his delight, Neville was sitting at the Hufflepuff table. He had seen Neville a few times since the battle, but they had not had a chance to talk.

“Mind if I join you?”

“Harry! How are you?”
Harry sat, not sure how to answer that. “Fine. You seem to have recovered.”

“They hustled me in to see Madame Pomfrey right away. Personally, I think she was glad to get her hands on me, after last year. She spent way too much time checking me over.”

Harry remembered all of his times in the infirmary, and gave a sympathetic grimace.

“Ginny told me about last year.” As soon as he said the words, Harry wished he could take them back. Neville looked as if Harry had just punched him, and suddenly the pain of Ginny leaving him, or not waiting for him, or whatever it was, washed through him.

He realized that he didn’t connect Neville with losing Ginny. Neville was one of those who had stood by him, who had found skill in the DA, had found courage at the Ministry, had apparently found strength during the year he had been away from Hogwarts, and had become a hero in the battle at Hogwarts. Neville was a friend who had never given up on him. Somehow, it didn’t bother him that Neville and Ginny had chosen each other. What bothered him was that Ginny had given up on him. Neville’s guilt-stricken expression hurt to look at.

“I meant about the Carrows,” he said, feeling lame.

“Harry, I—”

“I don’t blame you Neville. I don’t even think I blame Ginny. I’ll be fine. It will be fine, Neville. But... can we not talk about it just yet?”

Neville was spared having to answer by the morning owls.

One of the owls flew in his direction with a thick bunch of parchment. Harry untied it and gave the owl some of his bacon and a bit of his cinnamon bun. The owl nibbled both and took off with a strong downward thrust of wings. No sooner had he done so, when another, larger owl also flew toward him and dropped a heavy box into his hands.

Neville had covered his food and drinking glass out of habit. The owls rarely deposited anything too disgusting on the table, but feathers and down would occasionally float down into the porridge.
“Sorry, I keep getting these from Mrs Tonks. I think I’ve answered five owls full of questions since Tuesday. And I wasn’t here for most of yesterday. I never realized how much is involved in planning a memorial, and I’m not even doing most of the work. I feel bad, like I should be doing more. She’s lost her daughter, and her husband last year; she shouldn’t have to be doing all the work.

“Maybe she needs to do it herself – to keep focused.”

He looked at the box first. It was from the shop Mrs Tonks had suggested for Remus’ plaque. He wasn’t quite ready to look at it. His throat suddenly got thick, as if he’d swallowed a Bludger. He wondered if he’d ever be ready for that. He’d have to be. Just... not yet. He set it on the table and picked up the sheaf of parchment.

The first page was a list of people Andromeda thought he might want at the funeral—people who might want to be there for Remus, with a note asking if there were any additions. She explained that, as most wizarding families were interrelated, it was rare that a potential guest would not be able to cross the outside barrier, which blocked Muggles, and those who wished ill to the family. That could be taken a number of different ways. The inside barrier of the Black estate had been to limit it to family, which, as it was determined by blood and magic, was again fairly broad a swath, considering the interrelation. Still, she would follow tradition and set the Portkeys to transport the guests to a clearing outside the wards. Harry shook his head. Purebloods were paranoid. On the other hand, with families like the Malfoys and the Blacks, he supposed they might have reason to be.

Another page was a spell he should learn and perform. Harry did a double-take. It was a hair lengthening charm. He turned to Neville. “Why would I need a hair lengthening charm for a funeral?”

Neville glanced at the parchment, then his eyes widened. “When did you become Head of the Potter family?”

Harry suddenly realized he would have to do that whole thing again, some sort of ritual to become the magical Head of the Potter family. He wondered what the Potter family had in mind for the Head of the Family, and decided he could wait on that. Ever since that day at the Black Estate, he could feel the reactions and sometimes even hear comments of the Black family. He didn’t think he could handle the Potter and Black families using his mind as their own personal Quaffle. With what little he knew of the two families, it would soon come to Bludgers. Would there always be someone whispering in the back of his mind, trying to influence his choices? He’d only just gotten rid of Voldemort!

He realized Neville was still looking at him. “I didn’t. But Sirius made me his heir.”
“And you accepted?”

“The day before yesterday.”

“Wow. Doesn’t your life ever slow down?”

“I haven’t managed to make that happen yet. Do you have any tips?”

Neville just gave him a wry smile. “So, about that spell—usually the head of a pure-blood family will wear their hair long as a symbol of their rank. At some point, I’ll take over the Longbottom family, but right now Gran has the responsibility. I know I’m of age and all, but with all that’s been happening, it just never seemed the time. When I do, though, I’ll be expected to grow my hair.”

But, wouldn’t more purebloods have long hair then? I mean, Mr Weasley doesn’t, and neither did whatshisname, Fudge.”

“It would only be the head of the family. Even then, some only do it for formal occasions, like a funeral. Families like the Weasleys have let go of some of the older traditions. I’ve never seen Mr Weasley wear his hair long, but Bill Weasley does, which a traditional family would never allow.” Neville paused for a moment. “Even among the old blood families, most are cadet houses. They owe allegiance to one of the old pure-blood houses, and it is only the Head of the main family that carries the Pride.”

Neville suddenly looked abashed. “Sorry for running on like that. Gran drilled all that into my head as soon as it became clear I had magic.”

“No, it’s okay. So, I should wear my hair long, when I go to this funeral? Should I have worn it long to Fred’s?”

“What do you think? I can just imagine Fred’s comment on that.”

“If the twins thought of it, they’d have a Head of House Halibut, or something.”

“No, it has to be a candy. Head of House Hyssop.”
“Sounds like a cough medicine.”

“This is why neither of us ran Weasleys’ Wizarding Wheezes.”

Harry was suddenly silent.

“Harry?”

“Never mind.”

The morning passed—once Harry sent one of the school owls off with the information Mrs Tonks required—with Harry on a sorting crew, levitating rock into piles of usable, repairable, and unusable stone. The pile of stone blocks that needed transfiguration or repair was the largest. At lunch he sat at the Ravenclaw table with several members of his crew, but no one he knew personally.

Lunch was a hearty stew with chunks of venison in it, fresh fruit, dark, thick slices of bread, and custard for dessert. He wondered at the change of menu, with fewer choices and especially fewer sweets, but expected that the elves were catering to adult tastes, and perhaps were too busy to make five different options for each course. He didn’t mind. It was filling, and felt like luxury after so many months on the road.

“Hi Harry. Do you mind if I sit with you?”

“Luna! How are you? I am so glad to see you well!”

“It’s been going well. Daddy’s getting better. I’ve been helping him with articles. I have to help him run the press, too.”

Harry slid aside a bit and gestured for her to sit next to him. Before sitting, she twisted her pale hair into a knot and stuck her wand through to hold it in place. “Easier to eat this way.”
Harry nodded, wondering if he would have to wear his hair long all the time, and if it would get into his food. Of course, he could take a leaf from the Weasleys' book and thumb his nose at tradition. He wasn’t sure why the thought made him uncomfortable.

“Holding the fork and my wand at the same time can be difficult. I once cast a levitation charm on my food by accident.” Luna continued. “The mashed turnips were especially difficult to get back down. They landed in Eddie Carmichael’s stew, and splattered all over his robes.” She gave a smile. “Cho Chang was sitting right next to him. Too bad she didn’t hear me when I mentioned the dangers of the second Saturday in March.”

Harry was almost afraid to ask. “Dangers?”

“The Creelple dance that day. It tends to cause accidents. She really shouldn’t have worn that lovely cream jumper under her robes that day.”

Just as lunch was ending, Professor McGonagall strode into the Great Hall and up to the head table. She touched her wand to her throat, and with a *Sonorus*-enhanced voice, spoke. “May I have your attention please?” After the noise in the hall abated, she continued. “For safety reasons, all work on Hogwarts Castle has been postponed. I wish to thank the volunteers for your time, and apologise for sending you home early, today. Please do come back Monday, as we should have the issue in hand by then. The work you have done is much appreciated, and I know that with your help, we will be able to reopen Hogwarts this fall. Those of you who are staying at Hogwarts and are unable to return home for the weekend, please see Mr Filch. Thank you.”

“You’re staying here, aren’t you Harry?” Luna raised her voice slightly to compensate for the sudden burst of conversation filling the Hall.

“I should go talk to Filch. Ugh. Maybe I’ll just ask Professor McGonagall if it’s okay if I stay.” He paused. The Headmistress was busy, and he didn’t want to disturb her. He knew she’d make time for him, but it wouldn’t be fair of him to abuse that. “I suppose there’re some other places I could go for the weekend if I needed to,” he added.

He could stay at the Weasleys. He wondered if the rooms would be too full of visitors, like they had been for Bill’s wedding. He really didn’t want to stay alone at Grimmauld Place. Well, alone except for Kreacher. Despite the changes in the house elf, he didn’t think he was in a mood for dealing with him. Grief for those lost still weighed too heavily on Harry, and Kreacher would remind him either of Sirius or, in the house elf’s new helpful guise, of Dobby. And both of those thoughts hurt too much. All the recent losses echoed those earlier deaths, making the pain sharp again, when it had started to dull. Grimmauld Place would only make it more intense, with the memories of the too-short
amount of time he had stayed there, getting to know Sirius. It felt like he had wasted so much time.

As he was getting up, Luna said, “Professor McGonagall will help you, Harry.” She tilted her head back and blinked slowly, then tugged her wand out of her pale hair. “Tell her that Gryffindor tower will be okay. And Harry--”

Harry turned back, waiting for her to continue.

“Would you walk with me afterward? I have something I want to ask you.”

“Sure. Shall I meet you by the entrance?”

She nodded. Harry found the Headmistress still by the front table, again surrounded by people clamouring with questions. When she finally got to him, she agreed to let him stay in the castle that evening, but asked him to go outside for the afternoon but to avoid the spots where the battle had raged, and to check in with her or Filch before returning. There would be an Auror at the main entrance with information, as well.

To his surprise, Luna was still waiting for him, when he reached the entry hall. They made their way outside and proceeded to walk toward the lake. Luna drifted, wandering on the thick grass as if blown around by a breeze, never once coming close to the furrows in the ground or jagged gaps in the hedges where giants had crashed through or spells marked their passage.

“I always loved this place.” Luna commented, when they had reached the lakeshore. “Shyfusser are particularly fond of the darker grasses.” She ran her fingers gently along a long bunch of grasses. They were a dark green that was almost blue. “It shows off their skin so well, you see.”

Harry didn’t, but nodded.

“I heard you are giving Professor Lupin a memorial.”

He nodded again. Luna had turned away, but continued as if she had seen him.

“I wonder if you’d mind if I make something for him – for the memorial.”
“What do you want to make?”

“I’ll know when it’s finished. You don’t have to use it. But I wanted to give you something to remember him by.”

Harry remembered the painting on Luna’s ceiling in her room and smiled. “I think that would be great.”

“Oh, good. I’d better be going, then. So I can give it to you on time.”

“Luna, I didn’t know you were that fond of Remus.”

“He was a good teacher, Harry. But I’m not doing it for him.”

Harry thought about that for a second, and suddenly felt warm.

A Funeral in Black

May 8, 1998

He didn’t sleep much that night, not only because he had been forbidden to go back to Gryffindor Tower until a bunch of Aurors and Unspeakables had scanned it with an odd device one of them carried. They had needed to fiddle with the settings multiple times. Each time, the loud tone emitting from it went up or down. Finally, they let him in, but left behind a smaller device that would have been at home with the many spinning and squealing instruments in Dumbledore’s office... before he had destroyed half of them. They told him that it was just a precaution, but if the device started making a sound, any sound, he was to go see Madame Pomfrey immediately.

That, combined with worries about the funeral, kept him up half the night. When after an uneasy slumber he woke up at the first light of dawn, he gave in and sat cross-legged on the rumpled blankets, once again going through the parchments Mrs Tonks had sent him.
One of them was a chant he would have to sing. The parchment was charmed to sing the chant to him so he could practice. At the funeral, others would join in, but as Head of the Black family, he would have to lead it. He was beginning to wonder if it had been a good idea to accept the role... except it was somewhat of a gift from Sirius. He had ignored one gift from Sirius, and lost him because of it. An ache clenched at his belly at the thought. It was the same twisting ache that he felt every time he thought of the mirror that could have saved Sirius’ life. He was not about to repeat that mistake.

After a few hours, the chant was as good as he could make it. He wasn’t a good singer, but he thought he was singing the right tune, at least.

He could only take off and put on his robes so many times, and the mirror showed (and told) him that even his magically grown hair, now tied back in a neat ribbon, was a bit too wavy on top and still looked tousled, no matter how many times he took the ribbon off and re-combed it. He wondered what Malfoy’s hair would look like without the gel. He hoped it was just as messy as his, and that that was the reason Malfoy used so much shellac.

Harry shook himself out of his ridiculous musings and made his way to the Headmistress’ office. He arrived early, despite the need to navigate his way through various detours marked with bright purple streamers and warning signs.

He’d been waiting with McGonagall for half an hour when Mrs Tonks came through the Headmistress’ Floo in a flare of green flames.

Even though she held Teddy in a carrying basket, Mrs Tonks’ severe black robes made her look more distant. She looked like the pureblood Harry knew she was. He was not sure if he was comfortable with the idea. It was disconcerting how the formal black robes emphasized the resemblance to Bellatrix Lestrange. He did not want Mrs Tonks to be sucked into the darkness of the Black family. He wondered if his own magic would be woven into the Black magic. Would his magic change the Black family, or would it change him? Why had he not thought of this before?

But Sirius was a Black, despite the fact that his magic would never come home. It was such a strange way of thinking. It was almost as if, once he assumed the Head of Family role, the good of the family was always present in his mind. As if there was another presence in him that was the Black Family, and he carried it with him always. What would happen when he accepted the Potter family? What if the good of the Potter family conflicted with the good of the Black family? Harry laughed at himself. He was the Potter family. He was all that was left. In a way, he was the Black family as well: he and Andromeda Tonks, and little Teddy. None of the ones left in the Black family were Dark. Harry grinned at the thought. He could reclaim the family, change the meaning of what it meant to be Black. It would be the ultimate prank, played to honour Sirius. Wouldn’t that set them all on their arses! He could imagine Narcissa Malfoy’s expression when she realized that he was head of the house she was born to, and that he would be changing its direction. He was glad she had married
At the very thought of her name, Harry felt a pull. He could feel a sense of duty toward her. It was muted, but it was there. And he knew that did not come from Harry Potter… unless… She had lied to Voldemort for him. Was that what he felt? Was this what a life debt felt like?

He shuddered at the thought. He did not want to owe Narcissa Malfoy anything.

Mrs Tonks was giving him a strange look. He tried to remember the past few minutes, then realised she had asked him a question. Probably. “Sorry?” Harry asked.

“I asked if you were ready to go,” she repeated gently, transferring the baby basket to her other hand. It looked heavy.

“Sure. Professor McGonagall, we’ll see you later? At the funeral?”

“Of course, Harry.”

Harry followed Mrs Tonks through the corridors and out of the castle, and on out of the grounds past the Apparition wards.

“Harry! Wait!”

They had just reached the apparition barrier, when Luna’s call reminded Harry of their conversation of the day before. Surely it couldn’t be finished already!

“Here you are, Harry.” She handed him a small, cloth wrapped bundle. He looked at her, and she nodded encouragement, so he unwrapped it. It was a painting of Remus, looking out at the viewer. Luna had captured how he always seemed just a little tired, but she also caught the warmth in his eyes, with a hint of golden flecks. The barest hint of a crescent moon was in a starry sky behind his face.

“He wanted to be painted as close to the new moon as possible,” she said softly, looking at the picture. She could be referring to a conversation with Remus when he’d been alive, but with Luna, it
was difficult to tell for certain. Had Luna and Remus spoken about this? Harry didn’t know if the
thought made him happy or sad. Had Remus sensed he would die?

“Since I did most of my painting last night, I couldn’t paint him in the daylight. Besides, then you
wouldn’t know what time of month it was.”

Somehow, Luna’s words made sense to Harry. Even at their craziest, somehow, they always did.

“Thank you Luna. This—this means a lot to me.” He wished he could have a painting like this of
Sirius. Maybe he could commission her to do one. Remus wasn’t alive like the Hogwarts paintings,
but she had caught him so well, he seemed to be.

Luna nodded and turned away. Harry suddenly felt bad that he hadn’t thought to add her to the list
for Mrs Tonks. “Luna!”

“Go ahead, Harry. This is for you. I have a conversation scheduled with the Squid. She’s been upset
by all the commotion.”

Harry nodded as if that made sense.

“Ready?” At his quick nod, Mrs Tonks wrapped her free arm around him, and Apparated them both
to the Black estate.

Upon arriving, he could feel the wards reach out and recognize him. Upon an impulse, he sent a
greeting back, and was surprised at the feeling that returned. He would not exactly call it warmth, but
it was welcoming. It was as if he had been tested and found worthy, the last time he was here, and
now was recognized as belonging. It was like a nod of respect from an ally across the room, and it
warmed him.

They made their way to the small mausoleum in the field beyond the fence from the main house, and
Mrs Tonks pulled a small box out of her pocket. She unfolded it, until it formed a large, flat disk.
Touching her wand to it, she murmured an incantation. The disk was suddenly covered by various
items, some of which Harry recognized from George’s funeral.

“Transfer Portkey,” she explained, seeing his look. “Once it is keyed to the things you will need, it
can be activated to transfer those items from storage to your location. The spell work is difficult and
the disks themselves are a challenge to create, so are mostly used for moving large amounts of things.”

Harry thought how useful that would be. As he had at the Weasleys, he helped her set up the miniaturized chairs and benches, these much more ornate, and then watched as she cast the charm to return them to their original size. He tested the charm on one chair, and when it became chair-sized instead of exploding, repeated the action.

These were not transfigured chairs as they had been at the Weasleys. They had been reduced in size, but were actual furniture as far as Harry could tell. The chairs had black ribbons looped around their backs, to tie in the back. They were somewhat shiny, like satin. Directly above the bow was the Black family crest. Yes, this was a Black family funeral, and there would be no mistaking it, despite the fact it was not in the large Black mausoleum. While outside of the main property, it was inside the outer wards, and that is what mattered. It was Black land, and would call to Tonks’ magic, and through hers, it would call to Remus’.

“Harry, I’ll need your assistance to get the next thing. It’s in there.” Mrs Tonks gestured to the large, old mausoleum. Harry had glanced at it several times, curious as to why Tonks had feared it. She had not been the kind of person who feared much.

As soon as he stepped foot into the large mausoleum, Harry understood. It was frightening. It wasn’t just that it was under-lit, but there were stone statues of horrendous beasts, some of which Harry didn’t recognize from any Care of Magical Creatures class. Harry found himself startled at the movement of the many things that shouldn’t move and yet did, like the statues at Hogwarts. The statues never bothered him, but these unnerved him just a little.

There were glass urns with dark red fluid inside. There were twists of what looked like desiccated hair, hanging from strands as thin and sticky as spider webs. Some of the bodies were dusty skeletons, resting on their shelves. Those were okay with Harry. That was what was supposed to happen.

What made his skin crawl were the three bodies that lay on their shelves as if they had just lain down. Dark black hair lay in coils beneath their heads, spilling off their shelves in loose draping curls. The skins were soft and did not look dried out like he would have expected. The robes were soft and luxurious, with a vague silky sheen, in the fashion he’d seen in some of the older Hogwarts portraits. He couldn’t tell what era, not really having had the time or inclination to pay attention to ‘fashion through the ages’ when there was a Dark Lord after him, and frankly, when there was Quidditch to play and just about anything else to do. He could only tell that the style wasn’t the same as now.

Even with all his exposure to magic over the last seven years, Harry could not repress a shudder.
Every bit of him rebelled at the sight of those disturbing, lifelike corpses. Mrs Tonks explained that those were the Blacks who had not allowed their magic back into the family, ritually keeping it for some purpose of their own. Until the purpose was fulfilled, their bodies would stay exactly in the state they had been at death. In some cases, she said, the spirits were bound as well as their magic, and could neither live on as a ghost nor pass onward. While that did not seem quite as final as a Dementor’s kiss, the thought still made Harry shudder. He had been willing to die in the forest, but part of that willingness was that he knew his parents would be waiting for him, and Remus and Sirius.

The first floor of the mausoleum was huge enough. But the stone stairway down into the earth gave evidence that there was more. The cold, dank air that drifted out of the opening downward hinted at more than low temperatures below. Harry shivered. He could well understand why Tonks would be unnerved by this place.

“It’s over here.” Mrs Tonks had not taken the time to gawk as Harry had, and was standing by an alcove in the wall. Inside the alcove was a bottle. It was as smooth as one of the glass bottles that Snape had stored potions ingredients in, but it was not glass. On closer look, Harry realised it had been carved out of stone.

“I can’t touch it. Only the head of the family has the right.” Mrs Tonks told him.

“What is it?”

“You might call it a potion. It has been here, in this vessel, for more generations than anyone remembers. No one knows how it was created, but there has never been a need to create more. It has never run out.”

“What’s it for?”

“It is the essence of the Black family.” It sounded as if that was all she was going to say on the subject.

He reached toward it, then, remembering the little room that was the Heart of Black, he paused. Mrs Tonks gave him an encouraging nod. “You are the only one who can touch it, Harry. Go ahead.”

He closed his fingers around the gracefully thin neck of the bottle, and lifted it from its alcove. It seemed rather anticlimactic when nothing happened.
He pulled the stone stopper, wondering how it could remain sealed. No vacuum packaging to keep it fresh. He sniffed cautiously at the opening, thinking of all the times he had cleaned the Dursleys’ refrigerator. Old milk, old mushrooms, rotting vegetables each had a distinctive smell that had sent him gagging. This did not.

It smelled of copper and herbs, of the dust of ages, and of power. Harry had not realized that power had a smell until just then. As soon as the scent touched his nostrils, something in him relaxed.

“That’s enough for now. Seal it up, we’ll need shortly.” Harry did as she asked and sealed the flask, and followed her back outside, not understanding what just happened. “When the time comes, you need to anoint Nymphadora with the liquid in that flask. Here,” she gestured to her forehead, “and here,” she placed each middle finger on the palm of the other hand, “and on the soles of her feet.”

He followed Mrs Tonks back outside. The sun was bright after the gloom of the mausoleum, and Harry blinked several times to get his eyes adjusted, then, after placing the bottle carefully against the wall of the new, smaller mausoleum, he returned to work.

After setting up the chairs near the new mausoleum, they set up a stand on which Harry leaned Luna’s portrait of Remus. He had finally examined Remus’ plaque last night. It was perfect. The plaque was bronze. He’d rejected the craftsman’s suggestion of silver, feeling that Remus would not have been comfortable with that. Magically etched into the bronze were the words:

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Remus J Lupin

The dearest friends are those who last the longest,
whose loyalty is a statement of the truth in their hearts.

Hero of the Wizarding Wars
Valued Teacher
Trusted Friend
Beloved Husband and Father
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Harry pulled the plaque out of his carryall, and then removed it from where it was nestled in its box and carefully adhered it to the stand with a sticking charm, just above the portrait. He draped the stand with black cloth.

Mrs Tonks levitated a solid stone and set it next to Remus’ memorial stand. The stone was almost waist high, and six foot long, and wide enough for a body. She laid herbs on the bier, some of which Harry recognized from Herbology. He tried to remember their purposes, but that was veering into Potions, and the very thought of Potions made him tense and sad and angry.

When the herbs were carefully strewn, Mrs Tonks looped swaths of black fabric around the bier in such a way that the stone could be seen through them and the herbs would be in contact with the body.

Finally, Mrs Tonks Apparated away, then returned with a loud pop carrying her daughter’s body in her arms. Harry had expected a coffin, or at least a stretcher, hovering under control of her wand. Suddenly, he no longer saw the strong woman who had been carrying him through the arrangements. This was a mother holding her lifeless child. He felt like an intruder. After one glance at her face, he went over to help arrange Tonks on the bier, gently straightening her arms and legs and robes. The robes looked ceremonial, and more formal than he’d ever seen her in, with the possible exception of the Auror’s full-dress robes. Her feet were bare.

Tonks’ hair was brown. Harry couldn’t remember if he had ever seen her with her natural hair colour. It should be bubblegum pink, or purple, or Slytherin green.

Her face was somehow less symmetrical than he had ever seen it as well. Had she just instinctively made herself appear as she thought of herself?

“It’s been so long since I’ve seen her like this. I missed seeing my daughter.” Andromeda Tonks echoed Harry’s thoughts.

Harry understood. There were so many people he missed. But as he watched Andromeda Tonks lay her hand on her daughter’s cheek, caressing it softly, he wondered if he could ever understand, and if he wanted to. Harry had lost many people in his life, and felt each loss like a pain tearing at his heart, but this was something different. Each of those that Harry had lost was beloved, and each was either part of his history, of where he came from, or a symbol of his failures. Mrs Tonks had lost her daughter, her future. Only Teddy was left to carry her magic forward. The strange perceptions crept into his mind, as if he had inherited a second soul along with the second House, but he pushed the
The quiet ravages on Mrs Tonks face, even though she held back tears and held her expression as calm as she could, called to Harry. He reached out to her and laid his hand on her shoulder in comfort.

She stilled, breathing quietly. After a few moments, she nodded, then raised her hand up to lay it on top of his, resting there for a moment before gently removing his hand from her shoulder and walking into the smaller mausoleum.

This building was everything the large one was not. There were windows, letting in sunlight. The shelves with the bodies had stones sealing each alcove, which had presumably been levitated into place, each with an inscription. The floor was dusty, yes, but a spell made quick work of that. The walls were painted a greenish blue that somehow suggested the warmth of summer days, and between that, the sunlight, and the white stone, it reminded Harry of pictures he had seen of Greece.

Mrs Tonks went to an empty alcove halfway up one of the walls, cleaned it out with a slow sweep of her wand, as if even this needed all the attention she would have given her daughter, could she but have her back. She laid herbs into the corners of the bier, and then paused to look at Tonks’ final resting place.

Harry felt even more bereft than he had before. Remus would not have this. Sirius never got this. Neither would have a place to rest, to be remembered. He turned away and squeezed his eyes shut, fighting back the thickness in his throat. When he opened them, Mrs Tonks beckoned Harry back toward the bier, and he saw that she had cut a small niche next to that which would contain Tonks body. It would fit Remus’ plaque. It wasn’t the same, but... Remus would be remembered here. She laid some of the same herbs in there, carefully shaping them as if following an inner vision.

“It won’t hurt him.” She told Harry. “It will draw his magic to intertwine with Dora’s, and that will make it part of yours as head of the Black family, just as these will bring a bit of Nymphadora back to me.” Harry found he wanted that with all his heart. Remus couldn’t replace Sirius. But he could take his own place in the flow that had been in the back of his mind since Tuesday afternoon. If his parents had lived, he would have had them, and Remus and Sirius, all as family. He could hold onto one of them.

He wondered if the Potter family felt like that. Had his parents’ funeral used this kind of magic? If he accepted his own family in the same way he accepted Black, would he hear his parents in the back of his head, and feel their magic? He yearned for that. He longed to hear their voices, and to feel their presence. The only Black he had close connection with was Sirius, and he would never be part of the connections he sensed, just out of reach. If Andromeda taught him about the Black Family and Traditions as she said she would, and about the jumble of whispers in his mind, he would have a
chance to learn from them, and maybe to use that knowledge to sense Remus as well, if his magic really did get woven in as she said. He looked forward to strengthening those links to little Teddy, and to Andromeda, as if he really had family.

The sound of voices indicated that the first few guests had arrived. Andromeda Tonks sent a quick glance around the funeral site, ensuring that the preparations were complete, and then walked toward the voices. Harry followed.

The first to arrive had been Mrs Weasley, with Ron and Hermione in tow. Harry grinned at the horror the Black estate felt at welcoming Blood Traitors, but Harry was the Head of House, and his choice overrode family tradition. He could feel it in the wards, this reluctant welcoming. But there was Black blood directly in the Weasley line, and even though they were Blood Traitors, they still had a right to be here, and Hermione--

“Hermione, STOP!”

Hermione froze. Harry could feel the wards vibrating, readying themselves. He could feel the resentment. There was an outsider here—someone who never could belong, worse than Blood Traitors. He felt the visceral cry of Mudblood from the wards. “Just a second, Hermione. I need to…” Harry sunk into that sense of what the Black family needed. It was crying with outrage, crying ‘impure!’ He sent back images of Hermione, standing by his side, from the moment she fixed his glasses on the train all the way through the Horcrux hunt.

He felt as if he was overpowering the desires of the Black family, which was what Mrs Tonks had warned him against, but this was… this was unconscionable, that she would be excluded.

He traced his own sense of her, that she was his family, that he was of Black, therefore she was the family of the head of house Black. The wards shivered. He heard howling in his mind. He almost heard Sirius’ mother, screaming at him. “Quiet! She is one of mine!”

With that mental shout, the din in his mind subsided, and he felt acceptance from the inner crowd. It perplexed him for a moment, and then he realized what he had done. He could feel it. As far as the magic was concerned, he had claimed her as a possession. Like a house elf. That wasn’t what he had meant. She was family—they were part of each other; she and Ron and Harry had grown into a kind of family. They each had blood family of their own, which he’d tried very hard not to envy, but this was something else. He couldn’t imagine life without either one of them. He shook his head. For now, he wouldn’t fight it. Hermione would be outraged, but it meant she could be there during the funeral. He would have to work with the family energies later. He would have to lead them to
understanding how important this change was.

“Come on in. Sorry about that, Hermione.”

“What was that?”

“The wards, erm…”

Understanding suddenly filled Hermione’s face. It was, after all, a Black property, and she was very good at making connections.

“It’s safe now. For now. I’ll work on it.”

The wards in the back of Harry’s mind flickered, reaching out and welcoming new arrivals. He glanced around, wondering who would cause that kind of a reaction in the wards. When he found them, outrage rose in him, as if the blanket that had been separating him from his emotions since the final battle had given way. Narcissa and Draco Malfoy were crossing the wards, accompanied by two Aurors.

Malfoy’s face was a still mask, as was his mother’s. Neither showed the fear or desperation that had been visible when Harry last saw each of them. It was as if the war left them untouched, despite what he remembered to the contrary, despite the Aurors at their arms, despite the fact that they were at a funeral! Harry saw Mrs Malfoy lean toward her son to murmur something. Malfoy nodded. Harry wondered what they had said, and decided he didn’t care.

Harry felt betrayed by the wards, which had nearly attacked Hermione, and yet were yearning for Draco and Narcissa Malfoy as plants for the sun. Today was supposed to be just right, the first time he ever got to mourn for... for someone who cared like a parent. Remus’ friendship with Harry’s parents somehow made him part of them, connecting Harry to what he had lost. This was his last chance to honour them: his parents, Sirius, Remus. Nothing was supposed to mess it up. Why were the Malfoys even here? He was ready to stomp over and eject them bodily, regardless of the disruption it would cause, for at least then it would be quick and done with, when Andromeda leaned over and whispered a gentle reminder. “She is my sister, and they are both of the Black line. I forgot you knew young Draco.”
Harry’s mind couldn’t encompass all that was wrong with that. Bellatrix Black was also a sister to Andromeda Tonks, and she killed both Tonks and Sirius. Sisterhood alone was not enough reason to let Narcissa Malfoy intrude, as far as he was concerned. Malfoys had no business here. He wasn’t even sure they had any right to be free to move around.

He repressed the memories of glimpsed scenes that revealed that perhaps Malfoy was not the willing Death Eater Harry had always assumed: scenes of Malfoy, crying in a bathroom, and later looking terrified, forced to torture for Voldemort’s pleasure. Harry didn’t want to feel anything ambiguous toward Malfoy. It didn’t matter if they were free or not, he just did not want them here! Still...

“Why aren’t they locked up?”

“Compassionate leave, Harry. They are family.”

He forced himself to calm. He wanted to be selfish and send them away from Remus’ memorial. This was his. It was his chance to grieve for Remus, and extending from that, to grieve for all the rest, for Sirius, for his parents, for all his lost family. The look on Mrs Tonks’ face stopped him.

Suddenly, he realized how very strange the war had been for people like Mrs Tonks. He kept forgetting that Mrs Tonks was also Bellatrix’ sister. For her, it was sisters fighting sisters, and cousins fighting cousins. Her own sister had killed her daughter. Harry couldn’t imagine how that would feel. He remembered seeing the Black family tapestry, and seeing so many familiar names: Longbottom, Weasley, even Potter! If the wizarding world was as interconnected as that, then for those born and raised in it, the war had been against members of their own families, or at least kin.

Harry had always thought if only his parents had lived, his life would have been so much better. But what if he’d been in Mrs Tonks position? Having to choose between family and what was right? What if he’d had other extended family, who supported Voldemort?

Suddenly it was all just too complex. All he wanted was to have his chance to remember Remus, and to remember Tonks, to mourn all that he had lost, and not to have to think so much.

At least Lucius Malfoy wasn’t there.
Draco did not know if he could do this.

He had always taken pride in his family. The Malfoy family was one of the oldest pure-blood families, and had been influential in the wizarding world for generations. Malfoys had guided the thinking and the direction of politics, education, and the wizarding financial world, starting where goblin control ended. They had adhered to wizarding culture when so many other families had weakened, letting Muggle ways influence them.

He was also proud of his mother’s family. While the Malfoy family was old, the Black family was ancient. The Black family didn’t merely hold to the old ways, they *clung* to them. The family had existed when the old ways were new, and their will and their wands had directed the evolution of what Draco held sacred. Draco had always been proud to be of direct Black descent.

He’d agreed to come to this partly because of that pride. That ancient blood flowed in his veins, and the House of Black deserved his respect, and his protection, whether he was the recognized Head of Black or not. It was despicable that there were so many in the House that had no idea what it meant to be of the line of Black, what the traditions meant. A blood traitor, a half-blood, a werewolf, and worse yet, their progeny. He repressed a shudder. He understood the other reasons for being here. He knew he had to make nice to the victors, if his family were to survive.

He did not know if he could stand through the funeral with that smug git Potter usurping the role of head of the family. He stood there, greeting people, putting on a tragically brave face as if only he knew what it was to lose people. Potter didn’t know anything of sacrifice. The ponce had won the war. He had no right to look as if he had lost everything.

Just the sight of him made Draco want to punch him in the face.

His mother had always been too good at sensing his emotions. She put a calming hand on his arm. “Now is not the time to make a scene, Draco.” His mother rarely made a scene. Her control was another thing that he took pride in. When Narcissa Malfoy made a scene, she *orchestrated* it. Every nuance planned, every word, every adjustment in volume. Even now, with Harry Bloody Potter taking over as the head of the family she was born to, she was cool, gracious. “Rule 8, Draco.”

His eyes widened. He loved his mother. Slytherin Rule 8: There is always advantage.

They had talked about the benefits and risks before making the decision to attend, but holding the rules in his mind helped clarify things to him and keep him calm despite the provocation that Potter embodied. His mother always knew just what to say.
He took a deep breath. The air smelt of grass and sunshine. Even if nothing else came of this, he’d been able to get out of that room for a few hours.

Turning to examine Potter more carefully, Draco noticed he had cleaned up for the funeral. One could almost mistake him for a pureblood. Someone must have loaned him decent robes. Someone had possibly helped him dress. His hair was even the proper length for his assumed role in the event. What was the proper hair length for an interloper? Draco would have to look that up.

It was obvious that Potter knew nothing of proper hair care potions. Even at the length for his assumed role, and bound back in an appropriate queue, his hair still looked like he’d just got back from playing Quidditch. In a windstorm. He stood awkwardly in the fine robes. Draco hoped Potter would not make even more of a farce of the funeral than it was likely to be, honouring a blood traitor half-blood and a werewolf.

At least the bier had been set up properly. He could smell the herbs on the breeze, and identified them: hemlock to call the magic of the deceased, bay laurel to reawaken it into the family, and ivy to weave it in. He could see the bright red holly berries, preserved for just such occasions, mixed in with other herbs chosen more specifically for the one in the bier. Despite her rejection of the culture that had given her birth, the Blood Traitor had apparently remembered what was necessary and was following the true ways in this. Draco didn’t know whether to be impressed or offended. To hold a traditional funeral for the spawn of a Blood Traitor, and to include a werewolf in the magic, it was almost insulting, yet at least the magic would not be wasted. It could come back to the family to be wielded by more suitable hands. His own, for example. At the very least, his mother’s. Unfortunately, it seemed most likely that the wand to direct the magic would be Potter’s. For the moment.

His mother was directing their movements toward the grieving mother and Potter. He stopped. Narcissa paused so as not to visibly pull on his arm, where her hand had been resting. “It is necessary to pay our respects.”

Draco swallowed. Respect? Respect for the Boy Who Lived? Respect for a Blood Traitor? His thoughts must have shown on his face, or at least his revulsion, for his mother replied as if he had spoken. “Respect for the head of the family of my birth, and for my sister, who grieves her daughter. While I cannot take joy in her choices, she is my sister, and she is the only one of my family yet alive.

“You don’t have to swallow your pride, Dragon. You merely have to find enough to greet them with your head held high. A friendly overture toward the winners of this war does not damage your pride. It is too strong to be damaged by allowing others to feel equal to you, whether or not they are.”
Draco gave a resolute nod, and they continued, side by side, trailed by the Aurors who followed like the servants Draco pretended them to be, to where Potter stood, surrounded by consoling hangers-on. They backed off when the two approached, except for the Weasel and Granger, who stood protectively by his side as if he would hex Potter in the midst of a funeral full of powerful people, and a Black funeral at that.

Potter stared at him as if willing him away. At least he got to ruin a part of Potter’s day. Suddenly he felt a bit ashamed. It made no sense, but to all appearances Potter cared for the werewolf, and was honouring him with good, pure-blood custom. Today was perhaps not a day to ruin for him. Tomorrow, he thought, ignoring the fact that he would be locked up with his parents. He would ruin Potter’s day tomorrow.

“Potter.” Draco gave him a brief nod, as if Potter were a peer, proud that his voice was calm, with none of his resentment in it.

Potter glanced at Aunt Andromeda, then took a deep breath as if greeting him were hard work and he needed the older woman’s encouragement, before finally replying. “Malfoy.” Wonder of wonders, Potter nodded back. Perhaps he had been coached in proper behaviour. Potter couldn’t keep the dislike from his face, although it did not twist into a scowl as Draco had expected it to.

Narcissa had reached out her hand to grasp Aunt Andromeda’s. He was surprised to see a touch of warmth on his mother’s face, such as was usually reserved for him and his father. His mother drew the other woman aside, murmuring softly, leaving Draco and Potter relatively isolated, except for his two followers. And therein lay the problem.

“What are you doing here, Ferret?”

Hermione put a restraining hand on Ron’s arm, but it did nothing to calm him.

Harry sighed. Ron was just saying what he had been thinking, but while he appreciated that Ron stood stalwart next to him, Harry knew it was more about how Ron felt toward Malfoy than loyalty to Harry. With the fury vibrating in Ron’s voice, Harry did the only thing he could.

Turning to Malfoy with gritted teeth, he said the words that whispered in his head. “I see you.” That part was easy. It could be the warning he intended, but he also felt a resonance, as if those words mattered. He felt the echoes of that single sentence filter through the wards, and knew something had
happened. He just wished he knew what it was.

In the piles of paper Mrs Tonks had sent had been the formal words he should have said, but he couldn’t remember them exactly. He knew that he was supposed to thank Malfoy for coming, but he couldn’t. Harry would rather have said the truth, that Malfoy didn’t belong anywhere near Remus’ memorial service, that this was his, not Malfoy’s, and the git didn’t deserve to be free and mingling with the people he and his family had fought to destroy. Except Malfoy didn’t belong in Azkaban either. Harry had seen Malfoy drop his wand, unable to kill Dumbledore; he’d seen how Malfoy hated casting the curses he had on Voldemort’s orders. Harry had seen him broken, both face to face and in his mind. After surviving Voldemort, after choosing death and then choosing life again, after finally completing the prophecy that had destroyed his family and his childhood, Harry found that Malfoy was too small to hate. He wished he knew what to do with Malfoy. He found he didn’t want Malfoy hurt, he just wanted him gone.

With Ron vibrating like a restrained Rottweiler, he couldn’t give in to his own reactions. It would only escalate. He wasn’t going to let Malfoy, or Ron, or anyone, spoil his chance to grieve like everyone else got to.

Grabbing Ron’s shoulder, he turned his back on Malfoy. Surely Malfoy wouldn’t do anything in plain sight. Harry touched the three wands in the pocket of his robes. He had not yet returned Dumbledore’s to the tomb, and he didn’t dare return Malfoy’s. He wished there was somewhere he dared keep the other two wands, but he felt safest keeping them with him. Without his wand, Malfoy could do nothing.

“What are you about, Harry? He’s a Death Eater! He should be in Azkaban, for all he’s done, not free to mess up your funeral!”

Harry choked. “My funeral?”

“Professor Lupin’s funeral, I mean. And Tonks’,” he added as an afterthought. “Look, Harry, I know how important this is to you.”

Harry just stared, all thought of Malfoy momentarily forgotten.

“Who are you and what have you done with my best friend?”

Ron grinned briefly, then turned serious. “You were there to mourn for Fred. I know you came
because you liked him, but you also were there for all of us. So we could be together. I get it. I’m not going to mess it up for you. But why would you want him here?”

“I don’t. Mrs Tonks does. It’s part of the price. I could have had a private memorial, just for me. I wanted to do it like other people got to, surrounded by friends and family. You and Hermione are here for me. They’re here for her.” Harry paused. “Well, they’re probably here for themselves, but she wants them here.”

Ron stared at his hands, then looked up to search Harry’s face. Apparently finding what he was looking for, he said, “All right. But I’m keeping an eye on him.”

Harry grinned, feeling happier than he had in awhile. Ron was still Ron. The smile was still on his face as he turned to face Malfoy, whose hands clenched briefly. Malfoy swallowed, then stepped forward. “You’ve followed the customs, Potter. I can respect that.” He swallowed again, looking as if he had swallowed something sour. “I regret to hear of your loss.”

Not sure what Malfoy was playing at, Harry just nodded.

Silence stretched between them. Draco reminded himself that Potter was an ignorant lout, but it still infuriated him that he had turned his back on Draco immediately after uttering formal recognition. He was proud of himself that he managed the proper words, in the face of such disregard. He took a deep breath, wishing he could insult Potter as he deserved, or find the appropriate thing to say. What is the proper protocol when an uncouth usurper recognises you as connected to the family, then immediately turns his back? Draco looked around. His mother was still talking with the blood traitor. She had her hand on her arm, as if consoling her. He didn’t know how she did it. More silence.

“So how’d you get the Mu—Granger on Black Land?” The words were out before Draco could stop to think, thankfully adjusted at the last minute.

Potter’s face, which had been calmer than Draco had expected, turned cold. “I don’t think that’s any of your business. If you’re only here to cause trouble—“

“I’m here because I am of the line of Black, and my mother was born a Black. I’m here because Family is important to me. I can see why you wouldn’t understand that—“
“You have no idea what I understand. You have no idea how important family can become unless you’ve lost it, Malfoy. You—” Harry stopped himself. “You’re not worth it.” He turned away.

Draco’s skin burnt with fury. “I don’t know how you made yourself head of my mother’s family, Potter, but I’ll find out! The Malfoys may not have the influence we did before, but we still have the skills we were bred to. Politics is in my blood, Potter. Wizarding history runs through my veins!”

“It won’t do much good there, Malfoy. It has to get to your brain.” Potter looked over his shoulder at Malfoy. “Perhaps that’s been your problem all along… relying on what is in your blood instead of what is in your head.” Potter stopped. Turning to face him head on, Potter continued, “This is a funeral, Malfoy. A funeral honouring those I care about. If you can’t behave yourself, tell me now, and I’ll arrange to have you sent back to where you came from. Mrs Tonks wanted your mother here.” Potter looked at Draco’s mother, still in close conversation with Aunt Andromeda. “Mrs Tonks has lost her daughter, I have lost people—“ Potter’s voice faltered.

Speaking slowly and deliberately, he continued, “I won’t let you ruin this, Malfoy. Mrs Tonks doesn’t need it, I don’t need it, and Remus and Tonks don’t deserve it. Your mother is—“ He glanced to the two of them, “exhibiting more care than I would have expected.” Potter’s eyes turned thoughtful, as if remembering something. “I guess I shouldn’t be surprised. I have reason to know that she cares for her family, perhaps even more than I thought. But you, Malfoy—is family more than bluster and pride to you? Now’s your chance to prove it.”

Potter held Draco in his gaze, as if evaluating his worth. Draco felt the flush rising in his cheeks. How dare he presume… He straightened his shoulders and tilted his head so he could look down at Potter. “I know how to behave at a wizarding funeral. Do you?”

“Then do that, Malfoy. Prove to me that you can. If you cause any disturbance, Malfoy, you’ll regret it. I’ll make sure of that.” Potter nodded to the Auror who had been watching the entire exchange.

Draco realized he had completely forgotten her presence. Potter always managed to make him forget himself. He really had intended to use this opportunity to show both the Auror and the other attendees, all victors in the war, that he could behave with honour, and could be trusted to be free. How did Potter always cause him to sabotage his own goals? Did he do it on purpose? That would be an approach worthy of the most Slytherin of Slytherins. He watched as Potter walked away.

Harry took a deep breath, calming himself. People had arrived while he’d been distracted by Malfoy, and he hadn’t had a chance to greet them. He made his way over to Mr Weasley, who had Portkeyed in with Bill and Fleur. The wards had no problem with Fleur, Harry noticed. He tried to think if
they’d target any of the other people who would likely be there. He’d felt them twinge a few times, but nothing like with Hermione, and he’d been too distracted to see who they were responding to. It was the same blood-purity rubbish Voldemort spouted, and Harry didn’t want to have to think this way.

Before he’d reached the Weasleys, however, people started moving to sit down. He realized that Mrs Tonks had moved toward the bier, her posture that of patient waiting. He supposed saying “Okay, listen up, everyone,” as he had in the DA, would not be appropriate. Still, it was amazing that she didn’t even have to say anything to let people know the service was starting. He joined her, standing next to Remus’ plaque.

It was hard to see Tonks lying there, even in her formal robes, subject to the eyes of the old-style purebloods who had gathered. There were more of them than he had expected, not just the Malfoys, but also some others he didn’t recognise as having been in the war on either side.

Tonks looked somehow vulnerable without her brightly coloured hair, without her smile and her humour. Even the pig snout gave her more strength, more of a defence against the world, than the slightly uneven face that looked like Tonks, but not completely. Mrs Tonks had said this was the Nymphadora she remembered, the one she had raised.

It was harder still that Remus was not lying there. He should have been put to rest with Tonks. Sirius should have been buried here too, and then Remus and Sirius could have romped together in the afterlife. He expected they already were, truthfully, given what happened with the Resurrection Stone. But their magic should weave back into the family. Sirius should never have been exiled. He should have been Head of House Black, instead of Harry, who understood so little of it, who had never been prepared.

When the time came to remember the dead, it was not like the funeral with the Weasleys. Harry silently rehearsed the chant he had practiced earlier. He was sure he was no good at all, and hoped he wouldn’t disgrace Remus. Andromeda had explained that the chant was old magic, and helped draw the family magic back in. Tonks was of the line, and her husband had married in. The Lupins were not even a cadet family… Andromeda mentioned that while both Mr and Mrs Lupin were magical, Mr Lupin was a Muggleborn, and Remus’ mother was of Muggleborn ancestry. Not having his own magical family, when he married Tonks, he was able to become of the line of Black, if he desired. Harry had no idea if Remus would desire this. He hoped his old Professor and ersatz godfather would not mind being woven in so his magic and Tonks’ could reconnect, and so that Harry would be able to feel him amidst all the voices in the line of Black.

When Mrs Tonks rose, she didn’t tell funny stories about Tonks. Harry could remember some, but he would not be asked to relate them either. After the formal ritual, during the social time, that was a time for remembrances, according to this tradition. Harry was alright with that. He thought he might not make it, if he were expected to tell stories about Remus, how he’d taught him the Patronus
charm, how lost he looked when confronted by Sirius, when everyone still thought Sirius was a murderer, and how he had grabbed hold and hugged Sirius when the truth came out.

Just before it was time to sing the chant, Mrs Tonks nodded toward the bottle they had retrieved from the old mausoleum. Harry turned to pick it up, and at her murmured instructions, poured barely a drop onto his fingertip. Feeling somehow as if he were being too intimate with her body, he smudged the drop onto her forehead, each palm, and the soles of each bare foot.

The chant was eerie. Mrs Tonks had said something about it being in a minor key, which was supposed to make it feel sadder. Whatever it was, the melody was haunting. Other voices carried the tune. Some of the voices were stronger in the words, supporting his own faltering singing.

He could feel the song echo in the wards. He could feel it reaching out, calling to family, weaving the magic together. He could almost see Tonks’ changeable face in his mind, and suddenly Remus’ gold-brown eyes looked straight into his.

Suddenly, he didn’t feel awkward and uncouth, he stopped being aware of the wandering of the tune, and the fact that he was nobody’s idea of a singer. Instead, he felt the land beneath him call to his own magic, made part of the Black family by his grandmother’s blood and his own choice. He felt the magic awaken in his voice, and heard his voice get stronger. He felt others of the Black family singing, adding their own magic to the calling. And he felt the response. He could almost see Remus and Tonks, joined together. But even if he could not quite see them, he could feel them.

Something in him settled, feeling the magic return. It was like he hadn’t truly lost them. They were no longer with him, but they weren’t completely gone either. He opened his eyes, scarcely aware that he had closed them, and he saw a look of peace on Andromeda Tonks’ face.

This is what he’d wanted. This is what he’d needed. A sense of continuity. He had felt adrift all his life, growing up with people that hated him, never knowing true kin. He felt that connection now. He could see Andromeda Tonks would still grieve her daughter, but he knew that Tonks was not completely lost to her. Her magic would continue on in the family. It was at that moment that he fully understood how much that mattered.

After the chant, a black cloth was wrapped around Tonks, and Mrs Tonks cast a levitation charm to carry her daughter into the crypt. Harry followed with Remus’ plaque held in his hands. The metal was warm against his skin. Once Mrs Tonks had positioned her daughter into the alcove, Harry moved to place the plaque. He could feel something. Mrs Tonks said the herbs helped weave the magic back into the family. Harry didn’t know what they did, but the web of connections that he was coming to understand was the family Black felt more complete. That was his job, as head of the family, he suspected... to look after the continuity of the family, and keep the magic whole. When the brightness of the new magic had woven back into the web, a sense of satisfaction filled him.
He turned to Mrs Tonks, and saw she had tears in her eyes. He suspected he did as well. He wasn’t sure they were grief.

After the service, those who were not close to Remus or Tonks left. This included the Malfoys, fortunately. The rest of them adjourned to a tent that had been set up... a wizarding tent, with tables and chairs and food. Even though the service could not have been more different from Fred’s, the gathering afterward was very similar. Here, now were the stories of the two of them. Here now was the release of laughter and crying, as they shared with each other all that they knew of two people, two lives lived and now ended.

Chapter End Notes

Author Note:
As always, reviews and critiques keep the creativity flowing! Let me know what you think!

Thanks:
Thanks to the lovely rosskpr, who beta-read this chapter. She reviewed this chapter not once but twice, with good suggestions and comments each time.

Disclaimer:
Harry Potter, his friends, his enemies, and the lovely world they live in all belong to JK Rowling. I play here.
Aftermath – Hermione Granger

Hermione sat in a room piled with scrolls and bound volumes. Dusty light came in through one window. Why did rooms that housed books and parchment always end up being so dusty? The records in the room had been frequently accessed and modified throughout the previous year; dust should not have had the chance to accumulate.

She reviewed the book in front of her, which contained extensive information about Muggleborn witches and wizards and their families. Some of it was from the previous ministry, originally collected with the intent to track them down and imprison them, or worse. This information was mostly written in a small, cramped hand, categorizing them by myriad different qualities. Some made sense, considering the values—and bigotry—of those keeping the records. Hogwarts house, wand wood and core, number and description of family members, all were useful in tracking down those they deemed unworthy of magic. She didn’t know what the individual’s robe size had to do with their magical ability, but she supposed it, too, might be useful in finding a fugitive.

Other records had been gathered from Muggleborns and mixed-blood witches and wizards who had begun to appear at the ministry requesting assistance in finding their lost relatives. These were often scrawled hastily, the handwriting wobbly with emotion. They were hard to read. Each and every one of them carried someone’s dreams and fears.

She knew that her own parents would not be listed among the pleas from family members. She didn’t dare submit an official request for assistance, not wanting even to think of what the Ministry would make of her actions, no matter the motivation, in modifying her parents’ memories. To her relief (and dismay), there was no mention of Wendell and Monica Wilkins in the records of the corrupt Ministry. The records did mention her, of course, as an undesirable and prime target, but Ethan and Rosalie Granger were listed as missing—unavailable for questioning. If all had gone according to plan, they were somewhere in Australia. Would they have followed her strongly implanted suggestion to move there?

She would go to them, but first she had to find them. Their dental practice had been sold, and their house stood empty, although Hermione had not been ready to look inside for longer than it took to verify that they’d moved. Wherever they’d moved to, they had not been there long enough for their address to be listed in one of the directories at the British Library, and she did not have the connections to send inquiries directly. The Ministry, as chaotic as it was, would have the necessary resources as soon as it got itself back into some semblance of order. Surely they would have enough access to the Muggle world for her search.

She needed to help the Ministry get back to a point where it could help her. In the meantime, organizing these records would help many other people who were in her position, or worse.

The Ministry was not at all what Hermione had expected. She supposed she should have realized that Voldemort’s adherents would have destroyed things, making access as difficult as possible to those who came after. How had they had time to cause such destruction when they fled the building, upon realizing they had lost the war? Regardless of the cause, she never expected such – disregard
for efficiency within a workplace.

She had never expected to see a place of government in rubble. She should have done. She had seen pictures of Berlin in school as a child, when they were studying history. She had been to museums on her trip to France that one summer. But it was one thing to see pictures of wars past. History always happened to other people. Somehow, despite all that she had done with Harry, despite being on the run from a corrupt government for a year, she still hadn’t realized that she had been living history.

She had even seen the destroyed fountain in a photograph in the Prophet after that awful debacle at the end of their fifth year, and knew that it had been destroyed while she was in the building, and as a result of a battle in which she had taken part.

It hadn’t really dawned on her that she had been part of a battle that would become history. Harry was part of history. She was… Harry’s friend.

The battle hadn’t made it real. Fighting was part of being Harry’s friend. But coming to work in a destroyed building, one that should be the core of the wizarding world, one that was supposed to be part of making that world function, somehow made it real that she was living part of history. She was helping rebuild the government, even in her own small way.

She had those thoughts every time she passed by the atrium on her way to her small workspace on level two.

Her workspace felt like the tables she had taken over in the Hogwarts library when studying for her OWLs. Littered with books and documents, her workspace was a place of research. She could focus, if she could only read the illegible scrawls of some of the ministry clerks. They had enchanted quills! What excuse was there for this atrocious handwriting? Parts were smudged, and most were written so small she had to cast magnifying spells.

She matched the names of Muggleborns and their Muggle families from the book maintained by the Death Eater-led Ministry, listing who was to be rounded up, with those same names, if she could find them, among the lists of confirmed dead or missing. She matched them with wanted lists. She matched them with the heartbreaking messages from those hoping to reunite with their families. She sent for Muggle phone directories, despite the fact that they would be out of date, despite the fact that the names might have changed, just to get a starting place.

So many missing. So many displaced.

Worse were the lists of Muggleborn dispatched, and their wands “reclaimed” to return to their “rightful owners,” if they should ever be found.

The wands were listed lovingly, carefully, marking length and wood and core, as well as any distinctive markings.

The witches and wizards were merely categorized. Female. Male. Muggleborn.

Their weight and height was listed, and their hair colour, and how they had died. If they died from the torture, they were merely listed as cursed, or sometimes which curse they had died from. Some were listed as Kissed. Each Muggleborn was catalogued to ensure none fell through the cracks to breed with their precious purebloods.

During the lunch break, Hermione got out into the sunshine as much as possible. She ate sometimes at Muggle eateries, getting away from the sight of wizards and witches. There were moments when
the sight of the sight of a wand made her wonder what magic had run through it, whether it had carried a curse to kill any of those named in the books on her table.

She ate fish and chips, just to remind herself where she came from. Even though her parents had not bought those on a regular basis, it was prosaic, and that calmed her.

Other times, she ate in places in and around Diagon Alley, looking out at the witches and wizards reclaiming their lives, glad she had played a part in giving those lives back to them.

She watched people go by, wondering for each of them what their story had been. Had they killed? Had they had a friend or family member killed? What did they do to get through the past year? She wasn’t sure she wanted to know.

Her face was not as recognizable as Harry’s. People didn’t fawn over her. She had found a wanted poster of herself, not the full sized ones for “undesirable number one”, but batched with several others on a single parchment. Her image was partially obscured, and kept turning away. She recognized that it had been taken at Hogwarts, and probably during her sixth year, but she couldn’t figure out when it had been taken, or by whom.

She was still no closer to finding her own parents. But, she hoped, they were doing well. She hoped they had set themselves up well in Australia. But part of her hoped they had not succeeded. Would they even want to return? Would they even want to see her again? She searched and matched and marked names, and reunited other families, all the while harbouring a fear that her own would want nothing to do with her ever again.

The dust in the air made her sneeze when she worked. She frequently cast a charm she had read about—one that could be used in libraries—that removed the dust without harming parchment. Each cleaning charm had its strengths, and each had its weaknesses. Some were too vigorous. Some added water and scrubbed, such as the one used by Mrs Weasley with the dishes. Some, however, were designed for archival environments, and would not damage fresh parchment or tear age-brittle volumes.

There was not, however, a single charm that would cleanse the mess that had been made of the wizarding world. For that, they would need time, hard work, and resolve.

Logistics
May 8, 1998

“I have no idea where to put them!” Poppy’s exasperated exclamation rang out.

“What are the requirements again?” Minerva looked up from her tea to observe the woman who paced the length of the faculty room. The Headmistress had finally taken a moment to relax in a soft chair, her hands wrapped around her teacup, soaking in the warmth in the cool of the castle, but it seemed a moment was all she would be allowed.

“A non-magical location. It has to be large enough to house all sixteen patients, preferably larger in case there are more cases. Several smaller sites would also work, but not be optimal. A home would be best, but Muggles live in such small houses.”

“I’m sure I could convince Kingsley to have the Ministry rent or purchase one. There may be a house we could use from one or more of those who fled the wizarding world.” She put her teacup
down and sat upright, regretfully giving up her plans for a bit of rest. Poppy’s agitation was not conducive to relaxation.

“No, the Malfoy book said it can’t have had any magical person living there recently.”

“What constitutes recently?”

“Certainly not within the last six months. A year would be better.”

“Weren’t there homes left behind, when the parents of Muggleborns fled in fear of You Know Who?”

Poppy started to reply, but then stopped to think about it. “There may have been. Their magical relative must not have resided there recently. I’d have to check with that department. But who will take care of them? Anyone I send will be at risk of infection.”

Minerva thought back to the pages she had read, before turning Narcissa Malfoy’s book over to the Mediwitch. Although the book didn’t say anything about transference of the taint from one person to another, the risks were too high to take chances. She shuddered to think of all the people that had been through the infirmary during the past week. Poppy herself had cast spells on the afflicted!

“Poppy, how are you doing?”

“I do not seem to be affected.” The Mediwitch paused. “After reading what we are allowed to see of Narcissa Malfoy’s book, I’ve made it a practice that all those working in the hospital wing be tested before leaving for the day. Those who come into contact with the volunteers are tested after each patient. The volunteers themselves are tested as well, of course. Each new case... It is so frustrating, Minerva. The quarantine was a better choice than I knew.”

The silence after her words weighed on both of them.

“We need to check with the Muggleborn re-connection office.” Minerva said, suddenly. She stood, banished her teacup to the kitchens, and settled her robes into place. She was through the door and on her way to her office, Poppy matching her step for step. It was good to have competent associates, and even better to have good friends.

They used the Floo in her office. The Ministry atrium was busy, and still damaged. Minerva was dismayed at how much one band of bigots could destroy. The only thing still in one piece was the horrendous statue that had been built to replace the one destroyed a few years ago. There were purple caution markers ringing around it. She shook her head. It symbolized everything He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named stood for: the ego of pure-blood wizards and the oppression of everyone else.

“Why hasn’t that thing been demolished?” Poppy spoke the words she had been thinking.

One of the passing workers spoke up. “We’ve tried! It’s protected with more layers of curses than the Minister’s office was. Even trying to move it sent three of my workers to St Mungo’s. One of the Unspeakables tried to destroy it. I hear she is still in critical condition… she almost died.” His tone made it clear that he took personal affront that the Unspeakable had not succeeded.

“Could it at least be covered?”

“Tried that too. Not a good idea.”

They had their wands measured, weighed and registered; got directions from the Auror standing guard; and took the elevators up to level two.
The constricted hallways of level 2 seemed even more crowded than the atrium, due both to the smaller space and the volume of people. Aurors, witches and wizards of the Wizengamot, and various Ministry employees hurried to their various tasks. Members of the wizarding public were recognisable as such by the slightly lost expressions on their faces as they made their way to one of the offices of Auror headquarters that had not been damaged, or to departments of Wizengamot administration. The two witches navigated their way through the stream of people, intent on their own business. Finally, toward the back, they found the small, out-of-the-way rooms that had been the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts office where Arthur had worked. They now housed the Muggleborn reconnection office.

Tables with stacks of scrolls lined the walls, in between tall wooden shelves divided into pigeonholes, also overflowing with curled scrolls. More tables layered with piles of parchment had been placed throughout the room, forming a maze of narrow paths between them. The top of a head of bushy brown hair could be seen peeking over the piles on a table toward the back, and Poppy and Minerva wound through the tables toward the person working there. When she raised her head, Minerva smiled.

“Miss Granger! What are you doing here?”

“I’ve been volunteering, helping gather the information so we can find the Muggles and Muggleborn that have fled. They put us on level two, because all the records were here. Apparently, Muggles and Muggleborn were a law enforcement issue.” Her words were sharp with indignation.

“Well, I’m glad you’re here. I’m sure you’ll do a wonderful job. At the moment, you’re just the right person to help us. Has anyone told you about the people getting sick at Hogwarts?”

“Arthur mentioned it. What is wrong with them?” Hermione asked, concerned.

Poppy described the symptoms, and what Narcissa Malfoy had told them. Hermione’s eyes grew wide at the mention of the poison to drain their magic, and she was clearly shaken by the rest of the necessary cure.

“Are any students from last year among the ill? It seems that they would be at risk as well.”

“Mrs Malfoy said that the battle was probably what finally turned the magical field toxic. So, it is only people living and working there now.” Minerva replied.

“Is Harry ok?” Minerva had no difficulty tracking Miss Granger’s thinking. It would be just like him, to be one of those who came down with some deathly illness. Fate seemed to follow him, and now that he was free of one burden… She shook her head.

“He’s fine. He’s been volunteering, yes, but is not among the afflicted. We hope there will be no more volunteers infected. We’ve set up a team to cleanse the Castle using an old tradition.”

“Are they sure it will work? I know how risky it can be, using an old method learnt out of a book.”

Minerva gave Hermione a stern look. “Do I want to ask how you know of these dangers, Miss Granger?”

Hermione blushed.

“In this case,” Minerva continued, “we have people who have performed the cleansing before. Apparently, the purebloods, especially those who use dark magic,” Minerva’s face twisted a bit when she said that, “have been doing this to their estates every turn of the season. Several of the Slytherin and Ravenclaw students know how to do this, as do their parents. Unfortunately, most of
their parents—"

“If they’re that used to dark magic, they’d be downstairs in cells right now, waiting for trial, I expect, or on the run.” Hermione smiled darkly. Minerva recalled that the trio had been on the run for over a year. Perhaps she was entitled to a touch of Schadenfreude at the reversed circumstances. “Can you trust the students?” Hermione asked. “Wouldn’t they believe as their parents?”

“I doubt they are entirely trustworthy. But we are taking precautions, at least until they are cleared or convicted.”

Hermione straightened the parchments on the table in front of her. “So, you need a building, somewhere in a Muggle area, to house at least sixteen wizards?

“And we need at least one Muggle to take care of them while they are being drained of their magic.” Minerva wondered that the words came out so calmly. “We need someone who knows about the magical world, but is not magical themselves. Preferably someone who knows of medicine. I understand that this office is tracking down Muggles connected with the magical world to make sure they are all right?”

“Yes, and to return them to their homes or help them find new ones. Many of them had their homes or livelihoods destroyed.” She paused looking at the scrolls lining the walls as if searching for an answer. “That might work!”

They waited while Hermione rifled through a stack of parchment.

“Here! Dr Marcus Renier has a daughter who would have been in her fifth year at Hogwarts. He and his wife ran a small doctor’s office, until their daughter was identified and had to flee for fear they’d take her wand and imprison her. They just returned the day before yesterday, to find that their home and office were both destroyed. We suspect Death Eaters had tracked them down and destroyed the buildings when they couldn’t find the family. If they could stay with the patients while they recover, it would give them a place to stay—once we find one. Could they be paid, do you think? He is a Doctor.”

“I think we can arrange that. I’ll talk with Kingsley.”

“Actually, talk with Arthur Weasley. He is helping Kingsley.”

Minerva had had no doubt that Hermione would find her place at the Ministry, but she was amazed at how quickly the girl had grown into her role.

“I’d have to meet with the Reniers first. If they work out, it would be best that they meet with Narcissa Malfoy as well, so they’d have a chance to get answers to any questions they may have.”

“Do you think that wise?” Poppy objected. “Mrs Malfoy has never been very tolerant toward Muggles.”

“I think it necessary.”

Poppy nodded. “What about their daughter? She would not be able to stay with them. It wouldn’t be safe for her.”

Minerva tried to remember the girl from her student files. “What was her name?”

“Parker Renier. She’s in Hufflepuff.” Hermione ran her finger down the parchment, reading the details. “Sometimes there is information in these about ‘known associations’, but she apparently was
not an active threat, as far as those idiots were concerned."

“I’ll ask Professor Sprout.” Minerva gave a firm nod. “Perhaps she will know somewhere Miss Renier could stay. We are, of course, ahead of ourselves. We don’t know yet if Dr and Mrs Renier will take on the task. After losing their home and livelihood, they may want to wash their hands of our world.”

“They can’t, can they?” Hermione asked. “Wouldn’t their daughter need to finish at Hogwarts?”

“Family ties can be stronger than ties to our world. She would not be the first Muggleborn student to leave the Wizarding World.”

Hermione shivered. Minerva thought of what the girl had risked for the wizarding world, knowing that she probably only knew a small part of it. Hermione Granger was one Muggleborn student she had no fear would leave their world.

“We are still left in need of a place to house my patients.” Poppy interrupted Minerva’s thoughts.

Hermione went to the shelves along one wall, scrolls curling in pigeonholes from floor to ceiling. She pulled out one, unrolled it partway, then let it curl back up and replaced it, repeating her action several more times.

“Why didn’t I think of that right away?” Hermione exclaimed. “Here!” She finished unrolling the scroll she had just pulled, tapping her index finger down onto it in triumph. “Justin Finch-Fletchley!”

Minerva came around the table to read the parchment. Hermione pointed to an entry half way down.

“When it became clear that Muggleborn students would not be welcomed back to Hogwarts, his parents took him to Greece for the year. They have a house there. That would mean their house here would probably have been empty for the last year.

“Justin once told me about how he grew up, before attending Hogwarts. He was all set to attend Eton when he reached thirteen, but his Hogwarts letter caused his family to change their plans. Eton’s a well-respected Muggle school.” Hermione added, seeing Poppy’s momentary look of confusion. “He lived in a manor house in Banbury. He said it was built at a time when there were rooms for the live-in staff, as well as guest rooms, so it might well be large enough to house them all. If Justin’s family are in Greece, they won’t need to use it, will they?”

“But surely they’d want to return, now that You Know Who has been defeated, and things are returning to normal,” Minerva commented, “especially if Mr Finch-Fletchley chooses to return to Hogwarts and finish his education.”

“How long will the space be needed?” Hermione asked.

“According to our information, it will take several weeks for the potion to completely drain the patient’s magic.” Poppy answered. “Longer for those with particularly strong magic. After that, they will need time to recuperate, and for their magic to replenish itself.”

Minerva noticed Poppy did not even mention the possibility that the patients might never regain their magic. Even so, Hermione’s face went white at the Mediwitch’s words.

“Yes, this is serious.” Minerva said gently. “But we will do everything we can for those afflicted.”

Hermione drew a deep breath, and then nodded. “I’ll continue to search. It can’t hurt to ask Justin’s parents, though, could it? They might well want to stay in Greece through the summer. Wouldn’t that
be enough time?"

Poppy nodded. “If all goes as described in the book we have, yes. I would not want to move them before they are fully cured, however.”

Minerva felt something in her relax. It seemed they had options. “We will contact Justin’s parents, but it cannot hurt to have an alternate plan. Thank you, Miss Granger. You have been most helpful. Do let us know if you find any other suitable places in your research.”

Temporary Employment – Draco
May 9, 1998

The perfunctory knock on the door was followed by the usual series of murmured unlocking spells, and then the door opened. Two Aurors and Professor McGonagall were framed by the doorway. Not waiting for an invitation, one of the Aurors came in, took in the room, and made a few checks with his wand. They did this every time. Did the Aurors think he and his mother could lay traps or curses without their wands? They had such high opinions of his family.

At one time, that opinion would have been justifiable. Draco thought of his father, still in the hospital wing. He had once been so strong, so decisive. When had he lost his direction? Draco forced his mind away from the images of his father over the last year. Malfoys were still a force to be reckoned with. When he was through, everyone would know it, he promised himself.

The Auror nodded and McGonagall entered as well. The other Auror took a stance out in the hallway.

Draco hoped the Headmistress was there to talk with him, finally. His mother had said it was likely that he would be asked to assist, but not guaranteed. McGonagall may need convincing. He rose to meet her.

“I understand you wish to assist in the reconstruction of the castle.” Her voice was cold, her expression showed disbelief. “Your letters were quite persistent.”

“Yes, Professor. I see all the work being done. It’s not right that we are just sitting here, not contributing, especially when we are uniquely suited to assist you.”

“Don’t try that earnest innocence with me, Mr Malfoy. I am not so easily deceived. I have known you, and—” she nodded at Narcissa, sitting quietly at the table, “your parents, since each of you started Hogwarts. I know much of what you have done, and I am all too familiar with your beliefs. I am neither stupid nor blind. Do not treat me as such.”

Draco assumed his best respectful voice. This one would take careful balancing. They would not get out of this without acknowledging some responsibility, some wrongdoing. But he would not give up his pride. “Professor McGonagall, I know that my family and I have made… unfortunate choices. And we have seen the results. Malfoys have never aimed at destruction as an end result. It is now clear that that was the Dark—Voldemort’s goal.”

He paused, but McGonagall didn’t reply.

“My mother and I also discussed the situation in the castle. Did you get our notes on your list of
possible volunteers? We identified those most familiar with the process, to the best of our knowledge.”

McGonagall levelled a suspicious gaze at him. After a few moments, she nodded to herself and continued. “I would not even be considering this, if we did not need assistance. Your mother explained to me the danger we are in, with Hogwarts contaminated by dark magic as it is.”

Draco repressed a sneer. Contamination indeed. His mother had told him, with appropriate disgust, that they had not bothered cleansing Hogwarts for decades, perhaps longer. Draco had always assumed that it would at least have been cleansed in the summer holidays. Why else were the students forbidden from staying over the summer? It wasn’t as often as Malfoy Manor was cleansed, but there was a different type of magic cast there. Still, with students casting, and worse, miscasting spells all year, it was no wonder that Hogwarts was as odd as it was.

“As according to what your mother said, some of the spells cast in the final battle have … tainted areas of the castle, and they need to be cleansed before any magic can be cast there, lest the magic cast add its power to the taint, causing it to spread.”

Draco nodded his agreement, even though the Headmistress still laid the blame on dark magic itself, instead of the combination of circumstances his mother had described, to Draco’s horror, when she returned on Thursday evening. He had grown up with dark magic. There were ways of handling it, of containing it or removing the residue. Spring cleaning at the Manor was not performed solely by house elves. Draco remembered the feeling of the Manor becoming less heavy, brighter even, after the spring cleaning. He had helped from the time he was seven. Still, to blame a few dark spells for the mess that Hogwarts was in seemed wilfully ignorant. Apparently those in charge of Hogwarts kept to their preconceptions. He was dismayed to realise that, especially after his mother had showed her the Malfoy book, revealing Malfoy secrets, McGonagall still did not truly understand. He wondered how long it had been since Magical Theory was taught at Hogwarts. Had it ever been? Or had it only been passed down through the generations of pure-blood families?

“With some help from the Department of Mysteries and the Auror Department,” McGonagall continued, “we have scanned the areas of the castle where people are working and living, and identified which are contaminated. As many people as are volunteering to help, we daren’t let work resume in those areas until they are made safe. We have identified several individuals from your mother’s notes who would be capable of this work, you among them.”

“Which others?” Draco wanted to know, hoping McGonagall had taken his and his mother’s suggestions. There were some they had added to the list as tentative possibilities, which McGonagall may have chosen due to their more acceptable house affiliation.

“Several of the Slytherin students living in the castle.” Draco mentally translated that to imprisoned. That told him almost nothing except that they were probably on the preferred list. At least he could work with most of the Slytherins, especially now the Dar—Voldemort was dead.

“I am sure your mother has discussed this with you, but I would feel remiss if I didn’t mention that some of our volunteers have become ill from working in these locations.”

Draco repressed a sneer. Idiots. Didn’t they take any precautions? So they wait until people had their magic at risk before realizing that something needed to be done? This was a perfect example of what was wrong at Hogwarts. He knew of very few students, outside those in Slytherin, and a few Ravenclaws, that knew how to handle dark magic residue. Even if they never used dark magic themselves, it was pure ignorance not to know how to deal with it when encountering it, yet it had not been covered in any of his classes, with the possible exception of potions. Professor Snape made sure his students knew the risks and the precautions for each potion they brewed. Of course only a
small portion of the class paid attention, and they never specifically covered dark potions.

Draco forced the thoughts away, schooling his face into a quietly receptive mask.

McGonagall looked at him for a few moments, before giving a decisive nod. She reached into a pocket, and pulled a metal anklet from it, similar to the wristlet he and his mother had worn the day before. Draco had the suspicion he would quickly become very familiar with such devices. “If you choose to help, you will need to wear this. It will be tracked at all times. Should you leave the defined area we set, or come too close to the controlling device that has been linked with it, or come into contact with a wand, it is spelled to introduce a sedative. It cannot be removed except by those who know the charm.”

Did they have to recite the same information each time they locked them in one of their little minders? Draco picked up the anklet, eyeing it distastefully. It was a band, three inches wide of solid metal, shimmering like oil on water in a colour that combined silver, gold, and bronze without blending them. There was a hinge on one side and a clasp on the other. It was ugly compared to the one his mother had worn, even compared to the one they had worn yesterday, yet a sedative was perhaps better than a stunning hex. A mobile prison was certainly better than this room. Certainly it was much better than Azkaban. Wearing this was the first step toward avoiding that fate.

It was a chance to show the faculty what they should have been teaching.

McGonagall pulled something else out of her pocket, and Draco nearly laughed, but restrained himself. It was a dark magic detector. As if he, or any of his friends, wouldn’t be able to sense it without resorting such trinkets. “That won’t be necessary, Professor.”

McGonagall looked as if she would protest. “You may not trust me,” Draco commented quietly, “but trust that I know how to find and cleanse such … taint, as you say, without resorting to using one of those toys.”

“You misunderstand me, Mr Malfoy. Your mother requested that we find some other way to verify your work than for you to risk your magic with an oath. These instruments were found and tuned yesterday to be able to identify the magical residue that you will be cleaning. They were used over the past day and a half to identify which areas need to be cleansed.”

“Wait. You can’t mean for us to cleanse only the areas currently infected?”

McGonagall paused at his interruption. “Why would we need to cleanse—”

He turned to his mother. “Surely you explained this to her?”

His mother nodded. “Of course. I also gave her the book with the appropriate pages marked.” She turned and explained to the Headmistress, “If you don’t cleanse the whole castle, you risk the same contamination the next time magic is cast that leaves a dangerous residue. The magical cascade happened because of the battle, but it could not have occurred if the castle had not been primed by the excess of magical residue already present.”

McGonagall seemed reluctant. “Let’s just start with the areas currently tainted.” At the reluctant nod of the two Malfoys, she continued. “As I was saying, there will be an Auror present at all times, who will use one of these to ensure that the work is completed, as well as ensuring the safety of all involved.”

Ah, so it was yet another facet of their imprisonment. How degrading. “Your concern is touching,” he said, understanding it was not his safety that she was concerned about.
“Do you still wish to help, knowing the terms?”

As answer, Draco took the anklet and fastened it around his ankle, submitting to having McGonagall test it both physically and with her wand. After she pronounced it satisfactory, she opened the door to let him out.

“What about my parents? My father...”

“Madame Pomfrey is looking after your father. He is in his own room, and when he recovers he will be returned to you.” McGonagall turned to his mother. “All is as we have agreed.”

Draco could see his mother’s hand, subtly giving him support. Narcissa gave a regal nod to McGonagall, as if acknowledging that she had heard, and then turned to Draco. “We’ll be fine. Go. I’ll take care of your father, and you take care of our future.”

“Unless you’ve changed your mind,” McGonagall said brusquely, “come.”

Draco turned, lifted his head high, and swept past the old cat. They climbed down several flights of stairs, then up another flight, and met up with a group in a third floor corridor. There was an Auror there, and several other students from Slytherin, all but one people he had suggested: Daphne, Theodore, Pansy, and Adrien Broderick from sixth year. He knew Adrien, but could not definitively say he would be competent, just that he was pure-blood. As for the others... it was amazingly good to see them. Draco would have liked to ask them what had happened to them, and to others in their circle, but with the eager ears of the Auror nearby, he dared not. Not only was it beneath a Slytherin’s dignity to bring up personal topics in front of outsiders, but he knew that any information they discussed could be used against them, or their parents. He contented himself with an acknowledging nod at them, noting the bulge on Daphne’s left ankle matching his own, and after looking, noted the way each of their robes hung less than elegantly around their legs, indicating that they each had been so hobbled. Theodore saw the direction of his gaze and scowled briefly, shamed by the situation they found themselves in. Draco looked him in the eye. “There is no shame in finding a new path, Theo. Third rule.” Theo’s face cleared. Slytherin rule number three: if there is no winning path, make one.

The Auror indicated a room off the corridor, where the outer wall had been destroyed. The rubble was still there, unlike in the corridor, where it had been cleared away. One step into the room made it clear why. The miasma of ungrounded dark magic filled the room. This had been a battle, not a carefully controlled ritual, and there was residue. Draco was surprised that the volunteers had willingly gone into the room, if it was all this bad. Couldn’t they feel it?

“I understand you can clear this without your wands?” McGonagall asked.

Draco resisted the derisive glance he wanted to give her. “Any magical energy, even the magic in our wands, would only make it worse. These... contrivances are shielded?” He asked. If the people who made them were smart, they would be. If they were unshielded, they could be turned to another purpose by some enterprising prisoner. But he did not necessarily believe the fools that followed Dumbledore were smart. Just lucky. And Draco was not about to trust his life or his magic to luck, or to the faulty knowledge of dark magic of McGonagall and her ilk.

The Auror flicked his wand over them, and the shield glowed briefly, before hiding even that magical signature. “We have worked in tainted areas before.” The Auror spoke coldly. Draco wondered if they learned it in Auror training. They certainly didn’t learn it at Hogwarts. “We may not have the... comfort level, you all do,” the Auror continued, his tone indicating his distaste, “but we do know to shield the restraints.”
Draco nodded, instinctively taking command of the group. The others did not look ready to challenge him, now that they were not backed by Voldemort, and now that it was likely that all of their parents would end up in Azkaban. In such uncertainty, they fell back on old habits, and Draco made use of that. “We’ll need salt.” He reminded McGonagall. And cold water, not from a wand. And several brushes. Thestral tail by preference. I suppose you have pure silk robes to protect each of us?”

“This is not a pure-blood reception, Mr Malfoy.” McGonagall looked affronted. “Or a bastion of outdated superstition.”

“I thought you might have realized by now that what we are doing is neither superstition, nor outdated. My mother said you’d read the section from the Malfoy book. I assumed that meant you’d read it thoroughly.” Draco shuddered at her ignorance, especially as someone in the position to teach others. He glanced at the others. They all were wearing their Slytherin robes, and he knew that any Slytherin who had not been provided robes containing a healthy proportion of magically insulating silk in the fabric would have been taken aside by Snape for a bit of an education early in first year. No Slytherin would walk around without the protection that silk would offer.

“Then if you can at least find a few pairs of silk gloves, or dragonhide if you can’t find silk.” Werewolf hide would be better, not being merely magic resistant, but magically neutral, but he did not believe that the Dark-fearing professor or Auror would have such a thing. Given who’d been hired as a defence teacher in his third year, she might even take offense.

“I’ve made arrangements for some of the things you request, but the book didn’t mention the need for special robes or gloves.” Of course not, Draco thought. Why would it? Shielding yourself was not specific to cleansing, it was just common sense. When McGonagall went to fetch what she could find of the items requested, and the Auror went to stand guard by the wall, Draco turned to his friends. “You okay?”

“As can be expected, Theodore said. “Father is dead.” He swallowed, then continued, “Pansy’s parents were both captured. Only Daphne still has a parent still free, and I’m not sure how long that will last.”

“They treating you okay?”

“Well enough. We aren’t important enough to interrogate, I suppose. So they just lock us away until they need something from us.” He gestured to the room. “As always. Ignore us unless we make a fuss or they need us.”

Draco nodded. He knew how those of the supposed “light” side treated those they deemed dark.

McGonagall came back about then with the salt, and a pail of clean, cold water. “I’ve sent someone to the dungeons to find some gloves.”

Draco sneered. Of course. Slytherins had the taste and good sense to wear silk gloves. The other houses... not necessarily. After she left, he carefully measured seven pinches of salt into the water. He couldn’t stir it with his hand, and he didn’t have a glass or gold stirring rod. Nothing magical would work. Daphne took out her silver hair pick. “Will this do?”

It shone, and there was no visible tarnish. “It’s as neutral a thing as we have. You’ve done no charms on it?” The look on Daphne’s face made it clear that for him even to need to ask that was an offence.

He took the ad hoc stirring rod and the silk handkerchief Theo offered. After wiping down the rod
three times, he stirred the saltwater six careful stirs, widdershins. He wiped the rod again, and gave it back to Daphne, who twisted her hair back up and stuck the stick back in. Draco smirked at her. She quirked a lip back. It felt good to be back with people who understood. Somehow, the time with his parents was not quite the same. His father was just so... broken. Except for yesterday, his mother focussed her concern on his father, especially now that he was ill. Before that, he had spent too much time with the Dark Lord. Voldemort never seemed to appreciate the finer Dark Arts, just the result. Did it work or did it not. An appreciation of craft was rare. Daphne had more than that, she had good sense.

When someone came back with gloves, which Draco recognized as his own (of course), and another runner brought some old, somewhat ratty brushes, only two of which had Thestral hair, they each took a pair of the gloves and donned them. They were one pair short, so left-handed Theo took the left glove of one of the pairs, and Draco took the right. They could always tuck the off hand into the pocket of their robes when they worked. They each took a brush and dipped it in the salt water, and Theo carefully painted a containing rune in the doorway. No sense letting the residue spread into the corridor.

Draco dipped his brush into the water, and painted a cleansing rune on Theo’s forehead, and Theo returned the favour. It was always best to have someone else paint the runes, as they tended to distort when you painted them on yourself. Each then painted a protective rune on the other’s chest, opening robes and unbuttoning their shirts just enough for access. Finally, they each painted a second protective rune, placed to ensure that their families did not stop with them. The last was the trickiest, as they compromised and painted it on the somewhat bumpy cloth, but they had practice. It was not always necessary to paint on skin, and he was not about to strip down in front of the Aurors.

Pansy and Daphne did the same favour for each other, painting the chest rune higher than normal to maintain propriety, and then Theo painted Adrien’s protection. They ignored the sniggering Auror.

Draco shuddered to think of what some of the other houses would make of this protection, as it was usually done in the privacy of the home, where it was known that you did what needed to be done.

“Adrien, you stay to watch the cauldron.” Adrien nodded. Draco had worked with the other three before, but not with Adrien, and it was safer to have partners you could trust doing the actual cleansing. Draco nodded to each of the others, and as if choreographed, they each carefully moved into the room stepping on the side, carefully not touching the rune Theo had painted, and then fanned out into a semicircle, facing toward the room. Draco was on the left, Theo on the right, and Daphne and Pansy between them.

Draco made note of the places where fallen rock and rubble would impede their way, and out of the corner of his eyes, saw the others doing likewise. They would have to move carefully.

Starting with the walls, Draco painted first a protection, then a cleansing, then a banishing sigil on the wall to his left. He could sense Pansy and Daphne crouching to paint the floor, and Theo the wall on the other side of the doorway. They stepped another step in. Slow, meticulous, steady. No brash heroics that would let the residue through.

They each painted the next set of sigils. And the next. After each set of sigils, they returned to the corridor to re-wet their brushes, one at a time, in the salt water. There was no point risking contamination by reusing the water on the brushes, or by bringing the cauldron into the room.

On the next set, they were far enough in the room that Draco and Theo had to bend and paint a set on the floor as well as the ones on the wall. Theo had painted a cleansing rune on piece of stone that had been fractured off the side wall, and, although it wasn’t part of the cleansing, painted a stabilization rune immediately afterward. It would not do to stabilize it before cleansing it, trapping
the taint in the stabilization. Draco nodded in approval.

Daphne and Pansy had to do three sets each on the floor (as they were down there already.) When they were done with that set, Theo turned to re-wet his brush just as Pansy was getting up from the ground, and she collided with Theo’s knee. He grabbed to hold her as she started to fall, but missed, and she fell past the sigil she had just painted on the still contaminated floor.

Fuck. The hairs on his arms pricked as the magic residue in the room responded to Pansy’s magical field. He could almost hear the vibration of unbalanced magic, like a shriek. His nerves felt raw at the proximity to the building chaos. They should not have been doing this without full silk working robes, at the very least. Only her hands were fully shielded by the magic-resistant silk. Draco noted that she had twisted to miss the sharp edge of a piece of broken stone, and he could see no cuts or scrapes. Her blood would at least not be adding its magic to the room. Just one drop... He shuddered to think what would have happened.

The look of fear on Pansy’s face set Draco into motion. “Pansy, you need to pull in your magic!” He noted the shrill tone to his voice, and took a deep breath. If he had been the one to fall, he knew she would have found the calm to talk him through. It was why you never worked alone, always with someone you trusted. Lowering his voice with an effort, he continued. “You are already influencing the residue in the room. Don’t try to shield, just pull it in.” Draco tried to see if he could see the magical residue from the dark magic cast in this room, without invoking his own magic. He did not need to add yet more energy to the mix. Sometimes, if he could relax enough, he could catch glimpses of it. But this was not a situation conducive to relaxation. Finally, he felt, rather than saw, the vibration in the ambience of the room slow down.

“Stay there, Pansy. The protection runes will keep long enough, if you just stay where you are.” He went out into the hall, re-wet his brush, and motioned Daphne and Theo to do the same. Quickly, they painted the protection and then the banishing rune, repeating those two over and over, working their way into the room, around the spot where Pansy sat: protection runes close in, banishing on the outside. When he got to the debris that had nearly cut Pansy, Draco first cleansed it, and then stabilized it, using the same stabilization rune that Theo had used.

After they had separated her from the rest of the room, Draco got a fresh brush of saltwater, and painted the cleansing runes within the circle of protection they had drawn. Finally, he and Daphne painted the cleansing rune on her, one each on her heart and stomach (Daphne), neck and forehead (Draco) shoulders, arms, three down her spine. After having her stand up, they did the same to her legs and the bottoms of her feet. Wherever possible they did it on bare skin, but as her robes protected her a little, they would also soak in the protection of the cleansing.

They brought her back to the corridor, and caught the attention of the Auror. “Pansy, do you have a bath in your... room?” He avoided saying “cell”, although they all knew that that was what it was. He turned to the Auror upon Pansy’s nod. “She needs to go back to her room. She’ll need to take a salt water bath. She’ll tell you the herbs to she’ll need for it. No magic. Not even an Aguamenti for the water. After the bath, then she’ll need a cleansing potion. Exteritio Expurgum. Madame Pomfrey should have it by now, but if not, then... then come get me. I know where to find it in Professor Snape’s potions stores. Pansy, go. Take care of yourself.”

The Auror looked taken aback, perhaps not expecting to receive direction from those he was guarding. “I’m afraid she cannot leave the area without a guide.”

“Of all the—look, she has been contaminated. Without the bath and potion, right now, she could become one of Madame Pomfrey’s patients. This is serious. She is in your care. See to it.” Draco had heard his father use just such a voice when talking to simpletons and lackeys. He supposed mere
students did not warrant a higher level guard, and was glad of it, for he seemed to waver.

The Auror looked around somewhat frantically, automatically responding to the command in Draco’s voice, and Draco inwardly smirked. He flagged a passing student, not a Slytherin, Draco noticed, and therefore running free, and murmured briefly to the student, who then trotted away.

Draco was beginning to get nervous, when another Auror came and exchanged a few words with their guard before he handed her the controller and she drew her wand, beckoning Pansy to follow her.

The rest of them were obviously expected to stay and complete the rest of the cleansing. It went well, even with Adrien filling in for Pansy and the unfortunate Auror tasked with keeping an eye on the Cauldron, not that they trusted him. Each time they re-wet their brushes, they scanned the water for impurities. A few hours later, when each of them reached out to sense the room (and the Auror scanned it with his toy), and all examinations came back clean, the Auror told them to pack up to be taken back to their … rooms.

The sun had sunk low enough to break through the clouds. Draco hadn’t even noticed the day was overcast until just then, as focussed as they had been. Now that they were done, the sun’s rays streamed through the jagged hole in the wall, and the room shone with its light.

Draco was exhausted. He could feel the sore muscles as he walked back with the others, slightly ahead of the Auror and his device. He would have to stretch when he was back in their rooms. Holding his magic back so it did not interact with the ambient magic of the environment, performing the small controlled movements to paint the sigils, standing, to paint the walls, reaching to mark the ceiling, crouching or kneeling to paint the floor, all together took a lot out of him, and he was ready to rest. At home there would be long soaks in hot swirling water, and a feast of simple foods afterward, Draco thought longingly. Here there would be a cell and his mother, and whatever the house elves sent.

He was, however, satisfied. It felt good to see the result of their work. Before, he had always worked at the direction of his parents, cleaning the areas of the Manor that had been used in such a way that there might be any dangerous residue. He had also cleaned up after himself, of course, when he had been learning magic.

This was different somehow. He was not sure what made the difference, whether it was working as a team with peers, or the way they had taken his direction, or the fact that they left behind a room ready for use (although it still needed physical repair), but he felt like he had accomplished something. He had not felt that in a long time.

“Let me know if you hear how Pansy is doing,” Draco told the others when they got to his and his parents’ rooms. “I expect we’ll be back at it on Monday, if not tomorrow.” Draco found he was looking forward to it. He was glad to be able to stay with his parents, especially considering what the others were going through, but he felt cut off from his friends. Theo and Daphne both nodded, and the Auror opened the door, and waited until Draco entered. He gave his friends a stiff nod just as the Auror closed the door between them.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks:
Thanks to my beta rosskpr .Her suggestions and comments have made each chapter
better, bringing to my attention all kinds of little and big details I missed.

Disclaimer:
Harry Potter, his friends, his enemies, and the lovely world they live in all belong to JK Rowling. I play here.

Other Notes:
Please note that the last scene is from Draco’s point of view. He has learned all of this at his parent’s knee, so to speak, so McGonagall’s lack of familiarity with the process seems ignorance of the worst sort. There are historical reasons why these techniques are no longer taught and no longer considered relevant, except among those who practice dark magic or who are fully within the pureblood culture. Each side of the divide was missing critical information. We can hope these events bring about some needed dialogue.

My beta asked about the Slytherin Rules mentioned in this and previous chapters, asking if I was basing it on other Slytherin rules that other authors have come up with. Nope. These were based on the culture I'm developing, and my sense of what it actually means to be Slytherin.

I hope you enjoy!

As always, reviews and critiques keep the creativity flowing! Let me know what you think!
Draco knocked on the door to the hall. He had worked all day yesterday, making part of the castle safer for the other volunteers, and he deserved something in return. He knew exactly what he wanted. He wouldn’t get it if he asked for it, but he could work around that. He knew something he could ask for, if he did it in just the right way...

His mother had been called away to discuss the results of the first day of cleansing with McGonagall. Draco allowed himself a smirk. Narcissa Malfoy had made herself necessary.

With his mother out of their rooms, he could implement his plan without revealing Snape’s survival to her prematurely. Draco needed to understand first. Why had Voldemort ordered that thrice cursed snake to attack Snape? And before that, he needed to know if his godfather had indeed survived. Was he receiving care? Had he awakened?

He pounded again.

The door opened after his pounding got loud enough that his head was beginning to pound along with it. He was beginning to think the guard at the door had cast a silencing spell, when the door opened and an irritated Auror had a wand levelled at him. “What is it, Death Eater?”

“My father is in the hospital wing, and is very ill. I want to see him.”

“And I want to have my partner back. Neither of us is going to get what we want.”
Draco considered. “I’m sorry for your partner,” he started.

“No. You don’t get to be sorry. You...”

Draco waited through the guard’s tirade, wondering how many Aurors had lost people, especially Aurors who were still on the job. The ones who had collaborated, who had done their jobs regardless of who was in control, they were likely either imprisoned or on leave. He wondered how thorough the Ministry purge was going to be. What would a bitter old Auror want? What could Draco offer? It couldn’t be anything that would harm their chances, slim as they were, for freedom.

He couldn’t believe what he was about to do. How Gryffindor. “Look. I know I have nothing you want,” he conceded. “My father is ill, and none of us knows what will happen next, not to any of us. If there is anything you want, any reason you can think of to help me spend what little time we have left together, then tell me. He’s my father!”

He hated the tone of his voice, slightly breathless, slightly whiny, but it was necessary. This is what a do-gooder Auror would want to hear, so this is what he’d give to him. Draco arranged his expression so he looked younger, more hopeful than he was. He hoped he looked more the Hogwarts student, and less the Death Eater.

The Auror looked at him. This was the expression he’d used to cajole brooms from his father when he was just starting Hogwarts. He hoped it didn’t look too strange on his face now.

“I wasn’t able to check in on him yesterday. I was helping repair the castle, as a volunteer. The cuff from when I volunteered yesterday is still locked around my ankle.” He tilted one leg forward, so the bulge caused by the anklet was clearly visible. “You could set it to limit me to the Hospital Wing.” He wondered how long he’d have to keep this up. How did Potter manage to look so wholesome all the time? It was exhausting!

The guard moved to close the door. “That really is too bad.” He did not sound at all sympathetic. Maybe you needed to be a Gryffindor to make that earnest thing work. Time to blend in a bit of Slytherin cunning.

Draco made note of the small, Badger pin on the guard’s Auror robes. They had come into style while Draco had been a student. He remembered Pansy and Daphne steering a group of Slytherins into the jeweller in Hogsmeade, insisting, as a matter of house pride, that they all get the snake pin. The Auror would not have bought it during his own time at Hogwarts...
“Do you know what I've been doing?” Draco tried to think of the simplest words to use. “There is a very dangerous magical residue in the castle, left over from the battle. I know how to remove it.”

The guard looked bored. “So? You’ve been the cleaning crew? Seems about right.”

"There are people in the hospital wing, in danger of losing their magic, possibly their lives, because they were working in areas affected by this residue. You can't see it unless you've been trained. You could just wander in, use your magic, and get sick."

The bored expression disappeared.

"I am trained to see it, and to cleanse it. That is what I’ve been doing."

“I’m sure that is all very noble of you, cleaning up your own mess—”

“It is a task that needs full concentration. Without that, I could miss something. Someone, an Auror, a teacher, a volunteer, a student, could wander into an affected area. It could happen to you, and you’d never know, until the sores started to erupt in your skin, until your own magic starts to work against you.”

“Are you threatening me?”

“No!!” Draco affected horror at the idea. “But I’ve been so distracted, worrying about my father. I could make a mistake. The risks are too great. You see why it is so important that I see him?”

The guard stared at him. Draco kept his face as earnest as possible. He waited just until he saw the guard’s expression start to close and then added, “I’m especially concerned because we’ll be working near one of the house dormitories. Unless the residue is cleansed, it could remain there for months or longer, unnoticed, until something, a stray student spell for example, causes it flare up. I don’t understand how it got so virulent near Hufflepuff.”

The guard’s flinch was subtle, but Draco had been watching for it. He covered his satisfaction with a rapid blink. When another Auror chose that moment to pass by, the guard’s posture shifted slightly, and Draco knew he had won. “Fine.” The guard ground out. “Alexia, would you guide Mr Malfoy here to see his father in the Hospital wing?”
The Auror gave Draco a cursory glance, and turned to the first one. “Do you have the controlling device?”

It changed hands, the guard provided a few instructions, and they were off.

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**Tending the Sick**

The door to the hospital wing was guarded. A set of private rooms likewise had an Auror stationed at the door. The presence of his Auror guide got him past the guards, who nevertheless looked wary. Draco’s lips quirked. Even unconscious or delirious, even weakened as he was, his father commanded respect.

His smile faded as he saw his father. Lucius Malfoy looked... grey. His hair hung lank against his scalp, looking more like a white-haired Snape than a Malfoy. His skin looked parched and flushed. They had clearly not been taking proper care of him. Hadn’t they given him a bath or washed his hair?

Draco moved into the room, leaving the two Aurors behind as unimportant, vaguely aware that the Auror who had guided him had passed the controller to the guard, and after a brief murmured conversation, left the room. He touched his father’s forehead, but Lucius didn’t respond. Draco had never seen his father looking so ill, not even after the Dark L—Voldemort had held him under Cruciatius on and off for half an hour. He remembered Aunt Bella laughing. Bella found anyone’s pain, even her own, delightfully amusing.

“Why hasn’t he been tended?” Draco kept his voice soft but couldn’t keep the outrage he felt completely out of his tone. Truthfully, he didn’t want to. His father deserved better than this.

“He is a criminal.” The guard spoke as if to a ten year old, too young even for Hogwarts,
enunciating each syllable of ‘criminal’ as if it were a separate word.

“He is ill. It looks as if he hasn’t been bathed since he got here. Why isn’t anyone looking after him?”

“He resisted. Didn’t want to be touched by a Muggleborn. Went mad, he did, waving his arms about. The volunteer from St Mungo’s ended up with scratches. He can stink in his own mess, as far as I’m concerned.”

Draco tried to imagine his poised father clawing at some Mudblood volunteer like a wild man. The man on the bed looked too weak to put up such a fight, and he wanted to discount the guard’s description, except he had seen his father’s strength. It shone behind his reserve, daunting opponents and allies alike, and emerged even when his father was weak, if confronted with something he found intolerable. His father was ill indeed, if he couldn’t restrain his instinctive responses. He knew better. He had taught Draco only to show disdain if it strengthened his position. Causing a scene in such a way brought no strength. Had Lucius Malfoy given up?

Draco stroked back the matted hair from his father’s forehead. His skin was too hot.

He couldn’t just leave his father like this, despite his need to see how Severus was faring. “I can keep him calm. Surely there is a volunteer who is—” suitable, he thought. He kept the word back, turning his face toward the Auror guarding the door, wearing an expression almost as earnest as a Hufflepuff. “Willing.” He threaded just the right amount of pleading into his voice, although he wanted to demand his father be treated well. It was too late for demands, he reminded himself.

“He had his chance,” the Auror spat. “He wasted it. The volunteers have enough to do without squandering their time on scum that don’t want it.” Draco looked at the Auror’s face, memorising the features, storing them away for later. He turned back to the bed. “Father. It’s Draco.”

“Draco?” His father’s voice was weak and hoarse. There was a pitcher of water and a glass on the table by the bed. Draco looked; the glass appeared clean. He poured some for his father. Draco noticed Lucius’ hands shaking when he tried to take the glass. “Here, let me help.” He pulled his father forward, and supported his back with one hand while steadying his arm with the other. He would not diminish his father in front of the guard by holding the glass for him, but he could keep him from spilling.

“Better?” Draco spoke softly. No need to give the guard a show.
“Thank you.” The words were uttered quietly, but confirmed to Draco that his father had been ill-tended.

“Would you like to bathe?”

“I will not be touched by—“

“I will assist you.”

His father closed his eyes, as if denying what was. The father he knew would not succumb to such denial. Draco did not acknowledge the relief he felt when he caught the almost imperceptible nod that followed.

Leaning forward, he pulled Lucius to more of a sitting position, then wrapped one arm behind him and began to leverage him out of bed.

“Oi! What do you think you are doing?”

Draco didn’t turn. “Tending to my father.”

“Stop that. You don’t have the authorization!”

“Who needs authorization to assist a family member?”

“He may not be in Azkaban now, but he will be!” The guard was almost shouting. “As soon as he gets tried. Azkaban inmates do not get pampered, they do not get daily perfumed baths, and they don’t get house elves catering to their needs. He might as well get used to—“

“No.” Draco repressed the image of his father shortly after the Azkaban break out. He could not see his father like that again. He knew he would have to become accustomed to it, but not yet.

“He is not in Azkaban now. He has not been tried yet. Right now, he is a patient here, and as such, he deserves care. If no one else will provide it, I will.”
So much for acting the Hufflepuff.

The door opened behind the guard, revealing Madame Pomfrey.

“What is this commotion? This is a sick ward, not a tavern.” She turned toward Draco, as if just noticing him. “Mr Malfoy, what are you doing here?”

“I was permitted to come see my father today, and saw the condition he was in. As the Auror here indicated unwillingness to call for someone to see to him, I found it necessary to see to his needs myself.”

“Mr Malfoy—”

“I am concerned with the health of several of your patients.” He layered just enough meaning on the sentence that the Mediwitch could not fail to know who he meant.

Madame Pomfrey turned to the guard. “You may wait outside.”

The guard glanced warily at Draco. “Are you sure, Madame?”

“I am at no risk from a wandless child wearing a limiter cuff!”

Draco bristled at the description but subsided as the guard, after a moment’s hesitation, turned and left, closing the door behind him. Madame Pomfrey rounded on Draco.

“Mister Malfoy.” She paused and took a deep breath as if to stave off exasperation.

Draco took a glance at his father, who seemed too tired to pay attention. Appearances could be deceiving, and his father certainly had practice. He eased Lucius back onto the bed and stepped closer to Madame Pomfrey, noting how her eyes turned wary, but she did not back up. “How is he?” Draco whispered urgently.
“Your father will be fine. He just needs rest while the illness works its way—“

“Yes, thanks, I’ll want to know about that. I will also want to discuss his care. But first, I need to know, how is your other patient?” He kept his voice low enough to be heard only by Madame Pomfrey.

“I have many patients, Mr Malfoy, as you well know.”

Draco levelled his gaze at her and waited.

She raised her wand from the folds of her robes and cast a privacy charm. “He has not awakened. This is to be expected, due to the severity of his wounds and the combination of potions you saw fit to give to him. He is, however, no worse.”

“Where is he?”

Her eyes flickered. If she had completed the glance, it would have landed on the north wall of the room. Draco noticed a door in the wall, and gave himself a smug mental nod.

“I appreciate that you are concerned for him, Mr Malfoy, but he is in my care. I will send word when he wakes, but in the meantime, you need to stay where you have been put. You take way too many liberties for one whose future is not certain.”

Draco wanted to contest her words, but they were regrettably true. He could say that it was he that had given Professor Snape into her care, but so had anyone else who brought someone in for healing. This did not sit well with him. He had saved Severus’ life! He ought to be accorded some recognition of the fact. At the very least, he should be able to see him, and to be informed of his status.

Holding back his frustration, he gave a curt nod. “I would appreciate anything you can tell me.” He paused. Now, with regard to my father—”

“He refused care. Most vehemently. I have ensured that he has the potions, the tinctures he needs, but I am too busy at the moment to find someone willing to deal with him. I have heard you are assisting with the purification of the tainted areas of the castle. You therefore know what we are dealing with. I have patients with far greater need—“
“Certainly. But I am asking no more than that he be given a chance to bathe, and have his hair combed and a potion for his skin! He looks dehydrated! Are there no assistants, no house elves?”

“The Hogwarts house elves have never been involved in the hospital wing, other than to clean the beds and bedding and bring the food. They are not trained for patient care.”

“Whyever not?”

“It is specialized training, Mr Malfoy. The house elves are often too eager to please, and will do things that are contraindicated for patient health.”

“In that case, I can assist my father. I was about to do that very thing when the guard objected.”

Madame Pomfrey cast a critical eye over the young man. “I will allow it. Afterward, you will call the guard and permit him to take you back to your mother.”

Draco nodded.

Madame Pomfrey released the privacy charm and bustled to a cabinet, removed a towel and a patient’s sleeping robe, as well as a small phial of hair cleaning potion. Draco was almost certain that Snape had provided it. He sniffed it, and was relieved to find it was not the one his godfather used. He followed her into the bathroom, and watched as she set the robe and towel on a small stand, then filled the tub with a charm similar to Aguamenti, but one which allowed the caster to control the temperature. The water would be purer than that from the tap.

He trailed a finger into the filling tub, and was glad to find the temperature appropriate. “If there is nothing else, Mr Malfoy, before I return to my other patients?”

“No, Madame, nothing else. I appreciate your care.”

She turned and left the room, closing the door behind her. He heard a murmur of instructions given to the guard. He would have listened, but he had to be swift. He returned to the bed.
“Father?”

His father didn’t say anything or open his eyes, but Draco saw the twitch of one cheek. He was listening, then.

“Are you ready? You can’t be comfortable like that.”

Confusion gave way after a moment, and Lucius gave a brief nod.

Draco leaned forward and helped his father sit up and then lifted his legs to hang off the side of the bed. Putting his arms around the older man’s back, he told him, “I’m going to lift you now.” His father didn’t respond, so after a moment Draco pulled him to his feet.

Lucius didn’t weigh nearly what Draco thought he should. Lifting him should have been more difficult, with no wand to lighten him. He adjusted his grip around his father’s waist and helped guide him toward the bathroom, closing the door behind them. His father’s fingers were clumsy, but Draco allowed him the dignity of disrobing himself, before helping him into the warm water. He handed him the hospital soap, and glanced aside as his father lathered his skin. This was not the strong, driven man his father once was, and Draco felt he was intruding to see him like this. He wanted to think it was the illness, but Lucius had been less and less himself, ever since his time in Azkaban. Draco had blamed Potter for all of it, but it was more than just that. Voldemort’s curses, and the strain of trying to please the Dark Lord, had slowly worn away what there was of his strong, proud father, leaving behind a man diminished.

When Lucius was finished, he leaned back, soaking in the warmth of the water. He didn’t say anything, as if speaking would make real the fact that he needed his son’s assistance to bathe. Draco allowed him the illusion, watching as the elder Malfoy closed his eyes. When his father made no move to wash his hair, Draco reached for a pitcher by the side of the tub and filled it with warm water, then poured it over his father’s scalp, being careful that the water slid back through the hair instead of into the eyes. He poured a bit of the shampoo into his hands and worked into the long, pale hair. It had become lank and brittle, so unlike the soft, shiny, white-gold hair his father should have.

The proud hair was as much a part of what it was to be Malfoy as the commanding presence Lucius had shown throughout Draco’s life, until his time in Azkaban. The Malfoy strength came from within. It begat their wealth, their prestige, their political power. Malfoys had the will to carry through, to do what must be done. It was hard, seeing his father so, his tarnished hair a reflection of a broken spirit.
He washed it thoroughly, massaging the scalp to encourage blood flow, then rinsing the lather out of the hair, running his fingers through to hear the squeak verifying that the soap was gone. There weren’t proper hair care potions, but there was a smoothing and detangling cream and a metal comb, which Draco used to finish the job.

His father had not said a word during Draco’s ministrations. Draco almost wished he would, even if it would delay his next task. To have his father so unresponsive, so passive, was unnatural. When Draco was done, Lucius continued to recline in the bath, eyes closed, as if the world had ceased to matter.

“Father?” A slight twitch on his face showed the man had heard. “Come, let me help you back to bed.

An eyelid opened, then the other. Grey eyes gazed at him, with very little of the determination Draco was used to seeing. He was losing his father, and had been for the past two years. Draco didn’t think he was ready. He didn’t think he would ever be ready.

He assisted the older man out of the bathtub, handed him a towel. He turned his back, unsure whether he was protecting his father’s privacy, or his own illusions.

The bed had been remade with fresh linens. Madame Pomfrey apparently allowed the house elves access to the beds when the patients were not in them. He guided his father, now clean and in fresh hospital robes, back to the bed.

Lucius Malfoy gazed at his son, then closed his eyes and drifted back to sleep.

Draco stared at him. He looked better than before, but Draco still felt a bit lost.

After a moment, he turned on his heel and approached the door that Madame Pomfrey had glanced at earlier. He hadn’t much time.

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**The Other Invalid**
The door Madame Pomfrey had glanced at was unlocked. It opened to a short corridor, with a few doors on one side. It was deserted. Draco slid through the door and closed it gently behind him, listening for the soft click of the latch. He would have to hurry. It would not do for the guard to return to find him missing.

The doors along the corridor were closed, but when he quietly turned the first doorknob, he found it likewise unlocked. He breathed a sigh of relief. The room was empty, the bed made, ready for the next patient. Sunlight shone in through the window glass, casting a stream of light across the bed onto the floor. He closed the door.

The second room was empty as well. When he reached the third, the knob didn’t turn. Draco almost moaned in frustration, but when he went to rattle the door, it gave way, opening to a room that held a patient. Snape. Quietly entering the room and closing the door behind him, Draco wondered if the guards knew they were guarding more than one patient. The room was darker than the empty ones, the curtains drawn.

Snape looked so pale. Draco wanted his wand. He had several charms to improve the colour in a person’s cheeks, and he wanted to use it just now. There was a glass left over from some potion on the night table. Draco reached and sniffed it, but didn’t recognize it. It had the sharp smell a lot of healing potions had, as if the scent alone would drive away illness. He sat by the bed.

“I had to come and see how you were for myself. You never know if they’re going to tell you the truth, especially now.” He felt foolish, talking to someone who could not hear. Snape would reprimand him sharply for such idiocy.

There was a chair by the bed, a wooden one with a plain white cushion. Draco sat. “I’m not sure I can do what is needed.” Draco would never have said this to Snape if he had been awake. “Father has always been the one with the vision. I wish you were awake to tell me what a fool I am.”

There was no response.

“Severus!” The word was spoken softly, but contained all the longing Draco felt for someone to take charge, to tell him what to do so that it would all turn out all right.

He had never felt so alone in his life.

The door opened. Madame Pomfrey looked startled that he was here.
“Mr Malfoy, I thought you were here to see your father. I seem to remember your promise to return to your room after seeing to his needs.”

Draco smirked. “I didn’t say how soon.” His smirk faded. “Father isn’t himself. I was hoping Professor Snape –”

“He is the same as I told you. How did you even get in here? He is a prisoner! The door should have been locked.”

“It wasn’t,” was all he said on that. “I needed to talk to him.” Draco realized he sounded a bit pathetic, and truthfully was feeling a bit pathetic, but there was no cause for the Mediwitch to see that. “Both my father and Snape are prisoners. I do not need to be told this, I could not forget the outcome of the war in a week.” He pulled back the bitterness he felt, but could not quite hide a smug quirk to his lips when he added, “I thought you might have saved yourself some trouble and used one guard for them both... as you did! I had to follow up, to see how he was. You’re a healer, you understand, I’m sure.”

“I know you care about him, Mr Malfoy. That is not the matter at hand. You perhaps don’t realize that, despite your ability to persuade your way out of your assigned room, you are also, in fact, a prisoner. You have not had a trial. You have done unconscionable things, young man, and you do not get to gallivant around the castle until it has been determined, by a court, what should be done with you.”

“I understand everything you’ve said, Madame. I am neither a clueless Hufflepuff, nor an idiot Gryffindor. That man is my godfather. I rescued him, and I wanted to see how he fares.” Draco’s voice got louder with each sentence.

“You have seen. Now Mr Malfoy, I must insist—”

A low groan from the bed froze both the Mediwitch and the wizard in their place.

“What ... conceivable reason ... is there ... for you to ... find it necessary ... to argue in such ... stentorian tones ... by the bed of ... a patient?” A deep voice, halting and scratchy from underuse, came from the bed.

“Severus!”
“Mr Malfoy!” Draco had not known it was possible to shout so softly before, but if anyone could, of course it would be Snape.

“I’m sorry, Professor Snape.” Draco said abashed. “I was so pleased to see you recovered enough to talk—”

“I presume—” Deep, breathy coughs interrupted what he had been about to say. Madame Pomfrey hurried to his bed and held a glass of water for him to drink, followed by a vial of something thick and sludgy. Severus eyed it cautiously. He tried to grasp the vial himself, but collapsed back onto the bed. With a grimace, he allowed Madame Pomfrey to hold it to his lips. He swallowed it with only a grunt as complaint.

He turned back to face Draco. “I presume I have you to blame for this?” Snape asked, his voice stronger, though still raspy. At first, Draco thought he was talking about the potion, and was about to object that Snape had most likely been the one to brew it, but then he realized.

“I thought you dead! But I remembered your potion, the one you mentioned in your first year class, and ...”

“I saw the vials you purloined, Mr Malfoy. Do you plan to take thievery lessons from Mr Potter?”

Draco saw Snape watching him carefully. “Yes, he lives. He lives up to his moniker.” Draco commented wryly. The look on Snape’s face was somehow both hopeful and fearful. “Is—“

“The Dark Lord is dead.”

Snape closed his eyes. Draco could not tell if it was in relief or sadness.

Madame Pomfrey had regained her sense of purpose, and shoved Draco out of the room. “I must see to my patient, Mr Malfoy. I will report to you what is appropriate for you to know.”

She continued shoving him until he was back outside his father’s room, facing an irate guard. She gave the guard explicit instructions to ensure Draco ended up back in the Malfoy family cell. Draco took a deep breath, straightened his back, and gave the guard an expectant glance. The Auror gestured for Draco to precede him through the door. Outside the hospital wing, he gave the controller and more instructions to one of the stationed Aurors, who guided him back to captivity.
Draco took heart that Madame Pomfrey did say she would report back.

Severus Snape examined his situation. Physically, he felt much better than expected. He was alive, and his soul was in his body. No Dementors guarded his room. He appeared to be under the care of Poppy Pomfrey, and Draco had access, albeit unauthorized, to his room. The victors were treating their prisoners much better than he had expected, if this small sample was indicative. He had certainly not expected to be on the receiving end of such benevolence.

He could not anticipate that it would continue.

Despite having bared his soul to him, Severus doubted Potter would spare a thought for him unless coerced. He could expect no grace from that quarter. The thought pained him, not because he expected better, but, after all he had done, just once, he would have liked for his contribution to be acknowledged. Judging from past experience, he would more likely be penalized for his efforts. He would have to assume he was on his own.

He recognised the room. It was one he had occupied on many occasions, upon returning from one of the Dark Lord’s summons. The corridor it was in had no direct exit to the castle, leading instead to one of the infrequently used private rooms, keeping him safe from prying student eyes. The windows had strong wards, which had served as protection, but now perhaps served to make his retreat a cell. The wards had been cast independently of the castle’s protections, but it was still possible they had fallen when Hogwarts had given way to the Dark Lord and his followers. It was something to investigate. More immediate was the need to investigate his physical condition.

He wiggled the toes on one foot. Pain rolled through his body like ocean waves. He was glad he had not started with a hand, or his head. He breathed through the pain, and when it subsided, he made a second attempt.

Perhaps it would be better to plan first.

He glanced around the room. His wand was not in sight, although he distinctly remembered it in his hands when he had regained consciousness the first time. Ah. That had likely been necessary, and was so no longer.
That would affect his choices.

The first question was whether he should try to leave. From what he had heard, before announcing his return to consciousness, Lucius lay in the room at the end of the corridor. Draco was in a cell, but seemed to find it possible to run about the castle. Didn’t these people take their prisoners seriously? He was not going to object if he stood to benefit by it, but no one would benefit if any of the Dark Lord’s followers escaped. Even Draco could be a risk; he was still young enough to be used, if someone dangled the right lure. Perhaps he could use his own escape as a warning that stronger measures were needed to secure the remaining prisoners.

Did he want to leave? Although he had made provisional plans for a variety of scenarios, the Order winning and him still being alive and somewhere other than Azkaban had not been a high enough probability to spend much time on.

Death had been the most likely outcome, regardless who won.

He reviewed his choices.

If he escaped, he would have to set himself up with another face and a new name. He knew as soon as Albus had made that last request of him that his own name and face would be too notorious for him to wear if he wished to live a peaceful life, certainly in Britain, possibly also on the continent. The Dark Lord had sealed shut what remained of that avenue when he had directed him to take on the Headmaster’s role.

Even under an alias, here or on the continent, using his skills would put him at risk. He was well known as a Potions Master, both as a teacher and as a brewer. Potions were an art, and any master of the art would recognize his signature style in his brews. That put his strongest skills out of reach.

He could teach defence. While Albus had certainly employed substandard defence instructors with insufficient background checks, he could not assume that any other school would employ such lax standards.

Going further afield would require the use of a Portkey, or Muggle transport. He repressed a shudder, not wanting to know the pain that would awaken. International Portkeys disagreed with him, and Muggle methods of travel were disgusting: trapped in some metal contraption for hours or days on end, together with a throng of Muggles. He’d left that behind along with his childhood, years ago. As for destinations: the options were numerous and all unpleasant.
If he did not interact with wizards, if he lived as a Muggle or a hermit, he could survive, even here in Britain. He remembered his drive to learn all he could of magic, to prove himself. Living as a Muggle would sacrifice all that he had learned, all that he had become. Living as a hermit was preferable. He had found a small cabin in a forest and set aside some meagre provisions. Perhaps he could still publish, under a pseudonym, and receive a fraction of the recognition he had once craved. He knew he would find it deplorable to live as an outcast from the society he had helped save, but it was an option.

His other choice was to stay. He would put himself at risk in an entirely different way. He had no wish to throw himself on the questionable mercy of any court run by the Ministry, especially with Albus gone. The victors would not be merciful toward a Death Eater, and he had no desire to spend time in Azkaban ever again. What would he gain?

He didn’t have enough information.

Among other things, if Potter was alive, could the Dark Lord truly be dead? Had the brat refused the path laid out for him, and condemned them all to relive this nightmare in another ten years? He had provided his own memories to the boy, had given him access to private moments no one else should have seen, all so Potter would know what was needed to end the war. Had he sacrificed his privacy for nothing?

If so, would it be better to stay to complete the task? Never again. He could not stop the shudder that went though him at the idea, suffering the inevitable pain the movement caused.

He had to know. He had to be sure.

If the Dark Lord yet survived, his choices dwindled, and none of them were good.

He closed his eyes, weary resignation sweeping through him. Before he could decide, he had to talk with Potter.
Reflections

Sunday morning dawned bright and clear, the air alive with spring breezes. Harry went outside, wandering the Hogwarts grounds, avoiding those spots that had been marked. It was strange, thought Harry. He, Hermione and Ron had been in each other’s pockets for almost a year. It was strangely pleasant to be...just alone.

Sure, it was great to be able to talk with others, those who had not been on the Horcrux hunt with them. Catching up with Neville and Ginny some more would have been great, if it didn’t hurt to think about them. It would be great to talk with Luna, despite what her father had done. Harry understood the desperation one felt, protecting a family member. He remembered how he had felt about Sirius. Luna was all Mr Lovegood had left, and Harry understood that he would do anything to protect her.

Despite all that, there was also the feeling that these other people could not understand what he had been through, as Hermione and Ron did. He almost wished they were there with him, but they were both busy. Torn too many ways, wanting the familiarity of his two closest friends, and wanting some actual solitude, after having almost no time to himself for almost a year, and also wanting to finally socialize without having to look over his shoulder in fear of attack, Harry wandered, mourning to see the broken castle walls and the fallen Quidditch towers, but enjoying the familiarity of the distant rooftops of Hogsmeade.

He did not look at the forbidden forest. He was not ready for that.

He made his way down to the lake. The breeze brought the smell of algae and a hint of fish, although the merfolk never let a dead one stay long enough to cause a stink. He remembered swimming down to get Ron, so afraid he would do something wrong, or that the Gillyweed would fail, or something. There had been nothing for it but to continue. That, if nothing else, was the story of his life.

The lake also reminded him of his first sight of the castle, the first time he had come home. He could almost hear the clatter of water against the boats. He remembered Ron with the smudge on his nose, Hermione rattling on about all she had read before even setting foot in a classroom, Neville and his missing frog, even Malfoy, pompous and smug and so sure of his own superiority. It had been a moment of possibility. He wished he could be that Harry again.

Voldemort was dead. Maybe he could.
Best Mates

Monday May 11, 1998

Harry was glad when Ron flooed over to Hogwarts on Monday. He was beginning to feel alone after the weekend, even though some of the volunteers had returned once it had been deemed safe. He had been with Ron and Hermione for most of the past year, just the three of them, and it felt strange not to see them every day.

He stuck with Ron through the introductory training, and they joined a sorting team. He felt a bit wild, with Ron at his side, and the grins Ron shot his way let Harry know that the feeling was shared.

No work had been done since McGonagall called a halt on Thursday, and there was a sense of cheer amidst the volunteers. They were not allowed to work in certain areas. Apparently, there was some danger that was being seen to, and until it was resolved, there were actual physical barriers around the areas.

“I wonder why they don’t use magic.” Ron commented.

“Would they? What would they do?”

“Usually they’d put a visible ward around dangerous spots. It usually glows purple.”

“No orange?”

“Why would they use orange?”
“I just always saw danger signs in orange.”

“Muggles are odd.” Ron grinned. “Here’s our spot. What do we do again?”

Harry put his hands on his hips, and said, “Weren’t you listening? Honestly, Ron!”

Ron guffawed. “Merlin, Harry! You got her exactly. ‘Cept your voice is too low.”

“I am not doing falsetto. Some reporter would capture it, and there’d be a story that I’m really a girl!”

“Nope. I’ve lived in the same room with you, and everyone’s all seen you in swim trunks, back in fourth year. I know! They’ll say you’re turning into one. I can just see it!” Ron put his hands up in the air, stretching them out to indicate a headline. “Boy Who Lived now Girl Who Lived!”

Harry laughed. “Vanquishing You-Know-Who has given me the strength to admit who I really am!” Harry quoted. “I always felt I was living a lie.”

“The Girl who Vanquished You-Know-Who!”

Harry’s face twisted in a grimace. “That’s how you’d know it wasn’t me. If they quoted me saying You-Know-Who. Especially now, when there’s no taboo on it.” He suddenly sobered. “Ron—“

“If you dare apologize, Harry, I’m going to hex something. And then you really would be the Girl-Who-Lived… for awhile at least.”

Harry turned sideways to Ron’s wand, just in case.

“So, debris sorting. Whole blocks over there, bits of blocks over here, and dust and debris over there.”
“So long as it’s not bits of blokes.”

Harry smiled and turned away.

They levitated blocks and bits into the appropriate areas, saving the debris for last. It was perhaps the hardest to control, and Harry didn’t want to be breathing rock dust. Ron screwed his face up in concentration when he was lifting a particularly heavy block. Harry wanted to cast a helping levitation, but he was afraid of ruining Ron’s concentration, so waited. When Ron was done with that one, Harry suggested they try synchronizing their spells.

“How?”

“Well, let’s test it on one of the smaller fragments. That way we won’t wreck anything important if we mess up.

Harry levitated a smallish, irregular fragment in Ron’s direction, waiting until it looked like Ron had added his own spell to it before releasing his. As soon as Ron got control of it, he directed it back in Harry’s direction.

“This is like wizarding catch!” Harry commented, amused.

“Wizarding what?”

“Catch. You know, where you throw a ball back and forth.”

“Why would you do that?”

“Didn’t you ever throw a Quaffle back and forth? I mean, before you could fly.”

“Well, when we were little, we had kids’ training brooms, and we had a play Quaffle.”

“Yeah, like that.”
“But that was Quidditch!”

Harry grinned. “My mistake.” He thought for a moment. Without cricket, there’d be no reason to toss a ball around, and without football, there’d be no reason to kick a ball around. It was all just Quidditch. Perhaps American wizards played catch. Of course, then it would be just Quodpot.

“Hey Ron! Catch!” Harry levitated the stone just to the right of Ron, letting it go when he could tell the arc of it would not hit Ron, but came close enough. Ron directed his wand at it, and with a Wingardium Leviosa, he managed to flip it back in Harry’s direction. Harry tried a banishing spell to redirect it back toward Ron, who tried something else to send it back.

Harry let it fall. “What was that one?

“Repelling charm.”

“Good one, Ron!”

“Let’s try this one. He levitated a slightly larger rock toward Ron, and the game was on. They tried playing bucket brigade, except instead of buckets and water, it was wands and stone. One of them would heft the rock part of the way, and then release the spell when the other caught it, all the way to the spot where the stone was supposed to go.

Soon they were using just a bit of a lift, just to get enough momentum that the stone would arc on its way, and then let go for the other to catch it.

Harry found a laugh bubbling up inside him that he hadn’t felt for a while. He felt that warmth that let him know that Ron was still his best friend, and there was something they each gave the other that made it all worthwhile.

The work was much more fun with Ron. They continued their game with the irregular pieces, and practiced working together, two spells woven together for the large square blocks. They almost lost one of the larger blocks when Ron’s spell went one way and Harry’s went another, but Ron quickly cast a repelling charm on the ground, and the stone bounced against a cushion of air a few inches off the floor.
That was lovely, except when Harry took a step toward it, he slipped on the repelling charm and fell, only to bounce a few inches from the ground himself.

Ron took one look at him and burst out laughing. Harry thought about being offended for half a second, then imagined what he looked like, flat on his back with his legs in the air, gently bouncing on nothing.

“Come here, you!”

Ron took a tentative step forward, felt the give of the air above the stone, and stepped up onto air, bouncing on the balls of his feet. Suddenly, he took a quick hop, and started jumping up and down.

Harry giggled. He clambered carefully to his feet, and then started bouncing himself. It was like the time the school had a trampoline in fitness class. Harry never got a turn, because Dudley insisted on going first, and broke one of the springs. Uncle Vernon came to school and yelled about unsafe practices, and they didn’t have any more trampoline exercise in Harry’s year. Harry hoped that Dudley hadn’t ruined it for the other kids. It looked fun. Harry tried bouncing higher. Soon Harry and Ron were bouncing in counterpoint to each other: when Harry went up, Ron went down, and vice versa.

They kept recasting the repelling charm, making sure to avoid the part where the debris was, lest it too start bouncing around the room.

Harry couldn’t remember ever having so much fun.

“What’s this?” A gruff voice shouted.

Filch! Harry had been high in the air, and landed wrong, falling again onto his arse. Ron had bent his legs to soften his landing, so was still on his feet.

“I should have known you wouldn’t take the repair seriously! You can lure You-Know-Who here, but Harry Potter is too good to clean up after the mess he made. Inconsiderate, unthinking hooligans! It may not be the school year, but don’t think I won’t talk to Headmistress McGonagall about this behaviour!”

The old caretaker was practically frothing at the mouth, he was so angry. “You!” He pointed at
Ron. “You are not welcome on the cleanup crew. One day here, and already causing trouble. Go find somewhere else to destroy.”

One of the only times he had felt truly carefree since the battle, and Filch had to come and stop it. What’s more, if Filch forbade Ron from volunteering, they wouldn’t get to work together again as they had today. It had been – fun. Harry couldn’t quite describe how Ron helped Harry feel less aimless, less cut off.

Ron’s face started to get red, bursting with the same resentment he felt. “We weren’t hurting anything!”

Harry’s resentment faded a bit at Ron’s ready defence. Ron was... Ron.

He remembered how Filch had looked that first day after the battle, as if each scar to the castle was a raw wound, and tried to imagine how he’d feel… no, he knew how Filch felt. Hogwarts was his home too. It hurt every time he saw the furrows in the ground, and the holes in the walls. It was just that the people were more important. He had Ron, Hermione, the Weasleys. For just a moment, Harry was awed by how many people he still had in his life. Harry thought this was probably all Filch had. Somehow, that was a horrible thought.

“We apologise, Mr Filch. We didn’t mean to cause problems.”

Filch peered at him. “You’ve had it too easy. Sorting crew, bah. I think you need to get a real sense of what was done to Hogwarts.” He made a note in his notebook. Harry started to get a little nervous. But Filch wouldn’t make Harry do anything too dangerous, would he? McGonagall wouldn’t let him.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to rosskpr for beta reading, and giving good suggestions. Thanks to my readers for their patience, too, assuming you have not given up on this story and me.

Comments, critiques, suggestions, and kudos are always welcome. I find they inspire me to write further, knowing someone else cares about the story.
Disclaimer:

Harry Potter, his friends, his enemies, and the lovely world they live in all belong to JK Rowling.
May 13, 1998

Harry stumbled down to breakfast, glad of the slightly extended hours for the volunteers. The Great Hall looked so much like it did during the school year it triggered a bout of nostalgia.

Today, Dean Thomas was at the Gryffindor Table, along with Eddie Carmichael, a Ravenclaw Harry remembered as being a year ahead of them. Harry wandered over to sit with them. As more students were volunteering, the food was becoming more like Hogwarts fare. Harry grabbed some eggs and toast, and a few grilled tomatoes from the platters.

The owl that descended toward him landed on the plate for the empty seat next to him, talons curved around its edge. It extended its leg, and gave Harry an imperious stare. Harry quickly untied the scroll tied to its foot.

*Harry—*

*I believe it would be a good time to commence our lessons on the Black Family magics. Would this coming Sunday work for you? Please confirm by return owl.*

*Andromeda Tonks*

A small slip of parchment fell out of the scroll, ready for Harry to confirm the meeting. According to the note, all Harry had to do was lay his wand on the parchment, and say either yes or no, and it would complete the reply for him.
He had avoided thinking about the voices he’d heard in the back of his mind while on the Black Estate. They had diminished since he had left there, but every once in a while, there came a wry comment that was not something he would think, or a suggestion to do something. It was usually a good suggestion, but he’d really had enough of voices in his mind.

Still, it would be wrong to avoid Andromeda, and even worse to avoid Teddy, out of fear or discomfort. It still startled him that he had a godson, a child that should be his responsibility. He was grateful that Andromeda was taking on the role for her grandson, but sometimes Harry felt like he wasn’t doing his part. Harry really needed to make sure to spend time with his godson on a regular basis. He would make sure that Teddy knew he was loved, Harry promised himself. Teddy would not grow up like he had.

It seemed to be a day for correspondence, for another owl reached him toward the end of the morning, as he was levitating the last stone—now cleaned and somewhat smoothed—onto the top of the pile, ready to be replaced and balanced into the wall and the castle’s wards. The corridor was now cleaned of rubble. Harry looked at it with a certain satisfaction.

It was good to be part of rebuilding, good to see the destruction reversed. Without Ron volunteering beside him, the work was not as much fun, but it was very satisfying. He brushed the dust off of his hands and clothes, and reached to remove the scroll from the extended leg of the school owl.

HP

Please come to my office. Password has not changed.

MM

Giving the cleaned hallway one last look, Harry made his way to the Headmaster’s office. He felt better about the password this time. “Victory.” Being part of the rebuilding had made it easier to say. Easier to believe.

Minerva McGonagall sat behind her desk, a tidy pile of scrolls to one side, and with a few scattered in front of her. A picture of a man in a kilt graced the sideboard. Her tartan cloak hung from the cloak-rack by the door. Looking around, he realized he’d have to get used to calling it the Headmistress’ office. It had remained Dumbledore’s in his mind, from its rounded walls to the shining, whirring silver instruments that had cluttered the shelves. It had been transfigured when he
wasn’t paying attention from Dumbledore’s office to McGonagall’s. The change left him with a feeling that swirled around his belly. Nostalgia, perhaps, and sorrow, and hope. It was a sign of change, and of things lost, and possibilities.

It was this change that made Harry realize that Snape had barely altered it at all, from what he’d seen. He could not imagine Snape working in a room with all of Dumbledore’s trinkets, but he had not noticed their absence. He remembered being able to enter the Headmaster’s office with the word “Dumbledore”. Having seen the memories, he could not help but see this in a different light. What torture it must have been for Snape, entering the office with the name of the man he had killed, surrounded by Dumbledore’s artefacts, day after day. Harry shook his head. Perhaps he was not remembering accurately. He’d had other things on his mind that day, rushing up with a bottle of Snape’s memories clutched in his hand.

“Ah, Mr Potter. Thank you for coming so promptly.”

She gestured to the seats facing her desk. They were soft and comfortable, but still firm enough to sit upright and high enough to look at her directly. Harry remembered the seats that were here when Dumbledore was Headmaster – squishy, brightly-coloured chairs one could get lost in. He always felt a little out of control in those chairs. It felt different to sit eye to eye with the new Headmistress. He was not sure if he felt empowered or daunted by the expectations of equality that implied. It was a lot to live up to.

Professor McGonagall called for a tea service, and poured each of them a cup. She looked down at the tea tray for a moment. It had been Dumbledore’s. “It’s been a tradition for so long, it would feel wrong to go without.”

Harry sipped his tea, remembering those times he’d done so with Dumbledore on the other side of the desk. The Headmistress seemed lost in her own memories for a moment, but then she set her teacup down and cast her gaze on Harry. Her expression was searching, as if she were trying to discern something important. After a moment, she spoke. “I have not announced this publicly yet, but in order for us to have this discussion, you must know that I am inviting all students back to retake the year that they would have taken last year.”

Harry sat up straighter, relief washing through him. He’d be able to have one more year at Hogwarts. He’d have time to think, before having to decide anything.

“I have discussed it with the Board of Governors, and we feel that it is important for all students to have a fair chance at their NEWTs, considering how important those are for starting out well in our world, once school is completed. The NEWTs have been delayed this year, due to the turmoil that exists both at Hogwarts and at the Ministry.”
Harry nodded, thinking of both the madness that Hermione described at the Ministry, and the rubble he was clearing at Hogwarts. Yes, they would not be able to hold something as ordinary as NEWTs anytime soon.

“Each student who has completed a seventh year at Hogwarts may decide to take their NEWTs at the end of June of this year,” McGonagall continued, “at a testing site at the Ministry, in which case their schooling at Hogwarts will be complete. There are, however, students such as yourself, who, for reasons of safety, or,” and here Professor McGonagall’s mouth quirked as she continued with a dry tone, “saving the Wizarding world, who were not able to complete their final year at Hogwarts. In addition, although it pains me to have to say it, conditions at Hogwarts last year did not lend themselves to learning. It is in consideration of the students who did not have a chance, last year, to complete their Hogwarts education properly, that we are making this offer.”

“What about students in other years? What about the OWL students?”

“Tests are being devised for each class and year. Students who wish to continue to the next year may sit those tests, and with passing marks and, in the case of underage students, parental approval, may move on to the next year. For this reason, space has been allocated at the ministry, not only for OWL and NEWT testing, but also for placement testing for the other years.”

Harry realized what this meant for younger years: if they wanted to move on to the next year, they would have to study for a test, over the summer! He thought of Ginny and Luna and grinned. If they passed, they would all be in the same year. Ron would go spare!

“That wasn’t the reason I wanted to talk with you, however. I wanted you to be aware that a seventh year at Hogwarts would be an option for you, should you desire it. You do not have to make a decision now, of course—”

“I can’t think of anything I’d rather do, Professor,” Harry interrupted.

“Be that as it may, you have until the deadline to sign up for NEWTs. The deadline will be on June first, and the NEWTs will be held four weeks later, starting Monday, June twenty-ninth. Testing for advancement will commence the following week.

“Now that you have that information, Mr Potter, I wanted to talk with you about what you want to do with your life.”
Harry lowered his gaze, suddenly focusing on the hole in his trainers. It was right at the big toe, and had loose threads crossing over it. An old pair of socks poked through, and from the colour (orange and green wool, knitted together) they were part of the Weasley collection.

“I did not mean you had to decide this minute, Mr Potter.” He caught her wry smile as he looked up. Harry doubted he had ever seen McGonagall be this—this friendly, with him. “I do not only mean what you mean to do as a job, although that is certainly a consideration. The last time we spoke of this, in your fifth year, you wanted to be an Auror. Is that still the case?”

Harry considered it. It would not all be like the last year. As an Auror, he would not be in hiding, and he would be ridding the world of dark wizards. But... “No. I’m sorry, I know you worked to make that possible for me, but... it’s like Aurors work to destroy what’s bad. But they don’t create anything good.” Harry paused, struggling to find the right words. “Helping clean up Hogwarts these past few days, even if it’s just moving rubble, that’s felt satisfying. I look back after cleaning a room, or a hall, and it’s improved, and I know that I did the work to make it that way. Every time I fought against Death Eaters, against Voldemort, it was something I had to do, but it didn’t feel good afterward. It just felt done. And it always felt like I lost more than I won.”

McGonagall nodded. “Well, you have some time to figure things out. But I had a reason for bringing this up. Several in fact.”

Harry waited.

“I know you are not particularly fond of the press—” she paused to acknowledge the emphatic shake of his head. “Have you seen the papers lately?”

“She’s been avoiding them.”

The Headmistress passed a small pile over her desk, and gazed at him expectantly. He didn’t think she’d let him get away with avoiding them. He sighed and picked up the top one. There was a picture of one of the many impromptu celebrations that had taken place immediately after the battle. This one was in Diagon Alley, with grinning and shouting people toasting each other against the backdrop of boarded-up shops. Every issue had pictures of him. Most of the pictures were old, one had clearly been reused from the “undesirable number one” posters. Below the fold were also pictures of Ron, Hermione, Dumbledore, Neville, and many others. There were articles about the rebuilding of the Ministry, and the rebuilding of Diagon Alley, and of Hogwarts. Suddenly he noticed something.
“There aren’t any pictures of Hogwarts. Not as it is now, I mean.”

“That’s part of what I wanted to talk with you about. Have you noticed that there have been no reporters at Hogwarts these past two weeks?”

“No, I guess I hadn’t.”

“I wanted to give those who fought, but especially you, some breathing room after —” Professor McGonagall paused as if trying to find the right word to encompass it all “—after the year you’ve had. I know the battle was only the culmination of all you’ve done.”

“We.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“All we’ve done. Me, Hermione, Ron, Neville, you, the house elves, even Trelawney had a part. Even Peeves.”

“I fully acknowledge that. Without you, however, the battle would have gone quite differently.”

Harry looked off to the side, not wanting to see what was in her eyes. “It took everyone.” He could hear the flat tone in his voice, a tone he had never taken with McGonagall before, but he would not allow McGonagall to put him above the others. It was wrong. It ignored everyone who fought alongside him, everyone who died.

McGonagall nodded. “Of course, you’re right. As I was about to say, although the castle wards are not fully active yet, I have raised some protective wards around the perimeter. One of them specifically blocks reporters. I would like to lift that block.”

Harry’s gaze darted back to the Headmistress. “Why?”

“I believe people need to see the damage that was done here. The picture of Hogwarts at her strength,” McGonagall gestured to one of the images in the Daily Prophet, “gives people safe illusions. Eventually they will tell themselves that we were never in that great a danger. They will
convince themselves that they don’t need to be vigilant, that they can forget.”

Harry saw the sense of that.

“You will be the most affected by this decision. They will want to talk with you.”

“I don’t have to talk to them, though.”

“That is the rest of what I wanted you to consider.”

“No!”

“I know it would not be your first choice. However, I want you to consider some things.”

“What?” His voice was flat, unyielding.

“What is the state of the Wizarding World?”

Harry looked down to see the boarded up shops on Diagon Alley in the newspaper photograph. Hogwarts was torn up, as was the Ministry, based on reports from Hermione and Mr Weasley.

“It’s a bit torn up, but with all the volunteers—“

“The physical damage is only part of it. Assume all the repairs have been made, all the shops in that picture are again open for business. Is this a Wizarding world you can be proud of?”

“I love the Wizarding world!”

“That’s not what I asked. Do you want to see another dark lord in another twenty to thirty years?

Harry was about to reply, then stopped.
“Has anything really changed?” McGonagall continued. “How many people supported He Who Must Not Be Named without carrying his mark on their arms? How many of them will retreat for a while, waiting for their next chance? I trust Kingsley, but what of the next Minister for Magic? How many in the Wizengamot want things to go back to the way they were? I will tell you that I never again want to witness the atrocities I saw last year.

“You have the ability to make a difference, Harry. People in our world are looking to see what you will do next. Whether you want them to or not, they will take their cue from you. If you want to see changes in our world, now is the time to start them. Speaking with the reporters allows you to have your voice heard now, when people are clamouring to hear what you will say.”

“What if all I want is to be left alone?”

“Then the world will continue on its way without your input.”

The bare statement hung there, as McGonagall replenished their tea.

“I received a note from Kingsley Shacklebolt. You may have heard he is Interim Minister of Magic?”

Harry nodded.

“The Ministry is planning a celebration to honour those who fought against You- against Voldemort,” McGonagall corrected herself upon seeing Harry’s grimace. “Minister Shacklebolt would like you to speak at the event.”

Harry tensed, his shoulders pulling up. “Is this what it will always be like?” he asked.

McGonagall looked at him. “What do you mean?”

“Voldemort’s dead. I did what the prophecy required, what everyone required. Can’t I have my own life now?” He knew he sounded petulant, but he didn’t care.
“Harry, the Wizarding World owes you a great debt. But they can’t give you your own life. That is something you will have to find, and create, for yourself.

“You are in a unique position, Harry. You are in everyone’s minds. You have succeeded in doing something that great wizards have failed at, and in the process, saved us from great horror. At this point in time, you could probably get just about anything you asked for.”

“But not to be left alone,” Harry said softly.

“No. You could retreat, you could hide away, and eventually other news would take the front page of the Prophet. But the wizarding world will not forget. You will always be famous, Harry. Your only choice is what you do with that.”

He wiggled his toe against the hole in his trainer, watching the remaining threads strain as he pressed his toe against them.

“Harry, I want you to think about something. Currently, the Ministry is in flux. They are intent on cleaning out the influences that made You-Know—Voldemort’s take-over possible.”

“I know that.” Harry commented. “Hermione has been working there, and she told us some of what is going on.”

“At this point, you have the good will of the wizarding world. I want you to think about what you would like to see happen. Not necessarily the details, but the basic idea. You, more than anyone, have felt the effects of a society and government that has been... distorted. Harry, I know you have a good heart. I can’t help but believe that you would like to see some changes.”

Harry nodded.

“Right now, while the wizarding world is clamouring for you, you have the power to influence what changes are made.”

Harry rocked back in his chair. He never thought he’d hear McGonagall recommend such things. It seemed so... Slytherin. “Do you have changes you want to see happen?” Harry asked her.

“Of course I do. Everyone you meet will have an agenda, but you have to consider what you want. Not what I or anyone else might want, but what you want. Only when you are clear on your own
desires, can you aim for those goals without being distracted by the desires of those around you, some of whom are people you care about and want to see happy.

“Every one of us will be working toward our own goals.” McGonagall paused and waited. Harry met her gaze. “Harry, it is only right that you work for the vision you have. You have done our society a great service, Harry. You have earned the right to influence what direction our world goes in. Don’t waste that opportunity, and certainly don’t cede it to others.

“Right now, Harry, you have three choices: To try to hide, which will most likely fail. To be buffeted by the will of those close to you, each wanting to use your influence for their own desires. Your friends may not even be aware they are doing this. After all, we all have the same aims, don’t we?” She waited while Harry thought about that.

Of course his friends and he wanted similar things. But Harry thought of what was important to him. He wasn’t sure of the details, but he could imagine a wizarding world he would like to be part of. He could almost see Snape sneering at that. It was sheer ego, to think he had the right to force his will on everyone else. Still, the image was so sharp in his mind, now that McGonagall brought it up. The problem was that he had no idea how to get from here to there, nor even the specifics of what he wanted. Without specifics, it would be way too easy to let someone like Hermione shape his vision. He trusted her, but he was sure her details were different than his. Freeing house elves was less important to him than ... And that was the problem. He had a general sense of protecting those who needed it. Sirius should have had a trial. No other wizarding child should have to go through his childhood. It was just that he had no idea how to accomplish it.

“The third option is to consider what you would like, and to work toward that. Right now, you have more ability to influence the future than almost anyone else. Harry, if you don’t shape the future, or at least work toward a future you can believe in, then other people will work toward their best version of the future without you. If you don’t participate, than your unique experiences and the dreams that come out of them will all be lost. I think that would be unfortunate.”

He remembered how frustrating it had been when Dumbledore, his teachers, his friends and their parents were all so intent on protecting him. He also thought of how horrible it had been to have no guidance but their own guesses and cryptic remarks, in the search for the Horcruxes. He didn’t want to be controlled, but he also didn’t want to be in charge, and that is what McGonagall seemed to be recommending.

“Promise me... no, promise yourself that you will take some time to envision what you want. Focus on the image first, then hone in on the details. You may find that the good will of the wizarding world will be useful in reaching your goals. In the mean time, by talking to the press, and going to the Ministry’s celebration and accepting the honours you have earned, you will be retaining that influence in case you decide you have a use for it.”
Harry sat back. He didn’t like what she was telling him. It was like she wanted him to emulate Lockhart, or worse, Lucius Malfoy. He didn’t want to spend his time cultivating his fame or his influence like a plant.

“There’s no need to run out and do something immediately. You have time this summer and this coming year at Hogwarts to consider what you want, both for yourself and for the wizarding world. You can choose to work to bring about some changes, and you are more likely than others to see them accomplished. Until you know what you want, one way or another, do not squander the good will of the wizarding world.”

Harry sorted through what she had said. “So, you think I should go to the celebration.”

McGonagall sighed. “At the very least, Mister Potter. At the very least. The choice is, of course, up to you. You are an adult. I am not here to make those decisions for you, just to remind you that you have them to make.”

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**Narcissa Intervenes**

*May 12, 1998*

Narcissa had not been pleased to hear from her son about the state Lucius was in. She had also not been pleased that Draco had arranged to visit without her. She knew full well that it had not been an accident, although Draco had not yet told her the reason. She could be patient. She would find out eventually. Regardless of the reason for Draco’s visit, she was glad he had tended to Lucius. It was proper, even if it should not have been necessary. What was necessary was that she obtain regular visiting rights herself.

It had taken her a full day before her negotiations with the guard bore fruit, and Minerva McGonagall came to visit. The following afternoon saw her, under guard, guided to the hospital wing.

Madame Pomfrey awaited her in the mediwitch’s office.
“For people who are imprisoned, I seem to see members of your family quite frequently,” the mediwitch commented. “You do understand that for most people, imprisonment does not imply the freedom to wander around and visit.”

“Malfoys are not most people.” She paused. “My son informed me of the state in which he found my husband. This is not acceptable.”

Madame Pomfrey gazed at Narcissa without speaking. The silence accentuated her last comment, as if the mediwitch wished her to become aware that she had said something unreasonable. She had grown up with such games. The mediwitch was out of her class. Narcissa merely waited.

“Your husband is being taken care of to the best of the ability of the present hospital wing staff, given increased usage of the facility and the restrictions he has – quite vehemently – imposed.”

“It is clearly not enough.”

“Look. Even as we speak, arrangements are being made to transport the afflicted volunteers to a non-magical location, according to the instructions you have provided. By the end of the week, they will all have been relocated. At that point, the strain on our resources will be reduced, although there are still patients from the battle, and a small but regular stream of volunteers who have damaged themselves in the process of rebuilding the castle.

“The issue of your husband’s restrictions is another matter entirely. This facility cannot and will not pander to the prejudices that got us into the war. If the person who is currently able to tend to your husband is Muggle-born, that is the person we will send. If he refuses care under such circumstances, that is his choice. I will not subject the volunteer to his attacks – if he refuses care, the volunteer is authorized to leave him untended until such a time as someone he will accept becomes available, which may involve a significant delay.”

“I can care for him.”

“You are a prisoner, just as he is. Every time you go gallivanting through the castle, it is necessary to allocate Aurors to guard you. We do not have an unlimited supply of them, and your family has used up more than your share of their time.”

“Then let me bring him back to our ... rooms. I will take care of him there. Why is he even still here?
You informed me that his illness was a common Muggle disease. Surely as a wizard, my husband’s magic would fend off such an infection.”

“Normally, yes. A wizard’s magic will normally make him immune to Muggle diseases, which only infect the body. It takes a disease that infects both body and magic to bring down a wizard. Because those diseases are magically caused, they can be treated directly in the witch or wizard’s magic, and can usually be cured quickly.

“Your husband, however, was severely run down. He has been subject to numerous curses, including the Cruciatius. His magic has not had a chance to heal him. In addition, he has not had his wand for an extended period of time. The wand helps shape the magical core, to give it focus. Once a witch or wizard has become attuned to a wand, to go without for too long a time is to allow one’s magic to start to ... fray at the edges. Thus weakened, I believe your husband was in the presence of Muggles who were likewise weakened, and thus susceptible to illness.

Narcissa was glad for the chair behind her. She sat. The facts, laid out before her, were damning. The Dark Lord had taken Lucius’ wand. The Dark Lord had cursed both Lucius and herself. The Dark Lord had used Malfoy Manor as a prison, storing Muggles for later amusement, and Muggle-borns and Blood Traitors for leverage and information.

She closed her eyes. Never had she been so glad that she chose her family over the Dark Lord. She had lied to the Dark Lord, allowing Harry Potter his final chance. It had been a rare, unplanned decision. It had been clear that until Potter was dead, the Dark Lord would not advance on the castle where her son was. She had needed to see her son. Beyond that, she had suspected there was hope that Potter could free them from the servitude in which they had placed themselves.

He had done so. They now had a chance of freedom, whereas, with the Dark Lord, there had been none.

She brought her attention back to the matter at hand. Something was wrong with what the mediwitch had just said. Narcissa replayed the conversation in her mind. She opened her eyes.

“If my family is such a bother to you, why am I here?”

“I do understand your desire to spend time with your husband. We are willing to grant such privileges until he is fit to return to your quarters.”
“Ah. There is something you want in return.” Narcissa was not normally so forthright in her negotiations, but these were not Slytherins she was dealing with. They did not understand the beauty of subtlety. She wondered if Madame Pomfrey had gone to Hogwarts, and if so, what house she had been in.

“We have found a doctor, a Muggle Healer to watch over those afflicted with the taint to their magic.” Narcissa winced slightly at the phrase. It was not so much inaccurate as incomplete. It implied things that should not be implied. She was dealing with those who had set aside the old ways. Each conversation confirmed this.

“Dr Renier will have questions about their treatment, questions for which your answers will be more complete than mine.”

“The Malfoy book is not to be shared with Muggles.” On this, she could not bend. The very magic woven into the book would scream in protest. Of course, less pleasant things would happen as well, were the Muggle to touch it, let alone try to read it. Malfoys protected what was of Malfoy. The Black book had been the same, and perhaps even more merciless. Tojours Pur. She still wondered how Harry Potter had come to be accepted by the Black ancestors.

“I suspected that. Madame Pomfrey nodded. “Thus, it makes the most sense if you were to meet with Dr Renier, and be available to answer his questions.”

Narcissa digested that. It made sense in this world they were moving toward, where Muggles were given the same respect as pure-bloods. She had made this path possible. She would have to live with her choices, even if it meant politely conversing with a Muggle. The thought caused revulsion to wash through her, but she repressed the accompanying shudder. She needed to make the best of this, and to find a way to turn it to her own, and to the Malfoy family’s advantage. It was a disconcerting thought, however, talking to a Muggle about magic, worse yet about private rituals and methods passed down within the Malfoy family for generations. She had participated in the Black family traditions, but never been the keeper of the book. It was the Malfoy traditions that she had been charged to guard.

What would Lucius say? Family first. Necessity. What happened when family and necessity conflicted? When she had to go against family traditions for the good of the future of the family?

This further betrayal of her past was not in exchange for visiting Lucius, although she would allow the mediwitch to believe that. This was for the future of the Malfoy family. Every step, every minor betrayal, was in the service of long-term loyalty.
“You will allow me to visit my husband every day, and see to his needs,” Narcissa confirmed. “In exchange, I will meet with this Muggle, and answer his questions to the best of my ability.”

“Yes.”

“I agree. So will it be done.” With the traditional words, she turned her face from tradition.

“So will it be done. We will send for you when the time is set.” Madame Pomfrey nodded toward the door. “And now, if you will come with me, I will show you to your husband.”

The Mediwitch gestured her through the door to her office, and followed behind her. The Auror flanked her on her other side. Narcissa allowed herself to observe the goings on in the hospital wing. Healers from St Mungo’s treated breaks and sprains from people mishandling the debris around the castle. One witch seemed to have a severe burn. Narcissa wondered what had caused that, but nothing related to the repair came to mind. A ward with purple warning stripes across the door let her know exactly where the volunteers whose magic had been touched by the residue from dark magic were housed.

It was useful knowledge, but unimportant at present except to note that that ward was not close to where her husband was being kept.

They arrived at the door to his room, complete with guard. Their Auror guide stationed himself on the other side of the doorway, and Narcissa and the mediwitch continued through it.

Lucius looked better than Draco had described. She could see the signs of Draco’s care still. She reached forward to stroke his brow, testing the heat of his skin, and the spark of his magic against her own.

He opened his eyes, and she was gladdened to see Lucius behind his gaze. He looked at her. He had not looked at her with his full attention in way too long.

“Lucius, I am here.”

He nodded. “Narcissa.” The word was quiet, so soft that she doubted that Madame Pomfrey, still in the doorway, could hear. It was full of everything that he was, dry with humour, and yet imbued with longing. She took his hand.
“Lucius, they will allow me to come by every day to see to you. If I am not here, promise me you will allow those charged with your care to provide for you.”

His eyes sparked. She would not win this one. His pride was part of him, as much as his strength. She loved him, even when his strengths were difficult. It was not unreasonable to keep to traditions, to keep to what you knew. It was only difficult. The world she had allowed to come into being would not tolerate his ways. Despite all the compromises she was forced to make, she and Lucius were perhaps too set to bend. Draco was the one who would have to learn.

“I will come as often as I am allowed, until you return to us. Shall I get you some water?”

At his affirmative, she found the glass, filled it, and held it to him. She provided the care she had come to provide.

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**Slytherin Work Party**

*May 11 onward, 1998*

Draco fell into a pattern over the next couple of weeks. He would get up and shower in the small bathroom off their rooms, try his best to make his hair behave with the stupid, ready-made cleaning potions that were available there. The Aurors had not taken the shackle off when he got back to the suite that first afternoon, nor had they removed it when he had been returned after visiting his father and Snape. Instead, his guard adjusted the charm so it limited him to their suite and adjusted it each day to allow him access to the area his crew were to cleanse. A red line of irritation had formed where it chafed against his skin. Draco scowled at it each morning, and tried to think of what he could use to heal the welt. He asked for a cream each time they brought him back in the evening, but no one ever brought anything for him.

After his morning ablutions, he would eat breakfast with his mother. Draco talked about his day with the Slytherins, and passed on whatever news there was about friends. The news was mostly convictions. Daphne’s mother was still eluding capture. Draco felt a most un-Slytherin joy in someone else’s good fortune, as if her success were a sign that he too could succeed in his plans.

At around 9:00, McGonagall or more frequently some other person would let him out of their room,
after first testing the dratted shackle. It had never failed. Yet. Draco kept himself from thinking along those lines. After all, the point was not to escape; it was to find a way to restore the Malfoy family. To do that, they had to make nice with the winners.

So he would meet up with the other Slytherins. He did not know if they were the only team who had offered to work, or if they were the only ones that had been captured, or if they had selected just a few based on his and his mother’s recommendations, and the other captives were rotting in some cells somewhere, or if the other teams were doing something else. He suspected his was the only cleansing team, especially after comparing who was on their crew with the recommendations he and his mother had made.

The five of them had gotten very good at decontaminating areas from dark magic residue. Pansy had recovered quite nicely. She flushed when Theo had asked after her health, as well she should, having made such a beginner’s mistake.

They worked as a team. Even Adrien found his place in the group. Dip brush, bend, paint, reach, paint, repeat. Draco was beginning to feel he could make those sigils in his sleep. Spending all the time holding their magic under tight control was exhausting, but at the end of the day, Draco felt good. He was confident they would not let another accident happen; there would be no interaction between their magic and the residue. Even more than that, it felt good to see the castle returning to what it should be. He had felt shattered That Day, watching Bella and Greyback and the others destroy his school, knowing he was responsible for letting them in. If he hadn’t been so preoccupied, he would have felt even more torn apart by the destruction caused by the last battle. Hogwarts was one of the oldest still extant wizarding institutions, part of their heritage, something to protect. It was an icon, representing the future of their world. His father had railed against the damage it did, with Dumbledore shaping the ideals of wizarding youth, but they were supposed to reclaim it, not destroy it.

Draco smirked to himself. It especially felt good to be performing traditional pure-blood rites at Hogwarts, as if he were indeed reclaiming it from the decline of decades, perhaps centuries.

They took turns watching the cauldron. It was not that they expected anyone to sabotage it… necessarily. It would be an easy way to get rid of some pesky Slytherins, but the risk to the castle was too high. It was more that they did not trust those self-righteous Muggle-lovers to understand the necessity of keeping the saltwater pure.

After a while, the work started to be ingrained enough that they could converse while they were doing it. The major focus was still on the work. They were not stupid Gryffindors to risk their hides out of carelessness, but the work alone would have bored them all into somnolence if they had not had another task to layer on top.
So they found ways to communicate without letting the guard know what they were talking about.

The Slytherins were being kept in rooms next to each other, two to a room. Theo had seen Blaise, but was not sure if he was likewise captured and working, or just working. Draco was the only one staying with his parents, but his parents were the only ones who had not been actively fighting in that last battle. Draco never thought he’d be grateful for his father’s change of circumstance. He was sure that his father’s fall from favour had been a key factor in his decision to search for family instead of fighting, as they had been ordered. It had become clear by then that Voldemort would not advance, or even protect and support, the Malfoy family.

When circumstances look bleak, look after family. When his father saw him after the battle, the brief expression on his face caused Draco to wonder if it had been pure-blood values that influenced that decision, or the desperate emotions of the moment. There had been something so raw in his father’s face, before he schooled his features into something more fitting for public viewing. Regardless of the reason for it, he was glad of his parents’ presence.

Daphne did not know where her mother was. If she was free, she would not be able to come to see her, lest she be captured. She had been told that her father was captured. He hadn’t even been a follower, to the best of Draco’s knowledge. Certainly he had never been at the Manor except for the parties at Yule and Midsummer, nor been there any time Voldemort had called the full complement of Death Eaters. Daphne had been asked if she knew where her mother was, but she had not been forced to tell. If her mother were to be captured, it would shatter Daphne. Soon, his own family would have to face what the outcome of the war left for them.

Pansy had seen her parents captured. Theo had seen his father killed, but did not know where his mother was. Adrien’s parents were not core followers. Draco did not even know if they were marked. Adrien had chosen to receive the Mark. He had been close to the leader of the sixth year students, Reid Pucey, and had followed him into service like Crabbe and Goyle had followed Draco.

Draco wondered where Goyle was. He had not seen him since escaping the room of fire. He did know that both Crabbe’s and Goyle’s fathers were captured.

It was all so… pointless. Where was the glory? Where was the return of the wizarding world to its prime, where was the return to the ways of life they had been fighting for?

Somehow, cleaning the castle from dark residue was as close as Draco had come to a return to the old ways since Voldemort had returned to power. It was ironic that it only happened as a result of Voldemort’s defeat.
“I won’t be here tomorrow.” Pansy’s comment came as she finished one wall. Draco finished his sigil set, and then turned to quirk an eyebrow at her. “My parents have their trial tomorrow. I’m allowed to go. I still have to wear the minder, but…”

Draco nodded to her. There was almost no chance that they would escape Azkaban. At least they would not be kissed. Draco had overheard one of the Aurors talking about how the Dementors were no longer being used in Azkaban, and how only a few remained even if they wished to continue using them. Most of them had been destroyed. How does one destroy a Dementor? Draco wondered. Was this what their life would be like? Working for the victors, and watching their family members be locked up in that cursed fortress out in the middle of the North Sea? Working, so they would not also be locked up? Draco knew that it was possible that he wouldn’t be able to escape that fate himself. The Dar- Voldemort had taken power right after Dumbledore’s death, or Draco was sure he would have been brought up on charges. Would his actions finally come back to haunt him?

Pansy was gone for the rest of the week. They kept at it, one short. Daphne found out that her parents really were missing—both of them. She was glad for them, but wished she could see them. They kept at it. Draco found out Theo would be allowed to go to his father’s funeral, under guard, and bound by the minder anklet.

Draco wondered how long they’d be allowed to continue working, how long they’d have a tiny bit of freedom each day. Once his father got back from the Hospital Wing, he had no other valid reason to leave that tiny set of rooms, and even visiting his father stretched it. He hadn’t seen Snape since that one visit. Soon, they each would have their own trials. Would their group dwindle to the point where they could not do the work? Perhaps they would delay the trials of the members of his crew just long enough? Draco wondered when his father’s trial would be, and his mother’s, and his own. Did he have time to acquire allies before then?

As it turned out, Theo’s absence on a day that Pansy was also gone provided just what Draco needed.
Harry took the day off from the repairs at Hogwarts on Friday, travelling by Floo to the Burrow to meet up with Ron. The two of them then accompanied Arthur and Hermione through the Floo to the Ministry. Hermione continued on to her workplace, but Arthur took the time to guide them through the various ministry corridors, elevators, and departments to the Apparition Testing Centre, giving them news along the way.

Two employees at the Centre had failed their verity tests and were being held for further investigation. Delayed curses had been detected in three different locations within the office. The worst was an apparition blocker that practically guaranteed a splinching. The thought of all the hopeful new adults, about to start on their lives of freedom, torn apart by that specific curse placed in an apparition testing centre, made Harry shudder. The gashes in Ron’s skin had taken months to heal, and still left scars.

The curses broken, and replacement testers found and qualified, the Apparition Testing Centre was again open for business, expecting a bit of a surge after several days of birthdays. They had neglected to take into account a full year’s worth of Muggle-born and half-blood witches and wizards who had not dared come in to be tested, lest they be arrested and their wands confiscated.

The Centre was crowded. It had only reopened the day before, but news had gotten out.

Harry and Ron had tried to blend in, and Harry was wearing a pointed wizard hat pulled over his eyes that he had borrowed from the Weasleys. Mrs Weasley thought it might have belonged to her great uncle. Regardless, it was certainly a bit out of fashion. At least it had no ruffles, like Ron’s dress robes for the Yule Ball. At any rate it was black. That suited Harry just fine.

But, even though his own face was covered, he had forgotten that Ron was now nearly as famous as he was. Ron’s flaming hair had not been hidden. One witch had caught sight of Ron, figured out who his companion must be, and shouted “Harry Potter!”

Harry wanted to melt into the ground when the whole crowd started chanting “Harry! Harry!” as if he were a Quidditch star. He wondered how long it would be until he could safely walk in Diagon Alley, or the Ministry, or anywhere in Wizarding Britain. Volunteering at Hogwarts had led him into a false sense of security. The volunteers were all people who liked to do things, to be part of the solution, however belatedly.

“Harry Potter!” “Thank you!” Harry felt hands touching him as he walked past. One bold witch grabbed his arse. He spun to see who it was, but it could have been anyone. Come to think of it, it
might even have been a bloke. The hand had been big.

He hadn’t even noticed one of the testing wizards shouting, until a *Sonorus* suddenly made the wizard quite loud. “Here now! What’s the ruckus? Oh, Mr Potter! You didn’t tell us you were coming!”

Harry thought in hindsight that might have been a good idea.

“Mr Potter, come this way. Let him through. Let him through.” Harry felt bad jumping the queue, but he thought it would be worse if he stayed. This way, at least the commotion would calm down.

It was some work getting past the crowd, but he did, and the office behind the door was blessedly empty.

“Mr Potter, Mr Weasley, if you would please fill out these forms?”

The parchment had blanks to fill in for name, birthday, location and trainer of the preparation class.

“Ron, what was the name of the wizard who taught our class?”

“I can’t remember. I was just going to write Hogwarts Apparition class. Do you remember when it was?”

“Nope.”

“Excuse me, sir?” Ron asked, hesitantly.

The tester looked up at them.

“Erm, we took classes last spring, but with all that’s been going on, neither of us remember who it was that instructed the prep class. I’m sure my parents have a letter about it, but Harry’s not been in owl reach since then and...”
“So the two of you just came in without any paperwork?”

They both nodded. Harry felt particularly unprepared, just then.

The tester stared at them for a few moments, and then grinned. “You are by far not the first. Now, I should send you back for your class completion certificates... But how about we make a deal?” Harry started looking around the room for the exits. The one behind them led to the crowd. That should be safe, by some definitions of safe. The tester continued. “I’ll look them up for you in our files, if you’ll both let me take a picture with you. We’ll use the camera here... I just have to adjust the setting to include more than one person, and turn off the misery switch.”

The last brought Harry’s head up. “Misery switch?”

“You don’t think people look that awful on their Apparition License photographs by accident, do you?”

“But, why?”

“Well, it’s actually a switch to make sure that the face is completely visible at all times. No leaving the frame, no hiding in shadows. But it also distorts the face a bit to get rid of the shadows, and ends up making everyone look like they’ve just had a nausea hex cast at them. Unfortunately, for your photos on your cards to be official, I have to leave the Misery Switch on for those. But I can look up your records so you won’t have to go home and come back another day. We’re not supposed to...”

“So, you just want to take our pictures?”

“Take a picture with all three of us. And then you could sign it, perhaps?”

Suddenly the tester’s voice was a bit diffident.

Harry looked at Ron, who looked at him with a bit of a pleading expression. Ron hadn’t had much experience with people asking for autographs. It seemed he was about to get it. Harry nodded, and the formerly stoic tester bounced over to the camera, made a few adjustments to some to some dials, and then flicked his wand a few times at it. It began to glow in response. The camera was a huge
royal blue thing which stood about five feet off the floor, with a stack of parchment in a tray next to it. It looked like it was made of opaque glass. The wizard inspected it with great care, and then extended his wand to indicate where they should stand. It was a bit obvious, as there was a glowing circle on the floor. They stepped into the circle, and the man made a few adjustments further, then zipped around the camera to stand just between them. The camera clicked, and with a touch of the man’s wand, an image appeared on the top piece of parchment.

“Do you want one too? To commemorate your apparition license?”

Ron nodded. “Yeah.” Harry suspected he wanted to commemorate being asked for his autograph. He grinned at the thought. With two more flicks of the wand, the second and third parchment acquired the appearance of a somewhat smug Ron, a delighted testing wizard, and Harry.

“We’ll let these sharpen just a bit. I’ll be right back.”

It was a bit longer than a “bit”, but the wizard eventually returned with two pieces of parchment. “These are copies of your Apparition preparation class completion certification. You should keep them with your records.”

Harry realized he still didn’t know where his trunk was, or any of his “records” which he usually just shoved into his trunk when he got them.

“Alright, then. Down to business.” The tester motioned them close and asked them to hold tight, then Apparated them to an open field. He waited until Harry and Ron got their bearings and the dizziness abated, clearly used to the effect of Side-Along-Apparition on people. “Mr Potter, if you would Apparate to the blue post over there?” Harry could see the post in the distance, and focussed on getting there. He spun on his heel, and he was there. Within a few moments, Ron was next to him, as was the examiner.

The examiner cast a spell, and a distortion appeared in the middle of the field, preventing him from seeing the other side.

“Now, Mr Potter, if you would Apparate back to where we started? Never fear, the block won’t interfere.”

That was more difficult, as he had to rely on his memory to get there, but he’d had plenty of opportunity to practice over the past year, however illegally. Focussing on imagining the place where
they started, he remembered a small rock formation he had noticed. He turned and was there again.

Ron soon followed, but wound up chest to chest with Harry. Ron’s blue eyes widened, and he turned bright red, and backed away, practically stumbling on his feet in the process.

“You will want to remember to include a slight repelling charm so that if someone is where you want to be, you will be displaced sideways a bit. Unless you are Apparating to the edge of a cliff, which I do not recommend for many reasons.”

Harry remembered when he and Dumbledore Apparated to the caves where Voldemort had hidden the locket. Once again, he was made aware of the skill and power of the old wizard. He suddenly missed Dumbledore, despite everything. He wondered what he was doing with his “next great adventure.”

After a few more Apparitions, the tester had one final test: to Apparate by coordinates.

They did, Harry feeling a little nervous about that, as it was not something he’d done other than in the class at Hogwarts. It was also disconcerting that there was no way for him to know where he would end up and who would be there. That was probably true for Apparition in general, but he was still not sanguine about blind Apparition, any more than he was about travel by Portkey.

The destination, however, was an empty field. Harry landed in a muddy spot. He swiftly got out of the way, realizing they had been given the same coordinates and not sure how specific the coordinates would be. Harry wondered if it might be a wizarding skill, to Apparate to an absolute point rather than a general area, just as it seemed to be a skill to travel by Floo without falling down.

Ron landed in the same muddy spot. Okay. Apparition by coordinates was quite specific, then.

They Apparated back to the testing centre and got their picture taken again, this time with the Misery Switch on. Harry felt he probably looked like he had after Hermione hit him with the stinging hex. The tester offered to show them a back way out, but they opted to Apparate instead, with their shiny new licenses in their pockets.
Diagon Alley

Feeling adult and free, they wandered through Diagon Alley. The day was warm, with the occasional spring breeze. Harry felt a bit daft with the pointed wizarding hat, but was afraid they’d be mobbed as they had been at the Apparition Testing Centre. The wide, floppy brim shaded his eyes from the bright sun, and kept his face in shadow. Ron had given in to Harry’s entreaty, and transfigured one for himself out of a handkerchief. It was a bit ragged at the edges, and had trim that was the same Chudley Cannons orange as the handkerchief, but it gave them both some degree of anonymity as they meandered through the Alley. Harry was sure they both looked ridiculous, but it felt so good to be anonymous that he didn’t care.

Both boys were a bit wary of going into Gringotts after their bank heist, so they window shopped for the most part. Harry had enough galleons to treat them both to ice cream, but when they got there, Fortescue’s was still closed. A sign on the windows informed passersby that it was closed for repairs, and would reopen in a few weeks under the management of Gillian Fortescue. Ron thought it might be a nephew of Florean, but wasn’t sure.

Quality Quidditch Supplies was open, and the two eagerly scanned the store for anything new, but the newest broom was still the Firebolt. The clerk said that there may be a new broom in a few months, perhaps just in time for the beginning of school, as well as the new Quidditch season.

The memory of Harry’s Firebolt, falling away somewhere between Privet Drive and the Tonks’s house, twisted in Harry’s gut. He had it from Sirius. Sirius was gone, his mirror was broken, and the Firebolt was missing as well. He went over it in his thoughts, remembering just that moment when he could have reached out to catch it before it fell... He had caught Hedwig’s cage instead, and then she had been killed. He wouldn’t have done it differently, even if he had known the outcome at the time. He could not have lived with himself if he had reached past Hedwig for the Firebolt, even knowing it would not have made a difference. Ron must have seen something on his face as he stared at the Firebolt like some feebleminded idiot.

“Erm, Harry. We can go if you want.” Ron said. “We’ve seen this stuff before.”

Harry shook himself. No. Leaving would reinforce the memories, emphasizing the losses instead of the victories. He would not give Voldemort that.

“It’s okay, Ron. Look, there’s a new pair of chaser’s gloves, with cushioning charms.” He read the advertisement above the stand. “They’re guaranteed not to interfere with the player’s ability to catch and keep hold of the Quaffle.” Next to those was a seeker’s glove that was said to be spun with
Acromantula silk for enhanced gripping.

“Better you than me, mate,” Ron said with a shiver, reading over Harry’s shoulder.

There was a wall dedicated to Quidditch players who had died in the war, with photographs and brief biographies. Another shelf had Quidditch magazines from the continent. Most were in some other language than English, so even Ron gave them no more than a cursory glance to see if there were any spectacular photographs.

“Did you hear about the invitation to return to Hogwarts next year?” Harry asked as they left the shop.

“Yeah. Mum is thrilled, but I dunno. Won’t it seem strange, being back, with all the rules as if we were kids?”

“I’m going back.”

Ron looked at him searchingly, and then nodded. “Maybe I should too. It’s just—think of all that homework!”

“Hogwarts feasts.”

“Curfew.”

“Quidditch.”

Harry grinned in triumph as Ron’s eyes lit up, but then they dimmed a bit. “I was kinda thinking of helping out George. At the shop. He seemed so lost, right after the battle, but sometimes it’s like he doesn’t even know Fred is...”

Harry felt doused in cold water, his moment of victory lost. He sighed. “You’ll figure it out.”

They continued on to Flourish and Blotts, but after gazing in the window, they passed it by. Today
was not a day to dither over books. Hermione was not there to make them.

Some other time, Harry would probably go in and see if there was anything on the Black family. The Black presence had retreated in his mind after he had left the estate, only rising into consciousness when he thought about it, but he still had this inner urge to learn about them. He needed to make some time to talk with Andromeda Tonks.

For today, he just wanted to enjoy being outside, with Ron, with no responsibilities, no great duty, nobody hunting him down except for an autograph.

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer: Harry Potter, his friends, his enemies, and the lovely world they live in all belong to JK Rowling.

Notes:

Thanks to rosskpr for beta reading and giving good suggestions.

Comments, questions, critiques and compliments are always welcome. I find they inspire me to write further, knowing someone else cares about the story.

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