Summary

Draco comes into his veela nature early when his mate's life is in danger. Will their unique bond be enough to finally bring peace to the wizarding world?

Notes

This story is complete. I'm slowly transferring it over from ff.net to here. All chapters for it should be up within the next few days.
Harry Potter looked up from the book he was reading with a small smile as he felt a very familiar presence approaching the room in which he sat. The children gathered around him, ranging in age from three years to just under ten years, eyed him curiously before following his gaze to the still closed door. Those who had known him long enough shot each other discreet smirks, already knowing why the man had trailed off so abruptly from the story he had been reading them, and was now looking outwards with a slightly dreamy expression.

"Draco is coming," one of the witches said, before giggling with the redhead beside her.

"I heard that," Harry stated, glaring good-naturedly at her.

"But it's true," she defended.

Harry shook his head ruefully at that, because, the witch was entirely right. If it was not for the fact that it would amuse the children around him even further, the man would have already fled the chair he was seated in, running across the room and into the hallway to meet the veela half way. But, the children already laughed at him enough as is, and he knew that Draco would not appreciate having to fend off the little monsters that would inevitably mob them, inquiring as to what he intended to do with their Harry. He chuckled at the thought of it. The children were very possessive of him, and had taken to vetoing any plans that Draco came up with. The man endured it with good humour though, for he genuinely cared for the little brats that Harry devoted so much of his time too. More than that, he was certain that soon enough one or two of the brats would find a place with them in their home.

Although he maintained his decorum during his approach, Harry could restrain himself no longer when the veela finally entered the room after a perfunctory knock. Barely had he opened the door did Harry rise and, ignoring the giggles from the on-looking children, allowed himself to be swooped up into his mate's embrace.

"Hello dominant," he whispered, before leaning up for a brief, chaste kiss to the lips.

Draco's arms tightened about his waist possessively before he returned the greeting with one of his own. "And hello to you too, little voyeurs," he bid, looking over the brunet's shoulder.

A chorus of greetings met his ears, and, after stealing another kiss from Harry, he released him, although the hand on his waist remained. He guided him back to the vacated seat, and, after sitting, he pulled his husband down to sit on his knee, before picking up the discarded book of fairytales. "Isn't this?" he asked, looking at him questioningly.

"It is," he confirmed with a nod. "It's the very first storybook you ever read to me. I thought that they would enjoy it."

"Really Harry?" a seven year old interrupted. "Draco used to read that story to you?"

"Every night," he said with a nod. "I think it was almost a year before I allowed him to choose a next one."

"Dragons still are your favourite creatures."

"And unicorns are yours," Harry teased before tweaking his nose.

"You're so romantic," a girl cooed, something that brought agreement from some of the other
students but a good few eye-rolls from some of the boys. Draco's chest shook with silent laughter as he noted their actions. They would be the first to fall head over heels in love when the time came, he warranted.

Inevitably, as it always did whenever Draco joined Harry on one of his visits, the conversation turned to their relationship. Neither truly minded for, revisiting the past helped them to remember exactly where they had come from, and the strides they had made over the years. After all, Harry was nowhere near his previous level of brattiness, and Draco's possessive nature had tamed considerably with time.

"Were you always like this," a boy – Ethan – asked eventually.

"What do you mean?" Harry inquired.

"I mean, you always look so happy together. But, did you all ever fight when you were our age?"

The pair shared a look before dissolving into laughter. "Trust me Ethan," Harry responded once he had calmed down. "The fights we used to have were legendary, not that they are any better now. But to answer your question, we've always been like this in terms of the love we have for each other. That has never changed throughout the years. However, that does not mean that we did not try each other's patience at times."

"And let's not talk about the times I was forced to turn you over my knee to get you to behave."

"Draco!" Harry gasped, even as he felt a flush heat his face. "That only happened once or twice. Did you really have to bring that up?"

"Draco did that to you?" several of the children gasped, looking at the man with incredulous eyes.

Harry, ever the actor, placed a 'distressed' expression on his face. "Did he ever," he told his captive audience. "He was so mean to me at times."

"Stop it you," Draco ordered, clamping a hand firmly over his mouth. "Don't let this one fool you. Harry certainly was a brat when we were younger and there were times when tougher methods were needed to get him to take heed. Before he fills your heads with tall tales, would you like to hear of one of those times? You can be the judge then."

Draco gave his mate a slight smirk as the children agreed, laughing softly at the annoyance that radiated through their bond toward him. Harry was not truly angry though, and Draco knew that he would not be too embarrassed by a retelling of his misadventure. After all, he had shared several other stories, others a lot worse, with the children. And, even if he was upset, the veela knew that he would have a very good time making it up to him that night.

"Now let me see," he began, wrapping his hands loosely around Harry's middle. "He's right when he said that it did not happen too often. But this time was the worst. I think we were in our third year then, so you would have been, what, eleven?"

"Yes," Harry grumbled, before settling his head on his shoulder. "I started school before time," he said to a sandy haired boy who was a recent addition to the group.

"Yes he did," Draco confirmed at the boy's slightly incredulous look. "I'll tell you that story after. But for now, let us deal with this brat who wishes to paint me as a villain. Now..."
Hogwarts 1993.

It had started off as a typical morning for the residents of Hogwarts. Students ambled into the Great Hall at will for breakfast, a good few yawning, while others lamented about homework assignments that had yet to be done. Yes, no-one expected anything out of the ordinary to happen today, that was until an enraged veela stormed into the Hall, causing an abrupt silence to fall over its occupants as all eyes turned toward him. The veela was oblivious to their scrutiny though; his focus was solely on finding his errant mate, who he was certain was seated among them. Said mate was even now shrinking further down into his seat while ignoring the questioning looks from his friends. Even if he had the time to explain Draco's mood to them, he doubted that they would take his side on the matter.

His pitiful attempt at hiding proved meaningless though, for his mate easily singled out his presence before stalking over to him. The Gryffindors seated around him – even his friends – quickly moved away from him, for none wished to incur the Malfoy's heir's wrath at this point. While they were certain that Harry would come to no harm, despite the foul expression on his mate's face, their own safety was not as assured. A small whimper escaped Harry's throat when the veela reached him. Draco grasped his upper arms tightly as he pulled him from his seat. He found himself unable to meet his furious gaze, and so lowered his head, hoping that he would be placated by his meek demeanour. His attempt though, failed miserably. He made one attempt to speak, but after the snarl that emanated from his mate's mouth, he wisely fell silent. He knew that he deserved what was coming to him; he had been wrong, but that did not mean that he wanted to be punished.

Thus, when his veela started dragging him down the aisle toward the doors, he knew that it was not in his best interest to allow his mate to get him in private. The most he would have to endure in here was a scolding. However that was not guaranteed if they were alone. Somehow, he had an inkling that his mate would not be satisfied with just chewing him out and he wanted to delay, if not completely nullify any further retributive act from happening.

With that in mind, he dug his heels into the ground while layering his body with magic to weight it down. Within seconds, he was too heavy for his mate to move him further, and, despite himself, a small victorious smile formed on his lips when Draco spun toward him. That smile faded at the glare shot his way, but more than anything, it convinced the eleven year old that they needed to stay right here, in the public eye. He did not care at this point what rumours would abound; Draco's actions alone were enough to ensure that they would be the talk of the school for the remainder of the day.

"Release the spell," Draco snapped, his eyes narrowed dangerously. It was a tone that Harry rarely heard from the veela, but it was one that he always instantaneously obeyed.

"No," he responded, although his voice was far from assured. He swallowed nervously when the grip on his wrist tightened, and when he dared to look up into the blond's eyes, he whimpered softly. His refusal certainly was not helping his case.

Draco's head bent closer to his. "Now really is not the time to be recalcitrant cub," he warned in an icy tone. "You are already in enough trouble as is. Do not add to it."

A shiver ran down Harry's spine at the clear warning, even as his rational mind screamed at him to obey. All he had to do was release the spell and they would be on their way. Draco might even be somewhat appeased by it. But no, instead of listening to reason, he instead chose to give credence to that little voice in his mind that always pointed him to mischief. After all, his mate was a stalwart for their public image. He highly doubted that the veela would do anything that could potentially affect the Malfoy name. What Harry failed to take into account though, was the fact that, in his current state, Draco was more concerned with bringing his recalcitrant mate to task than to care for something as trivial as their reputation.
"I will give you until the count of three to drop this little show Harry James. You know better than to
cross me like this, and believe me, it is something we will speak about in depth later. Now, will you
obey me or shall I start counting? Fine Harry James, have it your way, but do not say that you were
not warned. One...two...Really, you should know better than to try something like this...three..."

Harry really had not concerned the repercussions of his mate’s words. He certainly did not expect this
to happen. He had honestly believed that the veela would counter his spell, before dragging him from
the hall. What he did not anticipate though was the hard tug that startled him enough to break the
spell. Before he could catch himself, the veela had propped up a leg against a bench and had bent
him across the raised appendage. His shock was brief though, and within seconds, he was struggling,
wriggling frantically to rise even as he felt his face flame. Draco would not do that would he?

He certainly did.

Harry hissed as the first stinging spank landed firmly on his bum, before groaning as several gasps
rose from the viewing audience. He had completely forgotten about them, and now more than ever,
he was sorry for annoying his mate to this extent. How would he ever live this down, he bemoaned,
even as he yelped from a next spank. How could he face the student body, far less the professors
after this? They already coddled him; what would they do after seeing him being dealt with like a
naughty child? At the very least, he decided, biting his lip, he could try to remain stoic and not cry
and kick out as he so badly wanted to do. Maybe if he maintained his decorum they would not see
how truly humiliated he was?

Two smacks later and that thought went out the window along with any hope of dignity.

"Stop it Draco," he whined, his voice carrying across the silent room.

Why wasn’t anyone, be it his Uncle or Grandfather intervening? They certainly were brave enough
to do so. Why were they allowing him to be spanked like this? "Draco," he repeated a waver in his
tone now. If the veela continued on as he was doing, he would certainly start crying, and then his
humiliation would be complete.

His mate’s voice, when he finally responded, was considerably calmer, although an edge of anger
still remained. "You really have not left me with much choice Harry James. Had you only heeded me
it would not have come to this point."

"I’m sorry," he gasped, although he was not entirely sure what he was apologising for. However, if it
made the veela stop, and allowed him to find a hole to bury himself in, he did not care. "Dominant!"

"You are not sorry," came the clipped reply. "You are just trying to save your pride and your behind.
You deserve this cub; you know that. And you are going to get ample reward for your actions over
the past few hours."

"This isn't fair," he said, even as he felt the first tear slip loose.

He raised a clenched hand to wipe it away, even as a part of him acknowledged that he truly had put
himself in this current situation. He had gone off with the twins on his own volition. Had he not
listened to them, and instead had done what he knew to be right, he would not be bent on his mate’s
knee currently, getting his bottom warmed.

When begging seemed not to do the trick, the eleven year old decided to switch tactics. Managing to
add an accusatory tone to his voice, he twisted his head slightly in a vain attempt to meet his veela’s
gaze. "I thought you loved me?" he protested around a sniffle. "You're not supposed to do this to
me!"
"It's because I love you that I am doing this Harry James," came the immediate retort along with the hardest smack yet. "Don't you dare talk such foolishness around me."

"You don't," Harry shot back, even though experience told him that this truly was not the case. He just wanted to be allowed to rise and escape the room. He could make amends for any cruel words at a later time. "You wouldn't do this to me otherwise."

"What I am doing," he returned, "is protecting you from yourself. I love you enough to keep you from harming yourself, something that you seem hell bent on doing! Allow me to remind you Harry James. As your dominant it is my duty to protect you, to love, nurture and care for you. How can I do that if you run off doing Merlin alone knows what? More than that, you ensured that I could not follow you. Do you have any idea how much danger you could have found yourself in."

"I didn't leave the castle!" he protested.

"Furthermore," he continued, ignoring his words, "it is not your place to incapacitate me. Were you even thinking last night little boy? You were not, which is why I need to do this. You are my life, and until you get that through that stubborn head of yours and stop placing yourself in danger, I will do what I have to do to keep you safe. And if that means I have to spank some sense to you then I will. I will not lose you. You. Are. My. Life."

The pure emotion in his voice had Harry pausing, and, ignoring the still punishing hand, he dwelt on his words. They were the truth, and, with a pang, Harry realised just how disrespectful his actions had been. He lowered his head, this time in honest contrition as he recognised just how must strife and worry his mate must have gone through while he was off on an 'adventure'.

"I'm sorry," he whispered again, although this time, the words were sincere. "I'm sorry dominant."

The hand finally stilled, something that he was eternally grateful for, as he knew that it meant that Draco understood that what he was saying was the truth. It was not just an attempt to stop the punishment; Harry was acknowledging that he was in the wrong.

"I'm glad you are," he said gruffly, before pulling him to his feet. "We can continue this in our quarters. I must warn you though; I am not entirely certain that I am finished lecturing your bum."

The eleven year old's breath hitched at the thought of more punishment, but he did not fight the veela when he tossed him over his shoulder. Although the position was embarrassing, it allowed him to bury his head into his mate's back, and in doing so, saved himself from facing his classmates.

The children were wide eyed when the veela finally fell quiet. None could truly believe what they had heard, but experience had thought them that the men before them never lied. If they said it had happened, then it did.

"But what did you do after that Harry?" a witch asked with genuine concern. "The school..."

"No one remembers Evelyn," he responded with a smile. "Uncle Severus cast a memory charm directly after we left. They remembered Draco stalking into the hall, but after that, they only remember us leaving."

"You weren't mad at him for doing that though?"

"I was," he admitted, even as his fingers tangled with his mate's. "I think I threatened you never to do something like that again?" At Draco's confirming nod, he continued, "but I understand why he did
it, even if I never approved. Veelas can be irrational sometimes, especially when it comes to keeping their mate's safe. It's an instinct he's long since curtailed though. I can take care of myself."

"I know you can."

"Good," Harry grinned, "or else you would find yourself kicked out of our bed more often." Before Draco could come up with a suitable retort, Harry turned, directing his attention to the students once again. "Now, we have about an hour left before snack time. Shall I finish the story?"

"No, we want to hear more about you!"

"Yeah, Ethan doesn't know everything! Tell us it all again."

The two men traded amused looks. Ethan was just an excuse to get them talking. Any one of them were capable of telling the boy anything pertinent about them, but, for the children, their lives were a real life story, one that they constantly enjoyed hearing. And they would indulge them like they always did.

"Well then," Harry said. "I suppose I should start from the beginning. The first thing you need to know is what happened to Draco the night that I got this scar..."
Chapter 2

October 31st, 1982

Although logic told Narcissa that the small manor she and her son were currently residing in was the safest place for them, at this point, the witch would have rather been at home in the Malfoy Ancestral Manor, even if it meant that death could meet them at anytime. It was a dismal thought to have, especially in relation to her son, but the veela mother knew that they simply could not remain in this old place for much longer. Her sanity was wearing thin in it. How much longer could she hold out for before the pull to her mate overwhelmed her? The thought caused her agitation to rise further and the witch growled, barely resisting the urge to blast a fireball at the wall. It would not change the situation yes, but it certainly would give her something to do to pass the time.

It had been two weeks since she had last set eyes on her beloved mate and had been allowed to drown herself into the safe haven of their bond. Fourteen days; any other veela would have spiralled into despair after at least seven. As is, she knew that it was Draco, her precious baby boy, who was giving her a reason to continue striving to live. It did not hurt that her little boy's soul bore a slight similarity to his sire's; it was something that soothed her ravaged spirit somewhat, but it would do her no good in the long run. Soon enough, not even Draco would be enough to sustain her. She hated it, this enforced separation from her mate. It was necessary. For their own sake, the world needed to believe that they were dead, killed by Lucius' own wand.

Had it been possible, Lucius would have visited them. She felt his longing for her as much as she knew that he felt hers. However, it was not worth the risk. Obedience to the Dark Lord's dictates was crucial for one's survival, and Lucius had, on numerous times, broken his dictates. But this betrayal was the greatest of them all, and he could not afford the mad man realising that they were still alive. Lucius, despite his lucrative position as a member of Voldemort's inner circle, was in no way loyal to the man. How could he be after he had been threatened into entering his service? The Dark Mark on his and Severus' arms had been unwillingly etched into their skin, marking them as the servants of a madman. The mere thought of it brought a choked sob to the veela as she sank down into a chair, recalling the last time she had seen either of the two men.

October 28th 1982

Lucius had not even spared the time to wash himself before coming to her. Instead, covered in his grimy, bloodied clothing, he had sought her out. He could do little more than give her a faint smile before he collapsed onto the bed, falling immediately into an exhausted slumber. Dismayed at his state, she had cared for him as carefully as possible, before heading to a spare bedroom to do the same for Severus, who was in a similar state. Once her honorary little brother was settled down for a more comfortable rest, she had returned to her husband, bringing Draco with her.

She had woken the toddler up, but he stopped fussing easily when he saw his father. Instead he had clamoured clumsily onto the bed beside him, and, far from dissuaded by his unresponsiveness, had snuggled down beside him, contenting himself with patting his face and tugging at his hair, reacquainting himself with the man. She allowed his actions, simply because she knew that Lucius was too far gone to feel the loving assault. She herself had claimed his left shoulder, and was using it as a pillow while she oversaw her son's actions, smiling happily at the joy that radiated from her little boy. He had missed his father's presence as much as she had. She had known better than to expect the men to remain with them for more than a few hours, but still it had hurt her terribly to send the toddler away the next morning with nothing but a brief kiss from his father. Lucius had not even
noticed his gurgled "Fa-fer" the closest yet he had come to managing the title. She would spend an extra hour playing with him to compensate for it, she promised herself before helping the man put on his robes once again.

She had managed to delay their departure long enough for breakfast. However while there was not any need for them to return to Voldemort before the afternoon, they had a different master of sorts to go account to that morning – Dumbledore. After the meal, Severus had wandered off on the guise of visiting his godson however, both she and her husband knew that it was his way of giving them a few more precious moments alone. He had squeezed her shoulder lightly as he passed her, a clear sign of affection that she returned with a soft smile. Looking at Lucius though, the smile quickly faded for his eyes were sombre.

"Lucius?" she whispered hesitantly, reaching out to cup his face. "What is wrong darling?"

He did not answer for a long moment, seemingly trapped in the vortex of his own thoughts. He surprised her by suddenly reaching out and grabbing her, pulling her too him for a deep kiss that she easily submitted to.

"I do not know when we will return," he said eventually, resting his cheek on the top of her head. She had stiffened in his arms, something that drew a sigh from him. She dug her fingers into his robes, before pulling back to look up at him.

"There is change in the air my love," he told her. "I can feel it. Something is going to happen soon that will end all of this one way or another and I do not think that I will be back before it happens."

The surety of his words shook her to the core and she moved to protest. He stopped her though with a stern look, so that she remained compliant in his arms.

"There is something I need you to do."

"Anything Lucius," she responded sincerely, pressing her forehead against his shoulder.

"That's my girl," he praised lightly, kissing her hair. "I need you to live."

"What?" she gasped in confusion. "Lucius, what do you mean?"

"I need you to promise me that you will live on Narcissa," he demanded in a room that left no room for contradiction. "If I die, I want you to fight against the urge to follow me. Draco needs at least one of his parents Cissy, someone who can teach him how best to survive in this world. Narcissa, you know that everyone believes you and him to be dead, and if I die, it may be best to keep it that way. I've managed to contact Gringotts. Upon my death, most of the Malfoy wealth will be automatically transferred to a new account I have set up. The goblins have instructions to help get you out of Britain and you need to cooperate with them should it happen. Leave here with my son and seek refuge elsewhere. Should I die, should he win, it may be best for you to forget that Britain ever existed."

"What are you asking of me?" she asked in a shaky tone, even as her fingers flexed against him. How could Lucius speak of these things? It was as if he had already accepted that their family was falling apart. "This won't be necessary; you'll survive this. You have to Lucius!"

Severus re-entered the room then, his expression saddened as he took in her state. "We need to leave now," he said hoarsely.

"I know."

"No!" she shouted. "You can't leave me. I won't let you go. And you aren't either Severus. You'll stay here with me. No one knows where this place is. Why do you-

Narcissa never got the change to finish her plea for, with a regretful sigh, Lucius jabbed the tip of his wand into her side, before spelling her to sleep. He easily compensated the weight for her now prone form. Lifting her, he carried her to a divan before depositing her on it.

"Never doubt my love for you," he whispered, stroking the hair from her face. "I will do my best to ensure that you live through this. Be strong my love."

October 31st 1982.

Narcissa found herself staring down the old clock that lay in the corner of the room. She was literally watching time pass her by, and currently, she had absolutely no issue with it. Draco was abed, and her husband was not with her. Her worry for him prevented her from even contemplating sleeping, and so, although it was nearly twelve, she was seated her in the living room, staring at nothing. A part of her acknowledged that she waiting for the floo to activate, allowing Lucius entrance, but, after two weeks, that hope was but a mere light flicking in a storm. Finally, she gave up, and, with a melancholic sigh, she rose before slowly making her way toward her bedchambers.

Her plan for a fitful night's rest did not come to fruition though, for, barely halfway up the steps, she heard the loud, shrieking cries of Draco emanating from the nursery. She hesitated for a moment, since it was Trix's job to take care of him during the night. Nevertheless, she was certain that she had never heard that particular cry from her little boy. It was neither one of hunger nor a wet nappy. More than that, Draco had stopped fussing in the nights about three months ago. Curiosity had had her peeking in on him the first few nights, surprised at the sudden change in his demeanour. She always found, in those moments, a small smile on his face and the odd gurgle or two that never failed to draw at least a chuckle from her as she wondered what her boy could be dreaming of.

Entering the room, she found her son in the arms of his frantic nanny-elf, whose efforts to calm him were futile.

"No by crying young master," Trix croaked. "Nothing be wrong with you. Your bed be dry, your tummy full. Please no be crying."

Narcissa doubted that her son even registered the elf's words. More than that, there was an underlying layer of pain in his voice that had her hurrying to take him from Trix.

"Dismissed," she said shortly, even as she pressed his head to her shoulder.

Quickly, she checked him for signs of illness but his skin felt cool to the touch. With that dismissed, she allowed her magic to wash over the toddler, allowing her to search for a curse, hex or even poison that could be affecting him. Those efforts proved futile as well, and, with her options considerably narrowed, the woman allowed the core of her veela magic to rise to the surface, as she forced herself to assess the situation rationally. Like her, Draco was a veela, and, with all other options exhausted, she was forced to consider the possibility that it was her son's future mate that was causing his current discomfort. It was the only explanation left to her, even though, she knew the likelihood of it being true was highly improbable. He had been formally introduced to the wizarding society about a year ago, and only took weeks before they had been forced into hiding. He had never left her side during the ceremony, and she had felt no reaction from him then that would have signalled that his mate was near. So, in reality there was no real way that he could be sharing his destined's experiences.
But she was starting to believe that it was the cause of the current situation anyway.

Bonded mates, at some level, felt whatever their partners did. Narcissa herself suffered considerably when the full strength of the Cruciatus Curse was directed at her mate. At those moments, Lucius' soul always cried out to her, asking her for strength and endurance. She would always respond to his plea without hesitation, allowing some of his pain to filter into her so that her mate would retain all of his mental faculties. Yes, it was within the powers of a veela to lessen their mate's sufferings; the problem was they needed to know that mate first and at least initiate part of their bond.

So, if that was truly the reason why her toddler was now limp in her arms, soft whimpers escaping him, there were only two possibilities. The first was that her son's mate was in serious danger. The second was that the person was so strong that they were able to bridge the gap between them, enough to forge a bond that transcended time and space. Neither option particularly appealed to the aristocrat now, as anyone with such power would likely draw the attention of the Dark Lord to them...which could eventually lead him to her son. But, she acknowledged, as she jostled her boy soothingly, such a thing would be years in the making. Draco made a soft gurgling sound, before looking up at her with exhausted, slightly pained eyes.

"Darling," she cooed to him.

His lips twitched slightly in response, but he did not give her that wide toothy grin of his, nor did he try to babble to her, as was his custom. Kissing his slightly sweaty cheek, she laid him in his cot once more, before casting a freshening charm on him. He wiggled under the spell before going straight to sleep, his small fists curled at his sides. She stood looking down at him for long moments before carefully carding her hand through his hair, continuing to offer him comfort. She took the time to dwell on his features, noting that, traits of Lucius were becoming more and more prominent. His hair had definitely come from her, and he had the Black chin. The rest though, was all Lucius' and with a pang, she wondered if she could look at him if something were to happen to take her mate away from her permanently.

At first, she believed that it was her own wishful thinking that had summoned Lucius' voice to her ears. Indeed, it was not until the third repetition of her name, said in a hoarse, and emotion filled voice that she reacted. Even as she turned away from Draco's crib, she heard the pounding of footsteps as he approached the only room in the hall with the door open.

"My love?" she whispered shakily, as he stood in the doorway.

In seconds she was crushed in his embrace. It mattered not to her that he was once more covered in filthy robes, nor the fact that the smell radiating from him was far from pleasant. All that mattered was that Lucius was here, and more importantly, alive. She relished the contact for long moments before pulling back to analyse his face. Her eyebrows rose inquiringly for, for the first time in living memory, there was not a shadow of despondency in his expression, a sure sign that he was already dreading his next summons.

"Lucius?" she asked, recalling the cryptic words he had left her with before.

"I'm here my darling," he told her, a slightly hysterical laugh escaping him before he pulled her even closer into his embrace. "To stay my love. I shall not be leaving again."

"What?" she gasped, pulling back to look at him with incredulous eyes. "Lucius, you cannot mean..."

"It's over," he breathed, a glimmer of tears in his eyes as he bent to kiss her forehead tenderly. "By Merlin, he's dead. It's over Narcissa. We are free from him!"
"But how?" she asked, even as she felt waves of elation bubble up from within. Her prayers had been answered. Lucius had made it through the war alive, and had been safely returned to her. "And Severus? Where is he?"

A flicker of sadness crossed his eyes at that, before it disappeared. He released her entirely, and, lifting a damp sleeve, showed her the bare spot where the dark mark had once sat. Almost reverently, the veela allowed her fingers to ghost over the spot.

"Severus' has disappeared as well," he explained. "And he too has escaped harm. Dumbledore believes that it is because we held no true loyalty for him. All of us who were against him are alive. The rest are either in a coma or dead."

"Who killed him?" she demanded, still stroking the spot. "Dumbledore? The Order?"

Lucius shook his head even as a pleased smiled curled on his lips. "He killed himself," he told her with some satisfaction. He ignored her sound of surprise. Moving away from her, he walked to his son's crib. Looking down at him Lucius felt even more of the tension within him fade. His little boy was sleeping comfortably, completely oblivious to the outside world. And now, he was safe. With Voldemort dead, there was no longer a threat to his life. Lucius breathed in relief at no longer having that possibility dangled before him.

"His targets for tonight were the Potters," he said eventually, still looking into the crib.

"Lily and James?" Narcissa inquired, as she moved to his side.

They had all been in the same year at Hogwarts, she recalled. Although no one would call them friends, they had interacted enough with them to be amicable. That was especially true of Lily, since she had been a long time friend of Severus; resultantly, in the early years, she had often been included into their group despite her house. Narcissa had not seen the redhead or her husband since their Hogwarts days; nonetheless she felt a pang of sorrow for the woman. "Are they?"

"They are," he confirmed grimly.

"Oh Severus," she breathed. "He still cares for her."

"What pains him most is that he never got the chance to make things right with her. He's there now; in Godric Hollow."

Narcissa had no response for that. Her heart went out to the man, and she could only hope that he was coping well enough with the situation. "Didn't they have a son recently? Heath? Henry?"

"Harry. His name is Harry James Potter, and he is someone we all owe our lives to."

"What?" she asked in confusion. If she recalled correctly, the babe would be a little over three months old. What did he have to do with Voldemort's defeat?

"The Dark Lord...Voldemort," Lucius corrected himself as it was now safe to do so, "tried to use the Killing Curse on him. Somehow, it rebounded on him. The child lived with nothing to show for it except for a scar on his forehead while Voldemort died."

"But there is no counter to the curse!" she protested.

"Which makes him the boy-who-lived," Lucius confirmed, looking at her. "It is what he is being called already. He is the hero of the wizarding world."
"But at what cost?" Narcissa murmured, feeling sadness for the orphaned child. The child would become a legend, but could that replace what he had lost? "What is to be done with him?"

"I didn't wait around to find out," Lucius admitted, drawing her to him. "Albus will find a place for the child. My only concern was to come back to you and Draco. I've been gone for far too long."

While saying that, he bent to brush his hand across his slumbering son's skin. They both noticed the flinch Draco made as Lucius stroked his forehead, but they put it down to surprise at the unexpected touch. Lucius held his hand on him for a second longer, even as he silently promised not to leave them both again. Draco had gone too long without a paternal presence in his life. He would do his best to rectify that forthwith.

"You need a bath," Narcissa murmured, gently tugging him away from the room. "And you must be hungry."

"I need to go to Severus," he sighed, even as he allowed her to lead him away.

"Leave him for now," she bid. "He needs the time to mourn. We'll go search for him in the morning if he has not returned by them."

"We will," he agreed. "And once we find him, we will return to Malfoy Manor. There is no need for you to remain in hiding any longer. We will return to our rightly place in the world now."

"Indeed we will."

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At three months old, Harry James Potter knew nothing of hate or the desire for power. He was surrounded by love and happiness with two persons who cooed at him, fed him and made sure that he was always comfortable. And more than that, there was always an unseen presence with him, one he had felt since he had been born.

He loved that presence, and often contended himself in his lonely moments to prod at that it and gurgle happily when it prodded back. Those touches were their only form of communication but it was sufficient for Harry who spent large periods of time just transferring feelings of contentment to the presence and receiving them back as well.

He had been in the midst of one of those communications when the door to his nursery cracked open, startling him. Immediately, he felt the presence questioning him, wondering at the sudden fright he had sent along their link. But before he could phantom a response of sorts, his redhead mother was lifting him roughly into her arms, causing him to mewl a protest.

Her voice as she spoke to him was shaky at best and he could sense her discomfort. There was a loud crashing sound from below and Harry felt a pain shoot up his arm as his mother's grip on him tightened painfully. He whimpered and the pressure slackened slightly. He cooed up at her, wanting her reassuring smile, but was instead met by frightened emerald eyes.

Her entire expression was drawn and her skin a sick pallor that caused the unknown emotion of fear to surface in the tiny body. Something was not right. Within him came a wave of concern and automatically he grasped at it, conveying his fear. The presence radiated some of it back to him. It was afraid for him, for what he was experiencing. Harry urged the presence to stay with him and got the reassurance that it would not leave him alone.

Seconds later, a pained scream tore from the child's throat as he landed in a painful heap on the ground even as his caretaker's body fell limply besides him. He knew instinctively that something
was wrong with his mother and he started to cry, the sound escalating as a hideous face loomed over him, sneering. A piece of wood appeared in the child’s vision as the snake-like lips started moving. Harry grasped at the link he had formed, drawing on it as much as he could for comfort.

A green flash was all that he saw next, that same light that had hit his mother and unknown to him, his father as well. The light raced through him, searching out the essence of his life to snuff it out. And there was nothing he could do to stop it. But the light never reached it, for the presence within him roared up, stronger than ever, merging with his own spirit and forming a barrier against the light, one that it could not penetrate.

A fierce battle ensued as the foreign magic battered at the defence, but the presence was constant, urging Harry to help him push against it. It took an effort but the combined souls were able to force it out, but not before the alien magic splintered, part of it integrating itself into both the child and the other presence.

With the same force as it had been fired, the magic rebounded and hit the startled monster above him, flinging him across the room where he slumped dead. Harry’s screams slowed to ragged weeping as the presence within him garbled at him and he responded with a tired gurgle. He was exhausted, and so was the other. The presence was slowly withdrawing and Harry felt strangely bereft once it had gone.

But then exhaustion overtook the baby, and when he felt his form being lifted into a pair of wrinkled arms and when he managed to focus enough to see an aged face vaguely familiar, the baby knew he was safe and succumbed to sleep. The baby placed his fate in the hands of the man who was now announcing for all to hear that he was the saviour of the wizarding world, before secreting him away to a location where he could hopefully grow up in peace, unaware of the fame he had now garnered.
Draco Lucius Malfoy yawned softly as he snuggled into his feather pillow. Across the room, his music box played softly, playing the soft strains of a lullaby that never failed to put him into a good mood. He moved slightly, making himself even more comfortable before he allowed his eyes to close. It had been a tiresome morning for the young veela, and so he was perfectly contented to stay here for the next few hours to revitalise himself. His mother sometimes peeped in on him at this time, but he doubted she would do so today. His godfather had flooed over, excited over some endeavour of his. His parents had gone off with him to see the results, and although he had accompanied them, only a few minutes had passed before he had started nodding off. From what he remembered, the potions master had successfully brewed a variation of some potion, making it twice as effective in a fraction of the time. His father was interested in being its primary distributor, something that he knew his godfather would easily accept.

As a new melody wafted to him, Draco felt the memories of that morning surfaced. Those two hours of ballroom dancing had been pure torture, especially since Pansy had been his partner. He wished that his godfather didn't work at Hogwarts; his lessons were the best of them all, but he could only have them when the man was on holidays and until that time came, he was stuck learning wizarding etiquette and history and other such dull topics. More than that, since he needed a partner for dancing, he would be stuck with Pansy for a while yet and he really did not like the girl. At first he had thought that all girls were strange, but now he was certain that it was just Pansy. He had never seen Millicent giggle or bat her eyelashes as much as the witch did; was it too difficult for her to keep dust from getting into her eyes? She was a menace, he huffed.

More than that, the witch had decided that she was his mate, and was in the process of convincing him that that was true. Silly girl; why wouldn't she leave him alone? A sharp tug from within him distracted him from his thoughts though, and, the young veela's eyes flung open, even as his hand clutched at his chest. What was this pain that he was feeling? Draco gasped as it happened again, this time accompanied by a wave of fear that left him winded. He had felt remnants of this before, but never to this extent.

As long as he could remember, he had occasionally gotten feelings and emotions from someone – he was completely certain that they did not originate from himself. He had never spoken to his parents about them, simply because he doubted that they would believe him. More than that, although sometimes unpleasant, he mostly enjoyed such feelings from the person. He could not help but believe that his own attempts to return his feelings to that person were the reason that the dismal mood he sometimes felt from them lifted. They 'convered' this way for hours sometimes, usually in the night after Draco had been put to bed, or early in the morning before breakfast. It was the only time convenient to both of them; he had tried contacting him at other times, only to receive vague, distracted replies, although he never complained when the random burst of emotion hit him.

But this, this was something entirely different. What he felt within him now was an almost deathly fear. More and that, with each second that passed, the pain grew worst, causing him to whimper and moan, even as he desperately tried to determine why it was that he was feeling it to this extent. Was there any way he could help his companion and thus prevent the pain from continuing?

Draco did not know, but, seconds later, the first of many screams tore form his lips as he felt as if his ribs were being crushed.

Harry was scared. His five-year-old mind had already accepted the fact that today was the day his
uncle would go too far. The man's face was purple with barely contained rage, his eyes spelling nothing but doom for the cringing tiny child before him. However, for once, Harry could not understand what he had done to earn himself his uncle's displeasure this time.

The flowers were pruned; he had mopped the floor with the dishrag until it gleamed and had even managed to dust some of the picture frames (and remembered to remove his grimy footprints from the chair afterwards!). So what had he done wrong? Why was he being blamed, he wondered as he watched the man fumble with his belt and remove it from the loops with a sickening crack.

He had not done anything. Harry had been nowhere near the steps when Dudley had fallen down them, leaving him with his neck encased in a brace. It was not as if he had asked his fat cousin to fall. So then, why was he about to be beaten?

"It's not fair," Harry whispered brokenly even as he backed away from the enraged adult.

Unluckily, the words that had not been meant to be heard reached the man, increasing his rage substantially as the man rushed forward, belt forgotten as he clouted him, the force of the blow leaving the young child dazed on the floor.

Taped glasses flew from the child's face with the next blow, breaking yet again. The corrective lenses had done little in terms of aiding the child's vision to start with, but at least wearing them he had been able to vaguely discern his uncle's shape.

Now all he could see through the haze of pain engulfing him was a dark blub that neared him before he heard a swishing sound as the belt was drawn against him. Mercilessly, after it connected, darkness descended and Harry found himself liberated from the pain.

The child didn't remember when he had first felt that small ache in his heart. To him it was always there, like an itch he could never see, to scratch. Most times the feeling was negligible, and he could ignore it while he went about his daily chores. At other times, it consumed him, distracting him from everything else. He was experiencing the latter feeling now, and the five year old groaned at the sensation. Currently he had no desire to deal with both internal and external pain.

He couldn't remember how long he had been locked in his cupboard, but enough time had passed so that his hurts had lessened into dull throbs. He knew that this beating had been the worst to date and it would be quite a long time before he was pain free, especially if his uncle continued to beat him daily to squash the freakiness out of him...whatever that freakiness was.

Vernon Dursley had never done a kind act to the child, but now, as he whimpered in pain, Harry was certain that the man was as loony as that cartoon character on the telly. Not that he was allowed to watch it, but sometimes while scrubbing the floor, he had been able to sneak glances at the screen.

Harry's eyes squinted and he gave a low hiss as his cupboard door was abruptly open.

"You lazy brat. Get out here and wash the dishes. There will be no supper for you!" harped his Aunt Petunia.

Harry's body screamed as he forced it into motion. He swayed at first and took a moment to orient himself. The hardest part was actually finding the sink with his next to nothing vision. Three falls and two new bruises later, he was tiptoeing to his body's full extent to wash the dishes.

His little hands trembled as he scrubbed, feeling along the sink until he found a safe spot to rest a utensil. He knew that if he dropped something, being a spoon or a glass, he would earn himself a whipping. He did not think he would be able to take another one on top of what he had already
experienced already that day.

His eyes squinted as he concentrated solely on his task, directing all of his focus so that he did not even notice when Dudley, fresh from resting, snuck up besides him and whistled in his ear. Harry jerked in response, instinctively flailing an arm…and knocking several pieces of china to the floor as well. He heard each tinkling sound as the wares shattered. His heart sunk as he heard Dudley's gleeful shouting.

Surely, he would not survive the night.

"Not again!" Narcissa hissed, quickly dropping her wand and gathering her son in her arms.

Memories of the last occasion such an incident had happened rushed back to her, as well as her prior deductions. This time there was no hesitation as she allowed her veela side to full emerge, transforming her.

Lucius gasped despite himself. Despite the fact that he had seen his wife's true form many times over the years, he could not help but be enraptured by the woman's image once again. His wife was as beautiful as any celestial being could ever be, and at any other time, he would have allowed a wave of desire to overcome him. However, now was not the time to feel that pull of attraction. Something was wrong with his son.

His wife was crooning softly to her son in the language of the veela, her tone coaxing. Abruptly the boy's cries ceased and his chest heaved forward. Lucius found his knees growing weak as a brilliant light surrounded his son's small form, before disappearing and revealing his changed appearance.

The seven year old's hair had lengthened until it brushed his shoulders while his already pale skin glittered as if every beam of light was focussed upon him. From his back the patriarch sighted a pair of gleaming silver wings. Lucius was stunned. Draco was only seven, yet it was evident that his mature form had emerged.

Narcissa's crooning stopped abruptly and her appearance returned to normal. With a flick of her wrist, she put a freezing spell on her son, causing him to remain trapped unconscious in the form. That done, she returned to her bed and stood, a look of determination on her face.

"Love?" he broached as she retrieved her wand.

Her gaze pierced his. "Get Dumbledore," she said decisively.

Lucius knew better than to ignore that tone, but he thought it best to find out a bit more details first. "What is wrong Draco?"

"Our son's mate calls for him; he is in danger. That boy is a part of this family whether he knows it or not and I want him here."

Lucius tried his best to process the information his wife was providing him, however he was finding it increasingly difficult to do so. They had come here based on the frantic alert by Trix. Instead of seeing to him, Narcissa was now telling him to find Draco's mate? But that was impossible, especially since they had no clue as to who he or she was. Nevertheless, she seemed so certain...

"You know who his mate is?" he asked dubiously.

"It is obvious," she replied, looking toward the now silent veela boy now again. "Albus is the only
one who knows where he put the boy. Go get him now. He is in danger."

"Who is this he?" he pressed. What did she mean hidden? And what on earth did that have to do with Albus?

The woman gave him an irritated look. She never did like being questioned like this. However, there was no getting around it now. Lucius could not go running after Albus unless he was absolutely certain about what was occurring. The woman muttered something beneath her breath even as she grasped his hand. Tugging him roughly, she led him to Draco's side before brushing the hair back from his forehead. No words were necessary. The patriarch's breath hitched at the faint outline of a lightning bolt scar that marred Draco's usually smooth forehead. He understood Narcissa's insistence now. There was only one person in the wizarding world who possessed this mark, and although he did not know why it was now on his son's body, he agreed with his wife that it did not bode well.

"Harry Potter," he said softly. "He is the cause of this?"

"Exactly. He is Draco's mate. Get Albus now."

This time, Lucius listened to her. If the situation was to be believed, the hero of the wizarding world was in a dangerous situation, and they perhaps, were the only ones who would be able to get him out of it.
"Lucius my boy, whatever is the matter?" Albus Dumbledore asked seriously, moments after stepping through the floo system. "Serverus says that you're having a bit of a problem with your boy?"

Lucius' voice was terse as he responded. "No Albus, rather, there is a problem with your boy."

Albus' eyebrows arched in confusion. "My boy?"

Lucius sighed, turning away. "Come along. It will be easier to show you."

With that, Lord Malfoy turned and led the way to Draco's room, not seeing the curious looks the men gave each other. Lady Malfoy rose as they entered, nodding her head in greeting. Albus' gaze moved from curious to admiring when he noted the child's state. "Very impressive. A true veela at his age. He must be very strong."

"With my heritage there is no doubt of that," Narcissa snapped. "But Draco's transformation is only temporary and was forced by me."

"Why is that?" Albus asked curiously, even as he gaze drifted over the small form. Very few people had ever seen a transformed veela child and he was loathe to give up the opportunity.

"Because his mate is in grave danger. Draco is no way near mature enough to track his mate. However, I was given a vital clue by forcing the transformation. Unfortunately, we cannot get to him."

"Oh? Why?" he asked, giving the woman his full attention now. Something in her tone was hinting to something, but he was not entirely sure as to what.

Lucius decided to intervene when he saw his wife's hands starting to clench in annoyance. Narcissa was not in the best of moods at the moment and it would not take much for her transformation to go the other way and her devilish like appearance to emerge. Not even one of the strongest wizards of the time would be able to stand up to an enraged veela mother.

"We believe – know- " he quickly amended at Narcissa's growl, "That Draco's mate is Harry Potter. And only you know where exactly you hid the boy."

Albus' eyes widened. "That isn't possible." He said after a moment. "Harry is perfectly safe where he is, and I can assure you that neither Lily nor James had an ounce of veela blood in them."

"You don't need veela blood to be a mate," Severus said softly from the bed's side. He was leaning over his godson's body with little fear. Narcissa would never think him capable of harming her son. "Before you continue rambling Albus, see here."

Frowning, the headmaster moved to young Malfoy's side, breath hitching when he saw the scar imprint. It could not be. It was no way as severe as the one he remembered being on Harry's forehead. It seemed as if it was raised from beneath the skin. The location, even down to the size of the dents in the lightning shape was identical. This was no hoax. The question was why Harry's soul had sought out the other boy's at such a young age. Just what kind of danger could he be in? The child was well protected by blood wards. Lady Malfoy interrupted his musings.

"Albus, you will take us to the Potter boy. The time for discussion has passed." As if to prove her
point, she allowed her spell to disintegrate.

Immediately Draco moaned, a pain filled sound. His small arms moved to cradle his ribs. It was enough for them all. Albus cursed beneath his breath and gave them the address so that they could follow. Narcissa bade Lucius to stay. She was well aware that Dumbledore was not fully convinced. As her son was not of age, her soul would have to do the confirming. She knew that her nature would allow her to see if traces of Draco were present in Harry. Narcissa's witch side told her this. As she and the others disapparated however, her veela side let it be known that it was prepared to rip apart whoever had caused the child pain. A soul mate was considered a member of the family, and this veela mother would avenge her soul-child.

In theory, the wards would not allow them to enter the house immediately, so the trio appeared on the pavement in front of the house. Narcissa felt a tug immediately and allowed her veela side to take over. At once, a soul-call came from within the house, a desperate plea for mercy and relief from the torment. Dumbledore and Snape jumped at the high-pitched screech that emerged from the woman besides them. Both were stunned when she leapt forward, and landed in front of the door, rendering it open with a hard kick, storming in. Both men looked at each other in panic, both thinking the same thing before following. Both felt a mild sting, no more painful than an ant bite really before they followed her into the house.

Narcissa's furious cry rose in crescendo when she entered the kitchen and saw her soul-child curled on the floor, shirt off, pants torn. For a moment, she saw red, thinking the worst, before she registered the bluburous muggle gapping at her. The belt in his hand gave her the answer she needed for the tears. It was buckle-side down in his grip and the end had very sharp spikes. It did little to abate her fury though as her mind's eye replayed just how badly hurt her child was.

In a second, Dursley was flung against a wall, his head cracking sharply against it. It did not satisfy her. She waved her hand and he snapped against another and another until a bit of blood ran from his nose. There, that was enough use for her magical side. She hissed as her hands transformed into claws with long talons.

She rushed forward, claws before her to start shredding the barely conscious muggle when she heard Snape yell. "Narcissa, the boy!" She froze immediately, head spinning at an impossible angle to follow Severus' gaze. Dumbledore had Harry in his arms, but it was obvious that something was wrong. The boy had paled even more than when she had first seen him and was shaking as if he had been hexed. The muggle was forgotten immediately.

She was kneeling by Dumbledore within seconds, holding out her arms for the bruised and battered bundle. Dumbledore hesitated at first, but handed him over at once when she raised her eyes to him. There was no sign of rage in them anymore, only concern. Her voice was soft but clearly audible as she spoke.

"His soul calls for me," she began, running her hand a few millimetres above him in long sweeps. "He recognises a bit of Draco in me, so his body wants to try merging. His soul knows that I am not really the one so is struggling against him. Hence this. I am letting him feel the brush of me now; it will stabilize him enough to get back to Malfoy Manor." That said she lapsed into silence, doing her job and trying to get the child's soul to settle down.

Severus spoke just as softly. "I sense more than one muggle, but none have shown up despite all the commotion."

"Them? The spawn and his mother are...indisposed. They got in my way."

"Narcissa- " Dumbledore began.
"They aren't dead," she interrupted. "Not yet anyway..." She murmured the rest.

Nothing Dumbledore could say would stop her from returning here at a later date. Not even the threat of Azkaban would stop her. Besides, as a veela she would fall under their jurisdiction...she would not even be formally charged; the Veela Court would probably congratulate her on a job well done.

Her dark thoughts broke off as she felt Harry's soul settle for the moment. Good, now just to make sure he survived the journey. She put a stasis on him and rose. "Time to go. There is still much to do this night."

"But-"

Narcissa broke Dumbledore off immediately. "Do not even think to say that he cannot leave here because of wards Albus. I do not know if you felt it, but those wards were practically nonexistent. Even a squib could get into here. He will be with his mate – my son."

"Narcissa-"

"No Albus! I did not weaken those wards, it must have been happening over time. Did you even check to make sure the boy was being cared for? No you didn't. You told us that there is the possibility of the Dark Lord re-emerging, yet you did not explain how.

"Did it matter to you whether or not there was something left of the saviour if that time ever came or were you prepared to drop a casket in front of Voldemort and hope for the best? Because had we not been here, must surely my soul-child would be dead tonight!"

"Now Severus and I will go back and heal the boy. You will stay here; deal with these filthy excuses for muggles. Do not even think of hiding them from me, for I will find them. Do not return to the manor until you deal with this. Come Severus!" With that, they left, leaving a dumbfounded Albus to deal with the situation.

As the wizard rose to his feet, he realised that the Order had handled Voldemort wrongly all those years ago. They should have just found a way to lock him into a room with an enraged Narcissa. The shock of being spoken to in such a tone alone would have killed him. Albus smiled wryly at that as he turned to Dursley. He had to hurry; he had failed Harry once already, he wanted to be there to apologize.
Chapter 5

Narcissa apparated to the empty bedroom across from Draco's. Although it was imperative that the two meet, it had to be delayed. The recognising of two souls was a joyous occasion for the said entities. Harry's body however, was in no shape to receive the overwhelming feelings that came along with the process.

As she carefully laid the small body on the bed's centre, she heard Snape summoning his potions bag. For once she was glad that the man was paranoid enough not to go anywhere without it. While Snape waited for it to arrive, she released the stasis spell, moaning slightly as she took in his condition.

It seemed even more terrible now that her emotions were not in play. A wave of her hand caused the ripped garments to disappear, leaving the tiny form naked on the bed. There was scarcely any part of him that was not marked from new or old injuries.

Starting from the base of the boy, Narcissa ran a thorough sweep over him. The soles of his feet were cracked and unnaturally calloused for one so young. The flesh was dry and would be rough to the touch. It was as if the boy's feet had never been encased in some protective covering. Draco's feet were still as soft and velvety as the day he had been born.

The boy's toes were in no better condition. There were large blisters on most of the toes, as well as small nicks and dark spots that looked as if he had been bitten innumerable by insects of some sort. His toenails were dry and brittle; a sure sign of some sort of deficiency. His skin was parched and stretched taut; dehydration, she noted with a clinical mind. It would do no good to allow her emotions to emerge right now. She needed to be in control for now. Revenge would come soon enough.

Eyes rising over his form, she saw that the bone in at the boy's left ankle jutted out more pronouncedly than its counterpart, and the foot in general seemed to be...bent at an odd angle. It took her a moment to glean a possible cause. A badly healed bone most likely. Her observations were broken for the moment when Severus shuffled towards her bag in tow.

"Wait," she said shortly, not looking at him. "It's obvious to me that this is not the first time. I can see signs of prolonged abuse. We cannot heal him without a professional documenting this. We will have those pieces of filth in Azkaban for this. "After I'm through with them," she added silently.

"You're right Cissy," Snape agreed, but removed a potion nonetheless. He spelled it into the child's system. "It's a pain reliever as well as a sedative. It will keep him unconscious until we are able to heal him. He does not deserve to remain in such pain."

The sincerity in his voice had Narcissa observing him keenly. She was well aware of Severus' feud with James Potter, and even at such a young age, and in such a fragile condition, the boy's likeness to James was obvious. Severus seemed to understand her thoughts.

"As much as I disliked the boy's father, he isn't him. Besides, nobody, not even the child of an enemy deserves to be treated in such a matter."

"So you recognise that this boy is as much Lily's as James?" she questioned softly. As much as she loved Severus as the brother she had always wanted, she would not allow him near the child if he bore him any ill will. Unbeknownst to them both, remnants of their magic began swirling through the air, interlacing gradually.
"Yes, he is Lily's. Although," Severus' voice cracked a bit, "I do wish that there was something...anything of hers that I could see physically in him."


Even after all this time, Severus still loved his childhood friend. Still regretted not being able to apologize for insulting her. While she had never been particularly close to the Potters, she could share his sentiment. It was a shame that Harry had not inherited some of his mother's traits. She had been quite lovely with her flowing red tresses and those vibrant green eyes.

"You would protect him would you not?"

Severus nodded. "As if he were my own. It is the least I could do for Lily. Perhaps if I look over him, Lily would one day forgive me for what I have done, or at least I could hope."

"Good, then help Lucius and I keep him safe."

"I will. Wherever possible." There was a sharp crack as their magic joined for a brief moment before breaking. They stared at the shimmering remnants as they vanished.

"A wizard's oath," Severus breathed. "But only a third party can officiate over it."

"Who?"

"Me," a voice whispered. Both spun to the voice's sound, eyes widening as they took in the silvery form seated on the bed besides Harry. There was a smile on the woman's face even though there was a deeper emotion in her eyes.

"Lily."

"Yes Sevvy, it's me." Lily rose and glided over to the adults, smiling sadly. "Sevvy, I do forgive you. I did within a few minutes of you calling me mudblood. But I'm stubborn remember? I just didn't tell you and by the time I realised just how far I had pushed you away, it was too late," she finished sadly.

"Why are you here?" Narcissa whispered.

Lily smiled at her. "For Harry."

"What?"

"The blood wards. Dumbledore did not know it, but a bit of magic is needed to sustain the wards, magic that my sister does not possess. When Dumbledore raised them, I was forced from my resting place as I was the only one who could sustain it fully until they were no longer needed."

"So you had to watch..."

"Yes Sevvy, I had to watch my boy being abused. James helped where he could, I could do little as I was the sustainer, but James, he was the one who helped urge Harry's magic on, stirred it enough so that he healed himself enough so that he didn't die."

"But you said me..."

"Oh that. The wards were weakening, but not only because of the neglect. It didn't take James and I long to realise that Harry had a veela mate. We didn't know who, but we knew that Harry's call would not reach the mate from behind the wards' boundaries. So I released my hold on it little by little. I believe I've been doing so for months now. Every time he was hurt or scared, his soul would
cry out, and I would lower it a bit so it would be heard."

Narcissa nibbled her lip contemplatively on that. "I believe Draco has been hearing those cries recently, I just did not realise it."

It was true. Little random things suddenly made sense. Like Draco's sudden mood changes and tiredness. In particular one time she remembered Draco quietly reading over a book before he whimpered and clutched a hand to his chest in obvious pain.

Other times he would grimace or look scared for no possible reason. Of course, Draco was too young to recognise explicitly what a soul-cry was. She cursed herself for not recognising the signs until the situation had become dire.

"Tonight however was the worst. James used the majority of his energy just to keep our boy breathing - that's why you can't see him now - but he is around. He was going to kill him, I just knew he was, so I dropped the wards to the lowest I could. Only people with bad intentions would have been locked out. The moment you crossed the barrier Narcissa, I felt your love. Not even having met my boy, you loved him and in that moment my duty was done. My boy was protected and the wards fell."

"Lily, you are a ghost then?" Severus asked.

"No Sevvy, James and I haven't trapped ourselves in this plain. We merely prevented ourselves from moving on. However, our job is now complete. I know that Harry will be safe in your hands. James knows it too."

"I will. I will ensure that your son is raised loved and protected by us."

"I know. You will be the mother I never had the chance to be. Just...let him know about us?"

"We will," they both promised.

"Thank you." Lily's figure glided back to Harry and she bent and ghosted a kiss to his damp forehead. "Mommy and Daddy loves you baby. Be good for your new mama and papa, future mate and," she glanced over at Severus with a wicked grin, "your Uncle Sevvy."

"Give him hell for us son!" came a faint whisper.

James.

Severus growled besides himself. The tender moment was over. Even dead, James was a brat...a noble brat, but a brat nonetheless. "He gives me hell and I'll use him as a potions ingredient." He expected Lily to scold as she always did but instead she laughed.

"Good luck with that Sevvy. Harry, try not to be to much of a brat okay? Poor Sevvy will go grey." She stood and slowly began to fade. "Thank you once again. Time will unfreeze in a few moments. Goodbye." And she was gone, surrendering her parental rights to the Malfoys. Both blinked at that, having not realised that time had stalled in the first place.

"Well, I guess that it's official now."

"Indeed, with the pensieving of our memories, Albus would not even think to fight us gaining custody."

"Good, I'm going to get Poppy now."
"Thank you Severus."

Poppy’s diagnostic test uncovered far more damage than Narcissa could ever imagine possible. Other than the physical cuts, bruises and welts, there were cracked and badly healed bones, bruised internal organs and slight internal bleeding. His stomach was a quarter of the size it should be and Harry’s body was severely underdeveloped. The Dursleys had put the boy through every possible horror except rape, and that was the only reason that their lives had been spared thus far.

Poppy had spelled as many potions as she could manage without overwhelming the child’s system before murmuring various healing spells to right the damage to his bones. Once he was healed to her liking, she left to start writing out the report. However, not before checking on the Malfoy heir and determining that he was fine but exhausted. A Dreamless Sleep was spelled into him to ensure that he could have a good long rest. The scar imprint faded into nothingness once both had fallen into a healing sleep.

Summoning her nature, Narcissa assured them that both boys’ souls now rested easily. The distance was not too far apart that they could not feel each other. It would be enough to sustain them until Harry was strong enough to form the bond. Closing the door of her son’s room, Narcissa laced her hands with Lucius and together they went to meet Albus downstairs and inform him that Harry Potter would be remaining with them.
"Hm, so he's what I've been missing."

The thought idly flitted through Draco Malfoy's mind as he gingerly crossed a hand over the small body he was now lying next too. Instinctively he knew that the pain he had been feeling was a result of the boy, and oddly, it did not draw any resentment from him. He was simply glad that the boy was safe and here with him now. It was where he belonged.

He did not precisely remember leaving his room and getting here, but that was not important. All that mattered was that the dark haired boy was twisting his head slightly towards him, seeking his warmth. Draco obliged and scooted a bit closer, so that he was curled protectively around the younger boy. Instinctively, he bent his head slightly and placed a tender kiss to the younger boy's head.

A heat started to radiate from Draco's core a while later, slowly at first, but then increasing in intensity until his breath was hitching. It was not painful in the least, simply overwhelming. He was filled with a sudden awareness and he found himself looking at the slumbering figure with a new perspective. This was his mate, the one he was bound to protect and love. The younger boy was his, and he would not ever let harm come to him if he could prevent it.

Draco extended a shimmering hand and gingerly touched the pale cheek, as if it was a sensitive piece of ware that would disintegrate. The slumbering boy's eyes flew open in response, leaving Draco to stare deeply into vivid green eyes. Those eyes reflected momentary fear before the look was slowly replaced by one of contentment and hope.

The boy's tiny lips quirked into a small smile before the boy fell back, once more asleep. Draco did not mind. Their bond had been formed. Draco's features gradually returned to their normal state, and the imprint that Draco had not even been aware of faded. He allowed his eyes to drift close, feeling very drowsy. It was time for them to rest and his mate to heal. They would get to know each other better later.

Narcissa mewled in pleasure as Lucius brushed the hairbrush against a sensitive spot on her scalp. She heard her mate's soft chuckle and reluctantly opened her eyes to meet his in the vanity mirror. "What is it my love?" she murmured, glad that his movements continued.

He hummed in contemplation before answering. "It seems that our son has deserted his room."

"What?" she asked in confusion, elegant blonde brows furrowing. Lucius bent and kissed the top of her head soothingly before continuing.

"The charm on Draco and then Harry's door has gone off. Already they are drawn."

Narcissa smiled at that. It was inevitable. "Yes, although I hope their souls wait until Harry is strong enough to join. Lucius, you don't mind do you?"

"Mind what my love?" he questioned, putting down the brush. With gentle hands, he spun her in the seat until he could peer deeply into her eyes. "Do I mind that my son has found his other half, even though it's almost ten years to soon? Or that we now have a new member of our family? No, I don't mind my love. I am fond of that boy already and I look forward to see how their relationship develops."
His heartfelt words brought tears to his wife's eyes and she stood, wrapping her arms around his torso. He returned the embrace willingly. "I love you," she whispered, sinking into his warmth. Here she did not have to be strong or act in the regal manner of one of their social status. In the safety of his embrace, she could relax and finally release those heart-wrenching sobs that she had carefully locked away.

Lucius held her firmly to him; rocking her and allowing her to weep out her sorrows because of the treatment that innocent little boy had received. No one deserved to be treated in the way Harry had been. Those memories he had gleaned from Narcissa's mind were numbing and he had vowed that he would be by her side when the time was right to avenge the boy.

Dumbledore would seek justice for the boy, whereas the Malfoys would seek revenge. The headmaster would ultimately try to show the Dursleys the errors of their way while Lucius and Narcissa would ensure that they ran screaming whenever they glimpsed a tousled dark head. Oh, revenge was definitely in the works.

"I'm surprised you did not come back last night Albus," Narcissa pointed out as she handed over a steaming cup of tea to Hogwart's headmaster. The wizard was more subdued than she ever had seen him before. His eyes were deep and mournful, no sign of the usual mirth within them. His long grey beard looked slightly snarled, as if those wrinkled hands had spent hours running through them relentlessly. However, Albus' clothes spoke the loudest. The headmaster was notorious for his eccentric fashion sense. Nothing was off limit to the man in terms of patterns and colours and no one dared to question him on his choices.

Only years of careful training kept the surprise from showing on the woman's face when the man had apparated with Severus in plain black robes that were darker than Severus' could ever hope to be. It was at that moment that Narcissa realised that no matter how crazy and mismatched Dumbledore's fashion sense, it suited him perfectly. Whereas Severus could adequately pull off the grunge look, on Albus it simply looked...wrong. It gave the wizard an unnatural pallor. Moreover, ensconced in black, Albus looked several years older than he really was. It was disturbing really.

Albus' mouth twitched slightly at the statement. "I spent the night in the house my child, invoking every spell I could think off, forcing every memory to ooze from the house." His voice was lacklustre at best.

"Albus!" Severus said with a frown, "Please tell me you pensieved those memories." The slight shake Albus gave him was answer enough. "You crack-pot!" Severus snapped angrily. "What did you think to accomplish watching those memories, implanting them into your mind as I am positive you did?"

"Penance," the man said simply, staring down into his tea.

"What?"

"Ah Narcissa, do you not think I could go blameless in this? You said it yourself, I failed that boy. I dropped him there without a backward glance. Did you know that Petunia hates magic? Considers it unnatural and freakish? She does. In addition, she hated Lily. By Merlin, I dropped a child who was the epitome of both the things that she hated into her care!"

Tears sprung up into the wizard's eyes and Snape and Narcissa felt themselves sinking into their chairs in shock. Even Lucius, who had just apparated in unnoticed, was stunned by the spectacle before him.
"From day one she abused him, spread her hatred to her husband and child. Even when he was still a baby. S-she spoiled milk and fed him it. His poor body would cramp in pain and she would do nothing. And when he soiled himself, she left him in it for so long that he developed terrible rashes.

"She would slap him often, for the littlest things. If something fell, or someone tripped, she blamed him. A baby! And it only got worse the older he got. Vernon started on him when he was three for crying after his cousin kicked him. That child kicked Harry and Vernon beat him because Dudley's toes hurt afterwards."

The cup slid out of Albus' hands, but a quick movement by Snape settled it back on the tray. They were all gripped up in the horror of what was spilling forth from the wizard and did not want anything to disturb the flow of events no matter how grisly. They needed to know.

"He lived off water basically. A quarter cup three times a day. If he had managed to please them – which was not often – he would be given stale bread or food that was in the process of or was already spoiled. Merlin, the boy would wolf down the food even while knowing that it would cause him pain. He can do magic. Not accidental; real magic. Whenever he could, manage, he would transfigure the food into something edible. I don't know how, but he managed it.

"He couldn't do it regularly though. They expected him to get sick from his meals. Whenever he did not they would do something to the next scraps he was given. Laxatives, mild poisons. Yet he lived. Despite five years of abuse, that boy is alive and as the house shows me is none the worse emotionally. I asked myself how? After all that, Harry should be the most miserable, cynical child that ever lived. But he isn't. He is timid and scared, but his innocence remains. I spent hours understanding why."

His eyes raised and focussed on the Malfoy's seriously.

"I had no intentions of leaving Harry with you. Not because of your past, but because I did not want Harry to live with wizards. I wanted him to be like Lily, coming to Hogwarts untouched by magic, thinking he would appreciate it more. Do you realise that most often it is the muggle-born or raised that excel at Hogwarts?

"It's because they come to us like bare slates, no knowledge, no preconceived notions about magic or people. Muggle-borns have no use for our legends, our so-called rules and dynamics. They learn with a passion, absorbing everything, pushing the boundaries and limits that don't exist for them. I wanted that for Harry. And when you and Serevus left me last night, I knew that I would allow you to heal him, to meet his mate. Yet I had no intention of letting him stay.

"Despite everything, I still thought that he would be safer with the Dursleys. I assumed that it was a one-time thing. That the muggle had been drunk, the aunt too scared to intervene. That's what I thought, convinced myself, moments after you left. But then I saw the memories and felt sick to my stomach., I had been going to bring him right back into the hands of his abusers, at worst passing off some threats on them and then leaving.

"And I wouldn't have checked back on him, assuming that they would be too scared to disobey and treat Harry like he deserved. I was going to leave him there. Still planned to at the end of the memories. Severus would have whipped up some potion while I spelled them to ensure that they would not neglect the child. But that final memory stopped me. The memory of when Harry's soul awakened.

"In that moment I felt your son, felt the surge of protectiveness around him. Heard him screaming out alongside Harry. Moreover, Harry's soul clung to Draco's and in that moment I had clarity. It had always been like that since birth for Harry. Draco's presence in his heart was what sustained Harry,
kept that part of him untainted and pure.

"Draco, a mere child had saved Harry's sanity. And Draco would be the one to bring him back to his rightful state. That is why I am here. To ask your forgiveness for even thinking of returning Harry to those people. These memories are my penance. Every time I neglect my duties, my responsibilities to those under my care, these memories will surface, reminding me of what my ineptness caused; pain and torment of an undeserving child. Because of me."

Albus dissolved into sobs then, bending over himself, trying to contain it. Severus was by his side instantly, wrapping a comforting arm around his mentor. The married pair shot a glance to each other before they joined them, Narcissa kneeling before Dumbledore to be able to pull his head to rest on her shoulder while Lucius put a firm hand on his shoulder. There was no anger towards Albus, there could not be. Albus Dumbledore had never publicly broken down like this and that spoke louder than anything else. He was truly sorry for the pain he had unknowingly caused the Potters' sons.

To rebuke him would be cruel.

"Hi there, I'm Draco. What's your name?"

Harry blinked owlishly at the bright face before him, a perfect contradiction to the rest of the room which appeared blurry. That voice...called to him. It was friendly and inviting, the hand patting his arm oddly soothing. No one had ever touched or spoke to him like that before.

It was nice.

He knew that he should be afraid. Obviously, he had never met this boy before which meant that he was not at home. It did not panic him as it should have though. What sense did it make for him to worry about not being there? He knew he was already in for a licking once they found him. Might as well relax and enjoy it while he could.

"I'm Harry," he said softly.

"Nice to meet you Harry. How old are you?"

"Five."

"Aww...you're a baby then," Draco said in a teasing tone. "I'm seven."

"I am not a baby!" he grumbled crossing his arms.

That was one of the names that Dudley always called him and he hated it to the point that he always retaliated when Dudley said it. Getting revenge for that title was well worth a punishment.

Draco realised immediately that he had upset the boy. It bothered him more than it should so he hurried to apologise. "Hey, don't be mad. I'm sorry I shouldn't have insulted you."

"It's okay," Harry mumbled after a minute, relaxing. It was very difficult to stay mad at the boy. Twisting his mouth slightly he looked questioningly at the blonde.

"Draco?"

"Yes Harry?"

"Where are we?" The question and Draco's subsequent reply led the pair into a deep conversation as
Draco started describing not only where he was but what exactly they were. Harry was stunned that Draco could do magic, more so for the fact that he wasn't punished for it whereas he was beaten for it almost daily.

It seemed surreal, but he listened intently. After a while, he shifted and settled his head against Draco's shoulder, letting himself be lulled by the boy's words. He was starting to get sleepy. When Draco didn't shove him away he sighed and murmured a thank you. It just seemed right to be in contact with the boy.

Draco gave a pleased smile and summoned a book of wizarding tales, reading his favourites to the boy until he fell asleep. Waving away the book, Draco settled down. Harry had the right idea. It was time for a rest.
"So you will raise him?" Albus asked tiredly.

The headmaster was calmer now, but it was still a far cry from his usual cheerful countenance. The three other adults, all of whom had insulted him for it at some point, sincerely wished that the man would whip out a lemon drop from wherever he hid them and offer them it with that annoying twinkling gaze.

"That's the plan," Lucius replied softly, sipping at his tea. "There's undeniable proof that he is Draco's and I think it would be best for everyone if – " Lucius broke off to glance at the door.

The others followed his gaze, listening intently. It took them a moment to realise what had stopped Lucius. Childish chatter came from just beyond.

"It's quite alright Harry. Mother and Father will not mind that you are here. Besides, I think that they would have had to let you in."

Harry presumably replied before Draco's voice came again after a pause.

"Harry, its inconceivable...um sorry I forgot. Logic dictates...oops. Harry! I'm going to have to teach you bigger words!" Draco's voice sounded slightly miffed.

"No one's going to be mad at you Harry. I am here remember. I promise I will keep you safe. However, it will be unnecessary here. Mother and Father will adore you. Now, this is the 'receiving room'."

A pause.

"Hmm, I'll have to ask. I have been in there many times and I have never received anything. Trix said that my godfather and Headmaster Dumbledore are with them though. You'll like them."

Lucius guffawed at that and even Albus managed a smile, while Severus shook his head. Narcissa on the other hand started muttering that perhaps a new etiquette teacher was in order if her son did not understand that the 'receiving room' was for guests.

A quick knock came on the door, and Lucius recovered himself enough to say enter. The door did not budge however, but after a moment Draco's voice spoke up.

"Can someone open it please?"

Curious, Narcissa waved her hand and the door opened. Draco's inability was explained immediately. Harry's arms were wrapped tightly around Draco's torso and the blonde had been given little choice except to return the embrace and pat the shorter boy's head soothingly. It was an adorable sight.

Draco looked up and gave them a rueful grin, before easing Harry away.

"Come on Harry, let's say hello!" The dark haired child shook his head furiously and squirmed behind Draco, effectively hiding himself.

The childish gesture and the implicit trust it showed that Harry had in Draco to protect him was obvious to all. Draco shook his head lightly and walked into the room, Harry following reluctantly.
The door closed behind them.

"A pleasant morning to you all," Draco greeted.

"Good morning," they replied.

"Say good morning Harry," Draco urged, trying to get Harry from behind him. Harry, clearly reluctant, allowed himself to be drawn forward, and looking at the floor, murmured, "G'morning."

They replied again, their tones friendly. Even Severus managed to keep the sharpness from his tone, which was quite a feat.

Harry was dressed in a pair of shorts and a shirt. Albus was forced to smile when he saw that the shorts - obviously Draco's - stopped only two inches from his ankles. The short-sleeved shirt fell way past his elbows, not that the child seemed to mind in the least.

What was strange though was that the child seemed to move with ease. There should have been some residual soreness from the injuries that had been tended only the night before, but the child seemed to be in no discomfort.

Narcissa approached the pair slowly and when she was a few feet away, crouched down before them, smiling gently at Harry.

"Hello my dear. How are you feeling?" She was disheartened when the child flinched and looked up wildly before turning to grasp Draco.

"Harry," she tried again. "No one will hurt you here my dear. I am sure Draco has told you this. You are safe."

"It's just my mother," Draco added, using his hand to tip Harry's face up to his. "You're safe here."

Harry's face remained drawn to his for a while before he nodded slowly. Although his hands were still fisted in Draco's shirt, he turned to Narcissa.

"I feel fine madam."

Narcissa's breath hitched as she saw his eyes for the first time, remembering her and Severus' conversation from the previous night. "Sev?" she called softly.

"Yes Cissy?"

"Look."

The longhaired woman leaned away so that Harry's face was clearly visible. Severus' grip tightened on his teacup in his shock. Encased in a face that was clearly James Potter's were a pair of vivid green eyes.

Lily's.

Severus' throat constricted as he saw them, they were a perfect replica of Lily's, down to the soulful look in their gaze. "Lily," he breathed. Harry's head shook suddenly and a frown marred his features. Lily's eyes started to dart around quickly, slightly panicked.

"Harry, what is it?" Draco asked in concern, tightening his grip.

Harry whimpered. He could not see very well. He did not know where those other voices were
coming from and it scared him. He felt extremely vulnerable, even with Draco besides him. Albus solved the mystery as one of his implanted memories rose up.

"He wears corrective lenses, they were broken."

"You can't see?" Draco asked in surprise, looking down at his small friend in concern.

His mate had been in discomfort and he had not been aware of it. Draco was filled with a sense of self-loathing.

"I can see you," came the soft reply. "Everything else is blurry, but I see you good."

The answer pleased Draco for some reason and he smiled at his little mate, loathing evaporating at the delight that knowing he held such importance with the boy.

Then something occurred to him. "Can't you heal your eyes? You did it with those...marks."

Disdain was obvious in Draco's tone as he referred to the bruises that the potions had been unable to completely fade. It marred the beauty of his mate's skin and he had not been able to mask his displeasure at the sight of them on Harry's frail form.

His displeasure had alarmed Harry and unconsciously his magic worked and healed every trace of the marks away. His actions had earned him a hug from Draco, which made him immensely happy.

Draco's question shocked the adults present. Harry had healed his wounds? That was amazing. True, Albus said that the child seemed to be able to utilise his magic, but healing required a great deal of talent and energy.

"I don't know Draco," Harry hedged. Draco's gaze hardened slightly, and he forgot about everyone else present. The only thing important to him right now was his mate.

His voice was scolding now as he spoke. "Harry James, we spoke of this. You are expected to use your magic. No one will scold you for it, especially if you are helping yourself."

Harry nibbled his lip before murmuring a quiet "I'm sorry Draco."

The said boy's face cleared immediately and he bent to kiss Harry's hair. "Quite alright. Now, I will ask again. Can you heal them?"

"Y-yes."

"Then do so. It won't do for you to be running around blindly."

"Okay." He agreed. If Draco said it was all right, then it was.

Draco released him and took a step back. All eyes were riveted on Harry as the boy's eyes closed and he inhaled deeply. A light blue magical haze started to form in front of Harry's eyes, slowly pressing itself against his closed lids. It seemed to seep right into his eyes and when they opened, his irises glowed blue before it faded, leaving his eyes their natural colour. He blinked rapidly for a few moments, even bringing his small fists up to rub at them.

"Can you see better now?" Draco inquired. Harry stared at him and nodded, but Draco just shook his head. "You said you could see me already. Can you see them?" he asked, pointing to the room's other occupants. Harry twisted and as they watched, his eyes darted about.

"I can see them," he said softly.
"Good, I'll introduce you." Draco moved around him to stand by his mother who was still crouched. "This Harry is my mother Narcissa. I have her hair see?" he pointed out, grasping a lock of his mother's hair carefully.

Harry nodded and walked forward to her. He was a lot more confident now that he could actually see whom he was around. None of them looked threatening in the least. Well the man in the corner looked a bit strict, but not overly so.

"Hello," he said again, offering her a tentative smile. "I'm Harry."

"Hello my dear. I am Narcissa Malfoy. How are you feeling?"

"Um, fine," he offered, not used to being questioned about himself. It was a new experience.

"I'm glad." Narcissa stood up and ruffled his hair lightly. Her actions mildly annoyed Draco for a moment, especially when Harry smiled at her. He dismissed it though. Harry was safe with his mother. None of those here would hurt his mate. Still... "This is my father," he said, effectively distracting Harry by moving on.

Lucius remained seated, not wanting to overwhelm him. "Hello Harry. As Draco said, I am his father. Lucius Malfoy."

Harry's gaze drifted to Draco and when he nodded, he moved cautiously to stand before him. "Hello sir."

"And this is Professor Dumbledore. He is the headmaster of Hogwarts. It's a wizarding school."

That caught Harry's attention. "You teach magic?" he asked, shyness forgotten as he ran over to the man, eyes curious. "Honest? And you don't get in trouble?"

Albus leaned forward to reply, heart lightening at the openness Harry displayed. Draco really had a positive influence on the boy. "I don't get in trouble for teaching magic; neither do the students for learning it. I'm Albus Dumbledore by the way."

"Oh, sorry. I'm Harry James Potter. Can I learn magic then?"

Albus grinned at his enthusiasm and the relief of the Malfoys and Severus, the twinkle returned to his gaze. "I'm sure that you will join us at Hogwarts soon enough young Harry."

"I can, I can come? Really?" Harry's eyes spun to find Draco. "He said I could learn magic. Can I go Draco, please?"

Draco smiled indulgently, "Of course you can go Harry. I'll be going there, so why shouldn't you?"

"Yay!" Harry said, in spite of himself. His joy was infectious and soon everyone was chuckling. It was good to see that the boy was willing to open up so soon and so readily. Perhaps the Dursleys' had not had a permanent effect on him.

"Come here Harry. You only have to meet Uncle now. He's Severus Snape, my godfather."

Harry left the headmaster's side with a last grin and stood before the rather grimly dressed man. He peered up at him openly. "I'm Harry!" He announced.

Severus quirked a brow, before dryly responding, "I know, you've said it enough."

Harry was not the least bit put off. He could tell that the man wasn't annoyed with him. Perhaps
being gruff was just his way of saying hi. His primary school teacher seemed very strict when he had met her, but she had been surprisingly nice. Maybe this man was the same.

"What's your name?"

Severus struggled not to roll his eyes at that. Hadn't Draco just said it? "I'm Severus Snape."

"Sev'us?"

"Severus?" Really, the boy hadn't questioned Albus' name, why his?

"Sev'rus?"

"Sev-er-rus," he repeated again, this time through gritted teeth. Really, he was as annoying as James, this one.

"Severus," Harry seemed to muse on the name for a moment before shaking his head. "It doesn't suit you."

Snape gaped. Lily had said the same thing to him when they had been ten. Moments before she had renamed him...

"Sevvy, I like that better. You're Uncle Sevvy!" Harry announced happily while 'Uncle Sevvy' spluttered.

That was it. Narcissa broke out into laughter, Lily's words echoing in her mind. Uncle Sevvy indeed. Albus was chuckling loudly, even as Harry approached him and said firmly. "You don't look good." Albus stifled his mirth at that and looked questioningly down at the boy.

"Pardon Harry?"

"You don't look good. There, much better!" Harry affirmed turning to run back to Draco who grasped him immediately. Albus' mouth widened when he saw that his black robes had been transfigured a bright purple. One of his favourite colours, actually. Looking up he saw Harry regarding him with a knowing look.

"Thank you," Albus said simply, and the child nodded before snuggling against Draco.

Narcissa summoned a tray for the children after that and Draco and Harry nibbled happily on scones and milk under the watchful eyes of the adults. It was an eye-opening experience observing the pair. Ever so often Harry would lean towards Draco who would reach out to him, either offering a pat, or simply to hold his hand for some moments before releasing it.

Furthermore, Harry often cast shy glances towards him, while the looks Draco sent him seemed both amused and indulgent. It was as if he was pampering Harry and having a fine time doing it. After a while, Lucius cast aMuffliato, ensuring that the children would not overhear their conversation.

The dialogue began immediately. Albus turned to Narcissa. "Is that how normal mates interact?"

Narcissa studied the pair before shaking her head lightly. "Yes and no. Harry is obviously the submissive in the relationship. Hence, he seeks out Draco for confirmation before doing things, or seeks him for comfort. However, there is nothing sexual between them in the least, which I am eternally grateful for."

Severus grunted in agreement. He really did not want to be privy to two children trying to get it on.
Could they even get it up? Highly unlikely.

Albus however had cleaner thoughts. "Why is there no attraction?"

"Their age most likely." Lucius responded this time. "I think that plays a crucial factor in this. Won't you agree Cissy?"

"I concur. That and the fact that they are bonded at so young. First of all, I'm not certain either exactly knows what sex is or if they do what desire feels like. Secondly, a veela does not rape."

"Rape?"

"Yes, veela laws dictate that sexual relationships between a veela and their mate will not occur until both have reached their maturity. Otherwise it would be considered rape and is punishable. As you know, I forced Draco's maturity—although I don't seem to sense it now. The desire to actively mate will not occur until both are the age of consent. In this case, it will fall upon Harry."

"So seventeen?"

"Precisely. Unless of course Harry is not completely human?"

"No, the Potters were completely human."

"Then seventeen."

"What would Draco do in the interim? I mean, he is older," Severus wanted to know.

"He will wait. Of course, he would be free to court Harry to his heart's content in the mean time, perhaps even go as far as the occasional groping. However, no more than your average teenagers. Nature will ensure that."

"Wait Narcissa, so you are saying that Draco is now a mature veela?" Albus questioned.

"In a sense. Hang on." Narcissa turned and used her senses to feel her son's nature, categorising it. She frowned slightly at the results. "Strange," she murmured.

"What is?" Lucius questioned, concerned for his son.

Narcissa ignored him, turning to Harry and scanning him. "Albus, you are certain that Harry is completely human?"

"Positive."

"Hmm, well that solves it." She nodded after a moments contemplation.

"Solves what?"

"Oh, forgive me. My scan shows that Draco is no longer fully matured. It has been suppressed, if you will."

"Meaning?"

"He has all of his veela senses, but his ability to utilise it has been suppressed, much like an immature veela. However, it appears that the time it will take his full powers to awaken has been decreased significantly. He will mature—naturally—several years earlier than the norm."
"You suppressed it?"

"No, it isn't possible. Harry's to blame I'm afraid."

"What?" Snape asked, shooting a glance to the giggling child.

Narcissa took a careful sip of her drink before continuing. "It's amazing really. Somehow, Harry has adapted or should I say adopted part of Draco's veela nature."

"How?"

"Cissy?"

"I don't follow."

Narcissa sighed, raising a stilling hand, analysing her son and his mate again. "Simply put, the boys exchanged part of their natures with the bonding. Highly unusual although it would explain Harry's meekness."

She cast a quick smile at Draco as he looked towards her before continuing.

"Not only did their souls merge, but so to their cores. Harry basically is now about quarter veela, while Draco's wizarding blood is a bit stronger. From what I can tell, Harry took enough veela powers from Draco that he does not have enough left to be considered mature. As far as I can see, Draco is now an adolescent veela. His powers will regain their previous strength way in advance of his seventeenth birthday though."

"Astounding?"

"Indeed" Lucius agreed.

Looking at Harry, he could see it. Albus and Severus probably could too, if they new what signs to look for. Harry's skin held a faint but noticeable shimmer to it and his hair seemed a bit fuller than it had been when the boy had first came in. Its length and all was different, the bangs flopping lower down into his eyes.

Albus leaned back into his chair, his minds racing over the complicities of magical creatures. Perhaps it was time for a refresher course in Care of Magical Creatures. At least the theory part.

"So will the boy have veela powers now?" Severus questioned.

"I suppose, I can sense a bit of allure from him, not strong enough to drive one mad by any rate. At best guess, most people will find him simply adorable. As for his looks, he most likely will resemble more closely a veela submissive. Long hair, rather delicate features and stature. Other powers may or may not emerge with time."

"Interesting. Anything else?"

"His magic may be affected. He should be a lot more powerful in some if not all disciplines."

"Fascinating," Albus breathed, fingering his transfigured robes. Already so powerful at his age, he would be a force to reckon with by the time he matured. "Wait, will his maturity age be affected?"

Narcissa nibbled her lip thoughtfully. "It might. Veela maturity is sixteen to a wizard's seventeen."

Great, Severus thought, he would have to teach a mature veela who would be without his mate since
Draco would be long gone from Hogwarts by that time. Oh the joy and wonders. But on the other hand, at least he would be able to see Lily's eyes again.
It never occurred to either Harry that a day would come when he would have to say goodbye to Draco. That day however had come. It had not sunk in when Draco's acceptance letter arrived, not even when he selected his wand at Ollivander's or ventured into the bookstore to purchase his required books. Harry had giggled and clapped excitedly while Draco spun around in his school robes with exaggerated movements, much to the consternation of their uncle. The farewell dinner had passed easily for the pair, and as Harry hugged Draco for the night, he never realised that he would not get a chance to do so.

Draco however was well aware of the fact but hid it well. A weight had settled on his heart ever since his acceptance letter had arrived. Even while he celebrated, a part of him cried as there was no letter for Harry. None would come for the next two summers, and it hurt him gravely. Even as he sent his mate of to bed, with a forced smile on his face, tears threatened.

Four months.

After tomorrow, it would be four months until he saw that rounded face of his mate, his cute smile. There would be no Harry to tickle out of bed, to hold close when the thunder struck and sent him fleeing into Draco's room. There would be no Harry to recite his lessons to, to look on in awe as Draco used his father's wand to practice an incantation with. No one for him to gape at when his younger mate repeated the same incantation and the correct effects happened. Without a wand.

He had been so proud that first day when it had happened. While most people could manage a small amount of wandless magic, it was usually limited. His parents could do simple things like move objects or people (or prevent them from escaping in the case of Harry). He himself could only make an object shake at this point. But Harry, Harry's powers seemed to be limitless when it came to wandless magic.

When Grandpa Albus, as Harry called the man had been summoned, he to had been astonished to see every book in the library floating around, and Harry grinning at him calling, "Look Grandpa, look!" More astonishing was the fact that Harry had reversed the spell once the headmaster had shown him how to.

How many of those surprises would he miss out of while he was settled in Hogwarts learning to be a wizard? It didn't seem to be as important now as it had been when he was younger. When Narcissa entered his bedroom hours later to caress her son's forehead for the last time, she almost cried when she saw the tears streaming down her son's face even in his sleep.
"Now that we have that covered, I have some rather interesting news in terms of the incoming first years." Headmaster Dumbledore paused, allowing his eyes to drift over his staff members, settling briefly on Severus Snape who nodded almost imperceptibly.

"For the first time in almost twenty years, we have a veela joining our family." He allowed a moment for the murmuring to break out before Professor Flitwick motioned to speak.

"How can you be certain Albus? Are both the child's parents veela?"

"Good question Filius. The boy's mother is full veela. Due to special circumstances, the boy not only came into part of his inheritance early, but also happened upon his mate many years ago."

Once more whispers broke out while Severus simply rolled his eyes. He, Albus and the Malfoys had had a long discussion concerning Draco a few days ago and all had agreed that it was best that the staff members were informed.

"The student in question is Draco Lucius Malfoy, son of as you may have realised, Lucius Malfoy. Now as you can see, this is a very unique situation. Perhaps Silvanus will care to explain further."

Professor Kettleburn, Care of the Magical Creatures spoke up. "Most veela come into maturity at the age of seventeen. For one to do so before that is extremely rare and speaks of great power. Furthermore, to become bonded at such a young age is remarkable. I suppose that the mate will be joining him here?"

Dumbledore shook his head. "The mate in question is not scheduled to appear here for two more years."

"Then why is the veela here?" Kettleburn asked bluntly. "Albus, a veela and their mate are not to be separated for any length of time. It will be detrimental to both." A hush followed his words. "Surely the mother spoke of this?"

"She did. No solution could be found. A situation like theirs has never existed before. Checks with the veela court confirmed this. The best the parents could hope for is that with them being together for so long they would not suffer to much during their times of separation.

Professor McGonagall, hands folded provided her input at that point. "Can the veela not be given permission to leave on weekends? Won't that sustain the bonds?"

"That would do more harm than good Minerva," Kettleburn pointed out. "The child would do nothing except go through the week waiting for those two days. On the Monday most likely he would be in a state of depression, by Wednesday pining. Week after week."

It was a dreadful scenario.

"As you all can see, there is little we can do except prepare ourselves and the students to deal with a separated veela. Now, Mr. Malfoy is the godson of Severus. He will explain to us just what we can expect from our new student."

Severus sighed but stood. "On the occasions when Draco has been away from his mate, he first grew quiet, almost moping. It grows worse from there." Severus went on to explain what happened the first time Lucius and Narcissa had tried to separate the pair. Although he did not mention Harry, the reaction of his 'second' godson entered his mind as he explained Draco's.
Harry had been about seven when Lucius decided to carry Draco with him on one of his business ventures. The trip had taken the majority of the day, but it had been one of the most trying experiences he had had with his son.

Draco had been fine at first, expressing his usual excitement. However, within half an hour, he started mentioning Harry, wondering how he was doing with his lessons. He had only started history the week before. As time passed, Draco’s mood changed, growing increasingly snide until Lucius was forced to return them to the manor.

Harry on the other hand had moved from cheerful, to quiet, to depressed. By the time they had flooed in, he had been crying for almost an hour, upsetting Narcissa greatly as nothing she did comforted him. The instant they were back, the sobbing child had flung himself into Draco’s arms, clinging to him desperately while Draco crooned, his foul mood disappearing immediately.

"They were apart for approximately seven hours that day." He sat back down and waited for the other teachers to speak.

It was Hufflepuff’s Pomona Sprout who expressed what they were all thinking, "If that is his reaction to only seven hours, will we survive the two years it takes for his mate to arrive?"

There was no answer for that.

* *

September 1st 1991

Malfour Manor.

6:30 am.

"I don't want Harry at the station," Draco said as way of greeting as he strode into the breakfast room. His black school robes were over his hand. Proficient as always, he was already dressed in his uniform. He cut quite a picture in his long dark trousers, white shirt with a jumper over it. His tie was black however. Once he had been sorted, it would change into the house colours of whatever house he had been sorted into. Which wasn't a mystery considering his heritage. He was almost assured a place in Slytherin.

His parents did not bother scolding his lack of manners, shocked by his words. "Why Draco?"

Narcissa finally managed.

Draco's eyes were strangely glistening as he watched her. "I don't want him there. I can't...I can't!" How could explain it. He didn't want Harry there, because if he was, he would never make it unto the train. How could he board it, knowing that the small hand that would inevitably be on his would not follow him on? That he would have to turn around and watch through glass windows as that figure became naught but a speck as he moved from him. He couldn't, he couldn't have Harry there, he just couldn't.

He didn't realise that tears had started pouring from his cheeks until he was pulled into his parents' embrace, both of them cradling him as his tears turned into sobs. How could he leave his precious behind? It was wrong. Harry needed him here, not miles away in a blasted castle.

He needed Harry in his arms, just as much as Harry needed him to protect him, to catch him when he stumbled, to press a kiss to a scabbed knee moments before Harry himself healed it. Harry never healed himself unless Draco was there to whisper encouragement. How could Harry live without him, how would he himself survive without that dark-haired little child?
In the end, Lucius and Narcissa allowed Draco to leave without Harry. Narcissa said her goodbyes at
the manor and watched sadly as Lucius and her boy disapparated away, taking him away until
Christmas. They had delayed as much as they could, hoping that Harry would awaken and come
down, but when it was obvious that Draco would be late if they waited any longer, the pair left.

Narcissa walked with a heavy heart up the winding stairs, until she reached Harry's bedroom. When
her knock received no answer, she eased the door open. Harry was very much awake, sitting with
his knees drawn up under his chin. His head turned slowly towards her as she neared, and Narcissa's
heart clenched painfully when she saw the dull gaze in Harry's eyes and the silent tears that poured
relentlessly down his cheeks.

**September 1st, 7:00 am**

Harry's eyes flung open with delight. It was morning. That could only mean one thing. Draco was
going to Hogwarts! Harry grinned at the thought. Draco had been so excited since his birthday and
days later the letter arrived. Harry had been happy for him since. His Draco was going to Grandpa
Albus' school. He was going to learn all sorts of things.

He...

Wait.

He, not We.

The sudden realisation made an unpleasant shiver make its way down his spine.

Draco had gotten a letter.

Draco had bought the supplies.

Draco had gotten a wand.

Draco had, not Harry.

Draco was going to Hogwarts.

Not Harry.

Why hadn't he realised it before?

But then why would he? He and Draco were inseparable. They were never apart and it wouldn't
have been the first time somebody addressed a letter to Draco and was referring to Harry as well.
Take that birthday invitation from Pansy. It clearly stated Draco's name, but the actual invite was for
them both. It was a bit of a joke among family and friends. Where there was Draco there was Harry.
Where there was Harry, Draco was not far behind. But this was something else entirely and he had
not comprehended it until now.

That was why Draco had hugged him so tight the night before, clutching him so tight that it had been
a bit difficult to breathe. Why Draco had insisted on reading every last one of Harry's favourite
stories to him, why his voice had seemed so shaky at certain points. It even explained why Draco
shook him awake at some points to keep reading. Draco had known that he was leaving. That had
been his way of saying goodbye. Draco's last words drifted to him.

"I love you Harry James. Don't forget that. You're mine. I love you. Goodbye."

Draco's voice had quivered at that point, his tone almost desperate and Harry had felt a drop of moisture land on his cheek as Draco pressed a kiss to his cheek. But he had been too far gone in sleep's drift to do anything more than mumble a reply before sleeping.

He knew now that Draco wouldn't be coming into the room to awaken him even though only yesterday they had sat imagining what Hogwart's Express looked like. Draco wouldn't be there to praise him for waking himself up for once. Draco wouldn't be there. Draco –

Harry broke down crying.

Time passed and the clock struck ten. His broken sobs had waned into ragged weeping. Eventually the tears poured unnoticed while Harry's heart slowly broke apart.

Ten o clock.

The time they had planned to leave. Draco was gone. Gone off to Hogwarts.

And Harry was here, all alone.

The door creaked open, and Harry's heart gave a small twitch. No one else ventured into his room in the mornings. Only Draco. His head turned, hoping beyond hope to see his blonde partner standing there with that quirky smile on his face. Maybe Draco had stayed.

No. It was only Narcissa.

The tears started falling a little faster as she neared and as she sat besides him, he swallowed deeply and whispered one question. "He- he's gone?"

"Yes."

That was it. A wail ripped itself from Harry's chest, filling the room with its mournful sound. Narcissa could do little else but pull the child to her, tearing up even as she tried to comfort her son's broken-hearted mate.
Chapter 9

7:00pm

September 14th 1991.

Headmaster's office,

Hogwarts.

Fawkes emitted a shrill cry. Albus' head spun to the floo network and sure enough moments later a head appeared. Lucius Malfoy's to be precise. "Albus, can I come through?"

"Of course Lucius," Albus said quickly, frowning at the harried expression on the normally calm man's face. Even as Malfoy stepped through, his office door burst open to admit a worried looking Severus.

"Albus – oh, hello Luc."

"Hello."

Albus' gaze drifted from one face to the next, beckoning them both to sit. He already had a notion of what both men were here to say.

"What is it?" he asked simply. The men glanced at each other before Severus spoke.

"I'm glad you're here Luc. This does concern you. Draco...isn't settling in I'm afraid. He's getting worse not better." Albus nodded sadly at this. Hogwarts life was not being kind to the separated veela.

The young Malfoy wore an almost permanent scowl on his face. Only his extensive training in manners and decorum prevented him from biting off the heads of those around him, but that did not mean that they escaped his fiery tongue. Albus had been forced to explain Draco's situation to the entire school on his third day there. It was the only way to save off the complaints students made about the teachers' refusal to berate the boy for his downright mean demeanour.

Dumbledore's explanation had placated them all; indeed their antagonism towards the child had turned into respect. Especially after Kettleburn explained to each one of his classes the entire history about veela and their habits. By the end of the week, everyone was casting sympathetic glances to the blonde boy. Quite a few had even written to their parents and Albus had to respond to a number of angry parents, all wishing to know why he was allowing a veela to be tormented in such a way.

Lucius' face fell as Severus stopped talking. "That's why I'm here. Harry...Harry is in a terrible shape. He barely speaks anymore and almost always cries. In the beginning, he always could be found in Draco's bedroom. Now he never leaves his own unless we force him. Tutoring him is almost impossible. He just sits there. Narcissa's afraid that he'll just pine away. We cannot stand it anymore. Everyday it gets worse. I'm here for Draco."

Albus' eyes were grave. "Is there no other way?"

"I'm afraid not. Draco will have to be home-schooled. Perhaps Hogwarts can be reconsidered when they can both attend together."
Albus' closed his eyes and thought quickly. It came to him in an instant. "They need to go to school together."

"That's what I said."

"No, that's the solution!"

"What?" both men asked in unison, confused by the headmaster's sudden excitement. But Albus didn't answer, instead reaching for and throwing a handful of floo into the fireplace. When it glowed green, he thrust his head into it.

"Minerva!" he called, "Arrange an emergency staff meeting." Without waiting for a response he turned to Severus. "I assume you've put Draco in your quarters? Good. Today is Thursday. Tomorrow is a light day for the first years anyways. Take Lucius with you and I will open up your floo network. Carry him home. Report back here by eight o clock."

"What is this about Albus?" Lucius asked with a quirked brow.

"The solution to our little problem of course. They need to be together. Well they will be. Go on now, trust Grandpa Albus," he quipped, laughing lightly at the title Harry had given him.

Both men shrugged but left, neither quite entirely sure what was going on behind those twinkling eyes.

*

7:15 pm

September 14th

Malfoy Manor.

Draco came through the fireplace first, a thunderous expression on his face. He had been snappish when his father arrived in Severus' quarters, growling when his father had attempted to hug him. Lucius did not take it to heart though; well aware of what bugged his son.

Quietly explaining why he was there only served to lessen Draco's murderous expression into the thunderous one he now bore. His only response to his father had been. "I want Harry. NOW."

Severus had responded by throwing the floo powder immediately. It would not do well for Draco to feel as if they were denying him access to his mate.

Narcissa held Harry's morose form on her lap, assuring the boy that his Draco would be there soon. It was the only thing that had slowed the tears on his face, the promise of seeing his mate. Harry had looked up at her with disbelieving eyes when she had first told him, and it was obvious that he still did not believe her. But at least now he allowed her to hold him close.

As the flames suddenly roared, Draco sauntered through, his eyes already looking around. Harry had twisted at the sound and as such their gazes met.

That was it.

With a joyous wail, Harry was off Narcissa's lap and was flinging himself at Draco. Draco reached him halfway and swept him off his feet, spinning him around in relief. The thunderous expression was already ancient history. The tears that rained down little Harry's face was now of joy not sorrow and he buried his head against Draco's chest when Draco returned him to his feet. Through his sobs,
the adults could clearly differentiate the words, "Please don't leave." "Stay with me." "Missed you."

Draco simply repeated the phrase "I'm here now," continuously like a mantra. When Harry finally drifted into silence, simply lying limply against Draco, the blonde's eyes rose and settled on his parents and uncle. "I'm not leaving him ever again." All they could do was nod in the face of that declaration, watching quietly as Draco twisted and urged Harry to jump up on his back for a 'piggyback' ride to their room. With nary a goodnight, the pair was gone.

Narcissa spun to them at once, "You have brought his things?"

"Actually no darling. Albus it seems has a plan although he has seen it fit not to clue us into as yet."

"Speaking of which," Severus broke in, standing, "I have to get back for the meeting. Shall I floo back afterwards?"

"Please do. I want to know what exactly 'Grandpa Albus' has planned."

"I will."

*

8:00 pm

September 14th

Hogwarts Staff Room

"Ah Severus, you are just in time," Albus greeted when Snape strode into the room nodding his head in greeting. "How has young Malfoy settled?"

"There is a vast improvement already. I believe that they should both be back to their usual selves by this time tomorrow."

"Excellent, excellent." He turned to the other teachers. "As you can discern we are back here to discuss young Malfoy. His father came to me this evening ready to withdraw him from the school."

A small murmur rose at that.

"I knew this would happen," Kettleburn declared. "That boy was drowning in emotions due to the withdrawal. Let me guess, his mate was no better off?"

"Rightly so. Minerva, what can you tell me of the boy's academia so far?"

Being the Deputy-Headmistress, it was the transfiguration professor's job to stay on top of all student records. "Mr. Malfoy is at the head of his year by all appearances. The grades for his homework assignments areexceptional and I honestly would expect superb grades in all areas at mid-terms."

"So in spite of his issues the boy excels. It would be a shame to lose such a brilliant mind. Imagine his performance should he be in top form." They all murmured there agreement. "This brings me to this point. The reason why Mr. Malfoy cannot remain at Hogwarts is that is his mate is not present. Severus!"

"Yes Headmaster?"

"What can you tell us of the mate?"

Snape raised a questioning eyebrow before shrugging. "I have tutored the boy since he joined the
Malfoy home. Like Mr. Malfoy, the boy shows remarkable prowess academic wise. As of this summer, he matched Mr. Malfoy in knowledge. The child is nine, but I believe that it was around the beginning of this year that he joined in his older mate's classes full time. I taught him potions. In the last exam he and Mr. Malfoy took together," he paused for emphasis. "He beat him by around 3 percent."

That statement was met by stunned looks, even Albus was suitably impressed. "I see. Thank you."

"Albus," Professor Flitwick began, "Are you carrying this where I think you are?"

Albus smirked at him. "If you think that I am suggesting that Mr. Malfoy's mate, who incidentally is Harry Potter, should join us here at Hogwarts, then yes, I am."

A pause and then chaos erupted.

"Harry Potter?"

"The Harry Potter?"

"I thought he was with muggles."

"He is the mate of a Malfoy?"

Albus held his hand for silence. "Yes, he is the boy-who-lived. He has been in the care of the Malfoy's since he was five due to circumstances. He is indeed Draco Malfoy's mate. That has been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt."

"Albus, what is his magical potential? Intelligence aside, will it be right to allow the boy into here if his magic is not sufficiently matured yet?"

"Clever as always Minerva. Severus?"

Snape growled, realising that Dumbledore was using his knowledge of the boy to help gain him admittance. Scowling he answered, "The boy has a great deal of power. He has good control over it, better than a lot of the dunder-heads here." He couldn't resist throwing it in. "There has never been 'accidental magic' with Potter. He knows precisely how to do it to his benefit."

"Thank you. Despite the validity of Severus' words, I know that you would like to see a sample of it yourselves before deciding if it would be safe to allow the boy into classes. If it is agreeable and you all do not mind the inconvenience, we can arrange to have Saturday be a day of 'mock classes' for forty five minutes each for those of you who will potentially have him as a student this year. Those who don't can observe."

"That's seems fair."

"Very well. I will arrange it. If there is anything else? Ah, yes Severus."

"As I am already positive that the brat will be joining us on Monday, I raise the issue of rooms."

"Explain please."

"Draco is a snake. Potter, as far as I can tell, is a lion through and through despite growing up in a house of snakes. With Harry entering first year, he and Draco will share - according to the current timetable, Transfigurations, Potions, Charms and Defence. They will have each other for between two to four hours a day class wise."
"That is not an issue as until early this year they had tutoring at different times and are thus accustomed. My only suggestion here is to ensure that they are always partnered or seated together. The point I raise is more house based. The boys will need to spend time together apart from lessons, bonding if you will.

"Should Harry be sorted into Ravenclaw or by a wide stretch Slytherin, this would be an unnecessary point. It is not that unusual to find the odd eagle in the snakes den. However, knowing the brat, he will be lion and the rivalry between the lions and snakes is legendary as you very well know."

Severus failed to notice the light chuckles part of his statement meant as he unconsciously called Harry 'brat'. "Not even Draco's protection will spare his mate from the wrath of the snakes and I doubt the lions would tolerate a snake in their midst."

"I always knew not discouraging the house rivalry would bite us in the arse," Minerva muttered.

"You raise a valid point. Moreover, when Mr. Malfoy reached maturity, he would most likely react...badly to having his mate surrounded by other males, all of whom would be older and thus stronger than him."

"My point exactly."

"Albus, the school has dormitories for married students or those with a similar problem right?"

"Indeed we do. Thank you Filius. That is a solution. The boys' could have a separate dormitory..."

"Two bedrooms," Severus broke in.

"Two bedrooms," Dumbledore concurred. "Complete with a bathroom and common room. I assume between you and Minerva, Severus, you can imprint on the lions and snakes the importance of...ending the rivalry, if only for the sake of their fellow mates."

"The lions will always stand by there own."

"As do the snakes."

"Good."

"You know Albus," Professor Vector said with a slight smile, "It seems as if the boy has already been accepted here."

Albus only smiled.

* *

10:39 pm
September 15th
Malfoy Manor.

"I see nothing wrong with this. Do you Lucius?"

"No. Harry would manage. And he'll have Draco behind him."

"So then it's agreed. You, along with Draco and Harry will have to be in Hogwarts on Saturday for
"I'll leave that for you darling."
"Very well. I will see you both on Saturday."
"Safe journey Sev."
"Goodbye Sev. Thank you."
"Good night."

8:30pm
September 16th
Harry's Room.

"Do you really think I'll do good Draco?" Harry whispered, clutching his wand to his chest. Draco chuckled and eased it from his grip, setting it on his bedside cabinet.

"Well you won't if you don't sleep soon Harry," he teased, pushing him so that he lay back on the bed.
"Dray?"
"Yes Harry?"
"If I get in, can we bring the storybook?"

Draco nodded as he passed his hand over his mate's eyelids, urging them to shut. "And I'll read it nightly."
"Good. Will you be mad if I'm not a snake?"

"Harry James, I will be proud of you whether you are a little nestling or a little cub. I might just take to calling you that," he teased.
"Only you..."
"Only me, I promise cub. Now, keep those eyes closed. Let me tell you about..."

5:00pm
September 17th
Hogwarts.

To say the Hogwarts' professors were impressed was an understatement. The nine year old listened intently to their every word, asked pertinent questions and could even answer a few that were well above first year knowledge (courtesy of Severus of course). The only fault they could fine was that
The child's attention span was a bit below the norm, although it was easily excusable because of his age. Besides, it only took a slight change in one's tone to completely regain his attention. It was something the teachers could easily accommodate.

The practical parts of the lessons proved equally successful. Professor Sprout actually cheered when Harry was able to dodge the grasping vines of one of the plants and retrieved a seed in less time than all the other first years save Draco.

He got the Wingardium Leviosa charm right on the first try (levitating not only the feather but the desk as well), then grinned cheekily at Professor before righting it with a quick wave of his hand. That stunned all those who were secretly watching. While wandless magic was not uncommon by any stretch, the ease with which he did it was astonishing. At the request of Flitwick, he put aside his wand and they were all riveted as he proceeded to do the rest of the practical wandless, simply mimicking the wand movements with his hand.

The decisive factor came however when he entered the Transfiguration classroom, waving goodbye to Draco. Once he had seated himself, Professor McGonagall did the theory part of her planned lesson. Then in a move that always served to amaze new students, she transformed herself into the tabby cat that was her animagus form. Harry's reaction however was not the same. Whereas all the other students over the years had openly gaped or applauded, Harry simply frowned and asked how she had done it.

Intrigued, she explained. Never before had a student asked her how she accomplished it. It was something that his parents would have done. She even indulged the boy when he asked for permission to attempt, while wondering if she should cast a mild illusion charm so that the child would not be too disappointed.

To her and all the observers' amazement, Harry accomplished what most other wizards could not. After closing his eyes and concentrating for a few moments, Harry disappeared and a green-eyed black kitten sat mewing happily in his stead.

Needless to say, Harry gained immediate admittance.

It was a purring kitten that left the classroom, scratching happily at his mate's shoe until he was picked up. "Harry?" Draco questioned, scooping up the kitten. Harry mewed happily and licked Draco's thumb with a rough tongue. Draco laughed and said, "Maybe I should call you kitten instead of cub."

"Mr. Malfoy, can you bring Harry back in here?"

"Yes Professor," Draco replied, carrying his mate back in. "Is he in trouble?"

"Not in the least. I just thought he would like to know how to change back."

Draco laughed at that, a merry sound. A minute later, he had his arms full of his mate in his right form. The headmaster entered then with the Malfoys and Snape.

"Grandpa Albus!" Harry cried, running to him, laughing when he was scooped up. "I was a kitten!"

"We saw Harry. Although I'm afraid you will have to call me Professor or sir unless we're alone or at home now." Albus pointed out, settling the child back on his feet.

"Why Grandpa?"

"Is that really necessary Albus?" the transfiguration Professor interrupted, from her desk. Albus had
explained everything to her the night before. "There's nothing in the rules saying that a student cannot call family by other names. And you are essentially family. Besides I believe that Mr. Malfoy refers to you as Uncle Severus, Professor Snape."

"I saw no need to correct it," Severus said simply.

"I don't want him to be troubled by remarks about favouritism. Professor is different from headmaster."

"As if letting a nine year old in won't seem as such?" Severus pointed out dryly. "Let the child be Albus."

"Very well. Grandpa Albus it is!"

"Thanks Grandpa."

Severus moved to Harry and bent down to look down at his 'brat'. "Albus does have a point though Harry. You will have to work as hard, if not harder than the other students to prove yourself. Draco is at the top of your year. I expect you to reach his standard."

"Yes Uncle Sevvy."

Severus found himself blushing at the startled sound Minerva made. "That is Professor Snape to you," he growled.

Harry giggled. "Nope, if he's still Grandpa Albus, then you're still Uncle Sevvy. I told you, it fits."

Draco decided to interrupt the potential argument. "I agree with Uncle Sev, I expect you to meet if not pass me Harry." Draco meant it. He would be extremely proud if Harry surpassed him. It would just prove just how spectacular his mate truly was.

"If Harry's performance proved anything, that will not be a difficult task." Professor McGonagall added. "Allow me to be the first to welcome you to Hogwarts Harry."

"Thank you!"

Events moved fast after that. Harry and his family said goodbye to the transfiguration professor and went to the headmaster's office. Harry was duly impressed by the sorting hat who even reprised his song for the child before declaring the child a lion. They all clapped while Draco laughed and said, "Now I'll have to decide whether to call you cub or kitten," to which Harry pouted and declared that either option was fine.

Albus himself guided them to their new dorm room which was further along the corridor that Severus' quarters were. That way he could keep an eye on them. Trix had transported over their belongings and it had only taken a snap from Albus to have them packed away. The boys' settled on a password before they left the rooms and from there the castle. They would return on the Monday where Harry would be introduced, not only as a new student, but also as Draco's mate.
Chapter 10

"Relax little lion," Draco murmured soothingly as he felt his mate's small hand tighten its grip on his wrist. Looking down he met Harry's nervous green eyes. Harry's voice was little more than a whisper when he spoke up.

"What if they don't like me?"

The blonde-haired boy had to force himself not to smile at the statement. Really, his little one's mood changed so easily. Only an hour before he had been chiding the child not to wolf down his breakfast back at the manor. Harry had only turned to him with his eyes bright and sparkling as he whined, "But Dra~co, we're not leaving till breakfast is done. Hurry up. I wanna go now!"

The Malfoys had shaken their heads at the little boy's antics while their son frowned slightly and scolded him about his grammar. "Harry James, do not mince your words together like that. It is 'until' not 'till' and 'want to', not 'wanna'." The boy had subsided a bit after that, but a minute later was back at it.

His excitement had faded the minute he and Draco were met in the entrance hall by Severus who stated that they had to stand before the school to be introduced. The veela had not been too pleased to hear that. He did not want all those eyes fixated on Harry.

His little lion was easily intimidated under immense scrutiny. He could only hope that with him by his side Harry would remember all his graces and not hide behind him as he was prone to do when scared. Not that he minded it in the least; he enjoyed knowing that Harry trusted him to protect him. He just did not want Harry to seem weak.

Not everyone at Hogwarts was of good character, and one as young and innocent as his little Harry could easily be targeted. Draco could not be at his side at all times, no matter how much he desired it.

His thoughts were not reflected on his face though when he bent to reassure the boy "Harry, just be yourself and you will do fine."

The answer did not completely placate Harry though. "Promise?"

"I promise. They will like you."

"Okay Draco. I believe you."

The headmaster's voice drifted through the closed doors then and they listened to what it was he told the school.

"As you know, we have a first year veela with us. Unfortunately, the last two weeks have been extremely unpleasant for the lad without the presence of his mate. Towards the end of last week, it became clear that he would have to leave the school due to the separation.

"Fortunately, it was brought to our attention that the mate in question, while quite young is a bit of a prodigy. Over the weekend, the child was tested and passed all the required qualifications. As such, he has been admitted into the school as a full-time student and will be joining the first years as a Gryffindor."

Harry whimpered as loud chatter rose at the headmaster's words, but quieted when Draco patted his head comfortingly. He would have preferred him to have run his fingers through his locks as he was
prone to do. It was incredibly soothing. However, it was not possible as the veela had pulled his dark hair up and out of his way.

Harry's hair was quite long now, reaching just past his mid-back when loose. It had started to grow exponentially a few weeks after he had settled into the manor. It was one of those 'side effects' of being a veela's mate. Narcissa had offered numerous times to cut it for him, but he had refused, shyly offering that he loved when Draco sat him down to brush it. She had relented after that. Who could resist such an adorable child with the most appealing eyes?

"I have one more important issue to address before I introduce the pair. Mr. Malfoy's mate is known to many of you. He is most commonly referred to in the wizarding world as the boy-who-lived. Settle down please...thank you.

"Yes, he is Harry Potter. However, I will ask of you to give him the respect and care you give to your fellow students. Although he is well aware of what he accomplished as a mere babe, he has been shielded from the majority of the wizarding world. He was raised as far as possible to be a regular child. I am certain that neither he nor his veela would react well to him being fawned over.

"You have all learnt about the relationships between veela and their mates. I ask you to be mindful of it whenever interacting with the child. Now, putting that aside, let me reintroduce you to Mr. Malfoy and his mate, Harry."

That was all the warning they were given before the doors creaked open and Harry got his first look at the Hogwarts students. He had been in the Great Hall over the weekend, but it looked completely different now when filled with so much people.

The four elongated house tables were filled with black-robed people all craning their necks to get a view of him. He would have run for cover had his eyes not settled then on the encouraging ones of his Grandpa and Draco who now held his hand in a firm grip.

As he walked besides him to the head table, he was privy to a few hushed whispers.

"He's so small."

"He's adorable!"

The latter had a furious blush working its way onto his cheeks while Draco just growled as the words reached his ears. He did not react other than that though, continuing his walk to the head table.

As had been expected, his and Harry's bond did not completely follow the norm.

When his parents had first mated, many a witch or wizard had been attacked by Narcissa for even glancing at Lucius the wrong way. Draco's reactions were (thankfully) less severe and as such, he could ignore the sentiments that were now being seconded by witches throughout the hall, feeling little more than mild annoyance.

When they reached to the front of the hall, they stood at the headmaster's side. He asked them to introduce or in Draco's case, reintroduce themselves. Draco nodded and began in an eloquent tone as he had been taught.

"Thank you headmaster. Firstly, I must apologize to you all for my less than gentlemanly behaviour the past few weeks. I was less than complete for a lack of a better term." His gaze drifted towards Harry at that and a few 'Awws' could be heard.

Girls, he thought, resisting the urge to roll his eyes at their actions.
"Unless I perceive any threat to my mate, that less than pleasant side of me should remain dormant. I thank the headmaster for his kind words and I hope that you heed them."

A brief silence fell at that. Draco's voice had hardened a bit towards the end and only a few people did not get the veiled threat that they contained. Certain that his message had been received, he put on a pleasant smile as he indicated to Harry. "I'll let my mate introduce himself now. Harry?"

The said child, who had been shyly regarding the Hall through his long bangs now peeped at Draco and when he nodded, turned to them. "Hello," he said simply, "I'm Harry". His ringing voice carrying through the hall. Warm laughter broke out at that, followed by applause.

It was quite funny the way Harry had greeted them. They had expected a speech as eloquent as Draco's, assuming that any mate of the aristocratic blond would be as refined as him. Apparently it was not so.

Harry did not carry himself with the same easy grace that the older boy did. His emotions were laid plain for all to see. He was small, even for his age and his reliance on Draco was obvious to all. It was seen in the way that he held the older boy's hand or peeked up at him for permission before doing things.

Albus thanked them and indicated that they could leave his side and join their classmates so that the meal could begin. Draco nodded while Harry offered a small smile. Although food appeared on the tables, none of the students moved to begin eating, eyes still fixed on the couple.

Draco had moved to join the Slytherins after pointing Harry to his table. Harry had shaken his head, adamant that he did not want to leave Draco's side. Harry's tone was firm and was the one he used when he was determined to get his way on something.

Draco ran a hand through his hair as he thought quickly. Harry had been told that since he and Draco were in different houses, they would have to take their meals apart. He had been passive at the time but apparently the attention focussed on him had put a strain and he wanted the comfort that Draco afforded.

Draco was not entirely certain as to what to do. It would not take much more for Harry to burst into tears or throw one on his rare tantrums. Neither action was appropriate at the moment. The only way to placate Harry at this point would be to let him have his way.

He glanced at his godfather, then to Gryffindor's housemistress, knowing that they had heard Harry's words. Minerva nodded while Severus waved his hand after sending a pointed and warning look to the Slytherins.

"Very well Harry. You may sit with me for now." Harry's mood alleviated immediately and he followed quite happily to the snakes' table, oblivious to the stunned looks they were receiving. A lion with the snakes? That was something new. There were a few outcries from the lions but they were quickly quelled by the scattering glare their housemistress levelled at them.

Draco sat besides a few of the other first years, drawing Harry close to his side. After greeting them politely, he reached for the pitcher of milk and poured Harry a glassful, handing it to him. Harry pouted but started guzzling on it, relenting under Draco's gaze. He was not fond of milk, but the Malfoys insisted that he needed to drink at least a glassful a day.

Through they had had breakfast at home, it would not do Harry wrong to have a bit more, Draco thought. Hogwarts' schedule ran differently from that at Malfoy Manor. There was no snack time and he refused to have Harry hungry before lunch. As such, he reached for a slice of toast and deftly
sliced it in half and slathered it with marmalade before setting it on Harry's plate. Once Harry started nibbling on it, he poured himself some pumpkin juice and joined in a conversation with second year Marcus Flint.

Around a bit of toast Harry perused the students around him, not as shy now as their attention was not on him. He was familiar with quite a few of them. Many were Draco's friends or had been at the manor at some point with their parents. Some he even knew by name.

Sitting across from him was Blaise who was winking mischievously at him. He giggled at the gesture. Blaise was Draco's best friend and had been at the manor often during the years. Next to Blaise was a burly boy that for some reason was only referred to as Crabbe. Harry didn't much like him or Goyle. They were friends of Draco however, so Harry had always strove to be polite to them.

Further along the table his eyes met Pansy Parkinson who sneered openly at him. It took a lot of willpower not to stick his tongue out at her. He did not like her and unlike Crabbe and Goyle openly showed it. The girl had always been mean to him although he had yet to understand why.

It took him a few moments to notice that the person on his left was speaking to him. "Huh?" he asked, turning to the girl. It took him a moment to place her face but when he did he smiled. "Millicent!" Other than Blaise, she was the only other one among Draco's friends whom he truly liked. She was always pleasant to him and even played with him.

The girl chuckled. "Yes Harry. It is a pleasure to have you here. I didn't expect you to be at Hogwarts so soon."

"Well yeah," he said, swinging his legs under the table. "Will you still play with me?"

"Perhaps we can play sometime," she lowered her voice to a conspiratorial tone. "I do believe I have some exploding snap."

"Yay! We'll play soon?" he asked excitedly, almost knocking down his half-drunk milk. He was not aware of the smiles and fond looks his actions garnered from a lot of the students.

"We can, that is, if its okay with you Draco?" She directed the question to the blonde who had turned to see what had caused Harry's exuberant outburst.

"I'm sure Harry would enjoy that Millicent," Draco said. "Finish your milk Harry."

"Aww," Harry pouted, but obediently reached for the glass, chugging it down quickly.

"Manners Harry," Draco chided softly, passing a napkin for him to wipe away his milk moustache.

"Thank you." Harry used it quickly before engaging Millicent once more, discussing when they could play.

Eventually Draco excused them, citing that their rooms was a lot further away than the Slytherin quarters and they both still needed to collect their books. His statement drew some notice from a couple of people, namely Parkinson.

"Drakey," she began in a surprised tone, "Surely you don't mean that you aren't with us in the den now?"

"I'm afraid so Pansy. Harry and I have separate rooms."

"Is that necessary? Why do you have to be with him all the time?"
"He's my mate?" Draco stated, his tone clearly indicating that he thought the answer obvious.

"I know that," she snapped, before catching herself and reassuming her 'pleasant' look. "However, if you spend all your time with the lion, you'll forget who you really are."

Draco sighed, deciding to cut off the girl before they attracted too much attention. Really, even after all this time the girl still acted as if she had a claim on him. "This really has nothing to do with you Pansy. Come along Harry."

Harry waved goodbye to Millicent and then Blaise before following Draco out the Hall. Before he could ask Draco about Pansy, they were intercepted by the transfiguration teacher. "Good morning boys."

"Good morning Professor."

"Hello ma'am."

"Here is your timetable Harry," she began, handing the boy a rolled parchment. "Now, I have to have a quick word with you Harry."

"Okay ma'am," he replied, curious.

"Harry, I know you want to be with Draco as much as possible, but you will have to make friends with your own house. Only half of your classes are with Slytherin remember. You wouldn't want to be lonely for the rest would you?"

Harry shifted uncomfortably at that. "I don't need friends. I have Draco."

The veela motioned to intervene and raised Harry's face to his. "You don't mean that Harry. I have friends. Remember Blaise, Millicent?"

"Yes," Harry allowed, albeit a bit reluctantly.

"You like them and get along with them but they really aren't your friends, right?"

"I guess not."

"Right, you will have to make friends of your own. As much as I want you with me, you are a lion and as such will need to be with them."

"I can't sit with you no more?" He asked alarmed.

"No, no, no," Draco said quickly.

The professor spoke again. "Harry, you are welcome to sit with Draco whenever you need to. You just need to be with the lions sometimes too okay? However, you do not have to do so before you make friends with a couple of them or are comfortable being away from Draco. I have arranged for you to meet with Gryffindor after dinner. That way you'll get to know them."

"Is that acceptable Harry James?" Draco questioned.

"Yes it is. Thank you ma'am."

"That's all I ask," Minerva said, before allowing them to continue on their way.

A check with the timetable showed that they shared all their classes that day. That was a bit of a
relief. They had Charms first followed by Defense. After gathering the necessary books they went to their first class of the day.

They were among the first to arrive to the classroom. The Professor cheerfully urged them to sit wherever Harry would be comfortable. They settled on the first row. It was the only way Harry's view would not have been obstructed by a taller student.

Harry observed the students carefully as they entered, in particular those who wore a crimson and gold tie like him, keeping his housemistress' words in mind. Most of the lions stared at him openly, curiosity evident. He dismissed the first two immediately as one boy gave him a cold look before muttering none to quietly to his partner that he "had no place in Gryffindor if he wanted to sit with snakes."

Draco levelled a glare at the speaker who flinched slightly before hustling to a seat on the other side of the classroom. Draco bent his head to whisper to Harry. "The speaker is Seamus Finnigan and his friend is Dean Thomas. Do not befriend them."

Harry readily agreed, he didn't seem nice. "Why shouldn't I sit with you?" he murmured back. Draco sighed. All he had told Harry was that the snakes and lions were rivals and that a few might have less than pleasant words to say about their relationship. He had neglected however to mention just how deep that animosity ran. It seemed he would have to tell him much sooner than expected.

"Later little one."

Harry accepted it easily, now watching the others who entered. There was a boy who seemed rather skittish, eyes darting around him nervously and even tripping on his way to a seat. Then, there was a pair of girls who entered, giggling excessively. They stopped when they saw him before launching into hurried whispers. Several snakes followed, including Blaise and Millicent who took seats in the pair of tables next to them.

The final students to enter were a redheaded boy with freckles and a bushy-haired girl. Unlike the rest of the students when they saw Harry, they did not break out into whispers or stare at him. The girl gave him an appraising look, before turning away. The boy regarded him with mild curiosity, but openly smiled hen his gaze met Harry's before hurrying to a seat besides the girl.

"They seem nice. They didn't stare or anything."

Draco followed his gaze. "That's Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger." Draco was careful to keep his tone neutral, not wanting to impose his opinion on the child.

Quite frankly, none of the lions seemed qualified enough by his standards to be Harry's friends. They either were gossipers, ridiculously clumsy and inept or already had a disdain for his mate. He did not know much about Weasley and Granger, but he would rectify that as soon as possible, especially if Harry decided to befriend them.
Charms class proved to be quite enjoyable for Harry. He was able to correctly perform his spell on the first try, earning him five points and a pleased smile from Draco. Many students still stared at him as Draco led him along the corridor to the Defence classroom. It bothered the nine year old terribly. Why did they insist on looking at him so much? He was not that special!

Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger sat in the bench next to theirs in the classroom. The girl seemingly paid them no attention although the veela was certain he had caught her sneaking glances their way under the guise of finding a quill from her bag. The freckled redhead was anything but covert, eyeing them openly and grinning at Harry whenever the child glanced their way.

The Malfoy heir seriously hoped that neither would openly approach Harry until he had a chance to check their backgrounds with his godfather. The fact that they were deliberately trying to get Harry's attention was bothersome, as he was worried for a motive behind their actions.

From an early age, his parents had insisted that he learn ever facet about their family history in order to understand the possible effects the past could have on their present and future lives. Whether or not they cared to admit it, his parents' past links with the most feared wizard of the twentieth century could have future ramifications for him and Harry and it was something that they needed to guard against.

Lord Voldemort.

It was a name greatly feared in the wizarding world, even though it had been years since the man had been vanquished by Harry. However, even in death, the Dark Lord's influence on their world had not ceased. His followers still existed. Quite a few were imprisoned in Azkaban, but there were a great many still on the loose.

There were several wizarding families who had links with the Dark Lord and his past deeds who had not received his marking, although their loyalties to him were well known. Many of them had children currently in Hogwarts; mainly in, but not limited to the Slytherin House.

Draco’s father had served under the Dark Lord for many years, along with his godfather. They had been forced into his service during their last years at Hogwarts, and for many years had suffered under his rule. In what Draco always saw as a valiant act of courage, Severus and Lucius had sought out Dumbledore and begged for his aide when they realised just how far the Dark Lord meant to go.

In the few years preceding his death, it seemed that Voldemort had crossed the line into insanity. His original goal had been to rid Britain of muggles and to eradicate their impact on the wizarding world. He led countless assaults against their non-magical world, as well as on muggle-born witches and wizards. With time his plans had expanded to include all those with even a hint of muggle blood in them, no matter how far back in the ancestry line.

If that was not bad enough, he eventually turned his attention to squibs or those with barely enough magic to be considered a wizard. However, the breaking point for Severus and Lucius had been when he had declared war against the magically creatures, most prominently, veela, sirens, and vampires. Lucius had felt his heart break when Voldermort had turned his cold gaze upon him and ordered him to present his wife and son's heads within a week.

He had Severus had gone to Dumbledore that very night, flinging themselves upon his mercy. Albus, ever the kind soul had listened to their heart-wrenching stories and had offered them his protection
immediately. His door had always been open to them, he had explained. The headmaster had been aware that they had been forcibly inducted into the Dark Lord's circle and with his help, they had concocted a plan.

Under the cover of numerous wards, Narcissa and Draco had been whisked away to a manor unknown to the Dark Lord. Dumbledore himself took the role of secret keeper. With extensive use of disillusement charms and skilful transfiguration, bloody replicas of Lucius' family were delivered to Voldemort who had blasted them away with little a second glance.

Lucius and Severus became spies for the light from that day on. The information they provided to the light proved invaluable and with time, Voldemort's plans slowly but surely began to crumble. His last chance at power came when one of his Death Eaters informed him of a prophesy that claimed of one capable of defeating him once and for all.

The Dark Lord spent long days determining just who filled the criteria before launching his assault on the Potter household. How exactly he found the house that had been placed under the Fidelus Charm was unknown. What was certain however was that the Dark Lord had met his end last night. And with his death, Lucius and Severus were finally free.

Up until the time of Harry and Draco's bonding, Lucius and Severus had been exempted from the residual attacks led by a few straggling death eaters. Until that time, their status as spies had been unknown. However, it was their refusal to surrender Harry over to them when the news of their bond had passed along the grape vines, which placed a bounty on their heads. Working at Hogwarts ensured Severus' safety while Lucius' social status offered him and his family the protection needed.

What Draco feared and had been warned about, were possible attempts to harm Harry by Death Eater children. His parents had raised him quite well. He knew that the ones he needed to watch out for were not those who openly declared their dislike for Harry, but those who sought to befriend him, much like the two Gryffindors across from them.

His thoughts were distracted by the matronly professor who had now entered the classroom. Professor Kernally was quite advanced in age. Her eyes were dull, her skin wrinkled. Her white hair was pulled back into a tight bun and her gait was slow but steady as she walked the distance to the podium. It was the first time that Harry was seeing her as another teacher had done her Saturday class with Harry since she had been "under the weather".

Draco was forced to disguise a laugh as a cough when Harry innocently expressed the hope that she would not do like Professor Binns and drop dead in the classroom because he did not want to see how a ghost was 'born'. It seemed that he needed to be more careful about which tales he regaled his cub with.

All in all, the class was quite boring as the woman did little more than drone about the dangers of confronting a magical creature especially if you did not know what their powers were. Quite a few times, she repeated the same sentences continuously, earning several snorts from the students that went unheard. By the time the class had ended, most of the students had drifted off into their own activities leaving only Harry, Draco and Granger paying attention.

Harry once again joined him at the lunch table, answering the numerous questions about how he was enjoying school so far. The snakes were a lot more relaxed around him and even a few upper school students crouched besides him to inquire about his day after receiving small nods from Draco.

Transfiguration passed by with little difficulty and their final class of the day was potions. Draco snickered quietly as Harry pranced into the room, settling in a seat directly in front of the teacher's desk. He seemed confused by the morose and occasional frightened looks on the lions face as they
entered the class while the Slytherins seemed perfectly contented. Draco did not have time to explain
though as his godfather billowed into the room.

Harry's head cocked thoughtfully to the side at the sneer on his uncle's face as he surveyed the
students around him, before shrugging it off. He was used to the man's mood changing constantly. It
hardly fazed him at all and besides, he knew how to get the sneer off his face if need be.

The professor pulled the role from his desk and went through it quickly. Harry learnt that the clumsy
boy from earlier was Neville Longbottom. The boy seemed worse than before. He actually
overturned his ink well when his name was called. That garnered a few laughs from the Slytherins
(even Draco smirked) and many sympathetic glances from the lions.

"Harry Potter?" Severus called out, ignoring the fumbling boy. Even as he called the name, his hand
moved to place a tick by his name.

"Present," he replied absently, still eyeing the boy who was now frantically mopping up the ink. Why
didn't someone help him? He levelled a questioning look towards his uncle who rolled his eyes
almost imperceptivity before raising his wand to the boy and performed a cleaning charm.

"Really Mr. Longbottom," he drawled, "Are you a wizard or a house-elf? Dispose of those soiled
parchments before I dock points for disrupting my class!" His uncle's tone bothered him a bit but he
dismissed it. His uncle was not nice to many people. Something about an "image" to maintain.

Draco asked Harry to wait outside the door for him after class. Once the last student had left, he
turned to his uncle saying bluntly, "I want information on that Weasley fellow and Granger girl."

"Why?"

"They won't stop watching Harry. I don't mean like the rest. I can tell they want to approach him. I
don't want anyone around him who can pose a potential threat." His concern was evident in his
voice.

Severus rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I know about the Weasleys. They are a low class pureblood
family firmly affixed with the light. I doubt you have anything to worry about on them. As far as I
know with Granger, she's muggle-born, never knew anything about our world until she got her
acceptance letter. She's the best girl in the year thus far, second only to you and hopefully with time
Harry."

"So why the interest?"

"I don't know Draco. I will investigate further. Now I have called for a snake meeting after dinner, I
believe that Harry has one with the lions yes? I will come to your quarters after it is done. Perhaps I'll
have more to tell you then."

"Are you through yet?" Harry asked, popping his head into the room.

"Patience brat!" Severus growled, before indicating to Draco that they would continue their
discussion later.

"We're done Harry. But really, you know better than to interrupt a conversation. Come now, we
have enough time before dinner to start on our assignments. It won't do to get behind already."

"Okay Draco. Bye Uncle Sevvy!"

Severus growled again, vowing to use the boy in every possible potion should a student hear of the
name. Harry seemed to read his thoughts because he smiled sweetly at him over his shoulder before running after Draco.

Harry and Draco parted ways after dinner, he leaving with the snakes to head to the dungeons while Professor McGonagall escorted Harry to Gryffindor's tower. He related his day excitedly to the stern looking teacher, surprising her when he admitted that he had already completed the foot long essay she had assigned.

"But its due Friday Harry!" she exclaimed to the grinning child.

"Oh I know, but Draco says I shouldn't let the work pile up. I hope you don't mind but it's a bit longer than you asked for."

"That's perfectly fine Harry, as long as you got your point across."

"I think I did, Draco checked it over for me. I only had a couple of spelling errors as far as he could tell."

"That's very nice of him. Well here we are. This is the entrance to the Gryffindor common rooms." She stopped before a large portrait of a woman who stared curiously at them. She looked friendly enough, politely asking for the password.

"Teachers do not require passwords to enter the common room Harry. I believe the Lady is showing you how it is done. When you stand here, she will ask you for it and you will respond. Passwords are changed every term. For this term, it is Leo. You may tell Draco the password as from time to time he may have the need to enter Gryffindor's lair. He is most welcomed."

"Yes ma'am. Can I say it?" after receiving a nod, he called out. "Leo!"

"You certainly are my dear," the portrait laughed before swinging open.

The entire room was done in red and gold, from the chairs to the tables. Even the rugs reflected the house colours. There was a large fireplace to the side of the common room and above it sat a great shield with a roaring lion. The common room was filled with students, all of whom seemed to have been expecting them as they sat idly around.

"Good afternoon, housemistress," they greeted respectfully.

"Good afternoon," she replied, indicating an empty chair for Harry. "I have asked you here so that Harry can be introduced to his fellow housemates. So far, he has been exclusively in the hands of his mate's house. This was because he did not want to be in among persons unfamiliar to him."

"Hence this meeting. I hope by the end of this evening that Harry feels completely welcomed among you. However, I must stress that it may be quite some time before he feels comfortable enough to join you fully. I would like for you all to introduce yourselves to him, starting with the first years whom he will undoubtedly be around the most."

That said she took a seat near Harry. One by one, the students rose and introduced themselves. For the most part they seemed genuine in their welcomes although there was a few he felt uncomfortable with. He hid it though and maintained a pleasant demeanour.

Once the introductions were over, the housemistress stood again.

"Before I allow you to go back to your regular activities, I have one more thing to say. Harry's mate has been given permission to enter here. Harry has been afforded the same privilege with the snakes.
I will remind you that Mr. Malfoy is as welcomed here as any of the other badgers or eagles that undoubtedly find their way up here on occasion. Keep that in mind."

She turned to Harry. "I will be back in an hour to return you to your quarters. You do not know your way there from this side of the castle and it would not do for you to get lost."

"Yes ma'am. Thank you."

"Goodbye for now Harry," and raising her voice, "Dismissed lions."

The common room gradually cleared after that, students either leaving for the library or heading to their dorms. Less than twenty people remained five minutes late. The pair from class was the first to approach him.

"Hello Harry." Ronald greeted cheerfully, "I'm a first year like you remember?"

"Of course he remembers Ron, we've been in class with him for the entire day," the girl said in a snippy tone. The redhead rolled his eyes, a gesture that had Harry biting back a smile. "I'm Hermione by the way," she continued, stretching out her hand to him. He shook it automatically.

"I'm Harry, nice to meet you."

"Would you like to join us?"

"If you don't mind…"

"Of course not mate! Come on!" He followed them to the armchairs in front of the fireplace sitting across from them. He was uncomfortable as it was the first time in a long while that he had to converse with persons without Draco's comforting presence.

"Have you started on the assignments yet Harry," Hermione asked. "I've gotten through quite a bit of the reading already."

"Yes I have. I've finished the transfigurations essay already. I have the reading to do still though."

"Already mate?" Ron asked in shock. "You understand it…er I mean," he broke off, realising what he had insinuated. "Sorry, I just mean, you're so young. Are you really, you know, er…ready to be here?"

Harry chuckled, the redhead was quite amusing. "I passed the tests, so I'm here. I had a lot of tutors. Besides, my mother was really smart…well that's what I was told."

"You intrigue me Harry," Hermione said after a few moments silence.

"How so?" he asked, shifting a bit.

"It's just the way you act. Nine year olds I know of want to do nothing else but play, yet you don't seem to act that way."

"Oh but I love to play," Harry said with a grin. "I like exploding snap and chess. I play tag and I fly."

Harry and Ron shared amused glances. "Now you're acting your age," Hermione said grinning. "Everyone keeps staring at me," he admitted.
"So you were feeling shy?" Hermione prodded gently, an understanding look on her face.

"Yes. Draco says I get quiet like a mouse when I'm nervous."

"Well you certainly did a fine job of hiding in his robes this morning," Ron laughed, earning him a knock on the shoulder from Hermione.

"Sorry mate, no offence."

"That's okay. I'm not a baby though," he said with a glare, in case that was what the redhead had been insinuating.

"Of course not Harry."

"Yeah mate. You may be small but you're no baby."

"You actually seem quite mature for your age most of the time Harry. But then it's no surprise since Malfoy is older than you and you spend so much time with him."

"What's he like by the way?" Ron broke in. "I mean when he isn't walking around with a storm round his head."

"Ron!"

"Sorry, but you have to admit Mione, he was a bit of a grouch for a while there."

"That's because he wasn't with Harry."

"I know that." Their argument was halted by childish laughter. Harry had a hand over his mouth and was laughing furiously.

"You're funny!" he managed between laughs. The pair shared a sheepish look before laughing to.

"Well I'm glad to see you all getting along so well," came Professor McGonagall's amused voice, "But Mr. Potter needs to get to his rooms now. It's almost curfew."

"But Professor," Hermione spoke up, "It's now eight. Curfew isn't until half nine."

"I know Miss Granger, but some people need a little more rest," she said, gesturing to Harry.

"Oh. I didn't think of that. So Harry has a separate curfew?"

"Not officially," the professor allowed, calling Harry to her side.

"I…see…" Hermione edged, although her tone suggested that she did not understand in the least.

"Thanks for talking to me," Harry said softly. "It was nice."

"I'm glad Harry. We'll see you tomorrow okay?"

"Say yes mate, I promise, we'll be funny some more."

"Okay! G'nite Ron, Hermione."

"Good night, they returned and Harry left with the Professor.

He and the Professor parted ways at his rooms and he scrambled in quickly, calling for Draco. His
Veela was curled comfortably on a divan reading what appeared to be a potions book. He dropped it immediately though, beckoning Harry to join him.

The boy snuggled besides him eagerly and with a little prompting started telling Draco all about his conversation with Ron and Hermione. Draco did not interrupt, allowing his mate to ramble on at will.

"But Draco, I meant to ask. The Professor said that I had an unofficial curfew. What did she mean?" He pulled away from Draco to be able to stare fully into his face.

"Unofficial...I think she was referring to your bedtime little lion."

"Bedtime?"

Draco laughed at his affronted look. "Uncle Severus must have spoken to her. You're bedtime is nine o'clock remember."

"But Draco, I'm sure no one else has a bedtime at school!"

Draco wrinkled his nose at the boy. "They do. Curfew is at half nine. By that time, all students are expected to be in their common rooms unless they have a special pass. First years are expected to be in their dorm rooms by ten thirty, second years by ten forty five and so on. I believe that from sixth year onwards there really is not a time set.

"The only exception for curfew is when you have an astronomy class. The classes are always at night but the time differs almost every week. So you see, the school does in effect have a bedtime."

"Well then since I'm a first year, won't that mean that my bedtime is not until half ten?" he asked slyly.

"Trying to go Slytherin on me Harry?" Draco teased. "You know that since you are younger, things are slightly different for you. No one is going to come in here to check whether or not you're still up after half ten, but you do need your rest. You are nine cub and so you require more sleep than older students. I won't have you arguing with me on this Harry. Your regular bedtime sticks."

Harry pouted and stared plaintively at Draco. His mate usually gave in to that look but apparently, this time he was not having it. "Don't flash those eyes at me Harry James or there will be no wizard tales for you tonight."

"Bur Dra~co," he whined, in a last attempt.

Draco's gave grew stern. "Harry James. Stop this now." His firm tone was relentless, and Harry dropped the attitude although his expression remained slightly petulant. "Very good. Now it's half-eight. Go shower and change into your night clothes." Softening his tone, he continued, "And if you don't dwaddle I'll see if I can fit in two stories for you."

That appeased the boy and he nodded, moving to rise. Draco halted the movement by pulling him to his chest and hugging him tightly. He pressed his cheek against the top of Harry's head and murmured. "I'm sorry I have to be strict with you Harry, but it is for your own good. I love you little one."

Harry's small voice rose after a few seconds, "I know Draco. I'm sorry I acted bad."

"No Harry," Draco corrected, stroking his back. "Not bad, you were a bit bratty yes, but bad no. You're good Harry."
"But still a brat?"

"Of course. It's Uncle's favourite nickname for you is it not?"

Harry giggled at that. "It's fun being bratty to him."

"I know that cub. Now off you go." Harry nodded and left.

The portrait near to the entrance of their rooms glowed for a moment before Severus entered. "Hello uncle," Draco greeted, moving to the man.

Severus pulled him in for a brief hug before asking, "Why aren't I being tackled?"

"Bathroom." Draco said simply, leading him to a chair.

"I see. I have your answers for you."

"Really?"

"Yes, it seems that Professor McGonagall asked the pair to befriend Harry. Out of all the first years, they have proven so far to be the most competent and accommodating."

"I see. Harry's told me quite a bit about them." He mused on the information. "So they are befriending him only on orders?" His voice hardened on that. He did not want his mate to have fake friends.

Severus held up a placating hand. "McGonagall assures me that they have Harry's best interest in mind."

"I will have to see that myself," Draco declared. "No one who doesn't meet my approval will be allowed to be his friends."

"Of course Draco," Severus agreed, recognising that this was his godson's dominant nature speaking. "I will suggest that you do so as soon as possible because as you said, Harry seems to be falling in with them already."

"Tomorrow."

Harry entered then, his damp hair hanging down his back in a loose braid. "Uncle Sevvy!" he crowed, but to their surprising walked rather than ran across the room.

"Where is my tackle?" Severus asked curiously.

A faint blush rose on Harry's cheek as he glanced towards Draco before murmuring. "I'm tired."

Draco gave him an 'I told you so look' while Severus shrugged and patted his shoulder. "Well it is ten to nine. You should head to bed."

"Yes Uncle Sevvy," Harry replied, reaching up to rub at an eye. "Good night."

"I'll be there soon Harry."

"Okay Draco."

Harry wandered off to his bedroom on the left. "I'll leave now Draco. And don't worry I won't be dropping by here every evening. My rooms are down the hall if you need me. Goodnight."
"Good night uncle. See you in class."

Harry was already under the covers in the middle of the bed when Draco entered with the storybook under his arms. He joined his mate and opened to the one they had started the night before, urging Harry to close his eyes before beginning to read. Barely two pages into the tale, Harry drifted off. Draco closed the book gently and after brushing a gentle kiss to Harry's brow left after extinguishing the lights.

Returning the book to its place, he settled once more on the divan, returning his attention to his textbook. His thoughts drifted to Harry after a while and he went to his cub's study table, finding his timetable.

As he thought, Harry had a late astronomy class from eight to half ten with Ravenclaw. Hmm, he would have to schedule in a nap time somewhere in the day for Harry or he would fall asleep during the class.

Perhaps before dinner. He had completed most of his assignments already, only having two chapters of reading for charms and potions left. Harry had already covered the potion's chapter with Severus during his tutoring so only a brief review would be needed. That could easily be done before breakfast and charms was not until Wednesday.

He did not have a first period class that morning due to the late Astronomy the night before. Good. He just hoped that Harry would not give as much trouble with the nap as he had about the bedtime.

Draco also considered the Weasley-Granger matter and decided to deal with it during lunchtime. Plans set, Draco returned to his reading. It was only half nine after all.
"Look Draco, there's Ron and Hermione!" Harry pointed out, tugging excitedly on Draco's wrist.

"I see them," Draco said dryly. Harry really did seem to like the rapidly approaching pair. All the more reason to talk to them as soon as possible in case he needed to nip the relationship in the bond.

"Hi Harry!" Hermione called cheerfully, before greeting Draco with a much more reserved "Good morning."

"Hi mate, had a good night?"

"I did Ron!" Harry grinned, releasing Draco's wrist to move to Ron's side. Draco's brows rose at that, and he glared slightly at the redhead who had captivated Harry's attention.

Granger's focus however was still on him. "Can Harry sit with us for breakfast? I'm sure he'd like it."

The veela gave the girl a level look. "No."

She frowned at the decisive tone. Lowering her voice so that Ron and Harry would not overhear she asked, "And why is that Malfoy? You can't keep Harry with you every moment. It is not right. He should be with his housemates."

Draco's temper started to elevate itself. "What happens between me and my mate is none of your concern."

Granger's voice was a few degrees cooler as she responded. "So what? Are you going to refuse Harry the right to have a few friends of his own? Or must he make do with yours? Harry is his own person, not simply your mate and you have no right to deny him the freedom of choice."

It went unnoticed by the lioness that Draco's hands had clenched into tight fists the longer she spoke. His veela side was deeming the girl's words as a threat between his and Harry's bond. It would not take much more for him to attack her.

By Merlin's own grace, he had the restraint of his mother and that was the only reason Granger was not feeling the kiss of his talons. Moreover, his wizard's blood was urging him to settle down and see the greater picture. The girl was concerned for Harry.

That was the only comprehensible reason why an intelligent person like Granger would risk her neck (literally) to question him about his relationship with his mate. It took courage and a great strength of will, he grudgingly allowed. He drew in a deep breathe of air and forced his body to relax.

When he was certain he was in complete control he spoke again. "Granger, am I right to believe that it is concern I hear in your voice?"

Granger was a bit put off by the change of topic. "Y-yes. I am concerned for him."

Draco cocked his head thoughtfully, observing her body language. There was no telltale sign of deception. "Look Granger, I think you took me the wrong way. I'm not denying Harry freedom; I am just ensuring that he doesn't fall into the wrong hands."

"I don't follow."

"You won't, wouldn't you? I don't have the time to explain this now and Harry needs to eat. Will you
and Weasley join me on the grounds at lunch? If I deem you trustworthy then Harry may join you when he chooses."

A pleased smile rose on the girl's face. "Under the trees? Maybe at twelve?"

"That's acceptable."

"Okay, but that doesn't mean we won't keep an eye on Harry until then."

Draco snorted, "Do as you please Granger."

"So we can carry him to class with us?"

"If you must," he allowed.

"Good, because you only have him for potions and that's after lunch."

"I know my schedule Granger," he sneered. "Come on Harry. Time for breakfast. I'm sure Millicent will be glad to see you."

"Coming Draco. I'll see you later okay Ron?"

The redhead cast a glance to the female lion. She shook her head briefly at him. "Er, right mate, we'll see you in History okay?"

"Cool! Bye Hermione."

"Goodbye Harry," she waved as he and Draco left the Entrance Hall.

"Mione, I thought we agreed to ask him to sit with us?"

Granger sighed and tugged on a snarled lock of hair as they headed off. "It's seems that Malfoy isn't too trusting of us. I think we came on a little too strong for his liking."

"Well he is a veela. But I like Harry. And we're a lot better for him to be friends with than the other lions."

"I know that Ron. Malfoy wants us to meet him at lunch. I think we're in for an inquisition of sorts."

"Blimey, it's not like we want to marry Harry or something, just be friends."

"It does seem a bit excessive," Hermione agreed, "But he insinuated that there is more going on than we know off."

"Well, we'll see at lunch then."

"Yes, I guess we will."

Draco did not want Harry around while he spoke to his two potential friends. He met his godfather between classes and arranged for Harry to spend lunch with him. Harry did not mind in the least, hurrying away with his uncle after waving goodbye to his mate.

To Draco's surprise, Granger and Weasley were already at their agreed meeting spot when he arrived at ten to twelve. "Aren't we eager," he muttered as he settled cross-legged across from the pair.
Getting straight to the point he began, "Why exactly do you want to be Harry's friends? Weasley?"

The redhead started at the veela's clipped tone. "I- because, he's a nice kid. I have a sister a year older than him. She would be terrified to be among so many new people. I figured that Harry would like a friendly face and none of the other first years have siblings around his age so they wouldn't know how to treat him."

Draco's face remained impassive. "Granger?"

"Harry reminds me of myself," she said simply.

"Explain."

"Look, we've been in Hogwarts for what two weeks and some days right? My first week here was torturous. I'm the oldest in the year, one of two muggle-borns, yet I'm one of the smartest. People don't understand some of my muggle phrases and that first week I was called so many things that I wanted to drop out by the first Friday."

She took a breath before continuing. Draco noted that tears were starting to gather in her eyes. "I was crying one night in a classroom when Ron here came in. We spoke for a long time that night. The next morning he went ballistic on some of the other first years which is why I actually have some friends now.

"Harry's in a similar place. Two years younger than his housemates, really smart from what the teachers have said. Worse than that, he has the labels of boy who lived and veela mate on his shoulders. Some of the lions labelled him a spy the moment they saw that you were his mate and him sitting with the snakes doesn't help his case at all. He's like an open show as far as the school is concerned. I just thought that he would want to have a couple of lions behind him."

"Ah I see. So you expect me to believe that you wanting to befriend Harry has nothing to do with the fact that McGonagall told you to?" he asked bluntly, seeing the shocked looks that graced their faces.

"That's irrelevant. Your excuses don't seem entirely pure now does it?"

"She did ask us to keep an eye on him," Granger said slowly, "But the decision to make friends with him was solely on us. We could have watched him without getting to know him."

"Yeah."

Draco rolled his eyes. That was the best reasoning they could come up with? "It seems to me that your intentions towards my mate are not entirely pure."

Granger's temper bristled. "I really don't see why your opinion is needed Malfoy. Harry is his own person. If he wants to be friends with us, your opinion should not matter."

Draco's hackles rose. "Harry is mine. If I forbid him to stay away from you he will have to other option but to obey for fear of angering me."

"He is not some slave!"

"He is my mate. I will protect him from all threats!" he snarled.

"What threats? Harry is nine. Who on earth would harm him!"
"VOLDEMORT!" Draco shouted, breathing deeply. He stood up pacing. "Him and his darn followers!"

"You-know-who is dead," Weasley pointed out, while putting a restraining hand on Granger. She obviously didn't realise the danger they were in right now. Draco's hair had lengthened to brush his shoulders and his pupils had narrowed to slits. The air around him crackled with barely restrained magic and Ron was positive that there were dark talons on ends of his fingers.

"He may be gone, but his followers aren't. Have you any clue the number of death eater spawns enrolled here? Any one of them could be ordered by their parents to harm Harry. The number of owls that left the school yesterday! No doubt informing parents that the great Harry Potter, boy who lived was now among them.

"Harry's a child. He does not realise the true extent of the danger he is in. He is too trusting, too young to understand the meaning of deception, to even start to sense it. It's my job to keep him safe, my duty. I won't have anyone near him who could turn around and betray him."

"L-look mate," Ron said soothingly, even though he was shocked by what the veela had revealed. "We didn't realise Harry was so big a target."

"Ron's right," Hermione seconded her tone apologetic. "I'm sorry for accusing you. Now that I understand, I can see why you're so protective.

Draco stopped his jerky movements, staring at them. "I'm glad you understand."

"We do, honest."

"We still want to be his friends though, right Ron?"

"Yes."

Draco was stunned by their words. It was enough to return him to his normal state. "You would still be his friends, after what I told you?"

"We would. Harry shouldn't be denied the right of friendship just because of his...situation."

"Even though there will be a possibility that you both would be targeted?"

"Yes. Harry's worth it."

"You would protect him in my absence? Someone you barely know?"

"To the best of our ability. We lions are loyal."

The sincerity in their voices was what finally and completely convinced Draco. "Very well. You have my permission."

"Thank you."

"We won't fail you."

"You better not." He smiled a bit to take the sting out of his words but he meant it. "I will leave it up to you to find other suitable friends among the lions. However, I would like to be informed about who they are before hand."

"We can do that."
"Yeah, I have three older brothers here. They'll be able to help."

"Fine. I will ask that you keep what I revealed to you a secret though. Especially to Harry himself. Although he's at Hogwarts, I want him to grow up in as normal a way."

"Okay Malfoy."

"You can call me Draco if you wish."

"As long as you call us Ron and Hermione."

Draco's lips twitched. "I think I can manage that."

Harry sat with the Gryffindors the next morning. Hermione and Ron had extended their offer again and this time Draco nodded, although the final decision lay with Harry. He accepted after Draco whispered to him that he did not mind. He raced off with Ron although Hermione followed at a more sedate pace. "Hermione?" Draco called before she rounded the corner.

"Yes Draco?"

"He always drinks a glass of milk with breakfast. Don't let him convince you otherwise."

Hermione laughed. "I will Draco. And I'll try to ensure that he doesn't get eaten by a rabid plant in Herbology."

Draco chuckled at her joke. "You best not, but if you can't, you better hope that the plant eats you too."

Harry divided his time between the two tables after that, although after the first day it was wisely decided that he would breakfast with Draco as Hermione had ended up wearing Harry's milk. It happened after she refused to give him pumpkin juice for the third time, as well as the fact that he had noticed that no one else was drinking milk.

She had not been able to berate him for it as he had turned innocent eyes upon her and managed to put a bit of a quiver on his lower lip as he apologised for wetting her. Severus who had witnessed the scene realised at once that Harry had unconsciously used veela allure on her to negate her annoyance.

Hermione had simply smiled at him and vanished the split milk. A quick cleaning spell set her clothes to right. That did not save Harry from a scolding from Draco though who was well aware that it had been no accident.

Harry had a naughty streak to him and in the past, it had fallen upon his family and mate to correct it, as anyone else was prone to do as Granger had and dismiss it. The scolding added to a few meals with nothing else but milk to drink effectively cut out any repeat performance of the incident. (although Draco had to suffer Harry's sulking gaze as the boy guzzled morosely on the white liquid.)

Harry was at the lion's table at the end of his first week of school when a Hogwarts owl dropped a small package unto his lap. He opened it curiously, grinning when a chocolate frog wrapped in purple paper was revealed. A short note was attached.

_Harry, please join me for tea tomorrow afternoon in my office. There will be many more Chocolate Frogs._
The note was signed G.A.

"Whose it from mate?" Ron asked curiously from his left between bites.

"From Grandpa. He wants to see me tomorrow."

"I can't get past the fact that you call the headmaster Grandpa, Harry. It's weird."

Harry shrugged, unwrapping his treat. "I've always called him that. Like how I call Professor Snape Uncle Sev..." He broke off, sensing a heated glare from the head table. Peeping up he saw that the potions master was indeed glaring needles at him. Really, did the man have enhanced hearing?

"Uncle what Harry?" Hermione asked curiously, oblivious to the glare.

"Um, Uncle Severus. I call him Uncle Severus." The intensity of the glare receded and Harry breathed a sigh of relief.

"Well that's what Draco calls him."

"True. However you don't seem to call him by any title in class." Ron pointed out.

Harry was spared responding when one of Ron's older brothers distracted him further along the table. Gratefully, he made to eat the frog, but Hermione stopped him.

"Finish your meal first Harry and eat the frog for dessert."

"Okay," Harry grumbled, setting the chocolate into Hermione's outstretched hand. She returned it to him when the pudding bowls started appearing on the tables and he opened it with delight. He grabbed his pudding cup and dipped the frog into it before Hermione could protest.

Pudding covered chocolate, yummy.

"What card did you get?" Ron inquired, laughing at Harry's dessert combination.

Harry handed it over absently, intent on finishing his sugary treat.

"Strange. I never saw this one before."

"Really?" Harry asked, a bit more interested since his dessert was mostly gone. "Let me see."

Taking the card, he stared done at an old, wrinkled man who had a look of deep contemplation on his face.

"Nicolas Flamel, S.S." he read, "I wonder who he is."

"Well he has to have done something great to have a card of him made," Hermione pointed out. At their looks, she shrugged. "What? I was curious."

Ron shook his head disbelievingly. "Only you would do research into the cards from a sweet. I've been eating these things since forever and it never bothered me to ask why these people were on the cards."

Harry tuned out the pair's bickering as he examined the card more fully.

Nicolas Flamel.
It seemed like a name to remember.

"Have fun with the headmaster Harry," Draco whispered as he ruffled Harry's bangs. He watched as his cub grinned in response before running away, totally ignoring the portraits that called to him to slow down. "Little brat," Draco thought affectionately, picking up his bag.

It was a wonderful sunny afternoon and he planned to take full advantage of it while Harry was off. There were a few students milling around the grounds in groups laughing at some inner jokes. He waved at Millicent and Blaise but did not join in their game.

He settled contentedly beneath a wide shady oak tree and pulled out one of the books his mother had sent for him the day before. It wasn't for him actually, it was one of the latest child wizarding books that had come out. She had sent it for him to read to Harry. It was strange that even after four years, the rituals he and Harry had started had never altered.

He still read to him nightly, even occasionally obliging to make the 'dragon noises' that would send Harry into a fit of laughter. He always tucked him in firmly and stroked his hair long after he fell asleep. He fixed Harry's plate for him at meals although that was mostly for health reasons. If it were up to Harry, nothing that came from a plant would ever enter his system.

Hermione to his relief agreed with him although she never gave him enough to suit Draco or ensured that he ate them all. This was why he took great delight in scooping Harry extra portions, laughing when the boy scrunched his nose up and muttered darkly around bites of Brussels sprouts.

It was only a few days, but Draco did not regret allowing Harry to be with the two Gryffindors. It took considerable strain off him, as he no longer had to worry about getting Harry to his class before heading for his own. Furthermore, they kept watch over Harry while Draco had Astronomy although the veela was left carrying a slumbering boy from the lion's tower back to their own quarters.

It was nice having the time to interact with his own companions without constantly having to supervise Harry. In addition, it was good to have help dealing with Harry's penchant for trouble. Now that he had grown accustomed to his new environment, he seemed intent on determining how much mischief he could get into.

Draco had near suffocated laughing when an annoyed Ron had frogmarched Harry to him the day before for locking Mrs. Norris in the broom closet because he "didn't like how she was looking at" him.

Poor Ron had been left to scooping Harry up and running for dear life as he had heard Filch grating voice coming along down the corridor. Really, they had thought that Harry was nothing more than a cute little darling? How wrong of them.

Even Hermione had suffered, getting drenched by the Giant Squid after Harry had taken it upon himself to see if the tentacle that lay sprawled on the shoreline was ticklish. It was, and Hermione was splashed by a large amount of water as the tentacle twitched. Miraculously, Harry had remained dry.

Draco chuckled to the memory as he flipped the page on the books. The story was a bit mature for Harry. Really, the princess had to take a naked bath in honeyed water to summon the good wizard? That was more than even he wanted to know. Couldn't she have done a summoning dance like everybody else? Hopefully there were a few more age appropriate stories further along or Harry would not be seeing the book for a very long time.
His musings was interrupted by a shadow blocking his light. Even as his eyes rose to glare at the person who dared disturb him, he got a whiff of peach perfume. "Pansy," he thought, closing the book.

"Hel-lo Drakey," the girl purred, dropping besides him. "Such a coincidence seeing you here."

Yeah right. He was almost on the edge of the grounds.

"Can I help you with something?" he asked coolly, returning the book to his bag.

"I just wanted to spend some time with you. You were in that dreadful temper before and for the past week forced to baby-sit, so I just thought...", she trailed off, blinking at him in what was supposedly an innocent way.

Draco barely resisted the urge to snort. The girl had always been a pest in his side. "I will ignore your remarks towards Harry. As for the rest, you have other friends to spend time with."

"But Drakey," she pouted, not noticing his wince at the nickname. "You know we have to spend time together. It wouldn't do good for us to marry not knowing everything about each other."

Draco almost choked on the 'm' word and gaped at the girl, completely disregarding the Malfoy demeanour. "Married?" he finally managed.

"Why of course darling. You know we were always meant to be together. In six years we'll be of age. Of course we'll have to start planning long before that, and we can't officially start dating until we're thirteen because it won't be appropriate..."

Draco stared at the blabbering girl for several moments. "Parkinson, there is no marriage between us. Besides, what eleven year old thinks about marriage?"

She broke off, sending him a dark look before immediately smoothening it over with a falsely sweet smile. "Of course there is darling, don't joke like that. Furthermore you should know that all girls dream of their wedding. I am just one of the lucky few who already knows who I will be bound to."

"Parkinson, I have a mate!"

"Oh that little brat. Well, you will have to get rid of him at once."

"WHAT?"

"Enough of this silly joke of yours Draco. I am your mate. I know that your family were forced to keep the little menace all these years, but really, wasn't bringing him here just a tad overkill."

"Harry is my MATE, you daft girl!" he rose to his feet. Fortunately, there was no one within hearing distance.

"You are my mate!" the girl said firmly, also standing. "I knew you first and it would be extremely beneficial to join the Malfoy and Parkinson family."

"Enough of this!" Draco snapped, turning to walk off. A grip on his bag held him though.

"Don't you walk of on your fiancée Draco Malfoy."

"Just how dense are you?"

"Don't insult me, I won't stand for it."
"I will be writing to my parents about this," he declared, knowing that this was over his head. The girl was sadly disillusioned.

"Do that. I'm certain that they will demand that you apologise for your atrocious behaviour to me!" she huffed. Draco wrenched his bag from here and stormed off, heading for his Uncle's rooms.

Harry stood in front of the pair of stone gargoyles that gazed at him through jewelled eyes. "Hello, I'm here to see Grandpa," he told them.

"What is the password?" the left statue hissed.

"Chocolate Frogs."

"You may enter." The door swung open.

"Thank you!" he called, running up the long winding staircase. In his haste, he didn't realise that there was someone descending the stair case so he bumped right into them. "Ah," he gasped, automatically grabbing the person to stabilise himself.

The thin man hissed as if Harry's touch burnt him and he snatched his hand away. At the same moment, Harry's scar gave a tremendous pulse of pain and he gasped, raising his small hand to press at it. The pain continued to escalate and Harry whimpered, reaching out automatically to grasp the man again. It was an instinctive move that he did not question. His hand barely touched the man's robes before the man snarled at him, grounding out, "O-o-oo-ut of m-my w-way!"

Harry was roughly shoved aside as the man flew down the staircase. The pain subsided immediately, leaving only a dull throb. A pungent smell met his nose. Sniffing cautiously he determined that it had come from the strange man.

It smelt like garlic, mixed in with something slightly rotten. It was enough to make him feel distinctly nauseas. He walked sedately up the rest of the steps until he reached the Headmaster's office. His hand was trembling slightly as it rapped against the door. His grandpa's cheerful voice called from beyond.

He pushed it open and slowly walked in. "Ah, there you are Harry! I've been looking forward to...Harry?" The man's cheerful rambling broke of as he noted the condition of his honorary grandchild.

The boy was unbelievably pale and his face had a distinct green twinge to it. Moreover, he walked as if every step took considerable effort. The headmaster hurried around his desk to pull the child into a comforting embrace. "Harry my child, what is it? You look as if you have seen a demon."

Harry pressed his nose into his Grandpa's robes, inhaling deeply the scent of lemon. "My scar hurts," he mumbled pressing close. He felt his Grandpa stiffen before he was pulled up. The headmaster moved around to his desk and settled with the child in his lap.

He summoned a pain reliever potion from his cabinet and broke the seal, pressing it to his mouth. "Drink my child. It should help you." Harry obeyed the command, sipping slowly until it was empty. The dull throb ceased, but his forehead still felt dreadfully sore.

"Better?" Albus asked softly.

"A little," he admitted, closing his eyes.
"How long has it been paining you my child?"

Harry grumbled a bit before answering. He felt tired. "When I was coming up the stairs."

"Harry. I think you need to tell me everything."

It took a while, but soon the headmaster got the entire tale from his grandchild. "Who was he Grandpa?" Harry questioned, nibbling on the chocolate frog he held in his left hand. It was to give him strength, his Grandpa claimed.

"He is Professor Quirrell Harry. He is replacing Professor Kernally. Her medi-witch suggested over the past week that she resign for health reasons."

"More like old age," Harry muttered. "He smells."

"Harry!" Dumbledore scolded even as he mentally agreed. "Apparently he was attacked by vampires a few years ago. It left him with a stutter."

"And that has what to do with the smell?"

"Garlic. It's an irritant for vampires."

"It's an irritant for people," Harry said snidely.

"Harry! What has gotten into you my child?" Albus raised the child's head to gaze into his eyes. The child had never spoken with such malice in his voice before.

Harry blinked once, twice, then frowned. "I'm sorry Grandpa. I'm a bit lost."

"Harry?"

"Grandpa?"

"Are you okay?"

"M'scar hurts," he complained, rubbing at it. Dumbledore's aged hand rose to brush away Harry's hair so he could observe it. He hissed as he saw the raw state of the scar. It looked as fresh and livid as the day he had received it. "All this from touching the teacher?" Dumbledore wondered.

Harry tried to bat away his hand in annoyance, but that only drew the headmaster's attention to something else. Grasping Harry's right hand he urged him to reveal his palm. Albus stared at it in shocked disbelief.

There were small bits of skin on the child's palm as well as a tiny bit of the black robe the Professor had been wearing. The most shocking part however was that the pieces of skin looked a couple of shades darker than Quirrell's skin was. It looked as if it had been burnt.
Harry did not notice his Grandpa's horrified expression. He was tired and more than a little cranky. As such, the usually welcomed touch of the headmaster was now little more than an irritant. He tugged at his hand while yawning. "Sleepy Grandpa," he complained, wondering why the man had not released his hand as yet.

"One moment child," the headmaster said in a bland tone, reaching for his wand. A quick tap removed the evidence from the small hand and then he released it. "Do you think you can make it back to your room Harry?"

Harry shook his head, meeting his Grandpa's eyes morosely. "M'tired."

The headmaster offered him a small smile that did not quite meet his eyes.

"I know child. Let's settle you down for a nap here okay?"

"No nap," Harry protested even as he yawned again, body relaxing.

"Forgive me. I meant a rest, perhaps you should rest."

"Okay," Harry mumbled. "Don't tell Draco. He'll make me sleep earlier…"

Albus shifted the sleeping boy and stood, moving him to the divan in the corner of the room. He stared at the child for long moments as he moved, curling his hand beneath his cheek. He transfigured the child's clothes into a pair of pyjamas, before conjuring a blanket for him. Harry sighed softly, snuggling into the divan's softness.

When he was certain that he was in a deep sleep, he slumped into his chair, thinking deeply. To his knowledge, this was the first time that Harry had reacted that way after coming into contact with someone. He was not sure what exactly had caused it. There were so many possibilities, but the headmaster was leaning towards his and Draco's bond as being the cause. That was the most probable notion.

The reaction could have come about because Harry had never been introduced to the man before. Harry rarely interacted with persons without Draco, much less touched them. Perhaps because the veela had not on some level approved the man as being safe, their bond took it as a potential threat and had retaliated.

Even if the defence teacher had been deemed a threat, why would he have been burnt? Wouldn't a barrier of sorts or even a burst of magic thrown the man away? Why was something as personal as touch necessary?

It was also mildly disturbing that Harry was apparently oblivious to the fact that he had hurt the man. Quirrell had to have been in obvious pain. If Harry had not recognised that, it implied to the amount of pain his scar had to have been radiating for him to be distracted.

The scar itself also bothered the headmaster. It had been as a result of Voldermort's killing curse. He had done extensive research since Harry was a toddler on the effects of cursed scars. Not many
people in the wizarding world possessed them and had lived to tell the tale.

The few he had come into contact with over the years all had one thing in common. The scars imposed on them had effects on them in one way or another. There was a witch from Scotland who had a long gash running the length of her right leg. Every year on the exact date and time she had been cursed, the scar would ooze the same dark puss that had emerged when she had been originally cursed.

Another wizard from Ireland felt residual pain whenever he went near the location he was hurt. The most significant was a Swedish wizard who had been cursed on a visit to London. Unlike the rest, his attacker had been identified and jailed. However, it seemed as if the attack had left more than just a scar on the man. The man occasionally exhibited traits of the attacker, from his taste in rum to his fiery temper.

Harry had, up until now, never complained about the scar. It had never so much as itched him, yet even now, it was a vivid red. Could whatever protection he shared with Draco have caused it? He wanted to believe so but still, the scar was connotated with evil and Harry and Draco's bond was pure as white snow.

Was there really a link between the two?

*[

Harry yawned widely as he stretched shaking the last remnants of sleep away. He blinked owlishly when he realised that he wasn't in his bed. Sitting up he looked around curiously until his gaze settled on the large desk. Right, he was in Grandpa's office. But when had he fallen asleep?

He moved the blanket off him and made his way to the empty chair, grinning broadly when he saw the tea tray there. With it was a note.

Harry my boy,

I've gone out for a little while, but I'll be back soon. I'm sure the portraits and Fawkes will keep you entertained.

Grandpa Albus.

He eyed the tray carefully. It looked much too heavy for him to carry to the divan. He climbed up unto the headmaster chair, frowning a bit when he noticed that on it he was too short to reach the tray comfortably. Pouting, he searched for a solution.

"Why the long face boy?" A grey-headed man called from his portrait.

"I can't reach," Harry answered, pushing out a hand to emphasis his point.

"Indeed you can't," the man mused, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

"Why don't you add some books to the chair dearie," a cheerful looking woman suggested.

"That would work, thank you!" Harry hopped off the chair and headed for the large bookshelf, selecting one that looked particular thick.

"Careful boy, that's heavy."

"I know." Harry grimaced as he lifted the book against his chest, almost losing balance. It really was
heavy. He stumbled back to the chair and tried to set it on the seat. Unfortunately, it slipped and fell to the floor with a thud.

"Oops,"

"You didn't hit your toe did you?" the woman asked anxiously.

"No, the book opened though." Harry bent to close the book, but not before an illustration caught his attention.

It was a mirror, tall with a glittery sheen. There were markings around its golden frame that Harry assumed to be runes. "It's pretty," Harry mumbled, settling on the floor to look at it more closely. There was a small passage beneath the picture.

"Mirror of Erised," he read. "The mirror shows the viewer that which they wish for the most. Countless have died before its eternal gaze." Harry shivered at that. The mirror killed people? It didn't seem so pretty now. "Who would want a mirror like that?" he scoffed, closing the book. "It kills. I'll stick to seeing my reflection thank you very much."

"Good for you boy! Now only if the headmaster had so much sense!"

"Altrain!" Another portrait hissed, but it was already too late. Harry's sharp mind had made the connection.

"Grandpa Albus has the mirror?" he asked the man.

"Not at all dearie," the smiling woman said quickly. "Don't mind Altrain here. Being around for so many years has muddled him a bit."

"They have not!" the male portrait snapped, glaring through his frame into the one on the room's other side. "Just because I replaced you as headmaster, you act as if I'm beneath you. I won't have my memory besmirched in any way! Boy, I am not muddled. Headmaster Dumbledore indeed has the mirror. It's right here in the school." He finished smugly, giving the woman a broad smile.

Harry shrugged. "It doesn't matter to me where it is. It might be pretty but that book says it is dangerous. I'm not going near it."

"Good boy," the woman smiled. "You shouldn't concern yourself with these things. You're much too young."

"I'm nine," Harry grumbled, finally managing to get the book on the seat.

"That is young my child," she pointed out kindly.

Harry sniffed at her and climbed onto the seat. "You don't have to rub it in. I know I'm the youngest here."

"I meant no offence dearie. Now you just eat up your snack. The headmaster will be back shortly."

"Not a snack. Tea. I'm having tea."

The portraits laughed at the haughty tone Harry adopted. "Very well dearie, very well. Eat your tea things."

Harry huffed at her, but amusement was clearly reflected in his eyes. These portraits really were fun. He wondered if there were others in the school he could talk to.
Draco sighed, adjusting Harry to a more comfortable spot on his back. Apparently, this was his cub's second nap for the day and it had him a bit worried. Harry never slept this much. According to the headmaster, Harry had been asleep almost an hour before he had left to check on a disturbance. The portraits had said that he awoken for at least half an hour, but by the time Dumbledore had returned Harry was sleeping again, this time on his chair.

Albus had summoned the veela to carry Harry back to their quarters. It had taken considerable coaxing to wake Harry enough to climb unto his back and he was back asleep moments later. The veela walked slowly, trying to keep his movements smooth as not to jar Harry.

A helpful Hufflepuff proved most helpful by following along and opening any doors he came across on his way back. He thanked the girl politely when they parted ways. He was a bit surprised when the girl offered to "baby-sit" should it ever be needed. He had almost snapped at the term she used but then shrugged it off.

Unlike Pansy, the second year badger (Cho Chang he later learnt) meant no harm. Harry was indeed the age when most still needed to be under constant supervision. Draco promised to consider it after a few seconds. Hufflepuffs were harmless and it would not hurt for Harry to have companions in the other houses.

No Ravenclaw had as yet approached Draco or Harry, but he knew that they had a keen interest in his mate. Ravenclaws were considered the house of "wit and learning". Some of the most noted wizards and witches had come from there. He knew that their interest in Harry stemmed from Dumbledore's prodigy statement.

Blaise had a second year Ravenclaw friend who told him that the eagles were just waiting around for the bi-weekly scores to be announced. If Harry's met their standards, they would approach him. Draco snorted at that. The eagles thought themselves so smart, yet according to the first bi-weekly, the top five spots among the first years went solely to the snakes and lions.

It annoyed him a bit when Blaise had gone further to say that there were talks among the eagles about petitioning the headmaster for a resorting should Harry prove to indeed be intellectual. As the story went, the Ravenclaws believed that anyone "smart" should belong to them. A few eagles were declaring that Harry's sorting as being null and void since it had not been witnessed by the student body. Draco had asked his best friend to procure a list of all the eagles who shared that sentiment. They would not be allowed anywhere near Harry without someone trusted by his side.

Harry slid bonelessly unto the bed when Draco sat on it, quickly curling himself into a ball. Draco frowned – Harry was slightly pale. He stroked his hair away from his face and hissed when his eyes fell on his red scar. It was usually a pale pink, but now it was as red as the lion banner. Touching his cheek, he found it a bit clammy. Was his cub getting ill?

He would have to fetch one of his godfather's potions, just to ward off any possible sickness. At least they did not have much homework that weekend and Harry's history test wasn't until Tuesday. Draco's own was on Monday however, so he needed a general review.

Although he had received an E on the last exam, Hermione had beaten him by two points overall. He had sworn to close that gap and then some. He might be on friendly terms with the girl, but he was determined to be the year's top student. The only person he would allow to surpass him was Harry and even then, his little lion was in for a fight.

He left Harry with a gentle kiss to the cheek. Severus would be around later with news from his
parents. He would get him to check on Harry then.

Harry’s absence from Draco’s side the next morning was noticeable. He had been extremely lethargic when Draco had roused him earlier so had left him to sleep some more. Severus had not found anything wrong with Harry although he too was concerned about the condition of his scar. As far as the potions master could determine, Harry was suffering from mild exhaustion.

His suggestion was to allow Harry to sleep as much as he needed over the weekend and to set an hour aside every afternoon for a rest period. His uncle had laughed at Draco’s groan. He had been privy to Harry’s tantrum and eventual victory the afternoon of his astronomy class. It was an amusing sight seeing the usually calm veela looking so flustered. Harry was a brat true, but it was fun to watch once the brattiness was not directed his way.

His uncle’s suggestion was not the sole reason for him leaving Harry. He expected a bit of a spectacle in the hall this morning and it would not do good for Harry to become upset because of it. It did deal with him to a certain extent but Draco had not nor had any plans of telling Harry about his encounter with Pansy.

He laughed along with his friends at a joke, although his eyes occasionally drifted to the roof. Numerous owls were flying in and out with the morning mail. He had his eyes out for two in particular. True to his expectations, he spotted an ash grey owl belonging to his father.

He held out his arm and the owl landed lightly on it, nipping at his fingers affectionately. "Hello Sterling," he greeted, rubbing the owl’s head. "Have something for me?" he asked. The owl hooted at him and offered its leg. Draco untied a small pouch and a letter.

The pouch contained several sugar quills. He chuckled. Harry had written to his parents earlier that week, and his main complaint was that Professor Binns was a bore and he needed something to help him pay attention. Well the sugar quills would surely help him focus. Draco might have to swipe a few for himself.

He opened the letter, scanning its contents with an impassive face. He knew that Pansy was watching him a few seats away with a smirk. She thought he was on the receiving end of a scolding. If only she knew. Folding it he saw a white owl descending towards Pansy; a perfect contrast to the red letter clutched in its claws.

He bent his head to hide his smile. Let the fun begin, he thought wickedly. Pansy let out a surprised squeak as the letter was dropped before her. A dead silence fell on the Slytherin table as the envelope was noticed. Quite a few of the students around her leaned back or moved away; lest someone think the howler was for them. The nearby eagles had noticed the envelope to, and a hush fell on their table.

"You might want to hurry up and open that Parkinson," a senior prefect pointed out, "Before it explodes."

"T-this must be some sort of mistake!" She managed, refusing to touch the letter that was beginning to smoke at the edges. She looked at Draco. "If anyone should be getting a howler, it should be…” before she had time to finish the sentence, the letter burst open and a shrill voice bellowed out.

"PANSY PATRICIA PARKINSON! HOW DARE YOU MAKE SUCH WRONGFUL ACCUSATIONS AGAINST THE MALFOYS, ESPECIALLY DRACO! YOU ARE NEVER, EVER TO BRING UP SUCH A FOOLISH MATTER AGAIN YOUNG LADY. IF I EVER CATCH A WHISPER THAT YOU HAVE BEEN INSINUATING THAT HARRY IS NOT DRACO’S MATE OR THAT YOU AND HE ARE TO MARRY, YOU WILL BE THE
"Gosh I love a good howler," Draco murmured over the rim of his goblet, watching as Pansy's face turned multiple shades of red. The howler dissolved in a hiss of fire, leaving an embarrassed Pansy to face the snickering hall. The teachers were pretending that nothing had happened, eating their meals as normal.

Draco raised his eyes to the head table and chuckled when his uncle discreetly winked at him. "Thanks uncle," he mouthed. His grandfather had ensured that his parents had received his letter as soon as possible. Sevres nodded and returned to his conversation with the astronomy Professor.

"How dare you!" Draco calmly looked up to see Pansy glaring daggers at him.

"Whatever is the matter Parkinson?" he asked smoothly.

"You, what lies did you tell my parents?"

"Your parents? I simply wrote to mine. What on earth did you write to yours to garner such a response?" he questioned innocently, pointedly waving his own normal letter. "I even received sweets."

Pansy let out a most undignified screech. "I will get you for this Draco Malfoy. You will be mine, make no mistake!"

Draco laughed openly at that, though there was no humour in the sound. "Perhaps you didn't hear your parents right Pansy. Keep it up and another howler will come your way."

"You...You!" Pansy sputtered.

Draco calmly rose, putting a tray together for Harry. Balancing it easily in one hand he walked off, not before saying, "Let you be an example Pansy. No-one interferes with me and my mate."

Grasping his letter, he made his way out of the hall, nodding to the waves from Harry's friends.

Harry joined the snakes for dinner that night. Draco had been a bit confused by his actions. Harry had given every indication of going to sit with his lion friends until they reached the hall. Yet when they had entered, Harry suddenly stiffened besides him and clutched his robes tightly. Draco sensed his anxiety immediately and started to look around for its source. As far as he could determine, it was directed to the turban wearing man at the end of the head table. Well, he was dressed rather strangely. His turban seemed unreasonably high and was wrapped rather haphazardly. There were also several adornments sprinkled randomly across his clothing (garlic as he later realised). His appearance was startling and he supposed a bit frightening for one Harry's age.

The lions had waved Harry over, but he shook his head roughly, clinging even more to Draco. He shrugged at them to indicate he was not entirely certain what was causing Harry' behaviour before leading him to his house table. Pansy glared at them as they sat, but he ignored her. Harry had not even noticed. His grip remained steadfast on Draco throughout the meal. He ate and drank with one hand, never once loosening his grip on his mate's robes.

Throughout the meal, Draco observed the man. There was something different about him. He held himself with rigidity, yet his arms seemed to tremble as he brought his goblet to his lips. His body radiated confidence, yet he jumped visibly whenever students burst out in laughter. He was a sitting contradiction, and that made Draco weary of him.
The fact that Harry determinedly refused to look in the head table's direction at least once cemented Draco's suspicion. It did not escape the veela's notice that his godfather had a scowl on his face and was observing the man as keenly as he was. Good. It proved that his own suspicions were founded. He would be keeping his eye on that Professor, no doubt of it.

The headmaster rose as the dishes vanished. "As some of you may have noticed, we have a new teacher among us. Professor Kenally has left, and this is her replacement. Let us give a Hogwarts welcome to our new Defence against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Quirrell." Polite clapping broke out in the hall. The thin man rose to his feet, bowing slightly before resuming his seat.

As he sat however, his eyes zoomed to Harry and narrowed. The action went unnoticed to all but a few people in the hall. Draco's hackles rose at the malice in the man's eyes. Harry stiffened further besides him and was staring at the man with wide eyes.

Draco's lips curled in a snarl as he sensed the growing fright from Harry. His fingers itched to scratch at the man. The veela's instincts were cut off by the none to gentle jar his uncle gave the man's chair as he passed, effectively breaking his gaze. Severus gave his godson a speaking look as he left. Draco easily read it; the potions master would in their rooms that night. As soon as it was possible, Draco took Harry and they exited the hall.

His godfather was indeed waiting for them, relaxing in an armchair. He had summoned a mug of hot chocolate for Harry and tea for Draco. He himself held a tumbler in his hand, which he downed quickly. Harry sat quietly at Draco's side, sipping at the chocolate.

"Draco, I want you and Harry to be extremely careful around that man; do you understand me? Stay away from him as much as possible."

"Who is he?" Draco asked. "Is he one of his friends?" With Harry with him, they could not speak as freely as they could and so they resorted to code.

"Possibly. I never saw him at any of the parties, but then some of his friends never attended. They had special engagements."

"So you believe that he was a special friend?"

"It is possible. Your father and I were one of his closest friends at first, but we drifted apart after a few years."

"You should be more careful with your friends Uncle Sevvy," Harry spoke up unexpectedly. Severus stared at him for some moments. At times like these Harry was able to render him speechless. That was exactly what Lily had told them back in their school years, days before their relationship had disintegrated.

"They are not always what they seem," Harry finished.

"I'll keep that in mind Lil-ttle one," he quickly amended. Harry's eyes flashed at him before he returned his attention to his mug. Draco knew that something significant had just passed between his mate and uncle, but something told him not to pry. Instead, he moved on to another topic.

"Why are you afraid of him Harry? You only just saw him."

"No I didn't."

"What?" he asked in confusion.
"I saw him when I went to meet Grandpa. He isn't nice," Harry frowned, closing his eyes briefly. "He seems familiar," he murmured more softly. Severus tensed at that.

"In what way Harry?"

The child stared at him thoughtfully. "I don't know. He just does."

"All the more reason to stay away from him," Severus decided. "Boys, I want you to do your best never to be alone with him. Especially you Harry. Do not be alone with him and never allow him to carry you anywhere without a companion understood?"

"Yes Uncle."

"Is he bad?" Harry asked, putting down the empty mug.

"He might be Harry."

"Okay Uncle Sevvy, I'll stay away from him."

"See that you do." He decided to turn to a lighter topic. "Have you completed all your assignments?"

"Yes. I finished your essay before dinner."

"Same here."

"Any difficulties?"

"No. It was simple."

"Likewise."

"Good, then I expect at least an E. You as well Draco."

"Yes Uncle."

"What of your other subjects Harry?"

"They're fine Uncle Sevvy. I needed assistance with Astronomy but Draco helped me."

"What was the problem?" he questioned, noting the amused look on Draco's face.

"Ifellasleep."

"Speak clearly Harry," Draco corrected, his mirth evident.

"I fell asleep…"

"At half nine," Draco finished.

Severus chuckled. "I see. Now do you understand why Draco wanted you to take that rest?"

"Yes," he reluctantly admitted.

It had been a tad embarrassing to be shaken awake by the professor at the end of the class. The woman had ruffled his hair affectionately as she removed the blanket she had conjured. As she sent him along with the other lions, she had assured him that he would not be penalised and to let Draco help him with his chart.
"And so?"

"I'll never not take a rest when Draco tells me to."

"Very good," Severus praised. "Now it's almost nine. Where should you be?"

"Getting ready for bed," Harry sighed, hopping off the couch and disappearing.

"He shouldn't give any more trouble on that issue now," Severus pointed out.

"I should hope not," Draco muttered. "You will look into that man right?"

"I will. I'll see you in class tomorrow Draco. Goodnight."

"Goodnight Uncle."
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Cho Chang’s placement in Hufflepuff is *not* an error in this story.

Things settled down at Hogwarts after the novelty of Harry's arrival wore off. Soon enough it was only a few days until Halloween, Hogwarts favourite holiday. The dark haired boy garbled excitedly about the upcoming events. He crowed in delight at the large illuminated pumpkins and charmed broomsticks that were appearing all around the school.

The teachers as always went beyond the call of duty, even accommodating several non-magical concepts to appease their muggle-born students. The past few transfiguration classes of each year focussed on changing clothes into Halloween costumes. The charms classes focussed on ways to make the costumes more visibly appealing.

The headmaster had decided that the students (and willing staff members) would be allowed to wear their designs for the day. Judging of the costumes would be after the evening feast. Points would be given based on originality and creativity. The winning student would win one of the large pumpkins filled with sweets. A separate prize would be given to the best-dressed teacher.

Harry found those classes particularly enjoyable. He quickly mastered the art and so spent the classes transfiguring his clothes continuously, searching for the right costume. He had narrowed it down to eight choices so far. Draco observed with humour, knowing full well that Harry would change his choice Halloween morning, no matter how enamoured he was with the current ones.

Several other tricks or treats were provided for the students' amusements. Along with the true ghosts, several fakes and replicas roamed the castle. Students who correctly pointed them out squealed in delight as anything from stuffed toys to savoury treats appeared before them.

There even seemed to be a game exclusive to Harry. His new favourite pastime was chasing after the enchanted broomsticks through the corridors. No one actually knew how or why, but the broomsticks always led him to lemon drops and chocolate frogs. Harry's mate and friends were used to it after the first day and no longer followed along anxiously. The broomsticks always led him back to the Great Hall after the game so they had simply taken to waiting for him there.

Harry's charm had earned him a special place in the hearts of many of the students. There was always someone willing to carry him off for the afternoon whenever Draco was unable to. At the top of that list was Cho Chang.

The badger was always friendly with Harry and was willing to help him with his assignments with the same diligence as Draco although helping quickly turned into simple spelling checking. After checking Harry's transfiguration essay for the first time, she could find no fault other than some incorrectly spelt words.

Her astonishment had amused Draco to no end. It was funny; the school knew Harry was smart. He ranked second in their year behind Draco. Yet for some reason, no one could really associate the high quality work his mate produced with the playful child that ran through the halls.
However, life at Hogwarts was far from a bed of roses for the young student. There was the problem of the stuttering defence teacher. The man had taken to staring at Harry at odd times. A few times, Draco had found him wandering along the corridors leading to their quarters. Severus had intercepted him on the last occasion but never informed his godson what he had done to deter the man's strolls.

After that, he had taken to looking at Harry as much as possible during classes and meals. Harry never looked up in class anymore, afraid to see the man's eyes boring into his. He swore that they changed colour from mud brown to a deep red. His pupils also narrowed into dark slits. Harry now had many nightmares that centred around those red eyes. Draco never saw it for himself, but he did not doubt his mate in the least.

The worst case was the day when Quirrell actually broke off mid-lecture to stare at the nine year old with a fiery gaze in his eyes. Harry had been understandably frightened and had all but crawled into his mate's lap to escape the man's glare. Quirrell's lips had curled and a small snarl directed at the child before he continued with the class. Since then, the first years had grown accustomed to the sound of Draco's claws grating on his desk as he resisted the urge to carve the man's face.

Obviously, Quirrell had something against Harry and it went far further than a simple dislike. Thus, the veela had decided that the man needed to be removed from the castle at all costs. He along with Harry's best friends spent countless hours in the library or in Draco and Harry's private quarters discussing possibly ways of getting Quirrell removed.

Hermione had several theories about the man's odd behaviour, ranging from spirit possession to him being a paedophile. The latter seemed more probable in her opinion as Quirrell did seem to have a deep fascination with the nine year old. He was the smallest student and would likely hold the attention of such a person. His apparent anger towards Harry could be from his inability to get to him. Draco dismissed it. There was no longing in Quirrell's eyes, only something boarding on hate.

Ron's personal opinion was that the man was bonkers. Why else would he go round wearing pounds of garlic? The redhead did not believe in the rumours about vampires. One of his elder brothers worked in Romania where Quirrell had claimed to be attacked. Charlie swore that there were not any vampires in that country. Vampires and dragons were sworn enemies and the bloodsuckers had abandoned the country long ago. Unknown to them it was a story also being investigated by the headmaster.

Draco sided with his uncle's beliefs. Severus was convinced that Quirrell had some links with Death Eaters and was trying to unearthen the necessary evidence to have him fired or (even better) jailed. It was a difficult task however as Severus no longer held favour with the Dark Lord's former servants.

Harry was unaware of all their investigations. Draco had assured him that the matter of Quirrell was being looked into, and that was enough for him. He trusted Draco to protect him. He had more important things to worry about; liking finding that elusive grey broom.

The broom had first appeared before him a little over a week ago. It was different from all the other decorations that played with him. This one never dove after him or tickled him with bristles until he laughed. It simply appeared for brief seconds, hovered and slowly disappeared. At first, he had thought that he imagined it, but soon it appeared more and more often and for longer periods.

The broom now appeared for minutes at a time, floating sedately near him. At the moment, it was hovering near him, as if beckoning him to it. He had contemplated following it for a while now; it always drifted in the same direction. He was wary though. It really did not act like the other brooms. Draco had dismissed it when he mentioned it, saying that it was probably just a new type of game to amuse him. Harry had been reassured, and vowed to follow it the next time.
That was why he was trailing after it now.

It was two days before Halloween and he was playing hide and seek with Cho, hiding behind a tapestry. It was when he had peeked out that he saw it. The grey broom had been slowly flying back and fro as if calling him. When it remained visible after a few minutes Harry started to follow it, curiosity aroused. All the other brooms had led him to treats. This broom seemed to be very special. Perhaps there was an even greater treat at the end.

"Harry!" He stopped as he heard his name called a distance away. It was Cho. He was torn between heeding her calls and following the waiting broom. Cho sounded worried and Draco had told him to obey her... He pulled at his lip, thinking quickly. He really wanted to know where the broom would carry him.

"There you are Harry!" Cho called, relief obvious in her voice as she rounded the corner and saw him. Harry blinked as the broom's colour changed. It now looked like any other broom. "Harry, I told you not to hide anyway past the tapestry," Cho scolded.

Harry felt slightly bad for having worrying her. "I'm sorry Cho, but I was following the broom." He pointed to the broom behind him that had risen to the ceiling. The girl looked at it and then sighed.

"That doesn't excuse you Harry. You knew what I said. Come on, we're going back to the hall. We won't play this game again until I'm sure you'll listen to me." She held out her hand to him expectantly.

"Aww...Cho. I said I was sorry. Come on, let's follow it. I'll share the sweets with you." He put the most beguiling look on his face, pouting slightly. One, two, there. Cho's gaze melted. She reached down and ruffled his loose hair.

"Okay Harry. I'm not mad but don't worry me like that again." Chasing the broom did seem like an interesting idea, she thought. "Fine. Let's follow the broom."

"Thanks Cho!" He looked up. "Hey you! Let's go!" The broom shuddered and took off.

Harry and Cho ran along the corridors to keep up, nearly mowing over Cedric Diggory in their rush. "Sorry Ced!" Cho shouted over her shoulder, laughing at Cedric's expression. Running like this really was fun and she could get away with the burst of childishness by claiming that she was just trying to amuse Harry.

The broom led them on quite a merry chase, dipping into crevices, alternately speeding up and slowing down until they found themselves in a dank corridor. The broom raced to a door and stopped. Harry slowed down while Cho reached moments after, slightly out of breath.

"Where are we?" Harry asked, looking around the corridor. Its atmosphere was completely different to anywhere he had ever been before. The air smelt musky and there was the steady dripping of water. He didn't like the feeling he was getting from the corridor, but if the broom had brought them, it had to be okay.

"H-Harry, we should go," Cho said, suddenly nervous.

"Why?"

"I think this is the third floor corridor."

"So?"
"Did we take a right or a left getting here?" she asked, speaking more to herself.

"A right."

"Bloo- Oh darn. Come on Harry, we need to leave. This area's out of bounds. Merlin we're in so much trouble." Cho was obviously agitated and took Harry's hand to lead him back. He held his ground though.

"We followed the broom. If it led us here, it was not our fault. They always give me something and I want to see what that broom has for me." As if to help him, the broom zoomed around them before settling back in front the door.

"But Harry – "

"Come on Cho. No one will know. Just a peek..." Harry's voice trailed off as a tall figure turned into the corridor. His hand went limp in Cho's as he realised that it was Quirrell.

"W-why a-a-re you st-st-students h-here." He questioned softly even as he approached.

Cho spun around eyes widening. "We didn't mean to professor. We were following one of the charmed brooms. It brought us here."

"I-Is th-that s-so?"

"Yes sir," she hurried on, not noticing the way Harry stood, obviously scared. "These brooms always lead Harry to some treats. So we thought..."

Quirrell put a hand up to hush her. His voice lacked his customary stutter when he spoke next. "I'm well aware of Potter's little game Miss. As I can clearly see the broom in question, I suppose you are not at fault. Now I suggest you and Mr. Potter go investigate it quickly and leave. I will wait."

Where on earth was his stutter? Cho thought. Something was wrong here. There was an eerie drawl to his voice that sent a shiver down her spine. They needed to get back to a main part of the castle as soon as possible. "Er...we can just leave now professor."

"No, no. Since you both risked punishment to come here, I think you should finish the game. I insist."

"Yes sir." Cho murmured, realising that there would be no escape. She forced a smile as she turned to the stiff boy. "Let's go Harry." Harry started to protest, but caught Cho's look. The faster they did it, the sooner they could leave.

"Yes Cho." At a grave pace, they approached the door, hardly noticing that the broom vanished as they neared.

Tentatively Cho reached out and pushed the door open. A gust of stale air met them and Harry sneezed. The room was obviously empty. "There's nothing there professor. Can we leave now?"

There was a slight tremor to Cho's voice.

Quirrell chuckled darkly and shook his head. "Perhaps the treat will emerge when you enter the room. Go in children."

Harry shook his head, trembling at the man's look. Something bad would happen if they went in there. He was scared and he wanted his mate. "Draco," he thought anxiously. "I want you. Draco."
"Sir...I don't think...."

"Disobeying me on top of being here is not wise Miss. Get. In."

Cho hesitated, but in the end decided it would be more prudent to obey. He was a teacher after all, no matter how odd he seemed. She took a step forward and then another into the room, all but dragging Harry in behind her.

* 

"What time is Harry coming back?" Hermione questioned, repacking her books.

Draco looked at the clock, his hand dropping from his chest. He had been massaging it for a few minutes now. He was feeling something, but didn't really understand exactly what it was.

"He should be back any minute now," He replied slowly, deciding to ignore the feeling for now. "Cho usually brings him about half an hour before dinner to clean up."

"Oi Malfoy, how did the Hufflepuff stand up to the great Malfoy Inquisition?" Ron teasingly asked.

Draco mock-glared. "I'll have you know she answered all my questions with perfect eloquence."

"WHAT?" Disbelief was apparent on Ron's face.

Draco held his look for a few more seconds before breaking down into laughter. "Sorry, there was no inquisition as you put it. She's a Hufflepuff for Merlin's sake. She's as easy to read as a book."

Hermione chuckled. "I heard that she was meant for Ravenclaw though."

That sobered Draco a bit. "Why?"

"Something about a third year named Diggory. Rumour has it their parents arranged a marriage for them. They basically grew up together and she didn't want to be away from him so she chose to be a badger. The eagles weren't too pleased, especially since she's ranked third in her year. They've been appealing for her transfer since her first year."

"That's sounds like you and Harry mate," Ron pointed out, spreading out on the rug. "Do the eagles still badger him?"

Draco scowled. "They've taken their appeals to the teachers now after I threatened them. Do they really believe that no other house has anyone smart? I mean, look at our year, there aren't any eagles in the top five."

"True," Ron conceded. "I wondered why they never targeted you Mione?"

"They have," she said with a little sniff.

"Really?"

"Yes, they backed off when I hexed a few of them. Apparently they decided that any first year brave enough to do that really was meant to be a lion."

"So," Draco drawled, "I should just sic Harry on them?"

"Nah mate. They'll probably just coo at him and clap. Harry really isn't an eagle, I wish they would see that. I can see a bit of snake in him, but that could be from being around you too much."
"Funny Weasly," Draco stated, rising. "I wonder where Cho and Harry are. Dinner's starting in a few minutes."

"Maybe they're already in the hall. If they were running late, she would take him straight there." Hermione pointed out.

That feeling Draco had been experiencing increased suddenly and he felt a sudden concern for his mate. "Let's go," he said abruptly. The two lions noticed the urgency in his voice, but put it down to him being anxious to see Harry.

Many people were seated when they entered the hall, and Draco's eyes quickly scanned the four tables, looking for his mate. He was not among any of them. He didn't see Cho either. He headed for the badger table while Hermione and Ron went to the lions. "Pardon me; has anyone seen either Cho Chang or Harry?"

A tallish boy spoke up. "I saw them about forty minutes ago. They were chasing after a broom I believe. Almost mowed me down," he finished with an amused grin.

"Where were they headed?"

"Hm...they were near the staircase leading up to the third floor. I don't know if they went up though. Further along the corridor loops back towards the trophy rooms. Are you looking for them?"

Draco resisted the urge to snap "Obviously". "Yes I am. Cho was supposed to return him thirty minutes ago."

"I'm sure they're fine. She's probably showing him the trophies. Young Harry would be fascinated by them."

"He would," Draco allowed, not at all convinced.

"The lions haven't seen them," Hermione stated approaching him. A slight crease of concern was now apparent on her forehead.

"Neither have the eagles."

"Something's wrong," Draco murmured, unconsciously kneading the spot over his heart.

The veela froze for a moment before he turned and walked away. Sharing a look, Hermione and Ron followed him. Diggory decided to join them. After all, his intended was also missing.

"We should split up, right Draco?"

Draco gave no response or indication that he had even heard the redhead.

"Draco?" Ron called, jogging a bit to keep up.

He nearly tripped when he saw the veela's face. Draco's eyes were glazed and there was a far away expression in his eyes. His hand was firmly clamped on his chest. He appeared to be in a trance.

"Ron? Oh my?" Hermione gasped, catching a glimpse of Draco's face. "What's wrong with him?"

"My guess is that he's following a call." Diggory mused, also looking. "But that only happens if..." The boy broke off as a look of panic crossed his face. "I'm going to call a teacher," he said quickly, turning and running off.
"Why?" Ron shouted to his departing form.

Diggory paused long enough to say. "A call only occurs when a mate is in danger. Follow Draco but keep out of his way." With that, he was gone.

"Danger?"

"Come on Ron, we're losing Draco!"

Sure enough, the veela had passed through two corridors while they had stopped to talk. The two lions drew their wands as a precaution, both well aware that there was little really they could do if trouble struck. They barely knew any offensive spells.

Draco led them further and further until they were almost at the third floor staircase. He paused before it, seemingly torn between climbing it, and going beyond. He eventually passed it, but stopped a few steps away, turning to look behind it. He shook his head and retraced his steps, heading up the stairs. Ron made to follow but Hermione's squeak had him pausing. Following Draco to where he had stopped, Hermione gasped at the unconscious form of Cho Chang.

There was a darkening bruise the side of her face. "Sweet Merlin!" Ron breathed besides her. "Is she..."

Hermione bent quickly and licking her finger placed it beneath Cho's nose. The moist spot on her skin cooled from a movement of air. "She's breathing," she sighed. "Go find someone and lead them here. Whoever's with Diggory wouldn't know where we are."

"What about Draco. What is whoever did this..."

"Draco's instincts will protect him. But we need help. Hurry Ron!"


Cho's lips moved slightly and Hermione bent closer to her what the badger was trying to say. "Professor..."

"Help's coming Cho. The professors are coming."

"Pro-fes..." the girl rasped again, voice weaker. She slipped back into unconsciousness.

Hermione looked down the corridor as she heard multiple footsteps. She was relieved to see Ron leading several professors. Professor Snape and McGonagall headed up the stairs, wands drawn, while Professor Flitwick and Sprout stopped besides Hermione.

"My precious Puff," Sprout mewed in concern, tears springing to her eyes. Hermione backed away, letting the teachers examine her.

"She woke up for a few seconds," she offered. "She muttered 'Professor'."

"Thank you Miss Granger. You and Mr. Weasley have been a great help tonight. You will come with us to the hospital wing."

"Yes Professor."

Professor Flitwick produced a stretcher and with the Herbology professor's help they levitated the
unconscious girl unto it. After a few anxious glances towards the staircase, Ron and Hermione followed the Professors.

Severus and Minerva paused at the top of the staircase. As they had climbed the steps they had heard an enraged shriek. Having known the Malfoys for many years, Severus recognised it immediately. "Draco's angry," he told his partner, following the sound quickly to an open door.

He held a hand up to delay the transfiguration Professor. "He's likely to attack on sight. He knows me. I'll go in first. Come when I call."

Cautiously, he entered the room, a shield automatically rising as Draco flung a gust of wind towards him, looking feral. He had transformed into the form of an enraged veela. Though smaller than an adult veela, Severus knew that he was still as deadly.

"Draco, it's me, Uncle Sev," he intoned in a soothing tone. His godson shrieked and attacked again, noticeably weakening Severus' shield. "I mean you no harm Draco. I am your godfather. Listen to my voice. You know me. You trust me." Even as he spoke, Draco attacked again and again.

Severus knew that he was almost out of time. His shield would not hold for much longer and he really did not want to have to stun his godson. He tried one more time.

"Calm down my little dragon."

Draco froze mid-strike. That nickname was something he had heard his entire life. Only a few called him that, and only one in that tone of voice. "Un-cle Sev-er-us?" he stammered, raining in his emotions. As his rage lessened he recognised the man he had called uncle his whole life.

"Yes my little dragon, it's Uncle Sev. Come on, calm down."

"They hurt him, I'll kill them." Draco ground out, eyes wide.

"We'll find them," Severus soothed, even as his anger flared at the words. Looking behind Draco, he could see the crumpled form of Harry.

"They touched him, my mate, my cub. They HURT HIM." Draco screamed.

"Harry needs you calm little dragon. Calm down and let me help. I won't hurt him. You know that little dragon."

Draco's eyes bore into his for long moments before his veela form dissipated, leaving a frantic eleven year old behind. "Harry!" He spun and knelt beside his mate, gathering him into his arms. When his head lollled back, Draco shot a desperate look to his uncle. "Help him Uncle!"

Severus was by him instantly, calling for the transfigurations teacher. The woman cast a fireball to shine light upon them. They all hissed at the sight that met them. Harry's bare arms bore several puncture wounds and blood was seeping from them in thin rivulets.

There were some welts along his legs. On his left cheek were five thin long scrapes as if someone had scratched him with their nails. They were horrified by the injuries. Draco noticed something that neither teacher did. Harry's long hair was shorn off by the nape. His previously mid-back hair now barely passed his hairline. Draco knew how much Harry treasured his hair. His anger reemerged.

The two teachers sensed the change in Draco. Looking up, they met a deadly blue gaze. "I will get them for this." Draco said in a level and unwavering voice. Neither of them was going to argue with him in his current mood. They liked their heads where they were.
Draco insisted that getting Harry to the hospital wing was his burden to bear. The protests of his professors were met with fierce looks until they relented. The headmaster had sent the rest of the school to their dormitories as a precaution although he was certain that there would not be another attack that night. The prefects were to ensure that no student disobeyed his orders while the remaining teachers searched the castle for the attackers.

Dumbledore's heart clenched painfully as he watched the young Malfoy enter the hospital wing clutching his precious burden to his chest. A worried looking Severus and Minerva were at his heels. It was with great reluctance that Draco allowed Madame Pomfrey to care for his injured mate.

His instincts screamed at him to slash at the woman for touching his mate. Indeed, he did not want anyone within one hundred yards of his mate. He stood mere inches away from Harry, oblivious to the fact that he was crooning to him in his mother language. He begged his mate for forgiveness, for not recognising his call immediately. He apologised for not listening to his inner veela, for if he had he might have reached his mate in time.

Harry showed no visible sign of response but slowly a warmth seeped into Draco's chest. It soothed the last trace of unease that lingered there. It was Harry's soul responding to his pleas.

He closed his eyes and listened intently. Harry was reassuring him that it was not his fault, that he was partly to blame for the situation. The soul did not explain further, but Draco sensed lingering guilt. He sought to comfort it, but the guilty feeling remained.

Draco's eyes opened when he felt Harry retreating. Sure enough, Madame Pomfrey had healed the visible marks of injury on the child. Save for the short hair, Harry looked as he normally did. His hand moved minutely, reaching out. Draco clutched it instinctively. Harry's smaller fingers curled around his before slipping free. That brief touch had reassured him that Draco was near.

The veela was unaware how long he stood staring at Harry's still form before he heard his Uncle's soft voice. "Little dragon, look at me." He obeyed, turning to stare at his godfather.

"You stopped calling me that a long time ago," he murmured reflectively.

Severus gave him a tender smile. "It still seems to have the same effect."

Draco's lips tilted a bit at that, even as he turned to look back at Harry. Certain now that he was safe, he took a shuddering breath. He could be vulnerable for a bit now. He had been as scared as he had been angry when he had first seen Harry's unconscious form. He had allowed the anger to reign free as he knew his fright would have dehabilitated him and made him unable to defend Harry's prone form.

But now, there was no danger, and although the anger was mostly gone, the fright still remained. He may be a veela dominant, but he was also a child only two years older than Harry. He had been badly scared and as with all young people, he wanted comfort. His uncle was here, obviously willing to offer him what he needed if the use of his nickname was anything to go by.

With that in mind, he took a few hesitant steps towards his godfather, not caring about the other people around them looking on. Severus' arms opened invitingly and that was it. With a sound akin to a cry, Draco flew into those welcoming arms, clutching the black robes tightly. He pressed his head to Severus' chest as the man's hands enveloped him. He was pliant, allowing himself to be lifted
and settled on the man's knee.

A part of him protested that he was much too old to be seated there, but he shoved it aside. He didn't want to be refined or dignified at that moment. He just wanted to stay in this comforting embrace. "Papa," he whispered brokenly, voice muffled. He felt Severus' small jump at that.

He used to call Severus that when he was very young. Lucius was "father", Severus "Papa". Its use had lessened with time, until it stopped all together when he was around six. He barely remembered using the title, but it slipped easily past his lips now.

"Papa," he repeated; a slight hint of desperation in his voice. He wanted to let go, to lose control. But he couldn't do that if Severus wasn't able to help him weather the storm.

Severus' voice rumbled from his chest as he responded. "I'm here for you my little dragon. That's it, let go. Good boy. You don't have to be strong right now."

That was the assurance Draco needed and he broke. Wracking sobs filled the room as Draco cried. He cried for Harry and the fright and pain he had certainly endured; he wept for Cho, who had unknowingly been dragged into the whole situation. But most of all, he cried knowing that he had failed to protect Harry and the fact that the perpetrator was still at large. Even now, his Harry was not safe, and he was not certain if he could protect him.

Severus pressed his cheek against his godson's blonde hair as he wept, rocking him slowly and whispering assurances to him. Seeing Harry lying there so still upset him more deeply than he let on. He was gaining just as much comfort from Draco as the boy gleaned from him. His heart hurt knowing that someone had assaulted Harry again. He swore to work harder to protect the child.

Dumbledore's eyes were sparkling as he stood near the door, his arms occupied by two shaken lions. Seeing the stoic Slytherin break down had released some sort of dam and now he had two trembling students seeking comfort as well. The looks of agony on their faces when they had seen Harry's condition pained him. It was something no persons their age should witness. Thus, he gave them his support in the best way he thought possible.

In a far corner of the room, surrounded by privacy curtains, Cedric sat on the edge of a hospital bed, gently stroking the back of Cho's hand. He had intercepted the professors on their way up here. He had felt a moment of fear when he thought the stretcher bared Harry, but that fear upgraded itself to outright panic when he saw that the victim was his Cho.

He understood to a small extent what Draco was feeling. While he had been laughing with his friends, Cho had been staring down her attacker. He should have given into his urge to follow them when Cho had knocked into him; if only to chide them for their recklessness. Instead, with an indulgent smile he had left them to their fun.

Perhaps if he had followed, things would have gone differently. Well, there was no way he could ever know. He could not live with regret, Cho would never allow it. Therefore, he channelled those emotions into determination. He would help find whoever it was who had so cruelly attacked a teenaged girl and a nine year old. He would see that they were brought to justice.

Draco's sobs had quieted to hiccups, but he clung to his uncle as hard as ever. He felt considerably better now that his pent up emotions had been released, but now he felt terribly lethargic. "Papa," he murmured, "I'm tired."

Severus adjusted him slightly so that he could see his face. It was drenched with tears, but his eyes were wide and trusting. Draco looked around Harry's age now; he fully expected Severus to take
command for now until he was ready.

"Do you want to go to your rooms?"

Draco shook his head. "I want to be with Harry. Please Papa."

Severus stood, gathering Draco into his arms. Madame Pomfrey understood what Severus meant to do and the bed doubled in size with a flick of her wand. Another movement and Draco was in a pair of soft pyjamas as he was laid against the sheets.

He reached out immediately and turned until he was as close as possible to Harry, a hand laying possessively over him. Feeling Harry's warmth, the last of Draco's fears were swept away. Draco gave a contended smile and his eyes drifted close. "Thank you," was the last thing he murmured before drifting off. Severus pale hand caressed a cheek for a brief moment before withdrawing.

Straightening he turned to the headmaster, noting that Weasley and Granger were still clinging to him. "What do we do with them and Diggory?" he questioned.

"I think it best for them to remain here tonight. I'm afraid that they won't drift of as easily as young Malfoy there."

Madame Pomfrey was by his side instantly, gently coaxing the children from the headmaster and pointing them to beds across from Harry and Draco. She transfigured their clothing and soon they were settled under the covers.

Their shock must not have completely worn off, Severus noted, seeing the automatic ways they obeyed. He hoped they would not be too shaken. Pomfrey fed them a combination of Sleeping Potion and Calming Drought.

It was a combination that would send them slowly to sleep while ensuring that their anxieties would not produce nightmares. She directed a Dreamless Sleep to Cedric as he was old enough to have it while he performed the necessary charms himself.

"I think it advisable that the children be excused from classes tomorrow should they so desire." Severus said, once all the young wizards and witches were taken care of.

"I agree Severus. Poppy, when do you think Harry and Miss Chang would be ready to resume class."

"I'm not certain Albus. They have healed but I'm worried about lingering emotional distress. I think it best they remain away from the school population until we can at least reassure them that they will be safe."

"Very well Poppy. You will inform us of when they are ready to provide accounts of the incident."

"Of course headmaster."

Dumbledore thanked her and turned to the silent transfiguration professor. "Minerva my dear, how are you."

"Shaken but fine Albus. I am trying to find the best way to explain to my house about this."

"I'm sure you'll manage beautifully," Albus replied assuringly.

"There will be an outcry against this. You realise this?"
"Yes," Albus sighed. "Harry is well liked as is Miss Chang."

"It should help flush out the guilty party...if it was a student."

"You suspect otherwise Severus?"

"I have my suspicions. Does no one besides me find it strange where Harry was found? That entire corridor is sealed by powerful charms that you yourself helped cast Albus. No student no matter how powerful should have been able to reach that area unless the wards were weakened beforehand. For Harry to be there suggests that this was no random attack."

"Albus," Minerva said with sudden urgency. "Is?"

"The entrance is undisturbed Minerva. The stone is safe." Albus raised his hand to rub at his forehead. "Severus is right however. I doubt that a student was responsible for it. So that leaves only the staff and anyone who managed to enter the school undetected."

"Which is impossible."

"Exactly. The attacker rests among the staff."

A silence settled among the adults after that. All were lost in their own thoughts.

The first thing Draco was aware off when he awoken was that Harry was snuggled deeply in his arms. His head was tucked beneath his chin and Draco felt a warm breath of air continuously against his neck. He smiled, fingers reaching up to hold his mate's braid and clenching at air when he realised that there was nothing for him to grab.

Memories of the previous day raced back to him and Draco shot up, causing Harry to mewl in protest before snuggling into his pillow. "Dragon?" came a concerned voice. Turning, Draco found his godfather eyeing him with worried eyes, a Daily Prophet abandoned besides him.

"Uncle Severus," Draco greeted. "What happened?"

"You fell asleep here so we thought it best to leave you. Granger, Weasley and Diggory remained for the night but all decided to go to class. You've been excused."

Draco nodded absently, his gaze reverting to Harry. He rubbed at Harry's exposed neck. He really missed Harry's head. His godfather guessed his thoughts. "Draco, I think Harry can regrow it if he so desires. Remember last year when his braid was severed?"

Draco smirked. How could he forget? Harry had decided to play knight and dragon and had been furiously swiping around a sword he had sneaked from Lucius. Needless to say, his braid had been a victim of the game. They had found him crying brokenly, clutching the severed rope of hair. Narcissa had assured him that it would grow back eventually but Harry wouldn't be comforted, repeating that he wanted his hair back now.

To their amazement, Harry's hair started to lengthen and within a few hours was back to its previous length. Uncle Severus was right. Harry would be able to regrow it if he desired to.

Harry's hair was a security blanket for him, a protection from the past. It helped him to differentiate himself from the messy haired child who had suffered constant abuse. Harry's long hair represented the present and the fact that he was safe. He often clutched handfuls of hair whenever he was not at
ease. It comforted him. Yes, he was certain that Harry's braid would be back soon.

"Why his hair?" Draco questioned.

"We're not sure. Many potions or rituals often require such ingredients as hair or blood. Both were taken from him. The headmaster and I have already started investigating all the possible uses that could be derived from what was taken."

"So we're dealing with Voldemort's little minions," Draco deadpanned.

"It is a distinct possibility that one of his followers could be involved."

Draco sneered. "They choose to seek revenge for a dead man?"

Severus' eyes were grave as they met his godson's. "Draco. Based on the evidence I've accumulated over the past weeks, and the headmaster's own investigations, we have reasons to believe that the man known as Voldemort is not truly dead."
"Reveal me," a ghastly voice hissed angrily.

"Yes master." With trembling hands, Quirrell started unwrapping the cloth around his head. As it loosened, a revolting stench filled the room. The man gagged at the smell but continued his work until the last bit of cloth fell away...taking with it a blackened piece of his scalp. A chalk-like face was revealed on the back of the man's skull.

"You have failed me Quirrell!" the face growled, causing the man to flinch. "You will be punished for this!"

"But master!" the man pleaded, "The plan was flawless."

"Then how did they find the boy?" came the angry reply. "The girl was supposed to be found, not him. Why did they not find the house-elf?"

"Master, I do not know," he grovelled. "The house-elf we fed the polyjuice to was never discovered. Somehow, they knew where to find Potter. AH!" Quirrell dropped to his knees as searing pain raced through his head. The second face grimaced as well, but it was in pleasure. It unlike most people, revelled in pain.

How dare his servant fail him so badly? The boy was not supposed to be found. He would punish him further once he regained his body; for now he needed the fool alive and well to continue hosting him. Quirrell had been the best match for him so far. He had been living in him for three months now.

It was really only in the past few weeks that the man's body truly began reacting to him. Quirrell's flesh was slowly rotting, but he believed he could draw out at least four more months in his frame. Not that he planned on remaining in him for so long. Soon he would have his Elixir and would have a body once again.

Reluctantly, he released his hold on the man's brain, stopping the pain. His servant was blabbering apologies that he brushed aside. "Because of your stupidity, we have lost an opportunity to gain the stone. Lucky for you we shall have a next chance tomorrow. Have you enough of the boy's hair left?"

"Y-yes master. Only a quarter so of it was used in the potion."

Following his directions, Quirrell had brewed an advanced form of the polyjuice potion. It would have kept the elf resembling Potter for at least a week. Additionally, with the strong stunning spell that had been used to capture the elf still active, it would not have roused for that entire period. His enemies would have been suitably distracted trying to awaken the "boy", giving him ample time to complete his task and kill the child responsible for his current state.

Voldemort did not believe that Harry Potter would be difficult to kill. He was not the hero the wizarding world praised him as. It was a mere accident that had caused his demise. It had to be. No baby could have beaten him. He was Lord Voldemort and he was everlasting.

"Fetch the hair then carry me to the Forbidden Forest. I will have that stone."

"Yes master."
Severus cast a silencing spell to ensure that they would not be overheard before speaking.

"I don't have much information on Quirrell himself, but in researching him, I have found a few things on the not so dead Dark Lord. There have been several sightings that I believe are directly related to him."

"People have seen Voldemort?" Draco asked, his body posture more alert.

"Yes and no."

"Explain Uncle," Draco said with a bit of impatience. His godfather was being vague and he was not in the mood for it.

The potions master recognised that and gave him an apologetic look. "A few of my contacts have reported sightings of a deformed figure wandering through woodlands and forests. The earliest such sighting was approximately seven years ago, not too far from Godric Hollow."

"Godric? That's where Harry was born wasn't it?"

"Yes it was. Since then, it has been seen in different parts of Britain. There are also claims of it being seen in France. As you know though, ghouls are frequent there, so it cannot be confirmed if the figure seen there is the same.

"Its shape differs with each appearance. Sometimes the form is tall and burly, other times small and diminutive. The sightings were first thought to be unrelated because of that. Yet, a common characteristic has emerged. In every recorded location, the drained carcasses of unicorns inevitably turned up."

Draco paled. Unicorns were one of his favourite magical creatures, second only to dragons.

"Drained?"

"Of blood. There was not a single drop of blood left in the unicorns when they were found."

"But why?" he managed, disturbed by the revelation. Unicorns were one of the purest animals in existence, extremely intelligent. To kill one seemed sacrilegious.

A large palm settled over the veela's and stroked it comfortingly. "Unicorn blood has many healing properties. It also expands a person's lifetime. When willingly given, there are little ramifications for either the taker or the unicorn. When forcibly removed, both sides suffer."

Severus refused to explain it further. Draco did not need to know all the gory details; he was much too young.

"I believe that this figure is the Dark Lord. My theory is that somehow he was able to save a piece of himself when his spell rebounded off Harry. That fragment of him is what is being sighted, though how the form changes is beyond me. I also have no clue as to how he manages to have a physical form to start with."

"The unicorn population has decreased significantly recently, which leads me to believe that Voldemort is surviving off their blood. He must be extremely weak to be so dependent. Perhaps he is trying to find a way to strengthen himself, in the hopes of rising again."

"There are ways for him to regain his full power?"
"Yes. The only limit I believe magic truly has is that it cannot bring a dead person back to life. Everything else is fair game if you know where to look."

The veela was silent for a long while processing all that he had been told. He had always been warned that Harry would have to be kept safe from Death Eaters and their families. That he could accept easily. But to know that the Dark Lord himself could possibly be returning, Draco knew that it would be next to impossible to protect Harry as he was.

He was strong yes and would get stronger with time. He had his veela blood. That alone set him above a lot of wizards. However, he had yet to reach wizarding maturity. With it, his powers would increase even further. With time, he would be able to defend Harry from the darkest wizard himself, something he would do in a heartbeat.

But for now, he did not have the strength to stand up against him. If Voldemort returned to full power anytime soon, he would have to rely on those around him to help protect Harry. As a veela it disturbed him that he would need outside assistance.

"So he's alive but weak. How long do you think..."

"Until he returns? I cannot be certain. Unicorn blood keeps him going, but it will take much more than that to return him to full power. We have time. Perhaps no more than a year, but at least we know that he is alive. We can start to plan a counter attack, perhaps even getting to him before he even fully returns."

"We?"

Severus hesitated for a moment, debating with himself. Finally, he decided to tell him. He had already said so much, it would not hurt to continue.

"There are several organisations outside of the Ministry of Magic who collaborated to defeat Voldemort in the past. Many still exist, although their mission has changed. They take a different approach to dealing with dark wizards than the Ministry.

"I am part of one such organisation...as are your parents. With my findings plus the evidence of the founder, we will reform the group and work towards driving off Voldemort. Harry and the entire wizarding world will be safe and rid of that man once and for all."

Who better was there to trust than a group that his parents and godfather were associated with? Draco’s previous fears dissipated greatly at Severus’ revelation. There were groups out there that would fight against Voldemort. He was not alone in his task. With other organisations behind the project, it would leave his responsibility to center around protecting Harry.

"I trust you to help me with this Uncle Severus," he said after concluding his thoughts.

"Thank you Dragon."

Harry made a small sound besides them, twisting slightly. Draco’s hand shot out to stroke his forehead and he stilled.

"I don't like how he looks," Draco muttered, reaching up to tug at a short lock. "It reminds me to much of when he first came to me."

"It's just hair Draco," Severus pointed out.

"Not to me, and definitely not to him."
"Care to explain my dragon?"

Draco's face bore a frown as he looked at his uncle. "Harry has nightmares you know. Not as often as before but he still does on occasion."

Severus swallowed, "About the past? His time with..."

"Yes and no. He doesn't dream of what they did to him, he dreams of me abandoning him and he being returned to them. I can't say I blame him seeing that he was never told that they would no longer be a threat to him."

The "them" Draco referred to was of course Harry's muggle relatives the Dursleys. They were the ones responsible for the dreadful state Harry had been brought to him in. Draco's family had ensured that Harry had been avenged.

Vernon Dursley had been dealt with by his parents. They had placed a portkey in his vehicle that activated the moment his vehicle exploded by a timed spell. His "body" had been completely annihilated in the explosion. At least, that is what the muggles believed.

With his "death" on the muggle records, no wizard would ever think to link the mangled body found deep in Ogre Mountains with Vernon Dursley. Narcissa was in her rights as a veela mother to exact revenge on Harry. The ruse was simply to ensure that Lucius could not be charged under wizard laws.

The portkey had dropped him in the middle of the ogres' territory. Wizards had a treaty with the beings that allowed them relative safety. Muggles however were not apart of it and so Dursley had been attacked immediately. Lucius and Narcissa had apparated into the area long enough to hear his pain-filled screams as he was ripped apart by the beasts. They left long before the act was complete.

Severus had taken the task of dealing with Petunia. For the woman who stood aside and allowed an innocent child to be brutally abused, death would not be enough. Instead, he had put her under the Imperious Curse.

A week after her husband's "death", Petunia had called all of her husband's relatives and told them that due to her grief, she was leaving Surrey with her son to start a new beginning. She gave no information as to where she planned to go or if she would ever contact them again. Two days after that, Petunia Dursley disappeared from Privet Drive and re-surfaced in Russia.

Severus had a few friends there in the potioning world that preferred human test subjects to rats. Petunia was a gift to them. Year after year, she was forced to ingest as many experimental potions as were required. She suffered from terrible side effects from them, from excruciating pain to the spewing of slugs or other such undesirables.

She would remain there for ten years as Severus had arranged. He had no doubt she would be all but mad by them as a result of the endless potions. After that, she would be locked away in an asylum or wherever else his friends chose to put her.

Albus had settled for de-aging the young Dursley to a five month old babe and placing him in an orphanage. He truly believed that the child's atrocious behaviour and assaults to his cousin were because of witnessing his parents attitude. He had decided to give Dudley a second chance at life. Narcissa had argued that Dumbledore should have at least spanked the young bully's behind scarlet first. Severus had agreed but still handed over the required potion.

"That's something you and Harry will have to settle upon," Severus decided. "I'm not getting into it."
"Fine," Draco conceded. His gaze drifted across the room and settled on the bed he knew that Cho had been in the previous night. "Anyway, I notice Cho isn't here. Where is she?"

"Miss Chang was discharged earlier today. Her parents have chosen to remove her from the school for a few weeks. Honestly I'm not certain if she will return. Her parents were reluctant to send her here in the first place."

"Why?"

"Both her parents attended Beauxbatons. She only came here because of Mr. Diggory. I'm quite certain that if she transfers, Mr. Diggory would soon follow."

"I don't understand. Neither of them shares a bond like Harry and me. They should be fine without each other."

"It's my personal opinion that there is more to the matter than the school was told. Perhaps they are soul mates. It is a bond quite similar to yours. Once the soul mate is found, they feel bereft without each other. It would not be as severe as what the pair of you went through, but it would still happen. I remember Mr. Diggory as being quite withdrawn for his first year."

"So there are different types of bonds?"

"Many types Dragon. It can range from a bond like yours to a bond between enemies."

"Why on earth would anyone bond with an enemy?"

"The reasons differed between persons I suppose."

Draco mulled over it for a while before pushing it out of his mind. The only bond he needed to be concerned with was his own. "Uncle Sev, if Cho is gone will we have to rely solely on Harry to find the perpetrator?"

"No, she spoke to the headmaster before she left. Professor Dumbledore will meet with Harry after he has awoken."

"Do you know when that will be?"

"In a few hours. The potions he was given were a bit stronger than his body is used to. His body spent a lot of energy to assimilate them. He woke up out of the potion-induced sleep earlier this morning. This here is a natural rest."

"So, he'll be discharged after he wakes."

"Yes."

"Good. I want him home and safe with me."

The possessiveness in his tone was obvious and Severus shook his head at it. If people thought that the veela was protective before, they were in for a shock when Harry was ready to resume classes. Now more than ever, Draco would not want him out of sight. He hoped the students would be especially careful around Harry. From the glint in Draco's eyes, Severus knew that he would attack first and ask questions later.

Severus left after Harry woke to inform the headmaster. He knew the man was deeply concerned for the child, even if he had not been there with them. He had a school to run after all.
Harry had awoken abruptly and had immediately launched himself at Draco, deep tremors shaking his small frame. It had taken considerable time and a calming potion from the nurse to finally calm him down. Even so, it was clear how badly shaken the child was. He was still clinging to Draco when he had escorted them to their rooms.

Albus looked extremely ragged when he found him. He knew it had been a hectic morning for him. First informing the school about the attack and Miss Chang's subsequent removal and then investigating the incident itself.

Having asked Severus to stay with Draco and Harry in the hospital wing, it had been up to Minerva to investigate the whereabouts of the staff the previous days.

"All the teachers have been accounted for except for Trelawney and the groundsman Hagrid," Albus stated without delay once Severus sat.

"Hagrid?" Severus repeated surprised. Why was that bumbling oaf on the list?

Dumbledore seemed to have read his thoughts for he managed a small grin. "We have to be thorough Severus. Hagrid is on here as he claimed to be in the Forbidden Forest for the majority of the day."

"So what? He practically lives in it."

"I know Severus. No one of the human kind can verify if he truly was there. I'm not wasting time investigating him though. Hagrid would never harm Lily and James' child."

"He isn't smart enough to anyway," Severus remarked snidely.

Albus sent him a chastening look but ignored it. Severus never got along to well with anyone too cheerful and Hagrid was an exceptionally happy half-giant.

"I highly doubt that Trelawney is involved either. She rarely comes out of that opium den she calls a classroom."

The headmaster cleared his throat. "Ehem. I do believe Minerva was a bit biased when it came to her."

Not that Severus could blame her. Minerva's dislike for divination was well known. She considered the subject useless and the professor a fraud. Knowing the transfiguration professor, she had probably asked her to reveal who had attacked Harry and insulted the teacher when she could not answer.

"What exactly did she do to incur Minerva's wrath this time?"

"Trelawney's statement was that she was conversing with a spirit in Atlantis."

"WHAT?"

"No need to shout Severus. She sent her spirit wandering and it ended up in Atlantis where she had a wonderful conversation with a departed resident."

"The only spirit that woman conversed with was the one in her fire-whisky bottle. Why is Quirrell not on the list?"

"Professor Quirrell was in charge of detentions this week. His whereabouts are accounted for."

"You know my concerns about Quirrell, Albus. I believe that he is involved somehow."
"I know Severus, but there is little we can do with speculation alone."

Severus decided to put aside Quirrell for now. "What of Miss Chang's statement?"

The headmaster sighed deeply, rocking back in his chair. "Her memory has been altered," he stated bluntly. "She remembers everything except the face of her attacker. I'm afraid that questioning Harry will prove similarly useless."

"Is there no way to reverse the spell?"

"No. I tried that."

"So basically Albus, putting my 'speculation' aside, we're at square one?"

"As much as I hate to say it Severus, that's exactly where we are."

"Well Albus, that's probably where you are, but I for one will be watching Quirrell."

"If you wish Severus. Now tell me, how is Harry?"

* *

"Talk to me cub," Draco urged, standing behind his mate. They had been standing in front of Harry's mirror for the past few minutes. Harry had run here the moment Draco hesitantly asked him if he planned to grow his hair back. The veela saw the dullness in his mate's emerald eyes as he took in his shorn hair. He did not remember who did it, but he certainly remembered it happening.

The pain of his skin being punctured paled in comparison to what he had felt when his hair had been cut from him. He had been dragged up by it; crying as he was forced unto his tiptoes in an attempt to alleviate the pain on his scalp. He remembered the maniacal laugh, the hideous grin, but he could not place the face.

He had felt a moment of extreme panic when the man withdrew a gleaming knife. Not because he feared that it would slice his throat. No. He knew instinctively that the blade was not for caressing his skin.

The silver weapon had risen slowly to the rope of hair that had held him in the painful position. He had sobbed; pleading as he felt it press against the base of his braid, cried out as he felt it rip through his security. The shock of the actions was what finally rendered him unconscious. More than the pain of his wounds or the fright. It was the knowledge that all that he held dear was lost to him.

He knew that he could re-grow it. Draco had reminded him of that fact constantly since they had come back here. Draco understood the meaning of his hair. It reminded him of what he now had. Feeling the heavy weight of it against his back, assured him that he was no longer that abused scruffy haired child.

The long-haired boy was not abused. He was a veela mate, privy to everything that title afforded to him. He was loved and well taken care off. He had a constant companion. He had a protector. The braid reminded him of that every minute of the day. But it was gone now.

And with it all the comfort it had given him.

All feelings of security had died the moment someone wishing him harm clutched it. It sullied its significance to him, tainted it. No longer did it remind him of what he had. In a way he was grateful to the one who had cut and taken his hair.
Because if he had not, Harry knew that he would have eventually done it himself. He would not have wanted that impure rope of hair touching him, wouldn't have Draco dirtied by caressing it. No, he was glad that it was gone.

However, he knew that he could not leave his hair as the ragged mop it currently was.

That hair belonged to the child in Surrey who lived in constant fear and pain. Those unruly locks were gripped painfully as the child was flung about. That hair belonged to the past and this was now. To keep his hair as it was currently implied that there was the possibility that he could be abused again. Harry knew that would never happen. Not with the veela standing behind him.

There lay his problem. He could not keep his hair short, but never again could he wear it as long as before. Either option now held negative connotations for him.

"Cub?"

His mate's hands settled on his shoulder. Harry met his gaze in the mirror. Yes, he knew what to do.

Closing his eyes, he summoned his power, focussing it on his hair. Slowly, he felt it react and before long it started to lengthen. He reopened his eyes to judge the proceedings.

Draco's hands moved further down to rest on his forearms. He was grateful for the comfort it gave him as he went about his task. He directed the hair as it grew, stopping pieces from growing forward, while urging others to either curl or straighten.

He did not know how much time passed precisely until he was satisfied and stopped the process. A quick wiggle of his fingers arranged the hair as he wanted it. Satisfied, he met Draco's eyes again in the glass.

"What do you think?" he asked softly, hoping that Draco approved, but knowing that he would not change it regardless.

The elder boy took a long moment to answer, taking in the new look. It was different, yet it suited him. The longer he watched it, the more he approved. True, he would miss the long hair swishing besides Harry, but this was acceptable. Besides he had seen the determined look in Harry's eyes. The hair would not change.

"I like it little lion," he answered, stroking the boy's arms gently. "But will you explain it to me as you did before? I wish to understand your reasoning."

"Of course," Harry smiled. His hand reached up to the chin length piece that replaced his bangs. It fell to one side of his face, effectively hiding his scar. "This represents the past. My time before you."

Reaching further back, he ran his fingers through the hair that fell to an inch below his shoulder. "This represents the present. My time with you."

"Why the past and present?"

"They each are a part of me. I can't forget about Surrey Draco. I never truly did, which was why I had bangs before. But I never clutched that when I was nervous did I?"

Thinking back, Draco had to agree.

"I couldn't keep the braid. I knew you liked it, but it was dirty. At the same time, I'm not letting my past overrule my present, so I couldn't leave it short. This is a balance between the two."
He felt himself being gently spun around and his chin lifted. "I will admit that I miss the braid, but I understand and respect your thinking. I love you for yourself, not for your hair. You will always be perfect in my eyesight."

Harry was relieved that Draco truly understood and moved closer to snuggle against his mate. "Thank you," he murmured, drawing comfort from the embrace. "Do you think Mama and Papa will like it?"

The older boy chuckled as he pulled away. "Mother and Father will love it. Your new look bears a striking resemblance to one Father used to wear. It's a traditional style if I'm not mistaken. If anyone asks, tell them that you decided to embrace your pureblood heritage."

"My mother was a muggle-born," Harry pointed out.

"Ah, but you have two sets of parents don't you? And aren't one of them aristocratic purebloods? What else would you have been raised as? Furthermore, as my mate, you stand on equal footing as me. You share my status."

"You sound like Papa when he's lecturing me on tradition," Harry laughed.

"I'll take that as a compliment."

"Dray?" Harry asked after a brief silence.

"Yes Cub?"

"They'll catch whoever did it right?"

"I'm sure they will," Draco reassured. "But either way, I'll protect you. It won't happen again."
Chapter 17

The few students who saw the defence teacher striding through the halls realised that once again the old legend was coming to pass. There really was something cursed about the defence teaching position. No professor every lasted more than a year. And judging from Quirrell's appearance, it was starting to seem as if the professor would not even last that long.

The man's robe was torn in numerous places and there was mud on the edges of it. Added to the scrapes on his arms and face and the way he was speaking to himself with a crazed smile on his lips, it seemed that the man was going of his rocker.

Whispers rose as students watched the potions professor appear out of nowhere and trail after the man, a grim expression on his face. He seemed ready to rip the man apart. It did not take long for the rumours and speculations to start. By the time dinner began that evening, the talk was less about the Halloween festivities of the next day and more about the apparent duel between Snape and Quirrell and Snape's determination to finish the man off.

Severus could care less about the looks he received as he stalked after his target. Hagrid had informed him that the professor had entered the forest hours before and he was determined to catch the man in wrongdoing.

He caught the door to Quirrell's office before it slammed shut, startling the pale man by his presence. Really, how good a defence teacher was he if he had not even realised that he was being followed.

"Snape," the smaller man stuttered, eyes widening. Severus' face twisted into a sneer as he closed the door with deliberate care, before locking it. "Why are you here?"

"Drop the act Quirrell," Severus said smoothly. "You were speaking to yourself rather eloquently moments ago." He noted the way the man flinched and stepped back.

"I speak like this when startled."

"Really?" Severus asked, curiosity in his tone. "So underage witches and wizards startle you every minute of the day?"

The man paled, realising how his words excuse had been twisted against him. "Students do not startle me, I just get nervous."

"So you're nervous then. Whatever for?" Severus asked in what for him would be an innocent tone.

"Well, you've accosted me in my rooms and I really don't think you're here for a social call."

"You're right, I'm not." Severus stated bluntly. He dropped his guise and eyed the man with sharp eyes. "Where did your injuries come from?"

"I was helping Filch with some boggarts. They turned into vampires of course and attacked me."

"Really? I would think that a defence professor would be able to defeat boggarts long before they could reach him."

"Well there were numerous," he said defensively.

"I suppose. Where were these boggarts?"
"Different places. I spent quite a bit of time tracking them."

"But you said they attacked at once. Wouldn't that imply that they were together?"

"Ah..."

"Furthermore," Severus continued, as if he had not been interrupted. "I believe the only boggart we have is the one currently residing in the staffroom. I think Hagrid named him Pete or something of the sort. The school's kept it because we thought it would be good practice for the older students. You should know that, seeing that you're the defence teacher."

"Professor Snape."

"But since we both know you're lying, let's move on. You're a big man, if you want to go around getting yourself injured that really isn't my issue."

"Then, I..."

"Where were you when the students were attacked?"

Quirrell stood a bit straighter. "I have answered this already. I was in charge of detentions."

"Yes, but unlike other teachers, I am very thorough. Only one student was assigned detention yesterday, and you postponed it until next week." Severus was smug as Quirrell's expression widened into panic.

"You have no proof!"

"Yes, yes, only speculation," Severus retorted with an absent wave of his hand. "I've been told that by the headmaster. However, I know you did it and I will be keeping an eye on you. Make no doubt about it. You'll slip up Quirrell and the second you do, I'll be there to catch you." With that pronouncement, the potions master turned to leave.

"I will not be threatened Snape."

Severus paused, his hand on the door. Not looking back, he answered. "I don't make threats Quirrell, only promises. And I assure you, I keep all of my promises."

With that, he left. A quick glance at the time told him that he was supposed to meet Albus to check on Harry. He could not keep the pleased smirk off his face as he remembered Quirrell's panicked face. Yes, the man was guilty, he just needed him to slip up. Albus raised a questioning brow at his expression, but he dismissed it. He wasn't in the mood to be lectured about threatening fellow staff members.

"Grandpa Albus, you're squishing me," Harry protested from the headmaster's arms. The old wizard was clutching his boy tightly to his chest, finally allowing the last of his fears to be erased. It was only as he held the small body against his frame that he realised just how scared he was for the boy.

Hogwarts was supposed to be a sanctuary for his students, and yet, his most precious had suffered tremendously. He had been anxious when he had entered with Severus and had seen the child resting with his head in Draco's lap. The veela had been running his fingers through the child's head, murmuring softly to him.

He had expected to see fright in the child's eyes when the veela whispered that they had guests. To his immense relief, when Harry's head had turned slightly to watch them, he saw nothing but
happiness. In short time, he was holding the child to him, physically reassuring himself that the child was on the mend.

Severus moved past the pair to hold Draco. The tension in his frame as he watched Harry being held was obvious; his godson’s veela tendencies were close to the surface. Veela’s were prone to believe that the safest place for their mate was by their side. After the attack, Draco was on high alert. He had already warned Albus that it would be a problem when it was time for them to resume classes. His godson would not want the little boy out of his sight.

He laid a calming hand on his godson’s shoulder, rubbing slightly. Draco’s hand shot up instinctively to claw at him but froze mid-way, recognising the touch. His talons retracted and he allowed himself to be pulled back against his godfather’s chest. Severus bent to whisper into his ear. "You know that Albus would never hurt your mate. Relax my dragon."

"I know," he whispered back, "I can't help it."

"It's your instinct dragon, but you have to control it. I wrote to your parents. They’ll be here tomorrow."

Draco smiled at that. "They would want to make sure he's fine first hand."

Severus manoeuvred them easily onto the divan, pulling his godson down unto his knee. "Actually, you may find that Narcissa is more concerned for you dragon."

"Me?" he asked curiously, watching as Harry squirmed beneath the headmaster's tickling fingers.

"Of course. Harry is young enough to dismiss the incident easily. You on the other hand," he broke off, though his meaning was clear.

"I suppose you're right Uncle," he allowed. He really was still shaken and a bit paranoid about Harry’s safety.

"Right about what?" came Harry's curious voice. He was perched similarly on the headmaster and had an absent grasp on the man’s long beard.

"Mother and Father will be coming tomorrow Harry," he replied.

Harry was delighted. "That's great! They can come to the Halloween party with us." Harry's excited statement was met by silence. "They can, right?" he repeated, a little put out that his enthusiasm was not being echoed.

Draco shifted a bit, trying to determine the best course of action. He had decided earlier that it would be better for them to remain here tomorrow. It was for Harry’s safety as much as for the other students. The way he was feeling, he would easily attack anyone who as much as brushed up against his mate. Having Harry amidst a throng of people in his current mood would be a disaster in waiting.

"Harry, we won’t be attending tomorrow's celebrations."

Harry’s eyes widened in shock. "Why?" he asked plaintively, releasing his grip on Albus' beard. "Why can't we go?"

The veela sighed as any hope that Harry would have graciously accepted his decision faded. "You will be much safer down here cub," he reasoned. Severus’ hand patted his shoulder reassuringly, letting him know that he approved of his decision.
"But Draco!" he whined, standing. "I want to go!"

"You can't Harry. It isn't safe."

"I'm going!"

"No you're not."

"I am!" Harry declared, a determined glint in his eyes.

Mentally, Draco groaned, a full out tantrum was in the works. However, this was one argument his cub would not win.

Adopting an authoritative tone, he spoke. "Cub, I know you are disappointed, but it is not safe for you to be in a crowd of costumed people. We will stay here."

He could almost see the frustration radiating off Harry at his words. His green eyes narrowed as they glared at him before he spun around to face his Grandpa. "Tell him I can go Grandpa!" Harry demanded to the wizard.

Albus' eyes were sympathetic as he met Harry's. "I'm afraid I'll have to agree with your mate on this Harry. You really are safer here."

The headmaster's answer only served to infuriate the boy more and his expression darkened. He turned to regard the other adult in the room. "Uncle Sevvy!"

Severus gently transferred Draco to sit next to him. "Your mate has spoken Harry. As has the headmaster. You are not going to the celebrations. Accept the decision and calm yourself."

Harry's frustration turned to anger as he saw that he had no support on the issue. He wanted to go to the party. Everyone else was going. He even had his costume picked. There would be sweets and music. He wanted to go!

"I don't care what you say!" he said hotly. "I'm going and you can't stop me!"

Draco growled from his spot and Severus laid a placating hand on him. He knew that Draco's veela nature was demanding that he reprimand his mate for such blatant disrespect, not only to his person but also to his elders.

Adopting a tone usually reserved for his students, Severus addressed the angry child. "Harry, you will stop this behaviour immediately. You cannot have your way on every matter. You are being extremely disrespectful young man."

The boy stamped his foot in response and angrily shrugged off the hand Albus tried to place on him. "You can't stop me from going. I'm going!" His voice rose into a shout.

Draco's clipped tones interrupted anything Severus wanted to say. "You will apologise to the elders and then go to your room."

"I have done nothing wrong!" he retorted, tossing his head. "You are being mean."

"Harry James!" Draco ground out.

"Go to your room Harry," the headmaster urged. Looking up at him, Harry saw that his Grandpa's expression was grim. He ground his teeth when he realised that the displeasure was directed his way.
"No," he reaffirmed. "Not until you say I can go tomorrow."

Albus knew it was time to end this. As much as he hated to, he would have to use his position. Harry was getting out of hand and he did not want the situation to go any further.

"By order of the headmaster, you are officially banned from attending tomorrow's celebration. You will be supervised by your mate to ensure that you comply with these instructions."

Although Albus wanted to cringe at the hurt look on Harry's face, his face remained impassive. "So have I said, so shall it be."

Severus nodded to the pronouncement, sad that it had come to this. Harry was too young to understand the danger he was in. A party would be an ideal place for an attack on him.

"The headmaster has spoken Harry. Now, heed your mate and go to your room. Your behaviour has been disappointing."

Harry's hands clenched into fists as he growled. His eyes met those of his silent mate. Draco's eyes were fiery and his body radiated tension. His veela was angry and barely containing it, not that Harry could care right now. How could Draco do this to him? Worse yet, turn Grandpa and Uncle Severus against him?

"Go," came Draco's one worded command.

Harry knew he was outnumbered and there was little stopping them from physically carrying him to his room. As much as he hated it, he had to obey. It did not mean that he was happy about it. "Fine," he ground out and stomped off, slamming the door.

Draco dropped his head tiredly against his Uncle after downing the summoned calming potion. As it took effect, he felt his anger and frustration fade away. "I'm sorry you had to see that."

"Harry's just upset Draco."

"Yes Dragon, you did the right thing. We were glad to be of aid."

"He had no right to speak to you that way."

"Don't be too hard on him." Albus sighed. "He is but a child. Missing a party is a big disappointment for him."

Draco shook his head. "I'm sorry but I don't agree Professor. I intended to ask the elves to bring down some food and sweets for him. Ron and Hermione would have been welcomed. I can control myself around them. We would have thrown a miniature version of the party for him. After his behaviour, I won't do it."

"That should be enough then," Severus decided. "Knowing what he lost would be a good reminder for him to check his temper."

"I hope so Uncle."

Long after the two men had left, Draco remained curled on the couch, nursing a cup of cocoa. He had one along with a small tray sent directly to Harry but he had not gone into the bedroom himself. Despite the calming potion, he knew that he was not ready to deal with the child.

This was the worst behaviour Harry had ever exhibited and it bothered him tremendously. His
disrespect to his elders, much less Draco himself was cause for concern. He was glad that his parents would be visiting them soon. He needed their aid in dealing with Harry.

As much as Harry was his responsibility, he was limited when it came to matters like this. He was only eleven. He had heard his mother numerous times express her concern for Draco. He had responsibilities that were way above his age. Harry should have come to him years down the road when he was matured. He would have been better equipped to handle him then. But fate had dealt him this.

Not that he regretted Harry's small presence in his life. He loved his mate, and would so forever. Although he was well aware that some day Harry and he would share a relationship like his parents; for now Harry was his little brother. He did what anyone else would do for their charge. He ensured that Harry was well taken care of. However, his relationship with him was different here at Hogwarts than it was at home.

Back at Malfoy Manor, he had help dealing with Harry. There, he had tutors as well as his parents to assist him. They all took their part in guiding Harry. But here, other than his godfather, the roles of the teachers were much more limited. The professors kept an eye out for him, but they could not pay him the attention that those at the manor could.

It was up to Draco to ensure that Harry remembered his manners or completed his work. He, not Trix had to usher him into the bathroom and ensure that he was groomed in the morning. Whereas while at the manor he was little more than a playmate, here he was the child's mentor and guardian.

He fulfilled his roles willingly. Harry's smiles and hugs was reward enough for the effort he put out. He enjoyed every moment of the day that involved Harry, loved the way that he turned to him for guidance or sought him out when something was wrong.

Knowing that he had someone to care for was the most gratifying feeling he could ever have and he knew that that stemmed from being the dominant in the relationship. He imagined that Harry drew great comfort from being cared for. If it was similar to what he felt when being cuddled in Severus' arms or being praised by his parents, then he knew that Harry was contented.

But disciplinary matters were a bit over his head. He knew a bit about veela laws and customs. It was his duty as dominant to discipline his mate when the need arose. There were guidelines set aside for the treatment of veela mates and children, most of them ones that his parents had used on him and Harry. As such, he was familiar with them. However, to implement them was another matter.

He had no problem scolding his mate or other such mild things like banning dessert or giving an early bedtime. Nevertheless, a part of him knew that one day, those measures would not be enough for Harry. His mate's naughty side seemed to grow as he aged and soon greater means of correction would be necessary.

He really was not looking forward to that time; especially if they were in school when it occurred. At home he could push it off on is parents until he reached his veela majority. After that, his blood would demand that full care of his mate fall solely to him. But here... perhaps he could get his godfather to aid in the matter should it ever become necessary. That was an idea to think on further.

It was almost an hour before he could draw himself away from his reflections and make his way to his recalcitrant mate's room. It was after nine he noted absently as he gave a brisk knock. Usually he would have simply entered, but decided against it. When there was no response, he opened the door.

The tray had remained untouched he noted with mild displeasure. Harry was curled into a tight ball on the middle of the bed, but Draco knew that he was awake. He was never that tense when
"We need to talk Harry James," he stated, sitting on the edge of the bed. There was no response, only a slight shift from the boy. "Turn over and speak to me, I know you are awake." When silence met his words, he sighed in annoyance.

Harry's bad behaviour had gone on enough for one day. It seemed that greater measures were needed than the simple scolding he had in mind.

"Fine, ignore me. We will deal with this matter further in the morning. For now, please note that you are restricted to your bedroom and bathroom until further notice." He could hear the growl that Harry emitted.

"I'm sure you believe that I am being unfair but your deplorable behaviour cannot go unpunished. As I said, we will talk further tomorrow when you hopefully will be in a better mood. Good night Harry James."

He bent and kissed the child's temple, even though he pulled away. Frowning, he turned and left, extinguishing the lights. A good night sleep would set his young mate to right. He was certain of it.

As the door closed, Harry uncurled himself and shot a dark look towards the door. "I'm going," he whispered. "You can't stop me."

It took Draco a while to understand why he was feeling mild frustration when he woke up. It was not until he splashed his face with water that he remembered.

Harry.

As the events flooded back to him, he groaned, wondering what mood he would find his lion in. He expected that he would be sulky and even braced himself for some begging.

Lost in his thoughts, Draco stood, gazing at his reflection in the mirror. The bathroom had been spelled on Draco's request so that on mornings and evenings, Harry would not be allowed to leave until all necessary tasks were completed. He was a little boy after all and was tempted to cut corners on occasion.

The spell activated itself when Draco dallied before the mirror. His toothbrush levitated itself and rapped him sharply on the wrist. It broke him out of his stupor and he sheepishly grasped it, setting to work. The shower activated itself and he entered, deciding against the override spell. It reminded him a bit of his younger days before Harry when Trix's crackling voice would come form beyond his bathroom door urging him on.

He felt much better when he finally emerged. Summoning a house elf he ordered breakfast and relaxed himself on the divan eating. It was only half-six so he decided to let his mate have a bit of a lie in. He could use the rest and it would certainly help his temperament. A quick heating spell ensured that the food stayed hot.

When it was half-seven he knocked on the door before entering. Harry was sitting up on the bed, the sheets crumpled around his waist. He stubbornly refused to meet Draco's gaze even as the veela settled the tray on the bedside table before sitting besides him.

"Good morning Harry," he greeted softly.
Harry's breath emerged as a huff before he mumbled back a greeting.

"Have you anything to say to me?"

Harry's lower lip protruded but eventually he answered. "I shouldn't have yelled at you or Grandpa or Uncle Sevvy."

Good, he had been right. A good night's sleep was all that his imp had required. It was just to reinforce the lesson. "Why shouldn't you have done that?"

"It's disrespectful."

"What else did you do wrong?"

"I don't know."

"You did more than yell. You were disobedient to all three of us. To them is bad enough, but to me is even worse. I am your mate Harry James. What does that imply?"

There was a long pause before Harry replied. "I'm supposed to obey you."

"Why?"

"Because," he began grudgingly. "You have my best interests at heart. Anything you tell me to do is for my benefit."

"Good. Have I every ordered you to do something that was not in your benefit?"

"No."

"So, you understand that your temper tantrum was uncalled for?"

"Yes."

"Tantrums do little except gain you negative rewards. What rewards has your behaviour earned you Harry James?"

"I don't get to go to the party," he grumbled.

Draco frowned. "No Cub. I have already told you that it is not safe for you to attend the party. Don't be obtuse. What rewards did your behaviour garner?"

Harry glared at him a bit before replying. "I'm on restriction."

"Exactly. Because you threw a tantrum, you are grounded until I deem otherwise. However, you earned another reward, one that I am sure you knew nothing about. Do you want to know what it is?"

"Yes."

"I was going to have a small party for you this evening with your friends and perhaps a few of mine. I am sure they would not have mind spending some time with you. With your bedtime, there would have been ample time for them to return to the main party. Due to your behaviour, there will be no party. Instead, you will remain in your bedroom completing the assignments you have missed. Is that understood?"
"Yes."

"Very well. You will eat now and then have your morning bath. Afterwards you will return here." Draco stood, and drawing his wand, summoned all forms of entertainment from the room, leaving him with only his textbooks and stationary.

"What am I suppose to do when I'm done?" Harry asked morosely as he watched his toys float away.

"Study or sleep. Perhaps even reflect on your behaviour. You will however, do it quietly. Have a good morning Harry James." Closing the door behind him, Draco retreated to his room. Today would not be pleasant for either of them.

Harry thought as he ate his breakfast. Draco grounding him really was for his benefit. His mate would not interrupt him except to bring him lunch and perhaps scold him a bit more. He could deal with that.

He did feel a bit guilty for yelling and his uncle and grandpa, but still, they deserved it for not siding with him. He needed the time to finish his plans for the evening and the grounding would allow him to do so. He had started the night before but had fallen asleep. He needed to have a concrete plan if he was to deceive his veela.

Draco was satisfied when he left Harry after lunch. His mate seemed repentant for his actions and had already finished the majority of his assignments. He had been pleased and decided to lift the restrictions after dinner. If Harry continued with his good behaviour he would even relent and have the elves bring them some sweets. Especially those chocolate frogs Harry so loved.

He hummed idly to himself as he cleaned his bedroom. It was neat enough, but he really did not want his mother to nag him about untidiness. It was a bit embarrassing the way she fawned on him and his father was of no help whatsoever! He knew that they would be more concerned for Harry after his attack and he hoped that would deflect a bit of attention away from him. He really didn't need his mother cooing at him about how much he had grown!

He eyed the room critically when he was done, wondering if he should make Harry clean his own too. It wouldn't hurt. Putting thoughts to actions, he knocked briskly on Harry's door.

"Just a minute!"

He arched a brow at that. Harry never asked him to wait. Was his imp up to something?

"Um...you can come in Draco."

He entered, looking around suspiciously. Nothing seemed out of place except Harry who was looking at him sheepishly. "What have you been up to imp? No more trouble I hope?"

"N-no Draco." Harry's eyes opened wide in an attempt to reflect his innocence. Draco did not buy it.

He crossed the room and moving Harry aside, looked at the parchments on the desk. Ah, Harry had been doodling instead of writing. He reached out and ruffled Harry's hair. "It's quite all right to doodle Harry. I imagine you're bored in here?"

"Yes."

"Then I hope you've learnt your lesson."
'I have Draco, honest.'

'Well if you keep this up you'll be free soon. Now I came to ask you to clean up here a bit. We wouldn't want mother to nag right?'

'No!' Harry chuckled. He waved his hand and his sheets straightened. The clothes scattered about the floor flew into his closet and closed. 'There!'

'I meant by hand,' Draco teased, happy to see Harry in a better mood.

'Oops?' Harry offered.

'Yeah, yeah. I'll let you get back to your work now okay?'

'Um Dray?'

'Yes?'

'Would...could you leave the door open please?'

Draco frowned. 'You're grounded Harry."

'I know. I just want to see outside okay? So I'll know when mama and papa reach." Harry's tone had a hopeful ring to it that the veela could not ignore.

'I understand cub, I'll leave it open." The happiness in Harry's eyes pushed him to continue. "I suppose they don't need to know about your grounding."'

'Really?"

'Sure. It'll be our secret."'

'Thank you Dray!" Harry wrapped his arms gratefully around his mate.

'Your welcome cub. Now be good and we'll soon put this behind us."

'Okay Draco. I'll see you later."

'Yep, for dinner." Draco left Harry then, deciding to let the elves bring a basket of sweets. Harry certainly deserved it for his good behaviour.

'Great," Harry murmured, once Draco disappeared. Everything was falling into place.

*'

'I'm really sorry Dray," Harry murmured contritely to Draco's departing back.

He had asked for a snack a while ago and had managed to get Draco to stay while he ate. It was a little after five now and he knew that the feast was underway. He did not mind missing out on the food. The costume part of the event was what held his real interest and that started around six. When he was half way through his sandwich, he started to put his plan into play. He yawned openly around a bite and rubbed an eye.

'Sleepy?" Draco questioned.

'A bit," he allowed a bit of a slur to enter his voice.
"Well you didn't rest today. You should have one when you're done eating."

"Yes Draco," he agreed. If his veela was surprised by his easy agreement, he did not show it. He probably believed that he was still a bit meek because of the restrictions.

"Good Harry. Eat up and I'll let you sleep until mother and father reach."

"When will that be?"

"Around seven. Godfather said that they'll stay the weekend."

"Cool. I want to spend some time with them. We haven't seen them in so long."

"Yes, I'm sure they'll want to here all about our adventures so far."

"Hmm..." Harry stretched his arms above him, squinting his eyes. He lowered his left hand quickly, knocking his juice over unto Draco's jumper and lap. "Uh, sorry!" he squeaked, acting surprised. "I didn't mean to!"

Draco stood quickly, wiping his hands over the growing stain. "It's okay Harry. Accidents happen. I'm going to change."

"Maybe you should have a bath. You'll be sticky."

"You're right. You finish up your snack and sleep." Draco was already on his way out. The juice was seeping through his clothes. It really was not a comfortable feeling.

"I will. I'm really sorry Draco."

"It's okay pet. Really, don't let it worry you."

"I won't."

As soon as Harry heard the bathroom door click shut, he reached for his wand. Summoning piles of clothes, he quickly arranged it beneath the sheets. That done he flipped through his charm's book, finding the needed illusion spell.

It took him two tries, but finally the pile resembled his sleeping form. Creating his head took a while longer and finally he settled for pulling a pillow partly over the lump, making it seem as if he had pulled the pillow over his head.

The bit of cloth that peeked over was made to look like piece of his hair. The illusion was not perfect but he knew it would not matter. When Draco told his parents that he was sleeping, they would insist that he be left alone. The most they would do was peek at him from the door.

He creeped slowly from his bedroom door, throwing cautious glances towards the bathroom door. When it remained firmly shut, he dashed towards the entrance and quickly passed through. Grinning in victory, he transfigured his clothes into a knight outfit and ran quickly down the corridors towards the Great Hall.

Tonight would be great!

* * *

"Go!" Quirrell hissed, sending a spark towards the huge creature. It gave a grunt and strode off, its heavy footsteps causing the armoury to rattle as it passed. It stopped at the edge of the corridor,
taking a long sniff before moving off.

"You best not fail me tonight Quirrell." A dank voice warned from inside the turban.

"I won't master. The troll will find the boy or have a good time trying."

"Come Quirrell. Position yourself. The minute the school is distracted, we go for the stone."

"Yes master."
Harry crept along the corridors as quietly as possible. He wasn't in the clear yet, despite the positive start he had had so far. He had not thought to ask Draco where his uncle would be tonight. Severus could be on his way to his rooms, and if he was, there was no where for him to hide. He couldn't let himself be caught after all his efforts and careful planning.

The corridor was mercifully clear. Taking advantage of it, Harry dashed through it rapidly, making his way towards the Great Hall. He had a bit of a scare when he ran into Professor Sinistra. He was immensely grateful when the woman did nothing more than compliment him on his costume and teased him about sculling around.

"If you're going to act sneaky Harry, then you should have a ninja costume!"

He had given the teacher his best grin before dashing off into the hall before she could ask him why he was on his own. The Hall tables were absent when he entered. In the Hall's centre was a giant pumpkin that almost reached to the roof.

"Wow," he gasped as he took in the ceiling.

The normal sky had been replaced by moving figurines. Everything from muggle-witches to werewolves pranced across the roof, occasionally lunging down to scare an unexpected student. Despite the fact that it was only evening, the hall was dark; the pumpkin and flames on the walls the only sources of illumination. It gave the room an eerie medieval feeling. Harry wasn't sure where the loud music was coming from but it was infectious and soon he was dancing his way through the hall, looking for a familiar face.

Most of the costumed dancers were masked, although several patted him or waved as he passed them. He smiled in return, even allowing a green masked person to scoop him up and twirl him for a bit. He laughed loudly as the person tossed him before he was swept away into another pair of arms. He was tickled before he was set on his feet.

The two persons wore identical costumes in different colours he realised as they bent to meet his height. As the purple ogre mask was pushed up, he found George Weasley grinning at him.

"Hey there squirt!"

"Hey!"

"I'm mad at you," George declared, pouting a bit.

"Why?"

"Because you danced with Fred before me."

"He grabbed me first!" Harry laughed.

"That's not the point! My feelings are hurt. I demand justice!" He scowled at Harry, which only caused the boy to laugh louder.

"I second that motion! He's being disrespectful to your dictate! We must have justice! Come along Harry!" he mock-growled, sweeping him up into a bear hug. Harry squealed as they made their way through the crowd to the other side of the room.
Harry's eyes widened as they stopped before a large Dragon figurine whose head seemed to be swaying to the beat of the music in the corner. It didn't seem particularly scary but he went along with the Weasley twin's game.

"I'm sorry!" he squeaked. "Don't feed me to the dragon!"

"Oh but that's exactly what we're going to do," Fred whispered near his ear. "Come on George, what part of him should Mr. Dragon have? He's very hungry."

"I'm sure Mr. Dragon would enjoy a little hand, don't you agree?"

"I concur!"

George bent and set Harry unto his feet. "Now little boy, be a good prisoner and put your hand in the dragon's mouth."

Harry giggled at the mock-stern look on their faces. He loved hanging out with the twins. They always made him laugh or had some prank to show him. "But I don't wanna lose a wrist!" he pouted.

"Come on Harry," Fred urged, "Mr. Dragon's hungry. Isn't that right good sir? You want some Harry stew!"

In response, the Dragon's head twisted and bent so that it was level with Harry. As the child gaped, it let out a roar before opening its mouth.

Harry bit his lip as he watched the ruby eyes glint at him encouragingly.

"Don't tell me you aren't brave Harry."

"Um…it isn't real right?"

"Where is the lion bravery? Come on, you know we wouldn't let anything hurt you!"

Well that was true.

"Okay."

Taking a step forward, he gingerly placed his hand into the large mouth. Immediately the dragon's jaw closed around his flesh. His hand was gently turned and he felt something deposited on it before it was released and the Dragon adopted its original position. Blinking, Harry stared at the parcel in his hand. Opening it, he saw a bar of Honey Dukes Chocolate.

"Thank you!"

The dragon emitted a puff of smoke from its nostrils.

"Aww man," George side in fake disappointment, "And here I thought he would lose his wrist."

"No you didn't," Harry giggled.

"Well I could have hoped."

"Let's get you to Ron and Hermione okay?"

"Yeah, we have something to discuss with Lee."
"Mischief?" he asked.

"Of the best kind!"

"'Kay! Take me to my friends."

"As you command sir Knight!"

As Harry allowed himself to be guided, he couldn't help but be smug when he thought of Draco back in their rooms. He had told the veela that everything would be okay. That would show him, maybe next time he would listen to what he had to say.

*C

Decorum went out the door when Draco saw his parents walk through the entrance. In moments, he flew across to them, hugging them tightly. "My darling Draco," Narcissa cooed, bending to kiss her son's hair.

"Hello my boy," Lucius greeted, running a finger down his son's cheek. Draco leant into the caress, his eyes shining as he met his father's silver gaze.

"I missed you."

"We missed you too Draco."

*C

Severus leaned casually against the entrance as he took in the heart-warming scene. It was at times like this that he felt a slight ache in his heart. He loved the Malfoys as if they were his own family, but sometimes seeing them like this, he couldn't help but wonder about what could be. What if he hadn't insulted Lily during their school days? Would their friendship have moved on into something deeper or simply remained the way it had been?

He could never be certain. He had loved Lily, that was for certain, but he had never been sure if she had seen him in the same light. He had been her Sevvy, the boy who had introduced her to the wizarding world. Sevvy was always there to help her master potions or to hold her books for her while she docked into the girl's bathroom. But had she seen Sevvy as anything more than a friend?

Lily had been the one to stand up for him against those who teased him because of his shabby clothes and greasy hair. She had been the one to whisper in his ear that when he reached of age, his Prince inheritance would come to him. Once that happened, those who had teased him mercilessly because his muggle father had been unable to provide for him would be lining up to clean his shoes. She had been the one to hold his hand while Madame Pomfrey fixed his broken nose after the bludger had careened into him.

She had never given James Potter the time of day until he had called her "mudblood". While he had stood there and watched his world fall apart, James had been the one to lead her away, glaring daggers at him. That moment had ripped his heart apart.

To see Lily walk away on the arms of the person who helped make his Hogwarts days miserable had almost been too much for him. But what really had truly crushed him was the obvious anger in the eyes of Remus Lupin and the disgust in Sirius Black's.

For once upon a time, Severus Snape had been friends with the Marauders. That was until James Potter had joined their ranks.
He had met the pair in the summer before Hogwarts while he had been purchasing his books. He had been a shy snot-nosed boy back then when he had tripped into them. His stuttering apologies had been cut off by Sirius who pressed a hand over his mouth while Remus winked at him. It was one of the few childhood memories of his that had been pleasant.

"No problem mate. We were running," Sirius said with what became his characteristic grin.

"Yes, but I should have been looking…"

"Hey," Remus interrupted. "You heard Sirius, it was an accident. Are you alone?"

"Yes," he replied, a bit unnerved by the amber eyes regarding him kindly. Other than Lily, no one showed him any kindness.

"Well we just escaped Sirry's parents."

"Escaped?" he questioned before he could stop himself.

"Yeah, my parents don't much approve of Remmy here. The whole 'Black' legacy, yaddie yadda da."

Severus couldn't help but laugh at the tone in Sirius's voice, before his words hit him.

"Wait, Black? You're pureblood aren't you?"

Sirius' gaze suddenly went serious as he stared at him darkly. "Yeah, what's it to you?"

Severus took a step back but was stopped by the reassuring hand Remus placed on him.

"You don't need to be scared. It's just a sensitive issue for Sirry here. You see, he doesn't follow his family's tradition."

"Yeah. I don't follow all those pureblood nonsense. Remmy is one of my best friends and he's a –"

"Very special person," Remus concluded, shooting a warning look to his partner.

"Uh yeah, sorry Remmy. So, why did you ask about my status anyway?"

"Sorry, I didn't mean to offend. My mother just took a lot of time teaching me about pureblood customs and stuff even though I grew up in the muggle world. I recognised the name."

"Really," Sirius asked curiously. "What did you say your name was?"

"Severus Snape. My mother was a Prince."

Sirius scratched his chin before grinning widely. "Remmy I think we have ourselves a new friend!"

"Why?" the amber eyed boy asked curiously.

"Don't you remember? Eileen Prince is the renegade daughter of the Prince family. She went of and married a muggle." Sirius' tone suggested that he believed the woman deserved an award for her actions. "It was the talk of the pureblood was disowned but when her younger brother died, everything was transferred to her son, whom I believe is you right?"

"Er...yes." Severus was a bit shaken that the boy knew so much about him.

"Well no wonder you're on your own. Your mother wouldn't dare so her face back in the wizarding world. Your grandfather set a bounty on her you know? You're perfectly safe, in fact rumour has it
that he wants you to raise."

"I know that," Severus muttered. "She's been warned."

"Come on Sirry, let's leave him to his shopping now. Besides I think I see Regulus."

Sirius looked around frantically and indeed saw his brother weaving through the crowd.

"Sorry Severus, gotta go. Hey, you're going to Hogwarts right? Let's meet up on the train okay?" he called, even as he dragged Remus off.

"Okay," Severus whispered to their retreating backs.

He had sat on the train with them, along with Lily and a messy haired boy named James. The latter he didn't particularly like, especially when he sniffed disdainfully at him when he revealed he had a fascination with potions. Despite Potter, the ride was uneventful as they debated on which houses they would be sorted into.

He admitted that with his family, he would most likely be sorted into either Ravenclaw or Slytherin.

Sirius was morose when he revealed that every single person from his line were Slytherin. He then joked that if he had a choice he would go Gryffindor just to spite them.

James declared himself Gryffindor, while Remus stated that he was contented anywhere.

Lily simply hoped that they could all remain friends no matter where they went although after some coaxing she admitted a preference for Hufflepuff.

"What?" she had defended. "According to 'Hogwarts a History', the badgers have removed themselves from all house disputes. If I was a Puff I can be friends with all of you without repercussions!"

James had snorted that only a girl would say that and Severus was pleased with the injured sniff she sent his way.

To his shock when the sorting finally arrived, each and every one of them was sorted into Gryffindor while he was banished to the snake table. The hat had been adamant. Yes he was smart enough to be an eagle, true he had the lion bravery, but his real talent lay with the green and silver. Lily had clapped loudly for him and reassured him of their friendship the next day.

He found himself seated besides a regal looking boy named Lucius Malfoy who extended a hand of friendship to him immediately. He accepted it tentatively but warmed to him once he whispered to him that he would have his support against the snakes who despised half-bloods. It was obvious the boy knew of his family. That he accepted him anyway earned him Severus' trust. When a long blonde haired girl flopped on his other side with a smile, he knew that everything would be fine.

His friendship with them was what started the rift between him and his lion friends. The Malfoys were synonymous with the Dark Lord, as were the branch of the Blacks that Narcissa stemmed from. Sirius was never fully trusting of either of them though by their third year, he had formed a tentative friendship with his cousin.

Lily stood firmly by his side, but as the years passed, Severus was aware of James' efforts to crush their friendship. The arrogant Potter - Gryffindor's golden boy - had turned to pranking him. Sirius got in on the action being the fun loving person he was. His attacks were mostly harmless though and Severus could see the humour in it. He even retaliated against him a few times, one time turning
Sirius' hair a lovely shade of green right before the Slytherin-Gryffindor Quidditch match.

His relationship with Sirius and Remus had always been gossiped about. Everyone had wondered where he stood with them and it had confused him to no end. He had thought it obvious that his interest lay in Lily. He thought the speculations about him and his lion pals would have ended when they had officially declared themselves a couple right before the end of forth year.

Yet it did the opposite and his friends did little to stop it. Indeed it seemed as if they encouraged it. He found himself included in their activities more than ever to the point where he was dragged along on their dates to Hogsmeade. Strangely enough, he never felt like a fifth wheel.

Of course he was forced to endure the sight of them snogging on occasion, but it was surprisingly limited. More often than not he had been forced to bat away Sirius who had seemed determined to hug him. He was seated in the middle of them or had to endure Remus' arm wrapped around him as they walked. More than once he had questioned their actions and had received little more than devious smiles from them before they dragged him off to another attraction.

Their company had been nice, he admitted to himself. Looking back, Severus wondered if he would have ended up in a relationship with them if it wasn't for his love for Lily. Lions were not the most straight forward people when it came to their attentions. Maybe those times had been their bumbling attempts to court him? Well he could never know now.

He had cared for them, deeply. If he hadn't he would have hexed Sirius' hand off the first time he had pulled him into a hug. But then Lily had been his fascination. Everyone else paled in comparison to her. Even his love for Lucius and Narcissa, whom even then he had regarded as family, seemed insignificant when compared to what he felt for her. Was it that in his fascination with his childhood friend, he had lost out on an opportunity for love?

He still remembered the frightened look on Remus' face when he had finally revealed to Severus that he was a werewolf. He hadn't been horrified or frightened in the least. No, what he had experienced was anger. Anger for the fact that the lion believed that he would turn his back on him for something he could not help.

That was one of the few times he had initiated contact between them. He had dragged Remus into an embrace, gruffly assuring him that even though he turned into a hideous freak on the full moon, he liked him enough to suffer his presence. Remus had easily seen the sincerity in his tone. That didn't stop him from launching a tickling spell at him for his choice of words.

After that, Remus became "Wolf" and Sirius his "mangy mutt." It was still how he referred to them in his head, the times he allowed himself to dwell on them.

He had never gotten the chance to explore a possible relationship with them further. After he had insulted Lily, they had all but turned their backs on him. Remus remained his potion's partner, but rarely spoke to him outside of class. Sirius took to ignoring him save for the occasions when he joined James in humiliating him.

Even in that, thinking back, Severus could see signs that they had still cared. Sirius had always doubled back to ensure that someone eventually released him from whatever trap they had set for him. On one occasion, when he had been trapped to the floor for over an hour, Sirius had actually freed him and helped dust of his clothes, whispering to him that all he needed to do was apologize. But by then it had already been too late.

He and Lucius had already been forced to take the mark and there was no way any of them would accept him knowing that he was now a part of the Dark Lord's circle, no matter the circumstances in
which he had entered. He had stalked off, but raised his voice enough so that Sirius could hear him
referring to him as a mangy mutt. It was the best he could do to show his gratefulness for the help.
As he peeked back, he had seen the rueful grin on Sirius' face.

He had understood.

At graduation they had cornered him, urging him to just apologise. It would end once he whispered
those two words. But he hadn't. Instead he had watched as James knelt before Lily and proposed. All
he had been able to do was beg them to ensure that Lily was well taken care of. He had been one
step from crying and his voice broke over his plea.

Uncaring of the looks they garnered, Sirius and Remus had pulled him into an embrace, promising
that they would see that she was protected. Before they left him, Remus whispered that they hoped
one day he would finally see the light. He never saw them in person after that day as they walked off
hand in hand. As they headed off to their bright future he had turned and headed for Lucius whose
face was slightly twisted as he tried to bear the pain of the call. He had barely been aware of it, for
the physical pain had been superseded by the one in his heart.

The night Harry saved the wizarding world was the first time in years that Severus had cried. He had
found himself at Godric Hollow, and had clutched her dead body to him while Albus whisked Harry
away. He had barely spared the child a glance then. It seemed ironic that that babe was now an
integral part of his life.

He buried his head against her cooling skin, allowing his wails to flow unchecked as he repented for
all the lost time. Finally, after all the years he could apologise and it yet, it was too late.

Lily was gone.

He had aided in the clean up efforts, securing everything of value, passing it to Albus for safe
keeping. The second time he cried was when the news broke that Sirius had supposedly betrayed
Lily and James and had been arrested for the murder of Peter Pettigrew.

He never believed that he did it and had wept for the innocent man that was sent away. He knew the
mutt, Sirius would have never betrayed his friends. But he had never been able to prove his
innocence, even though up to this day he still chased leads, trying to find the truth. He had avoided
contact with Remus at the funeral, only moving to pay his respects after the sobbing man had been
led away. As far as Remus was concerned, Severus had never taken up their offer from graduation.
He had never contacted them, or ever given any indication that he even cared out him. Remus didn't
know how wrong he was.

"Severus?"

The potions master jumped as he felt a gentle slap against his face. Blinking he found Lucius
regarding him carefully.

"Are you alright my friend?" he asked worriedly.

"Of course," came his gruff reply. He flinched when Lucius ran a single finger down his cheek and
raised it to show the moisture on it.

"You are crying," he whispered, twisting them slightly so that they were hidden from view.

"Something in my eye," he evaded, quickly dabbing at it.

Lucius regarded him sadly. "We will talk of this later Sev. You can't deceive me."
"I'm fine Luc, I just remembered something."

"And we will talk about it," Lucius reiterated, cuffing his face lightly. If Severus had been moved to tears by the memory, then it was something serious. "Now come, I want you in easy reach to tap when I hear how many times you have called my boys dunderheads."

Severus managed his trademark scowl. "I save dunderheads for the other imbeciles. I have special titles for those two brats."

Lucius laughed, leading him into the main room.

"Ah, there you are," Narcissa smiled, "Draco and I were just debating whether or not to wake Harry. I do so want to hold him."

*Even though her tone was light and airy, Severus saw the piercing gleam in her gaze as she took in his expression. Severus was willing to bet anything that she had been the one to notice his condition first.*

"Actually I have to leave. I'm in charge of patrols tonight. I'll see you in the morning."

It was a lie actually. But he wasn't up to pretending to be fine for several hours and the boys were a lot more perceptive than one would expect. He really did not need to see Lily's eyes staring at him right about now. It would be his undoing.

The arched eyebrow Narcissa raised was enough to let him know that she didn't buy his excuse. "Certainly Sev. We'll have a nice long chat in the morning, won't we Lucius?"

"Of course darling," he agreed to her pointed tone, giving his friend a smug look. "Off you go Sev. As you said, you're busy"

"Right. Goodnight Draco."

"Bye Uncle Sev."

As he escaped the rooms, he wondered where he should go. Definitely not to his rooms. The Malfoys had been placed right besides him. They would know if he was in his quarters and would badger him until he let them in.

That left him with no choice but to actually go on a patrol. Of course he wasn't going anywhere near the Great Hall. A room full of teenagers and pulsating music was not his idea of fun. Perhaps he would go have a chat with Fluffy. Yes, that was ideal. He much preferred the three headed dog to a teenager any day.

And if he happened to stumbling across some snogging couples on his way, even better.

*Hermione and Ron readily believed him when he assured them that Draco was around somewhere with his snake friends. They had been ecstatic to see him though he grumbled when Hermione dragged from the halls to see for herself whether or not he was fully healed. After that, she had relented and they enjoyed themselves as the party continued (way past his bedtime he noted with glee). He was disappointed when he couldn't take part in the costume competition but it was for the best. He couldn't risk going on stage. Grandpa Albus had yet to make an appearance, but it was whispered*
that he was one of the judges. He really didn't want to be scolded in front of everyone.

Ron had seemed a bit suspicious; they all knew how excited he had been about the competition. But he wasn't part veela for nothing. One look into his sparkling eyes had Ron agreeing with him that he was a bit scared about being the centre of attention after his attack.

Really, and Uncle Sevvy thought he didn't know how to control his allure. He had mastered it long ago when he needed to convince his tutor that he had "accidentally" turned him into a frog.

Harry was having the time of his life, gorging on sweets and pumpkin juice. His fun ended abruptly though when the head boy threw the doors open screaming at the top of his lungs, "TROLL! There's a troll in the school!"

As the hall descended into chaos, the bit of chocolate in his hand fell to the floor.

Oh oh.

This was not good.

* * *

"We'll just take a quick peek at him," Lucius stated firmly, cutting off the potential argument between mother and son.

Draco wanted them to leave Harry alone. If he was sleeping that deeply, it was obvious that he still needed more rest, he argued. Narcissa on the other hand was insisting that they awaken him if only for a few moments. She wanted to feel the warmth of his body against her and be able to reassure herself that there was nothing wrong with her baby.

A clash of wills between veela mother and veela mate would have been quite interesting to see, but really now wasn't the time. Harry would most like become upset if he was awoken by shouting. That was something he would not allow to happen.

"Fine," Narcissa huffed, glaring at her husband. "But I will at least kiss him goodnight."

"Just don't wake him Mother," Draco relented.

"As if I would!" she sniffed.

Her angel was fast asleep she noted as she crossed the room silently. Lucius be damned, she wanted to hold him. She sat on the bed, a soft expression on her face as she saw the swat of hair revealed by the pillow. "Mama's here my darling," she cooed, reaching out to stroke the lock.

Her hand passed right through it.

"My word!" she cried in surprise, quickly moving the pillow.

"Mother what is it?" Draco asked in concern, entering with his father right behind. He froze when Narcissa moved the sheets to reveal a bundle of clothes.

A wave of anger swelled within Draco as he realised what had happened. "Harry James Potter, when I get my hands on you…"

"What's going on here Draco?" his father questioned, breaking off his tirade.

"He's gone to the celebrations. He disobeyed us!"
Narcissa shared a look with Lucius. Sev had told them that Draco had decided against the feast. Obviously, they hadn't been told the whole story.

"Draco?"

"We have to find him. Grandfather forbade him from the feast as did I and Uncle Sev. More than that he's grounded!"

"Come on Draco," Lucius urged. "Let's go find Harry. You can explain it to us on the way."

"Harry, go to Draco," Hermione ordered as the students were herded out of the halls.

"But-" He couldn't tell Hermione the truth. She would just turn him over to a teacher, most likely Uncle Sevvy and then he'd be in trouble.

She took his hesitation as concern for her own well being. "I'll be fine Harry. Go on now, we'll see you tomorrow."

"Okay Mione, I think he's over there."

He disappeared before she could check whether or not his veela truly was where he pointed. He was starting to feel a bit guilty now. This was the second time he had lied to his friends that night.

But it was too late to worry about that now. What's done was done. He needed to find his way back to his quarters as quickly as possible before someone noticed him. It wasn't as easy as he predicted. He had to dodge several snakes, including Millie and Blaise. He couldn't risk being seen without Draco. They would question his mate about it and then he'd be in trouble for sure.

He ducked behind a tapestry as Professor McGonagall raced down the hall, yelling at lingering students to return to their dormitories. From what he could understand, the troll was heading towards the ground floor. He had never seen a real troll, but apparently, it was a scary thing based on the teachers' reactions. He wished he could see it but that wouldn't be the best idea. Grandpa Albus was certain to be there.

He remained hidden until he was certain that the corridor was deserted. He then ran along it quickly and soon he was only a few halls away from home. Great, he was almost in the clear. Just as he was about to round the corner, he heard Draco's angry voice. He panicked, he couldn't be caught here, he just couldn't! He looked around him quickly and decided his only chance was to outrun them back the other way.

He ran as fast as possible, ignoring the angry calls from the portraits to desist his rambunctious behaviour. (what did rambunctious mean anyway?) He didn't pay particular heed to where he ran, weaving through corridors as fast as possible, putting as much distance as possible between himself and the Malfoys. If only he knew the real danger wasn't behind him but instead a little way ahead, he would have willing run into their arms.

"We can't fight the troll yet!" Sprout yelled, "Just let it pass!" Reluctantly Flitwick lowered his wand and did nothing as the troll strode past, completely ignoring them.

"It's obvious that the troll is seeking something. We best focus on getting the students to safety first. It doesn't seem to be heading to any dorm area in particular. Let the portraits keep track of him until the
headmaster arrives."

"Okay Pomona!" the Charms teacher agreed, passing the message along to the portraits. Immediately there was a flurry of activity in the portraits as they raced from frame to frame checking the troll's progress.

* 

The great thing about animals, Severus thought, was that you could spill your heart to them and they would do nothing but listen. They didn't judge or offer advice. They simply lay there and pretended to understand what it was that you were saying.

Perfect.

At any other time, Severus would have felt ridiculous expressing his feelings to a giant three headed dog named Fluffy. Really, had Hagrid been drunk when he had named the vicious beast or was it his idea of a joke?

Either way it didn't matter. Fluffy had actually been of great help to him. He had had several epiphanies that night. One of which was that he was lonely. Yes, call the press, he could finally admit it.

Despite Narcissa and Lucius, Harry and Draco, hell even Albus, Severus Snape was lonely.

He wanted someone of his own, someone he could lean on or protect. He wanted to feel loved and not in a platonic way.

What other revelations had he uncovered? Well, it was the fact that as much as he had loved Lily Evans, it was time to let her go. Why pine after the dead and deny yourself love when there was a possibility of a brighter tomorrow? What did he have left to regret? Lily had forgiven him; he had atoned for his sins. She was dead and even if she had been alive would not have been his. There were people out there who had once upon a time cared for him. It had been years, but maybe perhaps, they still bore some bit of affection for him.

It was a long shot he knew. Maybe as so much time had passed, the offer towards him had been revoked. But then again, it could be wide open. Was it worth the risk?

Severus closed his eyes on a deep sigh, silently wishing there was someone out there who could help him find the answer.

Unbeknownst to him, the room was suddenly bathed in a beautiful wide light and a pair of green eyes sparkled at him. Fluffy's heads quirked inquisitively as it heard a pair of voices, but when the man remained unaware, he settled back down.

"Finally, you've let me go," came a serene voice. "Now I can help you."

Another, in a deeper tone spoke next. "They were always meant to be Lily. I'm sorry that I played a part in splitting them up."

"Then let's fix it darling. It's never too late…"

"Yes. He's taken such wonderful care of our boy."

"And he'll continue to do so. But it'll be nice if he had an extra pair of hands. Our Harry really is turning into your son."
"Then perhaps two pairs will be necessary."

"It just might."

"Sevvy, pay attention you're needed outside."

The voices faded away. As they did, Severus slowly became aware of an insistent hollering from beyond the door. Immediately on alert, he rose, startling the beast who barked in annoyance. "I'll come back to visit boy," he whispered, abandoning the room. "I fear something is wrong."

"Took you long enough!" the portrait outside chided. "There's a troll loose in the school. All teachers are asked to help track it after the students have been secured."

Although the news surprised him a bit, he masked it quickly. "Send a message to the headmaster informing him of my location. I will remain here just in case. The troll might be a diversion."

"Excellent thinking. Five points to Slytherin!"

"Really, I haven't been a student in years…" he grumbled as the figure disappeared. He drew his wand and with a wave reopened the door and whistled sharply. Fluffy was on his feet and on alert at once. "Sorry boy, but it seems that we might have a bit of trouble."

The dog growled in response and Severus closed the door. It was time to see if anyone showed up.

"The troll is working master," Quirrell whispered as he strode down the halls.

"It best have Quirrell. I don't take failure lightly."

"No master, the stone shall be yours on this night."

Being a professor really was the best way to infiltrate a school, Quirrell thought as he ordered a pair of eagles towards their dorms. No one questioned you, especially when you moved in the opposite direction of the problem.

Almost all of the staff was distracted, leaving little interference for him as he climbed the steps to the third floor. His master's plans would come to fruition this night and once it did, he would be amply rewarded.

Smirking he drew his wand. It really was too bad he hadn't been around when Dumbledore had explained the protections placed around the stone. But that was hardly an issue for him. He had his master with him; they would unravel whatever little spells Dumbledore had placed. Soon they would have their prize.

His sure steps faltered when he turned the final bend and found himself staring down the end of Severus Snape's wand.

Dammit.

Harry had no idea where to go from. He had passed here one time or another for classes, but right now, he was trapped. There was no route for him to go along to lead him back to his quarters. To go forward would only take him further away. To go back meant he could be intercepted by Draco.

Thud

Thud
The sudden thumping interrupted his thoughts and Harry's movements ceased.

Thud

Even the armoury rattled on the last…footstep.

Harry's eyes widened in terror when he saw a humongous shadow looming in the distance. With every inch closer it got, there was that distinctive thud noise. Raising his eyes up, a scream died in Harry's throat as he saw a club welding creature heading his way. He had wished to see the troll and apparently it had been granted.

The troll didn't seem particularly cheery. Indeed it seemed to be regarding him as a possible meal.

He was in trouble. Suddenly dealing with Draco didn't seem such a bad idea.

As the troll slowly advanced on him, his thoughts raced and focussed on his mate.

Draco.

He wanted Draco.

He needed Draco.

As he saw the troll's mouth open in a grotesque semblance of a smile, his heart leapt and his soul cried out one word.

DRACO!
Drake stumbled as he felt a piercing pain in his chest. His father stabilised him and held him steady as he recovered his breathe.

"Dragon?" he whispered in concern. He really did not like the expression on his son's face.

"Harry," he whispered, a far away look entering his eyes. "He's…"


"But that would mean," Lucius began.

"Harry's in trouble," Draco finished.

"Follow the call Draco," Narcissa ordered, her eyes darkening. "Embrace your nature and let it lead you to your mate."

Draco took a shuddering breath and heeded his mother's directions. Within moments, he felt a tug, and he followed as it increased in urgency. His parents were hot on his heels, Narcissa allowing her own soul free reign to ensure that Draco was going in the right direction.

She could hear a faint whisper that she long ago associated with Harry. Her son was on target which was an impressive feat. She suspected that her son was a lot more closer to his majority than she had anticipated. She would have to examine him later on to confirm her suspicions.

Draco’s thoughts and plans for the night altered unconsciously with every step he took.

First, he would save his mate from whatever situation he was in.

Then he would smother him in care and ensure that he was alright.

After that, he would set about tearing the hide off his recalcitrant mate.

Better yet his parents were here.

As well as Uncle Severus.

And Grandfather Albus.

A small smirk played across his lips as he ran.

Harry James Potter would be one sorry little boy by the time they were through with him.

* 

Luckily for Harry, he was not entirely alone. A portrait on its way with the latest report had caught sight of him.

"Into the bathroom child. Quickly!" it ordered.

Harry obeyed automatically, scrambling into the bathroom whose door opened for him. The man appeared on a frame inside the bathroom. "He's too big to get through the door. I'm going for help!" and with that he vanished.
Despite the reassurance, Harry was dreadfully afraid. Even from within the room, the footsteps still seemed incredibly loud. And they drew nearer and nearer until they stopped in front of the bathroom door. A whimper tore from his throat. Somehow, he was certain that the troll was examining the door.

"AH!" Harry screamed as with a blow, the bathroom door flew inwards and the ugly head peered into the room…at him.

"Draco," he whispered, moving backwards.

The troll (MONSTER) was trying to enter the room. The portrait was wrong. The troll was only slightly bigger than the doorway. "AHHH!" Harry screeched as the troll started to ram at the wall above the doorway with his club. If the wall fell, he would have ample room to squeeze in.

"Draco!" Harry whispered, tears streaming down his face. He wanted his veela. Even if it meant scolding or punishment, he wanted his mate. He was so scared.

Harry's body shook as a piece of the wall broke away and the troll started to enter. He moved backwards until he was pressed against the wall, watching with terrified eyes as the troll scraped through the doorway, apparently unaware of the wound it received from a jagged brick.

Its beady eyes were firmly affixed on Harry and the little boy feverently wished that he had obeyed his veela.

"Dear Merlin," his whispered. "If I get out of this, I'll drink milk every day for a year."

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Snape was not surprised when he came face to face with Quirrell. "Taking a stroll?" he sneered, noting the barely masked fury on the man's face.

"What are you doing here!" he growled. A few sparks shot out his wand, reflecting his anger.

"I should ask you the same thing. Why aren't you helping with the troll? You're the defence teacher. I would think you'd be on the front line."

"I can say the same of you," he hissed. The man's gaze drifted to the side a bit, before he returned his full attention to Snape. "As you said I am the defence expert. I will stay here and you will leave."

Severus laughed at the man's brazenness. "Do you take me for a fool? You just happen to find yourself up here when the rest of the school is conveniently distracted? I told you that you'd slip up and here we are not a day later."

Quirrell shook with barely repressed fury, before he released an oath. "Fine Snape. Stay here and guard Dumbledore's treasure. I will secure the troll." The man spun and left.

Severus didn't stop him, but neither did he drop his guard. Now he was fully convinced that Quirrell had attacked Harry. He had tried to use occlumency on him and had failed. That meant that he had strong guards against his mind which in turn indicated that he was skilled with memory charms.

Even Albus had great difficulty keeping Severus out of his mind and he doubted that an upstart like Quirrell would have superior skills to the headmaster. Someone else had to be aiding in Quirrell's attempts. He just had to determine whom.

The headmaster would be of little aide in his quest. Dumbledore was hampered by protocols and the what nots. His hands were tied until Severus could provide him with concrete proof. He would have to work harder to find it. He needed to secure Harry's safety and soon. After that task was complete,
he could turn to more personal matters.

"I hate him!" Quirrell yelled as he entered his office.

"Reveal me."

The man froze at the command, hearing the ice in his master's tone. By Merlin no.

"Master," he stammered. "It was not my fault. I could not have…"

"RELEASE ME!" With trembling hands, Quirrell obeyed and soon he was cringing in pain as his master sent bolt after bolt of pain through his body. He did not let up until Quirrell was a writhing mass on the floor, squeaking apologies.

Voldemort released his hold before any permanent damage had been inflicted. He still needed him alive, no matter how useless he was. As the man lay recovering, the Dark Lord's face frowned.

Severus Snape.

He had been one of his best Death Eaters. But now it was obvious that he was a traitor to the cause. His servant had felt no reaction to his presence. If he still bore the Dark Mark, it would have burned being in such close proximity to him.

No. The rumours were true. One of his best Death Eaters was lost to him. He would have to be eliminated after he was returned to power. His head and those of all other deserters would rest on a pick. No one betrayed the Dark Lord and lived long to tell the tale. Severus Snape was living on borrowed time.

The Malfoys were intercepted by a worried looking headmaster. "It's dangerous to be out here. There's a troll on the loose. I have to get to the bathrooms. The portraits said that a student has been cornered."

"Harry," Draco deadpanned, shoving the headmaster aside.

"What?" Albus exclaimed even as he followed.

"Harry left the rooms," Lucius said shortly, drawing his wand. By Merlin, a nine year old facing a troll? He could only hope it was too late. "Hang on little Malfoy," he murmured. "Papa's on his way."

He felt a surge of power besides him and knew without looking that Narcissa had transformed. He managed a chuckle despite the situation. The Calvary was on the way! He pitied that troll, more so if even a hair on Harry's head was out of place.

Harry knew he had to do something. Something told him that Draco was on his way, but it was up to him to stay out of harm's way until his mate arrived. He needed to think and fast.

He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror, and realised that he was still in his knight costume.

That's right.

He was a knight! Knights slain evil beings and that troll was right up there on Harry's list. He wasn't
a real knight true, but he could still defend himself. Draco was on his way. He just needed to remain safe long enough to be found.

The troll was approaching him, slowly but steadily, a large glop of drool dripping from his mouth.

Eww.

Hopefully the thing wasn't hungry and looking for an easy meal!

Harry's eyes darted around. He was a knight. He needed a weapon. Umm...there! Harry waved his hand and a bathroom stall door broke off its hinges. The noise distracted the troll. As it turned to investigate, Harry aimed the door and sent it flying towards the troll's face.

That was what all the knights in his story book did. They attacked the eyes. It was the most vulnerable part. Apparently, it worked on trolls to as the creature gave a loud howl of pain, reaching up to rub at his eyes.

Darn. He had hoped for it to stubble and give him a chance to run. No such luck.

The troll's focussed on him once more and Harry swallowed as he saw that he had made it mad. "I really need a way out," he muttered as the troll advanced. So the door was of no great use, perhaps... wham!

With a burst of magic, Harry ruptured the pipes. It took him a little more effort to guide the water but soon it was gushing at the troll, once more focussing on his face. The troll was essentially blinded by the heavy flow. Moreover, the water had him slightly off balance. It stumbled to the side, creating a tiny space. The problem was, it was too small for him to pass through. He couldn't make himself smaller.

Couldn't he?

Wait, of course he could.

Harry closed his eyes and forced himself to calm down. He called back to his memory his first Saturday at Hogwarts. What was it that Professor McGonagall had said? Right, imagine your body melding, feel the change flow through you. There! Harry felt the stirring within him and soon his world grew smaller. When he finally opened his eyes, he found that the bathroom looked at least three times bigger and everything was in sharper focus than usual.

He had done it. He was back in kitten form. He hissed as the troll tossed his club towards the water, disrupting its flow. Harry's back arched and he scratched the air in a threatening movement. The blinking creature seemed confused by his form. The troll inhaled deeply, reaching for a black rope on its neck and bringing it up to sniff.

The creature sniffed the air before growling. Harry hissed again as it lunged at him. Thankfully, he was agile enough to dodge the burly hands and ran for dear life as fast as his little legs could carry him. He heard the troll's angry howl and stopped long enough to spin around mockingly before taking off. He didn't register the people he passed, nor did he hear his name being called.

He did mewl in fright though when he suddenly found himself levitated off the floor. His legs moved automatically until it occurred to him that he was getting no further. Blinking down, he found himself several feet off the ground and panicked, clawed at the air.

"Calm down Cub!"
Harry's movement ceased at the familiar voice and he twisted slightly to see Draco holding his wand towards him. Oh. Behind Draco, he could see his Mama and Papa with Grandpa Albus, firing spells at what he assumed was the troll. It didn't matter anymore. All the tension left his body as he felt Draco wrap him in his arms. He purred appreciatively when his veela rubbed behind his ears. It felt so good.

"It's over kitten." Draco whispered, nuzzling his furry head.

Harry twitched an ear to show his confusion. What was over?

Draco seemed to understand. "The troll, look."

Reluctantly he turned and saw that the troll lay in a heap on the floor. His papa was trying to urge his wife off the body. She held that black rope from earlier in her grip and was screeching in fury at the beast.

Not that he cared. Good riddance he thought. Impulsively, he manoeuvred himself so that he was standing in Draco's spread palms. Going on his hind legs, he scratched the air, signalling victory. Pleased with his actions, he purred loudly, eying his mate. After angling himself, he leaped and landed on Draco's shoulder. He licked a patch of skin on his mate's neck, suddenly feeling very tired.

"You can sleep kitten," Draco whispered in a kind tone.Harry mewed in response. His veela was so good to him. He licked him again to show his thanks. He felt so content, so safe.

That feeling faded a bit with Draco's next words came.

"Yes, sleep my naughty kitten, for you have a lot of things to answer for in the morning."

Harry tensed at those words, but the comforting hand Draco placed on him held him in place. It stroked him a bit, urging him to relax. He fought against the feeling. It seemed wrong to be drawing comfort from the one who had just threatened him. However, the movement was so soothing. Giving up on the inevitable, Harry allowed himself to drift to sleep.

* 

Far, far away from Hogwarts in a dark cell in Azkaban, Sirius Black dreamed of one of his dear departed friends.

James.

"Hi Padfoot!" James called, waving at him furiously.

"Prongs?" he whispered, disbelief obvious in his tone.

"In the flesh so to speak. We have something to discuss my friend."

"What?"

"Come, sit with me." As James spoke, a large elm tree appeared out of nowhere. James walked to it and sat easily, calling him forward with his hand. "Heel boy," he joked.

Sirius growled at the mild insult before joining his friend. "This is a dream isn't it?"

"Partly. I've invaded your mind as I don't have the strength to appear before you physically."

"Why is that?"
"I spent most of my power protecting Harry. It takes long to regenerate."

"Harry? My pup?"

"My son has numerous nicknames I see," James laughed, "But yes, your pup. He had a bit of a difficult spell but he's perfectly fine now."

"What happened to him?" Sirius demanded.

"Now Padfoot, calm yourself. You can ask Harry about it himself."

Sirius snorted. "Now I know this isn't real. I'm in jail Prongs. How the hell can I meet Harry?"

"I know Padfoot. I'm sorry you're locked in here, but once Lily works her magic, you'll be free in no time."

"Prongs-"

"How do you feel about Severus?" James asked abruptly, cutting him off.

"Sev?" Sirius was surprised. There was absolutely no antagonism in James' tone. "I…well…"

"You can be honest. I won't hold it against you. Lily won't let me."

"I…," it wasn't the first time Sirius had thought about Severus, but it was the first time he spoke about it to anyone besides Remus, "I miss him Prongs. Him and Remmy both. What must they think of me? Accused of what I was…!"

"They believe you, you know."

"No they don't. How could day."

"Moony would be here everyday if it was possible but you aren't allowed visitors."

"But why would he…I'm a convicted murderer. I'm trapped here. He should forget about me."

"Actually Moony has gone to great lengths to ensure that he doesn't forget."

"What?"

"He's at Black Manor. He's lived there since you were jailed."

"Why?"

"Because at least there he has something of you. He knows you didn't do it Padfoot. If he could he would prove you innocent. However the prejudice against werewolves remains."

Sirius swallowed. It was one of his recurring nightmares, Remus insulting him and accusing him of betraying their friends. "What of Severus?"

"Ah…your little crush you never made your move on. He's doing what Remus is unable to. He's trying to prove your innocence."

"James, you despise him."

"Those days are long behind me, He's helping to raise Harry, how can I hate someone whose insuring my son's happiness?"
"Why is Harry with him?"

"Pronglet didn't do like other kids and find himself a puppy. He got himself a veela. A Malfoy to boot. I think the fates wanted to pay me back for my actions," he finished ruefully. "But he's happy and that's all that matters to me."

"Wait, a Potter with a Malfoy? Merlin, just what is going on in the outside world?"

"Listen Padfoot. I don't have much time left. Severus cares for you and Remmy, but he's confused. He's finally let Lily go but is worried about where he stands. Can you see yourself forgiving him for the past?"

"Of course James. We always wanted him. Gave him every chance to join us."

"Well, he's ready to take it now, if you're willing to offer it once again."

"I would, but, I'm stuck here."

"I promise you it won't be for much longer. Harry needs his other godfathers after all."

"James…"

"I have to go now Padfoot, but I might come again. You need to hold on. Don't let the dememtors win. Remember what you have waiting for you. Remus, Snivellu…Severus," he corrected himself." Harry, even your cousin Narcissa and her family. We were wrong about them you know. They were on the light side. But you have the chance to make it up to them.. Be strong Sirius, you'll get out of here soon."

With that James vanished, leaving Sirius alone once more.

Sirius' eyes flew open. For the first time in years he had dreamed, and of James of all people. Could it be his mind playing trick on him after all these years? He didn't think so. Prongs never let him down and he wasn't going to lose faith in him now. If James was right, he had people waiting on the outside for him.

People to love.

He was filled with determination.

He had to keep his sanity until he gained his freedom.

He felt the sucking presence of a dementor as it approached, trying to drain his newfound emotions from him.

No, he would not let them.

It took all his strength, but Sirius managed to transform into his dog form. Immediately the dementor's effect faded. He flopped to the floor to rest. He had hope now. Prongs had said to hang on. Soon, soon he would be free. As his mind drifted off, he struggled to recapture everyone of his pleasant memories. It was a strenuous task, but he was determined to recapture his happiness.

Remus Lupin was wide awake. It was the night before the full moon, and as always on such nights, he was unable to sleep. His mind drifted back to the past as it inevitably did. Thoughts of his lost friends and his unknown godson plagued him. How he missed them. His only human connection to
the past was Harry, and he hadn't laid eyes on the child in years.

"You can see him you know," a voice whispered.

He spun around. He knew that voice, but that person was dead. And yet, before his very eyes an eternal outline of the woman formed, seated on the edge of his bed.

"Lily?" he asked through dry lips.

"Hello Remus. Come sit with me."

"But you're…"

"Dead. I know." She patted the spot besides him. "Surprisingly, it's not so difficult to navigate between the planes of the living and the dead as wizards are prone to believe. I really don't understand why souls bind themselves here as ghosts when they can experience the best of both worlds."

Remus could do little but heed her command. "How?"

"I'm not certain. From what James and I have discovered, once you have a claim on this realm you can visit quite easily."

"Claim?"

"Yep. Like a family who needs you or an unfinished task. I thought my mission ended years ago but yet I find myself drawn back here time and time again."

"You have an unfinished task?"

"No, my family is unsettled," she stated, flashing him her trademark smile. "I haven't had to show myself since Harry though. But now its necessary."

"Harry? What about him?"

"Relax Remus. Harry is fine. He's in a bit of mischief now I believe, but he'll be okay."

"So why are you here?"

"For you, and Sirius, and Severus."

"Severus?" The name rolled off his lips. How many days had he sat in grief, hoping that Severus would appear to him. Whether or not he was aware of it, he had given a piece of his heart to Severus Snape. And even now he still held faint hope that Snape would give him back a piece of his own.

"Yes my Sevvy. He's finally recognised that he has to let me go. In doing so he has freed himself to love others again, mainly you and Sirius."

"Us…but…"

"James and I always knew that you pinned for him. Why you never embraced your feelings was beyond me. But then, we lions are stubborn aren't we?"

"Lily what..." Lily was rambling away as was her habit. It was hard to keep track of her.

"James is talking to Sirius now you know. Reassuring him that he has you and Sevvy to love."
"Sirius?"

"Will be fine. The fates have decided you know. It was unclear before, but thanks to Severus' decision tonight, the path has been made clear."

"I don't understand." Lily ghosted a hand against his cheek, smiling softly.

"Severus will write to you soon. Tell him that Harry needs to visit the Weasleys over Christmas. Tell him he needs to be there and to pay particular attention to all the animals in the house."

"Why?"

"The key to freeing Sirius is in that house Remus. And once Sirius is free, you all can join together. My boys have been so lonely," she finished sadly. "Each one of them has been hurting. But that will end soon." As she spoke she started to fade.

"No Lily wait. How can you be certain about Severus? How can you be sure he even cares?"

Lily didn't answer immediately, instead pointing to the Wolfsbane Potion on his bedside potion.

"Albus is a terrible potion maker. Just where do you think those potions have come from?" She winked at him as realisation dawned in his eyes. "He created it you know and is still working on a complete cure. Follow my instructions Remus, and you'll be there for Harry's tenth birthday. You and your family. I promise."

The woman's voice held surety so he could do nothing else except agree. "Lily, will I see you again…and James?"

"Perhaps. I think we'll be needed for a while yet. Until we meet again Remus, take care."

With that, she faded.

Remus sat there for long moments, wondering if he had imagined the last few moments. When he heard a soft tinkling laugh and a softly whispered "Silly wolf", he knew that it was real. His dead friend had come to him and given him hope for the future.

He scrambled off the bed with more energy than he had ever had before so near to full moon.

He had a letter to write.
Chapter 20

Harry couldn't stifle a squeak as he was suddenly flipped over Narcissa's knees. On moment he was on her lap, being squeezed tightly, the next, his bed's comforter was mere inches from his face.

"Mama?" he called softly, his voice slightly appealing. He had not been in this position since the beginning of the year, but he had long since realised that being bent across someone's lap usually meant that his bum would soon be stinging.

"Mama?" he repeated, pushing up on his arms and twisting slightly to look at the woman. Narcissa seemed lost in thought for a moment and as such did not hear her veela-son. She was busy convincing herself that this had to be done. Harry's behaviour had been terrible she repeated to herself constantly. And yet she was loath to punish the child in the manner he richly deserved. This was why she usually left such matters to Lucius. He was much better at ignoring Harry's doleful gaze and always applied the discipline Harry or Draco needed.

However today, her blood demanded that she or her son be the one to carry it out. Direct disobedience to one's dominant was not a light matter. Usually, the said veela would be the one to issue retribution but Draco had asked her to handle this particular aspect since she was present.

She knew that Harry deserved it for his actions, but that did not make it any easier for her. Even as she turned him over her knee, she was convincing herself that this was for the greater good. Harry was at risk from some unknown person. Especially at this critical time, she could not have him disobeying orders. As the previous night had proved, it could turn into a life or death situation. When she believed that she was in the right frame of man, she lowered her hand and started to gently pop it against Harry's clothed bum.

"Why are we here Harry?" she asked, noting the way he tensed at each pat. She would have sighed if it would not send the wrong message to him.

"I-uh," Harry's voice was wavering as he tried to respond. The full impact of his position was now upon him. He turned back to face front and gripped his hands in the bedding. Every part was slightly harder than the last and if she continued on that vein, it would soon start to sting.

"Perhaps I should be clearer," came his mama's voice above from above. "What did you do wrong?"

"I-I, the party..."

Narcissa nodded slightly, before letting her hand swing harder. From here on out she would carefully count how many smacks she delivered.

"Oww...Mama!" Harry groaned, rising a bit as a slight sting echoed from his bum. A second, mildly harder smack followed before her hand stilled.

"You are right. You were specifically told that you would not be able to attend the party and yet you did." Several sharp swats followed her statement and Harry's legs kicked a bit.

"Oww, please Mama. I just wanted to go to the party!" the little boy pleaded. "I don't wanna spanking!"

"If you wanted a spanking I would be worried," Narcissa quipped, mouth twitching at his confused squeak. Going back serious she continued, "That's not a valid excuse. You should not have
disobeyed."

"It's not fair!" Harry declared, twisting sharply. A palm on the small of his back held him in place.

"Oh?"

"Yes it isn't!" he reaffirmed, sniffling softly. "No one told me why I couldn't go, it's not fair. Why couldn't I go Mama?"

Narcissa hesitated, stilling her hand. The boy's logic had some merit. "Were you not told that it was not safe?"

"Yes," he reluctantly admitted. "But no one told me why. And they were wrong, nothing happened at the party. Well maybe the troll, but it wasn't even near the hall! Why wasn't it safe for me to go?"

The veela-mother thought hard before responding. Harry was nine. To a boy his age being told he could not go without a valid reason would have done nothing more than annoy him or stroke his mischievous side. And it had, leading him to plan a way to get to the festivities and quite successfully, she might add. His cunning actions proved that her little boy was not a hundred percent Gryffindor after all.

"The person who attacked you has not been caught. He could have been in attendance and used the opportunity to hurt you again. Here you could have been monitored."

"Well," Harry reasoned, hoping that it would end his punishment. Although not too bad, his bum was stinging and he didn't want anymore added to it. "Is it my fault that I didn't understand that? If I had known that yesterday, I probably would have stayed home, especially if I knew Draco was planning to invite some people over. So it's not my fault that I didn't know why I was banned," he finished.

"In a way you're right…"

"So I can get up?" he interrupted hopefully.

"Not quite yet, my snake in training," she smiled. "No matter whether or not you knew the danger, your mate and elders are not to be disobeyed. But I suppose the smacks from before should suffice on that regard."

"Yes!" Harry breathed, causing the woman to almost break down into chuckles. Did the child not realise there were other issues to be dealt with?

"Like I was saying Harry, there is more to discuss." The boy's body tensed slightly at that and she could almost hear the wheels in his head turning trying to figure out what else he had done.

"Mama, I don't know what you're talking about."

"Going to the party was a direct act of disobedience on your part my child. Yet there were other acts that you committed. You have to be reprimanded for them. Can you tell me what they are?" she inquired, rubbing his back.

"Um..." Harry racked his brain for the answer once again, coming up empty. His legs kicked slightly as they were prone to do when he was thinking deeply. Okay, try to remember, he thought, what did Draco scold me for? "I yelled?" he offered after long moments.

"That you did. However, I believe Draco dealt with that. What else did you do child?"
"Uh...I don’t know."

"Two things my dear. Come on now, you can do it," she encouraged, her hand soothing the tension from him.

"Mama, I really don't," he whispered.

The sincerity in his tone was obvious and caused Narcissa's hand to still. It was slightly disturbing that Harry could not determine what was wrong in his past actions. "Harry, have you considered that you both lied and deceived countless people yesterday?"

"I did?" Well, yeah he had lied to his friends at the party. "Okay, I lied to Hermione but I don't know about the deception."

Narcissa knew her son was being honest and she realised at that moment that she could not continue his punishment. The two offences had gone hand in hand. To reprimand the boy now would be meaningless as the true meaning behind her actions would be lost on him.

"Get up Harry," she ordered, removing her hands.

The child made a confused sound but obeyed all the same, standing and looking at her warily.

"I will send Draco to you to explain what you have done wrong. Perhaps the one whom you offended can explain it better than I could."

"Yes Mama," he replied although a slight frown creased his face. He had offended Draco? The woman rose and kissed his hair.

"You will remain in here until Draco lets you off restriction. To ensure that you obey this time, I will place an age line on the door as I leave. I will also be showing your mate this so he may use it should the need ever arise again."

The little boy bit his lip but nodded anyway.

"I love you Harry," she whispered, running her hand through his hair.

"I love you too Mama."

"Good boy. I will see you later." Disentangling herself gently she pointed to his desk. "I'm sure there is some work you can do until Draco comes to you. Goodbye."

As she crossed the threshold, she waved her wand. Although Harry saw nothing happen, he knew that she had cast the spell. There was no need to test it, if he did he would be transported and stuck in the corner until someone released him. Sighing he reached back to rub the already fading sting away.

"Deception?" he wondered as he seated himself.

Everything had seemed so much simpler that morning. He had discovered that he had a lot more perception of things in his kitten form as well as the animal's instinct. It was strange, but he had never before noticed how the air seemed to sparkle with tiny balls of light as the early rays of the sun shone through his window.

It was an amazing sight and even more fun when he chased after the little glowing balls, batting at them with a paw. It was something he would have to do more often, he decided as he emitted happy mewls. His impromptu game had continued until the light had moved on. Once it did, he had
slumped lazily on a rug on his floor, unwilling to climb the considerable distance back unto the bed. His game had rid him of the last nuances of fear he had left over from the incident with the troll. Although scary at the time, it all now seemed like a great adventure. Despite his grounding, it had been the best Halloween ever. Who else could say they escaped from a nasty troll? He had gotten to act as the knight he had dressed up as. Draco would be so proud of him...well probably not, he thought, remembering his veela's last words.

When the smell of breakfast drifted to him, he had stopped clawing the rug to glance around and see a tray waiting for him. The bed seemed huge compared to him and he was not about to try climbing the sheets to reach it, no matter how sharp his claws seemed to be. Rather reluctantly, he changed back, transfiguring his clothes back into pyjamas. Unknown to him as he sat to eat, a chocolate frog card fell from his pocket, drifting beneath the bed. The card's woman continued to smile gaily before signing her signature to the bottom of the book she had penned.

When the door had opened, he expected to see Draco or even his uncle stride in. He had therefore been shocked when his mama breezed in, enveloping him immediately. He had completely forgotten about his second parents coming. Narcissa had pulled back, scanning him intently for injury. He had seen the relief in her eyes before her gaze hardened and he found himself staring at his comforter.

His abrupt release was surprising to say the least. Neither of his parents stopped until he was at least sniffling, but then she had stated that he did not fully understand why he was being punished. Well it was no use worrying about that until Draco came he supposed, pulling his transfiguration book to him. Oh well, he might as well review his work.

About half an hour later, he twisted at the sound of the door opening. He bit his lip nervously; half-expecting it to be his mama returning to finish what she had started. However, it was only Draco, leaning against the door. "Mother says I need to talk to you about what happened. I'll do that after you take a bath. You've been in those clothes long enough."

Heeding the unspoken command, Harry closed his books and walked to his mate, stopping a few inches from the door. "Mama put an age line," he stated, eyes downcast.

Draco did not respond at once, simply offering his hand. "I put you on restriction, you can leave with me. Come along now," he said a tad bit impatiently. Harry took his hand and was across the doorway with one quick tug. "Now," Draco continued briskly, releasing him. "Head to the bathroom. You will find pyjamas in there, you will not be leaving here today so regular clothes are unnecessary. Go now and don't linger."

The younger boy hesitated. There was none of the previous night's affection in his mate's voice. His tone was clipped and business-like. He did not like it one bit. "Dray?"

"Go."

Harry was stunned when the boy turned from him and walked back to his bedroom calling over his shoulder for him to come to his bedroom afterwards.

It was a very hesitant Harry who stood in front of Draco a while later. In the bathroom, his mind had raced over every single time he had done something wrong to earn his mate's displeasure. As he had known, never in any of those times had Draco been cold with him. Sure, he had been stern, or openly angry, but never before had that glint in Draco's eyes left. It was that flicker of emotion that always reassured Harry that no matter what, Draco still cared. But now, as he looked into the eyes boring into his own, he saw nothing. It was as if his mate had lost all affection from him and it shook him to the core.
Suddenly the room felt several degrees cooler as the boy started to shake.

It had been a busy morning for Albus. First, the ministry had to be summoned to dispose of the troll. After that, he had to answer the questions of his staff, all of whom wanted to know just how a troll had managed to enter the compound undetected. A few of the more perceptive teachers put him on the spot, blatantly asking if there was a link between the troll and the earlier attack.

Albus had been put on the spot to find an appropriate answer. He was hesitant to reveal Harry's part in the event for fear of tipping off the culprit. Yes, he and Severus had to have a serious discussion after the meeting. If the past night proved anything, he owed his potions master a serious apology.

Finally, he had settled on an obscure version of the truth that impressed even the head of Slytherin. By the time the headmaster was true, everyone excepting Severus believed that the two events were unrelated. Peeves always had a penchant for mischief, especially around Halloween. The poltergeist was a lot more cunning than he was given credit for. It was entirely plausible that Peeves had somehow manufactured, if not aided in the unfortunate prank.

Severus subtly aided the headmaster by using his skills in mind magic to soothe away the doubts a few professors had about Albus' story. Only one posed a problem for him but it was of no concern. A quick sneer had Quirrell staring at the floor. The man shot what could have passed as an innocent look to the headmaster who had noticed the defence teacher's reaction.

The older wizard shook his head slightly but continued on, now fielding questions about Cho Chang and Harry. The Hufflepuff's parents were still indecisive about her return to Hogwarts but had promised to fire-call him by Monday with their decision. Mr. Diggory's parents had wrote to him with their intentions of removing their son from the school should Ms. Chang withdraw. That confirmed many professors' suspicions that the pair indeed possess a bond.

Harry's family retired to Albus' room where the headmaster related the night's events. To say that Severus was livid when he heard of his godson's disobedience was putting the matter lightly. He was well on his way describing the torment he would put the child through before he was distracted by an important detail. Albus gave him room to vent, knowing it was the best way for Severus to relieve his sudden tension from hearing of Harry's night. The black haired professor was just about winding down when the Malfoys joined them.

"Draco…"

"Sit. I have to talk to you and that is what we will be doing. Afterwards you will return to your bedroom."

Draco gestured to the bed and Harry sat, clasping his fingers to hide their slight tremor.

"Good, now mother informed you of your transgressions. What is it that you don't understand?"

The veela rocked back unto the chair as he spoke, propping his hand under his chin. His nonchalance gave the child the impression that Draco did not care either way. It was as if the veela was tolerating his presence only because his mother had asked him to. Harry's chest tightened at the thought.

"Well?" Draco asked, a tad bit impatiently. "I do have other things to do. Either speak or leave. I'll simply tell my mother that you are beyond redemption."

Harry's breath hitched at the tone, moreover by the words "my mother". The way Draco spoke of the
Malfoys always implied that they were as much Harry's as his. To Harry the use of "my" instead of "our" or even simply "mother" showed that there was a definite wedge between them. The thought had tears prickling in his eyes. His voice was thick as he scrambled to reply before Draco dismissed him.

"I-she-I." he stammered, unable to continue.

"Spit it out or leave," Draco snapped, frowning darkly. "Gods, trapped here with a little imbecile," he muttered, but his words were clearly audible to Harry.

That was the breaking point for him. Hearing his mate insult him so vehemently broke down the last of Harry's barriers and he dissolved into tears, sobbing loudly. He got off the bed and raced away, not wanting the veela to see him in his distressed state. He ran across his doorway, not even caring when an invisible force dragged him to the corner and dropped him on the chair that had appeared there.

His sobs echoed in the empty room. His mate hated him. Why else would Draco be so cold, so unfeeling with him? He had driven him away with his actions. He never thought that a day would come when Draco would be anything but kind to him, but here it was. His loving, caring Draco was but a distant memory.

Even now, he was aware that no comforting arms encircled him, hushing him as always. The door remained closed and he was alone, stuck in the chair with no company but the spider scuttling on the wall. And even that creature was moving away from him, leaving him to his misery. That brought on a fresh bout of weeping and soon the only sound Harry heard was the echoes of his own sobs. He curled himself into a ball as best as he could manage, hoping to just disappear.

"Harry." Through his sobs, he heard the whisper of his name. It was just his imagination he rationalised, still crying. That could not be Draco whispering to him…rubbing his back…urging him to rise…It was him.

Harry's wet hands dropped from his face and as he twisted, he saw Draco regarding him sadly. There was a moment's hesitation when his breath hitched on a sob before Draco's arms widened. It was then that he realised the chair had been turned and he was free. He hesitated, but then Draco nodded. With a half sob, half cry he lunged for the veela, not caring about the sudden change of character.

As Draco started rocking him in his grasp, he cried even harder, causing the older boy to become concerned. Draco's lips parted and soon Harry was calming to an ancient veela sound that lulled him to peace. When his sobs had lessened to occasional hiccups Draco pulled away, reaching for a handkerchief in his pocket. Tears still streamed down Harry's face as Draco wiped and the veela clucked.

"I'm afraid the lesson was too harsh if you're acting so," he murmured, more to himself than anyone else.

"L-lesson?" Harry managed in a thick voice. His hands still clutched handfuls of Draco's shirt which now had a damp spot on it.

"Uh-uh," Draco deferred, summoning a damp cloth. He resumed patting the boy's face and soon his face was at rights, except that his eyes were red-rimmed. "Come sit with me and I shall explain."

Draco led them to the armchair, making space for Harry. However, the child shook his head, settling for clamouring unto the veela's lap. When the older boy's arms circled him, he let out a heartfelt sigh and rested his head on a shoulder. "Lesson?" he repeated, eyes half-closed.
"Yes, mother told me that you were unaware of the deception you utilised yesterday. I figured that if you did not know that, you were also unaware of the results of your actions. I figured showing you would be a lot more easy than explaining. I never meant for it to go that far, I apologise."

He felt Harry's nod against his skin. "You still want me?" Harry asked softly.

"Of course I do. My life is meaningless without you my beloved mate. You are loved, I will always be there for you."

Long moments passed as Harry allowed the warmth of the words to flow over him, reassuring him. "You scared me. I was hurt." There was a small amount of accusation in his tone that brought a small smile to the elder's lips.

"That was the lesson kitten; I wanted you to get a taste of what you did to me. But like I said, it got out of hand."

His words surprised Harry and the boy pulled back, watching him with wide eyes. "I did that to you? How?" he demanded, alarmed by the fact that he had inadvertedly hurt his veela.

Draco pressed his head back into place before answering. "How do you think I felt when Mama's hand passed through your illusion Harry? I was terrified. I knew you had gone to the party, but there were so many things that could have gone wrong. You were alone Harry."

Draco's voice reflected his emotions and so Harry heard the real concern in his voice. "Anyone could have grabbed you. I know you are excellent with wandless magic, but what if you had been put in a body bind or something worse? You need to move your hands to cast the spells Harry. If even just your wrists were bound…" the veela broke off, burying his face into his mate's hair.

Breathing in his scent helped him control his emotions, reminding him that he was safe. When his emotions were more controlled, he continued to speak. "And even before that. Do you know how worried I was when you pretended to be sleepy? You never willingly rest and there you were looking ready to fall asleep in your tray. Harry James, I called Uncle Sev to check on you, but he suggested waiting until the night, thinking you just needed to recover your energy.

"I spent the whole evening peeking at an illusion, never entering for fear of waking you. And all that time you were elsewhere, putting yourself in the path of danger."

The veela stopped again, his grip growing slightly painful. Harry endured it though, feeling miserable at the amount of trouble he had put his mate through. And all because he had wanted to have some fun. He had caused his mate so much anguish.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "I know it isn't enough, but still, I'm sorry."

Above him Draco took a shuddering breath. "I know you are Harry James. I can sense it. But please, never lie to me like that again. I can't protect you if you lie and deceive me Harry James."

"I won't, I promise!" Harry's voice wavered at Draco's desperate tone. He had scared his veela and it saddened him. "I swear Draco." He looked at his mate, letting him read the sincerity in his eyes.

"Then the lesson was learnt," Draco whispered after reading his expression, He kissed Harry's forehead. "All's forgiven little one."

"Thank you," Harry murmured in relief. "So my punishment is over?"

Draco chuckled but shook his head. "I'm sorry kitten. You still have to deal with Grandfather and
Uncle Severus. You disobeyed a school decree."

"Oh," he said morosely, not looking to more punishment.

"Don't worry kit," Draco soothed. "I'm sure it won't be too bad. They love you after all. They won't do more than is necessary."

"I know Draco. I owe them an apology for yelling and disobeying."

"That you do. How about you write them a letter? It'll give you something to do until lunch."

"I can't stay with you?" he asked curiously.

"I've decided to keep you under restriction for now. When you have finished your letters, I'll re-consider lifting it. But only if it's done properly."

"That's fair. Do I have to do it now?" he questioned reluctantly, not wanting to leave Draco's comforting presence yet.

"I suppose we can stay like this a while longer," he allowed, laughing when Harry relaxed bonelessly on him instantly.

The veela was not too surprised when the little boy drifted off on him. His emotional outburst had left him drained. The veela truly was sorry for the method he had chosen, but Harry really was a hands on person. He learnt much better when something was demonstrated to him than if it was simply explained.

It had crushed the veela to see the pain in his mate's eyes when he ignored him earlier. It was only the knowledge that what he was doing was for the best that had prevented him for dropping his mask. Yes, being Harry's mate made him responsible for the boy's wellbeing. If that meant at times he had to hurt him to get the point across, he would do it. Nothing would stand in his way of keeping Harry safe.

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"So seeing that the troll was in possession of my child's hair, I assume that the person who attacked him and the one who set the troll loose are one and the same?" Narcissa inquired.

"Do you have any clue of the identity of the one I have to destroy for even considering hurting my little boy?" Lucius continued, his tone deceptively mild.

"Well Luc, I believe that the new defence teacher, Quirrell is behind it. Albus here though…"

"Has had a change of heart and is more willing to listen," the headmaster interrupted.

"What?" Severus asked confused.

Albus' eyes lost some of his twinkle as he explained.

"I dismissed your suspicions until last night Severus. After I retired to my chambers, I utilised my pensieve just to ease the burden of my mind. Something compelled me to swim through them afterwards. All of our recent conversations came to the fore Severus and I found myself re-experiencing them, quite firm in my convictions.

"It came to a surprise to me when I left the pensive when the memories of Privet Drive returned to me in full force. Mind you, I have never relived Harry's previous life and yet here was everything.
Assaulting my senses. At first, I thought it was as a result of the troll. Did my magic decide that the troll was a sign of me neglecting my duties I wondered. But then I was drawn back to our conversations Severus and I finally determined that that was the cause. I was unintentionally harming Harry by dismissing you."

"As a result I am placing more of my faith in you Severus. You have my full permission to investigate him as you wish."

"Very well Albus, now allow me to explain my whereabouts last night."

Before Harry knew it, Monday had arrived and he was back in the full swing of things. He waved happily to his grandpa as he followed Draco to the snake table for lunch. Everything had worked out wonderfully. His letters of apology had been readily accepted and his "official" punishment consisted of a rather mild scolding from his Grandpa after Draco allowed his memories to be skimmed. The kind-hearted headmaster thought that Draco had handled the matter tactfully and once the reprimanding was over, they settled down for an afternoon of family time.

Draco had been reluctant about classes, not wanting Harry away from him at all. There was no way to alter either of their schedules without drawing unwanted questions. In the end, Lucius had summoned Draco's elf Trix and Harry's Dobby, asking them to follow Harry whenever he was alone. That satisfied Draco and that was the end of that. The veela had graciously decided not to inform Hermione and Ron of Harry's deception, sparing him from Hermione's wrath.

"What do you want to drink Harry?" Draco inquired, setting a plate in front of the boy. Harry nibbled on his lip, before almost reluctantly stating milk. Draco arched a brow at him in surprise.

"You've already had you glassful this morning kitten," he pointed out. "And it's all you've had this weekend. Don't you want pumpkin juice?"

Blushing Harry explained the promise he had made in the bathroom. His veela stared at him incredulously for some moments before bursting out laughing.

"Hey!" Harry protested, miffed.

"Sorry kitten, but really, a year?" Draco chuckled again. "While I admire your desire to keep your promise, it's a bit extreme. How about this? Milk only for one week and no candy for two."

No sweets for two weeks seemed as bad as milk only for a year in Harry's opinion so he nodded in acceptance. After that, the pair settled down to eat, conversing lightly with the other students around them, both glad that everything was back to normal.
Draco looked inquiringly at his mate who sped squealing through the entrance. A few seconds later a panting Dobby followed, all but collapsing. "Master Harry, sir," Dobby breathed, "Please slow down!" The veela laughed heartily at the elf's words while Harry shot him a sheepish smile.

"Sorry Dobby, but you need to move faster!" Harry shoved a letter at his mate. "Here Dray, read this for me please. I'm going to the loo, I got to poo!"

"Too much information!" Draco called to the departing child, rolling his eyes at the raspberry blown his way. Dobby by now was simply lying on the floor. "Dobby, why on earth were you chasing after him? He has energy for two."

"Master Draco," Dobby began, rolling onto his stomach. "Master Harry wanted a racing partner. Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley have not finished their transfiguration essays so Master Harry was in need of company."

"They haven't finished?" The essay was due tomorrow, he thought. He and Harry had long since completed it. "Hermione usually stays on top of her work. I wonder what caused the delay?"

"Gryffindor threw a party for a seventh year couple who got engaged."

"And that is exactly why I'm glad Harry lives with me." Draco declared. "He would never get anything done spending all his time around that lot. Really, wouldn't the weekend have been more appropriate time?"

Dobby sat up. "Miss Granger sent you and Master Harry some cake sir." With a snap of his knobbly fingers, a parcel dropped onto the veela's lap. Opening it, he found a slice of chocolate and one sponge.

Sponge was one of his favourite and he dug into it readily. "Well," he mumbled around a mouthful, "That lot isn't that bad." Dobby smiled slightly, amused at how easy it had been to change the young master's opinion. "Thank you Dobby. You may join Trix, I'll be looking after Harry for the rest of the day."

"Yes Master Draco sir! Good day!" With a crack, the elf vanished, leaving Draco to finish his treat in peace.

Opening the letter he found it was from Cho Chang. Reading it brought a small smile to his face as he saw that the Hufflepuff would be returning to the school the following day. She wanted to see his little lion as soon as possible it seemed.

"Who's it from?" Harry asked, exiting the bathroom.

"Washed your hands?"

"Yes. The door zapped me," he complained, reaching for the offered slice of cake.

"Then you forgot to do something," Draco pointed out, surrendering the cake.

He had altered the spell slightly now to give his mate a bit more freedom. The spell no longer guided him through every step of the process. Instead, he was zapped lightly by the door and denied the right to exit if he had forgotten a task.
"Yeah, wipe my hands." Harry muttered, cramming the slice into his mouth.

"Manners Harry," Draco chided, already summoning a damp cloth for when Harry was done. "It's from Cho. She'll be back tomorrow and she wants to see you."

He was surprised by his mate's reaction. Instead of being exuberant as he expected, Harry's body tensed. "What's wrong kitten? I thought you would be happy."

"I am," Harry replied even though his voice was now quiet. "But-"

"But what?"

"Won't she be mad at me?" Harry shuffled restlessly, wiping at his mouth with the cloth.

"Mad at you? Why ever would she be?" A memory tickled at his memory and Draco urged it forward. Soon he recalled the feelings of guilt that had drifted from Harry the night of the attack. He had always meant to ask him about it. "What is it that makes you feel guilty?"

"I...I didn't listen to her." Harry mumbled. "If I had, we wouldn't have been there when..." Harry broke off, a distant look entering his eyes.

"Cub?" The veela shook his mate gently and the boy blinked, his gaze refocusing.

"She said we should leave but I didn't listen at once. If I did we probably wouldn't have been there."

The veela noticed immediately that Harry did not realise that he had drifted off for a bit. He seemed about to name his attacker when he broke off. Could the spell's strength be decreasing? Harry had never revealed that bit of information before. It was something to ask his uncle about. For now there was a child watching him warily.

"Kitten, I am positive that Cho is not mad at you okay? It wasn't your fault. The person would have found a way to you that day whether or not you had listened to her. If you want you can apologize to Cho, but I'm certain she'd say the same thing."

As usual, Draco was proven right. Cho dismissed Harry's apology easily the next day, handing him a book she had gotten for him. A delayed get well present she called it. The snake waved them off as the girl carried him to the badger common room to read it with him. Smiling at the pair, he turned, heading of for Slytherin for an evening of fun with his own friends.

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Time passed and soon Hogwart's trees were beginning to change colour. The mates took to strolling the grounds at lunch, sometimes alone, other times with a foray of friends. They passed the time chasing loose leaves or summoning leaves together for fights.

Draco and Ron took particular relish in trying to stuff handfuls of crackling leaves down each other's clothing while Hermione and Harry piled leaves together and jumped into them, creating a mess. Occasionally the piles would gather and chase after them, much to their delight. They never quite knew who was responsible for that bit of magic, although Hermione suspected that it was Harry subconsciously using his abilities.

In truth, the spell was cast by the headmaster. He had taken to watching their lunchtime activities and like with the broom at Halloween, sought to find ways to add to the Harry's fun. This time however, he ensured that he monitored his "games" carefully instead of bewitching the objects to move whenever Harry was in the vicinity. He had learnt his lesson the last time.
Autumn gave way and soon winter had arrived at Hogwarts. Unfortunately, end of term exams prevented the students from indulging in outdoor activities although a few decided that it was worth risking their grades. As the last exam papers were handed in, a loud cheer erupted from the first years. Exams were over and classes were out. They had a week of freedom before the term ended. A lot of the students made beelines for the outdoors for a long overdue snow fight.

Draco and Harry settled for ordering cups of hot chocolate and snuggling together beneath a large blanket on the hearth. They spoke softly to each other as they browsed through catalogues, choosing gifts for their friends and family. Laughing they turned their backs to each other as they selected presents for each other before curling up to stare into the fire's dancing flames.

Severus smiled softly at the sight hours later when he checked on them. They were in each other's arms, sleeping soundly. A wave of his wand added more logs to the fire and he magicked away their empty cups. Seeing the mail orders waiting he summoned them, tucking them away to deliver. Giving into the urge, he took a few images of the pair to add to his growing collection for the Malfoys. Lucius and Narcissa had long ago decided to present the pair with an album on the day of their bonding ceremony. As such numerous pictures were taken over the years. Severus had taken over the task when they had come to Hogwarts.

He had seen those at the manor already, taken from the time Harry had joined them. Off hand, he remembered a few. Draco cheering Harry on as he rode his first broom, Harry crying over a cut knee while Draco fussed over him and urged him to heal it. There was even the one when Harry turned Draco's head purple. He didn't remember why but it had been extremely funny. These ones at Hogwarts would join the collection. Extinguishing all lights except for that of the fireplace, Severus left, unaware of a light banter between two unseen figures.

"I never took him for being sentimental," a voice mused out loud.

"Sevvy is a kind hearted soul James Potter. I'm glad you can see that now."

"Yes and I will sing his names to the heavens if he gets Sirry out of Azkaban."

"Then you better start working on your vocals darling. I believe that Remus has made his move."

"Really? Shall we watch?"

"Go if you wish. I want to stay here for a little while longer."

"Okay my love. You watch over these two while I go make sure our friends find happiness."

"James did you just-"

"Yes love, I can finally say it. Severus Snape is my friend."

"Oh James..."

"That doesn't mean I won't prank him when he joins us!" he declared drifting off before his wife's aimed cuff could land.

Lily smiled as her husband dissipated, moving closer to the slumbering pair. She knelt besides them and ghosted her fingers over both of them, a peaceful look on her face. Soon the only sound in the room besides the crackle of flames was a soft humming. Hours later, a particularly hard crack from the fire place roused them and they blinked groggily. She sat still, using a bit of energy to render
herself visible.

She watched as green eyes blinked before focusing on her. "Mother?" her son whispered, catching the attention of his mate.

"Harry who-" Draco blinked at her but made no move. He recognized her from the photos. Besides, his mother had told him that the Potters sometimes visited. It was the first he had encountered her though.

"You know, I always saw you as calling me mummy and not mother," Lily said softly.

"Mummy," Harry corrected, smiling at her. "Am I dreaming?"

"No baby, I'm really here. I wanted to see you for a bit. I didn't expect you to wake up but since you did, how are you my son?"

"I'm fine mummy, we just finished exams."

"I know honey. I'm sure you did wonderful. And you Draco?"

"I'm fine as well Mrs. Potter."

"Now, now," she chided, waggling a finger at him. "If Harry here calls your mother Mama, I'm sure you can manage the same."

"Of course...mama," he smiled regally at her. Looking at her, he could see where Harry got that adorable gleam from. "But what do I call your husband? Uncle Severus I occasionally call papa."

"Hmm, now that is a question. So many titles you both have for the persons in your lives. Perhaps dad?"

"Dad," Draco mused. "I like it."

"Where is daddy?" Harry asked, looking around.

"I'm sorry honey, daddy isn't here right now."

"Oh, I wanted to see him."

"You will someday sweetie. How about I make sure he leaves you a sign when you wake up?"

"That sounds good mummy."

"Good. Now it's very late and if you want to build a snowman tomorrow you need your rest. Come on, snuggle back down and I'll sing you to sleep."

"That was you?" Draco asked, now recalling that his dreams had been filled with song.

"Yes it was my blonde son, now listen to me." The boys obeyed and soon were drifting off to her voice. Lily sat with them until she felt her husband calling to her. With one last caress to them both, she dissappeared, but not before fulfilling her promise.

When the boys woke up the next morning, the words "Hello boys, toss a snowball at Sevvy for me", was written on the floor with a bit of coal.
Severus dipped his quill once again before penning another line of his letter to Lucius. Already sealed in an envelope were the boy’s lists (which he had not read). It would be delivered along with his letters. He was reporting what he had uncovered with Quirrell so far. Unfortunately it was not much, but at least he had enough to go on.

He had proven conclusively that Quirrell indeed had links to the underworld, although the extent of these was unknown. He had several outstanding debts still to be paid and more than one magical creature had a bounty on his head. The only reason Albus had not discovered it when a background check had been done on the man was that the headmaster rarely checked beneath the surface. Dumbledore assumed that the ministry’s list of potential applicants would have been thoroughly screened, leaving him with the sole task of determining if the person could adequately fit into the Hogwarts’s lifestyle. It was something he and the headmaster would be having a long discussion about soon, Severus decided.

The information he had found so far was enough to ensure the man’s dismissal but Severus was determined not to hand it over yet. The old saying about keeping your enemies close held great merit. If the man was out of Hogwarts, they had no way to keep track of him. Furthermore, Severus had an inkling that the man wanted the sorcerer’s stone.

Why else would he have been in the corridor that night? Additionally, he had once more checked Harry and Cho’s memory for any change in the memory spells. The effects had waned slightly but not enough to be broken. From what he could tell, the spell would dissipate naturally eventually. Why it had not been permanent was beyond him.

As far as he could determine, the attacker (whom he mentally called Quirrell) saw no reason against letting himself be identified someday. That both puzzled and worried Severus. It implied to him that the man feared no repercussions. He either meant to flee or would be too powerful to be bothered by the threat of imprisonment.

The former would not bother the potions master to much, he had already labelled Quirrell a coward...the latter however, was unnerving. Then there was Cho’s muttered "professor" the day of the attack. At the time, it seemed as if she was asking for help but sometimes memory charms took a while to activate. The spell could have rendered her unconscious so she could not tell before its full strength was activated. He suspected that if Harry had been conscious when he had been found, he would have been able to name his attacker to.

Pushing the parchment aside, he drew a list he had composed over the past few weeks, detailing Quirrell’s activities. He had staged it carefully, throwing a fit a few steps away from Quirrell's office. He was one hundred percent certain that the man had heard him ranting about Dumbledore refusing to believe that Quirrell was guilty and that he was officially banned from pursuing any investigations towards the man.

It had worked marvellously as the defence teacher fell for it. Severus made a show of glowering at him occasionally to which the man smugly looked back. Albus overlooked the interactions with hidden amusement knowing that Severus trailed the man more now than ever before.

So far, he had determined that Quirrell entered the forbidden forest every three weeks. Severus himself never followed, but he always had Hagrid investigate afterwards. The half-giant had found nothing unusual in the forest and had no indications of what Quirrell did in its depths.

Severus had noticed that around those times the man’s use of garlic increased three-fold to the point
that students in the front rows of his class used bubble-head charms just to be able to breathe without gagging. His moods also changed abruptly, he could go from stuttering to brooding, angry to strangely cheerful. Another thing what puzzled him was the fact that Harry seemed to respond to the man's moods. Not openly, but if one knew what to look for, the signs were there. Draco had noticed it and had brought it to his attention.

"Uncle Severus, I need to talk to you." The urgency in his godson's voice surprised him. They had just finished potions class. Although it was not unusual for one or both boys to remain afterwards, it usually was to help him clean up or simply have a brief "family moment". Today however, Draco had sent Harry off with his lion counterparts, warning Hermione to keep him in sight at all times. When the lioness had eyed him inquiringly, he had mouthed that he would explain later. Nodding, she led a morose looking Harry out the class while Ron traipsed behind them.

"What is it Dragon?" he asked seriously, locking the door and casting a privacy charm.

"Something's different about Harry. I've noticed it for the past week or so, but nothing as pronounced as now."

Severus frowned, he had not noticed anything particularly different in his brat, well true he had seemed a bit put off in class but he had assumed that Draco had scolded him or something. "Different how?"

Draco sighed. "That's just it. I can't explain it but sometimes I just feel as if Harry's not all there. I can feel him as I normally do but it's like his presence is muted." Draco's index finger started scratching at the skin just in front of his ear, as he was prone to do when confused or deeply thinking. "It took a while but I think it has to do with Professor Quirrell."

"What? Dragon, you will show me now." The blonde boy nodded his agreement and brought the memories to the fore of his mind. Gently Severus intruded and watched them with the veela.

It was defence class. He and Harry were in their normal seats, Draco rubbing his hand soothingly along the boy's thigh as he always did in this class now. Harry despite the reassurance was all but sitting on his mate's lap, pressed as closely to him as possible. The other students had long since noticed Harry's strange behaviour in defence but rarely mentioned it.

As they watched they saw Quirrell for no apparent reason grow increasingly agitated. Suddenly he rounded on Harry and shot a question at him with such ferocity that the child flinched. Many classmates shot dark looks at the man, while Draco's talons carved yet another grove into the desk. In a low voice, Harry replied, correctly of course.

This seemed to drive the man into a rage for he yelled at the class to read the next chapter before retiring to his office. Draco pointed out what he truly had wanted his godfather to see. Harry's face was no longer fearful, the child seemed mad. Draco spoke to his uncle, telling him that at the time he had thought it was simply Harry's annoyance with the man. However even then, Harry had felt strangely distant.

They moved on to another memory, this time two days later. The two boys were on their way to the Great Hall, Harry's fingers interlaced with Draco's. His eyes sparkled madly at the veela as he told him of the prank the Weasley twins had played on their friend Lee. He waved animatedly towards a couple of Hufflepuff first years, who after glancing at Draco, returned the gesture.

The boys turned the last corridor to the Great Hall. Out of nowhere, Professor Quirrell emerged, looked quite distressed. Harry and Draco stopped to let the man pass before continuing. On reaching the hall, Ron and Hermione waved to them but to all their surprises, Harry ducked behind Draco.
They all recognised the gesture by now.

Draco had to coax Harry from behind him and even then the boy latched unto his hand and robes, burying his head. Easing him away to see his face, Draco was stunned to see tears in the child's eyes. Instinctively his veela blood urged him to start carving Weasley and Granger but logically he knew they were not the cause. He had been with them the entire previous day and they and Harry had been fine. He whispered to the pair that he was not sure what was happening but to go ahead. Harry sat quietly besides Draco, only eating when Draco whispered into his ear. Even then, he only managed a few bits and half the milk.

The veela did not press the issue and allowed Harry to bend and lay his head unto his lap, Millicent graciously moving down the bench so Harry could rest fully on it. Draco stroked his hair as he ate his own breakfast, politely stating to the inquiring snakes that Harry had a bit of a tummy-ache. Severus watched himself leaving the head table to move to the snakes once Dumbledore had pointed out the unusual scene to him. Harry had been silently crying on Draco's lap, something that the veela had not noticed and he still felt guilty for.

Bending he told his godson that he would take Harry and had scooped up the reluctant boy into his arms. He managed to sneer at a few who started whispering about the scene, not wanting his reputation to be damaged. However, looking at it he could understand. He did look rather homely holding Harry, especially the way the child curled a small hand around his neck and laid a cheek on his shoulder. Thankfully no one heard the murmured, "Unca' Sevvy," as he strode out the hall.

He interjected his own memory so his godson could see from his point of view.

He had stopped at the nearest available room and cradled him until the silent tears ceased. Harry had been unable to explain why he had gotten upset and Severus placed it down to a moment of childishness on Harry's part. Something or some sort or another had bothered the boy and this was the only way he could have dealt with it. He did not deny the child, nor rebuked him for the tears. Thinking on it now, he did indeed find it strange, especially seeing how upset Quirrell had been.

Draco spoke softly as they walked towards another memory. "Harry stayed in that quiet state for the rest of the day. However, remember dinner? Quirrell was quite cheerful and it was then that Harry's mood went back to normal."

"I can see your point," Severus muttered, mulling over the memories..

"I have one more to show you Uncle."

Draco led him to another memory, this time that of this morning. Once again it was defence class. Hermione had raised her hand for what was the third time. Quirrell snapped at her to stop waving her hand like a lunatic which had caused the girl to sniff sadly. Severus felt sorry for the girl. No one should be insulted for showing a desire for learning. Besides the rest of the class seemed not to know the answer and Draco was too focussed on calming Harry to care about the questions being asked. Severus made a note to ask just how the boys were still excelling in the class as it seemed obvious that they rarely paid attention to the teacher.

His godson led him closer so that he could hear what was being said between the boys. Quirrell was muttering as he strode back to his desk. They both saw a brief hint of red in Harry's eyes before he breathed the words "disgusting mudblood." Draco had almost reared back at the venomous tone and had to stifle the urge to punish his mate right then and there for using the explicit.

What stopped him was the fact that Harry blinked once and shook his head before calmly resting it back on Draco as if nothing had happened. Later when Draco dragged Harry into the nearest
available classroom and demanded where he had learnt the vile word from Harry had scratched his head and asked why saying that mud was covered in blood was wrong. It was then that the veela had started piecing everything together and come to his uncle.

Severus had withdrawn at that point and handed his godson a bit of chocolate before they continued their discussion. From what Severus could have deciphered, it seemed as if Harry had a bit of emphatic ability as he responded to moods. However, it was terribly strange that he only reacted to the emotions of the person he feared the worse.

The fact that Harry had channelled a bit of Quirrell's thoughts disturbed Severus even further and he had set about creating a potion to block Harry from experiencing anything Quirrell felt. So far, the potion worked as Harry had not had another "episode" as he coined it.

He had set Albus the task of researching the Potter ancestry to see if there were any recorded empaths. As an after thought, they included the Evans as some muggles had shown empathic traits. There was a chance that it could have originated from Lily's parentage.

That was all he had discovered so far. Currently his investigation centred on finding plausible reasons for Quirrell to desire the sorcerer's stone. As he browsed through the list once more, he was unaware of an impatient snort behind him.

"Oh come on Snape! You can recite that dang list in your sleep by now. Quirrell is the least of your concerns right now. Merlin what I would give to have enough strength to knock you one. Hey, no, forget about Lucius, you can finish the bloody letter after you answer Remus! Oh hell, fine, let's do this the hard way!"

Severus whipped out his wand when his letter holder was knocked over and the unread mail scattered out. Seeing no one or nothing, he put aside his wand, gathering the mail together. One letter excluded his grasp, moving away anything he tried to put it back. He stopped and stared at the mail. It seemed to be guided and if he looked hard enough, he could see the faint outline of a hand moving the letter.

"Lily?" he asked. There was no answer but the mail rose and slapped him in the face, dodging his hand and repeating the gesture. Severus growled. "No, not Lily. James!"

He felt a soft wisp of air against his ear before he heard a soft whisper. "Yes Snape, James. Read the letter and you better answer or I'll sic Lily on you."

"You can try!" he growled, looking around. "Show yourself!"

"Sorry Snape, I'm not strong enough yet. Remember what Lily said, I used up a lot of my strength. I'll regain it someday though."

"What do you want?"

"Just read the letter Snape and be open to what it says. You've let go of Lily but are afraid to seek out the ones you are meant to have. We decided to intervene so here you go. Please Snape, listen, if not for yourself, for Harry."

"Harry?"

"And yourself. You need all the help you can get to fulfil your vow to Lily. Please keep your mind open Severus."

"James Potter, asking me for something," Severus said incredulously.
"Actually I'm begging. Look Snape, I'm sorry for everything alright. Let's move on okay?"

"It is pointless holding a grudge against a dead man," Severus mused.

"Dead but not gone," James quipped, relieved the man had accepted him so easily. He felt a tug, signalling that his core strength was fading. "I have to go now. Thank you in advance."

"Why don't you and Lily stay?"

"A day will come when we're able to stay here indefinitely. However, we still do not have the strength. The day will come, the time when Harry needs more than what you all can offer him. When it comes we will unite with him and help him to fulfil his destiny."

"Destiny? Against whom?"

"That you need to discover yourself Snape. Never fear, you will and soon."

"How soon?"

"Around March. Now, I must go. Goodbye for now Snape."

"Severus. I help raise your boy, the least you can do is say my first name."

"Very well Sevvy," he laughed at the man's growl, "Goodbye, and it's 'our boy'. Harry's as much yours as he is mine now. He will never want for father figures in his life. Later potion brains."

"Goodbye, P-James."

When he was certain that James was gone, he tore open the envelope. He shuffled through the parchments, noting the vaguely family handwriting. He moved straight to the end to see the signature and almost dropped the letter when he saw the name. "Remus?" he breathed, his voice cracking a bit. Remus had written to him. Severus' hands were suddenly shaky as he read the letter.

One hour and several re-reads later, Severus was pushing his head through the floo, fire-calling Black Manor.

"Mama!" Harry yelled, flinging himself at the blond haired woman. Several persons at the King's Cross Station stared openly as they watched the child, wanting to see the woman's reaction. They all knew who she was, Lady Malfoy. They expected the child to be slapped for taking such liberties with the lady. The Malfoys were cold unfeeling persons, never showing public affection of any kind. Yes any moment now they would hear a ringing slap...Several gasped openly as the woman dropped to her knees (uncaring of the dirt and grime that would surely stain such beautiful robes) and pulled the child tightly to her.

What was even more shocking was when the Lord Malfoy chuckled loudly as the child's attention was transferred to him while the young Malfoy, approaching at a more sedate pass, hugged his mother with more restraint. An old witch thought she would have an aneurism as the black-haired child's (looking much too young to be a Hogwarts child despite the uniform) hair fell back at the movement, revealing a lightning bolt scar.

Harry Potter...

Nine years old...
In a Hogwarts uniform...

Leaving in the arms of a Malfoy...

She fainted.

Draco looked over his shoulder at the thud and shook his head. Really after all these years some people still considered the Malfoy name to be dark. His family had been exonerated beyond a shadow of a doubt. When would they learn? Snorting he walked through the barrier.

A flock of redheads were on the other side, apparently waiting for them judging by Ron's frantic waves. "Oi! Harry, Draco, over here mate." A plump woman rapped her son on the head but still smiled jovially when the Malfoys approached.

"Lucius, Narcissa," she greeted.

"Hello Molly."

"It's been too long my dear. How is Arthur these days?"

"Busy as usual," the woman beamed.

Narcissa was happy to note the well kept appearances of all the Weasleys. Gone were the poverty days the Weasleys' faced during the war. In the aftermath, the demand for ministry workers and aides had increased drastically. To encourage persons, salaries had been raised exponentially and still remained at an all time high. Apparently, Arthur and his family had benefited from it. As far as Narcissa could tell, the Weasley family was only a few more years away from being considered middle-class purebloods. With hard work, the next Weasley generation could even return the family to its former stature.

"Well I'm glad to see that Molly. I suppose you want to meet Harry?" she asked, gesturing at the boy regarding the woman shyly. Ron had told him lots about her and his father, but seeing her in real was something different.

Lucius set him on his feet and he reached for Draco immediately who presented his wrist. Molly smiled at the gesture, her sons had already informed her how Harry reacted to strangers.

"Hello dearie, I'm Ron's mom."

"Come on mate, say hello!" Ron urged cheerfully.

"Hello Mrs. Weasley," Harry greeted, peaking at her curiously.

"None of that cheery. I'm as good as an aunt. Call me Aunt Molly."

That seemed to put the boy at ease as he released his mate's hand and closed the distance between them. "Ron says you knew my real parents?"

"Yes, I met them when they just found out about having you. I was at St. Mungo's for this one," she gestured to Ginny who tweaked her nose, a scruffy rat held in her palms "to get her first checkup. Your mom and I were in contact after that."

"That's nice Aunt Molly. Ron said I can come over?"

Draco laughed, as Narcissa groaned. His mate truly did not care for societal rules and niceties. Molly simply chuckled and ruffled his hair. "That he did. I expect to see lots of you and that mate of yours
over the holidays. Understood?" she said in a mock-stern tone.

"Yes ma'am!" he chirped, before returning to Draco.

The families separated after that to return to their own homes after making promises to see each other soon. Harry turned back to watch him as he walked, trusting Draco to lead him. As he looked he saw a pair of beady eyes trained on him. Was he imagining it, or was the rat on Ginny's shoulder staring at him?
Chapter 22

September 1993

"Why are you frowning little lion?" Thirteen-year-old Draco asked after he pressed a kiss to Harry's head. "Is it Divination?"

His mate shook his head, causing his hair to whip about. "No Draco, divination's fine. Ron has the right idea about our assignments, make it up!"

Draco arched an eyebrow at the statement, reaching over Harry's shoulder to take his assignment. While he read it, Harry rose, rummaging through his drawer for an envelope for the letter he had written for his godfather. As he closed the drawer, he smiled at the small picture on the wall. To someone outside their family, it would seem strange but for him it was perfectly normal.

In the frame stood Lucius and Narcissa, arms wrapped around each other as they smiled at the camera. A recently turned twelve-year-old Draco held a black kitten in his arms whose green eyes sparkled mischievously at the camera. A little way off from them saw Severus sitting cross-legged on the lush grass, his right hand resting lightly on the head of a beautiful wolf that lay contentedly beside him. His other hand was stroking the hair of a black dog, whose pink tongue lolled out to the side of his mouth. Seconds later the two animals transformed into his godfathers, both leaning against Severus who had a peaceful smile on his face. Grandpa Albus was looking at the entire group, a happy smile on his face.

"Harry?" The eleven year old turned at his name, smiling dazzlingly at his veela. He had hoped it would disarm the boy, ridding him of the slight scowl on his face. To bad it didn't work.

"Yes Draco?"

"Why does this prediction seem exactly like what happened back in first year?" Despite his stern expression, a slight smile was working its way unto Draco's face. He ran a hand through his hair as he watched his mate try to come up with a competent explanation.

"Well, she never said that the prediction had to be of the future."

"The word 'predict' implies that the event is to come little one."

Harry pouted, the expression no less alluring than it had been during his younger days. "But Draco, we both know if I did it honestly I would get a P at the very least. Do you want me to lose my ranking?" There, that would do it if nothing else did.

"Of course not. But making up stuff..."

"Oh come on! Divination is based on talent. Either one has the sight or one doesn't. I refuse to let my ranking drop because I honestly could not help."

His mate was putting up a plausible argument Draco knew. Besides, he was excellent at the theory part of the subject. Unfortunately, it only accounted for forty percent of their overall grade.

Moreover, he did like the fact that Harry was still ranked second in the year. It really was not fair for him to lose that for something he honestly could not help.

"Okay Harry, I'll overlook it. However, if you feel so strongly about it, perhaps you should drop the class. We still have the option for another week. I can tutor you in Arithmacy, you'll catch up..."
quickly."

Harry tilted his head, considering the matter. "What if I take up Care of the Magical Creatures? I'd be with Ron."

"Cub, you aren't old enough to be in the class remember?"

"I'm a third year!" he protested, brows furrowing.

"Who's the age of a first year. And smaller in size than most of them I might add. Cub, we've been over this. Hermione's in Arithmacy too remember?"

"Yes, but numbers aren't the same like creatures!"

Draco shook his head, seeing the core reason behind the argument. What eleven year old wouldn't like to be around fascinating creatures? "I'm sure Hagrid wouldn't mind letting you interact with them on weekends Harry. You're less likely to be hurt if you have his undivided attention."

Harry nibbled his lip, considering. "Would you come with me?"

Draco's eyes sparkled, knowing that Harry had made up his mind already. "I suppose I could suffer their presence," he teased.

"Thanks Dray! You're the best." Harry reached up on tiptoes and pressed a chaste kiss to his veela's lips before dashing off. "I'm going to get Grandpa to put me in Arithmacy with you." The pre-teen was out the room before Draco could even reply.

The blonde pressed his fingers to his lips, still feeling the warmth that Harry's kiss had brought. Where others would have felt passion at the gesture, Draco was only filled with love and warmth. Harry was still of the age where he believed that all kisses meant the same. The kiss was meant to convey his love and affections for the older boy and hence that is what the veela felt. Draco did not have the heart (or guts) to explain to an eleven year old that a kiss to the lips had a totally different meaning from one to the cheek or temple. That would have opened up a ton of questions that he was not prepared to answer.

Harry had only recently started bestowing his kisses in such a manner after having stumbled across a pair of eagles kissing. Cho had been with him and the blushing badger had explained to him that when you loved someone, you kissed him or her there. Harry had decided that since he loved Draco, he had the right to kiss him on the mouth too. Never mind that Cho had not been referring to platonic love.

The first time Harry had done it, Draco had gently pushed him away, but the hurt look on Harry's face had forced him to bend and peck the boy's lips quickly to calm him. He hadn't tried to stop him since, simply telling him to limit such signs of affection to when they were alone. His mother had assured him that there was nothing wrong with it. Draco was of the age when such explorations began. And since Harry still had no clue about such feelings, there was little risk of anything that they were not ready for to happen. Draco's veela nature would ensure that nothing would happen until Harry was of age.

Pushing aside his thoughts, Draco sat, re-reading what Harry had written. When he reached the line where Harry had stopped, his mind continued, playing out the rest of the story that Harry had started. Harry had written about what he knew and thus his focus had been on the events at the Burrow and the events after it. Draco included some of the details his uncle had related to him about the time leading up to the Burrow incident and soon lost himself in a trail of memories.
Despite the neutral expression on his face, Severus Snape was very, very nervous. His eyes darted around, scanning the crowd for sight of a familiar face, those piercing eyes that played a part in most of his recent dreams. He was late and as each second ticked by, Severus felt as if the temperature lowered itself a few degrees. By the time a tempus spell indicated that he was thirty minutes late, Severus’ heart felt colder than the chilling wind around him.

How could he have fallen for it? It had obviously been a ruse on the man’s part. Lupin had been stringing him along the whole time and he like a fool had fallen for it. How could he really have believed that Remus had wanted to see him of all people? True he had seemed eager enough in the flames, his eyes brightening when he took in Severus’ face. But then, the Marauders had always been brilliant actors, had to be to get a way with all the pranks that they had.

Five more minutes past and Severus sighed, the breath of air forming a small fog in front of his face. He had been utterly humiliated. Even now, Lupin was probably snuggled at Black Manor, a tumbler in one hand as he wrote to Black, informing him that even after all these years, it was still easy to pull the wool over Snivellus’ eyes.

The thought had Severus straightening his back, a sneer automatically working its way unto his face. The look deterred any of the vendors on the streets who had seen him waiting from asking any questions. Out of the corner of his eyes the potions master caught a look of pity from one of the women. Was it obvious that he had been stood up?

He walked a bit faster, unwilling to simply apparate back to Snape Manor just yet. He needed to walk, to feel the strain on his lungs as it struggled to deal with the frigid air. Severus’ feet made crunching noises as he stomped through the snow. He had long since passed through the town and was now walking along the roadway leading to Merlin knows where. It did not matter really where it led. He just needed to get away and find a silent place to lick his wounds. He had been a fool.

The only consolation was that Lucius and Narcissa knew nothing of his plans with the man. He didn't know if he would have been able to face them if they had. Had he told them, Narcissa would have been anxiously waiting for him, already in tune with his magical system to intercept him the minute he tried to enter his home.

He never knew how she learnt that trick, but because of it, he spent little time in his own house. Hell, half his wardrobe was stored at Malfoy Manor. And if Lucius could have read the hopes in his heart, he had no doubt that “his room” in the manor would have been moved to one of those made for couples. Lupin would have never known what hit him.

Well not that he ever would. Severus had every plan of locking off Black Manor from any communication route once he decided to go back home. And he was sure that there was a spell somewhere to automatically destroy any mail from him. Severus breath hitched as he tripped on something in the snow. Loosing his balance he fell face first, not bothering to brace himself.

The snow was deep enough to be a comfortable cushion. Come to think of it, it was comfy enough to support one whose soul felt as cold as the frozen liquid. Severus turned his head slightly, pressing his cheek for an icy kiss. How nice, how soothing. He was slightly tempted to remain there, allowing the coldness and the falling snow to surround him, cradle him for all eternity.

He was destined to be all alone and he hated the fact that he had tried to go against fate. If he had simply burnt that letter the moment he realised who it was from, he would still be home, probably
oblivious to the loneliness in his heart. He had been perfectly content all the previous years, looking over the Malfoys. So what if he had felt a small pang back in Halloween? It would have faded or he would have ignored it until it vanished. But now, he had opened the letter days after Halloween and had been vulnerable to its contents. His hands clenched in the snow as he remembered how eagerly he had participated in a conversation with Remus, how he had opened his heart.

Had the man even been honest then, or was it a game from the very start? Deep down, Severus hoped that was the case. The only thing he could imagine being worse than Lupin stringing him along from the start was the fact that Remus had been genuine at the start and then decided that Severus was not good enough for him. Maybe the wolf had finally been driven to the brink with his true love by him and had decided to turn to Severus and found him lacking? That thought had him inhaling deeply, not caring that specks of snowflakes entered and burnt his nasal cavity.

How wonderful, the snow was now creating a blanket over him, cradling him in its icy grasp. So cold, yet so warm. Here all alone he felt at home. Really who needed him? Hogwarts would survive without him, there probably were more competent teachers around anyway. Who would miss him? A voice in his head whispered the Malfoy name, but he fought against picturing them. They would be fine without him. They all had a partner, unlike him, the fifth wheel. Lily would understand. Perhaps he could even do like her and find a way to look over Harry from beyond. Technically, he still would be protecting him right?

Unfortunately, the greater powers seemed not to agree, because the more his thoughts ran over the Malfoys, the less comforting the snow seemed to be. No longer was it warm and safe, he was shivering as he felt the icy presence worming its way through his robes. It was annoying to say the least and painful when he tried to move his limbs. Pain shot through him as he shook his body, causing the accumulated snow to dislodge from him. Slowly he twisted over until he was sitting in the snow. As his depression eased, he found himself thinking with more clarity, already regretting his previous thoughts.

The Malfoys would never forgive him if he was foolish enough to perish in the snow. Lucius would surely risk delving back into the dark arts if only for a chance to summon him long enough to hand him his ass on a platter. He shuddered to think what his best friend's veela would do. That thought brought a painful smirk to his frozen lips. Not to mention the boys whom he loved like his own. They would be heartbroken with him gone. He was a third parent to them. He couldn't believe that he had been willing to give up his life, and all because of a broken heart. Was he really that weak to allow himself to fall into some abyssal depression simply because of a failed love-life?

No, he wasn't.

He forced his chilled fingers to wrap themselves around his wand, allowing him to cast warming and protection spells on his clothes. Immediately his clothes were dry and his shaking stopped. He stood on his feet, allowing the spell to warm him to his very bones, making him feel alive. Too bad, it could not have put warmth back into his heart. As he waited for the spell to complete its work, he observed his surroundings.

The snow brought out the beauty of the trees they lined he thought, marvelling at the contrast between white and green. He had never appreciated its beauty before, but he was certain that he would do it from this day forth. It was a sight to behold. He spun around several times, rendering the environment to his memory. This was a place he would call forth to his mind for years to come.

As he made yet another turn, he stopped, seeing something that had not been there before. He squinted his eyes to discern its shape. It was that of a man, though completely transparent. He could only make out the shape because the snow fell around it, forming an outline. The longer he watched,
the more defined the shape became until it was recognisable.

"James?" he croaked, taking a step forward. There was no response, but his voice had erased the last of the shape's distortion and he saw that he was indeed looking at an opaque James. "Come to laugh at me too?" he managed, although there was none of the usual heat in his words. He watched as James scowled and wagged a scolding finger at him.

It was then that their last conversation came back to him. How on earth had James managed to become visible (although no way near the clarity that Lily managed). James nodded knowingly as if sensing his thoughts. From that Severus decided that the man was using so much energy to be seen that he had none to spare on actual speech. "You shouldn't be here," Severus stated, walking towards him. "You need to recover, save your strength. Go away."

The head shook, slowly backing away. Unconsciously Severus followed, still beseeching him to leave. So engrossed was he in his efforts, Severus never noticed that James was leading him back the way he came, an encouraging look in his eyes. Occasionally the soul looked behind him and seemingly satisfied, nodded before continuing to guide Severus. "Leave James!" Severus snapped again for what seemed to be the millionth time. He didn't really expect him to leave, but to his mild surprise, the figure smirked at him before obeying.

His voice echoed on the wind for some moments. "This needed to be done Severus, despite the risk to myself. However, you are partially right. You'll have to rely solely on Lily now until Harry can..." James' voice trailed off before Severus could hear the rest of his words. Once again, the dark haired man was all alone.

Severus was left staring owlishly at the spot where James had been, suddenly wondering what he should do with himself. Before he had too much time to consider though, he heard a distant call. "...Rus! S...rus!" The wind bit into the words but by the third repeat, the potions master was certain that it was his voice being called. His breath hissed out as he identified the person calling him. How could that be?

It was him...he was there, calling for him. Was that worry in the tone? Severus thought incredulously as the cry came again. Yes it was, and it was getting closer too. All of Severus' previous anguish seemed suddenly irrelevant as he heard the voice call again. True, Remus could have decided at the last moment not to stand him up. Maybe he even had a reason for being late. Neither really mattered at the moment. The most important thing was that Lupin was in the vicinity, calling for him with concern obvious in his voice.

To say that Remus was shocked when his best friend's voice started whispering anxiously in his ear was an understatement. A helpful woman had pointed him in the direction that Severus had left in, but it was half-heartedly that the werewolf followed. He felt terrible and didn't really blame the man for leaving. He would have done the same thing.

It was only moments before he had meant to leave Black Manor that the wolf had been filled with panic. He had not left the manor in years and as he donned his travelling cloak he was struck with fear, unwilling to leave the comfortable cocoon of a life he had built for himself here. As the time for him to meet Severus came and passed, he had sat there on the carpet, mulling over his options. It was only when he felt a tap on his head and looked up to see green eyes glaring at him before disappearing had he sprung into action, leaving the manor before his fears could overwhelm him again.

But he had already been too late, Severus was not in their agreed meeting place. He knew it was fruitless to search for him. Why would Severus of all people wander through the snow when he
could apparate? He was a practical man after all. After less than five minutes of walking, the former lion was prepared to give up and return to Black Manor. From there he would fire-call Severus or even floo in if the man wasn't too upset.

He was in mid-spin when James' voice whistled in his ear, telling him that Severus was indeed wandering around in the snow and was putting himself in danger. Momentarily he had thought that he was being delusional, but memories of that flash of green eyes earlier had him walking forward, wrapping his arms around himself.

After he passed a certain distance, James instructed him to start calling for him and after that the voice vanished. He pressed on, fighting his way through the icy wind and snow, calling for the man, even as he felt his throat constrict. Eventually, when he was on the brink of giving up, he heard one of his calls being answered. "Re...us? Remus!" Severus was answering him, an edge of panic to his voice.

Remus waded through the snow a bit faster.

A person swathed in grey appeared in Severus' line of vision and his voice broke off mid-cry. He halted to a stop, breath frosting, as did the person. Black eyes met amber for a long while as both men caught settled their breathing. They stared at each other until Severus' lips parted and he croaked out one word. "Remus." That was it. The next second, those amber eyes were inches from his own as he was pulled flush against him. Barely had he the time to wrap his arms about the were-wolf before Remus turned, apparating them away.

Severus suspected that Remus had brought him to Black manor, but as he had never come here before, he couldn't be certain. The man was acting decisively mugglish, Severus decided as he watched the man running through rooms gathering clothes in his arms. He thought the wolf was just anxious to be dry. He was therefore shocked when the clothes was thrust at him before he was all but shoved into a bedroom. He donned them without complaint although he snorted when the jumper's arms passed his fingers by about five inches. The pants dragged on the floor as well.

"I look like Harry when he decides to wear Draco's clothes," Severus grumbled before beginning rolling up the pants legs and jumper sleeves. He was reluctant to do a simple sizing spell, refusing to admit that it warmed his heart just a bit to know that the wolf was sharing his clothes with him. The thought brought a faint flush to his cheeks as he left the bedroom, wandering back along the direction he had come. The portraits stared at him curiously, a few whispering among themselves. He ignored them.

His footsteps eventually led him back to the den in which they had arrived in. The room was surprisingly comfortable with a lounge area near to the fireplace. Armchairs were artfully decorated around a coffee table that held cups of steaming tea from the looks of it. Remus was seated in one of the chairs, his face propped on his hand as he stared into the fire. He looked so thoughtful that Severus was loath to disturb him. The man caught his scent though as he turned, the look on his face fading as his eyes roved over Severus. The potions master had to prevent himself from flinching or worse yet blushing under the intense gaze before settling into the proffered chair.

His black eyes were lowered as he stared intently at the murky hot liquid he was sipping at. The other man's eyes had not left him since he had sat, and it was unnerving. Was this how his students' felt beneath his penetrating gaze? He knew he was not that good looking, so the heated looks the wolf sent his way were strange. He had never seen such an intensity in someone's eyes, especially when directed at him.
How was Severus to know that Remus was trying his damnest not to jump him right there? True they were only in communication for little over two months, and this was the first time they were physically in each other's presence for years. However, seeing Severus wearing *their* clothes – Remus' jumper and Sirius' pants - was sending Remus' wolf side crazy. The dark eyed man's scent was slowly but surely intermingling with the other two's and the combination was most tantalising. It was all the wolf could do not to take a small taste.

Magic had kept Sirius' clothes as fresh as the day that he had last worn it. To Remus' delicate nose, it was as if the man never truly left. That was why he had banished himself to Black Manor when the aurors had descended upon them. They had been in each other's arms, both crying softly after bidding their best friend and his wife goodbye. Lily's pendant had glinted at them as her casket was sealed, as if trying to capture the last bit of sunlight and store it away for the woman now living in eternal darkness.

It had been a trying time for them, coupled with the loss of precious Harry and the betrayal that had torn that small close-knit family apart. All they had wanted to do was mourn together, for the friends lost through death and the other person they loved who though very much alive, was denied to them. The small amount of warmth and comfort that the wolf had felt being with Sirius was shattered by the distinctive cracks that indicated multiple apparations. Everything else happened so fast that Remus had been unable to react until it was too late.

One minute his head was being cradled on Sirius' shoulder, the next the hand that had been brushing his neck tightened warningly before Sirius flung him away. Even before he had hit the ground, Sirius had been cornered, no less than five wands pointing his way. Remus' mouth hung open as the head auror read the charges.

**Breaking his vow as a secret keeper.**

**Treason against the country.**

**Aiding and abetting in the murder of Lily and James Potter.**

**Aggravated assault against one Peter Pettigrew.**

**Murder of Peter Pettigrew.**

Of the five charges, the only one that could honestly been laid against Sirius was the assault of Pettigrew. Sirius had attacked him, and had willingly admitted it to Remus when he had stumbled through their floo hours before with bloodied fists. He had been too incensed to even reach for his wand. But Sirius had reassured him that he had done little more than rearrange Peter's face and since no magic was used, there was little the wizarding law could do. Where had the other charges come from?

The fallen man had never been able to voice his thoughts as in a moment Sirius was gone, replaced by the large black dog (whose fur was remarkable similar in colour to a certain person's hair). Few knew of Sirius' animagus form and the now wanted man had used that to his advantage breaking free of the group and sprinting away, casting a last glance to his lover.

He hadn't reached too far however before hidden aurors came into view, sending no less than four stunners to the dog. With a pained howl, Sirius was rendered back into his original form and his prone body bound and apparated away. The sight of his lolloing head shook off Remus' shock and he had rose, screaming for them to return Sirius to him. Several arms restrained him, one voice whispering urgently to him to calm down. It had been Tonks, one of Sirius' own relatives. She had been the one to send away the other aurors, leaving her alone with her cousin's mate.
She had tried to console him, but he refused, swearing at her for betraying her family. She tried to explain that she had had no choice, it was her job and family or not she had to do it. Her words rang false to Remus though as he knew instinctively that she had not even tried to defend her cousin. Sirius was a bit rash, but he would never kill someone, hurt them yes, but never kill. Tonks was a high enough ranked auror that her opinion would have been considered. Yet she had not raised a hand to help her own blood.

It was something that Remus had never forgiven her for, not even when he saw that her name had been scratched off the family tree, the word killed engraved next to it. Somehow, he found it fitting that she would meet her end at the hands of rogue death eaters, torn apart by a series of cutting spells that Severus had invented and the dark lord had gleaned from his mind. It seemed oddly appropriate for in a round about way Severus had helped avenge Sirius for the woman who refused to assist her own.

A log popping drew the werewolf back to the present and he realised with a start that Severus was not seated in the chair but was instead staring at the mantle where pictures from their younger days sat. He knew which ones the man were perusing in particular. They were shots of him, unknowingly taken. The majority came after he had split away from them. His expression was open in all of the pictures, hands moving elegantly as they stirred a potion or chopped ingredients. There was even one when he leaned nonchalantly against a tree, staring up into the heavens.

He and Sirius had captured those images during the times that they were desperate to see signs of the Severus they loved. It was only during the times when the snake had thought himself alone that he had dropped his sneering demeanour, revealing the side they knew and loved so well. It was those images that sustained their beliefs that their snake was not lost to them, that there was still that pure side to him no matter the filth that had poured from his mouth.

"You always wanted me," the man said softly, not turning. It was then that Remus realised that he must have been broadcasting his thoughts very loudly if the Slytherin could read them without eye contact.

"We did," he said, his voice cracking softly. "We never stopped..." He rose and walked to the shorter man, resting his hands on his shoulders. The potions master tensed at the touch but made no move to brush it off.

"Why did you write me?" Severus breathed. "After so long?"

Remus squeezed his fingers slightly, turning Severus. "I doubt that you would believe me."

Severus' mouth quirked slightly. "Try me."

Remus took a deep breathe, knowing that his next words would probably send the dark haired man running. "Well you see..."

He spent the next several minutes explain Lily's visit and all that she had revealed to him. He was rather surprised when Severus neither balked or laughed outright at him. By the time his words wound down, the man's lips were actually twitching. "Severus?"

"It seems Lily and James have been quite busy, "he stated reflectively.

"What? You believe me?" came the astounded reply.

Severus nodded, grasping one of Remus' hands and leading him back to their seats. Once there he explained all of his encounters with Lily and James, starting from when Harry was five and
concluding with James just hours before. The wolf eyes were wide by the time he was through. Harry had been abused and had been living with the Malfoys. Even further he was the mate of a veela and was already at Hogwarts and ranked second in the year? His godson had had a very eventful nine years he realised with a sigh, although he chuckled at the mischief the child had gotten into at Halloween. He was James' son after all.

"Remus," Severus spoke after a long silence, "I admit I am a bit surprised by Lily's request. What on earth could the Weasleys have that would be of interest to us? And why didn't you just tell me this in the beginning?"

"She didn't specify Severus. Besides after so many years, what you have done if out of the blue I wrote you saying to go to the Weasleys and check their animals?"

"I would have hexed you through the floo instead off..."

"Snogging me?" The werewolf laughed at the man's flush. He had been the one to do it, and it had been little more than a quick peck as Severus had been withdrawing from the call. Yet the look on his face was priceless.

"Yes, well ehem..." Severus nosily cleared his throat, looking everywhere except at the man.

"More than that Severus, Lily indicated that there was the chance that we could overcome all our past difficulties. I'd like to believe that Sirius would enjoy coming home to meet not only me but a prickly little hedgehog of a snake." He chuckled once more at the glare his statement garnered.

"Would he really want me?" Severus asked before he could stop himself.

"You're asking answers Severus," he rebuked gently. "Now, let's turn to how exactly we're going to go about freeing Sirius hmm?"
The Burrow was an interesting house to say the least. Harry's eyes fairly bulged when he stood outside of the leaning structure. Looking at it, he could clearly see how it belonged to the Weasley family. It embodied what Ron had said about it. They were a crazy bunch, and the house's leaning nature certainly represented that. The dwelling was multi-storeyed, with countless numbers of windows. On the second floor, two broken ones flapped in the wind, something looking like grey goo slowly dripping from it.

His mind immediately ran to the twins, remembering their talks of experiments during the vacation period. It seemed obvious to whom the room belonged. Several other rooms' occupants were also obvious. Hints of orange could be seen through the windows of a room a little distance away from the broken ones. Orange was the team colour of Ron's favourite Quidditch team and so Harry deduced that it was his friend's own.

His eyes were moving along to the other windows when his godfather's voice interrupted his musings.

"Are you through staring or should I conjure a chair?" Severus snarled from the boy's side.

"Don't be mean Uncle Sevvy," the boy replied, frowning at him. "It doesn't..."

"...Suit me..." Severus finished, barely restraining himself from rolling his eyes. "I'll act as I please brat!"

Harry shook his head resignedly, absently noting that he would have to spend a lot more time teaching him to act like a normal wizard. He was usually so affectionate in private, the boy would have to start getting him to show it in public. "But I'll soon have help with that task," he murmured, his eyes darkening briefly. Severus caught the end of his statement but before he could ask, Harry blinked, his eyes clearing.

"Come on Uncle Sevvy!" he said suddenly, tone excited. "Let's go in!"

The abrupt change in demeanour was noticeable, but the elder shoved it aside. The child was prone to the occasional mood swings after all. The child grasped his wrist and tugged him along the path to the house, glaring at his slowness before ordering him to use the knocker that was a bit out of his reach.

"Coming!" a woman's voice called from within, seconds after Severus released the knocker. There was the sound of shuffling feet before the door opened revealing a smiling Molly Weasley, complete with apron and a smudge of flour on her cheek.

"Ah Severus, Harry! Welcome!" She ushered them inside before they had a chance to speak. "And why didn't you just floo in Severus? Poor Harry probably caught himself a cold out there in the chilly air!"

She bustled around, magicking off Harry's robe before slipping him unto a chair, a mug of chocolate floating out of the kitchen into his hands. He barely managed a thank you before she spun around, repeating the process on a glaring Severus. She tsked at him, repeating her question after he drained half the mug.

"It's impolite to simply floo in. It's not like we're close acquaintances," he groused, refusing to quail at the withering look she sent him. Molly gave him a speaking look that Harry could not understand,
before muttering, "Not close acquaintances my behind. We see each other, what, twice a week?"

Severus looked about to protest and although Harry enjoyed seeing someone else take his uncle to
task for his behaviour, he wanted to see his friends. "Where's Ron Aunty?" he asked, a chocolate
moustache on his upper lip. His question effectively distracted the woman who descended on him
with a rag, dabbing at the left over liquid.

He squirmed a bit under the "assault", much to Severus' amusement.

"Oh, he and his brothers disappeared after they heard that Severus here was bringing you. They'll be
back when he's gone I reckon." She turned a pointed look to the potions master who gave her a
"who-me?" expression. "Why is it that all my boys, even the eldest who have long since left
Hogwarts, cringe at the very mention of your name Severus?"

The man shrugged. "I can't speak for them Molly, though I suppose the youngest ones need fear that
I'd assign them extra work for their rather dismal marks." He said the last innocently enough, but it
served its purpose, distracting her.

"Dismal! Well I am certain you don't mean Percy. The last three then. Really they've assured me that
they've passed...but then report owls don't come out for a few days left and I know better than to
believe them."

Severus perked up, seeing a chance to reinforce his "git" image on the Weasley boys. He was certain
the last of those whispered comments that he was going soft (since the brat insisted on lunging at him
at every opportunity in public despite his glares and threats), would dissipate when the Weasleys
revealed that he had gotten them in trouble during vacation.

"Well, I believe the twins received P and the youngest missed that mark by 1 point. Percy's received
an E, although his score is a bit lower than last semester. I personally believe it has to do with the chit
he's chasing after." He stifled a laugh when the woman's eyes flashed in anger, and she started
ranting about what she would do with her wayward sons (especially the one who had not even
hinted that he had a love interest).

Harry shrank a bit further back in his chair, perfectly content to sip on his drink. Even if Aunt Molly
turned on him, he was certain that he had managed a high score. Uncle Sevvy would have already
lectured his bum had he scored lower than an E. As would Draco, and Mama and Papa and
Grandpa...he, unlike Ron, had ample motivation to do good in his studies!

Eventually Molly calmed enough to send Harry on his way exploring the house while she and
Severus spoke. The boy left eagerly, never having an opportunity to explore a wizarding home other
than his own. The differences were noticeable. Other than being considerably smaller, the house was
decorated oddly. Regal looking portraits, set against gleaming walls, littered the Malfoy Manor. The
floors were lined with furs, or polished until the marble floors gleamed.

The Weasley house was entirely different. Odd ends of parchment were stuck all over, most
containing notes for whoever read them; the floor was covered in some corners, revealed in others.
The few pictures called to him merrily, surprised to see a child without a head of shocking red. A
few animals also scurried past as he wandered through the rooms, something that he would never
have seen at the Malfoys. The only animals allowed in the house were the owls and even then, they
were carefully kept in the owlery.

He peered into any open bedrooms and indeed saw that the one with the broken windows belonged
to the twins. He knew better than to enter however, already briefed by Ron on stories of what
happened to people who entered uninvited. Even their parents felt the results of that on occasion
although Fred and George were always amply "rewarded" on those occasions. There was a small pop and a piece of parchment appeared in front of him, gluing itself to the wall. It was from Aunt Molly, informing him of where to find Ron's room and that Ginny was only a short distance away from it.

A toss up between exploring Ron's room and visiting his sister ensued, but in the end he decided to introduce himself formally to Ron's sister, about a year older than him. His knock on her purple door earned him a soft come in. Hesitantly he obeyed, and stood in the doorway looking at the only Weasley girl lounging across her bed. She looked up from her magazine curiously, eyes widening slightly as she saw that it was not her mother as she had assumed.

"Hello Harry," she greeted, sitting up. "I thought it was Mum."

"I can leave," he offered quietly, already moving to turn.

"Oh no!" she said quickly, "I've been looking forward to meeting you. Ron says that you're quite the guy!"

The child flushed slightly at the compliment, but moved to sit on the spot she petted.

"Is your mate around?" she asked curiously, looking towards the door. Her brothers had kept her abreast with news of their little friend, so she knew that Draco was never too far from the boy.

"No. He's spending the day with Blaise."

Ginny tossed her hair over her shoulder as she spoke next. "Really, I thought you guys can't spend too much time away from each other."

"I'll know when I need him," Harry said simply, assessing the girl carefully.

She did not look like her brothers in the least, except for her hair. True she had a smattering of freckles on each cheek, but it was so faint, one would not notice it if you did not know what to look for. Overall, she gave of an air of friendliness that appealed to him and he instantly decided that he had gotten himself another friend.

"I like you," he declared.

"Thank you!" Ginny blushed at the statement, already seeing why her brother said that Harry was endearing.

His eyes were so open and expressive, it was easy to guess his thoughts. He seemed rather small for a nine-year-old, and if she had not heard it from her family herself, she would have never believed him to be as smart as it was purported. Really, looking down into the face of the cute boy, who would think him capable of beating wizards academically far older than him?

"Do you want to play a game?" she offered, chuckling at his enthusiastic yes. If all little boys were so cute, she regretted the fact that all of hers were older. She would have loved someone younger than her to have fun with. It was lonely during the school year without her brothers around to harass.

Soon she and Harry were alternating between roles as they engaged in a game of hide and seek. From a corner of the room, a pair of beady eyes stared at the pair, eyes lingering on the dark haired child, assessing him. At one point, Harry glanced its way and moved to investigate. A call from Ginny however diverted his attention and by the time he had looked back, the eyes were gone.
"All of the animals have been cleared," Severus sighed, dropping back onto the armchair. Once Harry had departed, he and Molly had gotten to work, summoning one by one, all the animals that the Burrows contained. A line of animals ranging from squirrels, mice and bugs, marched into the room, standing still as revealing charms were cast over them.

Molly kept an idle count on the animals, noting what appeared. Many of the animals were strays that sought refuge against the frigid air. She placed a tracking charm on the squirrels and mice, so that she could find them later to ensure that they had sufficient food while she banished the insects (especially cockroaches) as soon as Severus was done. She laughed as the garden gnomes squeaked angrily in their high pitched voices as they fought against Severus' spell and she took particular relish in sending them flying over the fences once Severus was through.

"Well I can't say I'm too surprised," Molly replied, checking on the pies in the oven. "I told Albus that there was nothing here."

Severus' obvious melancholy was a bit surprising to her but she put it to the man being disappointed that his mission had failed. She had not been given full details of the situation, or else Severus would have found himself with his head squashed on the woman's bosom in a matronly hug.

"Are you sure that all the animals came Molly? There are a few magical creatures that could resist the call."

"You mean besides Mr. Groany?" she asked, referencing to the attic's resident that habitually banged on the floor and pipes. "No. Come now Severus, don't look even more dour than usual. Perhaps you simply misinterpreted the informant's message."

While the potions master thought that it was highly unlikely, he mumbled an agreement. Molly's hair would probably turn white if he revealed just who the information came from.

Draco dodged yet another snowball attack, laughing merrily. "Nice try Blaise!" he yelled over his shoulder, returning the lobby. His best friend made a rather rude gesture towards him that did little more than trigger another bout of laughter that left Draco with a mouthful of snow.

"Hey!" he sputtered, spitting out the frosty bits. His fellow snake smirked at him. "Can't keep up veela-veel?" He teased, using the nickname he had long since given his childhood friend.

"You wish!" Draco mock-snarled, covering the distance between them easily. He pounced on Blaise, sending them both sprawling into the snow.

They tousled good-naturedly, both trying to stuff handfuls of snow down each other's back. Their wrestling ended when a huge pile of snow landed unceremoniously on top of them. They looked around for the culprit, laughing when they realised that they had reached a tree and disturbed its load. Declaring it the victor, they made their way into Zabini manor where waiting house-elves supplied them with warm clothes.

"Do you need Harry?" Blaise asked as he flopped across his wide bed. Draco followed suit, sitting cross-legged as they waited for their drinks to arrive.

"Not yet. It's only been three hours."

"How long can you manage?" he asked, rolling over unto his back.

"Well at school we're apart for up till five hours depending. But then we usually still cross each other's paths or such," he mused, eyes drifting for a moment. Finally he shrugged before continuing. "I think that I'll need him after at least four hours."
Blaise looked mildly disappointed. "I was hoping that you could stay the entire day."

"I can," Draco reassured, reaching out to pat his knee. "Harry's flooing over here for tea remember? We'll still have the afternoon."

The boy brightened considerably. "That's great!" he crowed. "You know, school hasn't told us much about veela relationships other than what we need to do not to anger you. And I haven't thought to ask."

Draco looked mildly chagrined by Blaise's choice of words but dismissed it with a rueful smile. Had he really been that horrible in the beginning? "Well, there's no time like the present."

"Come, ask away."

The boys spent the next few hours speaking about Draco's heritage before moving on to other subjects, including Blaise's fear for the upcoming report cards "I failed History, I just know it!" to Draco's fear that Harry would return home with a bag of pranks from the Weasley twins. "If he pranks me I swear he'll be swimming in milk!"

As time passed, Draco's attention waned as his thoughts started drifting towards his absent mate. His hand rose to his chest and started absently rubbing at it as he gave a nonchalant "uh-huh" to his friend's statement. Blaise saw that it was almost time for tea and thus lapsed into silence as he knew Draco's attention was no longer on him. He watched silently as his friend's gaze grew increasingly distant.

It was interesting seeing first hand what Draco had explained. Wistfulness was evident in his expression as he gazed towards the door as if he expected Harry to wander in at any moment. When an invisible bell chimed, calling them to the tearoom, Blaise gently lead the veela to it, noticing how Draco's steps quickened as they neared. He was almost running when they entered the room.

Draco froze, looking around before his eyes fell on the small form munching on a biscuit while nodding to whatever Lady Zabini was telling him. His figure seemed slightly morose as he sat there, his eyes lacking their usual sparkle. A soft sound escaped from the blonde's lips and caught the boy's attention. In an instant, the moroseness was gone as the child emitted a happy squeal – Lady Zabini completely forgotten as he ran into the open arms.

The veela buried his head against his hair, reassuring himself that all was well with his mate before withdrawing. They both flushed lightly at the expression on Blaise and his mother's faces as they sat, before they all began nibbling at the various pastries. A pastry Draco nearly choked on when he heard of the adventure his mate had gotten into in the past few hours.

Burrow, a few hours earlier...

Harry eyes were blocked by his hands as he counted loudly. Hide and seek was fun to play in an unfamiliar place! There were so many twists and turns to hide behind that he and Ginny had yet to tire of the game. As he counted thirty, he removed his hands, running out of the room to find his redhead companion. They both flushed lightly at the expression on Blaise and his mother's faces as they sat, before they all began nibbling at the various pastries. A pastry Draco nearly choked on when he heard of the adventure his mate had gotten into in the past few hours.

He stuck his tongue at it, not liking the moulting creature in the slightest. It did nothing but stare at him and it was highly unnerving. Still, he could not give it the good kick he desired as Ginny
obviously cared for it from the way she cooed at the revolting thing. He checked in cupboards and underneath beds in search of the elusive girl but had yet to find her. His brows furrowed as he ticked off the areas he had already searched. It left him with nothing but the attic to search in and he was loath to go in there after hearing all of the stories Ron had related about the nasty creature that lived up there. He suspected that the Weasley girl was in it, but that was not a risk he was going to take. She would give up eventually and leave.

Plan decided he retracted his footsteps back to the girl's bedroom. He hissed angrily at the rat that scampered up his leg and stood on its hind legs regarded him. There was something unnatural about those beady eyes he decided, locking his gaze with the animal's. The rat seemed to be searching him for something and it was not a pleasant feeling in the least.

"Hey you," Harry poked the small body with a finger, causing it to topple off his leg unto the floor. "I don't like you so stop watching me!" The rat gave an indignant squeak and started to climb back up his leg. Harry dislodged it with a fierce shake and could not resist giving the creature a mild kick to emphasis his dissatisfaction.

His action drove the rodent into a frenzy however and with a squeak, it buried its admittedly long yellow teeth into the boy's leg. "OWW!" Harry yelled, as the rat retreated, blood shining on its teeth. Blood flowed from the wound and within seconds, a terrible stinging developed. "Oww..." he repeated, his voice growing thick with suppressed tears as the pain increased incrementally and the injured area darkened.

"Unca Sevvy," he whimpered, abandoning the room and making his way down the stairs as quickly as his now throbbing leg would allow. Tears were pouring down his face by the time he stumbled into the kitchen. "Un-ca S-evvy!" he managed through his sobs, catching the attention of the two adults in the room.

"Harry?"

"Whatever is the matter dearie?" Molly cried in alarm, eyes scanning the child that Severus now held in his arms.

"He bit me!" Harry managed, shaking his hurt leg. Both adults breath hissed at the sight of the wound. It had turned black and in addition to the blood, a black puss was now oozing out. "Hurts!" Harry sobbed, turning his face into his uncle's neck.

Severus sat down, manoeuvring the child so that his injured leg was accessible. Molly was summoning several potions from her stores, her eyes frantic.

"What bit you?" Severus asked calmly, not letting his panic at Harry's distraught face show. He had never seen an injury like this from a mere animal. Harry's entire leg was rapidly darkening and he allowed his magic to flow into the boy, keeping the blood from distributing the infection further.

"R-at!"

"A rat?"

"Impossible. Rat bites don't cause a reaction like this."

"G-ginny's rat. It hu-rts Unca S-evvy!"

Severus' arm rubbed soothingly on the boy's back as Molly poured a potion over the leg. "It's stop in a minute little one. Just hold tight."
"Want Draco," he enunciated clearly through his tears.

"Let's fix you up first and if you still want Draco after we'll get him okay?"

"Ok-ay."

"This isn't an animal bite," Molly declared, catching their attention. "What do you say bit you Harry?"

"Ginny's rat," he repeated, a bit more calmly now that his godfather's warmth was seeping into him.

"What do you mean Molly?" Severus frowned, leaning around to watch the leg again.

"This potion's for animal bites, all of them. This hasn't healed in the least."

Severus gently disengaged the boy's hands from his neck and set him unto the counter, easing his leg up. A tap of his wand triggered a diagnostic spell while Molly called for her daughter to come downstairs and bring her pet with her. The potion master hissed when his wand turned blue; it indicated that a wizard had bitten his godson.

That explained his reaction. A bit from another wizard infused some of their magic into the victim's body. If the magic were not compatible, the victim would feel considerable pain, especially in the case of Harry who had a mate. Only Draco's magic (if by some extreme the veela came to bite his mate so hard he broke skin), would not cause a negative reaction.

Severus ordered Molly to restrain the animal the moment it arrived before he launched into a chant that would draw the alien magic out of Harry's body. The child whimpered loudly at first, but soon settled into silent tears as the chant continued, his body sagging in relief as the pain receded and his flesh slowly returned to its natural colour. A wave of his wand closed the wound and another spell faded the scar into nothing, leaving Harry's leg unmarred as before.

Mother Weasley had left to see what kept her daughter and Severus used those moments to pull Harry back into his arms and settle him unto his lap, dabbing at his lingering tears. His godson was still, not fighting against his ministrations and settled his head on his chest when the cloth was banished. "Stupid weird rat," he mumbled, closing his eyes.

"How did the animal come to bite you?" he asked softly, raking his hand through Harry's hair.

"It's weird," Harry repeated. "It keeps staring at me and I told it to stop. It doesn't act like an animal should!"

"Meaning?"

"I don't know, its eyes just seem different, almost..."

"Human?" Severus finished. Harry nodded, eyes opening.

"That's it. It seems human."

That would explain why it did not come when I summoned it, Severus thought, pressing Harry's head back to him. His spell summoned animals; he never even stopped to think of summoning an animagus. Well, he would have to trust Molly to find the beast, whoever he was. As much as he knew that he should help find it, for the animagus, according to Lily was the way by which he would free Sirius, he could not leave Harry now, not in this condition. He knew that in his place, Sirius would do the same thing.
Molly's face was drawn as she re-entered the kitchen, Ginny close behind eyeing Harry worriedly. "We can't find it."

"I'm sorry it bit you Harry," Ginny apologised.

"S'okay." Harry murmured. "Unca Sevvy fixed it."

"Did you use the spell for animagus?" Severus questioned.

"Yes and it brought nothing. I warded the house though so he can't leave and I sent a message for the boys to stay at their Aunt Muriel for now."

"Good, sometimes more hands are not always better."

"Indeed."

"Harry dear, better?"

"Yes Aunty."

"Do you still want Draco brat?" Severus asked, although the "brat" held as much affection as his earlier endearment.

Harry's head twisted as he contemplated the matter. Now that he was better, the overwhelming urge for Draco had receded considerably. "I can wait."

"Okay." Severus set him unto his feet. "Molly and I are going to search for it. He won't get away with biting you. " And everything else, he added silently.

"Can't you just call him?"

"No. You heard Molly. He didn't come to her. I believe we'll have to search manually."

"Lunch is ready dears," Molly continued. "Ginny, you and Harry stay here and eat. When you are done, you may have some biscuits. We should be back by then."

"Yes Mum."

"Okay Aunty."

"Be good," the potions master reminded as they swept from the room.

The two children settled at the table and ate, conversing lightly with each other. Ginny was not reassured until Harry raised his leg for her inspection. "Did mum kiss it better?" she asked.

"No. Uncle Sevvy healed it."

"Well that will never do!" Ginny stated with a mock-stern expression that had the child chortling. The redhead then proceeded to ask where the spot was and placed a gentle kiss to the area that had Harry flushing lightly. No one ever kissed him there before!

"Now its better!" she declared, her eyes sparkling merrily.

"Thanks Ginny!" he giggled, rubbing his hand over the area.

Despite the adults' words, they were not back by the time he and Ginny had crunched their way
through a good few biscuits. "What's taking them so long?"

"I don't know. How is it that it so much trouble to find a rat?"

"A cat would find it in no time flat," Ginny mused, absently twirling a strand of hair. "To bad we don't have one. Percy's allergic."

Harry brightened at her words. "A cat? Would a kitten do?"

She frowned before shrugging. "I guess so. It is a baby cat after all."

"Cool, well we do have one!"

"How?" she asked, confused by his excitement.

However, she received no answer as Harry closed his eyes. She fell out of her chair moments later as she watched Harry's form compress itself into a tiny kitten who batted a paw at her. "Y-you, a k-i-tten," she stammered, scrambling to her feet. "But you're nine. You can't, well obviously you can. But!"

The kitten cocked its head at the girl's ramblings, licking at one paw until she quieted. When she simply stared at him, he straightened up, tail twirling. He sniffed at his hind leg, getting the scent of the rat before starting to wander around, following the scent. It was not easy at first as its scent lingered throughout the house. No animal was restrained at the Burrow so it had wandered around.

However, as Harry continued to walk about, he caught a scent that seemed stronger than the previous. Meowing to Ginny who was following closely, he led the way up to the Ginny's room. From there he scampered under the bed, crawling to a crack in the wall big enough for the rodent to have slipped into. He hissed in annoyance, but persevered, walking the length of the wall until he determined which way the animal had went. He followed the scent through the wall (knocking into it once in his enthusiasm), until he collided with a leg.

He recoiled, hissing at the offending foot, before scratching at air as a hand gripped him by his neck and raised him. He had the grace to duck his head as he saw his godfather's stern gaze. "What exactly are you doing here disobedient brat?"

"Severus who on earth...Oh what a cute kitten! Where did it come from?"

"This," Severus stated, still glaring at him. "Is going to be one very sorry kitten-boy."

Harry's ears lowered and he mewed appealingly at the man who seemed indifferent to his countenance.

"Harry, oh..." Ginny stopped short as she took in the scene and had the grace to look ashamed when her mother scolded her. Harry however, continued to squirm in Severus' grip, as he caught the scent stronger than ever. Severus was having none of it and tightened his grip.

Harry mewled in frustration. Did they not want the rat? As he felt the scent retreat further he used the animal's own tactic and buried tiny but sharp teeth into his uncle's skin. He yelped and instinctively released him. Luckily, he landed on his feet and was off before Severus could recapture him.

Harry skidded round a corner in his haste, almost parallel to the creature moving through the walls. He was only inches behind in their race. The moment it left the walls...THERE!

Harry leaped into the air as the rat emerged, running frantically across the floor. It was headed for a
crack on the opposite end, and Harry knew that if he reached it, his escape would be perfect. The rodent dodged Harry's first lunge, but was sufficiently distracted, giving the kitten enough time to regroup and launch another attack.

It was fairly big when compared to the kitten, and there was no way that Harry could restrain it with one or even both paws. Thus, he spun and sunk his teeth into the rat's tail, biting off a piece before he gripped it again. The rat emitted a pained shriek but there was no getting away. Harry drew himself to his full (admittedly short) height, and stood proudly as the rat hung from his mouth, squirming.

Severus blinked as he took in the scene. His godson had done their task in a fraction of the time. He relieved him of his burden and stupefied it. He passed the now motionless rat to Molly before sweeping Harry up and performing a cleansing spell on his mouth, grinning at the kitten's obvious displeasure. Task complete, he stood him on the ground and ordered him to change back.

Harry did so and stood watching his uncle with a hopeful smile, hoping to be patted for catching the elusive rat. He thus squawked when he was spun and three smacks dropped onto his bottom. "Unca Sevvy!" he cried, clutching his bottom while blinking back tears at the strong sting. He hated when his godfather did that, it *hurt*.

"That was for disobeying me and biting," Severus chided, steeling himself against the watery eyes.

"But I couldn't have caught him if I didn't!" he protested loudly.

"It was not your job to do so!" came the sharp retort.

"But!"

"One more word and you'll find yourself in timeout," Severus warned, trying to avoid the tantrum that was in the works.

Harry growled in frustration. "You're being mean!"

"That's it," the man declared.

And thus Harry found himself kicking at the wall with his foot, muttering all the while about a miserable godfather whom he had to take revenge upon. With a roll of his eyes, Severus set a silencing charm around the brat so his mumblings went unheard before searching out Molly, who had Ginny scrubbing the pots as punishment. The rodent was secured in an unbreakable jar.

"O, Severus. I assume that Harry's okay now?"

"Nothing ten minutes in the corner won't fix." He eyed the jar. "Would you mind keeping an eye on him while I carry this to headquarters?"

"No problem at all. Shall I send him along to the Zabinis in case you aren't back in time?"

"That will be greatly appreciated," Severus replied, before ceasing his burden and departing.

"And he left me there for ten whole minutes!" Harry finished with a pout, obviously affronted. Lady Zabini had to mask her laugh as a cough behind her handkerchief. To a child in forced inactivity, ten minutes really was a large expanse of time. Blaise however did little to mask his merriment, while Draco was torn between hugging and chastising his mate for disobeying. He had no idea what was so important about the rat but if his godfather had needed it, he was glad that it was secure.
He settled on scowling at the nerve of the Weasley girl to kiss his mate and decided then and there that Harry would be scrubbed from head to toe until he was glowing that night.

"So did they find out who the rat was?" Blaise asked curiously.

"Yeah, but they wouldn't tell us. Ginny took one of the twin's toys and we used it to listen in!" His pride was somewhat dampened by the glare Draco levelled at him, but he continued. "Uncle Sevvy was really excited. He said that the rat was some guy named Peter Pettigrew. Then he said something about Grandpa going to the ministry, but then all the other guys came back so we didn't here anymore."

"Mother, are you alright?" Blaise asked worriedly, seeing his mother drop her handkerchief.

Lady Zabini's fair skin paled and her voice was faint when she asked Harry to repeat the name.

"Peter Pettigrew."

"Merlin, he's alive," she breathed.

"He's supposed to be dead?" Harry asked curiously.

"He was supposedly killed by Sirius Black. Dumbledore would have gone to get that crime removed, thus lessening his sentence."

"Lessened? If he did not kill him, shouldn't he be released?"

"He committed other crimes my darling boy."

"Such as?"

Her response was interrupted by Draco. "Black. Is he some relation of my mother?"

Lady Zabini nodded. "They were cousins thus making him your relation...as well as Harry's."

"Me?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid it is not my place to say anything further. Ah, there's the floo now, you boys finish your tea, while I go answer."

"Yes mother."

"Yes ma'am."

"Okay!"

* 

After getting Molly's assurance that she would call for the Malfoys when it was time for Harry to leave, Severus apparated into Black Manor, shouting for Remus at the top of his lungs.

"Severus?" came Remus' concerned reply as he ran through the corridors to meet him. He expected trouble from his potential mate's tone, so was put off when he saw the tears swimming in the man's eyes. "Sev?" he asked, pulling the smaller man close. "What happened?"

Severus' tone was choked with emotion as he spoke. "We found a rat at the Burrow. It was Pettigrew." He didn't need to speak further as Remus discerned the rest. His hands tightened almost
painfully on Severus' shoulders as he felt emotions rock through him. Peter was alive which meant that Sirius would no longer be seen as a murderer.

"Albus has gone to Fudge," Severus continued after several long moments.

"It won't be enough to free him. Lessen his sentence yes, but not free him. They accused him of betraying Lily and James..."

"No Remus, he'll be free. Pettigrew...he was the secret keeper, not Sirius!"

"WHAT?"

"That's right," he continued quickly, wanting to rid Remus' amber eyes of the last remnants of pain. "Sirius switched it to Pettigrew after he heard rumours that the Dark Lord had put a hit on his head. He was afraid of revealing the location under torture and got them to switch it to him. Pettigrew was the traitor, not Sirius. He was a new recruit for the Dark Lord, so I never knew..."

His words were cut off as Remus bent and kissed him desperately, putting all his thanks into the kiss. Severus felt his gratitude and love through it and melted into his arms, allowing his lips to reciprocate. They were both breathless when they parted and Severus would have spoken had the medallion in his pocket not activate, vibrating. He retrieved it and with a tap, Albus' voice emerged.

"The pardon is secured. You and Remus are to go to Azkaban at five o'clock to get Sirius. The press has already gotten wind of it, so the wards have been temporarily lowered so that you can apparate out with Sirius." There was a pause as Albus' voice lowered before he continued. "Bring your love home my children. I wish you all happiness."

Remus' eyes were glinting to as the headmaster's voice faded away. A tempus showed that it was almost three.

"Two hours," the wolf whispered, hugging Severus to him, amber eyes glittering. "Two hours until he's home. Our love is coming home."

After that they parted, shouting for the house-elves to get the house ready for the return of its true master.
Sirius was wide-awake, pacing his cell anxiously. James had appeared in his dreams once again, this time bright and cheerful urging him to wake and look sharp for there were two handsome fellows coming to get him. He had snorted at his friend at first, slightly skeptical, but the folded Daily Prophet that somehow appeared in James' hand and waved threatening at him had him laughing even as he realised his best friends hidden message.

"Believe me or face every dog's worst nightmare, the folded newspaper!"

He had nodded his ascent, turning to wander off on the path back to wakefulness. He had not reached too far before James ran up to him and wrapped his hands about his shoulders, lightly resting his head against his friend's back.

"You're free now Sirry," came the soft emotion filled voice. "Free of this hell you've been in. There are so many people waiting out there to love you Padfoot, don't allow what you've gone through to keep you bitter. Your lovers await you, as do your godson and his family. All of whom anxiously await you. Promise me you won't stay bitter, promise me you'll give them a chance to love you Sirry."

It wasn't until James spoke those words to him that the inmate realised that he indeed felt bitterness. Bitterness to those who had dragged him here, kept him without a trial. Even after his friend's first encounter, his mild anger towards Remus for never coming to see him never truly receded. As for Severus...

"Remus wasn't allowed to come Sirry," James entreated. "If he had been, he would have been sitting in this dank cell right next to you, and you know it. Severus...Severus only recently realised what he has been missing and the minute he was given the opportunity, he took it. He and Remus are on their way here for you, even now the fire at Black Manor roars, waiting to welcome its master home."

"James," Sirius whispered, overwhelmed by the images his friend was filling his mind with. Pictures of Remus and Severus, together, welcoming him with open arms, reacquainting himself with the taste of his wolf, and delving for the first time towards Severus and discovering just what made his shy snake tick.

But most of all, the image of light appealed to him the most, finally freeing himself from the darkness and moist conditions he had been subjected to all these years. Finally being warm, snuggled beneath thick comforting sheets and fluffy pillows that the scooped hay he had here had no hopes of matching.

Finally, his hands rose, and pressed themselves against the arms encircled around him, squeezing them lightly. "Thank you James," he murmured. Those three words said it all. If it wasn't for the man behind him, he would have been several steps closer to madness, but instead here he was, anxiously awaiting the sound of footsteps clacking against the stone floor.

Footsteps and not the eerie shuffling noises the dementors made as they moved around the corridors before pressing their ghastly faces tauntingly against his cell door, showing him a gaping black hole where a mouth should be before he felt every positive emotion being drained from his soul.

"You're welcome Sirry. Go now, they'll be there soon. I won't be far away and I'm certain you'll see me again soon."
"Prongs..." but the arms around him seemingly melted away, leaving Sirius alone for several moments before he awakened.

Placing a hand on his face, he found a small smile there, something that had never happened since the day he had been thrown in here. Not even the dementor, who sensing his glee swooped over, could have damped his happiness. The creature tried several times but Sirius' good mood never faded a bit. It was like an uncast Patronus because the creature gave an enraged shriek and retreated and no other dementor appeared to see what was wrong.

"I've had enough of your ugly faces to last me twelve lifetimes," he muttered before raising his voice. "Oi! Moony, Sev, hurry up will you? Master Black wants to be in the light!"

"I think I hear our guy," a voice drawled causing Sirius to perk up at once. He knew that decisive tone.

"Really, already ordering us around and he isn't out of the cell yet. Perhaps he needs a little more time eh Severus?"

"I believe so Remus..." came the dry reply and the faint footsteps ceased.

"No I don't!" Sirius shouted, not noticing the amused snorts his statement garnered.

He was afraid that they meant what they had said and he really didn't want to be left in the cell a minute sooner now that he had the sound of his loves' voices ringing in his ear.

"Let me out please!"

The footsteps started once more, as the pair recognised the desperation in his tone. They would not have teased him so had they thought he would react this way.

"Sirius..."

"Sirry!" the pair called as they stood before the door, their heads barely visible to Sirius' panicked filled eyes.

"Bloody hell. We didn't mean it Sirius..."

"Just calm down Sirry, we're letting you out." Even as they spoke, Sirius heard the clanking of keys as they frantically searched for the right one.

"Hurry," he murmured, feeling the walls closing in around him.

Unwillingly, memories of his first day here rushed back to him, the only other time he had heard the jingle of keys. It had been the day when they had locked his door shut before incanting several charms to ensure that he would never leave the dirty walls. Even though a part of him rationalised that the door was being opened not closed, a part of him wanted to whimper, scream and beg as he had that first terrible day.

He was about to do just that when he felt the arms re-wrap themselves around his torso.

"When I said soon I didn't mean ten minutes later," James whispered in his ear. "Calm down now Padfoot, or it will be a hysterical dog that they drag from here. That's it, relax. See, the lock's open. Hear that, Severus is removing the incantations. You'll be fine Sirry. There, good boy, breathe and remain calm. There, last one. They're coming in now..."
As the whispery voice rambled in his ear, Sirius obeyed the subtle message, regulating his breathing and focussing on who was outside the door and not on what their actions were. That, along with James' calming presence held him straight and firm when the door creaked open for the first time in years, revealing the two people he had always held a love for, Remus and Severus.

"Remmy, Sev..." he breathed, breaking away from the smiling James to take a tentative step forward. The two rushed to him immediately and not caring for the fact that he smelt rancid, nor for the fact that the squelch on his flimsy, thread-bare prison robe was now seeping through their own clothing, the pair embraced him.

Severus' hands caringly ran along his torso, already searching for injuries to be healed, while Remus settled for staring deeply into his dark brown eyes, all his love for him on open display. His wolf's hands settled in his filthy hair, running through it as if it was as soft as fluff and not coarse with years of grime and dirt. He felt his chest heaving, and Severus resting a calming hand against it while Remus searched his pocket for the issued port-key that would allow them to leave immediately.

He was attempting and failing to suppress his dry sobs even as Remus guided his hand to touch the port-key, Severus assuring him that he would never have to return to this place before all three of them felt the tug of the port-key, leading them away.

Narcissa and her husband exchanged confused looks as they stared at their sons asleep on Harry's bed. It was not that the sight was uncommon, but the boys' expressions were. Harry's lips were twitching incessantly and ever so often, a chuckle or a giggle escaped past his lips. Draco was not much better of, his lips in a semi-permanent smile with his brows furrowing occasionally, as they were prone to do when he was trying to contain his mirth.

"Just what are they dreaming about?" she whispered to her perplexed husband.

"I don't know darling, but I believe that we need to start limiting how much hot chocolate we allow them to consume if this is the result."

"They only had one each," she pointed out, slightly disturbed when Harry laughed outright.

"Er..."

"Lucius! How much sweets have our boys consumed this evening?"

"Um, here or at Zabini Manor and the Weasley's Burrow?"

Narcissa aimed a tap at her husband's head, her own lips quirking at the scolded boy look her mate adopted. Chuckling she grasp his hand and led him from the room.

"At least we're sure they're dreaming peacefully. Perhaps they will even recall what exactly they were dreaming on the morrow. I do wish to understand their mirth."

"Yes dear," Lucius agreed, following her down the hallways to their rooms.

They paused before Severus' rooms, Narcissa passing her hand over it to sense for his presence.

"He isn't here," she frowned, slightly alarmed. She knew something had happened earlier for him not to be able to bring Harry back, but for him still not to have returned was mildly disturbing. "You don't think he's at Prince Manor do you? That place is not fit for..."
Two fingers pressed over her lips broke up the tirade before it started. "Severus is a big boy love. Let us give him the night to organise himself. You know he has never kept us in the dark for long on a situation. If he isn't here by tomorrow evening we'll summon him and you can tear a strip off his hide okay?"

"Promise?" she whispered, fluttering her eyelashes teasingly towards him. She knew her husband would realise that it was her way of accepting his words. He laughed and swooped down for a kiss.

She melted into it easily and soon the passion flared between them. At that moment, Lucius decided that the two hallways left to traverse to reach their rooms was a bit too far away. Pulling his wife snugly against him, he apparated, landing them among the fluff that was their bed.

"Look out Uncle!" Draco shouted to the thirteen-year-old image of his godfather.

"Mummy, you're good!" Harry laughed, pointing at the child Lily who was now landing one tickling spell after another on the squirming Slytherin whose rich laughter filled the hallways.

"Of course I was darling!" the redhead grinned, tousling her son's hair. "Shift to the side a bit Draco. Sirry and Remmy are coming out that way!"

Barely had the veela obeyed did two lions scamper in, laughing merrily at the sight of Severus being so thoroughly attacked by their grinning lioness.

"All hail our Maraundress!" Sirius teased, mock bowing to Lily who gave a playful curtsey in return. Unfortunately, for her, the distraction gave the writhing snake enough time to gather a bit of his wits and send a jinx back at her, causing her to start hiccupping multi coloured bubbles.

"Score for Sevvy!" Sirius crowed, helping the boy unto his feet and patting his back. The scene faded just as Harry's father was about to enter.

"Another one!" both boys demanded in union, turning pleading eyes to Mrs. Potter.

"But I've shown you at least thirty!" she groaned, hiding her pleasure at their enthusiasm. "I'm sure you know enough about your new uncles now!"

"Aw...please mummy?"

"Yes please mama?" Both boys nodded at each other before allowing their allure to rise, attempting to coax the woman into seeing their way.

"I know what you're trying silly minxes!" she chastised, but obligingly caused another memory to appear. This time they sat, watching an epic snow fight occurring between Severus, Remus and Sirius.

"That was great wasn't it Dray?" Harry whispered to the boy propped up on an elbow besides him. Draco nodded, reaching over to brush hair out of Harry's eyes.

"Uncle Remus and Uncle Sirius seem to be wonderful people although I think Uncle Sirius is a bit of a brat like you," Draco teased.

"Hey!" Harry pouted, reaching out to hit the veela with the pillow in his face.

It resulted in the blonde boy growling and manually re-enacting one of the memories they had
dreamt". He stopped when the boy finally gasped out "Merlin," between his squeals and rested a cheek lightly against Harry's forehead as he waited for him to settle his breathing.

"That was fun," Harry murmured, smiling up into the face above him.

"Uh-hm," Draco agreed, settling besides him once again. "I'm glad Uncle Severus will have people of his own to love him just as much as we do."

"Yes, he wouldn't have to pretend to be grumpy anymore."

Harry stiffened suddenly before sitting up, crawling towards the end of his bed.

"Where are you going?" Draco asked as he watched him pad across the room.

"I want something," Harry replied absently. "I just remembered."

"Okay," Draco agreed, raising his hand over his head as he waited for his mate to rejoin him.

He could not exactly remember how he ended up sleeping with Harry. Maybe he had fallen asleep here after reading to Harry or simply wandered in sometime during the night. It was not important he decided as he felt the bed depressing slightly, signalling Harry's return.

"Close your eyes," Harry urged, his hands held carefully behind his back. The veela gave an indulgent sigh before heeding his mate's request.

"Put your hand out," Harry instructed next, this time his voice much closer. Curiosity piqued, the veela proffered his hand. However, instead of something being placed in it as he expected, he felt Harry's smaller hand at his wrist wrapping something around it.

"Okay, open." Harry stated, although this time his voice was less sure.

Opening his eyes, Draco studied the younger boy instead of his hand. Harry's head was slightly bent and an obvious flush was working itself unto his cheeks. What on earth did his mate have to be embarrassed about? Looking down, a smile graced his face as he saw the bit of artwork around his slender wrist.

It was a plain silver wristband about two inches wide. There were thingy etching on it and on closer inspection; Draco saw that it was his own name, inscribed in a scrawl that was uniquely Harry's. Next to his name was a drawing of a tiny kitten that as he watched, stretched and batted lightly against the "Y" in "Malfoy", causing the letter to wiggle slightly. The green-eyed cat shot him a gleeful look before pouncing unto the name and transforming into a tiny replica of Harry who waved cheerfully at him from his spot on top of an "O".

The design work that had gone into the bracelet astounded him and Draco found his throat constricting as he stared at Harry who was now hesitantly watching his reaction.

"You don't like it," the child said despondently.

"No Harry, I love it, but how?"

Harry looked relieved and took a deep breathe before speaking. "I asked mama to use part of my allowance to buy it for me, and got Grandpa to show me how to do the etching. It took a couple of tries before I got it right, and I charmed it to move with my finger instead of my wand but…"

Harry's babble was broken off when Draco pulled him to him in a fierce hug, burying his head into
the boy's dark hair. On his wrist, the kitten was back, silently mewling contentedly as if it to felt the affection. It was an eternity before Draco pulled away, watching his mate with emotion filled eyes.

"I love it Harry James," he whispered, drawing a pleased smile from the child. "But why?"

Harry's mouth twisted and he was suddenly shy once again. "It's a thank you present."

"A thank you?"

"Yeah," Harry's head bent and his finger traced the pattern on the sheets before he continued.

"For the past term. I'm so glad you wanted me there with you Draco. You could have sent me away after I was so naughty, but you didn't. You've helped me everyday since we started school, you've done more for me than you ever have before.

"I've seen how tired you've been on some mornings after you spent time checking over my work, but you've never once complained. I just wanted to say thank you," he finished softly.

Once again, Draco felt his heart constrict. Harry had noticed? He never thought his mate realised just how much he spent ensuring that Harry's day ran smoothly. Really, how could the child know that after he had been seen of to bed, Draco's work had only begun?

There was ensuring that Harry's work was in top form as well as putting his things in order for easy access in the morning. And all of that before he set about proofing his own work. Waking Harry up and helping him get ready for the day all required substantial effort on Draco's part, making him rise a lot earlier than other people in their year would.

And although it was a bit tiresome at times, he never once regretted it. Seeing Harry happy and receiving his hugs of appreciation for the things that Draco did for him was all the reward the veela had expected. But to see the fine work of magic on his wrist, and to know that Harry truly understood and was grateful for the sacrifices his mate made to ensure his happiness, was enough to send emotions racing through Draco's veins.

"Thank you so much Harry," came Draco's heartfelt reply. "You didn't have to, but still, thank you. But little one, you know that no thanks are necessary for what you do for what I do for you right?"

"I know," Harry agreed, snuggling closer. "But I still wanted to thank you Draco. It's the least I could do to show you that I love you."

"And I love you," Draco responded, kissing Harry's forehead. The boy squiggled a bit until he was able to return the gesture, pecking Draco's cheek. "Love you Dray," he repeated, settling down among the pillows.

"Er, wait, don't sleep yet," the veela ordered softly, reaching for his wand.

Thankful that the heavy wards around the manor ensured that the ministry was unaware of who did magic on the compound, he summoned a wrapped box from his room, presenting it to Harry when it floated into his hand. "I meant to give you this on Christmas Day, But since you insist on giving presents early..." he teased, causing Harry to laugh and unwrap the gift.

Harry's mouth dropped open as he stared at the beautiful chain and locket in the box. The chain was a lot thicker than the one Narcissa wore; the pendant larger. He traced it with a finger and it sprung open. On the left side, he saw a picture of himself, at about the age of five, waving at the opposite frame in which a seven year old Draco sat.
“Watch,” Draco whispered. Harry listened, and a few seconds later, the pictures changed, showing them seated together on a chair, with a wizarding tales book.

“The lockets are keyed to us,” Draco explained. “Once we wear them, they are able to skim our magic, gleening from it images that are reflected in here. If you focus on something when the locket is open, it will show it to you.”

“Cool Dray,” Harry breathed, his eyes sparkling. “But you spoke in the plural.”

The veela nodded and reached into his shirt, pulling out a matching pendant. He flicked it open and both watched as a still shot of the past few minutes manifested itself. "I've been wearing mine since they were delivered."

Harry extended his hand eagerly and Draco obliged, fastening the pendant around his neck. "There, we match," he laughed, patting it fondly. "It can only be removed by one of us and it will never accidentally slip off."

"Great. Maybe you should do that for your band."

"Perhaps I will," he agreed, banishing the box. "Now we can sleep."

"Okay," he agreed, returning to the comfort of the pillows.

"Goodnight Harry."

"Goodnight Dray."

The pair was sound asleep when the elder Malfoys checked on them the next morning, twin pendants glinting in the early morning sunlight. They secured a couple of pictures before going downstairs to meet Severus who had sent a note with Twinkle saying that he was in the receiving room with a few guests.

* *

Narcissa gave a decidedly un-aristocratic squeak as she observed the persons before her. There, seated on armchairs near the fire was a trio she had thought never to see together again. She and her mate studied their best friend's face intently.

There was a genuine look of happiness and contentedness about Severus, not the traces of it that they had seen over the past few years. Casting her memory back, Narcissa decided that she had only seen such a look of utter happiness on the man's face when he had been around the two men whose gazes were torn between the blonde pair and their apparent partner.

"Sev?" Lucius finally managed, placing all of his questions into that one syllable. The potions master arched a brow at his inability to articulate further before smiling.

"Yes Luc, this is Sirius and Remus and yes, we are..."

"A trio!" Sirius finished on a ringing note causing snorts to generate around the room.

Narcissa eyed her cousin critically. His cheerful tone contradicted his rather ragged appearance. His hair was longer than she ever knew it to but it was clean, hanging around his face in slight waves. He seemed painfully thin, his eyes shrunken into his head. There was a razor sharpness to his jaw and despite the teasing attitude he exhibited, she could see traces of tension in his figure.
Perhaps he was unsure of being welcomed? True she and her cousin had been something more than acquaintances when they had graduated, but there was no real friendship between them. But thinking back she believed it was just her trying to face the wrath of her branch of family for associating with the family's Black sheep while Sirius never completely believed that she was at the very least, neutral in the war.

But she had long since discovered that Severus loved them although he never acted upon it. How could she hate the one someone she loved cared about? And judging from the look in Sirius' eyes, he had been briefed on all he had missed these past few years. Breaking her gaze from him, she shifted to the other man near Severus.

Like Sirius, Remus was a far cry from the picture of perfect health. His eyes were cradled by blackened skin, suggesting a lack of sleep. His frame was too thin, as if he had been on an inflected fast and his hair lacked the luxurious sheen she remembered. It was as if he lacked the minerals and vitamins needed to give him a healthy glow. His finger nails were ragged, showing signs of recent mauling, probably due to anxiety she noted as well.

As for her dear Severus, he seemed as dour as ever dressed in his black robes, Yet, the happiness he radiated more than compensated for it. All in all, Narcissa found her mothering instincts kicking in as she took in sight of the three men, all who had suffered in someway for the past few years. She wanted to do little more than to nurse them back into vitality and thus she shared a speaking look with her husband who nodded in understanding.

"Welcome home Sirius," she said sincerely, approaching the rebel Black of the family.

Sirius eyed her carefully for long moments before rising and offering his arms to her. She stepped into them and allowed herself to be enveloped into a warm hug from him, sighing. "I mean it," she whispered. "You have a place here, and not just because of Severus. I want to know about you, make up for the time we have lost due to the war and our family."

Sirius head bent further until he could murmur back. "Thank you Narcissa. Not just for Severus, but for taking care of my godson."

"Your welcome. I'm sure he'll love you, as shall my son."

"And I look forward to corrupting them both," he said, louder now. "My god and step-godson have been perfect innocents for those connected with the Marauders, eh Moony? We'll have to rectify that!"

"What kind of vagabond have you gotten yourself Severus?" Lucius jokingly inquired, clasping a hand on Sirius' back in welcome before eying Remus. "I see you will have a lot to handle Remus, with this one as well as the potions master there. Planning on keeping him?"

Remus nodded. "We let him go the last time; we aren't making the same mistake twice."

"That's right Moony!" Sirius agreed, interrupting their conversation. "Sev's ours even if we have to chain him to the wall!"

"As if I would stand for that!" Severus drawled, although they all saw his pleased smirk at being spoken for. "And you will find Sirius that Harry scarcely needs help. The mischief he contrived at Halloween alone!"

"My budding prankster," Sirius spoke with exaggerating delight. "I can't wait to see the little munchkin. Refine his technique as obviously he got caught."
"You will not corrupt a nine year old!" Narcissa declared, a smile flitting around her lips.

"Fine, I'll aim for your son then…based on what Sev says, he seems much too refined."

"Let's get to know the boys first, hmm Sirry?" Remus asked placatingly, shaking his head in amusement.

"Fine Remus. Two days and I start with the prank stories."

"Oh but we already know a lot of those," came a new voice from the doorway.

All eyes spun to the door, where Harry and Draco stood, smiling easily at the two men.

"Hello Uncles," Draco greeted, as Harry ran to them.

"Hello Uncle Sirius, Uncle Remus," he spoke, oblivious to their confused faces.

"Eh…hi Pup," Sirius replied with slight hesitance. He really did not expect the two to simply come waltzing through the door, as if they already on good terms. "But, how do you know who I am?"

"Oh Mummy," he replied absently. "Can you show me how to do that spell to turn people's hair purple?"

"And how to make people do nothing but sing opera?" Draco interjected, sitting on the arm of his father's chair.

"How do you…" Remus began, recalling the spells in question.

"Draco?" Lucius asked, wrapping an arm around his son.

"Last night mama…Harry's mum that is, came into our dreams. I don't know how we ended up having the same one though."

"Magic," Harry piped up.

"Right little lion," he agreed. "She told us that Uncle Sev found his mates and that we would meet them today. She didn't want us to be nervous or whatever so she showed us a lot of memories with them and a few with you and mother too, father."

"Almost all were about pranks and jokes!"

"I believe that is what we spent the majority of our time doing," Remus mused, tentatively reaching out to stroke Harry's face. The child leaned into it and motioned to be sat next to him.

"Lily and James seem to be very busy," Severus mused, glad to see his two favourite children at ease with the new persons in his life.

"Indeed, but they are so helpful."

"Mummy said to say that you are to take very good care of Uncle Sevvv, Uncle Remus and not to drive him crazy with your mischief Uncle Sirius."

"She would say that," Sirius grumbled, calling his godson's mate to him. "I hear you've taken good care of Harry."

"I've tried."
"Thank you. I believe you'll make a wonderful second-godson once I've taught you how to…"

"SIRIUS!" came the calls of four adults.

"What?" he pouted, turning to the two children. "I won't have any fun with this lot around!" he complained, causing the young mates to dissolve into a fit of laughter.

Lily had been right. Remus and Sirius would fit right in with their family.
Chapter 25

Christmas passed and the boys returned to Hogwarts, armed with memories of a wonderful break and the knowledge that there were two more people waiting to welcome them home once the term ended. With that in mind, they threw themselves into their schoolwork with renewed vigour and soon re-established their Hogwarts routine.

Everything seemed to have settled into a comfortable lull. Even Quirrell no longer seemed the frightful man he had been. The professor still scowled at Harry or snapped at him unnecessarily, but these instances grew further and further apart. More often than not now, the stuttering man could be seen staring contemplatively at the pair, a curious expression on his face. He had yet to make a move however, that would draw the attention of the pair's caretakers.

Harry took advantage of Quirrell's reprieve and threw himself back into the man's subject with his original enthusiasm. No longer did he study hard simply to ensure that Quirrell would not have an opportunity to belittle him; he poured over the texts because he was genuinely intrigued by the information they contained. Everyone noticed that Harry was no longer plastered to his mate's side during the class, and for the majority of them it was a relief. None of them liked seeing Harry in distress; he was their beloved little brother. The remainder still sneered or whispered snidely to each other about the pair, that is, until someone threw a glare their way.

Time flew quickly and soon March was upon them, the pressures of mid-term now a distant memory. Free of the stress, Harry and Draco lazed among the newly grown grasses, sometimes alone, other times with their friends. At such times, wrestling matches were inevitable.

Millicent cheered loudly for the squirming boys while Hermione simply snorted, returning to her readings. Cho was right among them, beating Cedric into submission, much to the older boy's amusement. They rarely ever decided upon a winner, their only rewards for their activities being the sound scolding the house-elves gave them for the grass stains on their uniforms. (Harry of course was always thrust to the front where his innocent expression always distracted the irate elf).

It was nearing the end of March and the mates were returning to their quarters after a riveting Quidditch match between Ravenclaw and Slytherin. The snakes narrowly managed a win, their seeker edging out his eagle counterpart at the last moment to ensure a win for Slytherin by a slim margin of ten points.

Harry had cheered for the green team from his space besides his mate. He looked out of place among them, his red and gold tie a sharp contrast to the green and silver around him, but he was perfectly contented. His friends had even heeded his calls to them and eventually joined him amidst the other snakes.

The trio caught the notice of those seated in the teacher's box, and expressions ranging from shock to satisfaction were reflected on their faces. In the previous academic year, had someone even dared to suggest that Gryffindors could be seen side by side with Slytherins, cheering for said house, they would have been spirited away to St. Mungo's. Nevertheless, here were a trio, obviously completely at ease with the rival house and it all was a result of the dark haired child waving at the seeker who teasingly dived at him.

Harry had inspired the change. True, at first the houses had been ordered to put aside their rivalry for the sake of the mates. However, as time passed and the school grew to know Harry, changes started to occur. The snakes saw that Harry was not the stereotypical lion. Many had heard rumours of him outsmarting his mate and even the potion master himself on several occasions.
He had gone head to head with Peeves in a staring contest a few weeks before and had stood his ground no matter what distractions the poltergeist sent his way. The child showed a cunningness that would make him perfectly suitable for Slytherin. Indeed a few wondered how he did not end up with them in the first place.

The Slytherins were not the only house to recognise that it was possible for students to reflect qualities of different houses. Harry certainly was as smart, if not smarter than the Ravenclaw students, and he showed a loyalty to his friends that would make Helga herself proud. Watching a fellow lion interact so comfortably with the rival house, made some headway with the lions and now there were several tentative friendships although so far none save for Harry wandered between house tables at will.

The snakes were celebrating their victory with a party in the common room and Draco was keen on going. If it was one thing Uncle Sirius had been successful in teaching him was that it was alright for him to "let loose" occasionally. No one would hold it against him if the Malfoy heir shirked a few societal rules and had fun like a regular teenager. The renegade Black had sat him down one day and informed him that in no way was it fair that Harry be allowed to act freely while Draco was forced to conform to societal dictates.

"You need to let loose! Prank a few people, ditch a class or five!" Sirius had laughed; dodging the pillow Severus sent flying his way for attempting to corrupt his godson.

Draco had listened to his new uncle (but then who wouldn't after being threatened to have their hair charmed permanently into pigtails?). His mate had wholeheartedly agreed and thus once they had returned to Hogwarts, the veela relaxed himself considerably, allowing Trix and Dobby to help him. He had to admit that the added freedom was enjoyable, and the slight pangs he felt for letting others pick up after Harry or ensure that his bag was packed soon faded.

Harry however did not share his mate's enthusiasm for the party. He felt rather tired and the idea of spending a few hours among dancing teenagers and loud music did not appeal to him in the least. No matter how excited Draco was about the event, all he wanted to do was curl up in his bed and rest for a while. The problem was that Draco would decide to stay with him and the little lion did not want to ruin the elder's fun.

He knew that he had to find a way to excuse himself from the party without his mate deciding to accompany him and with the way the veela fussed over him, it would be no easy task. Sometimes Harry thought that his mate cared about him a bit too much, always willing to sacrifice his own pleasure for his sake. He really wanted the blonde to have the time to relax without him.

As such, even as they walked towards Slytherin, the dark-haired child found himself debating the best way to get out of attending the party. He finally chose to turn the table on Draco and use his own mannerism against him. Plan of action decided, he stopped, and Draco who was loosely clasping his hand felt the movement and turned puzzled eyes on him.

"Harry?" he questioned, studying the smaller child. Had he looked towards his own wrist, he would have seen a kitten yawning widely, climbing into the hole of an "O" and curling up.

"I don't want to go to the party Draco, I'm tired," he admitted, meeting his veela's eyes. "Can I go back to our room?"

Concern instantly flashed across the Malfoy heir's face. Harry was never one to pass on the opportunity to have fun so his request now was slightly disconcerting. "Do you feel okay?" he asked with a furrowed brow, reaching out to feel his forehead. His mate scowled and batted his hand away. Who would have thought that only hours later he would crave for such a touch?
"I'm tired, not sick," he protested, a bit of heat in his tone.

His annoyance mildly reassured the older boy. His mate's temper was sometimes short when he was tired. Reassured that his mate was indeed fine, a feeling of disappointment worked its way into the Slytherin. He had been looking forward to the party, but now it was obvious that he could not go. Harry was more important to him than any social event, but he couldn't help but miss the fun he would have had. However, his logic won out as it usually did. He reasoned that it was only a small sacrifice and repeated it constantly to quell his negative emotions. Before he could speak however, his little mate spoke again.

"I'll be fine alone Draco. Go to the party."

Draco's teenage side cheered instinctively at the words. Harry had just given him permission to go and he was tempted to accept then and there. His veela side pushed him into prudence though and despite the urge to simply agree, he allowed his nature to surface.

"It is quite alright Harry. I prefer to stay with you than the Slytherins. Come on, let's go back."

To his surprise, Harry stood his ground, a frown forming on his face.

"You will do no such thing," he declared, his expression a good imitation of Severus. "You will go to the party."

"No Harry..."

"Oh no you don't!" Harry interrupted. "I can rest by myself. Why should you hang around doing nothing while I sleep?"

"I'll study," Draco protested, a bit disconcerted by the role reversal between them.

Tiredness made the smaller boy a bit cross and so he levelled a glare to his mate. "Draco Malfoy, you will go to the party and you will have fun."

"But..."

"But nothing!" he declared, stumping a foot for emphasis, before his tone softened. Was this how Draco felt when he was being difficult? "I'll be fine Dray. Trix will make sure that I am fine and if you're not back when I wake, I'll call for Hermione okay?"

The veela was about to point out that it was his and not Hermione's duty to stay with him, but the look in Harry's eyes deterred him. The boy obviously wanted him to go, judging from his expression. His cub was right. Being asleep, Harry would not really feel his absence and it wouldn't be the first time Hermione amused him.

Harry loathed sleeping without him there to help him drift off, but it was obvious that he was willing to forgo that comfort and only to ensure that Draco was able to spend time with his friends. It was heart warming the care his little lion was showing to him and finally he allowed his teenage side to prod him into acceptance.

"If you're sure..."

"I'm sure. Please Dray, go meet Blaise." Harry stepped forward and rested his head onto Draco's chest for a few moments. "I'll be fine alone for a few hours. Go on Dray," he finished, pulling away.

Long elegant fingers reached out to brush a loose strand away. "You'll go straight back to our
quarters?"
"And straight to bed," Harry agreed. "Go."

Draco shook his head ruefully. "One would wonder who's in charge the way you're ordering me about so."

Harry chuckled slightly, the sound becoming distorted by a yawn. "Be a good boy," the child teased, waving his hand. A soft call and Trix appeared. Immediately seeing Harry's tiredness, she started shooing him in the direction of their rooms, leaving a softly smiling Draco to make his way to the snake common room.

Harry and Draco were not the only persons that Quirrell observed. He kept a careful eye on the man who had been stalking him since his arrival at Hogwarts except that the said man seemed to be growing increasingly lax in his duty of late. What could have made the potion master become relaxed so suddenly?

Several times recently, Quirrell had been able to waltz out of the castle, at no time having to check that he was not being watched. Although he was curious to know the cause of Snape's distraction, he was not above using it to his advantage and thus had set another scheme on the way. This one was more elaborate than the latter and was sure to bring success. He could not fail this time, not after the severe punishment his master had dealt him on the last occasion.

He had thus spent hours pouring over plans, first on how to secure the Socerer's Stone and secondly how to capture Harry Potter. At some times he regretted not killing the child at Halloween when he had had the chance, but at the time he had seemed negligible. However now he could clearly see that the child was more powerful than most wizards and that power would surely increase further with maturity.

The dark lord slept soundly now, preserving his strength for when Quirrell managed to claim the stone. He knew though that the master would appreciate the extra prize. Either the dark lord would claim the brat for himself and find a way to utilise his immense powers or kill him, destroying the light side's symbol for peace.

The dark lord's servant had no clue what sourced the boy's extraordinary powers. The Potters had been no extraordinary wizards, and neither were any members of their ancestry. Yet they had produced a child with enough power to level countless wizards if he ever chose to do so. Quirrell contented himself with the belief that the dark lord would surely figure out what he a lowly servant had been unable to.

The opportunity to put his plan into action finally came after the Quidditch match when he had been lucky enough to stumble across the pair alone, conversing softly. He had been unable to hear their words and did not care to. All he wanted was for them to become lost in their discussion to the point that neither would notice him until the spell dying to slip past his lips had been cast.

It took all of five minutes before the moment came, and unexpectedly there was a bonus. The boys separated, heading different ways. If he had been so prone to, Quirrell would have sung for joy. They had unknowingly made his plan much easier for now he would not have to render one unconscious.

The corridor remained clear as he stalked behind his chosen target, his steps light to ensure that he was not heard. He slunk against a wall when the boy paused before the entrance portrait, murmuring
the password. In the second before the portrait swung open, the spell flew loose, striking the boy. His body jerked reflectively as the spell absorbed. He shook his head lightly, as if trying to clear it before climbing through the entrance.

Satisfied Quirrell replaced his wand and walked away, a contented smirk on his face. He crossed paths with Snape as he headed for his office, but chuckled silently at the man's glare. He had already set his plan into motion and already it was too late for Snape to intervene. Let the man glare at him all he wanted. He hoped that the glare was still in his eyes when Quirrell finally killed him. He closed his office door with a click, deliberately leaving it unlocked as while he summoned a tumbler and sat, waiting for a particular student to come to him.

Draco nearly choked on a mouthful of butter-beer at a joke from Blaise, while those around him roared in laughter. The party was in full swing and he was having the time of his life, dancing and mingling with the crowd. His thoughts occasionally drifted to his mate but for the most part he went forgotten while the veela enjoyed himself.

At one point Pansy tried to attach herself to his side, obviously trying to take advantage of Harry's absence. But after her second attempt to grasp his hand resulted in it turning bright orange and her enraged shriek ending on an opera note, she retreated.

"Score one for Sirius," he murmured, accepting another drink from Blaise.

The event ran on for hours, but eventually Draco started to feel a pull, calling him. Had he really been away from Harry so long? He judged its strength and determined that he had at least another hour before the call grew urgent and settled back, certain that Trix would appear should Harry need him before then.

But as the minutes passed, his attention to those around him waned. Blaise was the first to notice and easily pulled the veela into a corner, asking him if it was time for him to leave. Draco assured him that he still had time remaining, but after a few more minutes of prodding agreed and gathering a parcel with goodies for Harry, he left Slytherin.

His senses were being drawn by then, and used to it the veela gave into his feelings, allowing them to automatically lead him to the one he desired. Unfortunately for him, this time the calling did not lead him to his nine year old counterpart, but to a darkened room where a grinning man rose, as if expecting him.

He came to awareness at that moment, and the bag dropped from his fingers as he realised exactly where he was.

"How..." he began, but could not continue as an immobilisation charm followed quickly by a silencing spell hit him. All he could do was glare at the approaching man, his mind screaming at him.

"Finally alone," the teacher breathed, staring at the petrified student as if he was a precious gem. "My plans are finally coming to fruition my little Slytherin. My master will be pleased."

Master? Draco's mind asked, even as he sought for a solution to his dilemma. He was frozen so his wand was inaccessible to him and although he could passably use wandless magic, his fingers could not move to direct it. He was effectively trapped and there was little chance of being rescued.

Blaise had seen him leave and would not expect to see him until breakfast and even then would not find it suspicious if he did not turn up. Students had the option of dining in their rooms on weekends
and he and Harry often took advantage of it. His mate as well would not be overly concerned. He had not given him a timeframe in which he would be back, so until their pull became unbearable, Harry would remain ignorant to his absence. He was at the mercy of the man before him; much like his mate had been months before.

"Deep in thought? Do not waste your time. You are not leaving here until I am ready for you to." Quirrell smirked at the flash of emotion in the veela's eyes. "Don't worry little Malfoy. You will not die today. Unfortunately I need you to bring your mate to me...and for that you shall live a while longer. Now..."

Draco panicked as the man raised his wand, and instinctively went into himself, his nature rising to try and protect him. For a moment, he felt as if a bit of himself abandoned his body and unknown to him, on the other side of the castle, Harry jerked awake, clutching his chest. But then the moment passed and the veela felt a spell seeping into every nuance of his being.

All at once, he was filled with a sense of revulsion as he felt Quirrell's magic rushing through his veins. It felt like slush was invading his body, stifling him and the feeling only increased with the spell's intensity. His own magic fought, trying to repel the powerful spell, and although it gave a valiant effort, the dark magic took root. Draco's eyes glazed and even in his petrified form, his body slumped slightly as he felt himself being buried beneath Quirrell's alien magic.

Far away, Harry frowned, a sudden sense of dread filling him as he disregarded his robe, stepping out of the corridors in little more than his pyjamas. Trix's call went unheeded, his footsteps quickening as he felt that instinctive pull to find his mate. He didn't know how, but he was certain that Draco was in some sort of trouble.

Quirrell's dank breathe rushed over Draco's face as he twisted his head to one side then the next, judging for the spell's effectiveness. When the boy's eyes remained blank, he went to work, murmuring commands into the veela's ear. The boy's eyes flashed as each command registered and finally Quirrell allowed the spell to dissipate. Once the child left, he would not even remember having met with Quirrell. He would simply feel compelled to fulfil all that had been asked of him.

Slowly the veela regained consciousness, and as he did, Quirrell released his previous spells, causing him to slump bonelessly to the floor. Quickly he cast the required memory charms and left the room, completely certain that by the end of the week his master would return in all his glory.

His door was charmed to act as a one way mirror and so he watched with glee as the veela collected himself, glanced around in confusion before departing, bending once to collect his bag. His mission would soon be complete.

"Draco!" Harry called sharply as he turned a corner and saw his mate hurrying towards him. The feeling in his chest remained, even as he ran into the older boy's arms, clutching him tightly. He reared back quickly though...something did not feel right about the boy watching him puzzled.

"Harry, why are you in the corridor in your sleeping clothes?"

The boy glanced down at his apparel before dismissing it. "Are you okay? I felt something..."

"Come along," Draco interrupted, grasping his hand. "We'll not talk while you are so indecently exposed."

Any response from Harry was cut off by the strong grip on his wrist as he was dragged back in the
direction he came from. Numerous times he resisted the urge to yank away. The spot where Draco held him stung minutely and it bothered him. Draco seemed different and he tried to figure out why even as a bag with party snacks was thrust at him while the veela stalked off, muttering something about changing his clothes.

The ache had not dissipated in the least. He still felt that sense of urgency, that feeling that his mate was in danger that had him leaving the comfort of his bedroom in the first place. The blonde seemed to be in a much better countenance when he re-emerged. He pulled the smaller boy close to him once he had seated himself, unwrapping a tart from its parchment and bringing it to Harry's lips. Normally such a silly gesture would have earned a chuckle from the child, but today it only increased his unease.

Touching Draco brought a slight twinge of pain, one vaguely familiar. It caused him to cast fugitive glances at his mate as time passed. Draco made no move to speak, and the robotic movement of the hand rubbing up and down his arm held none of the affection it usually did.

Eventually Dobby appeared, bowing slightly as he indicated that it was time for Harry's bath. Draco dismissed him, ordering him not to return until directly summoned and extended the command to Trix as well. The elf looked about to protest when the veela reinforced that they were to leave Hogwarts and not return until summoned, but in the end had no choice to obey. Their original orders had been given by Draco himself. If the young master chose to rescind them, no matter how strange it seemed, it was not his place to argue.

The order had Harry's breath hitching and he hurried into the bathroom, locking it before pressing his back against it. Now he was certain that something was wrong. Why would Draco effectively remove his guards? Without the elves constant presence, he was once more vulnerable.

He remembered the day the elves had arrived.

His mate had stressed that he was not to go anywhere without someone supervising him, going so far as to make him swear an oath. Disregarding the oath would find him immediately transported to the corner of his room. His mate had tersely continued that should he find himself stuck in the corner, he should relish the act of sitting comfortably while he could.

The elves' dismissal, without Draco indicating that he was no longer bound to the oath meant that he was effectively trapped. He could make no move to leave their quarters without Draco, or else he would find himself stuck in the corner. Not that he was worried about a spanking at the moment, it was the fact that his mate was not as he should be. He did not like feeling oppressed and only minutes after the elves' dismissal, he was beginning to feel it.

He was literally bound to his mate's side unless he was in the presence of someone Draco trusted and somehow he did not see that happening until at least Monday. No one would even blink an eye, simply assuming that the two mates had decided to spend the weekend alone. Harry's fingers were shaking as he undressed and entered the shower.

For the first time in memory, he was afraid of his mate.

*  

Deep within his mind, Draco was fighting a battle against the entity in him. Even as he ordered Dobby to leave, a part rebelled, trying to override what was controlling him. It was no easy task though. He felt as if he was moving through slush, so thick that every movement towards control took tremendous effort. He could see that his efforts were failing and soon enough the elf disappeared. He screamed in rage, hearing the echo of Quirrell's words.
He couldn't do it. There was no way the man could expect him to follow those ludicrous orders. The thought of it had him struggling again, trying to grasp control, if only for a few seconds to allow him to raise an alarm. However, nothing happened except a faint laughter and he slumped down in defeat.

He saw through distant eyes his mate coming out of the bathroom, fear apparent on his face. He was torn between despair and joy. It was obvious that his mate realised that something was wrong with him, but there was nothing he could do to help. The order had locked him into the room and Draco knew Quirrell had ensured that he not allow Harry to leave until class time Monday.

He groaned as he heard his voice order Harry off to bed in a chilling tone. Harry all but fled the room and Draco was certain that he heard the distinct click of the lock. Thank Merlin the boy had the foresight to lock himself in, although it would do him no good should Quirrell decide to speed up his plans.

Draco lost awareness of how much time passed as he struggled, intermittently launching attacks as he attempted to dispel the entity. He spent so much effort on it that he lost track of what was happening with his body. Thus he had no clue how Harry was being prevented from signalling that all was not right. In all actually he was afraid of knowing what had been done to his mate in order to gain obedience.

The thought alone had him trying for the umpteenth time to find a weakness. Direct attempts proved useless and as of yet he had found no way to ease around it. The only thing that prevented him from surrendering and becoming the tool of his mate's destruction was that small spark that he felt deep within his recesses. It was severely dampened by the alien magic around it, but it was still there. The fragment of Harry within him refused to be smothered.

He had turned to that light constantly in his struggles, its small flicker prompting him forward. Now was no different, and as he watched, the flame danced as if waving to him. So much like Harry, always calling to him. A slow warmth enwrapped the veela as his mind streamed thoughts of the green-eyed boy; simple irrelevant memories flicked by. Each one of them lessened his depression minutely until he saw that the flame was now a fire, roaring brightly and calling to him.

Draco...

A shock ran through the veela as he heard the whisper of his name. It was Harry, his voice soft and unsure as it came again.

Is that you?

It sounded nearer and the veela pulled himself to his feet. The movement was a lot easier this time, the force that usually combated against him absent.

Draco...DRACO...

The flame calling to him was Harry. Harry was calling to him, which meant that he was seeing him, the real Draco and not the farce imitating him. He pushed forward at once, moving as quickly as he could manage towards the flame, knowing that if he immersed himself in it, he would be free.

He could not reach it though. A sudden force pushed him away and he fell with a cry, struggling to rise and reach the flame, the soul of his mate. Angry howls filled the void as Draco fought the unseen entity...and slowly lost the battle. But not before he was able to glean what exactly bound Harry from escaping and shout several words that he hoped reached his mate and released him.
The days passed painfully for the little boy as he walked behind his mate. The title was dubious at the moment as he was now certain that the person striding besides him was not truly his Draco. His Draco would not have invoked the veela rights on him, forcing him into complete subservience.

No matter how much he had tried, in the few moments when he was not plastered against the blonde boy, he was unable to signal that something was amiss. Not even Uncle Sevvy, who was usually so alert, noticed anything wrong in either boy's demeanour. The man had even fallen for "Draco's" explanation and had scolded him severely for even thinking of uttering the "f-word" he had heard from a couple of fifth years. Only yesterday, the man had snapped at him to buck up, accept his week's grounding with grace, and be grateful that he had not had his bottom smacked as Severus himself would have done had he been the one to hear him.

But there was a slight difference today as they sat in their common room, Draco at a desk and Harry on the divan. He had noticed nothing at first, but soon his attention had been drawn to Draco whose face was scrunched as if in pain. He had put aside his book in concern, because no matter how shoddily he had been treated this week, he still loved the figure before him, even if he was certain that all was not right with him.

Expressions flitted across the veela's face, some faintly recognisable, others alien. Eventually Harry placed what was familiar about some of the expressions. They were Draco, his mate and not the shelf before him. Those concerned expressions were his veela and as he saw that they appeared more and more frequently, his heart raced. When one expression remained fixed for almost a minute, he ventured closer.

"Draco?" he whispered, prepared to reel back should the need arose. There was no movement at first but then the blue eyes flashed showing signs of recognition. It gave him hope and he began to speak to the boy before him, seeing that each word brought another flash of life to the dull eyes.

All at once, Draco's body gave a sudden lurch and his eyes widened. As their eyes met, Harry felt his mind inundated with a welter of images – memories he realised before Draco's lips parted.

"I release you from all dictates," came a hoarse shout from the veela's voice in a tone that was his mate's. "Run Harry!" he screamed again, before the expression faded, and the cold mask returned, expression furious.

Harry heeded him instinctively and turned, running. There was a shout from behind him and he felt a hand grab at him. He whimpered and instinctively shifted his shape, now small enough to escape through the portal. The fact that he was able to continue proved that Draco had broken the vows and it was with relief that the kitten raced down the hall to his uncle's room, screaming the password the second he transformed. He barely saw his uncle's look of shock as he barrelled into him.

"Draco...wrong...help..." he gasped, wringing his uncle's robes as he collected a breath.

"Harry, calm down." Severus' arms instinctively wrapped around the breathless boy, offering comfort even though he had no idea what had driven him to such a state. "What's happened?"

Harry was unable to answer, the shock of finally being free and able to speak the truth rendered him a wreck. He heard a muttered oath from his uncle as the man felt his shaking before his head was raised. His eyes met his uncle's and immediately he felt his mind being searched. He allowed it, clinging weakly. His uncle's arms tightened around him as he withdrew.

"Dear Merlin," Severus gasped, shock and concern in his voice.
Still grasping Harry to him, he shouted for a house-elf. A tiny one appeared and he ordered it to get the headmaster and bring him here immediately. As the elf left, he picked the trembling child up and set him on a chair. He was filled with guilt now at how he had treated Harry the past few days, although at the time he had thought it deserved.

"Listen Harry, Albus is coming now, I'm going to Draco and help him."

"I want my Draco," Harry whispered, curling his arms around himself. "Bring him back to me."

"I'm going for him," Severus reassured.

As loathe as he was to leave Harry in his current condition, he was safe here. It was Draco that needed him right now. Stroking the boy one last time, he left. His wand was in his hand as he entered the boys' quarters, a spell already spilling from his lips. But there was no one to cast the spell on. The common room was empty and a quick check revealed that the rest was vacant as well. Severus almost dropped his wand as a single thought raced through his mind.

Where was his godson?
Hogwarts' headmaster felt his heart sink as he held the trembling form of his grandson to him, trying to give him comfort in the only way he knew how to. He had raced out of a meeting with representatives from the ministry after a tiny elf whispered a message in his ear. Their confused faces had meant little to him in those moments; Severus would never have contacted him in such a means had everything been all right.

His fears had been confirmed when Severus' entrance granted him passage and his sight fell on the huddled form of his beloved boy. When he approached him, he realised that the soft raspy sounds that Harry emitted were not breaths as he previously assumed, but a whispered mantra of his mate's name. His mind raced with confusion even as he crooned to the distraught boy. Less than two hours ago he had seen the two at dinner and although they seemed unusually quiet, there was no hint that there was something wrong with either of them. What could have happened to change the situation?

Even when the child's whispering ceased, there was no indication that he was willing to speak about what had transpired and Albus knew instinctively that to force him to speak would only create more turmoil for the child. Luckily or unluckily depending on how one viewed the situation, Harry was upset enough that his thoughts broadcasted themselves loudly enough that they could be skimmed by the headmaster. Moments later, alarmed by what he had glimpsed, the old wizard discretely delved further without Harry any wiser. He cringed internally when he realised the torment his little one had suffered the past week with him none the wiser.

"Draco?" Harry whispered tentatively, his hands clenching in his sheets.

He had barely restrained a scream when his eyes had flung open to find Draco looming over him, a predatory expression on his face. Nothing but malice was reflected in his eyes, causing Harry to cringe back, bringing the sheets up as if the thin material could offer him solace. The childish gesture invoked a chilling laugh from the blonde before he dashed the sheets away, drawing scared whimpers from the child.

"We need to talk, Potter," Draco murmured.

Harry inched away as much as possible before the veela's hand struck out, ceasing his movement. "Why are you running away from me Potter? I am your mate after all."

A dark chuckle ended the sentence as he released his hold. Harry backed up further until his back hit the headboard. It seemed that Draco had anticipated his move as a split second later he planted his hands on either side of Harry's head, effectively entrapping him. His movement garnered a scream from the boy, but unfortunately, there was no one near to hear it.

"You are right to fear me Potter," he chuckled, reaching out a finger to stroke Harry's soft cheek. The gesture stung and Harry winced, shrinking back further, something pulling at his memory.
"D-Draco," he stammered, his tone pleading, "Please, you’re scaring me."

"You should be afraid. You are at my mercy Potter. You are mine to command." The smirk on the veela’s face widened as he backed off, sitting next to the trembling child. "I think its time we make some changes around here. You have gone renegade for too long."

"Ch-ch-anges?"

"Yes, you are my submissive and I think it’s about time I start exercising my rights over you." The veela frowned minutely, a distant look entering his gaze briefly before he continued. "Yes, time for changes."

"D-raco."

"Be quiet!" The veela snapped, an authoritative tone entering his voice. He smirked when the child obeyed. "Good. You are mine, you shall obey my dictates. I am your mate, my word is law. You shall heed my will or suffer the price of disobedience."

Harry had never heard Draco speak those words before, but even as they were intoned, he felt a stirring from within. His soul was responding to the words- the call of a submissive to heed the will of their dominant - and no matter how much Harry tried to fight it, his veela nature surfaced.

He never had reason to fight against this will to obey Draco before. Truthfully, he had easily side-stepped it more than once before. But, as he now realised, Draco had never used his full rights of dominance before. All other commands or requests had been made simply assuming Harry would listen. This time, he was demanding obedience. Harry was certain now that had Draco spoken in this manner to him last October, he would never have been able to leave his room.

"I am your dominant. I will take control of you from this point forward. Your will is mine."

The desire to obey grew stronger, and struggling against it brought only pain. His desire to obey fought against his will to protest, but his wizard side succumbed to the strength of his veela nature and he found himself whispering submissively, "I am yours to command dominant."

Draco made a pleased sound. "I am glad you understand your station mate. You are worthless to me unless you heed my words."

"My purpose is to serve you," Harry replied, falling into his submissive role fully. A small part of him sobbed against his compliance, but there was nothing he could truly do anymore. Nature had overtaken him and he was helpless to disobey.

"Now, there will be a special event occurring this week submissive, and you will have a great part in it to play."

"Yes dominant. In what way can I be of service to you?"

"Oh you will know when the time is right. For now, I simply have a role for you to play. I expect you to perform it perfectly."

"I will dominant."

The veela gave him a look that could almost be described as fond. "You will, won’t you? Keep up this delicious obedience and you may yet make it through this week unscathed. Now, what I want you to do is very simple. You find that I am acting different no?"
"Yes dominant."

"That is irrelevant to me. What I want is for you not to mention this to anyone."

NO! Harry cried even as his head nodded. "I understand."

"In no form or fashion. Not through any means. Secondly, you will not communicate with anyone unnecessarily. Questions may be answered, but you must completely avoid any mention of me or my actions."

"But..."

"Hush. I know that some will find your behaviour strange but I have planned it out Potter. You are under punishment and are suffering pangs of guilt because of it. You have disappointed me terribly and are now paying the consequences of it. You cannot act normally until you have earned my forgiveness. That forgiveness will not be earned until you serve the duration of your punishment which ends over the weekend. You will stick to this story religiously."

"Yes, I will."

"You will not draw attention to yourself. No teacher is to recognise a change in your demeanour; your measly friends are none of my concern. Any questions?"

"No dominant."

"I thought so. Failure to obey me will lead to suffering on your part Potter. And it will not be something as trivial as a spanking, so be warned."

*

Albus searched further and saw that other than that day, Harry was left virtually alone once they were in private. The threat of his words held the child at bay and with gentle prodding the headmaster saw flashes of Vernon Dursley. His grandson expected Draco to pummel him and that thought brought an ache to the old wizard's chest. Lucius and Narcissa had worked so hard to teach Harry the difference between discipline and abuse.

It had taken almost a year before Harry stopped flinching whenever he needed to be disciplined. He knew for a fact that Narcissa was more relieved than annoyed when the child had taken to pouting or attempting to worm his way out of a punishment. It indicated that he had no real fear but like any other child, did not want to be held accountable for his actions. Each reflexive flinch Harry made when Draco so much as moved his hand swiftly was heart wrenching to observe.

Shaking aside such thoughts, he browsed further, now curious to see just how Harry had escaped the clutches of his mate. His answer came when he watched Draco apparently struggle with himself. "Imperious?" he mused to himself, alarmed. One as young as Draco could suffer permanent damage from being placed under such a spell, especially over such an extended time.

His alarm was seconded by a small feeling of pride though. Most grown wizards were unable to shake the effects of such a powerful dark spell and here was an eleven year old who could, even if only for a brief time. That would explain Severus' actions. He too would have noticed the spell, perhaps even sooner than he had and would have gone to free his godson from its effects. Albus watched as Harry transformed and fled before withdrawing, satisfied that he had his answers.

He thought it best to send Harry off to sleep and whispered first a sleeping spell and then a delayed calming charm. He had no doubt that the child would awake in panic and the second spell would
Harry had been under enough stress for the week. He lifted the now limp body into his arms and settled him in Severus' bed, knowing the potions master would not mind in the least.

As a precaution, he set a few wards that would prevent all save himself and the room's owner from entering. It was not the time to take risks. The immediate problem now was finding Quirrell. Albus did not bother to try to find anyone else to pin the blame on. Unlike Harry, he immediately drew a connection between the sting the child had felt and Quirrell. He was the only one Harry reacted to in such a manner.

The twinkling was gone from Albus' eyes as he left the bedroom. His grandsons had been hurt twice now by the man. It was time for him to be exterminated. He stared into the fireplace sorting through his plans until Severus returned, a grim look on his face as he announced that neither Draco nor Quirrell could be found. There was a deadly gleam in the younger wizard's eyes and this time, Albus made no move to reprove him. The younger wizard stalked towards his potions cabinet and downed two calming potions. The dangerous gleam in his eyes only receded slightly, showing the extent of his rage.

"Harry?" he asked tersely, dropping down onto a chair.

"Asleep. I scanned his memories."

Severus nodded, certain of what Albus had deduced. "My godson has been under Imperious for almost a week now and I did not see it."

Albus felt the guilt radiating off the other wizard and he moved to reassure him. His attempt was useless however. Nothing he could say could ease the emotions Severus felt. His thoughts were obvious although they were carefully secreted behind numerous mind shields. Severus blamed himself for being distracted. Had he not lost focus, his godsons would probably not be in the current situation.

What were the focal points of his distraction? Sirius Black and Remus Lupin. Caught in the throes of love for the past few months, Severus had grown "weak" in his personal opinion. He flooed over to Black Manor almost nightly, wandered off with them on the weekends and even chuckled (quietly of course) at the snips of parchments that somehow always found their way onto his desk during his lessons.

Albus did not fault him in the least. He had watched with delight the sight of Severus losing his inhibitions and learning to love once again. Love was not a weakness, it was the strength off which people lived. But the dark haired wizard before him would not see it that way. Even now, he guessed the man was damning himself for falling in love. And he knew that his potions master was not above cutting himself off from his partners if it eliminated the risk that he would forget the duties he had given himself. If he chose such a path, Albus knew that there would be no stopping him.

"We need to find him," Albus spoke at length, drawing Severus from his thoughts.

"Obviously," Severus grated.

Albus ignored the tone, standing. "I'll put out a bulletin with the staff. The school and grounds will be searched. No-one has left the boundaries as of yet, I would have been informed had that happened. I will lock down the wards now and will regulate who gets in and out of the floo system."

Severus copied his actions, standing although there was a noticeably slump on his shoulders. "Very well Albus. I'll contact Narcissa and Lucius. They should know..."
The headmaster saw an opportunity to deter Severus' plan and grabbed it. Although he could not
directly interfere with Severus' relationship, he could indirectly help it from falling apart. "Remus and Sirius should be contacted as well. The boys are as much theirs now. They'll be invaluable to us in the search." As he watched, he saw hesitation flit across the other wizard's face before he nodded resignedly.

"I will contact them."

"Good. I don't suppose you can call the house-elves back to oversee Harry?"

"I can. Dobby, Trix!"

There were twin pops before the elves appeared. "Master Severus be calling?"

"Yes. Stay here and guard Harry. No one is allowed to enter without our permission. Use force if necessary." He hesitated then added. "Should Draco arrive here he is to be restrained immediately. He is being controlled."

The elves' eyes widened at the revealed information but they nodded nonetheless.

Satisfied that their child was as secure as he could be, they left to fulfil their tasks.

Unknown to them, as they left, the elves shared sorrowful looks.

"Me knows something be wrong," Trix murmured, huge globs of tears welling up in her eyes.

"We be wrong not to tell," Dobby followed, in the same morose tone.

The pair stood in silence for a few minutes after that before separating. Almost in tandem they started banging themselves against the nearest hardest objects, punishing themselves for failing their masters.

Quirrell sat quietly contemplating the still boy before him. There was a rapidly forming bruise on one side of his face but there was no sign of pain in his expression. The dark lord's servant could not have helped venting his frustration on the boy's body, even though Malfoy was not "awake" to feel the pain.

The boy had complicated all of his carefully created plans. Only two more days and everything would have come to fruition. Today was Thursday. Only one more day and the castle would have been left vulnerable without its headmaster. The babbling fool was set to leave on the morrow for a conference. With him out of the way, retrieving the Sorceror's Stone would have been easy picking.

But no, the spawn of the treacherous Malfoy had foiled his plans, freeing his mate from the controls he had placed on him. He could not even begin to conceive how he had escaped from his control, but it was extremely vexing. Because of him he could no longer roam the castle and was stuck down here in a dank unused portion of the school with the boy at his side. He had no doubt that Potter had gone running for help and had thus fled his rooms. He was glad however that he had had the foresight to call the veela to him and bring them both here. Originally he had summoned him just to lob off his head for his actions, but then a niggling thought told him that the boy could yet still prove himself useful.

If push came to shove, Malfoy could be used as a bargaining chip. The old fool would never willingly sacrifice a student, especially one he had a bond to. Dumbledore would hand over the stone in a heartbeat if it meant that the child would remain unharmed. However, Quirrell could not ignore
the fact the wizard would have a back up plan. He did not doubt that he would have some sort of trap waiting to prevent him from leaving. With his lord in such a weakened state, he was on his own. Malfoy had to be of use to him in some other way.

A fat rat scuttled over the boy's legs and Quirrell took some amusement in the fact. The mighty Malfoy heir sitting among muck and grime, his only companion a rat. Purely out of amusement, Quirrell flicked his wand and made a wad of filth hit his face. It oozed down his face slowly in globs. Malfoy made no move to wipe it off and after sending several more projectiles that made a mess of the boy's form, he settled back down to plan.

He had the veela, but he needed the mate. There had to be some feasible way to get the boy and retrieve the stone. And all without alerting the light wizards to his whereabouts or plans. Hours passed as he contemplated on the possibilities. The answer came however when he saw for the first time Draco's hand raise up and slowly and robotically rest itself directly over his heart. It gave Quirrell the answer he needed and he barked in gleeful laughter.

"Come here Malfoy," he purred and Draco turned blank eyes on him.

Harry's rest was anything but peaceful as he tossed from side to side. His grandfather's spell prevented him from awakening as he had on previous nights and as a result, he was forced to watch a harsh looking veela mate. Draco had taken the place of his cousin and uncle in his nightmare, threatening him constantly, going so far as to raise a hand to his face in a stinging slap. Harry's lips moved in a silent moan as Draco shoved him to the floor, pouring forth wrathful words even as he raised a fist to strike him.

He pleaded to the veela hovering above him. "You love me Draco, don't do this!" But his words seemed only to infuriate the veela further and a swift kick was directed to his middle, one that he barely avoided as he scrambled away. Draco was no better than the Dursleys! At least they never pretended to love him, only to turn around and do this. Draco did not love him, no one who truly loved him would treat him in such a manner! Dream Harry dodged yet another word, even as the thoughts echoed in his mind.

No! another voice interjected. Draco would never do that to him. His veela was not the violent type. He was the boy who had held him when they had first met, cooed to him when he awakened screaming, having dreamt of his torturous past. That boy's eyes had narrowed in anger when Harry in a small voice explained what had been done to him.

The veela had held him tenderly and stayed by his side till he slept, ensuring no more nightmares. That Draco did so even to this day. No, the figure advancing menacingly towards him, who tried to strike him was not his mate. The boy who had held him in terror these past few days was not his mate and so he would fight. Fight to free himself of its stifling presence, fight to bring back the mate he loved.

Firm in his actions, Harry gathered all the love he felt for his mate, his true Draco. When he felt it rushing through his very soul he directed it outwards. It escaped him in a blinding force, knocking down the figure. It howled in agony and disintegrated, the blackness surrounding Harry's dream fading as well.

It was at that moment that Harry's eyes flung open. The spell his grandfather placed on him dissipated. He panted harshly for a few moments before a sense of calm filled him. It did little however to remove the remnants of his dream from his mind. Had it been an ordinary dream? It seemed so and yet there was a vitality to it that had him doubting that.
Normal dreams were figments of the imagination with hints of truth in it. There was a lifelike quality to this dream that never was there before. Furthermore, all his previous ones this past week had ended with him being pummelled. He had been victorious this time. So was it really normal, or was it like the one that the knight in his storybook had experienced?

The knight had been on a quest, had been for many years and bit by bit his hope had faded. He started having feverish nightmares, haunted by the faces of those he had let down. His dreams ran him ragged for weeks until one day he stumbled across a fairy in distress, its glistening wings trapped in a spider's web.

The poor fairy pleaded with the dishevelled knight to help it and eventually the knight did. The fairy thanked him profusely and offered him a wish as a reward. The knight had none and left the magical creature to continue his desolate journey.

The fairy was determined to repay the knight for its kindness and made a wish on his behalf. That night the knight dreamt of nothing but battle, but this time it was different. The village did not lay in ruins at the conclusion. There was destruction yes, but all was not lost. Several other persons stood watching the wreckage, but there were no howls of sorrow. There was determination in their eyes to rebuild and reconstruct their lives.

The knight woke and spent hours meditating on his dream. Finally he decided that it was a sign from above that his mission was not a total failure. Renewed, he went on with hope and indeed went on to succeed, becoming the greatest knight in history. Perhaps his dream was like the knight's? Had he not thought his situation with Draco hopeless?

Sure, he did not help a fairy but he knew that his parents were always watching over him. Could they have been the ones to influence his dreams? To show him that once he persevered, there would be a way to regain his Draco? He had to believe that. He had to believe that his mate was not lost to him, that a time would come when they could return to their previous life. Yes, he could not lose faith.

As his determination grew he felt an awareness rise within himself, a calming presence that took only seconds for him to place. It was Draco...Draco's soul to be precise, calling to him for help. Strange, he had always been the one to call for his veela but nonetheless he recognised the feeling.

Draco was not summoning him however, no he seemed to be calling to him to remember. The request puzzled the child for some moments before he broke away from his musings, sensing that Draco was fading from him. He tried to grasp hold of the fading spirit and it struggled to remain near him. But it was impossible and Harry heeded his mate's call to desist his actions and to concentrate on what he had been told.

Reluctantly Harry allowed the warmth to fade from him, leaving him bereft. Instinctively he searched once more for that which completed him and gave a relieved sigh when he felt Draco's soul, though severely dampened. It was more than what he had felt for the last few days and it was thus better than nothing.

Reassured he concentrated on the message the veela had passed to him and eventually deduced that the memories his veela were referring to had to be the ones he had shared with him in the few seconds before he had lunged at him. The veela mate had not fully scanned the memories before, but heeding Draco, he brought them to the fore.

It didn't seem to make much sense. He could hear a muted voice whispering harshly to Draco, even as his mate weakly fought against him. But it was not the words that were important, but the images that Draco had associated with them. Two cards materialised out of the memory. The first Harry
recognised immediately as Nicholas Flamel. He used the card as a bookmark so ever so often his eyes perused over the face that blinked back at him.

A memory was associated with the second memory. Harry saw himself asleep, tucked into bed while Draco moved silently around the room, tidying it up. Harry flushed guiltily when his mate waved his wand and a pile of discarded objects flew from under his bed. The blonde haired boy shook his head and levelled a stern glance to his sleeping form before sorting out the mess. He hesitated over a chocolate covered card and after brief pause wiped the sticky goo of it to find a woman signing something.

"Flamel," Draco mused to himself, tone soft as not to disturb his sleeping cub. "I know that name...oh that's right. She published that book Father gave Uncle Sev for his birthday. About the Sorcerer's Stone I think." Memory Draco stared at the card for a few more moments before pocketing it, muttering something about cleaning it.

Well he certainly didn't give it back, Harry noted, a trifle bit annoyed even though he didn't quite remember when he had acquired the card in the first place. Before he could continue his grumblings though, he felt another memory stirring and allowed it to surface.

This one was completely distorted, and Harry was scarcely able to see anything although he heard a hissing tone quite well. He was quite certain that the voice was Professor Quirrell's. "You will bring Harry to me," he breathed. "He will help me get past that blasted Erised. You will obey me...I need that stone."

The voice broke off, but Harry now had all that he needed. Erised, the pretty mirror in Grandpa's book was named that. What the mirror had to do with some stone however was beyond him. But Draco's memories suggested that the two items were related so he would not dismiss it. Obviously the man needed him for some task and Draco was supposed to bring him to Quirrell. But what was he to do with the information?

Before he had time to decide, the door across the room creaked open. It was only then that Harry realised that he was in an unfamiliar room although from the colouring he deduced that he was somewhere in his uncle's quarters. He blinked in confusion as the door opened and no one entered. His elves stood hesitantly in the doorway, regarded him through bruised eyes. His happy cry was stilted by the discoloration on their faces. They were bruises and he knew they were self-inflicted. Concerned he crawled off the bed and stood before his elves. Instantly they fell to their knees, apologising profusely. He shook his head as he asked them to cease their actions. He loved them and hated seeing them in this condition. Their apologies changed to sounds of praise at the merciful nature of their master, causing him to chuckle in appreciation. Silly creatures he thought fondly, sitting on the floor with them.

He explained to them all that had happened, once more brushing aside their words of sorrow. At the end, he asked for their opinion. Trix's expression was contemplative while Dobby's face reflected one emotion. Anger. "Me be carving some squirrel," Dobby said in a decisive tone, twin kitchen knives appearing in his hands. He started rubbing them together in a chilling manner that had even Harry clearing his throat nervously.

"Master Severus be saying that we not let anyone enter," Trix stated. "Master Severus never be saying that we no let anyone out."

Harry blinked at what the elf implied. But strangely, it was along the lines of what he had been thinking before they had arrived. Draco was his mate and he was in danger. It was his job to help him was it not? "Trix, Quirrell wants me. You really think I should go to him alone? Won't that be
dangerous?"

"Master Harry no be alone. Trix and Dobby go with Master Harry. Master Harry leave note so Master Severus follow. We no be alone for long."

Well that was true, and Draco had told him never to be alone. This way he would not be. "What do you think Dobby?"

"Dobby be thinking that Master Harry and we should go. That way Dobby be able to carve squirrel."

"Okay. Well it's agreed then. Let's go save Draco."
Quirrell never expected his plans to come to fruition so quickly, but in retrospect, maybe he should not have been so fast to celebrate. It had taken careful maneuvering, but he successfully evaded all of the professors teeming around the school. Getting past the obstacles on the third floor proved no difficulty for him since Dumbledore had so graciously informed the staff as to how to get past it in case of an emergency.

He had had to restrain himself from laughing when he had met the corridor empty. Apparently, he had covered his tracks so well that no one suspected that his goal had been the stone all along. Really, did they truly think that he had come to the school simply to make the life of two students miserable? How sad.

When he was safely in the final chamber, staring into the eerie glow of the Mirror of Erised at himself being named his lord's right hand man, Quirrell knew that everything would be all right. It took tremendous will to break away from the joyous scene in the mirror knowing that it would not do well for him to be ensnared in the mirror's grasp. He called Malfoy to him, noting that his hand was still clenched in that spot over his heart.

Another thing he owed Dumbledore thanks for. If it were not for the information he had forced upon the staff in regards to the veela, he would never have recognised that Malfoy was starting to feel withdrawal symptoms. That small gesture had planted a seed for the plan he was now intent on sowing. He had no doubt that Potter was now under lock and key. His caretakers would be aware that eventually he would be drawn to his mate, and would try to hinder him. However, there was no way they would not allow him to lead them to his mate if the child revealed that he was under...distress.

He knew that there was a fault in his plan. Potter would show up with help, but he could only hope that his final secret would give him an advantage during the confrontation. His lord was under a sort of stasis, only to awaken once the stone had been revealed. He hoped that revealing what was under his turban would distract the opposing wizards long enough for him to gain possession of the stone and activate it. Once that was done, his master would be awakened and there would be nothing left to fear.

Quirrell wandered back over to the mirror, looking long enough to discern the shape of the stone in the background before retreating. It was time to begin.

"Malfoy!" he called, and shortly, the boy stood before him. He smirked at the dirty condition of the boy, sniffing disdainfully at the stench attached to him. Oh well, soon he would be both dirty and bloody. The blood however would be a while in coming...it would only come into play if Malfoy's brat took too long to come to him. The dark wizard raised his wand and with an almost lazy swish, intoned one word, "Crucio!"

Pain filled shrieks rang through the air.

"Music to my ears," Quirrell murmured appreciatively, before repeating the curse, this time with more force. "Come out, come out wherever you are little veela mate. Surely your mate is of no use to you insane."

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silently along the corridor. Dobby went through the entrance first, ready to cast a burst of magic to incapacitate Draco. There was no one there to attack though and so the yellow glow receded from his hands, his two knives reappearing.

"That would have been too easy," Harry sighed, as he closed the door of Draco's room. He had been comforted those few minutes he had stood in it, seeing all of his mate's belongings. None of the nightmarish occurrences of the past week had entered this bedchamber. It was safe and almost a solace for him.

His own room he avoided, instead asking Trix to fetch his wand for him and in hindsight Draco's. His own wand was unnecessary as in all actuality he was more proficient in magic without it, but feeling it clutched in his hand offered comfort. He gobbled down the muffin Dobby had fetched for him.

Harry had been assaulted by sudden hunger pangs and was astonished when Dobby pointed out that it was early Thursday morning. That would show Draco! He was up so late and not even tired. Neither elf bothered to mention that he had been asleep almost five hours prior to awakening. Finished with his hasty meal, he pocketed his mate's wand before setting out.

The most obvious place that he could think that Draco would go to in his condition was to Quirrell, so he trotted to the man's classroom. He had to duck behind the occasional tapestry to avoid a teacher who seemed intent on searching for something. He hoped it was not for him, it would suck if he was caught before finding his veela.

He was severely annoyed when he finally arrived at the man's classroom only to find the entrance guarded by at least three teachers. They had almost caught him, would have if Trix had not cast a hasty invisibility spell on him. As is Professor Flitwick came over, having seen the hem of Harry's robe from around the bend. He was forced to press himself against a wall to avoid the revealing spell the man had cast before leaving.

"Trix," he whispered to the elves that had hid themselves as well. "Can you find out what's going on?"

"Me be checking Master Harry. You be quiet please." "Okay."

Almost a minute passed before she returned. "They know about bad man and looking for him. Them stay there in case bad man come back."

"And Draco?"

"No know where Master Draco be. Them worried but glad you safe in Master Severus room."

Harry felt a brief pang of guilt before reassuring himself that he was not deceiving them. No one ever said he had to stay in the room and he had not lied to anyone in order to leave. Hence he hadn't been naughty...right? He shook of the feeling and walked away as quietly as possible, seeking refuge in an empty classroom.

"They don't know where they're at. I think they're together. But if they're not there in the classroom, I have no clue where they're hiding."

"That be plenty 'they're,'" Trix deadpanned, before wilting under the glare Harry sent her. Really, his grammar was a lot better than hers. Why comment on his repetition?
"Anyway," he continued. "We need a new plan. We didn't count on so many people being around."

"They no be seeing us. We be invisible," Dobby pointed out.

"True. But we no know where, oops, you all are bad for my speech. We do not know where they are."

"Maybe they be where they no get caught?"

"That's a possibility. Somewhere forbidden. Where in this castle aren't we supposed to be?" He thought about it for a few minutes before he recalled Cho's words to him all those months ago.

"We aren't supposed to be here Harry!"

Where was there? Right, the corridor he had been attacked on. Quirrell had been the one to find them, would it be a stretch to think he would hide there since it was forbidden? Not really.

"I think I know where he is," Harry murmured softly, scratching at a spot on his chest. "Third floor."

Dobby vanished with a muted pop for a few minutes. "Nobody on one corridor there. One say squirrel no go where he attack Master Harry before and that stone safe enough without more protection."

"He's definitely there then," Harry decided. It made sense when he thought about it. "We need to go there."

"Master Harry, one teacher be saying that squirrel deadly dangerous. Me want carve him but me no want Master Harry be dead." Dobby twisted one ear anxiously as he spoke, showing his concern.

"Dobby, I'm going. Draco needs me."

"Me just make sure Master Harry. Me no stop you."

"I understand. Thanks for being concerned. Now lets go."

"Okay Master Harry."

With skilfulness, they crept along the corridors, silently passing teachers and ghosts alike until finally they stood in the right corridor. Harry knew that their assumptions had been correct. The ache in his chest lessened considerably, telling him that Draco was near. He let his senses guide him and soon stood in front of a door that seemed ridiculously larger than the other ones around it. "Where does this lead?"

"Another corridor," Trix replied, in the same hushed tones.

"Master Harry feel Master Draco?"

"Yes Dobby, he's definitely in there."

"Master Harry be going in?"

Harry hesitated. His mate was so near and yet something told him to ere on the side of caution. His goal was to help his mate and he had started the process already by finding him. For others to assist in finishing the task was not a bad idea. Moreover, if he was completely honest, he would admit that the idea of facing Draco currently was slightly daunting. Yes, Draco wasn't truly the one who had frightened him, but still...he couldn't.
"I think we need backup," he eventually murmured.

"Backup?"

"Yeah, just in case." Just in case it turns out I'm mistaken, he finished silently. Just in case Draco really meant to hurt me. I don't want to be alone with him.

Harry was sad that he felt that way about the veela but his history of abuse had taught him one thing. If they did it once, they could do it again. True something had influenced Draco's actions, but now that he had done it once, had seen the control he had over Harry, what prevented him from continuing? He vaguely remembered that his first cuff from his uncle had come along with the overwhelming stench of alcohol, but from that day on the abuse continued and rarely did he smell the hint of rum again.

"Master Harry?" Trix questioned, breaking him out of his reverie.

"Um, right. I think someone needs to go back and call for help. Either Grandpa Albus or Uncle Sevvy."


"Thank you Trix. Be careful."

"Yes Master Harry. Me wish for you to do the same."

"I will."

Trix disappeared after offering him a smile, leaving him alone with Dobby. The elf put away his knives and helped Harry push against the strangely large door. It was very heavy and it took several tries before it had opened wide enough for them to squeeze through.

The door automatically closed behind them and there was a distinct click. It had locked itself. Before he could consider panicking, he noticed that soft music was wafting throughout the room. "Why would music be playing here?" he murmured. Dobby muttered an incantation instead of replying and the child felt a ripple as the invisibility spell fell from him.

The room was dark and he could barely make out his own hand before his face. That would never do. He reached for his wand that he had pocketed and waving it, whispered "Lumos". A bright light washed the room and Dobby dropped into a defensive crouch, knives at the ready when the large dog came into view.

"Cool!" Harry cried, oblivious to the danger the dog posed. It was asleep if the loud breathing from the three heads gave any indication, but Dobby was not taking any chances. One of those heads would be able to rip him apart. The young master however approached the beast and ran a hand over a wet nose. It twitched and the head in question leaned into the caress. "I want one," Harry stated, petting along the fur for a while longer.

"Dog would eat you as kitten Master Harry," Dobby pointed out, relaxing now that the dog had proved itself no threat. "A door be behind big dog." Harry peered around the large form, and sighed, giving it one last pet. "Maybe I'll see you again, but I have to help someone. Goodbye," he whispered before following Dobby to the door. It opened with only a slight push.

This room was filled with light so he extinguished his spell, peering around. He heard the distinct flutter of wings and looking up gasped to see what looked like hundreds of golden snitches zooming around near the ceiling. "Wow!" he gasped. His voice seemed to trigger some sort of reaction as the
snitches all broke formation, parting to reveal a single silver snitch hovering in the middle of them. Harry barely had time to focus on it before it disappeared along with all the other snitches.

At the same time, a loud crash reverberated around the chamber as a wall on the far side crumbled. Harry flinched as he saw a looming shadow emerging from it then blinked. Huh? A large figurine that resembled the white king from wizard chess emerged, followed closely by the queen, bishop and several pawns. In total, seven figures lined up across from them. Harry was not as shaken by the second crash, which created a hole in the other wall from which black figurines, emerged. Noticeably absent were the king and queen pieces.

"What?" he asked as those pieces moved to stand alongside him and Dobby. From either hole, several brooms flew out, hovering in front of each person, elf or figure. There was a popping sound and Harry found himself draped in a Quidditch uniform, as was Dobby. A voice that reminded him of the Quidditch coach rang though the room.

"The match will end when the silver snitch is caught. If a gold snitch appears and is caught, one player from the opposite team must leave the field. Only one snitch at a time will be active. Each team consists of seven players although there are only two roles, one seeker and six beaters.

"The goal of the seeker is as per regulations. The goal of the beater is to disarm their opponents or put the seeker out of commission. If the seeker of the white team is unable to play, another player will step up into that role. If the seeker of the black team is unable to continue however, the game ends and the black team will be unable to leave this chamber. The black team will be disqualified should the opposing seeker catch the silver snitch.

"You have only one chance. If the black team accepts these terms, hold the broom before you. This will release the bludgers and activate the snitches. If you choose to forfeit now, you will be allowed to leave through the door by which you came. The choice is yours."

The voice drifted away.

"Well that's interesting," Harry muttered, turning towards Dobby. The elf looked ridiculous in the wizarding robes but Harry refrained from mentioning it as the elf seemed as infuriated as he was amused. "Well Dobby? Do we move forward?"

"Me want carve squirrel," Dobby replied. "To carve squirrel, we need pass through. Take broom. We no lose."

The elf's confident words reassured him and nodding he grabbed the broom before him.

The result was instantaneous.

Miniature shelves erupted on all of the walls, all no more than three inches wide. At the same time, two round stones flew from either hole and started zooming across the room. Harry squawked when they collided and little pebbles fell from them.

"Those are the bludgers?" he squeaked.

"No get hit Master Harry. That be all," Dobby reassured, clumsily climbing unto his broom. A metal beater bat appeared in his hand.

A bit more nervous now Harry followed suit, all of the figurines matching their movements. Lastly the silver snitch appeared. The two bludgers circled it until an invisible whistle sounded. Before the piercing sound ceased all the figurines were in the air, clamouring for the two bludgers. The snitch disappeared in the din.
"Oh boy," Harry breathed as he kicked off. "This is for Draco..."

The next minutes were harrowing to say the least. He was forced to put into play everything he had learned about flying and Quidditch. Snitches appeared randomly before disappearing just as quickly. Both he and the king spun in fancy manoeuvres to avoid the flying rocks as Harry had dubbed the bludgers and other players. Eventually the king outplayed him, capturing the first snitch. It was then that Harry realised that dodging the bludgers was the least of his problems.

A split second after the king had grasped the flying bit of gold; the bludgers disappeared and appeared before two white pawns. All play ceased as they were observed. Their heads turned mechanically as they searched for a target. Harry's breath caught as their gaze settled on him, flying several feet above them.

"Master Harry!" Dobby yelled. "Protect him!"

The other black pieces sprung into action even as the two bludgers were lobbed at a breakneck speed towards him. Harry screamed in terror as the two rocks neared him, too scared to even consider docking.

His hands released the broom and rose to block his face. He expected to feel sharp pain but there was only the sound of stone hitting stone. Tentatively he peeked through his fingers and saw a black pawn slowly crumble, its body splitting in two before it dropped to the ground with hard clunks. As the last piece fell, the caught snitch flew over to a shelf and rested upon it.

Harry's heart jumped as he realised just how much danger he had been in. His fingers trembled badly as they returned to his broom. Dobby made to fly towards him, but at the same time the whistle blew again and the match was back on. The display had unnerved Harry however and he missed every subsequent snitch. His terror grew as he watched pawn after pawn crumble.

The only respite he had was that after the initial attack, the white team had taken to avoiding him. Their goal was clear though. They were clearing all of the pawns who would deflect their attack. Once he was sufficiently vulnerable, they would go in for the kill.

Harry was whimpering as he watched the final pawn fall, leaving only him and Dobby to represent the black team. If he were capable, he would have dissolved into frightened tears long ago, but he was too scared to even summon any. "Dobby," he whispered to the elf who now flew closer to him. "I can't do this."

"Master Harry can. Master Harry need be saving mate, must catch silver snitch."

"But how? I can't avoid all of them," he continued in a shaky tone.

"No follow white seeker. Distract. Wait for real snitch," Dobby advised even as the whistle blew again. Harry took a deep breathe and tried to compose himself before flying off.

He heeded Dobby's words and instead of trailing the white seeker, flew away from him, scanning for a hint of silver. Dobby tried his best to keep attention from him, teasing their opponents so that they directed their bludgers to him or hitting them right back at them. He felt a deep sense of fascination when one of his blows connected, neatly decapitating a pawn. One less to worry about.

The opposing team realised the change in tactics and moved to match. The white seeker stopped capturing the snitches as they appeared and soon the shelves were filling with them. A snitch only appeared once. After that, it flew to its holding bay. Both seekers engaged in a game of cat and mouse, waiting for the elusive snitch to appear. It took so long in coming that Harry at first thought
he had imagined it when he saw the bit of silver. He blinked but it remained, on the opposite side of
the field. If only he could reach it, the madness would end!

He increased his speed, but his opponent had seen it too and easily passed him. He would have
captured it to had Dobby not sent a volley that he was forced to avoid. Harry pressed forward, but it
was too late. The snitch had already gone. Breathing harshly from the adrenaline rush, Harry circled
the field once more. But the other seeker had again switched tactics. Apparently, it had been
infuriated by Dobby's interference and was now racing after every gold snitch that appeared, wanting
to be rid of the last obstacle. Harry could only hope the silver one returned before it got a chance to
succeed.

He gave a yell of warning when the seeker dived suddenly. This time the gold ball was well within
its reach and as Harry feared, the king caught it. An abrupt silence fell as the seeker raised it
gleefully. No! Dobby sat frozen as he watched the twin bludgers appear and centre themselves
before the beaters. His only relief was that they were trained on him and not the young master.

"You be fine Master Harry, you be winning" he called even as the bludgers were sent careening for
him. Harry's hands rose from his broom and blocked his eyes, not wanting to see Dobby fall. It did
nothing to prevent the sound of Dobby's body hitting the ground though and whimpering, he peered
down through his fingers, glad that the elf was not in a million pieces like the other figurines. Even
unconscious (for he refused to think of the other possibility) the elf looked to be in considerable pain.
He was all alone now.

The child gulped as the whistle blew for what he hoped was the last time. He was the sole focus of
the six players now and more than ever he strained to remain uninjured. His only reprieve was that
no snitch appeared otherwise it would be all over for him. He lost track of how much time passed as
he dived and dodged, but he was almost desperate for the match to end, one way or another when he
saw it...the snitch. It floated inches above the ground, near Dobby.

This was it, now or never. He swooped down in a dive, wincing as the edge of a bludger grazed him
as it zoomed past. He heard a whooshing sound behind him and knew it was his opponent, only this
time he would not lose, he simply could not. As the distance narrowed, he reached out, straining his
fingers.

In his peripheral vision, he saw a bit of white and pressed on. He felt a tingling sensation flow
through his entire body as his fingers brushed, then closed around the snitch. He barely managed to
pull out of the dive but was able to land relatively unscathed. Mimicking his opponent, he raised his
clanched fist in the air. The floating figurines nodded respectfully towards him before they all

He could have sobbed with relief when the Quidditch uniform vanished. He shoved the emotion
aside however as he ran to Dobby. The elf groaned as he touched him before opening his eyes.
"Master Harry..."

"I'm okay. I won the match."

"Me be glad but me no think me can go on."

"I-I know Dobby. You helped a lot. Stay here and rest okay. Trix should be back soon, help will be
here soon."

The elf made no reply as he had already slipped back into unconsciousness. Harry bent and pressed a
kiss to his cheek. "Thank you Dobby," he whispered, rising. He was on his own now with no one to
provide him with assistance. He was scared to move forward but he knew that he had to if he wished
to save his mate. Turning he saw that an opening had been made in the wall and in the distance, he could see light. "Well I guess that's where I'm going," he said to himself as he carefully stepped around the crumbled rocks.

The entrance closed behind him, but after his last experience, he was unfazed by it, moving forward with quiet footsteps. The light grew nearer the faster he walked but he refrained from rushing into it, mainly because of the voice he heard...Quirrell! Reflexively he recast the invisibility spell and cautiously stood near the entrance, peeping around hit. He sighted the man looking into the mirror, but most importantly, he saw Draco.

He bit back a cry as he observed the blank expression on his face. No, this wasn't his Draco. He remained silent as he watched Quirrell's glance shift from Draco then back to the mirror. He heard his words and realised that Draco really had simply been a tool to summon him. But what had he meant by "distress"? His answer came seconds later when the room was filled by the pained screams of his mate. Harry's chest lurched, and in that moment he forgot about the reason behind Draco's pain, that it was a trap. All that mattered was ending his mate's suffering.

"Stop it!" he yelled, dropping the spell. Quirrell wand hand wavered as he spun in surprise. He had not expected his target to arrive so quickly...and apparently alone.

He smiled in pleasure as the child ran to Malfoy, totally ignoring him while fussing over the silent boy. "This is almost too easy," he drawled, raising his wand towards the dark-haired child. A moment later a spell burst out from the wand.
"Crucio!" Quirrell drawled, laughing over the high-pitched screams resounding in the room. It was not as pleasing to the ear as the blonde one's yells had been a minute earlier, but it was still a pleasure watching the dark haired menace writhe on the floor at his mate's feet. Even better was the fact that the veela continued to stare forward blankly, unaware of his little submissive's torment.

The dark professor held the spell for almost twenty seconds before regretfully cancelling it, knowing that leaving it longer would risk permanent damage to the brat. No matter how much he wanted to see the little boy suffer, he knew that killing him before his master had the opportunity for revenge would only earn him the dark lord's displeasure. He barely stifled a regretful sigh as the pained yells tapered off into ragged breathing. He however found some solace in enjoying the child's subsequent actions.

The man's lips twitched in amusement as he watched a small shaking hand reach over to the veela, weakly grasping the still boy's calf as Potter slowly raised an ashen face to his mate. It was obvious that the boy was seeking aid from his indifferent mate, not that Quirrell had any plans of removing the spell on the veela any time soon.

Speaking of which...

Quirrell whipped out his wand, sending a strong offensive spell towards the entrance the brat had run through. He half expected the mild explosion he heard, signifying that there had been no one for the spell to hit. The thought had run across his brain when a barrage of spells had not raced towards him when he had first cast the unforgivable.

The child never ceased to surprise him, Quirrell mused. It was something for which he had to give the boy credit. Somehow, Potter had found his way down here on his own, a truly admirable feat for one his age. The professor shook his head, seeing the asset such a boy could have made for his master when he grew older. It really was a pity that he would die before the night was over.

Shaking his head to rid it of thoughts of what could never be, he set about breaking apart the scene that would have caused someone of the light to weep. Quirrell however snorted at it, finding nothing endearing about Potter's actions. Waving his wand almost lazily while whispering an incantation, he sent the veela flying to a corner of the room where he landed with a painful thud. Potter's yell as his mate was ripped from his grasp was most gratifying for the man who smiled grimly at the sound.

The Potter brat started crawling towards the fallen boy, unable to stand as the effects of the Crucius curse was still strong. The professor chuckled darkly at the innocence of the child. Only the naivety of youth would make one turn his back to the enemy. Did the brat believe that he would not be attacked again? How wrong of him. Quirrell took full advantage of the open target the boy had made of himself, helpfully throwing the boy to his mate with a blast of energy. Potter landed painfully next to his mate, groaning even as he started to close the meagre distance between them.

Quirrell could have continued his game indefinitely and definitely would have had a hissing voice not have spoken up from within his turban.

"Stop fooling around Quirrell. You may assist me in destroying them after your task is completed. Get me the stone."

Quirrell's shock was almost palpable as he hurriedly caught the wand that had been about to slip through his fingers. How was it that his master was awake? The stasis spell he had used on him had
been the strongest one his research had revealed. There was no way his lordship should have been able to shake off its effects, especially in such a weakened state.

His confusion was momentary however as his attention was diverted by that last detail. His master had managed to throw off the spell with a mere shadow of his former strength. His master was powerful indeed and that realisation sent a rush of pleasure throughout Quirrell and added a tone of reverence to his voice as he replied to the dark lord.

"Forgive my transgression master. The joy of punishing your enemies overwhelmed me."

"You must learn control Quirrell should you hope to continue in my service. I will punish you for your carelessness later, but for now, reveal me. I will have my body back now," the voice finished with a commanding edge to its tone.

Despite the mention of future punishment, a pleasurable shiver ran down Quirrell's spine at the thought of further aiding his master. "Of course my lord," he replied respectfully, pocketing his wand. He positioned himself so that his master's first sight would be the child responsible for his demise in a crumpled heap, reaching helplessly for his mate. It would surely please him. That thought brought a small smile to Quirrell's face as he reached behind him with long spindly fingers, unravelling of the turban.

The pain that was currently coursing through Harry's vein was incomparable to anything he had previously experienced. Not even the painful kicks of his uncle could match the pulsing pain and dull aches that seemed to radiate from within his very core. It was all he felt as he struggled to close the distance between him and the veela. However, no matter how much his body ached, it was incomparable to the ache in his heart as he remembered the indifferent expression on his mate's face when he had turned to him for succour earlier.

The child was hard-pressed to remember that it was a spell that was causing his mate to act in his current manner. That air of indifference that radiated from Draco usually signalled that the veela had no inclination towards whomever or whatever was around him. Never before, had it been directed in any form or fashion towards him and that fact stung. Previously, all of Draco's movements had been a total contrast to his normal behaviour, and thus Harry could reassure himself that it was the spell and not truly his veela.

However, seeing that familiar expression had convinced Harry there was some part of Draco from which the spell was drawing power. Perhaps the spell was simply bringing to the fore what Draco had been reluctant to reveal. Maybe the veela really did not care for him anymore and the spell was facilitating the expression of those thoughts. Harry's heart sank with the knowledge that he had run down here to save him, only to question whether the veela would be glad to be rescued by him.

Despite these dismal thoughts, Harry automatically moved towards his mate when he had been flung away from him, whimpering when he saw a rivulet of blood running down the side of his face. Even if Draco did not want him anymore, Harry still cared for him, despite the severe doubts he now had about the boy. His nature still called to him to check after his mate, although if he had the opportunity to give the matter thought, he would have realised that the pull towards his mate was weaker than before.

As he finally managed to plaster himself against Draco's side, using the edge of his robe to wipe away the blood, he heard a new voice chastising Quirrell. Before he could even think of turning to see who was the new person in the room, his scar burned fiercely, causing him to clasp his hand over it and hiss at the painful sensation.

The other aches in his body paled in comparison to this new hurt and he felt his vision blurring for a
moment as he clutched a fistful of Draco's dirty clothes, trying to stabilise himself. The pain only seemed to rise with intensity and groaning he doubled over, moving his hand to press the scar against the cold stone floor, seeking relief. He would have preferred to have Draco's warm hand stroking it, but as it was not possible, he suffered alone with his mate barely an inch away.

The new voice continued to speak and with every word, the scar gave a throb that caused pained whines to escape from Harry's clenched teeth. The ground was offering little solace and as he twisted slightly, he felt his forehead glide smoothly along the floor. Puzzled at the lack of friction, he managed to open his eyes, hissing when he saw the smear of blood where his scar had rested. For the first time in his living memory, the lighting bolt scar was bleeding.

Somehow, he knew that whoever was chastising Quirrell was the source of his pain and that it would only stop once he was away from his presence. Moreover, judging from hearing only, he found that the voice seemed not that far away from Quirrell, almost as if they were standing right besides each other. Taking a shuddering breath, he used Draco's body as a prop to push himself up into a crouching position. Balancing carefully, he turned to investigate. He almost collapsed by what he saw.

Quirrell's turban was slowly falling away, and what was revealed was not the hair or even bald skin that one would expect. No, what was now looking at Harry through piercing red eyes was a grotesque grey, nose-less face.

A lipless mouth curled into a menacing smile as a hissing voice stated, "So we meet again Harry Potter."

At that moment, Harry realised who exactly it was that had imposed himself on the back of Quirrell's head. It was the man who had killed his parents, had tried to kill him. Looking at him with pure hatred was a being that according to the wizarding world was long dead but not forgotten. The man was had held the wizarding world under siege was regarding him, drawing wheezing breathes through the slits that was supposed to be a nose. Lord Voldemort was back, bodiless but very much alive.

Harry felt his world tilt dangerously.

Before he could think of anything to do, there was a loud clacking in the distance – the sound of feet slapping against slightly damp stones. Someone, no, many people were approaching and as the first one rounded the corner, Harry could not help but release a grateful sigh. His family had arrived. He did not have to face this monster alone.

Unfortunately, Harry was not the only one to notice the incoming arrival. With a hissed command, Quirrell manoeuvred his body so that he was facing the mirror while his master confronted the group of wizards and witch who now stood frozen in disbelief at the chamber's entrance. While Voldemort sneered at the shocked group, his host began an ancient chant; his eyes drifting close as he allowed the magic of the ages to flow through him. After a few moments, the mirror responded and a dim glow began to radiate from its surface.

The chanting broke the silence that had descended unto the room and in a swift movement, the light wizards had their wands raised and pointed at the two faced man, Albus moving to the fore of the group, his eyes a steely blue.

"Well, well, well. What do we have hear? A group of mudblood lovers and traitors here to witness my resurrection. How quaint," Voldemort hissed, his red eyes glinted.

Severus and Lucius flinched at the sound of the voice that they had been forced to serve so long ago.
Dreadful memories of cruelty and punishment waved over them. The only thing preventing Severus from dropping to his knees was the hand that pressing itself against the small of his back even as another settled on his shoulder, squeezing lightly. The cold feeling that had enveloped him faded and with it his initial annoyance with Albus for having summoned the pair in the first place.

For Lucius, it was the warm feeling of his wife filling him that grounded him. Narcissa had immediately opened their bond fully the minute she had recognised those hate filled eyes, allowing feelings of warmth and reassurance to flood her husband. Despite her shock, she was far from being daunted. How could she be when her blood boiled seeing her two children huddled in a corner, Harry with his eyes filled with conflicting emotions and her own child prone on the floor, obviously still under the effects of the imperius curse.

No, her fear had only been temporary, quickly transforming into anger at the vile being who had somehow managed to survive. She would send him back to the dead where he belonged. It was that thought that had her raising her wand, pointing it directly at the head.

On her free hand, talons sprung out and the air crackled around her as her appearance shifted to her veela form as her more primal magic demanded to be released. She was skilled enough that she could use both parts of her magic simultaneously, and thus summoned them both to the fore. All her strength would be needed if Voldermort were to be defeated.

Harry flinched when after a prolonged pause, Quirrell's chanting broke off as he spun around to launch a spell at the new arrivals. As he had moved, those red eyes settled on him, sending another painful bolt through his scar. Thankfully, their eyes linked for only seconds before the face stared into the mirror, continuing Quirrell's chant. Harry breathed in relief as the pain receded considerably. The sound of shouted curses and hexes resounded around the room as both parties dodged and parried. Surprisingly the chant remained constant despite the jostling of Quirrell's body.

Harry's gaze drifted to the veela besides him and he stared at the blonde boy dully, noting his stillness. He flinched when a popping noise came from above his head, breaking his concentration. Peering upwards, he saw a kind of translucent barrier crackling as it slowly diffused a spell. The spell would not have hit him, he realised, but the rubble that generated from its impact with the wall certainly would have. He was thankful for the barrier, but where exactly had it come from?

"From me," came the answer to his unspoken question. Spinning his head, Harry watched his mother's form slowly materialise before him. Both of her hands were raised as if she was physically holding up the barrier and her brows were furrowed in concentration.

"Mummy?" he whispered, voice cracking.

"I'm sorry I took so long honey," she replied, showing him that he had her attention even though she was not looking at him. "Be strong now my darling, your dad's coming through now. He just needs a little more time to cross the planes."

An angry roar diverted his attention away from his mother. He looked to see Sirius standing defensively in front of a prone Remus. Severus was on one knee, clutching the shoulder of his wand arm, a pained expression on his face as he cast a spell towards the enemy. The headmaster was the only unfazed one as he continued his relentless attack although Harry could see the slight grimace on his face as his spells were dodged and deflected. The Malfoys stood at an angle behind him, attacking with equal enthusiasm.

"How is he winning?" Harry murmured puzzled. Quirrell was outnumbered and yet he was holding his own against the light wizard.
"Voldemort has connected with him," Lily stated a bit distractedly as she waved her hand to stave off another wayward spell. "He was always a master dueller and is lending his skills and magic to him...Daddy's coming," she finished a hint of pleasure in her voice.

True to her words, Harry started to sense another presence in the room. However, his father did not appear near to him, but instead materialised a small distance away from the two-faced man.

"Daddy?" Harry whispered in slight confusion. Why wasn't his father coming to him? The messy haired man threw his son a quick smile but did not otherwise respond. The man who had killed him riveted James' attention. He needed to remain focussed or he would never accomplish the task at hand. He had to wait for the precise moment when Quirrell lost concentration enough for...

THERE!

One of Albus' spells finally managed to connect with the enemy, throwing him off-balance. Regardless, the wrong-sided head continued its chant although a brief grimace crossed his face. James' focus was not primarily on the dark lord however, and in the few seconds it took for Quirrell to regain his balance, Harry's father surged forward, passing through the man and entering his mind. He was by no means strong enough to cause any permanent damage, but he had enough power to travel the lengths of his mind and pinpoint the part of Quirrell's consciousness that maintained control over the imperious spell on his son's mate.

James was forced to accumulate the majority of his energy to attack the hold and after a brief struggle, Quirrell's grasp weakened considerably. Unable to remain any longer and hoping that he had done enough to help the veela-child; James exited Quirrell, his form little more than an outline now. However, it did not matter. He had considerably damaged the spell on the veela and he could only wait to see if the boy could overcome the last vestiges of its power on his own.

As he walked through Lily's barrier, he felt his son's eyes on him. Even as he knelt besides Draco, James stretched out a hand to ghost over his son's cheek in a caress, while he hovered his other over Draco's forehead. He felt for Draco's state of mind for a few moments before sighing in relief. Draco was slowly but surely overcoming the remnants of the spell. Sacrificing more of his power, James delved gently into Draco's mind, aiding his blonde son through the darkness back to reality.

He admired the progress the veela had made in trying to escape the spell. From what James could gauge, without his help, Draco would have broken free in a day or so. Unfortunately, there had not been the time for him to overcome it on his own. He could only hope that no lasting damage had been done to the veela-child. As James left Draco's mind, he felt a strong pull from the other plane calling him back. He was almost depleted of energy. Moreover, his mission was complete. All of the players necessary for the final battle were now in position. His task was complete, and soon Lily's would be too and she would rejoin him.

He shared a silent message with his wife who nodded at him, a silent reassurance that she would protect the boys for a few minutes longer before rejoining him. If it was up to her she would have stayed until her energy had become as depleted as James. Destiny prevented that however. There was only so much they could do to help guide the boys towards a happy future. But at the end of the day, it was up to them to make it a reality for themselves.

"I'm leaving now son," James whispered, smiling sadly at his son. "Be safe and know that you are loved."

James was drawn away after the last word left his lips and he found himself once again seated near to the angel of destiny, watching the events unfold from a distance. Destiny placed a hand on his shoulder, conveying her words directly to his mind. He sighed in relief at the knowledge that another
possible outcome for the encounter was eliminated. There were only two left...one that would bring
their son to them in the afterlife, or the other, which would give them the power needed to help his
son enact the prophecy. He sincerely prayed that it was not the former. As much as he hated the
burden that was placed on his son, he truly was the only one who could prevent the wizarding world
from descending into chaos.

Harry did not have the time to mourn his father's leaving as he heard a pained groan from the boy a
short distance away. His eyes widened and his breath hitched as his attention honed in on the veela.
Draco's eyes were fluttering and his fingers slowly twitched until his hands were clenching and
unclenching. Draco was waking up. The realisation sent mixed feelings through Harry. He was
elated that his mate was returning to the land of the conscious, on the other hand, he would see first
hand whether his thoughts regarding his mate were in fact a reality.

Thus it was with trepidation that Harry watched the veela's eyes open. The first thing apparent in
their depths was disorientation as the blonde blinked rapidly as if trying to shake off the feeling. Once
he had overcome the feeling, Draco's head turned slowly in an automatic search for his mate. Harry's
heart clenched as the eyes met his own, and he saw the concern reflected in Draco's eyes. His mate
was back, this was his Draco...but did he want him, truly want him?

"C-Cub?" the veela croaked, voice hoarse from his earlier screams. Added with the muck and grime
all over him, Draco was a far cry from the elegant boy with whom Harry was accustomed. Despite
this fact, Harry's heart tugged as the endearment washed over him. Despite the hoarseness, there was
no hint in Draco's voice that would suggest that he was not wanted. There was none of the hatred,
that menacing attitude from before and the child found himself responding to it, forcing aside the
doubts he still felt. His veela was awake, and that was all that mattered.

Ignoring his own pain and doubtlessly causing Draco significant amounts, Harry flung himself on
top of the veela, his shaking hands clutching the soiled clothing even as he buried his head in the
crock of the veela's neck. He nearly sobbed as when Draco's arms encircled him in a tight-grip. The
pair was reunited.

Although extremely reluctant to do so, Lily could not allow the boys to comfort each other for more
than a few moments. Like her husband, her time on this plane was growing short as her energy
drained from her. Only Albus was left fighting now, the rest of the group strewn across the floor, all
unconscious. She knew that it would only be a matter of time before he too was taken down. Albus
Dumbledore may have been the strongest wizard of his generation, but now the Hogwarts
Headmaster was old. Albus had no place being on the frontline anymore and it showed in his
wavering. It was to be admired that he had outlasted of the younger ones around him, but truth be
told, he was nowhere near what he used to be. If he had been, there was no doubt that Quirrell
would have been the one on the ground unconscious.

Drawing the remaining paths of destiny to the fore, she judged that she had at most a minute before
Albus too was defeated. The similarities between the remaining paths ended there. Thus, it was with
a reluctant heart that she called for the boys to separate. She could clearly see the effort it took for
them to obey her, and it took a reminder about the state of affairs to get them sitting up and heeding
her words. As quickly as possible with her time running out, she warned them that the battle would
end soon one way or the other. She conveyed to Draco a spell for healing, along with her love for
them.

The boys listened intently, though more than once she saw Draco's gaze move towards his fallen
parents, the sight causing his eyes to darken and his grip on Harry to tighten. Harry responded
strangely to his mate's emotions she realised as the child sent frightened glances upwards as he felt
the tightening hold. She was unable to comment however as, true to her prediction, Albus was
thrown backwards, before he crumpled to the floor. Her son whimpered at the sound yet made no move to seek comfort from his mate. Lily bit her lip but was never able to voice her thoughts as with Albus' defeat came her signal. Her time was now up on this plane. The rest was up to her sons. She vanished without another word to them.

The two pre-teens felt bereft without her reassuring presence. Lily was what was holding back their emotions. However, without her presence, the rage Draco felt at the sight of his fallen family and hurt mate returned in full force, causing his nails to sharpen and his eyes to darken until they were more silver than blue. His hair responded to his emotions as well, growing until it brushed against his collar. His voice as he growled contained a deeper edge to it, and so wrapped was he in his anger that he did not notice when his mate eased away from him with wide eyes.

Harry started to move away from his mate when he felt the rage radiating from him. It was not an emotion he typical associated with Draco, but to him, rage was always synonymous with pain and despite the comfort he derived from being at Draco's side, he was not going to stay near if there was a chance that the veela would lash out at him in anger.

He flinched slightly when Draco's face turned to him asking tersely, "You wouldn't happen to have my wand would you?"

Harry swallowed nervously at the tone before registering the question. Nodding slightly he pulled the veela's wand from within the fold of his clothing. Draco took it without comment, swishing it slightly until golden sparks shot from it. He nodded appreciatively, feeling the connection between himself and his wand strengthening. Harry perused the room for his own wand that had fallen out long ago. It was not too far away from his Uncle Remus but he made no move to retrieve it. Wiggling his fingers lightly, red and gold sparks erupted from it, the familiarity easing his tenseness slightly. He could get along well enough without his wand.

Draco paid no attention to his mate's actions as he directed his wand unto himself, whispering a mild healing spell. He groaned in relief as his pain lessened to a more bearable level. His eyes drifted towards the enemy, noting that they seemed oblivious to their presence as both Quirrell and Voldemort were now chanting in union, their voices rising to a fevered pace. Satisfied that they were occupied for the moment, he redirected his attention to his cub, not noticing the way Harry cringed slightly away from him.

"How badly are you hurt?" he asked without preamble.

Harry swallowed before replying. "I...all over hurts, but my forehead is the worst."

Draco's eyes settled on the scar, which had crusts of drying blood around it, crinkling his nose in distaste. "Heal yourself," he ordered, before turning his thoughts to a plan of action.

Harry was stung by the obvious dismissal, before closing his eyes, trying to draw his magic forth. There was no immediate response. When his healing powers finally rose to the fore, it trickled through him instead of rushing forth. Harry found that he was not totally surprised by his magic's lacklustre response. He had realised a long while ago that certain parts of his powers were directly related to his veela and the bond they shared. His healing ability was one such aspect. He could not draw from their bond now as he was in a turmoil regarding his stance with Draco and thus his magic was mostly unresponsive. Well there was nothing he could do about that now, he thought with a huff, as he opened his eyes. Only the slightest edge had been removed from his pain and his scar throbbed with its usual intensity.

"It isn't working," he whispered, not meeting his veela's eyes when they turned on him.
Draco titled his head in confusion for a second before he shrugged in acceptance. "I suppose you're too scared to concentrate," he allowed. "Try to bear it for now Harry." His nod went unseen by the veela whose brows were now furrowed in concentration as he ironed out the last of his plans. Finally satisfied with them, he eyed the younger boy.

"Stay here. I am going to try to heal them."

"I can help," Harry offered softly.

Draco arched a brow at him. "Your magic isn't even working properly," he scoffed, not realising the effect his tone was having on the younger boy. "Stay here out of the way and leave everything to me." Without waiting for Harry's agreement, the veela turned and silently made his way to the fallen adults.

For some reason, the veela's statement irked the young wizard and a growing sense of irritation grew and replaced his fear. How dare the veela insinuate that he was useless because he could not heal himself? After all this time, did Draco not realise that there were many sides to his magic. How could he say that he had no control over his powers when even now angry sparks were dancing off his fingers? Harry gritted his teeth, sending a hot glare towards the veela before turning his back to him entirely. He rather much watch the two-headed man instead of seeing his mate...what was he doing anyway?

Harry eased himself into a better position to observe them. However, it only took him a few seconds to realise that the mirror was much more interesting. The glowing surface of the mirror was no longer flat, instead bulging outwards as if there was something trying to break out from within. Tilting his head slightly, Harry saw that there was a dark red stone pushing against the glass. It was beautiful he noted, taking in the detail of it. There were fine lines etched along its surface that vaguely resembled runes. Suddenly the boy was filled with a desire to observe the stone in more detail, to run his fingers along its surface and discover the meaning of the runes on its surface.

Maybe that was why Quirrell wanted it...to examine it as well. Somehow Harry could not see him admiring its beauty the way he would. No doubt, Voldermort would want to taint it somehow and Harry knew that that could not be allowed to happen. He wanted to do nothing more that admire the stone, perhaps use it as a paperweight for his parchments, that way he could watch it to his heart's content. Nope, Voldermort couldn't get the stone...he wanted it and wished that it was in his possession.

Thus he was extremely shocked when he saw himself appearing in the mirror with a mischievous grin on his face. Sticking out his tongue at the unaware Quirrell, he picked up the stone, and flicked it into the air. As it fell, it disappeared and Harry felt a weight in his pocket. As his eyes widened in surprise, his 'reflection' winked at him before disappearing. Harry's hand reached down to rub at his clothing and sure enough. He felt a rough outline that had not been there before. His wish had come true; the stone was now in his possession!
Harry's glee at claiming the stone dissipated with the sudden sound of shattering glass. Automatically, he raised his hands in protection against flying shards, but the only one to be injured was Quirrell who seemed not to notice as he dropped to his knees amidst the sharp glass fragments. Harry winced as he saw a shard pierce the man's leg where he knelt, but the man seemed unaware of it. His second face bore a sinister smile as his servant shuffled through the broken glass, cutting himself in the process. The child knew that the man was searching for what he now possessed and realised that perhaps it was not a good idea to be near when the man figured out that the stone was not covered by the rubble glass.

He hedged away, nibbling his lip as the professor cursed loudly when the stone failed to materialise beneath his fingers. Oh oh, he thought, well aware that the man's attention would turn to him. A quick glance showed him that Draco was completely unaware of his predicament...not that he wanted the veela's aid anyway. He could protect himself...and he would show that to Draco and make him eat his earlier words!

The stone pulsed in his pocket, as if in agreement with his thoughts and he let his hand discretely move into his clothing, curling his fingers around the object. He rubbed his fingers gently across the etching he had seen earlier and the stone responded to it, a tingling sensation working its way through Harry's body. The feeling overwhelmed him for several seconds and he could not help but gasp as the sensation increased incrementally before fading...leaving him fully healed. Even his scar had returned to its previous painless state.

"Wow!" he exclaimed. If the stone could do that, he could understand why the evil duo wanted it. And with that understanding, came the realisation that he could not allow the stone to fall into their hands. He knew that Voldemort would try to heal himself with it and he could not let that happen. The stone throbbed again in agreement and hot sparks shot from Harry's fingertips as he squared his jaw, evenly meeting Voldemort's gaze when it turned to him.

The red eyes skimmed Harry's rigid form and read the determination in his eyes. What would have the boy so suddenly confident unless...the dark lord's eyes narrowed into mere slits as he hissed to the still cursing Quirrell. "The boy! Forget the glass, Potter has the stone!" The air seemed to cool several degrees at his pronouncement, but with the stone throbbing in his pocket, Harry felt no fear. The stone was his; he would not let the dark lord get his hands on it. Thus, he stood firm, even as Quirrell turned and pointed his wand at him with bleeding hands.

"The stone Potter," he ordered in a tone that had had Harry cringing numerous times during the school term. "Hand it over now."

Harry met his eyes defiantly, his voice sure as he replied. "No. It's mine."

Quirrell growled at the boy's words. "Finally grown a backbone Potter? Fine, we will do it the hard way. Perhaps I will enjoy beating you more now that you will actually fight back," he sneered.

"What?" Harry thought as the man leered at him. He had never fought the man before and somehow Quirrell's tone implied that he was not talking about their earlier altercation. Something about the man's look tugged at his memory, but Harry dispelled the notion, reacting quickly when the man sent a spell he had used earlier on him.

With nothing to distract him this time, Harry was actually able to defend himself, dodging the spell and rolling away. Coming out of the defensive position, Harry hurriedly cast a barrier around him,
saving him from a strong curse. He straightened his position and smirked slightly at the teacher.

"Impudent brat!" Quirrell snarled, shooting a hex towards him. Harry stood his ground, completely ignoring a shout from across the room, eyeing the incoming curse carefully. When it was within reach he held his palm up and to the caster's shock, the hex froze inches from Harry. With a slight smirk, Harry waved his index and middle finger and the hex rebounded, hitting Quirrell square in the chest. The man stumbled backwards, clawing at his chest for some moments.

"Avis!" Harry intoned, pressing home his advantage. A flock of birds materialised before him, their wings fluttering. "Oppungo!" he finished, merging the two spells into one. The birds shrieked in rage and flew forward as a unit, pecking at Quirrell's form. The man cursed at the assault and waved angrily at the birds before a rebuke from his master reminded him that he was a wizard. With a swift curse, the man starting cutting threw the birds which landed in bloody heaps around him.

Harry cringed at the sight of the fallen birds and ended the spell quickly. He sent a silent apology to the birds as they vanished, sorry for the sacrifices that some of them had made for him. But they had been effective and it was a considerable more haggard Quirrell who faced him now breathing deeply. It was his ragged breaths that finally triggered the memory for Harry and the events from months ago flooded back to him in a rush.

It was Quirrell who had attacked him...had bewitched the broom to lead him to the corridor. He had been the one to render Cho unconscious so quickly that Harry was not aware of what he had done until the girl had slumped down to the floor. He recalled the pure terror he had felt at that moment as the man descended upon him, his breathing filling Harry's ear as he gripped him around his throat. He had been too frightened to do more than launch a token attack, his fingers trying to hex him. The result however was little more painful than an ant's bite and Quirrell had laughed it off as he flung Harry into the classroom before entering and sealing the door.

A shiver ran down Harry's spine as he remembered the piercing feeling as he had been cut repeatedly, whimpering the entire time as he tried to struggle against the body bind he had been placed under. He had lost consciousness when Quirrell had produced a gleaming knife and pressed it against the base of his braid before slicing it off. It was the shock of its loss that had sent Harry under and as his body relaxed, Quirrell had cast the memory charm on him.

It was he who had interrupted an otherwise happy existence for Harry at Hogwarts. He who had sent Draco into such a protective fit that Harry had at times felt suffocated. That man who was sneering down at him had unknowingly been a bane in Harry's side for too long and now the boy wanted him gone. Harry's blood boiled as all the memories of the times he had been scared of this man rose and he found himself wanting revenge against the one who had brought chaos into Hogwarts and into his life. Moreover, the man had become a host for the one who had plagued the wizarding world and had killed Harry's parents.

No, Harry felt no fear now as he looked at the man, only feeling anger towards the man before him. The boy allowed the feeling to fill him, to build up within his system. Unseen to him, Voldemort's eyes widened as he felt an overwhelming rage within him, one that was not his own. Suddenly a sense of dread filled the dark lord that he forced aside. He was Lord Voldemort, he was not afraid of anything, not even the source of that emotion. Harry's emotions spilled over when Quirrell sent an unforgivable his way and without so much as a fidget, Harry returned it to him, watching him with grim amusement as he fell to his knees.

"Get up!" Voldemort shrieked and the man struggled to obey, another curse on his lips when his master spoke again. "This is useless. Summon the stone to you and end this!"

"Y-yes master," Quirrell replied. "ACCIO SORCERER'S STONE!" he shouted.
He had the element of surprise on his side as Potter had expected another offensive spell. Thus the child was stunned when the stone ripped itself from his clothing and sailed towards the dark lord's servant. It was almost in his grasp when the child's voice rang out.

"Accio!"

"NO!" he hollered as the stone was jerked the other way and he was forced to repeat his spell for it not to end up in Potter's hands once again.

Harry growled as the stone remained in mid-air between the two of them. He would not relinquish his grasp on it. The stone was his. Quirrell's thoughts were similar as he reinforced his spell, trying to lure the stone towards him. But it never moved more than a few inches before Potter responded. His teeth gnashed against each other as he poured more and more magic into the spell. He was successful and slowly but surely Potter lost ground and the stone started to edge towards him.

Harry felt a brief moment of panic when he found himself losing control of the stone and he struggled to maintain some hold of it. Sweat beaded down his face as the magical tug-of-war progressed and he found himself channelling more power into his hands, while his mind screamed for the stone to return to him. For several moments, it heeded his call, moving towards him. However, he was quickly growing weary and thus was never able to keep his advantage for a prolonged period of time.

Soon Harry found that it was only his willpower that was preventing him from caving in and relinquishing control of the stone. He was much more proficient at small bursts of magic. This prolonged process was sapping away at his power and unlike Quirrell, he had no second source to draw from. Voldemort was now repeating the spell alongside Quirrell and Harry felt himself releasing control. He wanted the stone, knew he could not let it fall into Voldemort's hands, but he was tired. The stone was now only a few feet away from the dark professor and he found himself slowly accepting the fact that he did not have the necessary strength to even try to draw the stone towards himself one more time.

Finally, Harry surrounded, physically, emotionally and magically drained. His hands dropped and the stone made to sail the small remaining distance into Quirrell's grasp. "I'm sorry," Harry murmured, swaying on his feet. The stone was mere inches from Quirrell's hand when a multitude of spells united before hitting the stone. Both the dark lord and his servant screamed as the stone absorbed the spells, before cracking. A huge gash ran down the stone and a cracking noise was heard as it rose to a height before the stone broke into two, both halves flying to each of the persons involved in the tug of war.

Harry dropped to the knees, wearily eyeing the fragment in the palm of his hand. His fingers closed loosely about it as it started to throb. Seconds later a brilliant red light poured forth from the stone, bathing him in it. A few feet away, the same thing happened to the two-faced man.

Draco hated what circumstances made him do, but there was no way he could protect his little lion as is. He needed the help of the adults and he had to admit that he would not be able to concentrate if Harry clung to him while he was trying to heal someone. His instincts would drive him to forsake everyone else for Harry and that would be detrimental for them all. Thus, he was forced to temper his desires and adopt a brusque tone with the boy, successfully dissuading him from the notion of following him to the unconscious adults.

The veela's memory of the past few days were foggy at best, but what he remembered from his brief periods of lucidity was a plan so ludicrous that the wizarding world would be brought to its knees.
should it succeed. Hence, he needed to put aside his desires towards his mate and focus on the task at hand, which in this case was to awaken the headmaster. Although it seemed strange for him not to start with his parents, Draco knew that the headmaster would be more valuable in the current situation as he had the most experience with dealing with the dark lord. As such he was kneeling besides him, tapping him with his wand as he repeated the healing curse like a litany. It was the strongest one he was capable of casting but it was slow working. Thankfully though, the headmaster responded and eventually opened his eyes with a pained groan. It took several moments for Albus to reorient himself but once he did, he quickly rose to his feet, ignoring the soreness in his body.

"Good work my boy," Albus praised, quickly taking stock of the situation. "Rouse your parents." As the boy crept off, Albus saw that Harry's attention was riveted to the mirror. The mirror itself was slowly reaching its limit and Albus knew that he had to get the other wizards awake and prepared in the eventuality that Voldemort actually managed to get the stone. He had set a test to prevent such an occurrence but being privy to its workings, Quirrell had somehow found a way around it. He shot his grandson a significant look as he started healing his potions master, wondering just who would gain the stone from the mirror.

Draco had reached the stage with his mother that her fingers were starting to twitch when he heard the sound of glass shattering. Spinning around he saw the professor clawing his way through the glass. He immediately shot a worried look towards Harry and felt his heart sinking at what he saw. Harry was nibbling on his lower lip in a way that he only did when he was hiding something. And Draco could only think of one thing in the room that could garner such a response from his mate. Obviously, his little lion had disobeyed him. More frantic now, he started to tap his wand against his mother with more fury until her eyes flew open. She jumped to her feet and began shaking her husband awake. Leaving her to it, Draco turned back to his mate, only to scream when he saw the spell hurtling towards Harry. He was stunned with the fluidity with which Harry moved and the power behind his spell. There was a look of determination and courage on his face and Draco found himself reminded of the fact that his mate was indeed a Gryffindor.

He was drawn away from the battle by a hand on his shoulder. Looking up he found his Uncle Sirius gazing at him with a glint in his black eyes, before drawing his attention to the headmaster who was speaking.

"...the stone must be destroyed."

"But Albus..."

"Nicholas will understand. Harry cannot last much longer. Nicholas would never forgive himself if his creation was used to resurrect the dark lord."

"Do you know how?"

"Yes, the spell is..."

Among themselves, the group silently intoned the spell, perfecting it. They would only have one opportunity to cast it and they had to get it right, for all of their sakes. The opportunity came to use the spell when Harry relinquished his grasp on the stone. Draco had to restrain himself from running across the room to hold his wavering form, instead, raising his wand alongside his family and casting the spell. All the spells intertwined as they raced across the room, hitting the stone dead on. The veela quickly pointed his wand towards Harry, a protection spell on his lips should the stone's destruction create an explosion of sorts. But the spell was unnecessary as in an anticlimactic way, the stone simply broke apart into two fragments, one going to Harry and the other to the dark lord.
Their collective sighs of relief ended abruptly when the fragments came to life. A restraining hand had to be placed across Draco as he made to run to his little lion when he was engulfed in the stone's glow.

"Father let me go!" he ordered, struggling madly. "Harry!"

"Calm Draco..." his father urged, even as the headmaster moved to reassure him further.

"The stone is not evil, it will not harm him."

"Then what is it doing?"

"That I am afraid I don't know the answer to."

Draco growled at the man in displeasure, renewing his struggles until his mother was forced to take him and wrap her arms around him. Her soul sang soothingly to him and though he resisted at first, Draco eventually slumped against her, accepting the comfort.

Moments later, the light began fading from the pair and all eyes focussed on them once more. What happened next could not have been anticipated by anyone in the room.

Harry did not know what to expect when he found himself enveloped in the stone's light. Hence, he was astounded when he heard a ringing melody that after a few seconds proved to be a voice.

"Hello?" he whispered cautiously. "I'm Harry, who are you?"

"Hello young Harry. I am the heart of the stone. You have proved yourself to be worthy of my powers."

"Really?" he questioned.

"Yes. That is why I chose you. I will lend to you my powers young one."

The voice's tone was coaxing, almost as if it was trying to cajole Harry into accepting its strengths. Had the voice been honest and straightforward he might have agreed, but caution had him shaking his head. Besides, he had no need for power.

He told the stone as much and was surprised when instead of sounding offended, the stone's voice chuckled. "Your answer proves that you are indeed the one young child. I will bestow my power unto you."

"I don't want it," Harry reiterated. "I have no use of your power. Can't you pass it along to someone else?" he asked. He was sure there was others, perhaps a squib, who would be grateful for more strength.

"My child, you do not know the power I possess. I can grant you immortality, self-healing..."

"I can heal myself...just not very well. And I don't want to live forever."

The voice was silent for a few moments. "Very well young one. You present a good case. But I am bound to pass on my power to one worthy. What shall I do with it?"

Harry thought for a moment. "Can you split it between people?"

The voice's tone sounded intrigued when it spoke next. "And send it to whom?"
"All of my family."

The voice made a humming noise before deciding. "They will not have immortality with my power thus diffused, but they will live a prolonged life." The voice paused. "All of you family?"

"All."

"Very well. Some will be granted the power they need, others will lose that which they never desired."

Harry blinked at the odd statement. "Whom are you referring to?"

"It matters not my child...you said all of your family and all it shall be. As for you..."

"I told you –"

"Only a portion of my power I have given to them. The rest will remain with you, dormant until the day you are in need of its strength and trust me, such a day will come when you will need all the power that you can receive."

The ominous tone chilled Harry and he sent a thought of dread for the future that lay ahead.

"Do not worry child. Live each day at a time. You will have many years of calm before the storm. Relish it while you are able to."

"I will," he promised.

"Very well. I will release you now."

To those in the room it seemed as if the light simply vanished from around Harry. In reality, it siphoned towards them, altering them in ways they were unaware of. Some were given back the strength they had lost with time, others were boosted and still one had his genetics unknowingly altered. The last bit that Harry himself did not absorb shot upwards, transcending the planes to hit a married pair who had been overlooking the scene with great anxiety.

Lily shook herself as she assimilated her new power. For the first time since the blood wards had been drawn, she was back to full strength. She stifled a gasp of pleasure when she felt a strong pair of arms wrap around her. Looking up she found a fully restored James grinning at her before claiming her lips in a kiss.

The stone had not brought them back to life for not even death could be transcended. But now, with their full energy restored and with the remainder of the stone's magic left in the mortal plane, they could traverse between the planes with ease and remain for indefinite time period.

A short distance away Destiny smiled at them, watching as one path dissipated leaving only one to be followed. Looking to the future, it saw that it would be a long time before Harry Potter and consequently the wizarding world's future diverted into numerous possibilities, requiring assistance to navigate the right one.

"Do not forget your mission," the angel bid the pair, before vanishing, not to return until that time came.

The pair nodded in understanding, still wrapped in each other's eyes. "It's almost over," Lily whispered string back down into the mortal plane. "Shall we go to them?"
"Not yet. Let us give them some time, when they start asking the questions that have no answers we will go."

"Okay James," she agreed, laying her head on his shoulder, breathing in his scent. James buried his face in her hair and they remained in that position for a long time, relishing their ability to hold each other once again.

Like with Harry, a voice emerged from the sea of red to speak with the two-faced man. However, it took a different tone in its entirety.

"Show yourself!" Voldemort snarled, as his minion tried to brandish his wand against the unseen force.

"I am the heart of the stone. Who are you?"

"I am the dark lord and if you are who you say you are, surrender your power to me at once!"

The voice was contemplative as it responded. "You seem to be worthy of my power but I must be sure. What do you want my power for?"

"I don't owe you any explanation." He gripped.

"You will give it me one if you wish for my strength."

"Heed my master." Quirrell echoed.

"Threats have little effect on me," the voice scolded. Voldemort spat out an oath before complying. He would find a way to punish the voice later. "The power will bring me back to my former glory. I will have my revenge."

The voice was silent for a moment and when it came again, there was an edge to its tone.

"You indeed deserve my powers. But I must warn you, it comes in many forms. Are you certain you want it?"

"Yes...give it to me!" he ordered, excitement lacing his words. Finally he would have his body and with it the power to reclaim his control over the wizarding community.

"Very well. You may have it."

The dark lord's gratified laughter tapered of into pained screams as he felt the stone's power infuse itself into Quirrell. Instead of healing his servant and bolstering him so that he could oust Quirrell's soul from his own body, Voldemort felt himself being pushed, shoved by the very essence of life. The grey face scrunched in agony as Voldemort fought to keep himself grounded in his servant with little avail. In the midst of his struggle, Quirrell dropped to his knees, clutching his head in pain. It was that scene that greeted the other occupants of the room as the Stone's glow faded.

The fragment in Harry's hand disintegrated into dust once the light completely receded and he shook his hand absently to rid himself of it. He felt invigorated. The light still surrounded Quirrell but deep within his being, he felt a tingle of something new, telling him that it was alright. The newness vanished almost immediately and Harry was left wondering if he had imagined it. It was a feeling that he would not experience again for a very long time.
His eyes drifted around the room and a happy smile graced his face as he saw his family, completely healed. His happiness tempered a little when he saw Draco and he sighed. His thoughts did not progress far as he heard Voldemort's pained screams before the light vanished from around him. Harry eyes widened as he saw the back of Quirrell's head bulging outwards much like the mirror earlier and Voldemort's face twisted side to side as if he was trying to fight against whatever was driving him out. Voldemort was losing, the fading pain in his scar was a good indication of that fact. A voice very much like his mother whispered in his ears and he found himself drawing on his drained magic reserves once more, absently repeating the spell that floated into his mind.

Voldemort's screams increased tenfold as Harry's spell hit the dark lord and it was with a tearing sound that the face mutated, changing into loose hanging flesh on the back of Quirrell's head. The said man sunk forward in apparent unconsciousness. But Harry did not see this as his eyes were riveted to a spot above the man where a grisly transparent shape hovered with pure menace in his eyes.

If the dark lord could have managed it in his spirit form, he would have killed the child then and there. Somehow, he...a child had defeated him again! He knew it was Potter. He had manipulated the stone...had tricked him into defeat! But it was far from over. He would not have wreaked the terror that he did had he only one plan at a time. No, he would be back someday, Quirrell had already stowed away some ingredients for him. The man himself mattered not now. He sneered down at the child gazing at him.

"Voldemort," Harry acknowledged in a tone that rankled on the being's nerves.

It screamed in rage, "I will have my revenge POTTER!" before striving forward. Before anyone could begin to consider an action, Voldemort passed straight through Harry, filling the boy with every ounce of the hatred he felt for him. Harry, unused to such a feeling, fell to his knees in pain, the negative emotions wreaking havoc on him until he collapsed. He never noticed his scar rupturing as he sank into blissful oblivion.

"Harry!" Draco screamed, finally breaking free of his mother's grasp. He ran to his fallen mate's side, pulling his limp body into his arms. His father was right behind him, running his wand along the boy's figure in a scan. The others adults directed their attention to Quirrell. Draco clawed at his father when he tried to take Harry into his more study grasp. A sharp rebuke from his father startled him out of his veela mode and he offered his father a sheepish look before relinquishing his hold.

"I can find no physical injury save the scar," Lucius stated, rising to his feet. "But Poppy is much better at this than me. Come along Draco."

Draco nodded, following his father out of the chamber, with nary a glance to anyone else. Harry was his entire focus now.

Severus nodded approvingly as the two Malfoys left with Harry. He hoped that the dark lord had done no serious damage to the boy. It was a miracle in itself that the boy was alive, Severus noted before turning his attention to the moaning man on the ground. It took him a few seconds to realise that even in his dismal state, with the back of his skull resembling grey mash potatoes, that Quirrell was trying to curse them. Sirius snorted and kicked the wand out of the man's grasp, going "Oops," when he 'accidentally' kicked the man in the process.

Remus bent and pocketed the wand alongside Harry's before questioning the headmaster.

"What are we going to do with him?"
"He won't survive more than a few days, even with treatment. Voldemort has wreaked havoc with his body."

"M-my m-master will be avenged," Quirrell sputtered, struggling to turn over.

"Oh shut up," Sirius growled, resisting the urge to kick the man again.

"Shall we keep him for questioning?" Severus inquired, looking at the man coldly.

"I say we kill him," Narcissa stated in a singsong voice. The men winced at the deceptively sweet tone. "We can always summon his sorry soul back to question him."

"If he has one," Remus muttered.

"I won't reveal..." he gasped out. His body was still racked with pain from his master's struggles to remain with him and he knew that some part of him had left with his master. The light wizards were right, he did not have long to live. But he would die happily with the knowledge that his master was not truly gone. He would be back and then he would crush the lives of the wizards sneering down at him.

"Look Albus, do with him as you please. Right now I want my boys," Narcissa declared.

"We all do," Sirius agreed. "Can't we just leave him down here for now?"

"Alone?"

"Well...we did heal Dobby right? Couldn't he..."

"An excellent point Sirius. Narcissa if you please?"

"Very well...Dobby!" The Malfoy matron called. The elf popped in front of her.

"Mistress be calling?"

She eyed the elf critically. Having given the elf permission to heal itself earlier, she was pleased with his overall condition. "Can you guard Quirrell here?" she asked.

Dobby frowned, twisting his fingers together. "Mistress be wanting Dobby to carve squirrel? Dobby knives be broken."

Narcissa blinked, making a mental reminder to get the elf schooled in grammar especially since he pronounced "guard" as "carve". "Yes Dobby, I want you to guard Quirrell." She looked around before quickly transfiguring two rocks into a pair of knives to replace the broken ones from earlier. She knew how much elves were fond of their trinkets and Dobby deserved to have his knives replaced. "Here you are."

"Mistress be so kind to Dobby! Dobby be doing a good job carving Squirrel." The elf promised eagerly.

"Thank you Dobby," she smiled, not noticing the weird looks the men were giving her.

"Well then," she stated, eyeing the males. "Come along."

She led the way out of the chamber with the men right behind. Sirius leaned closer to Remus as they walked, asking "Am I going barney or did that elf not say that it was going to carve a squirrel?"
Remus whispered back. "I certainly believe so...but I am not questioning Narcissa until she is back to normal."

"I don't even think she noticed," Severus interjected, having overheard their conversation. "Albus?"

The headmaster walked with his head resolutely forward. "I heard nothing. I know nothing."

Shrugging, the men decided to follow in his lead.

Dobby's eyes gleamed as his mistress and her family vacated the room. Mistress was so good to give him such nice, sharp, shiny knives. They shone in the light as Dobby advanced on the form of Quirrell. He scrapped the knives together, smirking at the sound. The dark professor managed to open his eyes, panic reflecting in them as he saw the weapons in the elves hands.

"No..."

"You be big, but Dobby be carving some squirrel tonight!"
Chapter 30

Madame Poppy sighed after she pocketed her wand. Her job was not yet complete. She could almost feel the waves of concern rising off the ones she had just analysed. The concern was not for themselves of course, but rather for the pair of boys on the bed, lying down between their parents, neither of which paid her heed, attention fully riveted on their sons.

"Well as you all said, I cannot find anything wrong with you. Indeed," she added, eyeing Albus, "some of you seem to be in an even better condition than previously." At her statement, the headmaster offered a sage-like nod. "Should I even ask what produced such a miracle?"

"I'm not entirely sure Poppy," Albus responded serenely "and the one who may have the answer currently cannot provide it."

"Speaking of which," Sirius interrupted, "I know you sedated Draco, but will Harry be waking up soon?"

"And why did you sedate him in the first place?" Remus questioned. "He is in the same condition as us."

Giving a fond look at the man whom she had taken care of numerous times during his stint at Hogwarts, the school matron responded. "Ah, but unlike you he does not have experience with such situations. Mr. Malfoy showed signs of mental fatigue and his stress level is a lot higher than I would like. Rest will go a long way to help his levels return to normal, as well as a few stress-free days. He really is lucky that there are no signs of ill effects from the imperious curse although I suggest keeping an eye on him for a while yet."

"And to answer Sirius' question?"

"His is a bit more complex. Physically he is fine but his emotional and psychological readings are a bit worrisome. There is nothing that I can do for him, except recommend that he be closely monitored. You know him best and should be able to determine whether or not a mind healer should be brought in to help him sort through his experience."

"We'll keep that in mind," Severus answered.

"I want them home," Narcissa stated suddenly.

All attention turned to her but she seemed not to care, her hand still stroking her son's cheek. Across from her, Lucius raised his eyes to study her, the finger that had been gently stroking Harry's scar stilling. He knew that tone. Narcissa always meant business when that edge entered her voice. Hogwarts be damned, the veela in her wanted her children home where she could protect them. And he was not going to protest against her instincts. He too wanted his boys home, if only for his peace of mind.

Turning slightly, he met Albus' eyes, nodding slightly. Knowing that to argue would be fruitless, the headmaster sighed, calling to memory the term schedule. "Assessment is cumulative and all assignments have already been handed in. I am certain that there is nothing on the curriculum for the term's final two weeks that a tutor cannot cover."

"I'll tutor them," Severus stated immediately. He always worked with them in the holidays regardless, and although potions were his specialty, like all Hogwarts teachers he was sufficiently proficient in all the subjects the school offered. "They won't fall behind," he promised.
"But will the rest of the year be able to catch up with them once you're through?" Sirius muttered good-naturedly.

"Then its settled. I'll..." he began, making to rise only to be cut off by Sirius.

"No Luc, stay here with the boys. I'll go to the manor and inform the elves to prepare their rooms."

"You'll be staying too," Narcissa stated, the words in no way a suggestion.

Understanding that the woman wanted her entire family within easy reach he nodded amicably. It was not as if they did not spend a lot of time at Malfoy Manor anyway. The veela had practically adopted them. "Yes cousin," he replied, nodding to his partners and the headmaster before leaving.

Poppy had busied away at some point, giving them some privacy. Finally drawing her attention away from the boys she looked at Severus. "You will be coming to dinner."

"Nightly," Lucius added.

Under the dual stares, the potions master was left with little choice but to nod obediently.

"I'll pack the boys' trunks," Remus announced, rising.

Severus gulped minutely at the hint of disapproval in the man's amber eyes as they settled on him for a moment before he was gone. There was no doubt now that Albus had to some extent told his partners of his thoughts earlier in the evening. He made a mental note to hold the man's lemon drops to ransom later.

Seeing that everything was settled, the headmaster rose with more ease than his years saying, "Well I have several messes to clean up and a new professor to start searching for. Alas, and a term early..." he sighed.

"Albus, I recommend that the next professor be interviewed in their undergarments," Severus offered, putting aside his thoughts for revenge now.

"Why on earth would you want that?" Narcissa asked in puzzlement.

The potions master could not help the slight smirk on his face as he responded. "Because not even the dark lord would stoop as low as to imprint himself on someone's arse."

Albus gave an edited account of the night's events at breakfast, ending with the news that Harry and Draco had been temporarily withdrawn from the school. Despite his cautions against it, several students flocked to the hospital wing, wishing to see their counterparts for themselves. Unfortunately, by the time that they arrived, the wing was empty save the matron sipping quietly on her tea. The veela mates had already been removed from Hogwarts to the safety of the parents' home.

The transition of the boys from Hogwarts to Malfoy Manor was seamless, neither boy awakening to the slight jostling as Lucius and Narcissa carried them through the floo. They were greeted by worried elves, who had already been told of the situation. Allaying the creatures' fears for their young masters, the Malfoy heads carried the boys to their rooms, changing them into their pyjamas.

After a brief debate, they opted to tuck the pair in together in Draco's room, on the premise that their bond would offer them comfort. With nothing left to be done for them, the elder Malfoys retreated to their room for a well-deserved rest. Later on Severus flooed into the room and after asking the elves
about everyone's whereabouts, settled for reading in the den, unwilling to face his partners at the moment, even though he had been assured that they too were fast asleep.

Draco felt a sense of déjà vu as he sat up on the bed, looking down at his mate. His mind was still fogged by the sleeping potion he had been given and the only conscious thought he had was that Harry had been lying down in this same curled up position the day he had met him. Except then he had not been tucked in besides him, and there were no bruises marring Harry's fair skin. The veela blinked several times rapidly, fighting off the fog of drowsiness as he reached towards Harry, vague memories of what had occurred drifting back to him as he placed a cool hand against Harry's cheek, before bending to kiss his temple softly.

"We're home cub," he whispered to him. "We're home and you're safe. You're safe," he repeated, moving away to snuggle back into the covers. The drowsiness was overwhelming and he could fight it no longer. Pausing only to throw a protective arm around the smaller boy's form, he let himself be overwhelmed by the feeling and was soon back in a deep slumber.

He was nowhere near as peaceful when he roused the second time. Body completely free of the potion's effect now, all the events slammed back to him the moment he opened his eyes. Quirrell's grim face looming over him had him tumbling out of the bed, breathing harshly as the imagined man vanished. No, he was home. Quirrell was not here. He repeated the thoughts to himself, but it brought him no peace. Instead, his skin crawled as he recalled the feeling of invasion as the man poured himself into his veins. The dark professor had been a parasite, burying himself into him, leaving him vulnerable.

Draco shuddered as he recalled how the man had become the center of his world, how he felt him, heard his voice all around him and within him, violating his person and robbing him of every ounce of his control. He had been helpless under the man's grasp, fighting valiantly to free himself, but it had been futile.

A wave of disgust at his own weakness filled the veela. He was a disgrace. He was a dominant and had lost control of himself so easily. He had made himself vulnerable to the extent that he put his mate in jeopardy. He had hurt Harry with his ineptitude. If only he had been stronger, if he had overruled his cub and had remained with him, he would not have been cornered. If he had employed his skills better...

His mind continued to run around thoughts 'what ifs' or 'could haves' until in a moment of clarity he froze, one image burning its way into his vision. It was that of Harry, scampering away from his possessed form as far back as possible, until his back was pressed against the headboard. Bile rose in the veela's throat as the panic...the fright in his cub's green eyes as they looked at him. Harry had had no where to run, had had no choice but to put himself under the control of Quirrell because of him. He had failed his cub. He had allowed himself to become polluted, and had spread that contamination to his precious mate.

He was dirty.

The realisation tore through him as he raised trembling eyes to his face. They were filthy. These hands had gripped his mate in coercion. These dirty digits had tried to prevent his escape. This body had been possessed by a vile being.

He needed to get clean.

He had to become pure once again.
The veela rose, stumbling into his bathroom. The door automatically closed behind him but he did not notice as he started tearing at his clothes, dropping them haphazardly as he entered the bathing area. His knees gave out as the hot water began pouring over him. But it mattered not. He sat there on the tiled floor, scrubbing at his filthy body with his hands, trying to remove the dirt. But it remained.

Even when his bathing soap and scrubber floated to him, and he scrubbed with renewed vigour until his skin turned pink, the grime stayed.

Tears began streaming down the veela's face, mingling with the pouring water as he tried again, attempting to rid himself of the impurities. He worked his way through one soap, and was half way through another when he heard the bathroom door click open. The bathroom's privacy charm activated, automatically shutting off the water and leaving the veela sitting on a now dry floor with a bathroom robe wrapped securely around him.

His cleaning utensils were still in his hand though as he slowly turned to the door. When he saw who it was standing tentatively in the door way, a broken sob tore from his throat as the objects fell from his hands. There was no hesitation as the body entered the room and ran to him, wrapping arms around his trembling form. He didn't deserve to be held by the person after all he had done, but if they were willing to touch his dirty form...he would not protest. Either this person was willing to get dirty alongside him, or they had the tools to make him clean once again.

*

Harry was in the midst of a recurring nightmare. Once again his mama was walking off on him, a loving arm wrapped around Draco's shoulders as she led him away. Draco didn't look back as they walked, but Harry knew if he was to turn the only thing he would see in the veela's eyes was that look of indifference; as if what he saw was beneath his notice.

The scenario never changed, although the people did. As the nightmare began once more it was his mummy who appeared this time. The woman whose eyes he shared sneered down at her son's trembling form, berating him. The Malfoys had been so kind to him, had liberated him from a life that would have even the worst treated house-elf cringing in horror. And what had he done? Brought nothing but pain and worry to the family. If it were not for him, Draco Malfoy would never have fallen prey to an evil professor. There had been no need for the veela to be hurt. It was his fault; he was nothing but a burden on everyone. Wouldn't she know? She had died because of him.

As always, Harry was a blubbering heap by now, desperately pleading for a chance to be heard, a chance that never came as the scolding continued, but the crux of the nightmare came when Draco appeared, tugging lightly on the hand of whomever it was that was yelling at him. His mummy's attention instantaneously shifted from him and all malice faded from her expression as she smiled down at the blonde haired veela. She reached down and tucked a fly-away strand of hair behind his elbow and at his hopeful smile, informed him that he was the kind of son she had always wanted, and would he not like to spend some time with her?

His veela nodded happily and when Harry managed to gasp out his name, did not even give any indication of having heard, turning away while that comforting arm wrapped around his shoulder.

"Don't leave me! I'm sorry!" Harry cried, pitifully stretching out a hand to the departing couple. "Mummy, Draco!" His small fingers grasped at air as they faded away. Harry screamed as a foot appeared from nowhere and smashed his hand against the earth. A pained shriek erupted form the boy as the heel dug into his hand. Bearing the pain he raised his hand only to shriek as he saw Vernon Dursley's sneering face looming above him. In one hand he held that thick belt that Harry had always feared.
"Worthless freak!" the man spat, his face glowering. "You're the worst kind of freak. Not even those others wanted you. They paid me to take you back. You won't be bringing any of your nonsense into this house. No way. I'll beat it out of you. They stopped me before, but they brought you back. You're mine."

All through the man's vicious speech Harry whimpered, a fear unlike anything he had ever felt before ripping through him, Not only had he been abandoned, he had been dropped back at Privet Drive, or Hell as he thought of it. How could they, how could Draco. As Vernon raised his belt to slash down, Harry's whole body froze.

They wouldn't.

Mama and Papa had sworn to protect him. He could still remember his first day with them, when he had flinched away, grasping Draco like a lifetime. They had been kind, reassuring him that that man was out of his life forever. No matter what, he knew that the Malfoys always kept their word. Even if the Malfoys abandoned him, they would not have gone back on their word. He knew that they would abandon him in an orphanage or even dumped him in a forest, but never would they return him to that place.

The weight on his hand vanished, and as he looked up once more, he saw that Dursley's sneering face slowly vanishing. His fear and sorrow at being abandoned remained but Harry still felt that glimmer of relief that he was safe from Dursley.

"They are right though," he whispered to himself as he cradled his abused hand. He could have done more for Draco. Despite the order not to draw attention to himself, he should have sought an alternative way to get a message across. That would have ended the problem way before it had reached that point and for that he was to blame.

"I'm sorry I could not help you," Harry told an imaginary Draco. "If there was anyway I could, I would."

There was a gentle rustle of air in front of him and looking at it closely, Harry saw that it had formed into a translucent image of Draco, one that was observing him with sad eyes. "You want to help me?" the image asked in a melancholy tone. "I don't deserve your help."

Harry rose quickly, eyes widened in concern for the figure before him. "I would, I do. I failed you I'm sorry."

If anything, the look of sadness in the image's eyes increased exponentially. "I don't deserve your help," it repeated. "You deserve a more capable protector...but if you truly want to..."

"Yes I do!" Harry stated earnestly. "I failed you once Draco. Let me help you this time with whatever is wrong Draco. Please!"

The image nodded slowly. "If you're sure, I'm in the bathroom..." and the figure drifted into nothingness.

Seconds later Harry's eyes flew open and he was sitting up on the bed, the sheets falling from his form.

He had been dreaming, that much was certain he knew. But there was a strange feeling in his chest. His bond to Draco was calling to him loudly, sending a distress signal that had pulled him to consciousness. He was home; he was in Draco's room. But where was his mate?

The answer ghosted to him from the dream.
The bathroom...

Shaking aside all thoughts aside, Harry slipped out of the large bed, walking briskly to the bathroom. With each step forward, a wave of emotion hit him through their bond. Immediately his steps quickened. It was not unusual for them to feel each other’s emotions when one of them felt it strong enough, but it was often just a vague sense. Now Draco's projecting emotions were hitting him strongly enough that Harry felt the pain as if it were his on.

Sorrow...

Self-loathing...

A sense of being worthless...

These were the emotions that he himself felt he realised and for a second wondered if his own emotions had been amplified because his mate felt the same and vice versa. It was something to ask about later. For now, he was at the bathroom door. Forsaking protocol that demanded he knocked, he pushed his way into the room freezing as he saw his dominant.

Never in his conscious memory had he ever seen his mate in such a condition. Tears were pouring down Draco's face and as blue eyes rose to meet his own, a spark of recognition entered them before the veela sobbed hopelessly.

Sorrow...

Self-loathing...

Worthless...

Unclean...

Harry almost lost his balance under the weight of emotions and felt their bond tugging him forward. His dominant needed him, just as much as he did and shoving aside everything except that thought, he made his way to Draco, wrapping his arms around the older boy, offering strength, comfort and love.

Tentative hands encircled his body, their grip slowly tightening, locking both boys in a desperate grip, while their emotions poured through the bond, sharing their feelings. There was no need for words. The emotions flowing between them carried their memories.

Draco felt Harry's sadness at his look of indifference during the battle; Draco sent an image that explained his actions. Harry felt Draco's self-loathing for not being strong enough to overcome Quirrell; he reminded him that they had not learnt how to do it.

Time passed as their bond worked, and as they held each other close, some of their fears slowly dissipated. Some remained though, it was more than their bond could eradicate and that only time could help heal. Draco still feared that he would fail his cub again and Harry still believed that there was a possibility that the Malfoys would turn their backs on him. However, despite the problems that plagued them, both boys knew that in their hearts, they truly loved each other. That was something that had not and would not change.

The next few weeks passed quietly in the Malfoy household. The adults had all been relieved to have found the boys awake upon a check, albeit strangely quiet. All noted the wariness in Harry's eyes and the slightly distant look Draco sported. Neither was commented upon at the time, as it was put down to them simply needing time to fully overcome their ordeal.
When they felt that sufficient time had passed, the boys were sat down for a discussion about what had occurred, although due to Harry's unwillingness to elaborate on his experience, Severus resulted to simply slipping into his mind and extracting what was needed.

They had settled into their normal Manor routine after that although it was not long before it was realised that the pair was not over the incident as they had first thought. Draco's protectiveness worked on overdrive, leading the veela to become Harry's shadow, literally following him everywhere the child wandered. It had taken under a day for Harry's temper to boil over, before he snapped at the older boy, leading to a loud argument between the pair that lasted until Lucius intervened, separating them for a while. The fact that he had to spell Draco's door shut so that he would not go to Harry led to a long discussion with the veela that night.

The discussion had been very disquieting as Draco revealed what had been plaguing him. His feelings and firm demand for his tutoring to be increased was met with reluctance at first and finally acceptance, and so Severus ensured that his godson could counteract the imperious and several other controlling curses. After much debate, Harry was similarly trained although unlike his mate, he struggled to learn it, something that surprised his family to no end given his natural affinity for magic. But then, as Remus pointed out, it was ridiculous to expect Harry or even Draco to master all aspects of magic with the ease that they usually did. All wizards had limitations and he had no doubt that with time, other areas with which the boys were weaker in would emerge. It would be their task to find a way to ensure that the boys could become at least moderately proficient in it.

Eventually attention was finally paid to Harry's weakness around them. He shied away from their touches, and all his responses to them were made with painful politeness. After seeing him flinch away from Sirius' touch, Narcissa and Lucius sat him down. It took much coaxing, but finally he revealed his fears. Tears sprang to Narcissa's eyes at her son's words, while Lucius' eyes darkened in anger towards Harry's original keepers. They spoke for almost an hour before the child finally accepted that they did not blame him for what happened, nor would they abandon him. He was theirs, had become theirs since the day they had met him, and he would always be theirs. His emerald eyes had sparkled at their assurances and for the first time in a long while, he was completely relaxed when he was pulled in for a hug.

And so the weeks passed and it was time for them to return to Hogwarts for the year's final term. Severus and his partners had departed for a final night alone, and Albus was to join them after the boys had been put to sleep to transport their suitcases as they had opted against sending the boys on the train. They wanted them to have a peaceful journey to the school and they did not doubt that the students would mob the pair upon sight for reassurances that they were fine.

The pair had been strangely quiet the final day home, but neither Narcissa or Lucius were particularly worried until the night came when neither boy appeared at the dinner table. "Perhaps they fell asleep playing?" Narcissa said as she rose from her seat. "I'll see what's going on darling."

"Very well dear," Lucius agreed, sipping at his tea.

The veela-mother truly expected to find them lying on the carpet, engrossed in a game and thus she was shocked to open Harry's bedroom door, only to be hit in the face by a side of sock. "What on earth...Harry!" she gasped as the sock fell.

The child did not hear her exclamation, still bent over his school trunk, throwing clothing over his shoulder. Striding across the room she said chidingly, "Harry James Potter, what in Merlin's name are you doing little boy?"

The child gave a slight squeak as he straightened, clutching a shirt in his hand. Seconds later his eyes hardened slightly and she noticed that his hands clenched. "I'm unpacking mama," the child replied,
and matching action to words, dropped the shirt and reached for another.

"What? Why?" she questioned, reaching down to grasp his hand, stopping his movement.

An emotion flashed across his face before he masked it. "I'm not going," he stated, not meeting her eyes. "therefore my trunk doesn't need to be packed."

So surprised by his words, Narcissa' grip slackened. Taking advantage, Harry pulled his wrist free and had tossed a pair of underpants before she stopped him again. Grasping him under his arms, she lifted him clear of the messy pile, and seated him on the bed with a command to stay still. She heard a low growl as the clothes were refolded and packed with a flick of her wand.

"Why did you do that?" Harry demanded in annoyance, hopping up. "I'm not going!"

"Don't you raise your voice at me young man," the veela-mother stated firmly. She understood that the child was frustrated. He was always cross in this state but it was no reason for him to address her that way.

"Sorry mama," he muttered, "But I'm not going."

"Of course you are. Why-"her question was cut off as a frantic elf popped into the room.

"Mistress, I is sorry but young Master Draco be tossing his school things everywhere and me not being able to stop him."

Narcissa did not miss the smug look that crossed Harry's face and she turned a stern eye to him. "Young man, you will go to the den immediately. Go."

Harry frowned, but preceded her out the room, heading in the opposite direction as her. Sending the elf to tell Lucius, Narcissa departed for her son's room.

Ten minutes later, it was a very harried veela-mother who entered with a scowling son in toe. The boy settled next to Harry, who had crossed his arms defiantly. It took under a minute for Narcissa to explain the situation, and duly informed, Lucius turned to the pair.

"Explain," he stated simply, sitting back and eyeing the pair.

There was no immediate response, both boys eyeing each other. Just when he was about to speak again, Harry piped up, in a churlish tone, "We aren't going."

Immediately understanding his wife's annoyance now, he leaned forward with a slight frown. "Adjust your tone Harry." A slight sneer was his only answer. "And drop that expression now Draco," he added to his son who had taken to glaring at him.

"Look, this is not a difficult question. Kindly explain what is going on. You knew you are to leave tomorrow. Why this attitude? Draco?"

His son huffed a sigh, before speaking. "I have my reasons and Harry has his."

"And they are?" Narcissa pressed.

The veela's lips twisted before he responded. When he finally spoke, all traces of an attitude had left him. "I...I don't want to be alone with him," he admitted, looking down. Seeing the lack of reaction from Harry, the parents realised that they had spoken to each other of their fears.

"Draco," Lucius spoke, "We're positive that you will come to no harm. The replacement professor
has been thoroughly checked and additional wards have been placed on the school. I'm a governor remember? Between your godfather, grandfather and I, I guarantee that you will be safe."

"I'm not worried about that," Draco admitted softly.

"Then what?"

The veela was reluctant to speak further and it was Harry who answered.

"He's afraid that he'll fail me again. He knows how much I was scared that week...and honestly, I am still somewhat afraid of him...especially at nights. He is scared to have me out of his sight when we're in different classes. It is easier to monitor my location from here. Although he has backed off here, the second we enter Hogwarts, he will be on the defensive with me again. His nerves are shot just thinking about it. We do not doubt that he will attack the first person who touches me, no matter who they are. That's why he doesn't want to go."

Harry's little speech left the older Malfoys stunned and it only took a glance at his face to confirm that Harry's assessment had been true. Neither parent had even thought of such a thing. They knew he would guard Harry more closely but the possibility that he would attack another student had escaped them. They could understand his reasons now but...

"And you Harry," Narcissa questioned, "What are your reasons?"

"I'm afraid," he said simply. "Afraid that it'll happen again. I love him but still...if it happened once, it could happen again. I'm scared, if we're here..."

"You're guaranteed protection," Lucius finished, closing his eyes. No wonder the boys had been defensive. He had every plan of simply, sitting, listening and then declaring that they would be going back. But now, after what they'd said...

"Boys," Narcissa stated, rising. "Go to your rooms...either one is fine. Dinner will be brought to you."

"Mama..."

"Mother..."

"It isn't punishment," she reassured, "You're father and I need to talk. Go about your nightly routine and we will join you when we have a solution."

"Okay."

"Yes mother," they agreed, rising.

"Go on now," their father bid, waving them out.

"Do you think they'll make us go back?" Harry murmured, sitting cross-legged in front of Draco.

"I don't know cub. I hope not." Smiling blandly, he reached across to stroke Harry's cheek.

"Dray?"

"Hmm?"
"I'm sorry I'm afraid."

"It's okay cub," he reassured. "No matter the facts, we can't deny that it was my body that attacked you. It's to be expected that there are some lingering fears."

"It's not as great..."

"I know, and eventually it'll fade away. The same way that I won't always be so defensive. But these past weeks haven't been enough time."

A knock sounded then, and the door opened.

"Grandpa?" Harry said in surprise as Hogwarts's headmaster appeared after their parents.

"Hello boys," he greeted with a gentle smile.

"Good evening grandfather."

"Harry, Draco, we've spoken on the matter and we've reached a possible solution."

"What is it?" the veela asked, putting a hand on Harry's arm, when the child scooted nearer to him.

"Boys," Albus began, "you're fears are fully justified and it is honourable that you want to protect your fellow students from attack Draco."

The veela nodded.

"A long time ago," Lucius stated. "There were two types of students at Hogwarts. Boarders and day-students."

"Day-students?" Harry questioned.

"Yes darling," Narcissa added in response. "Such students lived at home and flooed in for classes. It went out of style when Voldemort emerged as families chose to leave their children in the school where they were most safe."

"Currently about twenty students attend Hogwarts as day-students," Lucius revealed. "Mainly upper years that have come into inheritances or have married."

"I believe there is a second year Ravenclaw as well," Albus added.

"How exactly does this work?" Draco questioned.

"Well," Albus explained. "A floo point is first established for you for transition. Usually it is placed in the student's house common room but in your case, it can be added to your quarters. All of our current day students eat lunch at the school, although some choose to have breakfast and/or dinner at home. They remain until, at the latest, half an hour before curfew before returning to their residence."

"So at minimum we would spend six hours at school a day," Draco worked out.

No one commented on the fact that he had left no time for relaxing with their peers.

"What about his reactions?" Harry asked.

"I will reaffirm my warnings to the school about their interactions with you and ask that they give you a wide berth. I will meet privately with your more personal friends, as they would be more likely
than others to attempt physical contact with you and Harry. Moreover, until your protectiveness return to a more normal level, we can arrange for you to share all of your classes, as long as neither of you mind separating from your houses for lessons. No? Good."

"Astronomy?"

"Severus has agreed to remain with you on those evenings. You will not be alone. He will escort you to and from the class and then send you home."

"Well boys, is this acceptable?"

"If you don't want to," Narcissa hastened to add. "We will simply withdraw you from Hogwarts. Some families chose to have their children home-schooled."

Although we hope it doesn't come to that, they all thought.

Harry and Draco shared a look before Harry turned to them. "Say we go back, can we change our minds?"

"Yes darling. We won't force you to stay if you aren't comfortable."

"And we won't be separated."

"Not until you indicate that you are ready to fall back into your old timetable."

The pair looked at each other again, silently speaking before they came to a conclusion. "We'll give it a try," Draco answered. "And we'll see from there."

They chose to return to the school in time for the first class. They were the last to enter the Charms classroom, but were shocked to see their regular seat waiting for them. Their friends offered him small smiles, but no-one made a move to touch or approach them. They were greeted by an enthusiastic Flitwick and by the end of the class, both believed that they had made the right decision.

As they walked to their next class, Hermione and Ron along with Blaise and Millicent trailed behind them. Harry grasped Draco's hand as he felt the veela's rising tension but, by the time they reached transfiguration, they had engaged them in a tentative if not stilted conversation.

True to form, as time passed it became easier and easier for Draco to relax in the school and Harry's fear of him gradually faded. They did not return to Hogwarts as boarders until their second year, but that was no issue for them nor their family. The very fact that by the term's conclusion that they could be found at the separate house tables, engaged in avid conversations with their peers was enough.

The leaving feast found them with Harry firmly ensconced under Draco's arm at the snake house table. Hermione and Ron joined them and across the hall students were found sitting intermingled with different houses. They chatted amiably between bites of food, occasionally shouting across the hall to their lion comrades. Once the feast was clear, the ending ceremony began.

The Quidditch cup was captured by the Slytherins who had edged Gryffindor out for the cup by a mere ten points. Unlike other years, all of the houses cheered as the Slytherin captain hoisted the house. The fierce rivalry was gone and all appreciated the team that had emerged victorious that year. Mischievously, Albus did not announce the House Cup winner, jovially adding that the points awarded to the top percentile students of each year had not been added yet.

The winning house would not be known until the awards had been distributed. All the students clapped as the Hogwarts shield was presented to the outgoing Head Boy and Girl and then for the
top five students of each year as they accepted their animated trophies. For 'fun' as Albus claimed, he randomly chose a year and announced the recipients. Most noticeable for the pair was Cedric who cupped third place for his year and Cho claimed second. Marcus Flint ranked forth, but that was the extent with students that the boys were personally affiliated with.

Their own year ended up being last to go and by then the hall was tense. With each name Albus called, the corresponding amount of points trinkled into the House hourglasses. Twenty for fifth, twenty-five for forth, thirty for third, forty for second and fifty for first.

Hufflepuff was out of the race regardless, they would need over one hundred points to claim the cup, and it was highly unlikely that badgers had claimed the first three spots.

Ravenclaw stood a chance, needing just under eighty points, but unlike the other years, the eagles did not dominate among the first years. Thus, it came down to Slytherin and Gryffindor for the cup.

With 373 points, Gryffindor trailed the snakes by 17 points. Neither house was ready to celebrate as they knew it could go either way. Feeling the tension rising from the houses, the twinkle in Albus' eyes brightened as he cleared his throat.

"As you may have realised, the fate of the house cup falls upon the first years. But no pressure," he joked, causing a few chuckles. "Without further ado, ranking fifth, we have Terry Boot, Ravenclaw."

They all clapped as he received his award, and did the same as Hufflepuff's Susan Bones trodded up to the head table. If possible, a greater silence fell on the hall as Susan retook her seat.

"Okay, here we go. In third place we have..." the houses held their collective breathes. "Hermione Granger, Gryffindor!" Cheers erupted from as the beaming girl rose. As the noise died down Albus continued, his smile broadening as he read the final two names.

"In terms of marks, these two students are separated by three percent. Hmm...you know, this reminds of a time..."

"Headmaster!" students groaned as Albus delayed the inevitable.

"Okay, okay...In second place we have...

Draco bent close to Harry's ear and whispered. "Second place buys the winner a chocolate frog?"

"Harry Potter, Gryffindor." Harry laughed as he rose, leaving the table.

"First place goes to Draco Malfoy, Slytherin!"

"You owe me a frog," Draco stated as they walked up the podium and accepted their awards amidst loud cheering.

"And for those who haven't realised," Albus remarked, almost as a side note, given that the lions were already celebrating. "The house cup goes to Gryffindor, winning by three points."

On that bright note, the ceremony ended and the students were free to do as they pleased for their remain night at Hogwarts. Harry and Draco partied with their friends before returning to the manor, wishing Hogwarts farewell until the fall.

They were warmly received by their parents whom gushed over their awards. Draco, the valiant soul he was, gamely shared his earned frog with his mate, whom cheekily responded that "You'll be
buying me one next year!"

The nine year old's statement proved false the next year, although he lost to his mate by only one percent this time. It didn't matter though and this time they left Hogwarts via the express, leaving the station handing in hand, to enjoy the holidays before their third year began.
Chapter 31

September 1993

Sometimes, being an eleven-year-old in third year sucked, Harry decided, slinging his bag over his shoulder. He was not allowed into Care of the Magical Creatures, which, based on Ron and Hermione’s accounts was the coolest subject ever. Just last week the class had ridden Hippogriffs! Really, what was the point of allowing him into the school early if he could not pursue whatever subject he wished at third year? Too young, he had fumed, his face flushing as his grandpa reasoned with him. Eleven-years-olds could not be trusted around such creatures. The class was large enough without Hagrid having to keep an eye on him.

He had argued that Draco would not allow him to be hurt, and had glared at his mate who calmly announced that he was not taking the course. Some of those creatures on the list were quite antagonistic towards veelas and he was not in the mood to fend off attacks every week thank you very much. Harry released a swarm of pixies that Sirius had so eagerly helped him capture into the veela's room that night for his non-cooperation.

Neither his arguments nor his threats to release even worse creatures were convincing and so he grumbled loudly as he selected Ancient Runes and Divination, the latter his form of revenge against the family who all considered the subject to be rubbish. It had only taken him the first two weeks of the term to agree reluctantly that they had been right and with a little prodding from Draco, had dropped it and taken on Arithmancy, (but not before another attempt to wheedle his way into Care of the Magical Creatures), leaving Ron alone to his tea-drinking.

But as he headed out Gryffindor's common room, stoically ignoring the muttering from the students across the room, he had to admit that classes were not the only reason that his third year so far was far from ideal. He had been excited with the new school year. No longer would he be the school's youngest student (although as it turned out he was younger than almost three quarter of the incoming students) which meant that for the first time ever, he would have people his own age to interact with. Moreover, the teachers would no longer have a reason to mottle-coddle him.

As it turned it, he had been wrong on both counts.

Over tea and biscuits with his grandpa, he had learnt that the teachers would still be keeping a close eye on him. On the one hand, he was expending significantly more magic daily than a normal eleven year old would and so he would have to be watched carefully for signs of possible magical fatigue. On the other hand, there was still the matter of what they had discussed the weekend before Hogwarts reopened. Harry had sighed deeply but ultimately accepted that there was no way around the fact.

Not even his desire to make friends with the first years had come to fruition. On the second day of classes, while Hermione dragged a protesting Ron to the library, he had raced to the lion's den, a smile on his face. He waved at Luna and Ginny as he passed them on the steps and bounced into the common room with the Fat Lady calling cheerfully after him.

But within minutes, his enthusiasm had faded, leaving him perplexed. His greetings to the first years had been met with cool, indifferent looks and after a minute of standing there awkwardly, trying to make conversation, Harry realised that they wanted nothing to do with him. He had walked away from them slightly melancholy, and had moved on instead to Fred and George Weasly who settled him besides them, as they continued to plan a prank with the aid of their friend Lee Jordan.
He did not confide what had happened with anyone, convincing himself that there had been a misunderstanding of sorts. But each of his subsequent attempts had been rebuffed and soon enough, Harry found that Gryffindor Tower was growing less and less welcoming. He rarely ventured into it anymore unless he was certain that either Ron or Hermione was there.

But today Hermione had been running late, and with the Divination classroom on the other side of the castle, Ron would not be back for ages. He had shrugged and settled himself into a red and gold armchair near a fireplace, pulling a textbook unto his lap while he waited. He did not look up as he heard other students entering, though in only a few minutes he wished that he had not come up here in the first place.

"What is he doing in here? He should not be allowed in here. He isn't even a real lion," the first year, Michael Brussels said with malice in his voice. "If he was, he'd be living in the dorms."

"He thinks he's so special because he's in third year," another added. "It's only because he's the headmaster's favourite!"

"He's only in the top five because of him too," a girl piped up in a squeaky voice.

Harry's grip on his book slackened as he listened to the words he was obviously supposed to hear.

"And that thing about him being a veela's mate is absolute bull. Everyone knows that there aren't any same-sexed mates. I say he is only trying to rob the Malfoys. As if being the Boy-who-lived isn't enough."

At this point Harry had heard enough. Not caring that leaving would be cowardly; he flung his book back into his bag, their laughter ringing in his ears as the portrait closed behind him. If he had looked back, he would have seen two boys, descending the staircase from the dormitories, wide smirks on their faces as they settled down among the first years.

"That was quick," Fat Lady noted.

Harry swallowed thickly before responding. "I need some air."

"Okay dearie. Come again soon."

Not very likely, Harry thought. As he walked, he forced himself to breathe. He would not cry, he told himself, allowing his feet to lead him where they will. As it ended up, he settled under a tree with his back to the castle. The evening air had a definite chill to it, but it was not enough to force him back into the warm castle.

As he laid his bag besides him, he reached up to loosen his tie, sighing as he gazed into the sky. "Why do they hate me?" he asked the wind. "And where did they hear such lies?" The wind's seeming response was a waft of air that tickled his bangs.

"Thanks," he replied, closing his eyes to listen to the sounds of the wind rustling through the trees. He chuckled as a leaf fell unto his face and removing it, he reached for his book bag, his previous feelings considerably dimmed. "Maybe I'll talk to Draco about it," he murmured, before grimacing as an image of his veela with talons loose storming into the Tower entering his mind. "Or maybe not."

Deciding to put aside what he could not change for now, Harry reached into his bag and retrieved his half-written Arithmancy essay, scribbled during History of Magic. He was glad that it was with Ravenclaws instead of Slytherin this year otherwise he would have had to pay attention to the boring ghost. As it was, Hermione simply assumed that he was taking detailed notes. He would just rely on Draco's when mid-terms came around. The veela would definitely scold and perhaps even ground
him for a few days, but ultimately provide them for him. In Harry's opinion, a day or two confined in
his room was a small price to pay for the unofficial free-period as he had come to think of the class.

Harry waved his hand to cast a divergence spell, ensuring that the wind would not disturb him as he
worked. But inevitably, his mind returned to the words of those who, had the situation been different
would have been his classmates. He really had hoped to pick up a companion or two from them.
Make no mistake; he cared dearly for his friends. He, Ron and Hermione had been named the
Golden Trio, a name they had earned after a small prank war between themselves and the Silver
Stars who were comprised of his mate and his best friends Blaise and Millicent.

The names were a tribute to what they had done to each other back in second year. Mildly annoyed
with Draco for one thing or another he had spelled silver stars all over his mate's robes and skin. Just
for the heck of it, he had ended up extending it to Blaise and Millicent. He and his friends had had a
hearty laugh before the three snakes realised just what the students in the hall were snickering about.

Immediately figuring out whom the culprit was, Draco had stalked over to the lion table, his lips
pressed tightly together. To others it may have seemed as if the blonde was angry but Harry knew
that he was suppressing his mirth. Not that it stopped him from seeking revenge by changing Harry's
robes, skin and hair and all to Gryffindor gold. Following suit with Harry, he included Ron and
Hermione, just so that they could share in the experience. Neither spells wore off for several hours,
and no teacher chose to aid but even when the spells ended, the names remained.

The memory had Harry laughing softly as he scribbled yet another line of his essay before stopping
to find a reference. Yes, his friends were wonderful, but that did not erase the fact that they were two
years older than him and thus were not as willing to play the games he still adored. Not to mention,
their larger sizes gave them a distinct advantage over him. Harry's last wrestling match against Ron
had lasted under a minute as with his considerably larger frame, Ron had easily pinned him down to
the carpet. Although Hermione still agreed to a game of catch or two, she was able to catch him
easily enough. And with Cho having skipped a year to join Cedric as a fifth year, his badger friends
had OWLs to worry about and thus did not have the time as before to play with him.

Of course, he had Ginny and Luna, but it was weird being around them. They were girly, always
talking about some hair product or cute boy in Witch Weekly. He didn't understand half of what they
giggled over and the other half he simply did not want to know.

It was ten minutes to dinner when he finished his essay, extinguishing the lumos spell that had been
providing him with light the last twenty minutes or so. The castle looked magnificent he noted, all of
its windows illuminated, as if inviting him to enter. Accepting the invitation, he headed indoors.
Deciding that it was not worth making a trip to his room first, he cast a freshening spell on his
clothing and made a general attempt to neaten his hair before entering the Great Hall.

Loud conversations greeted him as he walked towards Slytherin, waving to his friends who gave him
curious looks. He offered them a small smile, but continued on his path, choosing to ignore the frown
on Hermione's face as she obviously wondered over his whereabouts. He sank into the space
Millicent created for him besides Draco. The veela's hand reached out automatically to run through
his hair even though he did not immediately turn to him, instead continuing his conversation with
Blaise. The young boy was about to fix himself a plate when Millicent placed one in front of him.

He tempered the laugh that would have given them away. The girl had placed only the barest amount
of vegetables on his plate, scattered in a way that gave the illusion that he had already consumed the
majority of it.

"Thanks," he whispered in a conspirical tone, spearing a piece of meat.
"No problem Har-Har. You could probably use a laugh."

"What?" he asked around a mouthful.

Millicent rolled her eyes at him. "You usually don't eat dinner here unless you need Draco," she stated with a twinkle in her eye.

"Oh," he mumbled. Was he really that obvious?

"What's this about Draco?" his veela asked, turning his attention to them. Although his face was drawn into a smile, Harry could see the slight concern in his gaze. He guessed Millie really was right, if the way Draco moved to touch his cheek was any indication.

"Oh we were just bad-talking you," the girl teased, waving her fork for emphasis.

"Indeed," Draco drawled, arching an eyebrow. "Well, by all means continue."

His tone had all but Harry dissolving into laughter. For him the words hit home and he masked his emotions by taking a large gulp of pumpkin juice.

As Millicent turned away, Draco's full attention fell unto the boy besides him. "Why are you here cub?" he asked softly.

Recalling the earlier image of Draco storming into Gryffindor, Harry decided to avoid the issue. "To eat?" he replied in what he hoped was a glib tone. If the veela noticed anything, he chose not to remark, instead reaching out to touch his skin again.

"You're cold," he remarked, taking a bite of his own meal.

"Hmm...I was outside."

"With?"

"No-one," he answered, his voice lowering slightly. "I finished Professor Vector's assignment."

"You told me you would be in Gryffindor with them." Draco made a vague gesture towards his friends across the room, ignoring the latter words for now.

"Y-yes. But the common room was so noisy and Hermione and Ron were arguing again..." he let his voice trail off, knowing he had said enough. The arguments those two had were legendary.

Draco shook his head lightly. Did those two do anything else? "Next time go to the library or come to me. You aren't supposed to be on the grounds alone," he finished, chiding lightly.

"I forgot," Harry replied honestly. Both ate their meals silently after that, and by the time dinner ended, Harry was back in a jovial mood after successfully managing to rob Draco of half of his dessert when he had not been watching.

Draco took Harry's bag from him as they left the Hall, wrapping an arm loosely around his shoulders. "You really surprised me," he said conversationally.

"How?" Harry asked, bending his head back slightly to look at his face, trusting Draco to lead him.

"The assignment. I haven't started it yet," he revealed.

"Yeah well...there wasn't much else to do," he admitted, ignoring the questioning look the veela
gave him.

As they made their way down another corridor, they heard another set of footsteps clacking against the tiles. Harry looked down the corridor curiously before a wide grin plastered itself on his face.

"Uncle Sevvy!" he greeted, pulling away from Draco to race to the man.

"When will you outgrow this?" the man asked with a mock groan as he lifted the boy, cradling him easily. "Hello Draco," he greeted his other godson, reaching down with his free hand to ruffle his hair.

"Hello Uncle Sev. You weren't at dinner."

Severus gave a slight roll of his eyes as he placed Harry on his feet. "Your uncles have demanded my presence for dinner."

"Tell them hello for us."

"I will. Don't think you can stay up late because I won't be there to check on you."

"We have you first tomorrow," Harry pointed out.

"Exactly brat. I will be most displeased if you two are yawning in my class."

"We won't," Draco promised. "Goodnight Uncle Sev."

"Goodnight Uncle Sevvy."

"Yes, yes. Off with you," he ordered, giving them a gentle shove. The pair beamed at him before continuing on their way.

"I'll make sure you two always remain so happy," Severus stated to the empty corridor once they were out of sight. With those words, Severus set back out for his destination.

* 

"Aren't you done yet?" Harry asked loudly as he left the bathroom. He sat on the arm of the divan, rubbing at his hair with the end of his towel.

The veela turned to look at him over his shoulder, a mischievous look entering his gaze as he replied. "You know, you're already way ahead of me in terms of assignments cub. Are we aiming for the top spot?"

Harry stuck out his tongue impishly. "We, are tired of buying a certain person chocolate frogs. Now hurry up and finish Mr. Malfoy. Complete it before nine and I'll even consider checking it over for you," he answered with a saccharine smile.

Draco chuckled. "You wish. That's my job."

"Says the veela who has yet to finish. It's been what? An hour? I finished in less than forty minutes. Shall I tutor you?"

"Keep it up Harry," Draco warned playfully, "And see if I don't take you down a few notches."

"You're welcome to try little veela. Now finish your work," he finished with a dismissive flick of his hand. He dropped the towel nonchalantly on the floor, dropping down unto the seat as he pulled his
latest novel from off the table.

Lips twitching, Draco snagged his wand and with a flick of the wrist, the wet towel, smacked the side of Harry's head. "Pick up after yourself cub," he reminded, turning back to his work.

"Whatever," Harry grumbled good-naturedly. Eventually he allowed the book's pages to turn itself, leaving him free to de-tangle his hair.

"I thought we were going to read it together?" Draco said after several minutes passed.

"Well, we were, but a certain someone is taking far too long."

Seconds later, the book was flung away unto the ground as Draco pounced on the smaller boy. "I warned you," he growled, tickling him mercilessly. After several short laughs, Harry retaliated, causing them to tumble off the divan, rolling around the room as they rough-housed.

Finally, the impromptu fight ended with them inches away from the fire-place, both breathing deeply from exertion. Draco propped himself on his elbows above Harry, gazing down in his face, slightly flushed with their playing. He allowed his eyes to rove over the features, noting the changes...or lack thereof. Harry's face had changed little, still retaining its childish roundish that lent him that deceptive air of innocence.

His smile as always, created just a hint of a dimple at the corner of his mouth. He supposed that as Harry grew older, it would become more pronounced. As his eyes lifted higher, over the flushed cheeks, Draco found himself swallowing compulsively as he stared into Harry's deep green eyes that twinkled with childish delight at him.

Harry's eyes were beautiful he realised, and not just in the innocent way he had always regarded them with. There was something about them, a depth in their emerald gaze that would entrap him if he looked into them long enough. The more he looked into him, the greater the warm feeling that was building up into his chest felt.

That warmth spiked as Harry reached up innocently to brush a lock of blonde hair away from his eyes. The touch was electrifying and Draco raised himself off of Harry hurriedly, flopping unto the divan. He ran a hand through his hair as he struggled to control the emotions racing to him. The way he had felt – still felt- was not usual. The warmth that was always there had threatened to become a heat.

Gazing down at Harry, he had not felt that surge of protectiveness that he always day, that desire to hold the small boy close and offer comfort was gone. Yes, he had wanted to hold him, but instead of pressing his head against his shoulder as always, Draco had wanted to kiss him. A groan escaped him at that and he jumped slightly as he felt a warm hand touch his knee. Looking down he found Harry staring at him, confusion and a hint of worry in those emerald depths.

"Draco?" Harry asked softly. "Are you okay?"

It took Draco several attempts to manage to speak. "I'm okay cub."

"Are you certain? You looked slightly panicked."

"Its nothing," he stated hurriedly. "I just realised that I should really finish that essay before we play. Uncle Severus is bound to assign a lot of work tomorrow."

Harry's slight frown remained, but Draco could read acceptance in his gaze. "Okay, well maybe I should go to my room? That way I won't be a bother?"
"No, that's not necessary. I should shower anyway. I'll continue when I'm done."

"Oh, okay." Harry reached across the floor and reclaimed the novel. "I wasn't really reading without you. I restarted."

Draco managed a smile. "I'm glad," he said simply. "I'll be back shortly."

Brushing his hand through Harry's damp hair quickly, he rose and walked to the bathroom, well aware that Harry's eyes were firmly on him.

As soon as he closed the door, Draco sank down to the floor, burying his head into his arms, accepting what he had felt. His mother had warned him about this. His had been raised knowing to expect his veela majority before the normal age of sixteen. Thus, he had been told to expect to feel the occasional pull of attraction towards Harry. It was a part of being a veela, nature's way of telling him that his destined was near.

Those pulls of attraction led to feelings similar to what a regular teenager would experience with their first crush. It had been that Draco had felt earlier, the strangest desire to blush along with the butterflies in the stomach feeling. It was quickly fading though. Since he had grown up with his mate around him, there was no need for nature's intervention. He knew who his mate was; he did not need such feelings to tell him such. And so this situation would only be an occasional occurrence. He certainly hoped so...Harry was only eleven for Merlin's sake! He shouldn't have these feelings towards him yet, veela trait or not.

It was pure embarrassment and nothing else that had made him flee to the bathroom. He had never felt such emotions before towards his Harry, and it was disconcerting. Harry's sparkling eyes always invoked happiness in him, to feel that warmth instead had caught him off guard. And without a doubt Draco knew that he would experience those feelings again, and with his luck at the most inconvenient times. As he set himself about showering, he could only be grateful for small mercies. At least he would not be plagued with those silly hormonal urges and the embarrassing situations pubescent boys often found themselves in on mornings. He could not physically bond with his mate until they were both of age, and until then, there was no reason for his body to do such strange things.

By the time he was dressed, he felt normal, those embarrassing thoughts naught but a memory as he left the bathroom. As Harry turned to him with a wide grin, waving slightly before returning to his book, the only thing Draco felt was contentedness for his mate's happiness. Yep, everything was back to normal.

The veela was putting the finishing touches on his essay when he glanced at the time. Twisting slightly, his lips twitched as he found Harry valiantly trying to keep his eyes open. "Why don't you head on to bed little lion. I'll join you in a few minutes."

Harry's voice was drowsy when he responded. "It's five to ten Draco. I have thirty five minutes left."

"Uh-huh," Draco replied with amusement. It was their nightly routine now. Harry had crowed for joy when Draco had told him at the term's start that he could have the first year bedtime...and had promptly laughed himself into a fit when his cub had fallen asleep on the couch at half nine. Every subsequent night, he tried to stay up a little bit longer, tonight being the longest at five minutes to ten. Vaguely he wondered if he could truly say Harry was awake, seeing the way he was barely coherent.

"Go on, cub," he shooed. "I'll bring the book and I'll read until half ten."
It took several seconds for Harry to agree and stumble to his feet. But he did not amble to his bedroom as Draco assumed, but instead came to him, spreading his arms. Chuckling lightly, Draco pulled the younger boy to him for a hug. He stared into those sleep fogged eyes before pushing aside a few strands of hair to kiss his forehead. "I love you Harry James," he whispered. A sleepy smile formed on Harry's lips in response, and before Draco could react, Harry leant forward and pressed his lips to the veela's for a few moments.

"I love you too," he murmured, walking away, leaving a blushing veela pressing fingers to his lips. This time there was none of those emotions of before. He simply felt the love that Harry had meant to convey with the kiss, even though, as allows, he was embarrassed at the way Harry had bestowed his kiss to him.

As Harry sat in his bed, determined to wait for Draco, he could not help but wonder about his mate's weird behaviour. When Draco had pinned him to the floor, Harry was shaking with silent laughter as always. But as he looked up into Draco's eyes, he saw a flicker of emotion in them that he had never seen before. Added to that, the older boy was not behaving as he was accustomed to. There was not that glimmer or amusement and indulgence in his eyes, there was something else. And then Draco had met his gaze and Harry clearly heard that slight hitch in Draco's breath before he jumped off him as he had been scalded.

What had happened?

Draco's face had pinkened. Was he not feeling well?

It was this concern that had him placing his hand on the veela's knee, his worrying increasing slightly when Draco flinched. But then the veela had answered his questions easily, even if there was the occasional hitch in his words. The flush had mostly faded from Draco's face and Harry put aside his worry. Maybe the fire had simply warmed his face. And yet, Harry could tell that his mate was having conflicting thoughts about something but did not press. It wasn't like he himself was not hiding something from the veela. Maybe he needed privacy to sort it out? But his offer to leave had been gently rebuffed and thus he returned to the novel.

He had drawn himself away from it when he heard the bathroom door click open and he could not help his relieved sigh as Draco sauntered from the room, looking completely normal. Evidently, he had already resolved his issues. Harry could only wish that his could have been as easily fixed.

Oh well.

As he continued to read, the words started to blur together and more than once he had to shake his head to stay awake. It really was annoying the way that he grew tired so easily, despite the extended bedroom. A hint of a blush formed on his face as he wondered if he would ever tell his mate the truth about his feelings towards his bedtime. He knew that Draco believed that he simply wished to stay up late to prove that he was mature. But truly, that was the case.

But then, how could Harry admit to such a childish thing as wanting to be by Draco's side for as long as possible? The night time was theirs. From the minute dinner ended to the time when he drifted away to the sound of Draco's voice, Draco filled his world. Doing homework together, talking about their day or just playing. At those times, Harry felt as if the world had shrunk down to being just the two of them.

That expanse of time was the only period in the day when they could enjoy each other's presence unhurriedly. With that in mind, how could he not want a later bedtime? Each minute it was extended
was another sixty seconds to be spent in Draco's company. And yet his treacherous body betrayed him, sending him to sleep way earlier than required, cutting into that time.

His brooding was interrupted by Draco's voice and warmed by the feeling invoked while thinking fondly of the time they spent together, he headed for his mate, opening his arms for a cuddle. Draco's whisper brought Cho's words back to him.

"When you love someone a lot, they sometimes show their love by kissing on the lips."

Without really thinking of it, he decided to give Draco what he had come to think of as a 'special kiss', to be bestowed on auspicious occasions. "I love you too," he had replied, before slipping away, content as always after being comforted by his mate.

Draco was sitting besides him now, having gently pushed him against his pillows and securing the covers around him. He was not really listening to the words of the story anymore, and rather was simply listening to the nuances that made Draco's voice unique to him. As always, he fell asleep with a slight smile on his lips, Draco's voice the last thing he heard as he surrendered to sleep.

"Sleep well, little lion," Draco murmured, pressing one last kiss to Harry's head before extinguishing the light. Eyeing his worktable as he left, he waved his wand, stacking everything neatly. He would proof read the essay in the morning. Right now, he just wanted to lie in his bed and think for a while. His cub's smiling face was the last thing on Draco's mind as he too surrendered to the realm of sleep, dreaming of sharing a picnic with Harry on a clear spring day.
"This is getting out of hand," Harry thought angrily as his slowed his rapid steps into a standstill. For the third time this month, he had abandoned Gryffindor Tower because of that group of menaces who seemed to be hell-bent on making his life hell. "What is their problem?" he groused, wiggling his fingers. The ledge of the giant window responded and dropped lower, allowing him to fold his arms comfortably on it. He looked down at the students on the grounds, enjoying the October day.

And just where in Merlin's name were his friends anyway? After he had all but dragged himself to the tower twenty minutes later than agreed upon, Ron and Hermione had the nerve to be absent!

"The entire situation is just frustrating," he huffed.

He had only gone up there in the first place because his friends were beginning to grow suspicious about his avoidance of it. Only yesterday, Hermione had pulled him aside and gently asked if something was wrong. He had avoided her question by running off, calling after her to chase him. He knew that she would not with her heavy book bag, and thus he had gotten away. Yet, he knew that any further strange behaviour would lead to unwanted questions, some of which might be directed towards Draco, and so, reluctantly, he had agreed to come to the tower.

Feeling the cool wind tantalising him, Harry was almost tempted to join the other students on the grounds and allow nature's beauty to rid him of his problems. Still, only last night he had been reminded of the importance of not venturing out there alone; and there was no one he could ask to accompany him who would not question his foul mood. He bit down on his lower lip in annoyance. Sometimes having an evil madman spirit thingy after you royally sucked.

Following that train of thought, Harry sneered at his absent foe. Really, did Voldemort have to have come into Scotland, putting his family on alert? Now made it approximately five months since Lily and James appeared the headmaster's office, expressions skewed. They had told Albus about sensing the Dark Lord's essence on the mortal plane, heading towards Scotland. From what they had gleaned, his path would take him in the general vicinity of Hogwarts. The old wizard had left the school immediately with Hagrid and James to scout out the forested area.

With nothing else to do but wait, Lily had wandered down to her sons' rooms, eventually relenting under their unceasing questions. Softly speaking, she explained that she and her husband's prolonged absence were due to them tracking Voldemort's essence. It was more difficult than they had originally imagined. They could only find traces of him and whenever they ventured near to them, the trail vanished completely.

When Draco had questioned the cause, she admitted that they believed that his spirit seemed incomplete. It was the only reason they could not get an immediate sense of his location. Currently they had no idea what that incompleteness could imply. What they did know was that it made tracking him extremely difficult. Weeks could go by without even a trace of the Dark Lord only for them to get a glimmer of him, as was the case today.

Really, it had only been a coincidence that they had sensed him at all.

"Why is that mummy?" Harry had asked curiously.

"Well," she giggled lightly, ghosting a hand over his skin. "You dad and I were on a bit of romantic stroll. What?" she defended when Draco shot her an incredulous look. Just because they were dead, didn't mean they had to deny themselves such simple pleasures right?
The veela mates had been asleep by the time the men had returned and they were given an edited account at a later date. The pair learnt that the only sign of Voldemort was a slight trace within the carcass of a snake. From that, Albus deduced that the dark lord was up to his old tricks, this time, possessing animals. This was a great threat, both to Harry and by large the school as Hogwarts' wards did not bar animals from entering the grounds and there was no feasible way for them to adjust it without risking some innocent animal.

The weekend before their third year commenced, Harry had sat pouting as the restriction was laid down, even though he understood the logic. Like any other child, when Harry was told he could not do something, he automatically felt the urge to do just what he had been forbidden to...simply because he knew it was not allowed. But, under the stern looks of both the headmaster and his uncle, he had promised not to test the restriction.

If he was truly honest he would admit that he had already broken that promise at least twice, but, as he justified to himself, he didn't remember the restriction until he was out there, and then, it just seemed a foolish idea to go back inside. However, if he was to go now, it would be an act of deliberate disobedience. That eliminated the great out doors for him now.

Turning his back to the window, and thus temptation, Harry contemplated a course of action to deal with his many problems. First of all, the first years. He no longer had any real desire to befriend them. In all honesty, he really just wanted to be left alone. Nothing would have suited him better than them forgetting about his very existence, but they did not seem keen to granting him that small mercy. Every time they could find him alone, he was harassed. The last few times had been the worst though, as they actually physically assaulted him.

That last time he had shirked off Ginny and Luna when he had found himself in the same passageway as them. Steeling himself, Harry had tried to walk past them as nonchalantly as possible, but almost past them, he had to yelp as someone pulled at the rug he was on, causing him to fall. Eyes burning at their laughter, he had stood as quickly as possible and left, thankful there were no physical signs of his fall.

He had felt vulnerable, and not wanting to go to Draco, had sought out his uncle whom did not mind the extra company. He went through great pains after that to ensure that they did not get him alone and had eventually relaxed his guard somewhat. That had led to today's situation. Harry knew he should have left the moment he saw that his friends were not present.

Gryffindor tower was usually empty during the weekend as most students either sought the library or outside to relax or work on assignments. It had been the very reason why Hermione had wanted to relax in it. As the portrait closed behind him, he saw that only four people, notwithstanding himself were in the room – a loudly snoring Neville and three first years.

Harry had convinced himself that it would be fine to wait. They would not try something with Neville nearby, right?

Wrong.

Had Harry lived in the dormitories, he would have known that Neville was a legend of sorts. Nothing, absolutely nothing could wake the boy once he was in a deep sleep. Harry did not know it, but the first years did and thus they had wasted no time to turn on their target, completely ignoring the slumbering boy.

The verbal assault had been swift and barbed. Accusations of Harry being a dark wizard, of having cast spells on the entire school to ensure that they all liked him and thus would not oppose his nefarious plans. He sat there as he was told that he was nothing but a money grubbing thief, lying to
those poor innocent Malfoys about being their son's mate in order to have access to their wealth.

A painful lump formed in his throat as they insinuated that the only reason the Dark Lord had sought out his family was to eliminate future competition. Their sources had told them that the Dark Lord had feared that the then baby Harry would encroach on his territory. And, obviously he had been right. No one who was not more evil than the Lord Voldemort would have been able to defeat him. Why did he not just drop the act and admit to the truth? It was then that he had left, angry with himself for sitting there for so long, angry that he had not retorted, angry that his friends had betrayed him by leaving him alone up here in the first place.

Shaking his head to toss the memory, Harry considered what he knew. More than once the first years had mentioned being told the information about him. Perhaps if he could find and stop whoever it was from spreading the lies, the first years would just leave him be. But then again, whom did he know in the school that held a grudge against him and would orchestrate such a thing?

Well Pansy would, he thought, grimacing as the girl's image flitted into his head. But then again, the Slytherin was quite vocal about her opinions of him, even if it got her nothing but censure for her words. It was that very fact which eliminated her as a suspect, Harry deduced. Whilst he knew that she was fully capable of such underhandedness, she would never lower herself to interact with first year Gryffindors.

If there was one person in the school on whom the house unification was lost, it was Pansy Parkinson. She still insisted that anyone not in Slytherin was beneath her notice. It was probably why she had few friends. The only people whom Harry knew actively spoke to her without visible malice were the children of those who worked for her father.

No, Pansy was not his suspect and he truly could think of no one else who would go to such an extreme degree. Giving up for the moment, Harry decided that what he currently wanted most was to have some fun. Preferably, somewhere he could go unnoticed for a little while. He was not in the mood to field questions from anyone. But the question was, where? Where could he hide for a few hours that no one would bother him in? It took him less than a minute to come to a solution.

Where better was he to hide than in plain sight?

Grinning at his ingenuity, he glanced around, and after ensuring that the area was still clear, transformed. Perfect. Only a handful of people would recognise him now. He could lose himself in the animal for a little while and just relax. Suiting actions to words, Harry followed the technique his Uncle Sirius had taught him and let the cat instincts take over and guide him.

Soon it was not Harry, but simply a curious kitten that pranced through the corridors, looking for entertainment. The kitten purred as it twined through armoury legs or batted at tapestries on his search for the perfect game. His target was found several corridors down and a mischievous look covered the tiny kitten's face as he lowered himself into a pouncing stance. His behind wiggled as he crept forward and prepared to dodge should his opponent strike first. Nevertheless, the target remained unawares, only learning of his presence when he leapt at it.

It was an intense battle. Neither opponent gave any leeway. More than once Harry barely avoided a punishing blow of retaliation, but overall, he gave as good as he got. Several times, he sunk sharp teeth into the opponent, who shook and danced trying to unseat him. It finally managed and Harry shook his head to rid himself of the slight dizziness, before launching himself again.

Hours later, when students were on their way back to Ravenclaw, a few would wonder at the tattered state of the Rubber-Root Plant, famous for its flexible and waving branches.
Once Harry believed that his opponent had suffered enough, he strutted away, head held high in victory. However, barely had he turned onto a next corridor did his jaw pop in a wide yawn. Fighting was a tiring task he noted. The kitten within subsided enough for the wizarding part of Harry to emerge, judging their location. It was a ten-minute walk to his room in his normal form, which meant almost twenty for his short kitten legs. There was no way he could make it at this rate. All he wanted to do was curl up and rest.

His answer came with a passing student. The witch was dragging her schoolbag uncaringly on the ground behind her. She did not even notice the additional weight on her bag as Harry hopped a ride. He jumped of when she turned to the path leading to the hall and within three minutes, was mewling at his room's entrance. Thankfully, the portrait recognised him in either form and allowed him entrance. Five minutes later, a kitten was fast asleep, curled on the rug in front of the fireplace.

"Well aren't you a cute sight," Draco whispered as he sat gracefully on the floor beside the tiny bundle. Gently he ran his hand along the curled form, chuckling when Harry shivered slightly in response. "I wonder what brought this on?" he mused as he moved to stretch out. He propped his head with one hand, using the other to stroke the kitten gently. He had not seen Harry like this in a long while and it never ceased to amaze him just how adorable Harry's kitten form was.

"I missed you at lunch," he told the sleeping kitten. "But now I see what you were up to."

He had not been too concerned when he had not felt Harry in the Great Hall. Blaise occasionally teased him about how lax he was being with Harry as of late, but the veela had simply shrugged it off. Threats within the castle towards Harry was minimal and so, for him to insist on the boundaries from first year would be considered excessive and would garner nothing but rebellion from his little mate. Harry was getting older, and he needed his own space. He could understand and appreciate that. Besides, it was not like if they did not relay all that had happened when they were apart to each other.

Draco lay there contentedly, observing the various minute movements the kitten made in his sleep. He was not sure how much time passed before the kitten's face scrunched slightly before opening to reveal sleepy emerald orbs. "Hello there you," he greeted softly. He laughed as the kitten blinked owlishly at him before stumbling to his feet. A warm feeling filled Draco's heart as the small distance between them was closed and he felt a furry head rubbing against his cheek affectionately.

"I love you too," he responded.

He sat up, placing Harry on his lap. He smiled when the black bundle mewled questioningly before purring when Draco scratched behind an ear. "Will I hear stories about a black kitten reeking havoc at dinner?" he asked softly. A negative headshake answered him. "That's good. Now, are you going to change back, or shall I conjure a ball for you to play with?"

In the end, Harry decided to remain as is for a bit longer. Draco humoured him by conjuring everything from wool balls to catnip, laughing loudly at his mate's antics. It was only when the afternoon was long gone that Harry changed back and they snuggled together on the rug to talk.

"That was fun."

"Indeed, I sometimes forget just what a playful kitten you are."

"What did you do today Dray?"
As he spoke, Harry shifted closer so he could rest his head on Draco's shoulder. He purred when the veela wrapped a hand around his shoulder, a sign that he had remained in his animagus form a little too long.

"Oh nothing much. I managed to teach Millicent the transfiguration from last class and Blaise finally understands the principles behind numerology."

"Draco the teacher," Harry teased lightly. Draco tightened the arm around him in response.

"And what did you do today kitten?"

"You know what I did," Harry hedged, skirting around his morning. "I played as a kitten."

"Hmm, but I believe you said something about going to Gryffindor," he asked lightly, his hand automatically rubbing on Harry's arm when he felt him tense slightly. He turned blue eyes to him. "Did something happen?"

"No," Harry whispered, not fully meeting the blue gaze. "Peeves was on a rampage so I didn't actually make it there..."

Harry felt a moment's panic when Draco's hand stopped moving but the teenager's voice was normal when he spoke next. "Peeves really is a handful. I'm glad you found something else to do, but you know you could have found me right?"

"I know Dray, but I thought it would be fun to explore. Everything is so different when I change."

"I suppose it would be," Draco allowed, returning his gaze to the ceiling.

As the minutes ticked by, Harry's worry grew. While his mate gave no outward sign that there was anything wrong, he could not help but feel that Draco had found something lacking in his explanation. Nibbling his lip, he decided a distraction was in order. It was easier than ever, given the strange behaviour his mate was prone to exhibit on occasion.

In less time than it would take someone to bat an eyelash, Harry rolled himself on top of the veela, pressing their foreheads together. He had to stifle a peal of laughter as the blonde boy tensed beneath him. Blue eyes met his in surprise before adverting themselves as a heated flush worked its way unto the boy's face. Harry pecked the veela's nose briskly before rolling off, chuckling when the older boy sat up, face bright red as he stammered, "W-why did you do that!"

"I wanted to wrestle," Harry hedged, eyes sparkling. "I take it you don't want to play anymore?" He was careful to keep his voice innocent. He didn't fully understand why Draco acted like this on occasion (Mama had written them both a long letter, but Ron was Draco's age so he would also be going through puberty right? So why wasn't he blushing and stammering?), but it had its advantages, especially when he needed to distract the blonde. "Why are you blushing?"

"Y-you surprised me, that's all."

The way his mate fidgeted and ran a hand through his head, indicated otherwise and when he all but ran to his bedroom and closed the door, Harry tilted his head curiously. Would he act that way when he hit puberty? He hoped not.

It took Draco almost twenty minutes before Draco returned, acting normally. Harry had a moment's regret at his actions. As always after such episodes, Draco kept him at a slight distance, as if he was trying to prevent a reoccurrence. It would be at least another hour before the veela trusted himself not to start back blushing before he would allow Harry to snuggle back against him. It was a slight
hindrance, Harry knew, but at least it seemed that the veela had completely forgotten about his earlier thoughts.

"Harry did you hear?" Ron asked with a wide grin as soon as he reached the younger boy. Hermione bore an entirely different expression besides him. She looked extremely peeved.

"No, what?" he asked curiously, shifting his bag to a more comfortable position on his shoulder.

"The first years got pranked!" the redhead announced with a loud laugh. "Last night someone threw itching powder all over their beds," he finished still chuckling.

Besides him, Hermione clucked in disapproval. Harry did not share Ron's mirth. Instead, his body stiffened and he forced a half smile onto his face when the redhead eyed him oddly.

"Could it be a coincidence?" he mused, as Hermione berated the boy for showing less maturity than their younger companion. If Harry did not find it amusing why should he?

However, Hermione could not know that Harry was wondering if there was a linkage to his last encounter with the first years. Somehow or another they had managed to slip some itching powder into his bag, which had him seriously uncomfortable later on when he had opened his bag. Thankfully, Draco not yet returned from Slytherin or else he would have had some explaining to do.

It really was strange, he thought, ducking away from Bloody Baron as they walked. He had not been anywhere near the first years that day, and he had had his bag with him the entire day. He still did not know how they had done it, but he was positive it was them, given how they shot him satisfied glances about it.

So, was it really only coincidental that the first years had been given a dose of their own medicine?

"Harry!" Hermione called, waving a hand in front of his face. "Do you need Draco?" she asked in concern.

He blinked at her bemusedly. "What? Why?"

"Well you did pass the tree," Ron answered. It was only then that he realised that they were already outside. Ron was sprawled under the said tree and he saw that he was indeed a good distance away from it, leaving Hermione with no choice but to fetch him.

"Um, sorry" he blushed, walking back. "I was just thinking."

"Don't be turning into Mione here," Ron teased, earning himself a mock-glare.

As always, the pair started bickering light-heartedly. Harry shot his best friends a fond look, before falling backwards on the grass, gazing up at the sky through the leaves.

Was it only a coincidence?

Eventually the older Gryffindors drifted into silence, and drawing himself away from his thoughts, Harry turned slightly to watch them. Hermione had retrieved a book from her bag and had it open on her lap. Besides her, Ron was absently stroking the glossy grass, enjoying it while it lasted. It was already half way through November and it would only be a few more weeks before snow stifled the grass. Looking at the pair, no one would guess that only minutes before they had been arguing.
Feeling slightly mischievous, Harry stirred the air with his hand, causing the pages of Hermione's book to turn. The bushy haired girl frowned slightly, noticing that there was no other wind around. Harry did it three more times, on one occasion, sending a tuft of grass into Ron's face before the girl realised who the culprit was.

"Harry Potter!" she growled, snapping the book shut. Harry chortled, scrambling from his position as the witch reached for her wand, a playful glint in her eyes. He was too slow to avoid her spell and laughed loudly as he was dangled in the air.

"Mione!" he shouted as she levitated him upwards into the tree, setting him down on a branch.

"Yes?" she asked pertly, reopening her book.

"Let me down!"

"Nope."

"Ron!"

"You're on your own mate," Ron said, grinning up from his spot on the ground.

"Get yourself down," the girl declared nonchalantly. "I should be able to finish the..."

"Finish what?" Harry asked innocently, from behind her. He chuckled as she stared at him in surprise while Ron stared (rather dumbly) up to the vacant tree.

"How..."

"Magic," he said simply, plopping down besides her. He wondered how long it would take them to figure out that he had simply transformed and jumped?

They lazed most of the afternoon away, determined to enjoy the last days of the weather before it grew too cold to be comfortable outdoors. Harry pressed himself up against Hermione, resting his head on her shoulder as he read alongside her. Ron, after complaining several times about their activity, settled in for a nap on Hermione's other side. Harry could not help but notice how on occasion, the witch's hand wandered down to run through the sleeping redhead's hair.

It was after four when they were joined by Ron's older brothers who completely destroyed the peaceful atmosphere that had surrounded the trio. The youngest Weasley boy groaned as Fred blew loudly into his ear, waking him while George pulled Harry away from Hermione, sticking his tongue out at her.

Harry sat between the twins easily, laughing merrily at the slightly off-coloured jokes they made. He really enjoyed their company. If anything, they were more childish than he was on occasion. However, his friends did not share his enthusiasm. Ron suffered from their jokes enough at home that he was glad for the escape Hogwarts offered, while Hermione simply did not enjoy such overly loud persons. Therefore, within a few minutes of the twins arrival, they excused themselves.

"It took them long enough," Fred said jovially as soon as they were out of hearing range.

"I thought that I would have to start farting," George agreed.

"You wanted them to leave?" Harry asked curiously, while poking through the contents of their bags curiously. They always had something cool with them. As he expected, he found a pack of Bertha's Every Flavour Beans and the three set about consuming them, alternating smiling or grimacing at the
taste.

"Uh-huh."

"Did Ron tell you about the first years Harrykins?"

The answer put Harry on edge immediately and he carefully chewed the honey flavoured bean before responding. "He did."

"Good. Do you approve?" Fred asked with a gleam in his eye.

"You did that?"

"Yes, and its only the start!" George declared.

It seemed to Harry that there was something that they were not telling him. "Why are you after them?" he asked cautiously.

"Because we know what they're doing to you." George deadpanned, all hint of amusement fading from his eyes. Besides him, his twin bore the same expression.

Immediately Harry realised that to feign ignorance would be futile, so he didn't even try to hedge.

"How?" was all he said, regarding them. Was there a possibility that other people also knew?

"Well, a certain lion was in the common room and you all thought he was sleeping."

"Neville?" he questioned as he furrowed his brows as he tried to recall what they were talking about. The last time he had been confronted by them in the common room was what, October?

"Yes Neville," Fred confirmed. "You know how he is. We found him pacing around a corridor talking to himself."

"He couldn't decide whether or not to tell a teacher what he had heard or if to ask you about it."

"We managed to get him to tell us everything he had heard."

"After that we did our own investigations. From what we gathered, it was not the first time, was it Harry?"

"No," he admitted, scratching his arm nervously. He had never seen the twins so serious. Their eyes glinted in a way he had never before witnessed. Moreover, there was an edge to the fifth years' voices that reminded him that they were almost approaching adulthood. "It wasn't."

"Thought so," they said in union, sharing a look.

"Well," George continued. "We were going to go to a teacher because bullying is a serious thing."

"But then we decided that you had your own reasons for not telling, right?"

"Right."

"And, we figured that it had to do something with a certain veela not letting you out of his sight if he found out, right?"

"Right."
"So, we decided to take matters into our own hands. We overhead them laughing about you and itching powder and we put two and two together."

"And so, we found some and put it in all their rooms."

"Why?" Harry questioned, not understanding the reasoning behind last action.

"Well, you wouldn't tell anyone, so we decided to punish them ourselves."

"And it's only the start. Since you won't tell a teacher, we'll handle it until it stops."

"Won't you get in trouble?" Harry asked, tugging on his lip. He really was grateful that the twins were on his side and would do this for him, but not at the risk to themselves.

"We won't get caught," they said simply. "No one has been able to trace the powder back to us and they won't unless we...or you...tell."

"I wouldn't," he stated earnestly.

"Good, then we're fine. We'll be careful Harrykins," George teased, his expression softening.

"Are you okay with this?" Fred questioned, seeing the dubious look in his eyes.

"I am," he declared after a moment's thought. "They really have been mean to me...and without any real cause. I can't tell anyone without being smothered and maybe if we prank them a few times they'll stop."

"That's the general idea," George agreed with a mischievous grin.

"Well, let's get planning!"

And so, with the twin's help, Harry got his revenge on the first years. By the end of the subsequent week, the eleven year olds were in a state of panic. Somehow, over thirty spiders of various species 'wandered' into the first year dorms. The girls ended up camping out in the common room as no one could get into the bedrooms to get rid of the pests. Although the Head of House had her suspicions, Filch announced after a search that there was a crack in a wall that led to a spider nest. It didn't explain the fact that there were multiple species of the creature, but the matter was eventually dropped.

Twice now, they had gotten salted juice and sugared food, but when tasted by someone else, nothing wrong was detected. The first year boys' bathroom was chilly no matter the time and the hot water had a habit of suddenly running ice cold. Harry never witnessed any of these things personally, and instead, with a twinkle in his eyes, listened to his friends' accounts. The twins also strove to ensure that whenever the firsties harassed Harry, they received an extra special treatment. However, even when a trio of the first years had to run screaming from a mud slinging Peeves, they did not learn their lesson.

Indeed, by the second week into his revenge, they determined that there was a link between Harry and the pranks. Grabbing at the opportunity to get him in trouble, they had ran to their head of house. When the said teacher asked him to remain after class, Harry felt as if someone had kicked him in the gut. Did she know? His mate eyed him questioningly, but he shrugged to show that he did not know what it was all about.

Once the room cleared, he walked to the professor's desk, standing before it. "You wanted to see me Ma'am?" he asked softly, hoping his nervousness was not apparent.
It was, for the teacher smiled kindly at him. "You aren't in any trouble Harry."

"I'm not?" he inquired, with a tilt of his head. "Then why?"

"Harry," she began, leaning forward. "I'm sure you're aware that all of the first years lions have been pranked...numerous times I might add."

"My friends have told me," he allowed, not fully meeting her eyes.

"The first years seem to think that you are involved."

Harry's eyes were wide as he met her. "Me?" he repeated, shock evident in his tone, not so much at the accusation, but at the fact that they had complained to a teacher after all they had done to him.

"Yes you," she confirmed. Harry swallowed, as he waited for her to start scolding him. Instead, his shock grew at the woman's next words. "They are very fortunate that I did not demand that they apologize to you personally."

"Huh, what?" he blinked.

"There is no way possible that you are involved in these matters," she continued. "You don't live in the dorms and are rarely in the tower. Someone who isn't there can't have done anything," she finished.

Harry just nodded his head, as he felt relief wash over him...along with a bit of guilt. This was deception wasn't it? Because technically, he did have a part to play in the pranks...but he didn't actually do them...so that didn't actually fit into the category of being actively involved. Right? So, he shouldn't feel as if he was lying right?

He didn't have an answer to that.

"I want you to be careful Harry."

"Why ma'am?" he inquired, redirecting his attention.

"Because I do not have an actual suspect in the matter. In any other circumstances, I would say the Weasley twins, but this doesn't fall into their style." She tapped her fingers together. "They usually claim credit for their pranks and they never focus on the same group of people consistently. Moreover, they have taken after harassing Filch these past few days," she said, a slight smile playing at her lips with the last line.

It was well known that the transfiguration professor was not overly fond of the caretaker, nor his cat. Rumour had it that Mrs. Norris had attacked the professor years ago during a summer vacation when she was in her cat form and Filch despite knowing of the professor's form and the fact there were no student pets left in the castle, had locked her away in a dungeon. It had taken almost a day for a concerned Albus to release her. The caretaker had never apologised, and since that day the woman had an animosity for the man. It was the reason she always turned her backs on attacks towards the man or his cat and rarely assigned detentions to students with him.

Bringing herself back, she focussed on the small boy before her. "I want you to be careful Harry. You're around their age and I would hate for you to start falling victim to such incidents or for Mr. Malfoy to start exacting retribution."

"O-okay ma'am," he agreed softly. Despite his earlier thoughts, guilt was starting to eat at him and he knew if he did not leave soon, he would probably start blabbing the truth. That would not be good.
"You must be hungry," she said, wrongfully interpreting his expression. The professor leaned back on her chair. "Run along now Harry, but remember, be careful."

Grateful for the dismissal, Harry left hurriedly, torn once more between relief for not being caught but feeling guilty for the deception. He stopped short when he saw Draco leaning against a wall with his hands folded across himself further down the corridor.

Harry stared at him for only seconds before running forward, wrapping his arms around the startled veela. It was instinctive for him. He was upset and here was his dominant, confident and strong. It took only a moment before he felt Draco unfurl himself and return the embrace, bending his head to press against Harry's hair.

"I'm here," he reassured, even though he did not know what was bothering his little mate. "You're fine."

"Can we go home?" Harry asked, voice muffled in Draco's robes. "Please?"

"Of course."

Not wanting to walk, Harry shifted to his kitten form. Draco shrunk their bags before he picked him up, carrying him back to their rooms. Once their, Harry returned to his normal self, but wrapped his arms around Draco again. His veela ran his hand through his hair, talking to him softly until the boy was calm.

Slowly, Harry eased his grip, shifting himself until his head was cradled on the older boy's lap. He smiled slightly as a hand reached down and brushed aside the swat of hair that hid his scar. A thumb gently stroked across the lighting bolt while the boys simply stared into each other's eyes.

Harry sighed after a long time, reaching to grasp Draco's stroking hand. He pressed a kiss of gratitude to it, to comfortable to rise and kiss his cheek. He smiled as his mate returned the favour, bending downwards to kiss his forehead tenderly.

"Are you feeling better now?"

"I am," Harry said in a soft tone. He took a shuddering breath, closing his eyes for a moment before gathering his thoughts. Eyes still closed, he answered Draco's unspoken spoken question, relating his conversation with the professor.

The blonde did not interrupt as he let his hand resume its stroking. When the dark haired child fell silent, he voiced his thoughts. "Why would they accuse you in the first place?"

"I-I don't know."

Draco's movement firmed a bit as he felt the slight tension creeping into Harry's frame. "Relax little kitten. I'm not mad at you."

"Okay."

There was a brief pause before he spoke again. "Kitten, stay away from those first years would you? I know you have not interacted much with them so far, but I really don't like them accusing you of something you had nothing to do with. Stay still kitten," he bid when Harry started squirming guiltily. "Can you do that for me?"

"Yes Draco, I will stay away from them."
"Good. Thank you for not arguing with me on this."

Harry did not meet the twins again until the next day, and even without him saying a word, the pair could see that he had reconsidered. Without speaking, they led him to the grounds and settled down.

"I don't want to do this anymore," he stated bluntly, looking at the pair.

"Why little brother?" Fred asked softly.

He explained to them everything, McGonagall, Draco and the extreme guilt he felt for lying. "Can we just go back to before?" he finished. "Just playing and exploring? I don't want to do it..."

"That's okay Harry," George reassured quickly, reaching out to pat his head. "We understand. We won't include you in anymore pranks."

It was not until he heard a story days later about the first years being stuck to their desks after Charms, did he realise that the twins never agreed to stop. They winked at him from across the table and he offered them a slight smile. In a way, he was appreciative for their efforts to help him, but he couldn't help but worry that they would be caught and punished because of him.
Chapter 33

All chatter ceased as Professor McGonagall entered the classroom. Backs straightened, smiles faded while two students paled slightly, shooting each other nervous glances when they noticed the previous week's assignments floating in behind the professor to settle in a neat pile on a corner of the woman's desk.

The aged witch greeted the class as she sat, drawing her roll towards her. Once all had been accounted for or their absence explained, the teacher moved on to the day's lesson, expounding on the last class' lecture. A sense of pride filled the witch as she watched the world's future leaders scribbling away diligently, absorbing her every word. Of course, there were a few students who gazed around them idly, but at least they were in the minority.

The class passed in that vein and when she had covered the day's material, the transfiguration teacher bid them to put away their notes before reaching for their marked essays. She felt their eyes upon her as she opened the first rolled parchment. Their anticipation was almost palpable. This was worth ten percent of their final mark after all, a ten percent that some of them would desperately need come end of year. Unlike other teachers, there was no particular order to the names as she called the students forward. She offered either praise or mild scolding to each student as they approached her desk.

Miss Granger's essay was acceptable, although the teacher sincerely wished that the girl would take her words to heart and stop simply repeating what textbooks said. McGonagall sometimes considered pulling the girl aside for a pop quiz with answers that had to be reasoned out and not learnt. It would be interesting to see if under such circumstances, the witch managed to receive her usual grade.

Mr. Goyle's work warranted some praise. True he had only scraped an A by one point, but at least, while simply written, there was the noticeable absence of atrocious spelling. Moreover, the Slytherin's handwriting no longer resembled chicken scratch and the professor had actually been able to read it without wishing for a glass of fire-whiskey to make the task less painful.

Mr. Zabini's work was its usual standard, while Miss Bulstrude seemed to have taken her words to heart finally and had researched the topic more thoroughly.

Mr. Weasley received a mild scolding for barely managing an A but contrastingly, Mr. Longbottom was praised for finally reaching the same grade and urged to continue. The pleased smile on the boy's face was enough to remind the professor to send a note to the boy's grandmother, asking her to congratulate the boy for at least passing instead of her usual criticism. Kind words did wonders, especially for one like Mr. Longbottom.

Minerva could not restrain a slight smile as a dark head popped up from a conversation with his partner at the sound of his name. The pair had been lost in their own world, seemingly unaware of the activity occurring around them. The child fairly ran to the table, a testament to his age and offered her a bright smile.

"Hello ma'am, how did I do?" he inquired with a slight tilt of head.

"You did very well Mr. Potter," she praised lightly, handing him the parchment. "Concise and comprehensive as always." Then, lowering her voice slightly, she said, "And congratulations."

The boy made a confused sound, but returned to his seat nonetheless. Mr. Malfoy was next, and the professor offered him similar praise. Discretely observing them while she called forward another student, her lips twitched as she saw the younger of the two gape before being embraced and kissed
on the head. Mr. Potter had earned a good five more marks than his mate, something she knew he had been striving to achieve. She was genuinely curious to see which one of them would earn the higher ranking at the end of the year.

As the last student returned to their seat, the teacher folded her hands on her lap before setting her sight on the two students whom had not been called to her desk. The pair were pensive she noted, no doubt bracing themselves for the tongue-lashing that was definitely coming their way. The manner in which she cleared her throat had all the murmurings from around the classroom ceasing. Good, she wanted her students undivided attention, knowing full well that this would deter anyone else from following in the two boys' footsteps.

She cleared her throat again before speaking. "Mr. Thomas and Mr. Finnegan. Why are there no assignments to return for the both of you?"

Her words had the entire class tensing, even though only two among them were in trouble. The transfiguration teacher was one of the school's strictest, second only to Professor Snape. How foolish had those two been not to do her assignment? Professor Sprout yes, or even Professor Flitwick was understandable. But not to do Professor McGonagall's assignment...their own Head of House? What had they been thinking?

While these thoughts ran through the minds of the majority of the students, Harry was pressing closer to his mate. Draco's thumb stroked soothing circles over the skin of Harry's palm, surmising that the promise of harsh words being exchanged was upsetting his little mate. If there were any lingering effects of Harry's previous life, this was the main one. Loud angry tones, especially from adults tended to leave the younger boy skittish and fearful. Draco's touch served as a reminder that Harry would not come under any harm and feeling the message, Harry forced himself to take deep breathes, striving to remain calm.

"And answer gentlemen," the teacher demanded, a hard edge to her voice. "Mr. Finnegan?"

There was an awkward silence before the student replied. "I didn't finish it and I didn't want to hand in an incomplete one." There was a hint of attitude in his voice that had a few students questioning his sanity. The teacher caught it as well, for she rose from her desk, her gaze sharpening as she approached the pair's desk.

"Why was it not completed? There was ample time."

"I didn't understand it."

Not replying, the professor shifted her gaze to the other student. "And you Mr. Thomas?"

"Same thing," he muttered, not meeting the witch's gaze.

"Hmm...I see," the professor answered. "So the only explanation you have is that you did not understand it?"

"Yes Professor."

"Hmph." The witch spun, surveying the class before settling on one student in particular. "Mr. Longbottom."

"Y-yes Professor?" the lion stuttered, afraid that the teacher's ire had turned on him.

"What would you do if you do not understand an assignment?"
"I...I'd ask someone?" he answered, although it sounded more like a question than anything else. The boy breathed in relief when the teacher gave him a firm nod before turning to another.

"Miss Greengrass!"

"Professor?"

"Whom would you ask for help?"

"A classmate Professor," the snake replied promptly and confidently.

"Excellent. And what about you Mr. Nott?"

"I would ask a senior student for assistance Professor."

"And you Mr. Zabini?" she asked further, spinning to regard the other side of the class.

"A prefect Professor."

"Ahh...Miss Granger, what would you do?"

"I would check the library Professor," she replied softly casting a sympathetic look to the duo who were attempting to slide down in their seats, having realised their professor's intentions.

"Mr. Malfoy?" she pressed on. "Whom would you have asked?"

"My head of house," he answered.

"Mr. Potter?"

"I would ask Draco," he said softly. His statement earned a few rueful laughs despite the situation and even the professor's anger lessened a bit as the blonde pressed a kiss to the child's hair, chuckling softly.

"And if Mr. Malfoy was not present?" she continued, looking into beguiling green eyes.

"I would ask you ma'am."

"And why would you come to me Mr. Potter?"

"'Cuz you're the teacher."

Getting the answer she had been searching from, she returned her attention to the pair of students. From the corner of her eye, she noticed Mr. Malfoy whispering something into his mate's ear. Judging from the slight frown that marred the boy's face, followed by a whispered sentence, she guessed that Harry's grammar had been corrected, as the veela was prone to doing.

"Now," she continued, regarding the pale boys. "How is it that the other students know what to do and not the two of you?"

"..."

"Well?"

"..."

"I'll tell you why," the teacher snapped, growing weary of their silence. "You did not submit the
essays because unless I am mistaken, you waited until the last minute to do it. Obviously for said reasons, you were not able to do it, as a large amount of research would have been required, which is why you were given ample time to complete it." The guilty looks in their eyes was enough to convince the professor that she had hit on the truth. "This is not a matter of not understanding, it is a matter of bad time management."

Before she could continue the lunch bell chimed, for which some of the students were eternally grateful. "You are dismissed," the teacher said to the other students. "Complete your readings."

There was the sound of scraping chairs as the class hurried out and once the door had closed behind them, she continued to tear strips off the remaining boys.

* *

Draco thought it best to avoid the Great Hall and thus, he and Harry ate in their rooms. Harry was grateful for his mate's thoughtfulness and snuggled close to his side as they ate quietly. More than once, Draco stroked him softly, earning him small smiles from Harry. By the time the lunch things had been cleared away, the younger boy was fine, his lingering nervousness dissipating.

While Draco removed their morning books, there was a knock on their entrance. Harry grinned as both his and his mate's friends poured into the room, greeting him.

"We thought we would find you guys here," Millicent said as she flopped unto the carpet. Ron and Hermione sat on the divan while Blaise claimed an armchair near to Millicent.

"And what exactly are you all doing here?" Draco mock growled as he closed his bedroom door.

"Well," Hermione replied pertly, "since you decided to abandon the Hall, we decided to join you here."

"That and the fact the school won't shut up about what happened," Blaise added.

"They found out already?" Harry asked in surprise, sitting on the arm of Draco's chair.

"They were gossiping about it before we got there," Ron snorted, kicking his bag lightly. "How they manage it, I'll never figure out."

His words earned a round of laughter.

The group talked about various matters before they went their separate ways, the three snakes to Herbology and the lions to Charms.

"Bye Draco," Harry murmured, as he wrapped his hands around the taller boy. He sighed as the boy put a warm hand to his cheek for some seconds.

"See you at dinner little lion," he murmured in return, before easing away.

"And you wonder why girls always coo at the two of you," Ron stated, as he slung a casual arm around Harry's shoulders.

"Huh?"

"Don't study him," Hermione advised, shooting Ron a light glare. "You and Draco are cute together."

That started a light banter between the three that lasted until they reached the classroom. They were
not seated together. At the start of the year, Professor Flitwick had deemed it necessary to divide the class in terms of skills, which left the trio divided. Harry found himself working alone as his skills far surpassed any of his other classmates, even Draco.

The professor often praised his practical skills and Harry and felt a blossom of pride when he had been informed that not since his mother, had the man seen anyone with such talents. He expected great things from him in the future and especially looked forward to Harry's OWL and NEWT results, hypothesizing that he might even beat his mother's marks, who to date were the school's highest.

There was another reason why Harry worked alone in a corner of the class. Of late, Harry was given alternative tasks to complete than his classmates as the normal lessons came naturally to him. Separating him ensured that neither he nor his classmates were distracted. Thus, while the other students were trying to make wooden soldiers mobile, Harry had a small army littered around his table, coaxing them into a march in different formations. He had reached the point that they could manage it, but now he wanted to ingrain them with enough power so that they could sustain it for an extended time without him having to guide their movements.

His tongue peeked out of the corner of his mouth as he concentrated his energy, trying to transfer it. His eyes fell close as he guided his magic and when he relaxed, he beamed happily as the soldiers started to move around without his guidance. Deciding to push a little further, he instilled a bit more magic and smiled when some of them started beating drums silently while others blew on trumpets. He finished by imposing a radius on them so they would not fall of the table before slinking back unto his seat to rest.

As he relaxed, he looked around, judging the rest of the class' progress. From his vantage, he saw that a handful of Ravenclaws and Hermione had mastered the spell and were now trying to manipulate two of the soldiers simultaneously. He suppressed a grin at the strands of hair that stood on end on Hermione's head, a sure sign that she was concentrating. Neville's soldier remained motionless, while Ron's twitched on his desk, as if in the throes of death. His haggard expression was quite funny, Harry noted.

"Excellent work Harry!" a squeaky voice praised, drawing the veela mate away from his thoughts. "Thank you professor," he murmured, cheeks flushing lightly as the wizard continued to appraise the figurines, gushing over the thoroughness of the spell. "Such talent, like your mother," the teacher finished wistfully. Harry offered him a smile shy, neither of them seeing the glares that two students were shooting their way.

"What are you planning on doing with them?"

"Can you send them to Grandpa?" Harry requested, knowing that the headmaster would love to add the figurines to his collection.

"Wonderful idea!" The teacher waved his wand, transporting them to the headmaster's office. "Now, class does not dismiss for another half an hour. Would you like to help me with something?"

"I would," Harry replied. "What is it?"
"So enthusiastic!"

He followed the short man to the back of the class were a number of cages were lined together.

"The fifth years are having a practical with pixies soon," he explained as they walked. "They are very playful creatures and I have to plant things in here to keep them interested. I would be grateful if you could charm these objects for me. Can you do it?"

"It sounds like fun Professor," he assured the man, assessing the materials that were littered about.

"Thank you. You can do whatever you like with them once the pixies will be entertained."

"I'll do my best sir," Harry promised, flexing his fingers as the teacher left him. Harry hummed as he went about his new class, blocking out the sounds from around him as he worked.

Lost in his own world, he was unaware that the people who had glared at him earlier had discreetly been working their way towards the back of the classroom, snarls on their faces. Thus the child did not know what hit him. One moment, he was bent over, trying to coax a ball into changing colours and chiming whenever touched, the next he heard an alarmed shout before he was hit by a spell. The force of it flung him several inches and he hit his head against the side of the cage as he fell heavily to the floor.

As a throbbing pain built at his temple, Harry groaned as he heard a variety of sounds. His body urged him to surrender to darkness for a little while, as it would allow him release from the pain and he acquiscenced.

#

Severus knew something had happened the moment the piece of parchment popped unto his desk. It took only a quick scan of the message's content to confirm his thoughts. Crumpling it, he drew the attention of the seventh years to him. "I have to leave now," he said without preamble. "Complete your work and leave the samples on my desk. Anyone who does not leave their work station impeccable can spend a month dissecting frogs and flubberworms."

With the threat hanging in the air, the teacher went into his inner office, grabbed a handful of floo powder and shouted his destination. Years of practice had him walking out of the fireplace gracefully, although the expression on his face was a perfect countenance to it. A Hufflepuff recovering from a bout of wizard's flu would blame his medication for giving him hallucinations because there was no way that the greasy bat of the dungeons could look concerned, right?

"How is he?" Severus asked tersely, as he reached the nurse's side. The matron was in the process of smoothing the sheets around Harry's waist, and twisted slightly to give the man a reassuring look. His godson was wearing a pair of hospital pyjamas, and judging from the slackness in his jaw, Severus could tell that he was in a potion-induced slumber.

"He'll be fine Severus," Poppy stated softly. "He hit his head here," she indicated, pointing to a dark blue spot. The potions master hissed at the sight of it. "I sped up the process. It normally would have taken several hours to reach this stage, and I know he would not appreciate being stuck here waiting for complications."

"There is no sign of any though and so I was able to give him a sleeping potion. Poor thing had a dreadful headache," she sighed, "but he'll be right as rain when he wakes."

The matron broke off, not realising that the man had moved. The potions professor was now seated besides Harry, running his fingers though the hair on the boy's face. The look on the man's face had
the woman smiling tenderly.

"Professor Flitwick will be back shortly. He'll be able to explain what happened."

"Okay," Severus replied absently, thumb now running along Harry's cheek. Why did everything happen to his little brat? The man strongly doubted that Harry's injury had been completely accidental. Had Harry been in Defence or even Herbology, the professor could understand something going wrong.

But Charms was hardly an offensive driven class. There were no vicious plants, or dunderheads aiming the wrong way to hurt his bratling. Unless someone's teacup had hopped instead of waltzed and struck Harry, Severus was certain that he would have to go after a few people, while preventing his godson from doing the same.

"What happened little one?" he questioned with a sigh.

"I can answer that," replied a new voice, causing Severus to spin his head.

Looking at him with grave eyes was the Charms professor who approached him slowly. "How is he?"

"He'll be fine."

"That's good to know," the professor sighed, running a hand over his head.

"It wasn't an accident was it?" Severus asked, observing his former teacher carefully.

"Always the smart one weren't you," Flitwick quipped, with a sad smile. "No it wasn't. The culprits are currently with Minerva."

"Gryffindors?" Severus asked in an incredulous tone. The brave and noble lions...well not all were noble, he amended remembering his lover's past.

"I'm afraid so," the man replied, sighing once again.

"What exactly happened Filius?" the younger of the two demanded.

"Well," he began. The charms master told his former student about all that had preceded the attack before moving on to the crux of the matter. "I was assisting Miss Brown when one of my eagles shouted a warning. I turned and saw Mr. Boot pointing towards the two near Harry. They fired but I was able to intercept the spells with a diffusion charm. However because they collided near to Harry the backlash of power hit him. He was knocked off balance and hit his head against the cage as he fell. I stunned them and brought Harry up here before going back."

Severus' eyes were glinting with anger at that point as he thought of what could have happened. From what his colleague had said, he inferred that the pair had cast different spells, spells that possibly were not meant to be used together. He wondered if it was a sort of prank gone wrong, Minerva had been complaining that her first years were being harassed. However, why would they try to prank Harry so openly...and what had been the students' grouse with his beloved brat in the first place?

Filius' voice brought him out of his thoughts. "Minerva asked for you to join her when possible seeing that Harry is under your care while here."

"Hmm..."
"Now Severus," the man pointed out. "I doubt you will be able to take an administrative position on the matter seeing your relationship with him."

"Doesn't mean I can't put the fear of Merlin into them," he grumbled.

Draco cut off any reply from the other professor by running frantically into the room.

"Shit," Severus muttered, pushing Filius away from Harry's bedside before rising himself. Although Draco's appearance was normal, it would take him only a split second to decide to attack. He would definitely go after the charms master – a stranger – first. There was also the possibility that he would lash out at his own godfather, which was why Severus moved as well.

"Cub!" Draco called, tightening his grip on Harry's arms. His eyes noted the bruise on Harry's forehead and he gave a low growl. He had left Herbology when he felt Harry's presence dim significantly. At another time, he would not have been too worried. It was not uncommon for their link to dim when one was asleep but the decline was usually gradual not abrupt like how it had been.

He had been in the midst of potting a Dancing Willow when the connection had dimmed. Frowning lightly, he had prodded gently at their bond, and when there had been no response, realised that it meant that Harry was unable to respond. That realisation had him hurrying out of the green house, ignoring the calls from his friends and professor as he focussed on searching out Harry.

The moment he entered the wing, it was as if a spotlight shone itself on Harry, and everything and everyone else was ignored as he moved to the boy's bedside, throwing himself unto the bed and grasping Harry tightly. His mate's face was relaxed in sleep but he could not resist the urge to awaken him and make sure he was fine for himself.

"Cub!" he murmured, shaking him lightly.

He stopped when the skin around Harry's eyes crinkled slightly before opening, revealing drowsy green orbs. "Cub," he breathed, relief shining in his eyes.

"Dominant?" Harry slurred.

"I'm here. How are you?"

"M'Sleepy," he mumbled, reaching up to loosely lace his fingers with those resting on his chest. He gave a soft sigh when Draco cupped his cheek with his other hand.

"There's a bruise on your face. Does it hurt?"

"Hm? Not really."

"Can you get rid of it?" he asked, not liking it in the least.

"M'sleepy."

"Come on cub, get rid of it and then you can sleep."

"Pwom's?"

"Promise."

"'Kay."

Draco felt Harry tighten his grip on his fingers slightly before he saw a light blue hue surround the
darkened area. When it faded, the bruise was gone. He moved to praise Harry but stopped when he saw that the boy had already succumbed to sleep. Smiling slightly, and glad now that the boy was alright, he gently freed his fingers before running a hand through his hair.

It was only then that he realised there was someone near them. Reacting on instinct, he turned, prepared to strike out against the individual with his talons. His action was stopped though by the hand that caught his wrist mere inches from the person's face. He blinked in confusion, feeling the familiarity of the touch before raising his head slightly to peer into glinting black eyes. "Uncle Severus?"

"Yes Draco," the man replied, his tone belying the slight fright he had experienced at the surprise attack. He thanked Merlin for fast reflexes or he might have had another use for the bed he was sitting on.

The teenager took several deep breathes but it was not until his talons had faded away that Severus released his wrist.

"I'm sorry," Draco offered, rubbing a hand sheepishly along his neck. "I didn't sense you."

"Which alone should have told you I was not an enemy," Severus said in a slightly reprimanding tone. He had not been best friends with Narcissa and Lucius for nothing. He considered himself an expert on all matters veela. "Perhaps Narcissa needs to increase your lessons on your nature."

"Perhaps," he allowed, sighing. The man was right. He had been taught over the holidays about how to harness and use his powers. He should have remembered that if someone was not a threat to he or his mate, he would disregard them in times of trouble. "I'll try harder Uncle."

"That's all I ask. Since Harry has once again healed himself, shall I have him moved to your rooms?"

"I would like that Uncle Sev."

"Stay here and I'll see to it."

Fifteen minutes later, Severus walked with Harry through the floo while Draco followed with his belongings. After the still slumbering boy was tucked into bed, Severus and his godson settled in the living room with cups of tea.

"I'm surprised you aren't grilling me for details," Severus said eventually as he poured himself a second cup. "Nor are you as panicked about the incident as I expected."

The blonde gave him a slight smile. "The greenhouse is filled with the plants used in calming droughts and they're in full bloom. I suppose its effects have not really worn off."

"I see."

"Besides, it was Charms. I am not going to become extremely angry for an accident. What happened, did Longbottom blow up a table or something?" he finished with a slight twitch of the lips. A frown creased the veela's forehead when his uncle failed to respond in like. "It was an accident right Uncle?" The man's hesitation to answer was enough for him. "What happened?" he growled, his hands tightening their grip on his teacup.

The man set his own on the table, and removed Draco's as he thought about his words carefully.

"It's my personal belief that it was a prank gone wrong," Severus said slowly, skirting around the issue for now. By the time he was done talking, Draco believed that the 'prank' was directed on a
group of students and not necessarily on Harry alone.

The man did not feel too guilty about the lie because prank or not, should Draco feel that they were a threat against Harry, nothing less than several stunners would restrain him from attacking the students. And no matter how just it would be in the circumstances, Severus was not up for explaining to some parents why their sons were in pieces. Luckily his godson bought his words, sighing at the stupidity of the lion third years.

"Not even Uncle Sirius would try a prank in class. Were they trying to get caught?" he asked rhetorically. "Make sure they don't do it again would you Uncle Sev? Or at least leave Harry out of their nonsense. Prank or not, no one should get hurt."

"I will," Severus reassured. "I'm supposed to meet with Minerva anyway about the matter. Actually I should go now," he finished rising. "You'll be fine here right?"

"Yes. No doubt Blaise and Millicent will show up eventually wondering what happened."

"That they will. Harry will probably sleep for several hours yet. I'll let you know what happens."

"Thanks Uncle Sev. Bye."

"Goodbye Dragon." With those parting words, the potions master stepped into the floo, heading for the transfigurations office.

"I was just going to call for you," Gryffindor's professor stated without preamble as he emerged. He raised an eyebrow at the harried expression on her face.

"Why?" he asked, shooting a look to the pair of third years. He was about to glare at them when his eyes fell on about ten smaller students clustered together behind them, all of them looking extremely nervous. "What are your first years doing here Professor?" he asked, letting his eyes rove over them. "Are these two responsible for the pranks against them as well?"

"Not exactly. Apparently they're all involved in the matter against Harry."

"All?" he asked, elevating his brow again in mild surprise.

"Yes all," she replied tight-lipped. Turning back to the group, she gestured to the third years. "You will tell the potions master what you have just told me."

Severus leaned back against the desk, not entirely sure about what he was about to hear. By the time they were through, the potions master was filled with conflicting emotions. The overriding one was anger, but he truly could not decide whom he was more angry with...the group of students shaking before him, or a certain little boy sleeping in his bed for not saying a word about what had been happening the past few weeks.
Chapter 34

Three heads turned at the sound of an opening door, while a relieved smile worked its way unto the face of one as the pre-teen stood in the doorway. The boy was yawning widely, one hand rubbing at his eye in a cute gesture even as he walked towards the veela on the armchair, flopping bonelessly onto his lap which garnered an "Oof!" from the blonde haired teenager. Harry ignored the sound, snuggling closer to him with a contented sigh.

His 'seat' knew from the lax way the boy relaxed on him, that it would take less than a minute for him to drift back into a sound sleep. Normally he would have left him, but really did not think he could stand the ribbing from his friends in the interim.

"We have company little one," he whispered into the closest ear, chuckling lightly when Harry grumbled sleepily. It was not until he blew a steady stream of air into the boy's ear that Harry cracked an eyelid, shifting until Draco was forced to encircle him with his arms, ensuring that he did not fall off with all of his wriggling.

"Who's here?" Harry mumbled into Draco's shirt as he rubbed at his eye again. When no response was immediately offered, he sighed, leaving the comfort of his mate's shirt to look around him drowsily. He saw that it was his mate's Slytherin friends, sprawled on the carpet, with textbooks scattered around them. It was only then that Harry registered the book digging most uncomfortably into his shin, causing him to shift slightly to relieve the pressure before plopping his head back down against Draco's shoulder.

"Hi Millie, hi Blaise," he greeted. "What 'cha doing?"

"We're making History notes," Millicent replied with a grimace. "The point of it is questionable."

Blaise and Draco laughed ruefully. It was a common known fact that Millicent hated History with a passion. The only reason she was bothering was that her parents would leave her at her great aunt's house over the Christmas holidays if she did not pass everything. And, three weeks with Great Aunt Ida was pure torture indeed. It was motivation enough for her to study, although it did not stop her from complaining.

"How are you feeling Har-Har?" Blaise inquired closing his textbook.

"Better."

"You must still be sleepy," the Italian born wizard noted, as he sat up. "We've yet to get a complete sentence out of you," he finished in a teasing tone.

Harry's only response was to stick out his tongue at the teenager, pointedly ignoring the light rap Draco gave his knee.

"Blaise is right cub," Draco told his mate, rubbing his arm. "Perhaps you need to rest some more?"

"Hungry."

"No wonder," Millicent chuckled, waving her quill idly. "It's one of the few things that wake boys up."

"And you will know this how?" Draco asked with a raised eyebrow.
"Because if I want Blaise before midday on Sundays, I have to waft a bit of food under his nose. He nearly bit my finger one time!"

"That, my dear, was deliberate," Blaise retorted.

"Behave children," Draco ordered laconically, cutting off a potential verbal spar. Looking down at Harry, he continued. "Why don't you go wash up hmm? I'll see about some food in the meantime."

"Treacle tart?"

"I'll see what I can do," Draco reassured, gently pushing the boy off him.

It was several minutes before Harry ambled out of the washroom, considerably more awake than before. He batted at his damp fringe, as he closed the door behind him before stopping short, looking around him questioningly. "Was I dreaming or did we not just have company?" he asked the teenager uncovering a tray.

"They left," the blonde answered as he straightened. "They decided to give us some privacy."

"Oh...they could have stayed for dinner."

"Dinner doesn't start for about another forty or so minutes cub," Draco pointed out, patting the space besides him.

"What?" Harry's brows furrowed in confusion.

"Uncle Severus brought you back down here around half two. It's now a little after five."

"Then why am I so hungry?" he mused, before chewing.

"Perhaps the potions cub."

They lapsed down into silence while Harry ate. Draco had settled for a simple tea plate. He would have ordered the same for Harry but he had a sneaking suspicion that the remnants of the medication would render the boy drowsy a lot earlier than normal and he would not want him to wake in the middle of the night seeking sustenance if it could be avoided.

Draco was enjoying a second cup of tea when a rolled parchment materialised next to the tray. Eyeing it curiously, he swallowed the last of his tea before reaching for it. Harry took no notice of the new item, too intent on enjoying his second treacle tart. So good, he hummed to himself before grinning impishly when some filling leaked out staining his fingers. A quick peep ensured that his mate was not paying attention and taking advantage of it; he abandoned propriety and gave his hand a good long swipe with his tongue almost gurgling in delight at the taste.

He continued to lick his fingers clean, discretely keeping an eye on Draco whose expression grew more and more puzzled.

"This is odd," he murmured half to himself.

"What is?" Harry inquired as reaching for the last piece of the tart he had placed on his lap.

"This note is from Uncle Severus. He asks for me to bring you to Professor McGonagall's office if you wake up before eight. If not, we're to see him in the morning in his quarters."

"That is odd," Harry agreed, after he had swallowed.
"I know. He said that you would not be needed. Perhaps something else came up. I'll tell him we'll be there shortly. There's no point in delaying."

"Okay. I'll go change."

"Just wash up and put on a robe," Draco directed as he summoned a quill. "There's no sense in you changing out of your pyjamas just to put them back on."

"I thought you said never to go out in them?"

"That was when you lions had the bright idea to have a pyjama day," Draco deadpanned. "Besides, your robe will be closed."

"Oh yeah," Harry muttered, recalling the event in their second year. It never did come off as Professor McGonagall had been waiting patiently for her lions in the common room. One look into the woman's glinting eyes had sent the students racing back to their dorm rooms to change. Somehow though, the Weasley twins had escaped her notice much to the school's amusement. Not even the detentions they had received stopped them from bragging.

"Go on Harry, it won't do to keep them waiting."

"Well it's not like they know I'm awake yet," Harry grumbled as he left. After securing his robe, he went to his dresser to neaten his hair. He emitted a light yelp when an insect of some variety nipped his hand lightly.

"Bad bug!" he scolded the retreating creature as he scratched at the spot that itched slightly.

It was only a mild irritation, pale in comparison to the first years itching powder and...Harry froze with his hand hovering over the brush he had been reaching for. Wait...it couldn't be that, could it? His mate had said that Harry's presence was unnecessary, so could it be that he was being summoned for another matter, something bad enough that Uncle Sevvy would demand their presence as soon as possible.

What if the first years had found a way to successfully blame him for the pranks, and the Professor believed them this time. If that was the case, she would have called for his Uncle – any disciplinarian matters with him and Draco fell under their Uncle's jurisdiction. But maybe the first years hadn't found out about him but instead had caught the twins?

He doubted that they would rat on him, but still...the possibility was there that she could have gleaned it from their minds if they were broadcasting it loud enough. And once confronted with that they would have no choice but to confess... And if the Professor knew about his part in it, then she would also be aware that he had lied to her earlier when she had questioned him.

This was not good.

"Harry!" Draco called from the other room, drawing him from his thoughts.

"C-coming!" he shouted back, hoping the quiver in his voice had not been noticed. He couldn't shake the feeling that he was going to get into trouble, and not only with his head of house or Uncle. Once Draco found out, he would press further, asking why Harry had helped pranked them, and once he had admitted why, all hell would break loose from there.

As Harry left the safety of his bedroom and grasped some of the floo powder he was offered, he couldn't help but wish he had some way out of what was about to occur.
When Draco had replied to the missive, the deputy head mistress had added their fireplace temporarily to her floo network, wanting them there as quickly as possible. The teachers turned to the transportation hub when the fire suddenly flared before turning green. Immediately afterwards, the Malfoy heir stepped through graciously, nimbly stepping aside for his mate who stumbled out, gripping Draco's proffered arm to steady himself.

Harry took the opportunity to press his face to Draco's arm for a few seconds, drawing some comfort from it before he faced the occupants of the room. His heart rate increased incrementally when a glance around the room confirmed his fears. Seated on the other side of the room in transfigured seats were all of the first years whom had harassed him and whom he in turn had pranked.

All of them were eyeing him, and as he glanced to each one of them, he was slightly perplexed at the lack of animosity or malice in their eyes. Instead, he saw an emotion in their depths that he could not readily identify and so continued around the room until he saw Dean and Seamus.

His confusion grew as all of the negativity that he usually associated with the first years hit him when his gaze met them. What on earth? Never before had his year mates looked at him like that. True, they were not particularly close, nor did he really consider them as his friends, but still, why the blatant dislike?

Still mulling on that thought, Harry turned to the teachers. His head of house's lips were compressed in that way that implied that she were highly annoyed. Moreover, her fingers tapped against the desk in an agitated motioned that quickened when her gaze wondered to the side of the room where the Gryffindors sat.

Wait, she was annoyed with them? That didn't make sense, Harry pondered. All her annoyance should be levelled on him, not them.

It was the same with his Uncle Sevvy. The thunderous expression on his face was obviously directed at the other students. That was confirmed when he looked at them and the lines on his face relaxed considerably...although...was that a flash of disappointment when their eyes met? Harry could not be certain.

Next to him, the veela noted the obvious tension in the room, and briefly wondered about the first years' presence. He shrugged after a second, dismissing them. Probably Finnegan and Thomas had done something against them too. They weren't his concern in the least, only Harry. That being said...

"Good afternoon Professor McGonagall, Uncle Severus. You sent for us?" he greeted politely.

"That we did Mr. Malfoy," the Gryffindor witch responded with a small nod. "How are you feeling Mr. Potter?"

"I'm feeling better ma'am," Harry said cautiously, waiting for the scolding to begin.

Draco put down the odd note in Harry's voice to the presence of Finnegan and Thomas. Of course his mate would be cautious after what they had perpetrated against him earlier. It was best to hurry this along so he could get Harry back home for a nice relaxing evening.

"Might I inquire as to our presence Professor? Uncle Severus had stated that it would be unnecessary."

"That was true Draco," the potions master replied before the deputy headmistress could even open her mouth. "However, while investigating, Professor McGonagall uncovered something that
necessitated your presence." Even though the man had been addressing the veela, his cool gaze was on the other boy the entire time, nothing the way he shied away from his gaze.

Here it comes, Harry thought, toe snubbing against the floor.

"Mr. Potter," his head of house called, causing him to raise his head.

"Ma'am?"

The two professors shared a speaking glance before she addressed him once again. "You've seen the other students that are here right?" A nod. "Very well, can you tell is why they would be here?"

The odd question drew a confused sound from one mate while the other nipped his lip.

Harry knew that he should just come out and say it and get it over with, but didn't have the courage to back up the thought. Thus he tried to deflect away from what he thought the primary issue was.

"They're here because they pranked me in Charms," he answered, pointing at the two third years glaring daggers at him.

Draco hissed at the pair. The warning cowered them and they lowered their gazes.

"That is one of the reasons," the lion professor agreed. "Now, can you answer about the first years?"

Too concerned about his upcoming statement, the odd wording of the professor' response was lost to him.

"Mr. Potter?" she repeated.

"Um...I..."

"Just answer cub," Draco whispered, rubbing Harry's back soothingly. He shot a questioning look at his Uncle who gave him a 'wait and see' one in response.

Taking a deep breath, Harry said the damning words. "Because of the pranks against them?"

His eyes widened in shock when she did not pounce on him but instead nodded. "Partly right. A most serious and might I add dangerous prank has been pulled on the first year students...and yourself," she finished.

"What? The Charms thing?"

"I'm afraid Harry," his Uncle stated, folding his arms. "What happened today is naught but the tip of the ice-berg."

"Um..." How did he respond to that?

"Uncle Severus, just what is going on here?" Draco asked, tired of all the double meaning statements that he could not decode.

"Perhaps Harry should tell you," Severus suggested. "Go on Harry, tell your mate why the first years are here...and what they have done to you."

A cold shiver ran over Harry at the last words. Wait, he had misunderstood. The first years weren't here because of what he had helped do to them, they were here because of what they had done to him. But he could feel no relief at that realisation because now the entire thing would be revealed to
Draco, who would no doubt try to attack the first years, the very thing he had wanted to avoid.

There was not way around it he knew. All eyes were on him and even now, Draco was reaching down and turning him to face him with gentle hands. Moments later he felt fingers under his chin that lifted his head so that he was looking into confused blue eyes.

"Cub?" Draco asked carefully. "What does he mean by 'done to you'?"

Harry closed his eyes just to avoid his mate's gaze. There was concern in Draco's tone, but within the next minute, Harry had little doubt that he would be privy to Draco in all his adolescent veela glory.

He knew his time for thinking was up when Draco's grip moved to his shoulders where they flexed against his flesh.

"Just say it cub," Draco urged.

"You'll be mad," Harry whispered.

He could feel the tension increase in his mate before he replied.

"Just tell me."

Taking a deep breath, Harry obeyed the mild command. "The first years are mean to me." There it was out in the open. Today was a day of surprises, Harry thought seconds later when an angry screech did not erupt from his mate. Indeed the only noticeable reaction was the way the fingers on his shoulders tightened.

"Define 'mean'," Draco said levelly.

It was easier to respond now because consciously or unconsciously, Draco was exerting his powers as dominant, compelling Harry to respond to his directives. Thus the words finally flowed from him in a steady stream.

"They say hurtful things to me."

"Like?"

"I'm an evil wizard, I have the school bespelled..." By the time he was done reciting the list, Draco's grip was almost painful. Harry gave a slight whimper indicating his discomfort. He was released instantly. Restraining the urge to reach up and rub at his flesh, Harry instead reached out through his bond, trying to gauge Draco's emotions. He expected to find anger and rage...what he didn't expect to find however was an overwhelming feeling of hurt and betrayal.

His head rose sharply and Harry analysed his mate's face. On the surface Draco's face was almost blank, retaining the cool expression he had been schooled to wear on occasions like this – occasions when he was close to losing the aloof nature that the Malfoys were notorious for wearing in public, one that Harry never quite managed to put on. No, Draco was not trying to harness in anger or even his natural instincts. Harry could see no signs of a partial transformation from his mate and now that he had accessed it, all he felt was those two dreadful emotions.

"Draco?" he whispered hesitantly, completely forgetting about those around him.

His whispered call caused Draco's mask to crack slightly and Harry heard the strain in the older boy's voice when he spoke next. "How long Harry?" he inquired, his eyes dulling slightly. "How long has this been going on?"
Draco’s tone shocked Harry to the core. Never before had there been that odd defeated quality in it. "The entire term," he choked out, feeling his own emotions rising as the emotions Draco felt reflected themselves in his eyes, sending pangs straight into Harry’s heart.

"Almost three months?"

Harry could do nothing but nod, as that aura around Draco increased. His mate's next words hit him hard.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I-I didn't want to involve you in it," Harry managed to say. "I thought that I could handle it."

"Did a great job of that didn't you?" Draco scoffed.

"I..."

"I can't stay here," the blonde said suddenly, shaking his head.

"We're leaving?" Harry asked softly.

"No," Draco said, pinning him with a glance. "I am."

Harry could only stand there stunned when his mate turned away from him, addressing the Professors.

"Forgive me, but I have to leave."

The two teachers were surprised by the change in events and could do little more than nod as the blonde strode to the door.

Harry shook himself out of his reverie when he saw Draco's hand on the door handle. Was Draco really leaving him here, alone?

"Dominant!" he called, voice cracking half way through.

Draco did not turn, speaking to Harry while opening the door. "Whenever you're dismissed go back to our rooms," he ordered shortly. "I be there...eventually," he added before leaving, shutting the door with an audible click.

That click echoed in Harry mind as he realised that his mate had left him here alone. His veela didn't want to be near him. That thought had tears welling up in Harry's eyes as his breathing increased, growing choppy.

He heard footsteps approaching him and looked up through tear blurred eyes when his Uncle was inches away from him. Under other circumstances he would have threw his arms around the man, but now he could still read disappointment in the man's expression as the potions master waved his wand at him. Seconds later Harry found himself calming slightly, although the urge to weep remained. A cheering charm, he noted, as the man pocketed his wand.

"Are you calmer now?"

"Yes."

"Then we can continue," he said as he turned, resuming his place.
The transfigurations professor was not sure how to proceed but after the potions master nudged her, she put the departure of the veela to the back of her mind, and instead forced solely on the matter at hand.

"Harry," she began, dropping formality under the circumstances. "I won't ask you to go through what has been done to you as we have already accumulated a list."

"Yes ma'am."

"However," she continued, hating the despondent tone in the boy's voice. "I have to say that although the first years are fully culpable for their actions, they were influenced into doing so."

"I don't understand," he replied, struggling to push aside thoughts of his mate so he could focus. He had been trying to reach Draco but somehow the veela had managed to dampen the bond and was not responding to his calls.

"When Mr. Finnegan and Thomas were sent here for questioning, they at first, insisted that it was a mere joke. Based on the recent circumstances with the first years, I was led to believe that they were responsible for that as well. Quite interestingly, Mr. Thomas inadvertently stated that they would never do something against the first years. When pressed, he continued that they were useful.

"Now, his choice of words were quite interesting and after some persuasion, they admitted to having duped the first years into hating you."

"What?" Harry was confused. First, his two year mates for some reason hated him, and now, they had turned the first years against him. "How is that possible? And why?"

"It seems Harry," Severus answered. "That they bear some animosity for you since you first year here."

"Why?"

The answer came from Seamus who snapped, "You're a damn menace that's why."

"Language!" his head of house chided even as Dean continued.

"Since the day you came here the school has been bending over backwards to please you. And all because you aligned yourself with a greasy snake!"

"Yes, everything was 'Potter this' and 'Harry that'," Seamus continued. "Oh, Harry's only nine and look, he can make a feather dance. What makes you so special? Nothing."

"Enough!" Severus ordered, noticing how Harry was cringing away. The boy was not in his good graces currently, but that did not mean that he would allow the boy to be intimidated.

Withering under the glares directed at them, the pair continued in a more normal tone. "We were tired of Potter running around like if he ruled the school and we decided to put him in his place. Where best to start than with first years who had never met him."

"We overhead a conversation with him and the Weaslette last year. He said he was looking forward to the incoming students. Something about he would finally have people his own age to hang out with. He was oh so chipper, blabbering about showing them around the school and all the fun they would have together."

Next to them, several of the first years were squirming, some regarding Harry remorsefully.
"We thought it would be grand to set it up so that Potter got the shock of his life when term started. It wasn't hard to convince the first years," Finnegan smirked. "They were so eager to please an upper class man, they bought it easily."

"Potter's face was hilarious that first time," the other stated.

"It was easy from there to get them to do the other stuff. It turned into a grand affair, especially when it became obvious that Potter wasn't going to go squeal to anyone because he didn't want his mate to put him on lockdown once again."

"Why Charms?" McGonagall interjected, moving the conversation along. The only lion currently in her favour was standing there woodenly, no doubt processing all that was being said. Worse yet, it appeared that he had little support in the room currently with his mate gone and Severus somewhat peeved with him.

"He humiliated us today, we wanted revenge."

"How?" Harry asked plaintively, breaking his silence. He could not believe what he was hearing. It was hard to comprehend how people he interacted with daily could bear such grudges against him, for things, he could not really even control. He could not help it if people liked him, and the teachers had to keep an extra eye on him. How could they fault him for that?"

"That I will have to take some blame for," McGonagall revealed with a sigh.

"Ma'am?"

"When I kept them back after class, I used you as an example of a student to emulate. Even with the slight disadvantage you have in terms of age, you still manage to complete all of your assignments with high quality. They somehow interpreted that as you slighting them and wanted revenge."

"So they pranked me?"

"Or tried to. Professor Flitwick's spell interacted with theirs. The jinxes they had cast would not have hurt you, simply leave you in an embarrassing position. However, it interacted badly with the Charms Professor's charm creating a burst of energy that struck you."

Severus was growing tired of the entire incident and frankly was growing concerned for his absent godson. He needed to make sure that he was not of doing something rash. He had some sympathy for his brat, but still, he had brought this onto himself.

"Since everything has been revealed now Minerva, shall we move on to the matter of punishment. I grow weary of this."

"Very well," the woman agreed, understanding his hidden reasoning for the request.

She decided to start with the first years. They looked shaken by what the upper years had stated. It was a life lesson for them she noted. She knew that being used to inflict hurt on another would leave a lasting effect on them, and hopefully leave them more cautious in their relations with other students. She felt for them, she truly did, but that would not stop her from handing them punishment. No matter the reason, bullying someone else was not acceptable. Hopefully, they would understand that someday.

Focussing on the eleven year olds, she cleared her throat and began. "Although your actions were influenced by others, I cannot condone it. Yes, you were misled, but somewhere along the line, I am sure that you saw the hurt you were inflicting on Mr. Potter."
"Insulting him, maligning his name, none of these actions should have been done against any student, no matter who they are or what you believed that they did. You represent the courageous and noble house of Gryffindor, but currently, I seriously wish you had been sorted into Hufflepuff, where no doubt you would have learnt more about the importance of loyalty and understanding.

"That being said, I hope you learn from this entire experience. I am assigning each of you three weeks of detention to be served with Mr. Filch, Professor Snape and myself. Secondly, I am restricting you to the Tower for that entire period. Outside of detention, you are only to leave Gryffindor for meals and classes. Any one found breaking this will be restricted to the dormitories for an extra week. I trust that I need not say that since the Quidditch match occurs within this time, you will not be attending. Lastly, letters will be sent to you parents."

As expected the last statement garnered the largest reaction from the group and more than one squirmed on their seats. Minerva knew that she could expect requests for several of her lions to be sent home for an evening or weekend.

"Are there any questions regarding your punishment? No? You are dismissed."

One by one, the eleven years old stood and left. Some looked towards the floor as they passed, although one or two shot Harry apologetic looks that the boy never noticed.

"As for you two," she said, as the last first year left. "I am ashamed of your behaviour, especially to one in your very own house. Were it not for the fact that Gryffindor would be in the negatives for years if I remove the amount of points you deserve, I would take them. Lying, turning students against a fellow housemate for naught more than petty jealousy, I am ashamed of you both.

"I am placing the both of you on disciplinary probation," she told the stony-faced pair. "Any wrong doings, even a step out of place and you will receive automatic suspension. You are banned from all extra-curricular activities inclusive of Quidditch matches and Hogsmeade trips for the remainder of the academic year. You will serve a minimum of a month's detention. After that I will reevaluate and decide if the time should be extended.

"Like the first years you are restricted to the Tower, more specifically your dormitory as you apparently cannot be trusted around the younger students. I will ensure that any materials you may need are delivered to the room. You are not to approach Mr. Potter in any form or fashion, nor the other first years. Your parents will be informed of this as well. I hope you use this time to re-evaluate your values young men. You have set yourself on a very dangerous path."

There were no words from the students, except for a twin set of glares directed towards Harry. No doubt they still held Harry culpable for everything.

"Another week of detentions is added for both of you," Severus snapped, noticing the looks, "and note that I will add another week each time I see you looking at Harry with any hint of malice. Understood?"

"Yes sir," they muttered, withering under his gaze.

"Dismissed," McGonagall snapped, sighing in relief as they shuffled out, muttering to each other. The door closed none to quietly behind them, leaving on a pale faced Harry who had wrapped his hands around himself. The lion professor eyed the boy for a minute or so before speaking in a gentle voice. A part of her knew that she should administer the boy at least a mild scolding at least for letting the matter escalate to this point, but looking at the dejected expression on his face she couldn't manage it.
"Harry, I will leave you here to talk with your Uncle. I will see you in class next week."

"Yes ma'am," the boy whispered, not raising his head.

Neither Severus nor the boy moved until after the woman dismissed herself, graciously surrendering her office to them. By now the effect of the Cheering Charm was wearing off and with it, the bulk of Harry's emotion was once more pressing down on him, causing him to sniffle noisily.

The nasal sound broke the silence in the room and by the third little sniff, Severus' reserve broke. Sighing, he gathered the child to him, lifting him to sit on the edge of the teacher's table. Reaching for a handkerchief, he dabbed at the stray tears that had leaked from his bratling's eyes before covering his nose and pinching slightly.

"Blow you miserable child," he ordered shortly.

When the boy obeyed, he wiped his nose deftly before banishing the bit of cloth. He was toying with the idea of casting another charm on the child, if only to stop the water works that threatened to recommence. He tapped the small chin, and responding to the unspoken request, doleful emerald eyes rose to meet his. It took only one look at Harry for the last of Severus' anger to dissipate, leaving only that feeling of disappointment with the child. He forcibly shoved those emotions aside for now. The child needed him now; his own feelings on the matters were currently secondary.

"The situations you find yourself in," he said with a shake of the head. He pulled the boy to his chest, smiling slightly when he felt Harry's hands curl into his robes.

"I'm sorry," Harry whispered. "I don't mean to..."

"I know, it just happens."

"But look what it did! Draco's left me!"

"Well," he said honestly, "I'm not entirely pleased with you at the moment myself."

His words had the boy tensing against him. Severus could have cursed when he raised the child's head, he saw that tears were once more shimmering in his eyes.

"You are too emotional," he declared, lifting Harry and settling him against his hip. He vaguely wondered how much longer he would be able to lift the boy in such a way. Eventually either Harry would grow too tall to make the gesture possible, or he would start to protest against it. Best to cherish the opportunity while he could, he thought, shifting him to a more comfortable position.

"Yes Draco left, and while I do not agree with his actions, he has his reasons for doing so. I suggest you and he talk about it." To emphasis his point, he tapped the boy's nose. "Now hang on tight, I'm flooing us back to your rooms."

Harry's reply was a tightening of his hands around the man's neck. His grip remained constant even as the man walked him into his bedroom and deposited him on his bed. The potions master turned away from him then and retrieving the shrunken potions kit in his pocket, he combined a sleeping potion with a dreamless sleep and fed the boy it.

As he waited for it to start working, he pushed his brat to lie down, covering him lightly with his coverlets. "I want you to clear your mind Harry. I know it is difficult but try to put your mate out of your thoughts. That's it little boy, now close your eyes. There we go. You've had an eventful day and it's taken its toll. No, no, do not worry, I will proof read your essay for you before I leave. Mind you I will not add anything, just fix any spelling errors. Yes, yes, Draco will come back once he has
sorted himself out. Yes, I am still peeved at you, but it does not mean that I do not love you. Yes bratling, I would love you even if you blew up the school...no that is not something to try out. Now enough of your grumblings brat, breathe deeply. There you go, such a good boy."

Severus' words tapered off when Harry's chest rose and fell steadily. Good, the bratling was asleep and would remain so until morning. Tucking the cover more firmly around his torso, Severus hesitated only slightly before kissing the child's forehead tenderly. "Sleep well beloved brat," he whispered before leaving, closing the door behind him gently.

As he settled on a chair with the boy's essay, he reached for another item hidden in his robes. Now to check up on his other charge. Rolling his eyes at the ridiculous password, he stated clearly. "I solemnly swear I am up to no good."

As the school materialised on the parchment, he spoke to the enchanted material again. "Locate Draco Malfoy." The figures on the map rearranged themselves before zooming in on the Astronomy Tower. Hmm, Severus debated with himself about going to him but ultimately decided against it. If his godson had gone to that remote area of the school, he definitely wanted privacy and he would honour that. Besides, Draco's name glowed yellow showing that although his emotions were unstable; they were not at a critical level. A quick check indicated that Harry's was the same. Ultimately, he decided to let the boys resolve their issues on their own. It was for the best.

With that thought in mind, Severus rolled up Harry's corrected parchment and set it on his table before leaving to write a few letters.
Harry's book bag floated idly behind him as he stepped off the moving staircase and knocked on his Grandpa's door. He had been extremely relieved earlier when his request to visit him had borne an affirmative and no hint of rebuke for the fact that he had sent it during his history class.

The preteen ran a hand through his hair as he entered the room at the headmaster's call, feeling his worries decrease substantially at the twinkling eyes that met his and the headmaster's "Lemon drop Harry?". He chuckled as he sat besides the man on his chair, popping the sweet into his mouth and sucking eagerly on it while the old wizard enlarged the chair to accommodate them more comfortably. He leaned into the arm that was wrapped around his shoulders and continued to suck idly while the headmaster used his free hand to finish add his signature to the parchments that shuffled towards him on the desk.

Workload for the morning officially completed, Albus guided the papers into their respective folders before summoning an elf to deliver them to his deputy's office. Desk considerably clearer, the man turned his full attention to the preteen who was casually twirling the end of his beard around his fingers.

"What did you want to talk about Harry?" he asked, starting their conversation.

Harry released the bit of hair with a sigh. "Draco and I are fighting."

"Oh?" was the man's response as a puzzled frown creased his brow. Of course he knew of what had happened thanks to Severus' note but he had thought by now the pair would have sorted out the matter. They usually did relatively quickly and without seeking outside assistance. "Is Draco still mad that you did not inform him of what was occurring?"

"How did you know?" Harry inquired before shaking his head. "Never mind, you know everything."

"I wish I did," Albus chuckled. "But in this case I was told."

The wizard was a bit surprised when besides him the child tensed slightly before giving him a wary look.

"You are mad at me too?" he asked in a small voice.

The boy's tone worried the headmaster considerably. It was as if the child was expecting him to release a torrent of scolding upon him, something he had no intention of doing. Albus truly considered himself Harry's grandfather in every way that counted and in his opinion a grandfather's job was to spoil and not discipline. He was not the scolder, he was supposed to be waiting on the sidelines to soothe away the sting of rebuke with cuddles and sweet treats.

The fact that the boy feared more retribution concerned him and Albus wondered just how much the boy had already been scolded on the matter. He knew that Severus had written to the Malfoys, and he certainly hoped they had not overdone it. To do so would be to gang up on a child, whose actions, while not being totally acceptable, were truly not wrong. If that was the case and they had taken the situation too far he would have to rectify it, but before he started to make plans, he needed to know to what extent the situation had already been addressed.

Tipping the boy's head gently, he questioned him. "I know your parents were informed of what occurred. They didn't scold you too badly did they?"
He felt relieved as Harry shook his head negatively.

"No Grandpa," Harry reassured, while wondering why his question had been met by another question. "Papa said that he understood that I wanted to become more self-reliant, but I had to learn to know my limits. Mama sent me some sweets and said to be more careful and to tell someone next time. But Grandpa, you didn't answer me. You're not mad right?"

"No my boy," Albus whispered, "I am not in the least upset with you, although I do share Lucius' sentiments. You'll be a teenager soon Harry," he continued in a whimsical tone, reflecting on the fact. "You'll soon have to start making decisions on your own and you must take care that you make the right ones. I hope you see this as a lesson about choices."

"Oh I do," Harry agreed nodding furiously. "I just didn't want to be babied again," he admitted.

That simply statement put everything in perspective for Albus. Eyes darkening sadly, he moved Harry who gave a surprised "Eep," as he was shifted unto the man's desk.

Albus cupped the boy's face in his hands. "Needing assistance does not make you an infant," he intoned seriously. "And people wanting to protect and take care of you does not make you weak. It shows that you are loved."

The sudden shift in conversation had Harry squirming slightly as the words hit home. "Grandpa..."

"Don't let the past control you Harry," Albus said tersely, as the memories from that accursed house rose within him. "You are very much loved. It is not a burden for us to take extra measures to keep you safe. You are worth it and you never need fear of adding duties to our lives. We are your family and that is what families do."

Harry's breath hitched as the man's words flowed over him compounded by the warm hands on his face. Had he really been feeling that, he wondered, eyes closing as he searched himself for the answer. Was he afraid of becoming a burden, a nuisance? Yes, a tiny voice responded from deep within his subconscious. Everything always seemed to happen to him and at times he had to wonder which incident would be the one to break the camel's back.

"Grandpa," he repeated thickly. "I never realised...I didn't know..."

"Hush child," was the response. "It is not your fault; none of this is your fault. You run around so happily, it's hard to remember sometimes that you have more to bear than just this." He ghosted his hand over Harry's forehead. "My boy, could I rid you of the scars you bear on the inside, I would."

From across the office, Fawkes trilled, lightening the emotions the pair felt until they could both smile softly at each other.

"That means a lot Grandpa," Harry murmured. "Thank you."

"There is nothing to thank me for. It is my duty to you."

A while later, Harry spoke once more with his mouth half crammed with a biscuit. "Do you want to know why we are fighting?"

"If you wish to share," Albus murmured, dabbing at the corner of Harry's mouth with a napkin.

"Well," Harry began, after gulping down some juice. "I woke up and couldn't get back to sleep. Uncle Sevvy had given me a potion but apparently, it had worn off. I decided to check my work but he had already done it and I only had to fix spelling...one word!" he declared proudly.
"Very good!" was the headmaster's happy response.

"Thank you," Harry preened before continuing. "But after I fixed it I had nothing else to do so I ended up thinking and well, I got mad."

"Why?"

"I started to debate whether Draco really had a right to be mad. And then I realised that I should be mad at him!"

"And how did you come up with this belief?" the wizard asked, unable to follow the train of thought.

"He left me Grandpa," Harry frowned, as if the answer had been obvious. "How can he be angry with me when he left? He heard me moving about and came to talk, saying that he was sad that as my dominant I hadn't come to him with something that important."

"And your response?"

"I told him that if he were my dominant he would not have left me when I was upset."

"You sound as if you are leaving out something," Albus prodded.

Harry gave him a sheepish look. "Well, I kind of shouted that bit."

"Ah, I see," Albus nodded.

"Yeah, well, after that he got angry too..."

* *

"Don't try to turn this back on me Harry James!" Draco snapped, folding his arms. "You've made a mockery out of me! I can't protect you if I don't know what's wrong!"

"Maybe I don't want you to protect me from everything!" Harry grated.

"I am your dominant!"

"A dominant that left me there alone! I was crying Draco and you didn't care!"

"I couldn't stay there Harry James! It was leave or do something drastic!"

"Well, I preferred for you to have attacked them...at least it would have shown that you cared about me!" Harry insisted stubbornly, mimicking the veela's actions by folding his arms.

"I do care!" Draco insisted.

"Then act like it! If you cared, you would have stayed. If you cared, you would have found out the truth. If you cared you would have been here to put me to bed!"

"And if you had cared you would have told me. If you had cared, you would not have lied to me. If you had cared, you would not have put yourself into such a terrible situation when it could have been easily rectified!"

"Don't turn this around on me Draco Lucius!"

"So this is my fault? Pet, I think you're confused."
"I am not confused!" Harry yelled at the top of his lungs.

"After that Trix and Dobby appeared," Harry continued, playing with his fingers. "They heard our fighting while they were neatening up. They separated us until breakfast. I'm glad today's Friday as Draco and I only have Potions together. I really did not want to talk to him. Lunch was awkward enough. We had to have it together and I think everyone noticed that we were fighting."

Albus nodded thoughtfully. "Yes well with how close you two are, any discordance would be easily to notice."

"Probably." Harry snorted, not really in the mood to reflect on how they usually acted towards each other. "So, what do you think?" he questioned, reaching for the tray.

Albus looked thoughtful for a moment. "I think that question should be directed at you."

"Huh?" Harry grunted, a biscuit half chewed in his mouth.

"Swallow Harry," the man admonished lightly. "What do you think should be done?"

"I asked you," the boy reminded with a raised eyebrow.

"Ah, but it is not I who am fighting with someone."

The pre-teen gave the headmaster a pointed look, but apparently that particular gaze only worked for the resident potions master for the old wizard only responded with an innocent twinkle that had Harry sighing in resignation. Reaching back, Harry tangled his fingers in his hair, tugging slightly on it while he thought.

"Maybe, we should try talking again," he allowed, "without shouting this time." He gave a hefty sigh before saying reluctantly. "I guess that I may have overreacted because of my emotions."

The headmaster nodded in agreement. "It is one of the disadvantages of communicating while upset. However, I do agree with your reasoning. Nothing will be better than the two of you talking peacefully."

"I guess," Harry replied, reaching once again for the tray.

"That's quite a bit of sugar you're consuming," Albus pointed out, glaring at the portrait who had snorted at the irony of the statement.

"Sugar keeps you calm," was the pert response as Harry chewed.

"And just where did you hear that?" Albus inquired, knowing that in fact sugar did the opposite.

"From Hermione," he said absentmindedly. "Ron always has a bag of some sweet or the other to offer her. It stops her from ranting at him."

"All the time?" the man asked with a tilt of the head, thinking it odd.

"Well, no, just a couple of days every now and then. He gets her mad really easily then."

"Oh I see," the man murmured, playing with his beard and wondering if Narcissa had ever explained the female experience with puberty. Probably not, given Harry's naive answers. Not that he had any plans of doing it. Nope, that was solely for the Malfoys.
"I'm free until Potions. Can I stay please? You wouldn't even know I'm here."

Harry gave the man a bit of a pout as he waited for an answer.

"Alright, you may stay with me. Fetch your books while I transfigure you a desk."

"Thank you," he chimed happily, retrieving his Ancient Runes notes.

"Feel free to ask me a question if necessary," the headmaster offered as he opened a folder.

"I will," he promised, picking up a quill.

They worked in silence, the odd scratch of a quill the only disturbance. Harry had gotten through a good bit of the weekend's reading by the time Albus indicated that it was time for him to leave.

"Take the floo to Severus," the headmaster instructed, as he looked around to ensure that nothing was left behind.

"Yes Grandpa."

"The powder is on the mantle."

"Okay," Harry said as he grabbed some. "Thank you for talking to me Grandpa. And for letting me stay."

"It was my pleasure," Albus replied warmly. "Have a good evening."

"You too!"

Harry thought he would find the potion's office empty, thinking that the potions master would be in the midst of either concluding a class or preparing it for his third years. This however was not the case and Harry found himself staring nervously at black robes as his eyes slowly rose to meet the man's cool gaze. He nipped his lip as he remembered the man's previous words to him. Despite the fact that he had been put to bed with all of the usual tenderness, the professor was not entirely pleased with him. That fact had the preteen fidgeting nervously.

"Good afternoon," he said softly. "Grandpa told me to floo here from his office."

"He would," the potions master said in a musing tone, as he closed the book he held. He continued towards his bookshelves – his destination before the floo had activated. "Are you ready for class?" he asked absently as he selected another text. "It is theory only so you may leave you other materials here."

"I will, thank you," was the polite reply before Harry heeded the offer. He stood nervously afterwards, clutching the quill and parchment sheets to his chest while wondering if he had been dismissed. Severus was not paying him any attention, instead searching through a text for something or the other.

"Um," Harry started awkwardly, "I'll go to class now."

He was almost to the door when the man spoke up in a more alert tone.

"I want you back here afterwards."
"Huh?"

"I have something to say to you, but it requires more than the few minutes left before class commences."

"Um...okay," he agreed, wondering what they would talk about.

"Oh and Harry, I will tell you the same thing I told your mate when he was here earlier."

"And what is that?" he asked, a hint of curiosity in his voice even as he noted that Draco had gone to his godfather much like he had sought out the headmaster.

"It doesn't matter that the two of you are currently at odds. I expect your normal exemplary behaviour throughout class or you will both squirm through dinner. I am not pleased from the reports the elves have given me about your behaviour thus far today. Is that understood?"

"Perfectly," Harry replied quickly, a bit put out by the warning.

The man was acting so conflictingly, he thought as he walked into the empty potions class, sitting in his normal place. One moment the man was all but ignoring him, the next he was issuing directives as if nothing at all was wrong. And what was the point of that warning anyway? Harry would never antagonise Draco during class; least of all in potions where retribution would undoubtedly be swift.

His ponderings were broken as he felt a familiar presence enter the room. He panicked mildly, rustling the materials on his desk in an attempt to appear occupied when the veela sat down besides him.

"Good afternoon," the blonde said neutrally. "I trust your lunch hour passed pleasantly?"

Harry strove to adopt the same nonchalant tone as the veela, but even to his own ears, it sounded strange, the words emerging stilted. "I did and I hope you had the same."

"Uh-hmm," was the mumbled reply as the veela sorted through his belongings, effectively dismissing him.

The actions irked Harry and he found his irritation with the blonde rising once again. Draco had no right to act this way, he thought with a silent snarl. He opened his mouth, ready to recommence the early morning argument when the potions master's inner door opened, revealing the man. Harry's words died in his throat and he grudgingly acknowledged the man had been right in his earlier warning. Taking calming breaths, Harry focussed on a crack in the wall, studying it in detail until he was certain he was once more in control of himself.

He barely managed it when his uncle started the lesson. However, the veela mate found himself unable to concentrate, thoughts drifting first towards his irritation with Draco and then to the upcoming discussions with the professor. Those two things were currently a lot more important than listening about the properties of aconite and the different ways it could be utilised in potions and the effects said ingredient would have.

Sometime during the class he felt the professor's eyes on him and he straightened slightly, only now realising that he had yet to even open a parchment. No wonder the man had noticed. Quickly rectifying the situation, he moved his quill in idle lines across the sheet, continuing to do so for the remainder of the lesson. Lost in his own personal activities, he was not immediately aware of the class ending until he felt the familiar warmth of Draco disappear.

Looking around quickly, he saw that students were already on their way out of the classroom, with
the veela stuffing away his belongings. With his bag stored away in the potions office, Harry simply watched him. Feeling the gaze on him, the veela spoke without looking.

"We need to talk."

"I know," he said as he pushed away a strand of hair from his eyes.

"Meet me home after you are done with Uncle Severus," he continued, in a level tone.

The tone of his voice had Harry gritting his teeth. "I will come home when I please," he declared.

The veela's eyes narrowed and his voice grew tight. "I said that you will come home."

"And I say I will come home when I want!"

Whatever response Draco wanted to make was cut off by a loud bang from behind them. Spinning, they found their Uncle watching them with glinting eyes. Near to the door, their collective friends looked on with worry, before leaving at the look the potions master shot them.

"I am not above carrying out my threat whether or not class is over," Severus ground out. That curbed both of their tempers. "Harry, go into my office. Now." The stern tone in the man's voice demanded immediate obedience, and Harry complied, shooting a last glare at his mate before he scurried out of the room.

"As for you," the man continued when the door clicked close, "did we not talk about this?"

"His petulance," Draco began before being cut off.

"Harry's petulance is nothing new to you Draco and you know how to deal with it. Although with the high handed manner you adopted just now, is it little wonder why he refused?"

"Uncle,"

"Hush. I thought you had enough time to calm your emotions but obviously I was wrong. Go home now and relax for a while. When Harry joins you I expect you to work this out civilly. If you two are still at odds by tomorrow, I will bundle you to the manor and let Lucius and Narcissa set you to straight. Hogwarts does not deserve to suffer because you are fighting. Just how much longer can you have before the strain on your bond increases so much that you revert to your aggressive self?"

The question was clearly retoric as they both knew that time was lacking. Even now, Draco's temper had grown quite short. The fact that he lost it with Harry was sign enough that their bond was being sorely tested.

"Go on now Draco, and remember, I will send you home if necessary."

"I understand," the teenager nodded, before leaving, the clicking of his shoes against the floor audible.

Severus huffed as the veela left, falling back heavily unto his chair. "I need a drink," he muttered, leaning forward unto his hands. Face carefully hidden, he allowed the mask he had been wearing for the majority of the day crumbled, leaving him sporting a troubled look. It had been extremely difficult to act normally when all he wanted was to go in a corner and reflect on his actions (Merlin forbid he admit to moping about). It had especially been difficult with his last period third years for the object of his preoccupation was seated right there in the second row.
His preoccupation stemmed from his actions with the eleven year old the previous night. His actions had been anything but refined and for that he owed the child an explanation. He had placed his own needs above Harry's, something that never should have happened. He could only hope the child would forgive him.

Harry swung his legs idly as he nibbled on his lower lip, checking the time once again.

Fifteen minutes.

It had been fifteen minutes since he had been ordered in here and the professor had yet to join him. He had heard a muffled conversation between him and Draco but had not been able to discern much. However, he was certain that he had heard the outer classroom door close. Therefore, the potions master was alone. So what was he doing so long to keep him here waiting? Despite his mild apprehension as to what was to come, he felt his boredom level spike. A little longer and he would find himself exploring the office.

He was just about to give into his boredom when he heard footsteps approaching from the outside. Harry schooled his appearance, observing the teacher as he shrugged out of his robe, hanging it on a rack. He sat while rolling up his sleeves. The disciplinarian look had faded from his expression. Indeed, there was a troubled look on his face, something that had Harry furrowing his brows in worry. He truly did not like the expression the man sported.

"Are you okay Uncle Sevvy?" he questioned, concern lacing his voice.

His question startled the man for he jumped slightly, apparently drawing himself away from his thoughts. As the spoken words hit him, he gave the boy an incredulous look before giving a rueful laugh as he wiped his brow with the back of a hand.

"Only you Harry," he murmured, almost to himself as he leaned back against the chair back.

"Only me what?" he questioned softly.

The response was so quiet that Harry literally had to lean forward to hear it. "Only you would be concerned for someone who has so wronged you. Where did you get such a big heart from child?"

"I don't understand Uncle Severus," Harry replied, tilting his head softly.

"You wouldn't," Severus laughed dryly. "Child you don't even know what I have done, do you?"

"No."

Severus smiled sadly, reaching forward to stroke Harry's face. "My reaction to you last night was completely unjustified and unnecessary."

Harry leaned into the touch, grasping the man's wrist when he made to withdraw it. "You were disappointed with me last night. Is that what you mean?"

"Exactly that."

"Why were you?" Harry asked. "What was it that I did to make you disappointed in me?"

"Merlin Harry," Severus breathed, "I was not disappointed in you. Not truly."

"Then why?" he pressed, a half-plea in his tone.
"I admit that I was a bit disappointed that you did not come to me, but mainly it was directed at me."

"For what?" Harry asked, perplexed. "Why would you be angry with yourself Uncle Sevvy? What did you do wrong?"

A reply was not immediately forthcoming as the man instead flashed the child a sad smile. Finally, he freed his hand from the boy's cheek, letting it lie limp on his side. "Harry, do you remember my days here?"

The boy nodded hesitantly. "Coming here was the best and worst thing that ever happened to you," he recited, drawing from memory. "You got to come here with mummy and made friends with mama and papa. But daddy and Uncles along with other students made you miserable."

"Exactly that Harry," Severus affirmed, his voice lowering. "My last few years in Hogwarts were nothing short of torture. I would never have wished that on anybody, not even an enemy."

From the man's tone, Harry realised that he was withdrawing into his memories and he settled back against his chair, recognising that the man needed to talk.

"When Draco was born, it was one of the happiest days of my life. I really do not know who was more anxious to see him, Lucius or myself. He was the perfect baby, a credit to his parents. He was so innocent and pure. When Lucius put him in my arms that first time and I watched those tiny blue eyes, my heart melted and I vowed then that my godson would not live the life that I did. I vowed to protect him.

"And as he grew older, as he took his first steps...the first time he called me Papa, my desire increased. I would have willingly died that night when Voldemort ordered Lucius to kill them. Hell, I would have killed Lucius myself had I even suspected that he would heed that order. That is how much I wanted to keep my promise.

"And when my little dragon was seven, you came to us, a tiny thing, so shy and hesitant that my promise immediately stretched to envelope you...moreso than with Draco given what you had gone through. I swore to myself that you would never know fear again, not from anyone as long as there was a breath left in my body.

"And then, to get that summons from Minerva, to hear what those miserable creatures had to say made me see that I had failed you. Failed to keep my promise. You were under my sight every day and yet were being bullied. I was disappointed. Not in you, but in me. How could I not have seen what was under my very eyes, what did I do wrong? Did I not make myself as available to you as I could have? Did I somehow give the impression that you could not come to me with any problem, no matter how small? Was our bond not as strong as I believed it to be?

"All those thoughts ran through my mind, and by the time you joined us, I had let those emotions override everything else and I withdrew myself from you."

By now, the man's words were coming out in a torrent, his tone laced such emotional depth that Harry's heart ached in sorrow for what the man had been going through. He could understand the man's reaction now, and he found that he could not fault him for it. Instead, he moved to comfort the man in the only way he knew how.

And so caught up in his speech, Severus never noticed when Harry slipped out of his chair and forced his way unto the man's lap, wrapping his slender arms around the man's neck as he continued to talk, offering him support as he went through the last of his emotions.
"You were standing there, crying and terrified. Draco had left you and it was obvious you were shaken. And what did I do? Nothing. I left you standing there for more than a minute before Minerva prodded me into action. And I did not comfort you as I should. I cast a charm of all things, something I would do for a stranger in distress. It did not matter what I did afterwards. I failed you, breaking my promise by allowing my emotions to take over."

Severus paused to take a breath and it was only then that he felt the slight pressure on his throat. A chill coursed down his spine as he realised that while he was exposing his guilt, Harry was offering him comfort, holding him securely and tightly, his head resting near Severus' shoulder. A tickling feeling assaulted his throat as his arms rose up to encircle the child.

"Harry," he breathed as soulful emerald eyes met his.

"I love you Uncle Sevvy," Harry said simply. "And I'm not mad at you. Please don't be sad anymore. I don't like it."

Those simple words, said in such an innocent voice rid Severus of the majority of his guilt. With a hoarse laugh, he tightened his hold on the boy. "Such a compassionate heart," he whispered into the boy's hair, marvelling at the boy's forgiving nature. So much like his mother. "Don't ever change my sweet child. Don't ever change."

"I'll try not to," Harry murmured, snuggling closer. The aura around the man felt considerably lighter and he was glad.

Time passed as they sat together, simultaneously taking and receiving comfort. Eventually, as Harry felt a slight strain on his inner bond, he pulled away with a soft sigh.

"I have to talk to Draco," he murmured, watching him.

"I know," Severus agreed. "This dispute has gone on long enough. Your relationship will grow strained."

Harry nodded minutely. "He told you?" he inquired, fiddling with the top button of the man's shirt. "Him and the elves," Severus supplied, shifting Harry into a better position. "So you know what is bothering him?"

"Yes but I won't tell you. That is something for him to reveal himself."

"You sound like Grandpa," Harry pouted. What naught but a chuckle met his response, he grumbled, briefly settling his head against the man's chest.

"You don't think I'm throwing a tantrum right Uncle Sevvy?"

"No, you are too old for tantrums now, although I will say that your temper is as hot as ever," he said, tapping his nose with a finger. When Harry laughed softly, he continued. "Keep your cool and you will be fine. You two love each other too much to allow something like this to come between you."

"I know," Harry said, twisting his fingers. "But he's so annoying like this."

"And he feels the same," Severus pointed out. "But then, no two people can love everything about the other. It's part of life."
"Uh-hmm."

"And so I want you to remain calm during the next few minutes. Can you promise me this? I hate
seeing you all like this."

"I promise," Harry agreed, settling in for another hug as he anticipated the talk to come.

Draco was waiting for him on the divan when he stepped into the room. The veela had taken a bath,
evident by his damp and slightly wavy hair. A towel wrapped around his neck prevented water from
dripping unto his shirt.

Harry observed him carefully, mildly surprised to note that there was no trace of animosity on his
face. The veela's expression was neutral yet somehow inviting. It seemed that his earlier anger had
completely vanished. Not that Harry himself felt particularly angry any longer.

Between his talks with his grandfather and uncle, the preteen was tired, and wanted to bring closure
to the issue. They were right, at the end of the day he and Draco belonged together. This was their
first major argument and undoubtedly, there would be more in their future, but for now, it was time
to end the drama. He would heed the advise given, try to reign in his temper and talk to his mate,
really and truly talk to him.

As calm as possible, Harry sat besides the veela, dropping his bag unto the floor. Reaching up, he
loosened the tie around his neck before tossing it to join the bag. Next he bent and dealt with the
shoes in a similar manner.

"How are we going about this?" he asked, feeling the blonde's gaze upon him, marking his every
movement.

"Hopefully without yelling," was the dry response.

Harry twisted slightly to observe the teenager's face, but saw no sign of derision there.

"You sound calm," he observed, struggling with a stubborn sock.

"Well I was here for over an hour," Draco replied, lips twitching slightly. "A long bath will soothe
away just about anything. But more than that, I realise that my temper was not helping the situation
in the least."

"Neither was mine," Harry admitted, throwing the sock haphazardly to join the growing pile on the
floor. A snap of his fingers had his robe joining them.

With nothing left to remove, Harry sat backwards, relaxing against the piece of furniture. He felt a
stirring within him and made a ghost of a smile, feeling the weight within him lighten considerably.
Apparently, they had already taken the first steps needed to heal the rift between them.

"Let's promise not to argue this time okay?" Draco said as he shifted slightly so that he was facing
his mate.

"Okay," Harry nodded, ruffling his hair. "I really don't want to be sent home."

"Neither do I," Draco seconded. "Mother and Father would not be pleased, especially since they
leave for their second honeymoon next week."

Harry could not help but snort at that. "Which second honeymoon is this?"
"Um, the ninth?" Draco replied without certainty before chuckling ruefully, Harry joining him for a few seconds.

Draco for his part was glad that the tension between them was fading. A long hot soak had gone a long way into helping his current demeanour, reminding him of what was important. Harry. The time for arguing had past. It was tiring he thought, noting that he was considerably more drained than usual for the end of the week.

In all honesty, he wanted nothing more than to snuggle down with his mate and have a long conversation about nothing, perhaps even fall asleep together and wake the next morning to a special breakfast containing all of their favourites, prepared by their elves.

However, in order to achieve that, he had to resolve his issues with Harry, and that was another factor contributing to his current calm demeanour.

"What?" he asked in confusion, not catching the end of Harry's words.

Harry eyed him curiously. "I asked how we should start resolving this."

Draco thought for a moment. "Well perhaps we can start with you?"

"Okay. What about me?"

"I want to know what happened from your perspective Harry, inclusive of all your reasoning behind it. I swear I won't interrupt you until you're finished but I really would like to understand what led you to withhold the information from me."

Harry nodded slowly. It was a fair request. "And afterwards you will tell me why you left right? That really hurt Draco."

The veela's expression reflected sadness for a few moments. "I'm sorry I hurt you Harry and yes, I will explain."

That was enough for him and for the next fifteen or so minutes, he spoke softly, hands wringing on occasions when he got to particularly difficult parts. It was hard for Draco to keep his promise, wanting at numerous times to either interrupt with a question or rebuke.

Nevertheless, he held his tongue, digging his nails into his palms as Harry continued; slowly easing the painful grip when Harry explained what had perturbed him. Moreover, by the time the boy was through, Draco found that he could understand Harry's actions, now that he had actually given him a chance to explain.

However, there was one small thing...

"You really had something to do with the first years," Draco mused, remembering how shaken Harry had been after his interview with his Head of House.

"I did," Harry replied hesitantly. "Are you going to tell on me and the twins?"

Draco adopted an aloft expression for a few seconds before shaking his head. "I don't think so."

However, the slight quirk in his voice was not reassuring for Harry and he eyed the older boy suspiciously. "You are not going to make me tell are you?"

Draco could not help but laugh at the boy's assumption. "Under normal circumstances I might have
been prone to do so," he allowed.

"But?"

"But, I can't help but think that it was deserved on this occasion. Although no more. Uncle Sirius told us that pranks are meant to be for fun, not revenge."

"And you turning Pansy blue last week was what exactly?" Harry retorted.

"Fun for me," was Draco's pert reply. "Besides, she was insulting you again."

"One of these days Uncle Sevvy will link it to you," Harry pointed out.

"Honestly Harry, if Uncle does not know it is me by now, he's gone soft. As long as it continues to be harmless he won't intervene."

"If you say so," the veela mate responded. "But anyway, it's your turn. Please tell me why you left Draco."

The veela mate's attempt to stare them away from their light-hearted banter back to serious matters was proof enough as to how important the issue was to him and that sobered Draco considerably.

Honestly, the veela had asked Harry to start the discussion simply because he had been unsure as to how to phrase what he had thought. And despite the time respite, he was still not certain how best to start it. Words seemed insufficient to explain what he had felt. It was then that the old saying 'a picture is worth a hundred words' came back to him. If he couldn't bring himself to explain it to Harry, then why not just show it to him?

He posed the question to the boy. After a minute's debate, Harry acquiesced, not minding in the least as long as the truth was revealed.

Bolstered, Draco meshed his gaze with Harry's and allowed him permission into his memories, shifting the ones he wanted him to see to the fore.

Together they felt and in Draco's case relived the moments of the previous day. Harry was assaulted by his mate's concern for him when he started to edge away from the tension in the room; felt the love of the veela as he rubbed a soothing hand along his back, silently offering him comfort.

That faded at the speaking look the potions master shot the blonde and soon a sense of impending doom filled Harry as through Draco's eyes he watched himself hedge around the issue, warning the veela that he would be angry. He felt Draco's disbelief that his anger would turn on his submissive, followed by a period of numbness when he told him everything. That numbness gave way to barely contained rage directed towards him for allowing it to go on so long.

Compounded with that, was a feeling of betrayal.

Startled, Harry delved deeper and Draco, with a mental wince, allowed him free passage. Following the train of thought, Harry discovered that the veela's ego had been hurt. He had felt destabilised, as if he had questioned Draco's dominant position. Harry had not come to his dominant, had not let him protect him and for that Draco felt betrayed.

The veela obviously thought that he was the victim in the whole issue and that irritated Harry. He let the veela know that plainly. Draco responded with an apology and stated that he no longer felt that way. Harry accepted that and moved on, knowing that the veela was being sincere.
Moving onwards, Harry learnt that that same sense of betrayal had spurred on Draco's anger and was the core reason for his leaving. Because, in Draco's opinion, Harry had spurned his protection and thus, he had thought it best to leave and let the submissive handle the situation he had found himself in alone. It did not matter if the mate was obviously upset. He had brought it onto himself and should therefore find a solution on his own. Draco's hurt ego led him to believe that his help was not required and consequently, he had left.

Finding what he had been looking for, Harry withdrew from the veela's memories. He shook his head lightly to reorientate himself before shooting the older boy a reproving look.

Ego?

Draco’s ego had suffered a beating and that was why he had abandoned him? It seemed almost trivial to him. Somehow, Draco had seen himself as the victim because of a mate who had denied him his rights. It was stupid, and he was about to tell the veela such when he noticed the pitiful expression on his face. Apparently the veela had come to the same conclusion and hence had been reluctant to say it.

It all made sense now, Harry mused. Draco's highhanded mannerism with him had resulted from an attempt by him to regain the grounding he believed he had lost. By ordering him around, Draco was trying to soothe his ego by re-establishing his role as dominant. And when Harry had spurned his attempts by his rebuttals and failure to comply, Draco had lashed out in anger, trying to protect that sensitive core.

"I wasn't trying to hurt you," Harry murmured. "Nor insult you in any way. It was never my intention."

Draco nodded. "I know that now Harry, but yesterday, yesterday I was just...just..."

I understand," Harry responded, interrupting him. "I don't like it but I do understand."

"I let my pride and ego get in the way of my duty to you," Draco said swallowing. "I should have never allowed that to happen and for that I am sorry."

The ease with which the apology flew out startled them both, but it took only seconds for Harry to nod in acceptance. "I'll forgive you for that Draco, as long as you forgive me to. I should have told someone, and for that I apologise."

As Harry had done, Draco accepted it immediately. They looked at each other for several seconds, feeling the bond between them hum happily with renewal. Bit by bit, they closed the gap between them, manoeuvring themselves so that they lay side by side.

"And so ends our first fight," Harry murmured, pressing a cheek against Draco's skin.

"Indeed," Draco agreed, stroking Harry's shoulder. "Let's not do this to often hmm?"

"I don't know about that," Harry said, propping up so he could look into the veela's blue eyes. "Ron and Hermione argue a lot."

"That's part and parcel of them," Draco responded. "Not us."

"Yeah, fighting sure is tiresome."

"Indeed."
After that, Harry shifted until he was half-reclining on his mate, humming softly as he simply basked in being in the teenager's presence. Draco felt the same way, manifested through the affectionate sweeps his hand made over Harry.

"Cub?" Draco called, a long while later, dragging Harry out of the half-dosing state he had fallen into.

"What's the matter?" he yawned, looking at him sleepily.

"You made a mess," Draco pointed out with a toss of his head to the floor.

Harry followed the movement before giving a hefty sigh and plopping his head back down on the veela.

"Dray?"

"Hmm?"

"Shut up, you're ruining the mood."

The haughty tone drew a startled laugh from Draco which dislodged Harry's head from its perch. The preteen growled in annoyance, before seeking revenge by digging his fingers into Draco's ticklish sides. That was the start of one of their infamous wrestling matches that drew laughter, peals and squeals from either party.

So engrossed were they that they never noticed when Severus' head popped into the fireplace, to check on their progress. The potions master observed them for a few moments, a pleased smile on his face before leaving...after snapping a picture to add to the ever-growing collection.

Once the boys had agreed on a truce, they lay contentedly against each other, simply relishing their closeness. Harry laid curled on his side near him mate, eyes sparkling madly in merriment. That green gaze was so beautiful, Draco thought. With their eyes locked, Draco found himself giving into his emotions and bent forward, first bestowing a kiss to Harry's forehead and then his cheek. Harry made a contented sound that had Draco's chest tightening slightly. Unable to resist, the veela pressed his lips against his mate's, silencing the sound. Harry made a slight gargle in surprise before he relaxed into it, enjoying the first "special kiss" that Draco had initiated. It felt nice, he thought, as the contact lengthened and he allowed his eyes to drift close to enjoy the pleasant sensation. He could not restrain a slight mewl when the kiss stopped and he forced his eyes open.

His face felt hot and to his surprise Draco's appeared as flushed as he felt. His tongue darted out to wet his lips before he whispered, "I love you."

If anything, the blush on Draco's face increased substantially before he replied. "I love you too."

With that they settled down against each other on the divan, relishing each other's company.
"Guess what this weekend is!" Harry chirped, waltzing into Draco's bedroom and throwing himself unto the bed.

Used to Harry going and coming as he pleased, it took Draco a second to realise that he had said more than "Hi...Bye". When he did, he turned, quill caught between pearly white teeth. "Hmm?"

The preteen brushed aside a stray lock of hair before repeating himself. "Guess what this weekend is. Come on, guess!"

Draco did not reply as the mischievous curl to Harry's mouth distracted him. The corners of Harry's mouth formed slight indentations that he found irresistible. More so, when added to the glint in the vivid green eyes. Too enraptured in his expression, the veela had not a chance of hearing what was being said.

The spell was broken though when said green eyes rolled in annoyance and the boy grumbled, "Why aren't you listening to me?" as he fell back unto the mattress.

Draco shook his head lightly before apologising. "Forgive me, would you say it again?"

"A third time?" Harry asked sceptically, stretching for the novel on the side table. "What are you thinking that's more important than what I have to say Draco?"

"N-nothing cub," the veela stammered, startled by the question. There was no way he could explain what had happened. So instead, he invented a quick explanation. "A point occurred to me for my essay."

"Oh? Which one?"

"Herbology," he responded, glad that his explanation had been accepted so readily.

"Hmm...I haven't started that actually," Harry stated nonchalantly, flipping open the novel.

"Harry!" Draco gasped. "What do you mean you haven't started?"

"Oh poo," Harry responded with a dismissive wave. "I have two days left. And it's not like it is for marks or anything, so whatever..."

The veela's teeth clenched as he fought the rising urge to scold. Instead he would wait to see if he started by nightfall. If not, then he would scold. That decided, he relaxed, twirling his quill idly.

"Where were you anyway?"

"Oh here and there. Millie will be done with your notes by dinner."

"That's good. I can start reviewing them earlier then."

"Uh-huh," Harry replied absently, shifting into a more comfortable position as he began to read. It seemed that the lion was through talking for now, something that was normally acceptable, but given his earlier excitement, it seemed strange. Draco seriously doubted that the state of his notes was what Harry had meant to share.

"Cub?"
"Hmm Dray?"

"What was it that you wanted to tell me?"

The boy lifted the book high enough to hide his mouth before responding. "Oh nothing, it doesn't matter anymore."

The slight sing-song tone at the end of the statement contradicted his words. Harry was baiting him, Draco rightly deduced. Deciding to indulge him, the veela went about coaxing his mate into talking to him.

Expression carefully hidden by the book, Harry's lips twitched with barely suppressed mirth as he eyed the angelic expression Draco strove for. It was far from perfect, his features too aristocratic to perfectly pull it off, but the boy found it alluring all the same and his resolve weakened and then broke completely at the exaggerated pout the veela made. The book fell from Harry's hands as he chortled, the sound increasing into full out laughter when the veela pouted further.

"So will you tell me or do I have to pout again?" Draco mock growled, earning a giggle from his mate.

"I'll tell you," Harry hastened to say, not thinking he could bear laughing so hard again so soon. While he tried to compose himself, Draco turned back to his essay, writing in neat script as he waited for Harry to speak.

"You're paying attention now right?" Harry inquired.

"I swear."

"Good. Well, I overhead Professor McGonagall and Uncle Sevvy talking. Grandpa Albus has declared this weekend a Hogsmeade one."

"What!" Draco yelled in surprise, spinning around. That was certainly not what he had expected to hear. "Is he mad?"

"The man's gone man," Severus groaned, leaning his head to rest against the chair back. A deep sigh escaped his lips, quickly changing into a moan as arms wrapped around his shoulders, tightening comfortingly. Throwing his head back to look into warm amber eyes, a slight flush dusted across the potions master's cheeks as those eyes came considerably closer as his partner bent lower, placing his lips against Severus' ear shell.

A pleasurable shiver enveloped him at the husky tone Remus adopted. "Bad Severus," he breathed into the cavity. "Not even a kiss to greet me, far less a hello. Very inconsiderate of you."

"Are you seeking retribution," Severus inquired hoarsely as teeth sunk carefully into his skin.

"Hmm..." Remus considered, continuing to place nips along the slender column of the man's neck. "I think pleasuring us will be retribution enough."

"As if that doesn't happen a-al-ready," Severus gasped at a particularly hard nip that ignited a spark within him. "Remus!"

"Hmm?"
"I am not a bone to be chewed!" he protested.

"I know that," Remus drawled, pulling away and giving him a heated look. "I would never do to a bone what I do to you."

His tone was enough to melt Severus, and when urged, the raven-haired man rose willingly, humming in pleasure when his lips were caught in a fierce kiss. The passion flared between them and both were breathing erratically when they parted.

"Stay the night?" Remus requested, nuzzling the side of his face.

"I can't," Severus sighed. "It's a week night. I only came..."

"Because of Albus I gather," Remus interrupted before his tone turned persuasive. "Come now Severus, this will be the first full moon night you've been here for months. I'm randy. Do you truly wish for me to expend all of my desires on Sirus alone?"

"Liar," Severus rebutted, although there was no heat in the words. "You haven't been randy like that since you were cured."

His partner gave up all pretence at that, a low growl emerging from his throat as he closed the small space between them, tangling his hands in Severus' hair. "You are staying," he said decisively, before crashing their lips together once again, letting his arms roam about the thinner's man's body, rendering him a puddle of feelings.

Severus' last conscious thought before he was lowered to the plush carpet was that he had been mistaken. Werewolf urges present or not, Remus Lupin truly was an insatiable lover when the desire struck him. And when the sandy haired man collapsed heavily besides him, struggling to breathe, Severus automatically pressed himself closer to his sweat damped body, allowing himself to relive the moment when they realised that all of Remus' pain and suffering was gone forever.

The coming spring would herald two years since the moon had lost its power over Remus. Two years since he needed to lock himself into the East Wing, for not even with the Wolfsbane did he trust himself to be left free. It had been two long years since Remus was able to observe the magnificence of the full moon in human form and it was a sight he had yet to grow tired of.

Before Lily and James' intervention had reunited the three, the hours preceding a transformation had been nothing short of torture for the werewolf. He grew aggressive, his attitude snarky and he was prone to leave whichever room he was occupying in shambles. With the return of his companions though, other wolf instincts came into play.

Why be aggressive when he had mates with which to sate himself?

With that in mind, the forthcoming full moon awakened his animalistic sexuality, leading him to saunter through Black Manor in search of his mates. And with Severus in Hogwarts, his desires fell solely on Sirus, who walked bowlegged the next day, while an apologetic Remus waited on him hand and foot while Severus brewed for them both.

The subsequent month, the potions master agreed to floo home. Exiting the fireplace, loud moans and deep growls from the bedroom greeted him, causing him to quicken his steps. Walking into the bedroom, he was immediately pounced upon much to Sirus' relief. Between the two of them, the beast's desires were slacked and after that they fell into a routine with Severus joining them for a half day every month.

That had all changed with the first moon subsequent to Quirrell. Severus had flooed as usual but
instead of immediately being assaulted by the sound of intercourse, he was met by silence. It was unnerving given their usual trend and worried that somehow the manor's wards had been breached, he threaded carefully, wand in hand as he searched for the others. But it proved unnecessary as he found Sirius, reclining in his favourite chair, a copy of the newspaper in his hands.

His question was obvious as he stood in the doorway.

"I'm not sure," Sirius shrugged, patting the arm of the chair in invitation. "He hasn't even groped me yet."

"What?" Severus asked in surprise, settling on the indicated spot.

"Uh-huh. He isn't the least bit horny. He went to nap about an hour ago. I checked him for a fever and everything. Nothing. And hear this..."

"What?"

"He refused his steak. You know how he likes it at these times, really rare."

Severus could attest to that. Those steaks saw a cooking time shorter than what was necessary to boil an egg.

"He lifted half of mine's instead."

Severus mulled over the matter. It was strange. Based on Sirius' words, Remus was acting true to his normal character. "Perhaps his control has increased?"

"In one month?" Sirius snorted. "Hardly likely."

"I know," Severus allowed. "But then what else could it be?"

They got their answer that night. Remus left them a few minutes before nightfall, fingering the vial of Wolfsbane he held. His lovers' eyes were on him as he walked away and he knew why, seeing that he was as confused as they were.

Where was the dull ache that always preceded a transformation? Why could he not feel the shifting of bones as his anatomy converted? Moreover, the urge to howl a welcome to the divine entity was absent. All in all, the man felt...normal. One would think that the full moon was at least two weeks away given how his body was acting.

The door locked behind him and embedded spells activated, ensuring that he could not leave till morning. Sitting, Remus toyed with the vial. It seemed almost alien to him. He had no desire to guzzle it down, felt no urgency for its relief. It was more habit than anything else that had him uncorking it and swallowing, the task more difficult than he remembered it. Barely had the last few drops been consumed that he was overcome by a wave of nausea that had him retching violently, regurgitating the potion.

Once in control of his body functions again, he banished the evidence, eyeing the empty vial with astounded eyes. Had something been wrong with the potion? Severus rarely made errors but it was possible that something had gone wrong in its preparations that had his body rejecting it. But honestly, he could not see that happening given Severus' drive for perfection, especially when it came to his family.

So that ruled out the potion being at fault. So then...what was it?
Deep in thought, the fact that darkness was quickly descending alluded him as an old memory niggled at his mind. It resurfaced slowly given its age. It was from his third year at Hogwarts with him seated in the classroom that was now Severus' domain. As if through a fog, Slughorn's face emerged followed by his lecturing voice.

"The notion of potion poisoning is the stuff of tales. Potions complement our magic and bodies and could never work against it. Take the Pepper-Up potion. For an exhausted wizard it provides instant energy but for a fully rested wizard, it does nothing. If it is not needed, its effects will not occur and the potion will pass harmlessly though the wizard's body.

"However, in the case of a potion whose ingredients could cause the body harm, the wizard's magic will forcibly eject it before it has a chance to be processed. This will always happen..."

Shock ran through the man as the memory faded. His body had rejected the potion, meaning that it had been poisonous to him. And the only reason it would be thus was if it no longer complemented his magic. For the potion not to be complementary meant that there was nothing within him that it could act upon. There were no urges to smother, no wild beast to be tamed. Thus to not need the potion implied that there was no longer a werewolf to be tamed.

And no werewolf meant that Remus was free.

At the same moment that that realisation hit, a single beam of light bathed the room. Remus' mouth went dry and his eyes widened impossibly as he stumbled to his feet, turning towards the window. There before him in all its glory was the full moon greeting him with its milky glow.

A trip to Hogwarts followed the next day, as none of the trio wished to celebrate prematurely. Poppy did every possible test, even removing almost a pint of blood from Remus to analyse. An hour later, she had emerged with tears in her eyes for the man she had had to treat so many times over the years. There was not a trace of lycanthrope in his blood. It was true; Remus was free.

"The stone," Albus stated thoughtfully, stroking his long beard. "It has healing properties, as we all experienced and for all intents and purposes, lycantrophy is a disease."

"And so it was healed," Lucius had finished, awe in his voice for the miracle that had occurred.

The exact cause of it was irrelevant for Remus, who was too overcome by the realisation that for the first time since childhood, he was normal again, just an average wizard. The change of status meant so much to him. He could get a job, a proper one! He could walk down the streets in broad daylight without fear of reprisal. But most of all, he could take long midnight strolls with his two lovers at the height of the full moon. That last point meant the most to him.

Months later it seemed ironic when he mastered the animagus change and his form was revealed to be a wolf. It became a joke of sorts that he could never be completely free of the creature but it was a form he embraced, knowing that for once he would be in complete control.

Severus was drawn back to the present by a hard sucking on his neck. "Remus don't!" he ordered too late as the amber-eyed man gave him a love-bite.

"You know you love it," was the languished reply as the taller man rose slightly to start raining kisses against his jaw line. "Be honest now."

Severus' reply was halted by the floo that roared into action. For a moment he panicked, afraid that it was Narcissa coming to haul whoever was present over for dinner. To his infinite relief, it was only Sirius, whose black eyes darkened in pleasure as he took in their position.
"What a delightful sight," he drawled, a gleam entering his eyes as he moved towards them, fingers already working on his clothing.

"Join us?" Remus asked, already resuming his work on the potions master's neck, smirking when Severus writhed in response.

"Wasted words," was Sirius' growl as he landed on Severus' other side, reaching over him to pull the sandy haired man over Severus for a kiss before bestowing the same on the man. "It isn't often that you come here during the week," he murmured as they parted.

"He came to complain of something or another," Remus said glibly, the motion of his hand on Severus rendering the professor unable to do anything but moan. "I thought this was a much better way of distracting him."

"And infinitely more pleasurable for us," Sirius agreed, drinking in the sight of Severus in passion. "Let's ensure that he can't even remember whatever was bothering him."

"An excellent idea," Remus agreed.

Putting action to words, the two ex-lions ensured that that happened.

Harry was not at all put out that the veela did not share his enthusiasm. "Uncle Sevvy asked the same thing, but Grandpa won't change his mind," Harry continued, a note of pride entering his voice. "He said that it was the perfect pre-exam stress reliever."

"He does know that the term is post-exam right? Besides, why a stress reliever at all? What does he think the holidays are for?" Draco grumbled with a headshake, while wondering if all the sweets the man consumed had finally addled his brain.

"Well..."

"The only benefit of this is seeing which students truly are dedicated to their studies," the veela deduced.

"How so?" Harry asked curiously, forcing himself away from the mental itinerary he was already planning for the Saturday.

Draco eyed him as if the answer was obvious. "No one serious about passing the exams will go," he summarised.

"That's not right," Harry said with a mild frown, meeting his blue gaze.

"How so?"

"Cuz we're going," he replied simply, lips quirking slightly at his mate's incredulous look. "Why did you think I mentioned it? We've only had one trip so far and I'm sure this one will be even better."

"We aren't going," Draco declared, his tone firm and unyielding. "These next few days are critical if we wish to be successful in the examinations."

"Lighten up will you?" Harry ordered, before gentling his tone. "We know everything we need already. We can take them now and pass."

"We are not going," the veela reiterated, dismissing the truth in Harry's statement. The discussion
was already over in his mind.

"It'll be great," Harry said, easily breezing over his mate's last words. "I promised Luna and Ginny that I'd bring them back some trinkets the next time we went. Perhaps some of those fairy statues we saw in that showcase last time. They'd love them I'm sure."

"Well then I'm sure that Grandfather would not mind carrying us there a day in the holidays seeing as we won't be making this trip."

"And I want to visit the sweet shop," he continued, pretending not to hear the veela as he rolled over. "Those pudding filled chocolate frogs were the best. Oh! And some Ice Mice for Grandpa, he loves those."

"Then you best order some," Draco directed, turning back to his essay. "Because the only place we are going on Saturday is to the library."

When Harry did not respond, the veela considered the matter to be closed. If he had turned he would have seen the calculating look on Harry's face before his shoulders shook with silent mirth before he reclaimed the book. But the veela didn't and so he worked on his essay, glad that he had resolved the situation.

Harry hummed softly to himself as he walked, smiling in greeting at the students he had encountered along the way. Hmm...the kitchens definitely was the best part of Hogwarts, he decided, patting his full stomach in contentment.

A trip to the rooms had earned him an honorary sampling of the night's courses...a sampling that left him with the dubious pleasure of not requiring to eat for at least a week he decided with another grin as he headed home. A rest might be in order he noted, given the pleasant feeling the full stomach gave him.

Lost in his memories of treacle tarts and pies Harry didn't notice the group of students hustling down the corridor, trying to make it back to Gryffindor Tower before someone believed that they were trying to skip out on their restriction. Nevertheless they saw him and as a collective unit they stopped, hardly believing their luck at running into him, and alone at that. They stood quietly, waiting for him to sense their presence.

Harry barely restrained himself from tripping when his eyes fell on the students he had not had contact with for weeks. A guarded look immediately entered his eyes as he told himself that he had nothing to fear of them. That reminder gave him the footing he needed to stand his ground and meet their gaze levelly. He had felt them observing him before, sometimes when he came to the Tower or when they ate in the hall. However, anytime he looked their way, their eyes averted, something he did not mind. But now he felt that he would have to say something to them, and was not sure if he was prepared to do so.

He was not prepared to speak first. If they wanted to talk to him, they would have to start. Sensing this, Brussels, whom Harry had realised was the first year's leader of sorts stepped forward, clearing his throat. Despite the fact that the other lions were looking at him for guidance, he did not seem confident in what he was going to say.

"Potter, we want to tell you something, have been wanting to for a long while. Would you allow us to?"
There was a plea in his tone that was surprising and curious to see what could have him sounding this way, he nodded slightly.

"Thank you," the twelve year old breathed, and Harry saw the relieved looks the others gave each other. "I speak for all of us when I say that we're sorry. We've had more than enough time to think. We were wrong in so many ways and we've realised that for ourselves, not just because of what the teachers and our parents told us."

Harry felt mild sympathy as the group sported abashed faces. Although no one other than those involved knew the reason for the punishment the students had been given, stories had nonetheless circulated about the howlers that had found the students in their beds.

Luckily for Harry, the rebukes were generalised and in no way implicated him. He knew from Ron that his two year-mates had gone home for that weekend, but unlike the first years who had returned looking contrite, their countenance remained as sour as ever.

They were waiting for a response, Harry suddenly realised. He ran through the boy's words, accessing it for a sincerity which he found. There was honest contrition in his words, they were truly sorry he noted. But could he forgive them for all the hurts and torment he had faced? He wasn't sure he could. Yet, to rebuff their apology would be cruel. They had made the effort, and even if he could not forgive them, then at least he could accept it and move on.

He brought a hand up and under his hair, rubbing at his neck while he phrased his reply. He ended up simply shrugging and saying, "I accept." Simple, but seemingly effective as the first years all breathed in relief.

"Thanks Potter!" Brussels exclaimed excitedly. "I hope this means we could be friends. We would really like for you to hang out with us. We could..."

Harry had recoiled in shock after the 'friends' bit. Which part of his reply had implied that he wanted something to do with them? It was best to nip that idea in the bud. "Whoa," he commanded, raising a hand to stop the flow of words. "Don't get carried away there. I accepted. I never agreed to be friends."

A nugget of guilt wormed its way through Harry's consciousness as the group's expression changed to being crestfallen. Brussels especially seemed to be shocked senseless, as his mouth gaped open at Harry's bluntness.

"But in the office," a tentative voice began. Looking around the twelve year old, Harry saw a hazel eyed witch eyeing him in confusion. "You said that you wanted to be our friend."

"Had wanted," Harry corrected, guilt increasing at the girl's flinch.

"I don't understand..."

Those were the wrong words to say as they hit a nerve within the boy. His emerald eyes darkened as emotions he had carefully hid away rose to the surface, lacing every word he uttered. "So just because you apologised I should forget everything? This isn't a fairytale with a mandatory happy ending. What do you want? For us to be all buddy-buddy just because of a few words of remorse?"

"That can't happen. Yes you were lied to, I understand and accept that. What I can't accept is what you did to me. No one deserves what you did to me. What hurts me the most is that your attacks weren't the result of malice towards me. I could possibly understand that. But instead you went out of your way to make my life a living hell, solely because of what someone said.
"Did you even think about it or were you to in awe of an upperclassman talking to you and went along blindly? Because you honestly can't tell me that at least one of you didn't see that what they said didn't add up. All of you can't be muggle borns, not knowing much about magic. You guys should know that it's impossible for me to wield enough magic to maintain control over people indefinitely! Yes the spells exist, but the power to keep them active would render me a squid!

"And if you had thought about it and yet said nothing, that makes you even worse because you were a coward, not standing against something you knew was wrong. I can't be friends with people like that. Hearsay made you act that way towards me. What prevents you from doing that again the next time you hear a rumour? I would never be able to trust you, and if I can't then a relationship with you is useless. I refuse to spend my time wondering whether your actions are genuine or bracing myself for the day you decide to turn against me. I can't deal with that and I won't!"

The last few words came out on a choke and within him he felt Draco seeking him out, no doubt sensing his wild emotions. He forced himself to calm enough to reassure him, letting him know that he was safe. That done, he saw the impact of his words. One girl was openly crying, held by another whose eyes sparkled with unshed tears. The rest of the group was looking anywhere except at him. It seemed that it was only now that they truly realised how much Harry had suffered, and now understood that their words meant little.

Not knowing what else to do, and wanting to be away from them and their melancholy, Harry made a last, ending statement. "Look, you're not bad people, I know that. But there's just too much between us. I'm just one person. You don't need my friendship."

His words seemed to have the opposite effect he had desired but he knew not how to change it. "Thanks for apologising anyway," he finished and before his guilt at their reactions could overwhelm him and prod him into accepting them simply to end their misery, he left, running past them without looking back...an action which would have broken his resolve completely.

He barrelled his way into his common room, freezing there when his eyes fell on Draco. The veela was near the fireplace, enjoying the heat, a serene expression on his face. His eyes were half-closed as he faced the flames. It made for a charming picture, but right now, Harry was not in the frame of mind to enjoy it, his need for comfort superseding everything else. He dropped heavily besides the veela, forcing his way into his arms and burying his head into the crock of his neck.

His actions roused the veela out of his drowsy state and as his arms automatically circled him and started rubbing his back, his sleepy voice asked. "Do you want to talk about it?"

It took Harry a second to decide. "Not yet," came his muffled voice. "Just hold me?" he requested.

"As long as you need," was the response as Draco shifted their position so that they were both comfortable.

But the comforting position proved to be too much for the veela who could not resist falling back into his drowsy state. He struggled against it, wanting to be ready for when Harry spoke. Harry felt it though and murmured to him. "Sleep Dray. I'm fine where I am."

"You sure?"

"I am. Sleep dominant," Harry bid, and the veela did just that.

To Harry it did not matter what state Draco was it. Awake or asleep his presence was there and that was what mattered. He gave him the strength necessary to process his emotions, identifying and dealing with all of his previous feelings. He couldn't decide what he should do about the first years
though but was not too concerned. He knew Draco would help him with that once he awakened.

With that in mind, Harry mimicked his mate’s actions, pushing away his thoughts as he relaxed and allowed himself to be enveloped by sleep.

* Minerva McGonagall found it difficult to contain her mirth at her younger colleague's growls, especially when she saw a piece of the love-bite he had been striving diligently to hide. It was an amusing contrast.

"Only dunderheads would take that blasted old man at his word," Severus groused, crossing his arms and glaring at the oblivious students racing happily towards the gate.

Although Minerva quite agreed with him, she had long surrendered to the eccentrics of one Albus Dumbledore. It seemed though that Severus would not stop complaining anytime soon.

"I ought not waste my time marking and instead give all those on the list automatic fails!"

About to chastise him, the lioness stopped as she sighted a particular pair of students, one all but dragging the next through the gates. Obviously Severus had not a clue and she delighted herself by informing him.

"Ah, so I take it your godsons will be receiving their first fails?"

"What, of course not. They would never... WHAT!" he yelled as he followed Minerva's gaze. His eyes widened comically as he spotted the pair. "Where do they think they are going!" he demanded.

"To Hogsmeade...with the other dunderheads," she quipped, laughing at the dark look he shot her.

Deciding that it was best to leave him alone, the Transfiguration teacher dismissed herself, still chuckling at his incredulous face as she headed for her office, leaving a potions master muttering incessantly about setting a separate test just for his godsons, one that would make them regret ever hearing of the word Hogsmeade.

* Draco's reluctance towards the trip ended the moment Harry turned to him with a bright smile. "Thank you Draco!" he chirped happily, his eyes sparkling madly.

Caught off-guard by his expression, the veela tripped and would have fallen if not for Harry's quick intervention.

"Are you okay Dray?" Harry asked worriedly, still holding on to the portion of the robe he had grabbed.

The teenager nodded shakily, even as he cursed himself for his impulsive responses. Harry had looked at him thus many times, so why was it now that he reacted so foolishly? His self-incriminating thoughts faded as his mate pressed closer to him, tiptoeing slightly to stare into his reddening face. A sad look crossed the younger boy's face.

"We can go back if you aren't feeling well," Harry offered softly. "I know you really didn't want to come today. Do you want to return?"

The offer surprised the veela. After the past few days of Harry subtly and not so subtly hinting at
wanting to visit the village and accosting him in his bed the night before with the threat of writing their parents about Draco being mean to him, he had agreed albeit with great reluctance. And yet here, with them barely out of Hogwarts gates, Harry was willing to forgo the trip, simply out of a worry for him. That alone was enough to firm his resolve to make the day as enjoyable for the younger boy as possible.

"I just stumbled cub," he murmured, raising one of Harry's hands to his lips and kissing it softly. It gave him some satisfaction when the dark haired wizard blushed furiously, proving that he was not the only one who could be affected by the other's presence. "Let's have fun okay?"

Harry's flush increased as Draco's head came closer to rest against his for a few moments as he waited for his response. "Why was his heart beating faster?" Harry pondered as Draco tugged him gently into motion. And why was it, that when the veela bent over, he had seen flecks of silver in his normally blue gaze?

He did not have time to think about it in great detail though as the village loomed into view and his earlier excitement returned to him. Feeling mischievous, he pulled his hand free and ran off, turning to look at the veela over his shoulder. "Race you!" he called, then laughed when he heard a playful growl from his partner as he ran to catch up to him.

The last time they had been to the village they had primarily focussed on browsing through the shops, however, this time they chose to start with sightseeing instead. It was a quaint village with many hidden surprises if one knew where to look for it. At the edge of the town, a stream trickled in defiance of the cold weather. It made for a scenic location and the pair promised to visit it in spring, perhaps even wading in it a bit, if the weather permitted.

They ventured around to other locations until the chilly air chased them indoors. Not far from the inn that most students favoured because of its butter-beer sat a smaller but classier establishment that Draco immediately gravitated towards. His mate's choice was reminiscent of their mother, Harry thought, knowing that Narcissa to would have chosen the more elegant setting over the rowdy atmosphere across the street. There was only one other Hogwarts couple in the place, snuggled away in a far corner.

Draco steered them to the loveseat near the fireplace after ordering self-refilling mugs of hot chocolate and marshmallows. Cradling the pleasantly warm mug, Harry lent his head against his veela's shoulder and sighed.

"Is that a happy sigh?" Draco's asked softly.

"Uh-huh," Harry murmured, staring into the fireplace. "It's nice to get away from the school for a bit. It does get tiresome."

"How so?" the veela pressed softly, never having heard a single complaint about the school from Harry.

The dark-haired boy shifted, suppressing the urge to bring his feet up under him. "I'm not sure. It's just that it gets repetitive don't you find? Breakfast, classes, lunch, classes, homework, dinner, studying. Its monotonous and I'm glad we can break away from the routine sometimes."

Not for the first time, Draco realised the sacrifice his mate was making for him. An eleven year old in the third year was an exceptional feat and the veela knew the pressure Harry was under to maintain high grades. He did not want anyone to doubt his ability to manage a workload that students older than him sometimes struggled to maintain. He could remember the debate they had overheard their parents having when the time for choosing subjects had come around.
They had been reluctant at first to allow Harry to take so many subjects, fearing that it would burden him, but the child himself had been adamant and managed the load surprisingly well. So it tore at Draco that Harry was starting to grow bored with it all. He would have to find a way to overcome that before Harry started slacking off or found less than conventional ways of amusing himself.

"You know that home schooling is still an option right?" Draco said eventually. "We'll be on our own schedule then, like in the holidays. You won't be bored that way."

"I know," Harry sighed after swallowing. "But then we won't see our friends as much."

"We could always go back to being day students."

"True," Harry agreed, but said nothing further, simply staring into the roaring fire.

Draco lent down to kiss the boy's forehead. "We'll talk about it some more another time okay?" he whispered into his ear. "Today's not for serious conversations."

A nod was the only response and for the next hour or so they remained in the shop, eating and conversing with each other.

Once warmed and filled, they went about shopping, gathering all the nick-knacks Harry had talked about. When it became obvious that Harry was shopping mainly for others, Draco slipped quietly out of the store for some moments to head into the next-door bookstore, ordering several new volumes for them that would be delivered directly to the school before returning.

"He didn't even notice you left," the plump shopkeeper informed him with a smile.

Draco shared an indulgent look with the woman, before propping himself up in a corner of the store to wait for Harry to come to him.

Their last stop for the day was at the sweet shop, where Draco was immediately relegated as the goods holder while Harry selected a variety of sweets for them to enjoy. The blonde crinkled his nose slightly at the every flavoured beans Harry enjoyed, while Harry returned the favour, mock-gagging at the Blood Pops the veela asked him to get for him. A few students also in the store giggled at their actions, earning an eye-roll from the veela and a slight blush from Harry.

The sweet shop owner was calculating their total when a mild frown marred Harry's face. Before Draco could question him, the child hurried to a far shelf and returned with a large parcel of mixed sweets, adding it to the pile with some hesitancy.

"Whom are those for?" Draco asked curiously, picking up the package and noting that they were not the sort the mates usually favoured. "Luna and Ginny?"

"Um...no-one," Harry hedged before throwing him a pleading look that begged him not to ask further.

A bit perplexed Draco acquiesced, trying to deduce on his own for whom it was. Eventually as they left the shop, he thought of a possible person, or rather group, given the size of the bag. Looking down to the lion walking quietly besides him, Draco nodded slightly. If he was correct, he knew just whom the sweets would find themselves to.

The following day found them in Harry's bedroom, books and parchment strewn about them as they quizzed each other on their subject material. History of Magic was the only sore point for Harry seeing as he had paid scant attention to their ghostly teacher. The veela fetched his notes after giving the boy a smack on the bum. Harry pouted as he rubbed at the spot, sticking his tongue out at the
teenager's turned back. It wasn't his fault Binns was so boring!

"Cub, that exam's our first!" Draco grumbled as he dropped down besides him. "And put away that lower lip. What I give you is nothing compared to what mama and papa will do should you fail a subject."

Harry had to agree, knowing that it would not please them if he failed because of slacking off and not because of him not understanding the material. For the next two hours, Draco lectured him on the coursework, testing him along the way to make sure he was comprehended it. And the veela mate did for his mate's teaching methods was a lot more sound than the ghost in Harry's opinion. After testing him, Draco was satisfied that he at least knew enough to pass, although they would review it again after dinner and early the next morning to ensure that Harry could manage his usual E.

After they ate, Draco flooed to his godfather's quarters for a few minutes to retrieve something he had forgotten. Seizing the opportunity, Harry summoned Dobby who appeared with a wide smile on his face.

"What is Master Harry needing?" he asked cheerfully.

"Speak properly Dobby," the boy chided while he enlarged the sweet parcel.

"What do you need Master Harry," the elf corrected.

"Much better," Harry praised. "I need you to give this to the lion first years. They should be in the Tower."

Accepting the package the elf frowned. "Those students harassed Master Harry."

"I know but they apologised and well, I kinda don't want any hard feelings between us."

"Master Harry..."

"Please Dobby?" Harry pleaded, bending so that they were at eye-level. "It would make me very happy. You don't even have to say anything, just give it to them."

"Does Master Draco approve?"

"Master Draco will understand Dobby. He knows that I spoke to them. It's partly why I want to do this. Even though I don't think I could be close friends with them, everyone deserves a second chance don't they?"

After a moment, the elf nodded. "Dobby will do as you ask Master Harry. Good day."

"Bye Dobby, and thank you!" he said as the elf left with a crack. Relieved that the veela had yet to return, Harry returned to where he had sat, acting as if he had never moved.

Outside his bedroom door, Draco leaned against the wall, arms folded as he listened to the hushed conversation within. A rueful smile graced his face at Harry's pleas. He understood the elf’s reasoning. Why send a gift to people who had made you miserable? But at the end of the day, that was his mate. A kind-hearted, easy-trusting person willing to forgive those who had wronged him. As he masked his expression into one of indifference as he walked into the room, the veela just hoped that that attribute would not lead his mate into trouble someday.
The houseelf's entering crack, startled a group of first years, crowded near the fireplace with their texts around them.

"Master Harry asked me to deliver this," the creature said without preamble, passing over the parcel to one student. "Good day to you."

Staring at the package in Brussels' hand, no one noticed the elf leave. Master Harry? There was only one student in the school whom they were affiliated with that possessed such a name.

"Potter?" a witch asked hesitantly, moving closer. "Do you think its from him?"

"I doubt," another answered. "Not after what he told us."

"There's a note," Brussels interrupted, drawing their attention to him. Setting aside the package for now, he carefully unfolded it before scanning its contents, his eyes widening.

"Well?" a wizard demanded, shaking him. "Is it from Potter? What does it say?"

"Come on, read it!"

"O-okay," the twelve year old agreed, voice slightly shaken in his disbelief.

"Everyone makes mistakes but everyone deserves a second chance. I can't promise to forget, but I can forgive. Maybe the new year can bring new beginnings. Harry."

Silence reigned for several seconds as the impact of the small note hit them. Finally one of the lions crowed, "He forgives us!" before hugging the witch besides him.

It triggered a chain reaction as the first years laughed and congratulated each other. He hadn't accepted their hand of friendship but at least there was a promise for change in the future. That he was willing to overlook their terrible actions to him took a burden of their chests, leaving them with nothing but elation. Eventually calming, they returned to their studies after dividing the sweets among themselves and munching on them as they worked.

The bag and note were given a special place of honour on the table near them and more than once, one of them could be caught watching it and smiling. Michael Brussels was one of them and as he looked at the simply bag, he couldn't help but murmur, "Thanks Potter," before turning away.
Chapter 37

As an aged woman walked rigidly through her equally old house, her dull eyes glared menacingly at the still pictures that lined the wallpapered hallway. "Muggle filth!" she hissed through dry, chapped lips, the dastardly tone a perfect contrast to the woman's overall appearance. But then, Mary Providence no longer had control over her body, existing only as a quickly dulling spirit trapped within a small portion of her heart, while the rest of her aging being was consumed by a parasite that slowly leached her body of its life force with every additional second it spent within her.

Had she a chance to do it all over, the muggle woman would have never ventured over to the bramble patch at the edge of her property to investigate the pitiful whining sound she had heard. Her kind-heartedness had not led her to a trapped or injured animal as she had expected, but instead to a red-eyed beast who breathed its last breath just as the parasite sprang forth from it and into her, battling her spirit into submission as it took control of her, governing all her actions and sending her spiralling downwards to a grim death.

She had little hope of reclaiming her body; not only was she non-magical, she was old, her spirit weary from its journeys on the earth. As such, she had scant defence against the paragon of evil within her, and could do little to shirk its malevolent presence. And while the small part of her that was left cried against the actions her body was forced to make, Voldemort, although hating being demeaned to possessing filth, found grim satisfaction with his current circumstances. Illness had affected the mobility of his vessel, but the belongings of the muggle compensated for it. A shabby muggle house, residing at the highest point of the hill proved most convenient, as visitors were scarce. Consequently, there was no one to notice his vessel's changing appearance, the way the skin of the face was smoothening and greying, the nose sinking in to form slits as his true face slowly manifested itself.

Wrinkled hands rose to caress the smoothening skin, as the Dark Lord sat on a throne transfigured by his worthless servant as he marvelled at the change in his circumstances. It had taken years for him to return to this point, but this time he would succeed. There was nothing to interfere with his plans again. No traitors, no muggle-loving bastards, no bloody Potter. Dumbledore no doubt revelled in his loss of the Sorcerer's Stone, but the small defeat meant little to the Dark Lord. Did the fool believe him to be the greatest threat since Grindelwald for his magical prowess solely? If so, then he was a greater fool that Voldemort imagined.

The Dark Lord in no way considered himself invincible, at least not in his glory days. Even in the midst of his conquests within the world, he had been painfully aware of his mortality, of the knowledge that one unexpected curse could send him straight into oblivion without enjoying the fruits of his labour. Thus he had continued his research started in his Hogwarts days, finding several concrete ways that would ensure, that in the eventuality of him finding himself in a potentially fatal situation, there would be a way to ground him, to prevent him from moving on to the afterlife while he found a way to return.

The Sorcerer's Stone had been placed low on his list, but circumstances had driven him to seek it as his first attempt at resurrecting himself. The power of the stone would have allowed him to merge himself inside of his servant's body, healing it, and banishing its original owner to death while leaving him in control of it. The other powers the stone offered, such as immortality meant little to him. He would not be dependant on something so fragile to ensure he lived forever. No, Lord Voldemort needed no such crutch. Instead, he had planned to dispose of the stone once he could solidify his survival through his Horcruxes. However, it had only taken one fight with a bloody nine year old to ruin all of those plans.
Since departing Dumbledore's stronghold, the Dark Lord had wandered through the wizarding world in search of another servant. Sometimes he travelled in the form of a spirit, at other times he merged himself with an available creature. He felt some remorse for the hundreds of serpents that had sacrificed themselves to sustain them. They were one of the few creatures he actually felt mild affection for, especially the last pure black snake that reminded him strongly of his own familiar who was still trapped under the stasis he had cast before his raid on the Potters. He had already determined that when the wizarding world was his, he would honour their noble sacrifices to him by making the snake the emblem of the wizarding world. Indeed, it was a fitting act for them.

It had taken him three months to find a trace of his dark mark among the free populace of the world, and he had sought the person out in Bulgaria. He had been wary of whom he would discover, from Quirrell he had learnt that his most capable and loyal Deatheaters were either dead or rotting away on the island prison. He was well aware that only his minions who had betrayed him, were crafty enough to escape, or were deemed insignificant by the Ministry had escaped Azkaban. It was a sobering realisation, especially when he found himself with another incompetent fool, who had fainted in shock when he had revealed himself.

Had the situation been different, Voldemort would have struck the man down instantly, however, as had been the case with Quirrell, he had to make do with the options available to him. His servant was both a coward and a traitor, escaping Azkaban by stunning a number of his more faithful servants and leaving them at the mercy of the aurors while he returned to his motherland. The Dark Lord had little patience for traitors, but was forced to temper his instinctive urge to strike the man with the viper's poison, instead reassuring the coward that he would suffer no immediate retributions for his actions a decade ago. The fool did not even notice the less than subtle hint that once Voldemort was back to full power he would be eliminated in the most painful way. It was with that thought in mind, that he could one day torture the buffoon senseless that had led him to traverse to this hilltop residence while he waited for the servant to complete his tasks.

The dwelling he inhabited was situated in a rural muggle area, relatively close to Scotland's boundaries. It was as close as the Dark Lord could have dared to settle near Hogwarts without risking alerting the muggle-loving idiot to his presence. Although he had little concrete proof, Voldemort believed that he was being tracked as on numerous occasions he had sensed a spirit residue similar to his own in whatever area he generally was in. The scents always vanished before he could more closely examine them, but he was certain that he had been spied upon at least three times, always ending when he was a considerable distance away from Hogwarts.

It seemed that Dumbledore feared he would try to return to the school, and while he had tried to return once, he had quickly found himself without the necessary equipment to retrieve what Quirrell had hid in the depths of the Forbidden Forest for him. Thus, he had assigned the task to his inept servant and was waiting for him to return with the final ingredients of the potion needed to restore him to his former glory.

"Where are they?" Harry asked after staring at the clock for a third time. It was twenty minutes past ten and their uncles had yet to arrive. "You don't think that this is a prank right Draco?"

"I wouldn't put it past Uncle Sirius," Draco mused from his seat, one hand idly propping up his head while he used his other to run idly through Harry's dark hair, enjoying the way he squirmed lightly at the caress.

When Dobby first delivered the note from Sirius, asking them to go to their classroom, both mates had been puzzled. Lessons were usually limited to the end of year holidays. The only reason they
could thing of a lesson being necessary was if their test scores were below average, but both seriously doubted that that was the case.

"And what is with the layout?" Harry asked further, gesturing to the side of the room which had been converted. No longer were there a large study table and some bookshelves. In their stead were several large comfortable looking cushions along with several incense holders, some of which were already lit, sending a calming fragrance throughout the room.

"I wonder if it has anything to do with our lesson? We'll give Uncle Sirius five more minutes to show up before we..."

Draco's words were cut off as the door slammed open, startling them. Turning, both of their eyes widened as Sirius strode determinedly into the room, a scowl on his face as his robes billowed behind him...wait weren't those Uncle Severus' clothes?

As the man tried to scowl and sneer simultaneously, Harry dissolved into laughter, Draco following suit while Sirius stood over them, aiming for a chilling tone as he said, "There will be no laughter in my classroom! Five hundred points from Gryffindor!"

"What about him?" Harry managed between laughs.

"You are distracting him by your imbecilic behaviour! Three hundred more points from Gryffindor and detention with...er...Hello Remus," he ended abruptly in a slightly guilty tone as the amber-eyed man cleared his throat loudly from the doorway.

"Hello...Professor," he replied with a pointed look as he walked over, patting each boy's head in greeting. "Planning on warming the couch tonight are you?"

"Erm..." Sirius began, paling slightly at the wicked glint in his lover's eye.

While he fumbled for a response, Remus spoke to the two grinning boys. "This isn't a formal lesson. Will you go and sit on those cushions for me? Severus taught you meditation right?"

"Yes Uncle."

"Good. I want you to start relaxing yourselves. There is something that we would like to start teaching Draco today."

"What about me?" Harry asked with a slight frown.

Remus ruffled his hair soothingly. "You've already learnt it child. We hope for you to assist Draco in doing the same and uncovering his animagus form. Now go on," he urged. He waited until he was obeyed, chuckling softly at Draco's eager expression before he turned to Sirius, casting a discreet privacy spell.

"Those are Severus' best teaching robes," the man pointed out, leaning against the recently vacated desk. "He will not be pleased you took him."

Sirius turned liquid brown eyes on his lover. "Oh come on Moony, it was just for fun."

"Umhmm? That fun has him searching for them all now." Remus stated as a disgruntled look appeared on Sirius' face. "I'll make you a deal and in exchange I won't tell Severus what you did. That way you won't be banned from the bedroom."

"What?" Sirius asked suspiciously, not at all liking the glint in the man's eyes.
Remus' smile turned feral as he bent to whisper his terms into Sirius' ear, laughing softly when a faint blush entered his cheeks.

"Perverted wolf!" Sirius growled in a suddenly husky tone.

"Who you love. Now do you agree or do I go to Severus?" Remus drawled, running a finger along the man's cheek.

"Fine," Sirius grumbled, although he was not in the least bit upset. The proposition was enticing.

"Good boy," Remus praised.

"Whatever." The black haired man rubbed the back of his neck. "I should go sneak these back home since he's looking for them."

Remus' lips quirked. "Do it later."

"But you said..."

"I lied," he grinned broadly. "Sev's in the greenhouse with Lucius and Narcissa."

"You tricked me!" Sirius spluttered after a few seconds of disbelief.

"Oh contraire," Remus laughed. "I simply ensured that Severus and I get to ravage you under the moonlight sometime."

Disabling the spell, Remus left Sirius to recover from the image while he crossed to join the two boys on the cushions, moving as quietly as possible so not to disturb them.

Both wore serene expressions, a clear indication that they were already in the right mind frame for such a lesson. He waited until Sirius had fallen into place besides him before he lighted the few unlit incenses, these different from the ones already burning in that they bore hallucinogenic particles that would assist the boys in what was coming.

Letting his voice soften into a soothing murmur, he began.

"I want you to imagine yourselves in an open plain," he said smoothly, eyeing them carefully. Neither startled at his words and he nodded, pleased. After a few seconds, he continued. "In this plain it is just you and nature. Focus on what you see, smell and hear...now concentrate on what particularly attracts you. Widen your mind and let other images flow. Do not think, just feel. Let your senses transform where you are, changing it to an environment you feel at home in."

Turning slowly, Remus nodded to Sirius, who gently prodded at Draco's mind, careful not to break the meditative state he was in. It was necessary. Remus needed a hint as to where the veela had taken himself if he was to guide him further into the process. Harry, he was not as concerned for, given that the child was already versed in his form.

Once Sirius had gotten his answer, he bent and whispered it into his lover's ear who looked contemplating at the blonde-haired teenager before continuing.

"Now, I want you to free yourself of all conscious thought, forget who you are, simply be. Keep your senses focussed. Now, very carefully I want you to imagine a being in front of you, something that clearly reflects what you are feeling now. Do not think about it, let the image come to you. Listen to your surroundings, let them help you in your task. The being is shaping now, regarding you. Help it solidify, help it to become a reality. It should be there with you now. It is your friend, he
means you no harm. Reach for it, embrace it, let your senses merge into one."

Remus was forced to hold still when Sirius's hand tightened on his calf after a prolonged pause. Shooting the man an annoyed look, he stilled when he saw what Sirius was trying to alert him to. Harry was frowning, a troubled look on his face even as he fidgeted. He was still firmly in his trance-like state, but it was obvious he was not at ease with what he was seeing.

Why was that happening? This exercise should not have bothered Harry in the least seeing that he already knew his animagus form. It should have been like meeting an old friend for him. So what was plaguing the child then? Remus had to put a halting hand on Sirius. For him to break the boy physically out of the trance could panic Harry, which in turn would upset Draco.

Retrieving his wand, Remus cast a selective silencing charm, signalling to Sirius to continue with Draco while he brought Harry slowly back to consciousness.

"Harry," the man instructed. "Come back. You are moving away from the being, fall back into your senses. The environment is releasing you, take control of yourself once again. You are now leaving the place you are in, back to your plain. Listen to nature once again. Depart from it now, rise above the plain. You are alone now, in the recesses of your mind. Leave it now, come back to the present. Wake yourself."

A minute passed after Remus' last words before Harry's eyes flew open, the child looking around him frantic for some seconds.

"You're okay Harry," his uncle reassured, stilling him before he jerked Draco out of his meditative state.

"What was that?" Harry demanded, his voice shaky.

"What do you mean child?" he asked, puzzled. "I was showing you how to access your inner beast, the animagus you transform into."

"No you didn't," Harry protested. "That wasn't my form!"

"That isn't possible Harry," Remus said slowly. "You went through this process before, why are you so surprised as to what you saw?"

"I never did this before!" Harry said, voice rising slightly.

Besides him Draco was slowly awakening, Harry's panic rousing him from the state he was in. Sirius did not try to stop him for the veela had already embraced the form in his mind. He had seen the merger happen, when a faint gold glow emanated from the teenager for a few moments before fading. Draco was now aware of what his form was and had accepted it. It was only a matter of showing him how to do the transformation that was left.

Seeing that he was having no difficulty, Sirius turned worried eyes to his godson, dispelling Remus' spell so that he could hear the frantic words.

"I'm a kitten Uncle Remus!" Harry said loudly. "My form is a kitten!"

"What's wrong?" Sirius interjected, causing wide green eyes to turn on him.

"Uncle Remus said that I was supposed to see my animagus, but I didn't! That wasn't it!"

"Pup, the trance you were under doesn't lie."
"It's wrong!" Harry protested, voice wavering. "I don't want to be anything else!"

"Cub?" Draco asked bemused, "Calm down."

"Tell them they're wrong Draco!" Harry demanded, rising from his cushion to move to Draco who stood also. "I'm a kitten, my form is a kitten!"

"Come cub, you need to relax. There is no reason for you to carry on so. If you think something is wrong, let's sit and discuss it."

"That's right," Remus seconded. "There must be an explanation for this. Come, you said that you never went through this process the first time you transformed?"

Harry shook his head furiously. "No, I did what Professor McGonagall said to do! I'm a kitten!"

"We're not disputing that Harry," Sirius said calmly. "What did Minerva have you do?"

Harry took a deep breath before reciting her instructions as close as possible. "Concentrate on changing your form. Feel your body shifting, turning into an animal. Release the human constraints on your person and allow yourself to fall into the animal, to embrace all of its characteristics. You are one with the beast and the beast is you."

Both men shared a look before Sirius asked Harry to explain the circumstances under which Minerva came to tutor him in the first place.

"She didn't tutor him." Draco explained instead, rubbing his hand up and down Harry's shoulder. "It was the weekend before Harry's admittance to Hogwarts and he was doing a mock run of her class. She transformed as she always does. Harry asked her to explain it and then he tried it and it worked."

"Well there's the problem," Remus sighed, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "Harry, when you changed, what did you have in mind?"

"I wanted to be like the Professor," he admitted. "And then I was a kitten."

Both men nodded as they came to the same solution. "Harry, Minerva probably never believed that you would transform, otherwise she would have never explained it to you, at least not in that way."

"What do you mean?" he asked suspiciously.

"Harry, animagus transformations come in two stages. The first is what we just took you and Draco through. You can't transform without knowing what you are to become and that is what the trance does. It helps you to discover your inner beast. From there, you need to fully accept what is within you and afterwards you move on to what Minerva explained, physically manifesting that form."

While Draco looked thoughtful at Sirius' words, Harry's expression grew thunderous. "So you are trying to tell me I'm not supposed to be a kitten?"

"Yes Harry," Sirius agreed, folding his arms together loosely. "You yourself said that you changed to match Minerva's cat animagus. It makes sense actually, right Remus?"

"Yes Siri. I always questioned your form. Persons usually bear some traits of their animagus form. For instance, Sirius is as playful as a dog yet as loyal. I have never found definite aspects of you that I can firmly link to a kitten."

"So what will happen now?" Draco inquired.
"Well from what I saw Harry was fighting against the merger right?"

"Of course," Harry frowned. "I'm not that!"

Ignoring the indignant tone, Remus continued. "He would have to embrace his inner beast to transform."

"That could potentially override his kitten form," Sirius mused.

"Possibly. Or there is the chance that he could have two forms."

"But persons with two forms are rare."

"Well we'll only know when it happens."

"It won't happen!" Harry declared, interrupting them. "I won't do it! My form is a kitten and so it shall remain!"

"Harry, there is no need..."

"No!" Harry yelled, eyes glinting madly. "I won't change it, I won't!"

Before any of them could move to stop him, Harry ran past them, and out of the room.

"Let him go Draco," Remus said, putting a stilling hand on the veela who had begun to follow him. "He's just upset and needed to let that out."

"I should go to him anyway."

"Hold on there Little Malfoy," Sirius told him. "Sometimes people need some time alone, even from their mate."

Draco did not look pleased in the slightest, but after a little more prodding from his Uncles agreed to put the matter aside for now.

"What do you think triggered that Moony?" Sirius asked a while later from his spot on the window seat.

Remus looked up at him from over the newspaper he was reading. A small frown formed a line in his forehead as he mused on the matter. "Personally I think that Harry was scared by whatever being was revealed to him. Why else would he protest so vehemently against it?"

"I'm not sure, but eventually he will have to embrace his inner self. He may encounter problems transforming eventually, especially if his personality changes to meet his animagus."

"I think we should drop the matter with Harry for now," Remus decided as he returned to his newspaper. "The point of it was to ensure that they could have a way of hiding in the open should the need arise. Harry has a form, even if it's not his true one. Let's leave it at that and concentrate on making sure that Draco had one to fall back on as well."

"Okay Moony, if you say so."

* 

Sleep was proving most difficult for Harry to achieve. The previous night he had slept fitfully, but he had put it down to residual anxieties from his meditation session earlier. But tonight was something
different entirely. He twisted and tossed on the bed until finally he settled into an uneasy sleep. However, only moments after he had drifted off, was he drawn into the most realistic dream he had ever experienced.

A churlish voice barked and screamed at a trembling slim man, who crouched at the grotesque figure’s feet, stammering out apologies in a thickly accented voice that Harry could not place. The man was screaming for mercy, especially when a wrinkled hand jerked a wand, causing the man to writ in obvious agony long after the curse was removed. There was something familiar about the voice Harry realised, despite the unfamiliar body it came from. Yes, that voice bore a strong resemblance to one he had heard before, possessing that grating snake-like quality that had haunted him for nights on end a few years back.

The cringing man was being lambasted for his failure at something...what he could not particularly understand. If possible, Harry would have flinched at the bloodied wrinkled hand that gesticulated wildly towards the kneeling man before the grey face twisted in concentration and a pained scream erupted from the man's lips as he clutched frantically at his left forearm. It was as the dream reached an ear-rending crescendo that Harry finally managed to pull himself from the visages of it, sitting up abruptly with a hand clenched to his chest as he took deep gasping breathes. Seconds later the trembling in his frame that always accompanied a nightmare started and Harry curled himself up into a ball to bear it more easily.

When the shudders had lessened in its intensity, Harry reluctantly straightened, only now recognising the strong sting on his forehead emanating from his scar. He hissed as he glossed trembling fingers over it as the pain increased incrementally for almost a minute before returning to a more bearable level. Pain had never before accompanied a dream he thought as he swung his feet over the edge of the bed. However, the exhaustion his body and mind felt from a week of stressful examinations deterred him from further thought except that he would never be able to return to sleep with the sting and the clammy condition of his pyjamas.

He was loath to disturb anybody, especially his mate since he had no doubt that the veela was as tired if not more than he was. The same held true for his parents. No doubt they had worked extensively to prepare the lovely welcome home dinner that had had and they too deserved a peaceful night without him interrupting them, no matter how realistic the dream had seemed. As he wearily made his way towards his lavish bathroom, Harry was forced to ignore the tiny voice in his mind that whispered that what he should be doing was going to his parents, for it was their job.

Unwillingly, the memory of the kneeling man returned and Harry shuddered. It had felt so real, almost as if he had been standing right there in the room, experiencing the events as it happened. It was a scary notion, one that had goose bumps rising on his flesh.

"Don't think about it," he chided himself softly as he left the bathroom, the door automatically closing behind him. "If you think about it, you'll dream it again." But it took Harry less than five minutes after returning to his bed to acknowledge that he was to keyed up to sleep and that the scar's throbs were being to become a nuisance.

Maybe a potion, he decided, as he pushed off his thick coverlet once again, summoning a pair of night slippers with an absent wave before padding quietly out of his room. Thankfully, the spells on the manor kept the hallways at a pleasant temperature that made extra clothing unnecessary. The torches flared as he walked, illuminating the passageways for the preteen. The flames cast a gentle glow on the portraits that held the images of the Malfoys of the past, most sleeping quietly in frames, while some whispered to one another. Draco's grandfather however, walked along his side through the different frames, scolding him for being out of bed so late. When he noticed the pained frown Harry wore however, the scolding ceased and he inquired worriedly about his state.
"My scar hurts sir," Harry sighed as he turned yet another corridor. At times like these, a large house was proving to be a nuisance. He still had another minute or two of walking to do to reach the room. "No wonder Papa prefers to apparate everywhere."

"Speaking of your papa," Abraxas interjected, his mouth twisting slightly at the title. "Lucius has already retired for the night. There is no one to help you in his office."

"I know that," Harry responded softly, his diction changing the match the man's. "It is not him that I am seeking."

"Then pray tell, why are you going there? Would it not be more productive to seek him out in his quarters?"

Harry nipped at his lip before responding. "I do not want papa. I'm going to get a potion. He always has some in his office desk."

"And are you a healer to prescribe yourself medication?" the wizard demanded. "You could poison yourself. Call for your elf and let it get Lucius."

"I am not daft," Harry snapped abruptly, a flash of red shortly showing in his eyes. "I know what I need."

"I am not implying that you are daft," Abraxas retorted after leaping into another frame. "But you are only eleven and not at all proficient in healing arts."

"I can't sleep and I'm in pain," the dark haired boy stated as he glared at the moving wizard trailing him. "I require a pain reliever...medium strength as well as a sleeping potion or even better a dreamless sleep. Shall I describe them to you as well as list their ingredients?"

"Don't adopt that tone with me whelp!" Abraxas huffed. "Why if I were capable you would eat standing for your words to me!"

"Well you aren't," the boy deadpanned, as he finally reached the desired door. "Why are you following me anyway? Is there no other portrait willing to listen to your innate ramblings?"

The snide drawling tone that Harry had adopted was one unlike which the patriarch heard at it disturbed him. There was an edge to that voice as well as a gleam in Harry's eyes that was unnatural for the boy and in an instant, Abraxas realised that it was not an eleven year old he was conversing with but something or someone who had in some form or fashion infested the child.

"Harry," the deceased wizard asked carefully, "Harry."

"What?" the preteen snapped in annoyance as he unlocked the door. "Can't you tell that I don't want to be disturbed? Go back to where you came!"

"Harry I think you should go to Lucius now. Something is not right with you."

"And the solution to it is in the office," Harry snorted, as he pushed open his way through the double oak doors. The fireplace immediately roared into life, illuminating the posh room that clearly reflected the man who most habited it. But the child spared no thoughts for the decor, instead dropping heavily down into a leather chair behind the desk and searching with his small hands for the groove in the underside of the table.

It took him three tries before it unlooked a hidden compartment in the mahogany desk, from where Harry retrieved a small brass key. As he closed the compartment, his elbow knocked against a
container on the desk, spilling some of the essence it contained on the wood.

Immediately the scent of sandalwood wafted into the room, the scent the current Malfoy head favoured to keep him focussed as he poured over files. The smell was synonymous with the man for Harry as he remembered numerous times in which his nose was tantalised by the smell when he was pressed against the strong man's body, the aroma clinging to him for hours after he had left the office.

The boy froze; key in hand, as these memories raced through his mind, lifting the fog he had fallen into. As the portrait looked on from the hallway, torn between entering his frame within or rushing off for his son, he observed the change in Harry, the way the boy was blinking rapidly, a frown forming on his face before it gave way to simple confusion.

"When did I get in here?" Harry pondered aloud, staring at the key in his hand. Looking up, he made eye contact with the portrait. "Sir? Aren't you going to come in?"

The contrast between the normal, slightly strained tone Harry was using now, and the drawling one of before was stark, but as Lucius' father stepped through into his frame over the mantel, he noted that there was no trace of that red glow in the boy's eyes anymore. Whatever it was, Abraxas was certain that that had been the cause of the child's rudeness to him earlier.

Yet the man could not help but inquire about the state of his grandson's little mate. "How are you feeling whelp?"

"I told you that already," Harry frowned, rising and heading over to a large book shelf. "My scar hurts and I am sleepy. Now where is that keyhole again?" he finished, half to himself as he slowly scanned the rows, looking for the crevice.

"Fourth shelf up. The third book from the right is the dummy. That's right."

"Hmm, I should have remembered that," Harry mused as he tiptoed carefully inserted the key.

There was a slight clicking sound as the space besides the bookshelf shifted, revealing a cabinet.

"Is all of this necessary?" Harry grumbled as he opened the cabinet door.

"I set this up back in Grindelwald's time," Abraxas said in a slightly defensive tone. "Raids and what not were frequent and I needed a safe place for my essential items. No one would have expected to find such a megalith setup in a pure blood manor. Lucius could have dismantled it but instead he turned it into a storage bin of sorts."

"Oh," was Harry's only response to the impromptu history lesson. "Grindelwald...Grandpa defeated him right?"

"Yes he did. And that was why Dumbledore is considered the greatest wizard of his generation...no matter his eccentrics."

"And who is the greatest of your generation sir?"

"Unfortunately I must say that Voldemort proved himself to be quite powerful in my last years. I would consider him the greatest from that generation, disregarding the fact that his powers were used for evil."

"I see," Harry mumbled, summoning the desk chair to him, and standing on it to better peruse the line of potions. "And in these times? Has anyone new emerged?"
"I am dead whelp," the man pointed out wryly.

"But you and papa talk," the dark haired boy countered. "So you should know. Who is it?"

Abraxas rubbed at his chin thoughtfully, contemplating the best way to answer. "Why don't you get that potion you've been after the last five minutes."

"And the answer to my question?" he asked with a raised eyebrow before heeding his instructions and selecting a vial.

"Ask me in a couple of years," he said shortly, his tone breaking no argument.

Harry scowled at him. Being put off like that was one of his pet peeves but he knew by now the nature of Malfoy men and knew that asking further would simply lead to frustration on his own part. "Fine," he grumbled, jumping nimbly of the chair before sitting on it and toying with the vial.

"Papa only has a few here and hardly any are helpful to me."

"Hmm?"

"There are calming potions, anti-nausea and even a pepper-up. But the closest thing to what I need is this and it's only a mild pain reliever. I doubt it will be of much help."

"Lucius only keeps potions he needs for every day things, anything stronger is in Severus' laboratory. Now if you would be a good boy and seek someone out then you would have better relief."

"We've already been over this," Harry reminded before sipping at the tasteless liquid in the vial. As he expected, although the pain on his forehead dimmed, it was still noticeable. "Well its better than nothing," he sighed, recapping the slender glass and setting it aside. "Unfortunately that won't help me get back to sleep."

"You look tired to me whelp."

"I am, but I haven't slept good thus far and I am certain that I will dream again."

"I haven't slept well," the man corrected.

"Now I know where Draco gets it from," Harry grumbled with a slight smile before rising and setting the office to rights.

"Good now it's off to bed with you," Abraxas said sternly, wagging a finger. "All good boys should be sound asleep in their beds at this hour."

"So I'm a naughty boy then?" Harry inquired glibly as he locked the office doors. "Because I'm still awake."

"You will be if you aren't back in bed in the next ten minutes."

"Yes sir," Harry chuckled, stretching his arms above him as he went in the opposite way from which he came. "Will you walk back with me?"

"Afraid?"

"No," Harry said defensively. "I just don't like it when the lights turn off themselves. It's spooky."
"I understand," he replied kindly, knowing what it took for the child to admit to it. "Come on, move those tiny legs of yours. I was busy before you came, you know."

"My legs are not tiny!" Harry protested in annoyance.

"Really? You're a lot shorter than Draconis was at that age."

"Why do you insist on calling him Draconis?"

"He was named after my own father," Abraxas explained loftily. "And I will continue to refer to him as such."

After that, they continued in silence, until they arrived at Harry's quarters. "Whelp?"

"Yes?"

"If this happens again I want you to promise me to go to your parents or Draconis. I do not like you wandering about alone."

"I will," Harry agreed. "Thank you for walking me"

"You're welcome whelp. But remember, no more night wanderings unless it leads you to your parents' rooms."

"Yes sir, good night."

"Goodnight Harry, and its Grandfather Abraxas, not sir."

"You're Draco's Grandfather, not mine," was the soft response as Harry closed the door behind him, not noticing the reaction his passing words had caused.

A few nights later Harry barely stifled a scream as he awoke from another dream. This time, the figure that was becoming increasingly disfigured had drew blood from the man whom Harry now thought of as being his servant. The entire scenario had been gruesome, he thought soberly as he took deep calming breaths. Chills were racing through his body and once again his scar throbbed, adding to his discomfiture. And, unlike the previous occasions his physical reactions did not dim, nor did the pained screams of the man which still echoed in his head.

Looking around him for a distraction from what he was feeling, Harry scanned his dark bedroom, not really paying attention to the details until his eyes fell on his curtained window. Faintly through the thick fabric, a wiry shadow danced, sending a shiver down the already uneasy preteen's spine. "Easy Harry," he told himself, as he felt a mild panic rise within him. "It's just a shadow...it isn't anything serious."

The words did little to reassure him though, especially as his eyes seemed riveted to the dancing fragment, his panicked mind, exaggerating it's form until to Harry, it seemed as if the shadow was emerging from the fabric, heading slowly but surely towards him.

Biting back a whimper, Harry fled the bedroom, not even bothering with a pair of slippers or night robe as he crossed the short distance to his mate's bedroom, emerald eyes wide as he stood at the side of the veela's bed. Normally the boy would have simply crawled under the covers and press as close as humanly possible to his mate. But he hesitated for the main reason that all did not seem right with the veela.

Even in the darkness of the room, Harry could see the tenseness in the blonde's face, the way his
hands curled and uncurled themselves in his bed clothes as his lips tightened, as if he was suppressing a shout or whimper. Was he in the midst of a nightmare as he himself had been a few minutes ago?

Observing his mate, Harry's intentions slowly morphed from wanting to derive comfort to offering it himself. Carefully he sat besides the rigid frame of his dominant, and tentatively pressed the flats of his palms on the boy's chest.

"Draco wake up," he urged, gripping the night shirt and shaking gently. "Come on Dray, please wake up. It's just a dream." Under his hands, Harry felt the tension slowly seeping from the veela, be it from his touch, voice or both. "Dominant," he called again. "Wake up!"

With the last word, the veela's eyes snapped open and Harry saw his own eyes reflected in slightly frantic blue eyes. "Merlin," the teenager breathed out as he sat up.

"No, it's Harry," the preteen said with a faint smile. "Are you okay?"

Draco ran a hand through his head, looking down at where his mate still held on to him. "You woke me up didn't you? Thank you cub."

"You're welcome. I had a bad dream but when I came, I saw you grimacing."

"It wasn't really a dream," Draco admitted, covering Harry's hands with his own, taking comfort from the warmth. "I couldn't see anything. It was only voices, muted at that, but what I understood was horrible!"

"I saw things Dray," Harry continued when the veela stopped, flexing his fingers under the teenager's grip. In soft, shaky tones he related his dream, noticing as he continued the way Draco's hands tightened over his.

"That sounds like what I heard," the veela said in a musing tone. "That's weird; I don't think it is normal for people to dream the same things."

"Could it be because we are mates?" Harry offered, leaning forward to press his forehead against his dominant's neck, sighing in relief as somehow, the connection dampened the pain.

"I'm not sure," the blonde replied, reaching up to work his hands through Harry's hair while he thought. "Mates can sense each other's feelings. Maybe you're dream was so bad, I felt it too?"

"Probably," Harry murmured, rubbing his forehead lightly against Draco's skin.

Several minutes passed in that vein until Draco thought it best they try to sleep some more. However, after the chilling voices, the veela was loathe to rest alone. "Sleep with me?" he asked the quiet boy in his arms.

"That's why I came," Harry replied, his breath tickling the veela lightly.

However, minutes later, despite the soothing syrup Draco had had Trix bring them, the pair were unable to calm themselves enough to sleep. After Harry's third sigh and Draco's forth shift, the dark haired preteen sat up, pulling the coverlet of them. "Come on," he urged, hopping off the bed.

"What?" the veela asked in confusion, propping up on his elbows. "Where?"

Harry blew out a harried breath. "I should have done this last time," he muttered, admitting that the portrait had been right. "We're going to mama and papa."
"Huh?"

"Come...On!" Harry demanded, tugging at his arm. "We'll sleep with them."

Draco immediately protested. "Harry I'm thirteen! I'm too old to sleep with my parents!"

"Nu-ah!" Harry retorted, tugging once more. "You can't sleep, I can't sleep, we're going!"

"No Harry!" A flush was quickly forming on Draco's face at the thought, finally freeing his hand from his mate.

A determined glint entered Harry's eye, one that reminded the veela that once the boy's mind was set on something, it was hard to divert him. However, he would not be moved. He was thirteen for Merlin's sake! He was not going to crawl to his parents like a little child, no he wasn't!

Five minutes later, Draco was tiptoeing across the lush carpet of his parent's room, one step behind a victorious Harry, who made a mental note that puppy dog eyes were still effective against his mate. "Are we going to wake them?" the veela whispered as they stood inches from the sleeping pair.

"No," Harry said in reply. "I just want to know they're there, if you know what I mean?"

"I understand cub," he murmured.

Falling silent then, the young mates carefully made their way unto the bed, slowly integrating themselves between the husband and wife, snuggling into them and enjoying the comfort their presence afforded.

"This is better," Harry sighed as a wave of sleepiness enfolded him.

"Much," Draco agreed, earlier embarrassment forgotten. "Good night cub."

"Night Dray, love you."

"Love you too."

*

To Lucius Malfoy, mornings were the best part of the day. It was those precious few moments when he awoke that he would find his beautiful wife in his arms, her delightfully sleep ruffled hair tickling his chin lightly as her breath wafted across his chin. It was in those moments that he always pulled her closer to him, breathing in the scent uniquely hers while he stroked her shoulder until her sleep clouded blue eyes opened to greet him before her soft lips tilted up for a sweet kiss.

The Lord was prepared for those actions as always, but when he slowly roused out of the depth of sleep, he recognised that their was something unusual. For one, the warmth against him seemed substantially smaller, the length off. Usually Narcissa's sleek form pressed against him from chin to ankle, but this morning, it barely reached passed his knees. That and the fact the hair tickling his nose felt thicker than usual and its scent different.

Opening his eyes to resolve the mystery, he blinked bemusedly at the decidedly dark hair. Why on earth was his son in his bed? Soft laughter had him looking across the expanse of the bed to see Narcissa sitting up, Draco's head cushioned in her lap while she petted him gently. He, like Harry was fast asleep. With small gentle movements, Lucius shifted the boy from on his chest so that he was resting in a similar position.
"When did they get here?" he whispered softly, as his hand cupped Harry's cheek, a small smile forming on his lips when the boy pressed into his touch, a small sigh of contentment passing his lips.

"I'm not sure, but it did make for a pleasant surprise."

"Hmm..." Lucius murmured, studying first Harry and then Draco. "They look adorable like this," he admitted.

"Aren't they?" she asked rhetorically. "Let's breakfast here okay?"

Lucius nodded in agreement. "Of course darling. We will spend the morning together, perhaps even tease from these two the reason for their presence."

"Certainly."

"But first," the patriarch said a glint forming in his eyes. "I would like my morning kiss please."

Narcissa giggled before bending to meet him halfway, enjoying the feel of her husband's caress, as well as the presence of their children with them.
Harry's legs swung idly behind him as he studied the puzzle before him. "Just where are you?" he muttered as his hands sifted through the multiple pieces.

Magical puzzles were the best in his opinion. Whenever he inserted a piece correctly, a beautiful musical note sounded and the emerging picture shimmered in encouragement. However, for every wrong piece added, two correct ones returned to the pile and recovering them was quite a tedious task. This was a new puzzle for him and he was very interested in hearing the entire melody once he completed the game.

A loud crack had him turning to frown at the elf that had disturbed him with his unexpected entrance, leading him to drop the coveted puzzle piece. "Yes Dobby?" he inquired. His tone clearly reflected his annoyance as he tried to recover the fallen piece.

The elf bobbed his head apologetically. "Master and Mistress want you young master."

"Whatever for?" Harry asked after consulting the time. "I still have another hour for myself," he declared.

"Dobby does not know," the elf responded, "But young master must not keep them waiting."

"I know, I know," the eleven year old grumbled, as he rose, shooting his half-complete puzzle a mournful look. "Leave it as is," he ordered Dobby as he accepted the offered evening robe, donning it quickly. "I'll continue it later."

"Master Harry," the elf protested, "You are not supposed to leave your toys out unless they are in the play room. Mistress will scold."

"I am not done with it," Harry reiterated, straightening the robes around him. "Mama shouldn't come in here today anyway. It'll be fine."

"If you believe so young master," Dobby sighed, knowing that further argument was pointless. "Mistress and Master are in their study."

"Thank you," Harry said shortly as he headed for the door. "And remember, no touching my puzzle!"

"I won't Master Harry," the elf promised, with a rueful smile as the door closed shut.

* * *

"Ah Lucius, Narcissa, good to see you," Albus greeted as the couple exited the floo gracefully, taking a moment to eliminate the soot from their clothing.

"We could say the same thing for you Albus," Narcissa greeted him warmly while Lucius only nodded, already moving towards the free seat by Severus' side, Narcissa following after a few more words with Albus.

"What is this all about old man?" Sirius asked impatiently once the blonde couple seated themselves. "The next meeting wasn't supposed to be until weekend."

"Manners Sirius," Remus chastised lightly, sharing an indulgent look with the rest of the room.
Sirius was unpredictable at times, one of the last remnants of his stay at Azkaban. Returning to a society where he was free to enjoy emotions without consequence, the slightly impatient streak he had borne in his teenage years had multiplied tenfold to the point where it was difficult to keep him still or interested in any one thing for too long.

"Whatever Remus," Sirius retorted wrinkling his nose.

"Gentlemen," Severus said in a warning tone, interrupting any further bickering. "Let Albus talk and you'll get your answer Sirius."

However, before the headmaster could take the cue to speak, Sirius leant over and whispered loudly to his sandy-haired lover. "Why does he act like he is in control in public? I mean when we have him alone he...mhm!"

"That'll be enough out of you," Severus growled as he pocketed his wand, pointedly ignoring the laughs of his surrogate brother and sister at the unfinished words.

"Children," Albus called out, shaking his head ruefully even though he was pleased to see the easy camaraderie from the people who had suffered so much in the past.

Once they were in the right frame of mind for a serious discussion, he continued. "Two of our special agents have returned to us for a short while and I thought you would appreciate the report coming from them."

"Special agents?" Narcissa mused before a look of happiness crossed her features. "Lily and James are back then?"

"Ten points to Slytherin," Albus joked even as he nodded. "They are indeed among us."

"In the flesh, relatively speaking," James said in a laughing voice as he descended through the ceiling, solidifying as he descended so by the time he seated himself, he seemed as alive as the next person. "Hey all!"

"Where is Lils?" Sirius demanded, looking around for his favourite redhead.

"Here I am," was the response as the woman walked calmly through the door, plopping down into the last available seat. "I stopped by Malfoy Manor first. The boys are up to mischief by the way," she said, looking towards the Malfoys.

"I warned you not to tell them to behave themselves." Narcissa sighed.

"What?"

"You said for them to behave. You didn't specify good behaviour or bad behaviour."

"As long as the manor is still standing," Lucius sighed, an amused smile playing at his lips at the loophole the boys were undoubtedly exploiting.

Light laughter wafted around the room before Lily started on their report.

"We're back," Lily began, twirling a lock of hair round her finger, "because we believe that we have figured out how Voldemort remains on this plane."

"It is Lily's theory actually," James said, rocking back as he took over. "But it does make sense."

"What have you uncovered?" Albus probed.
"Well," Lily explained. "It all goes back to why James and I keep losing track of him. I think we told you last time how on when we track him his soul trail seems to expand over a wider area, so that we can't pinpoint him."

"Yes, I remember."

"The last time it happened I realised something. It wasn't that his presence was spreading as much as it was appearing in different locations at the same time."

"As if his soul was divided?" Severus mused.

"Exactly that!" Lily seconded, grinning at him.

They always had been able to follow each other's train of thought easily. It was nice to see that it had not dissipated.

"When it happened again, James and I split up. However, neither of us found the trail we were after originally. It matches Voldemort enough for us to confirm that it indeed part of his soul but somehow it is disconnected from his central being."

James spoke up from there. "We started to think about it and we realised that the locations we traced them to were no where near where the same thing had happened previously. We figured at best we sensed such disjointed fragments at three other places, bringing it to bear that there are at least five such locations where fragments of Voldemort's soul resides."

"That's why we came back. We didn't dare go any nearer to the locations than we did for fear of detection – it would not do for him to know he is being followed – so we really aren't sure what we are dealing with. Albus, is there a way for someone's soul to be present in numerous locations at once?"

The headmaster laced his fingers under his chin and bore a thoughtful expression. "My dears, I do believe I have heard of what you've mentioned before. But for Voldemort to have dabbled in Dark Arts to such an extent," the man broke off with a slight shudder before continuing. "I believe that we are in a dire situation."

"What is it Albus?" Narcissa pressed, tangling her fingers with Lucius' under the table and squeezing it rhythmically. "What has Voldemort done and how does this affect our chances against him?"

Albus stared at her with grave eyes. "If I am right, Voldemort has rendered himself virtually immortal. By chance, have any of you heard of the term Horcrux?"

"It's cold," Harry giggled, as the chilly winter air danced teasingly around his pyjama-clad body.

"Master Harry!" Dobby squeaked, popping in. "You should not be on the balcony without a robe!"

"Aww," Harry grumbled, glaring at his carer. "Go away Dobby, you're being terribly annoying today."

"Inside Master Harry," the elf ordered, disregarding the request. "Or else I will be telling Master and Mistress that you be disobeying!"

"And I'll tell them how you are forgetting your grammar lessons!" Harry retorted, crossing his arms. "Now shoo! I'll go inside in a little while."
"Really cub," Draco's voice came from within his bedroom. "I would think mother and father would be more concerned for you getting a cold than they would be for Dobby's grammar."

A smile lit up on Harry's face as his veela sauntered into view. "Draco!" he called, beckoning to him. "The night is beautiful, come see!"

"Indeed it is," he agreed, as he passed the elf.

"Young master should not be outside in those clothing Master Draco," the elf said in a half pleading tone.

The veela turned to the house-elf at whom Harry was now scowling. "I will see to Master Harry's needs for the remainder of the night Dobby. Dismissed."

The elf hesitated for a few seconds before sighing resignedly. "Yes young master Draco. A good night to you both."

"Thank you for getting rid of him," Harry sighed as the elf vanished. "He was being most disagreeable."

Draco tapped the boy's nose lightly. "Or it could be that you were being cheeky with the poor elf? I won't be surprised if Dobby has nightmares about a certain precocious master of his."

Harry pouted slightly. "I wasn't being cheeky or precocious."

"Well petulant then," Draco chuckled, encircling the boy with his arms and resting his chin on his head. His hands ghosted down the child's bare arms. "You really are cold cub," he murmured, pulling back. "What on earth possessed you to put on your sleeveless pyjamas of all things? If you insist on remaining out here put on something decent."

"But Draco! The air feels so nice."

Draco shot the boy a fond look. "If you put on a robe," he bargained, "I'll order some hot chocolate."

"With treacle tarts?" Harry pressed, narrowing his eyes slightly.

"Yes with treacle tarts."

"Thank you!" Harry laughed as he hurried inside to grab the bit of clothing.

Ten minutes later, the pair shared a seat on the balcony as they sipped at their hot chocolates and nibbled on their individual treats.

"That looks like a dog," Harry murmured, pointing out to a group of stars.

While they ate, they studied the stars above, not with the diligence of an astronomy session but instead with the eyes of one simply admiring the beauty nature afforded them.

Draco agreed with the boy's opinion although they had a light-hearted argument over the animal's bred.

"Your turn," Harry indicated, while he licked the edge of his tart.

"Um, let me see," the veela murmured as he scanned the sky, seeking out an image. His eyes were drawn to two particular stars and with a smile playing on his lips at the image they evoked, he murmured softly, turning to peruse the shadowed profile of his mate. "Those remind me of you."
"How?" Harry frowned as he located them. He twisted his head from side to side, but no matter which angle he looked from, he could not discern how the clusters resembled him. "Explain Draco, they looking nothing like me."

"Not all of them," the blonde corrected as he placed his cup on the nearby floating tray. "Those two," he pointed, directing Harry's attention.

"Two of them?"

"Yes. When I look at them I see you."

"I am not there."

"Yes you are," he contradicted, a husky note entering his voice as the green eyes shone at him through the darkness. "Whenever I look into you eyes, I see a sparkle as bright as their twinkling. That is how they remind me of you cub."

The sudden change in the veela's tone, compounded by the darkening of his eyes sent a warm flush through Harry and embarrassed, the submissive's face lowered as he fiddled with the warm cup in his hands, wondering at the feelings the words had evoked from him.

Contrastingly, Draco was regarding his mate with a gentle smile on his face as he took note of the boy's reactions. He looked incredibly fetching in his current position and the veela felt his heart rate increase slightly. Driven by the soft sound of confusion Harry made, the veela gently lifted the boy's face with his hand, his smile widening at the flush he could barely discern with the light from within.

Chuckling lightly as Harry refused to meet his eyes, he leaned closer, studying the boy carefully before pressing a small kiss to the corner of his mate's mouth, a pleased growl escaping when Harry shuddered reflexively and the blush on his face deepened.

Laughing at the boy's reaction, Draco manoeuvred them until the younger boy was cradled under his arm. "Finish your chocolate Harry," he murmured after a minute. "Don't let me disturb you from your treat."

"Y-yes dominant," was the soft, shy reply from Harry, earning himself another chuckle and kiss from the veela.

Even though he was positive that his little mate did not understand the feelings coursing through him, Draco was pleased to see the wand pointing in the other direction, with Harry and not him discomfited by the feelings the bond evoked from them.

No words were spoken for some time after that. Eventually Harry pulled his legs up and under him, leaning fully against the veela's body. Draco started singing softly to him, the melodic sound lulling Harry into a half dosing state. He relaxed fully, letting the voice surround him, but was shortly startled when he felt his entire frame being rocked. Opening an eye, he found Draco smiling down at him.

"It's just a bit of magic pet," he explained. "I transfigured a swing seat like the one in Hermione's back yard."

"It's nice," he sighed, rubbing his cheek against Draco's shirt. "But how did you do it? I didn't hear an incantation and your arm was around me."

With a hint of pride in his voice, the veela responded. "I did it...wandlessly and wordlessly."
Surprised, Harry pulled away from his slightly to peruse his face. "Since when can you do so much?" he demanded.

Chuckling at the boy's tone, he tapped his nose lightly with a finger before answering. "My magic is growing. I started noticing it around the end of the term when my spells were getting stronger. Yesterday I was trying to summon my hairbrush to me and the entire armoire flew towards me. Don't worry," he reassured as Harry's grip on his shirt tightened in alarm. "I froze it before it could hit me."

A breath of relief escaped Harry before he scowled. "Why didn't I know this Draco?"

"It slipped my mind," Draco shrugged, rubbing his arm soothingly.

"You're supposed to tell me these things Draco," Harry scolded. "I don't want you hiding things like that from me. How am I supposed to help you if I don't know you're in trouble?"

"I can say the same for you," Draco countered softly. "It works both ways cub."

"I-I know," Harry relented, dropping his gaze. "But still..."

"Look pet," the veela said. "Let's not spoil our night with such dismal talks okay?"

The veela mate shifted slightly. "Fine. But next time you will tell me," he said firmly.

"Playing dominant little one?" He teased.

"If I have to," Harry mock-growled before returning to his former position.

"I should go bathe," Draco said presently. "I've been in these clothes long enough."

"You're being delinquent," Harry smirked. "Were mama and papa here you would have been in your pyjamas a long time ago."

"True," he allowed as he rose. "But if mother and father were here, we definitely would not be out here and poor Dobby would not be bemoaning his fate."

"Oh poo," Harry retorted, wrinkling his nose at his mate. "You aren't being nice."

"Of course I'm not," Draco laughed as he ruffled the boy's head. "It's just after ten. I'll be back soon so we can read and then it's off to bed with you."

"Sure thing."

With a last pat, the veela left, leaving the dark-haired boy with the balcony to himself.

*"

"Come talk with me," Sirius murmured to Narcissa, wrapping his fingers around her wrist and gently tugging her towards a divan in the corner of the room.

"What about Sirius?" Narcissa asked, noting the serious expression he bore.

No one noticed their disappearance from the main table, too engrossed in their discussion about potential Horcruxes. As neither Sirius nor Narcissa had had much interactions with the Dark Lord, they had been doing little more than listen to the theories being bandied about.

At first Narcissa thought that boredom had driven Sirius to pull her away but now she knew
otherwise. Sirius held up a quieting hand before releasing a soft whistle that had been his code to James in their youth. True to form, the man's head popped up and at Sirius' beckon floated to them, sitting on the arm of the chair.

"What Paddy?"

"You guys made me Harry's guardian. Cissy and Luc have custody now, but it seems the transfer of financial control can't be passed on. Now I'm stuck managing the Potter estates until Harry's twenty first birthday."

"I know," James shrugged. "I didn't make a provision in case you were incapacitated or guardianship went to another. So what's the problem?"

"I don't have the slightest clue what to do," Sirius grumbled. "Moony is the one seeing about the Black fortune and Severus won't even mention his Prince estate."

"Lucius is the overseer," Narcissa revealed. "Severus cares little for it."

"Do you think Luc can do the same with Harry's?" Sirius asked eagerly. "I mean I would be in control paperwork wise but as to the entire managing it thing..."

"He'd love to; it isn't like we haven't made our own provisions for Harry anyway. As long as you agree James."

"I'm dead, what do I care?" James shrugged, levitating himself a few inches to emphasis the point. "I have little care for materialistic things anymore. My only concern now is to ensure that my family is safe."

"So...does that mean I get to remodel the Potter homes? They shouldn't be left to fall apart until Harry is ready to use them."

"Just fix the ancestral manor Narcissa," James said. "The rest of properties will be fine for now. Besides Harry can do with them as he pleases. Why fix everything when he may decide to rip it all down for a quidditch pitch?"

"Sounds like something you would do," Narcissa quipped.

"I had planned to. There is a two-story residence on a moor. It would have made a perfect pitch," he reminisced with a soft sigh of regret. "Especially for the team I had wanted to sponsor."

"And be the star chaser of no doubt?"

"Of course, with you as my beater."

"I had planned to be an auror," Sirius reminded.

"And I planned to talk you out of it," came the immediate retort.

As the pair dissolved into friendly banter, neither noticed the dark look that crossed Narcissa's face. Although it meant little to them, the talks of lost dreams disturbed her greatly. Voldemort had destroyed so much of their lives already, denying them the chance to fulfil all of their childhood fantasies.

James never became the quidditch star he wanted to be. Sirius never became an auror. Lily never got the chance to apprentice for a Charms Mastery, nor had she been able to raise her son. Lucius had
inherited the Malfoy title extremely early and with the task of running the Malfoy estate and its holdings from the age of seventeen, had never been able to pursue his interest in Ancient Runes further. She herself had suffered a stress-induced miscarriage a few months after Draco's birth, and with it the only chance for a daughter.

So much had been taken away from them by the plague that was Voldemort and here the evil Harry had rid them of was returning, and with it the threat to a return to that dreadful past. However, more than that came the realisation that so many others could lose their dreams with his return. Her thoughts ran to Draco and Harry and her hearts clenched as she imagined the pair in a similar position to what they had gone through.

She could not see bear to see that happen and refused to let that come to reality. Her sons and by large, the entire wizarding community deserved happiness, it was a right, not a privilege. And she would be damned, if after a few years of peace, one former Tom Marvolo Riddle, with his mad thirst for power and control would rob the wizarding world of the right of peace and happiness.

"Ah! Hermione, it was just a joke!" Harry protested as he hovered several feet above the ground. "Free me!"

"No way," the bushy haired witch declared an evil glint in her eyes. "You changed my hair into this," she said, gesticulating with her free hand to the multicoloured locks she now sprouted. "I'm leaving you there until it changes back!"

Knowing from experience that the lioness was completely serious Harry wriggled his frame enough to seek out his mate. "Draco!" Harry called, casting a hopefully irresistible pout to the blonde leaning casually against a wall with Millicent's head buried against his shoulder as she muffled her laughter.

"Not a chance little one," was the response as the thirteen year old shook his head. "You should know better than to direct your mischief towards Hermione, especially after what she did to the twins. You deserve this little one."

"You better not help him unless you want to join him up there Draco!" Hermione growled, glaring at the veela who raised his hands in a show of submission.

"Draco!" Harry protested although in all honesty he could not fault his mate's logic.

Not a week before Fred and George, in their never-ending search for the perfect prank had spelled Hermione so that any book she attempted to reach for would move away from her. Not even a summoning charm could help her retrieve the texts. How the twins believed that such an act would not bring down the wrath of Gryffindor's top witch was beyond them. It was a well-known fact that Hermione's love for reading knew no bounds. To do to the girl that of all things was a true sign of the Gryffindor reckless bravery.

And indeed Hermione had revealed just how vengeful a lioness could be, in her anger releasing a torrent of hexes on the pair that had left them fleeing to the hospital wing with a variety of ailments. The angry witch had not even blinked at the house points that were eventually deducted from her, and neither did the house hold the loss against her. How could they when they were treated to the sight of a pair of bald Weasleys sheepishly making their way into the common room, their purple eyebrows furrowing while they meekly asked Hermione how long before they would return to their regular appearance.

"I'm her friend," Harry grumbled, folding his arms, "I didn't think she would hex me!" When
however he realised that no one would intercede on his behalf he huffed. With a wriggle of his fingers, the witch's hair was set to right and in a neater position than it had been previously. "Fixed it."

"And?" she pressed, after determining that her strands had indeed returned to their thick, bushy glory.

Harry pouted again, and discreetly tried to use allure on the witch to lessen her annoyance with him.

"None of that," Draco interrupted, distracting him from his efforts. "Take your comeuppance with dignity."

"I'm sorry Mione," he apologised, after shooting his mate a dark look who gave him an innocent one in return.

"You ought to be Harry Potter," she scolded as she pocketed her wand. "I'm off to the library then," she said glibly, spinning gracefully on her heels and heading for the door. "Millicent, I'm researching for the History essay if you're interested."

"I am," the female snake said hurriedly, dislodging herself from Draco. "See you guys later!"

"Hey, Hey!" Harry shouted, causing the pair to turn back.

"Oh-" Millicent began, but Hermione simply smirked.

"Something the matter Mr. Potter?"

"You didn't let me down," Harry said, mentioning the obvious.

A thoughtful look crossed the witch's face. "I didn't, did I?" she said in a musing tone, before that evil glint rose into her expression once again. "Oh well, come on Millicent!"

Grabbing a hold of the girl's wrist, she led them out the room, throwing one last smirk at Harry before the door shut.

"She left!" Harry gasped.

"Quite a dilemma you have yourself in Harry James," Draco said conversationally as he moved to sit on a desk, crossing one leg over the other.

"It was just a joke," Harry grumbled, looking down at him. "And why didn't you stop her?"

Draco made a tsking sound as he waggled a finger. "You deserved it," he remarked simply.

"Let me down will ya?"

"Language."

"Oh poo my language Draco. You wouldn't care about grammar either if you were stuck up here!"

"Hmm, arguing with the only potential helper, not a good idea cub. Besides, I find nothing wrong with your current position. It proves most conducive for a conversation."

"Conversation about what?" Harry asked resigned, fully realising that at least for now, he was stuck mid air.
"Why you aren't responding to the letters Uncle Remus and Uncle Sirius have sent you?"

Harry drew in a sharp breath before he crossed his arms defensively. "I have responded."

"That you have," Draco allowed. "But sending a quite detailed itinerary of your day when you were asked about going home on weekends to work on our forms isn't exactly responding is it?"

Harry nipped at his lip. "Well no...How do you know anyway?"

"Uncle Severus spoke to me yesterday," Draco revealed. "He told me to talk to you before you get taken to task for rudeness."

"It isn't being rude," Harry snorted. "I've already stated that I don't want any more animagus lessons. I already have my true form. I don't need a secondary one."

"Harry, you know that the kitten isn't your true form. Perhaps it is your secondary or maybe you aren't even supposed to have it at all."

The soft-spoken words were met with a burst of anger. "I don't want to talk about this any more! Let me down Draco!"

"No cub, if this is the only way to ensure you don't run out on this conversation I will keep you up there."

Harry's eyes darkened. "There is nothing further to speak about. Let me down Draco Lucius! I'm not playing!"

The slightly panicked edge to the boy's tone startled the veela enough that he dropped the spell, and with a click of his fingers (a testament to his newfound magical prowess), Harry was swiftly but carefully lowered to the ground. The actions did little to ease Harry's agitated mood, as he bolted for the door, growling when it would not budge.

"How are you doing this?" He demanded, after trying to spell it open. "Why can't I break your spell?"

"My magic's grown stronger cub," Draco replied softly. "You know that. Is it so much of a surprise that it has grown to meet yours?"

"I don't like it," Harry declared, twisting the handle again. "Let me out of here Draco!"

"When you are calm and have answered my question," the veela agreed. "But for now I refuse to unleash a sulking mate on the school."

"I am not sulking."

"No? Then explain to me why you are griping about your animagus so? I would think that you would love to get a new form if only for the novelty of it."

"W-what part of I don't want it don't you understand?"

A knowing light shone in the veela's eyes at the boy's slight stutter. What had he to be nervous about? "Don't you like it? What is it? Tell me. A pygmy puff? Or even an owl? I will not laugh at it, as long as it isn't a flobberworm, promise."

The humour was lost on the boy. "Well it's not like you've told me yours anyway," he snapped.
Draco sobered. "You haven't been particularly open to discussion on this particular matter have you?" he pointed out.

"Fine," Harry said. "Don't tell me, I don't care."

"Fine."

"Can I leave now?"

"Are you calm?"

"Shall I hex you to prove it?"

"Fine," Draco sighed, releasing his hold on the door. "Go, but don't expect any sympathy from me if you land yourself into mischief. Uncle and Grandfather aren't here, so any professor who catches you will bring you right to me."

"I won't get caught then," Harry snarled as he stormed out, leaving a veela to rub his neck ruefully.

"They won't be pleased," he sighed talking to himself. "But what else can I do? Cub doesn't want to change his form, and is it really worth pressing the matter?"

*

"Oi! 'ello there 'arry!" Hagrid, the Care of the Magical Creatures teacher and part time groundskeeper beamed as he swung open the door to his cabin. "I haven't got any new things to show you, though I got a plate of cakes if you are interested."

Harry beamed upwards at the man and followed him in. "I was wondering if you have a book on magical creatures I can read Hagrid?" he asked as he nibbled cautiously on the edge of a rock hard cake.

"Oh? What do you need that for? The library's got plenty."

"I know that, but they are all text bookish. I don't want one with curricular information. I am looking for legends, characteristics and stuff. Not their breeding habits or natural habitats. Do you have any like that?"

"What exactly are you looking for lad?" the man asked as he crossed to his self made, leaning bookshelf. "You seem to want something specific."

Harry shifted slightly, thinking of the best way to reply. "Someone-someone told me that all creatures have a story behind them. I want to know about it."

"Any in particular?"

"N-no."

"Well this will be perfect for you," Hagrid declared, crossing with a thick volume. "Every creature known to wizards and all about them. Pictures and all if you are so inclined."

Carefully he set it on the boy's lap, knowing that with the weight charm on it, it would not be too heavy for him.

"Thanks, Hagrid, this is perfect," he gushed after flipping through the first few pages. "Do you have somewhere to go or can I stay here and read?"
"You're welcome to take it with you 'arry. I trust you."

"Oh no, that isn't necessary Hagrid. I like it here."

"Well," the man contemplated, rubbing his wiry beard. "I'm heading into the forest for a little while. Professor Snape needs some ingredients and I'm the only one who can enter the forest and come out whole."

"Is it scary in there?" Harry asked curiously.

"It is for those who aren't supposed to be in there."

The warning was clear in his voice and Harry nodded in understanding. "Don't worry, I have no intention of going into the forest."

"Good lad. Then I'll leave you here to read. If you are still here by five wait for me and I'll walk you back to the castle."

"I can go by myself."

"You aren't supposed to be out here alone and I know that your veela did not come with you."

"He doesn't have to come everywhere with me," Harry grumbled.

"Yes, but if the headmaster ordered it, he had good reason to be doing so. Indeed I should tell him you came out here alone."

"Hagrid!" he protested. "Please don't"

The pleading eyes he turned on him broke the man's reserve easily. "Fine lad. You met me at the Entrance Hall and followed me here right?"

"Right!" Harry agreed in relief.

"But never again mind you."

"Promise."

"Good lad," was the response as the half giant patted him, the boy's body rocking with the movement.

Minutes later Harry was left alone in the cosy cabin, watching as Hagrid entered the forest with Fang running circles around him, barking excitedly. Sighing as he disappeared from view, the preteen opened the book and started to search for the right page.

An hour later, the book lay idly on his lap as Harry stared unseeingly out of the window.

Servant of death and guardian of its domain...feared and cursed beast...bringer of sickness...omen of death...it's poisonous drool pales to its barbed teeth...ripping flesh apart...deadly wrath...

Excerpts of the lines reverberated in the boy's head as goose bumps broke out on his skin. There was no way that he was allowing himself to transform into that. That thing was not him, he was kind and gentle, and he in no way resembled what the book described.

And even if somehow that was a part of his being, he would not allow it to emerge. He rather be at odds with his family than embrace that. His stubbornness would persevere and eventually they
would relent. They had to. There was no way he was letting that form be revealed.

"You missed dinner."

"Oh, sorry," Harry mumbled, rubbing a hand along the back of his neck. "I ended up planning something with George and Fred and we ate in the kitchen. Did I worry you?"

"No, I felt no tension from you so I didn't investigate."

"Oh."

"So you spent the entire evening with them? After you left me I mean?" The veela inquired as he put aside the letter he had been drafting.

"Er...no. I met Hagrid and was with him for a while. When he brought me back I went off with them," he said quickly. "Look Draco I..."

"What is it?" Draco patted the spot besides him invitingly, raising the boy's head to peer into his eyes. "What are you trying to say?"

The gentleness in the blonde's tone pulled the words from him. "I shouldn't have acted like that but-"

"It's okay," Draco interjected. "I ambushed you, your reaction was expected."

"Well okay then. But Draco, I really did mean it. I don't want to talk about it. I have my reasons. Can you please respect that?"

The bluntness in the boy's tone, coupled with the slightly desperate look in his eyes had the veela nodding. His curiosity was not worth the boy's discomfiture.

"I will if you answer me one thing. Do this and I'll drop it, and I'll ask Uncles to do the same. We'll work out a schedule for me alone. You will not be involved."

"Promise?" Harry pressed.

"Yes. You have my word cub. One question and the entire matter is forgotten."

"Fine. What is your question?"

"Do you know what the form is?"

"Yes," was the soft reply.

"Okay," Draco said simply before retrieving his parchment, pulling his legs up.

Glad at the sign that the conversation was over Harry padded off to change, settling comfortably on the plush rug with a book.

"I hope whatever mischief you and the twins got yourselves into was not too extreme."

"It wasn't mischief," Harry corrected. "And we didn't do anything, just planned."

"Another prank?"

"No, an adventure."
"Adventure?" Draco repeated, raising his eyebrow. "Care to elaborate?"

Harry shook his head furiously, knowing that most likely Draco would disapprove of it. It was really risky, but tempting at the same time. He wanted to do it and really did not want to be reasoned out of it.

"Cub...you not telling me is proof enough I won't like it."

Harry barely resisted the urge to roll his eyes as his thoughts were seconded. "You should be glad I'm keeping myself entertained," he grumbled.

"Ah but if you plan on keeping yourself interested in Hogwarts by reeking havoc perhaps its best that we are home schooled."

"I wish I never mentioned that," Harry sighed.

"What...why?"

"Nothing," Harry murmured. Once again, his veela was quick to sacrifice his desires for his benefits. It was a disquieting thought whenever Harry chose to dwell on it. "Forget I said anything. I'm tired."

After a long look, Draco nodded, accepting his excuse. "Then you should head to bed earlier tonight."

"I might," he allowed.

Draco nodded. "I won't keep you from having fun with the twins Harry," he said eventually. "You and they share a mischievous streak that far exceeds mine and I'm glad you have someone to enjoy that with. However, promise me that you won't do anything dangerous or that will get you into trouble okay?"

"Oh come on," Harry glared at him. "Why should I promise that?"

"Because I know the extremes the twins go to and you will readily go along with them. If you promise I know you'll be careful. I can just order you to heed me you know," he pointed out. "Although I'd rather it not come to that. So do you promise Harry?"

"No," he decided after a few moments.

"What?"

"You should trust me to know my limits. You shouldn't have to extract a promise from me."

Draco stared at the boy before conceding with a nod. "You're right. I shouldn't ask that of you. You're getting older and can decide for yourself. I'll just have to trust your judgement then."

"Thank you."

A week later, as he found himself stunned in their common room, Draco would regret falling for Harry's manipulations and not extracting the promise from him. Sometimes Harry proved himself to be more cunning than him a true Slytherin!
For the umpteenth time that day, Draco Lucius Malfoy shot his mate a curious and searching look. Currently he was on his way to the bathroom after his mate determinedly demanded that he bathe first as he was too busy trying to complete a paragraph that was not worth stopping for something as trivial as a bath. Usually Draco would not find such a statement strange, however the essay that Harry was working so diligently on was History and Harry never turned down an opportunity to get away from it, if only for a few minutes. It was one subject that Draco was positive that his submissive would be dropping come their sixth year.

Therefore, he knew for certainty that Harry would not be that interested in rehashing for yet another time the events that led to the 1367 Great Goblin Revolt. Heck, if anything the veela had expected Harry to send home for his essay file and simply expand on a previous essay, just adding in the tidbits Binns had thrown in for their third year. But no, the eleven-year-old was working on it with an assiduousness that implied to the veela that he was trying to be extra well-behaved, a sign that almost always guaranteed that a bout of mischief of some kind was in the workings.

Shooting him one last searching glance, Draco slowly shut the bathroom door, making a mental note to interrogate him later on and make sure that whatever he had planned would not cause too much chaos or land him in hot water with their godfather. Shaking his head at the necessity of it all but then reminding himself that Harry was still at the right age for mischief (the Weasley twins however had no such excuse) the veela decided to put the entire matter out of his mind for a little while, and focus on himself for a bit.

Tossing the last bit of clothing into the hamper, Draco went to the full-length mirror the room offered and contemplated with interest his reflection. He had gone through a welter of changes recently, both physically visible and otherwise. First of all he had gotten several inches taller in the last few weeks, and now was among the taller boys in the year whereas before he was around the average height for someone his age.

Harry was most put out by this fact and frequently grumbled at the increased distance he had to tilt his head back to meet his veela's gaze. Standing as he did below average height by around two inches, the height distance between them was obvious. It had taken a great deal of cajoling on Draco's part and a firm "no!" from Severus that he would not either brew a shrinking potion for Draco or a growth serum for Harry for the veela mate to start seeing the potential positives in the situation.

For one thing, he had a greater expanse of the veela to snuggle into or tackle. When he had pointed this fact out to his mate, Draco had glared at him, asking rather tersely if all his mate saw him as being was someone for him to use physically as he pleased. Harry had responded with a pert "Of course!" before fleeing into the relative safety of Cedric's arms, leaving the veela to growl at him before dropping the matter. The second benefit Harry found was that he could now more easily wheedle his mate into carrying him around on his back when he was tired or simply wanting to be lazy. Either way, Harry's grumblings on the matter had ceased with time.

Focusing on other changes with his body, the blonde noted that his hair was once again growing at a faster rate, even with his haircut the week before, it was now passing his collar and he was loath to have to suffer through cutting it again so soon. More than that, his skin seemed to be getting a slight sheen to it and his eyesight and hearing was improving vastly to the point that he could more easily discern sights and sounds from further away. His voice as well was slowly deepening, although currently the change was so subtly that he doubted that anyone besides him and possibly Harry had
noticed that little detail thus far.

However, the most extreme alteration in his self that Draco had noticed was not reflected in his outer appearance but instead proved to be part and parcel of his inner being. First of all his magical prowess had started increasing exponentially and was continuing to do so to the point that like his mate, he actually found his wand to be a hindrance in the channelling of his powers.

More and more, he was relying less on his wand and more on his own hands although the stronger spells were still better suited for use with his wand. Nevertheless, based on his progress thus far, the Malfoy heir had little doubt that by the end of the year, given the current rate, he would be completely proficient in wandless magic, something he was looking forward to with great pleasure.

Secondly, with increasing regularity, Draco found himself struggling to keep the balance between his wizarding self and his inherent nature. More and more he felt his dominant nature rearing its head to the potential detriment of those around him. Only this morning he had to restrain forcibly himself from attacking Hermione when she ran her hands along Harry’s frame straightening his robe for him as his hands were otherwise occupied.

Rationally he understood her actions, but his dominant veela blood was hissing to him that she was touching something that belonged solely to him. Sure enough, a quick glance to his hands revealed that his talons were indeed visible and he had avoided Hermione for the remainder of the day as his heckles rose quite easily around her. It was something he had meant to discuss with his mother, but unfortunately, she and his father were not at the manor, and had not been for the past few days. When questioned, their godfather had tactfully brushed them off with the reassurance that the Malfoy heads had some business to complete.

Sighing deeply, Draco moved away from the mirror and his self-examination, relaxing himself in the bathtub and allowing all of the day's tensions to seep out of his system.

It was a good twenty minutes later when he reluctantly left the still warm water, the tub automatically cleaning itself as he wrapped a robe around himself before cleansing his teeth. Drying his hair took another few minutes as he decided against a fast drying charm, enjoying the friction as he ran the towel briskly across his hair.

Finally, he was dressed for the night, and tossing the towel away, he stretched languishly as he headed for the door, ready to tackle his assignments and then spending a relaxing hour or so with Harry before bed to a hopefully dreamless night. However, all of the veela's plans flew out the window when he pulled open the bathroom door only to find Harry missing with a hastily torn parchment where the boy had been. To make matters worse, the parchment had a hex on it so as he finished reading, delayed magic shot out from the paper, stunning him and leaving him staring blankly up at the ceiling, while anger coursed through his veins.

Harry had had no plans for his night other than his usual routine with Draco. Honestly, he did not. All he was going to do was hopefully finish Binns darn essay and relax with his mate as much as possible. However all his plans for the evening unravelled when a knock sounded at the entrance of their quarters. Opening it, the Weasley twins, grinning widely pushed past him into the room and dropped haphazardly onto the divan.

"What's up guys?" he asked curiously, as he settled across from them. This was the first time they had ever ventured all the way to this side of the castle and he knew that it had to be something crucial to bring them so far.
The twins shared a look before Fred spoke in an excited tone. "We're doing it tonight," he revealed. "We overhead the head boy saying that all the house heads save Sprout plus Dumbledore aren't going to be in the castle tonight."

Taking over, George continued. "This is the perfect opportunity and we thought we'd see if you were interested in going."

Harry's mouth twisted slightly. "But we planned on going Saturday, and in the daytime."

"Yeah, but this is even better. Come on, how many people could boast of seeing the grounds in the night? This is the perfect way for us to end our reign of terror before settling down for OWLS."

"You said you wanted an adventure and tonight's the night. So are you in?"

"You have to say yes Harry," Fred urged. "Come on. You're the fun loving little brother we wished we had."

"Ronnikens was such a disappointment," the other twin sighed dramatically. "Not a fun loving bone in his body."

"And then you came along, so perfectly in tune with our pranks. You can't deny us this one thing right Harry? One last outing before we surrender completely to the boring old student life and fill our days with studying."

The twins were as persuasive as always, Harry thought as he regarded them. And indeed, the entire thing was extremely tempting. He had been looking forward to exploring Whomping Willow with them, and the twins rarely did the same thing twice so if he wanted to explore with them, this really was his only opportunity.

The more he thought it over, the more he found himself buying into the entire idea and even though his conscious niggled at him that only a few days earlier he had asked Draco to be more trusting of him, he was going to do something as extreme as this. But then, Harry was the son of the leader of the marauders and that held some sway over him. Like his biological father, the thrill of excitement was more than enough to be worth the potential risks and so, he nodded.

The twins smirked triumphantly. "We knew you wouldn't let us down Harry!" they chorused.

"Yes, yes, but we need to sneak out now before Draco is done with his bath. I'm stuck here otherwise and he might even try to stop you guys."

"That one will be a prefect no doubt," Fred stated, as if such a thing was disgraceful in the extreme.

"This little one might be as well," George pointed out. "He's got the academic requirement down already."

"Alas, we have some time still. Now we really must be going. Are you going to leave a note or something for him? Just to know that you're fine?"

Harry nodded. "I guess I should."

Moving quickly, he started writing hurriedly, reading aloud as he did. "Draco, Fred and George came over and we're going to go visit Whomping Willow. Don't worry, we'll be careful. Love, Harry."

"Not a smart move," Fred pointed out, as Harry placed it. "Now he knows where we are. Nothing is
going to stop him from following us."

"And we do not want that to happen."

"You're right," Harry murmured, "Unless..."

Taking a moment to recall the incantation Sirius had taught him some months earlier, he whispered it over the parchment followed by a stunning spell. "There," he murmured. "He won't be following us now." Although he will be mad, Harry finished mentally. Oh well, he wouldn't worry about that now.

"Let's go," he bid, and carefully the three snuck out of the room and headed off for their great adventure.

* *

What was supposed to be an hour or two of fun turned into an all night event for Harry and the twins. Yes they had made it unto the grounds without complication and discovered eventually that the Whomping Willow served as a barrier to hide a passageway.

They went no further at that, because, to Harry's chagrin, he realised that this was the tree planted when Uncle Remus had come to Hogwarts. It had gone by a different name then, but still...he should have known. Needless to say, the twins were not keen on finding naught but a dilapidated room and they had retreated, content with knowing the secrets behind the tree.

However, the problem came when they snuck back into the castle and found that the portraits were asked to alert professors to anyone out after curfew. Normally such measures were not taken, but with so many of the teachers absent, it had become necessary.

Luckily, for them, the first portrait they had stumbled upon was that of a young girl who giggled and blushed at Harry and after a bit of coaxing on his part, promised not to tell once he visited her again. "I promise," he declared with a small wink that sent the girl into another fit of giggles that she hid behind her fan.

"Eleven and already sending the girls wild," Fred teased softly, causing Harry's cheeks to turn a bright pink.

"Come on," George grumbled, as they followed him through one of the few portraitless corridors. Sighing in relief when the third classroom he tried opened, George ushered them in and closed the door. "Safe," he breathed, after casting several locking spells and silencing spells.

"Are we going to have to stay here whole night?" Harry inquired, as he perched on a bench. A quick time check showed it nearing twelve.

"Unless you want to get caught," Fred pointed out. "Come on Harry, don't despair. It wouldn't be the first time we didn't return to our dorms!"

"But Draco's still stunned..." taking a moment to feel their bond Harry winced. "And very angry."

"What can he do?" George scoffed as he went about transfiguring the available furniture into something more comfortable.

"A lot," Harry said simply, not willing to dwell too much on the matter. "Guys, maybe I should go back."
Fred and George rolled their eyes heavenwards. "Gads, a conscious this one has!"
"You'll get caught," George reminded, although he was well aware that the boy had already made up his mind on the matter.
"I won't," Harry reassured, knowing already how to get around the issue. Unlike them, he had some specialties.

Five minutes later, he was on his way, sending through his bond, a message to Draco that he would be home in a few minutes. To his slight fright, it did nothing to soothe Draco’s temperament, and for a second he seriously wondered if he was better off where he had been with the twins. His mate was furious.

However, it was not to be, as when Harry continued scampering through the corridors, he almost collided into Professor Flitwick, who called him to his side.

"What is a little kitten like you doing scampering about this time of night hmm?" the man asked kindly as he scooped him up.

Harry, whose ears had tensed from the moment the charm had drawn him to the man, relaxed in relief. The man had not recognised him.

"Meow."

"Got away from your owner and got into mischief no doubt," the professor continued, chuckling. "And now you're trying to get to safety before you are found out."

Well sorta, Harry thought as the man started walking, heading in the opposite direction from where he was going. Wait...what? Oh no, Harry grimaced, as he wriggled, trying to get free of the man.

"Calm down," Flitwick bid, stroking him. "The common rooms are all sealed already. There is no way for you to find your owner this time of night. I will carry you to my room. Let's see if some warm milk wouldn't soothe a little kit like you enough to sleep and forget mischief hmm."

Yuck, Harry thought, though he mewed. Kittens liked milk he reminded himself. A random memory flitted through his head at that, reminding him of when his family pointed out that he really did not seem to have enough traits of a kitten for it to be his animagus form.

He bared his tiny teeth at the absent people, not willing to buy into their theory in the least. It seemed he would have to start drinking milk a lot more willingly, he coached himself as Flitwick dropped him gently unto a transformed pillow and set a plate of the white liquid before him.

"Meow."

"You're welcome kit. Now sleep on that pillow and do not wander about. I have some charms around here that a silly kitten could be trapped in while I am sleeping. I'll let you out come morning and you can go slink back to your owner as if nothing happened."

"Meow."

"Good night."

As the man closed what Harry assumed to be his bedroom door, Harry could almost see the wards being raised around the room. He was stuck here till morning. That was just great.
"Put me down Draco," Harry protested loudly, as the veela strode calmly down the corridor with him slung over his shoulder. He made to shout when he was not immediately heeded, but the hand placed on his stinging bottom was a deterrent enough and he quieted. And here Fred and George had thought nothing of his earlier anxiety.

Flitwick had let him out of his quarters just after six that morning, but never having been in that part of the school, it took Harry a good half an hour to make it back to a familiar part of the castle where he transformed, grimacing at the fact that he had been in these clothes for just under a day now. Sometime in the night he had felt his stunning spell dissipate and he knew that returning to his common room now would only bring him face to face with an irate veela.

Not that he could exactly blame Draco, but still, he had not want to face him. With that in mind, Harry had cast several freshening charms on himself, before heading to the hall under the assumption that the veela (whom he knew would definitely be searching him out) would not create a scene.

How wrong he had been, he grimaced, remembering the sharp crack of Draco's hand against his rear and the shocked gasps. Really, this had only been the second time the veela had committed such an act (the first when he caught him about to drink a combination of potions he had randomly mixed together the year before) but still, Draco seemed quite an expert on the matter.

"Did you have to spank me in front of the school?" Harry asked quietly, hands fisting in the veela's robes to maintain his balance.

"You should not have tested me," was the stern retort.

"I know...but still," Harry said, a slight whine in his tone.

"Uncle Severus cast a memory charm. They won't remember."

Harry breathed a sigh of relief at that, and relaxed somewhat into the hold. At least now he could show his face in the corridors without worrying about being laughed at. However, that did not mean he was not still peeved that such measures had been taken in the first place. "Don't do it again."

By now, they were in their common room and the veela was marching into Harry's bedroom, depositing him on the bed. Turning his back, the blonde moved and started to rifflle through his mate's drawers. "Don't give me a reason to then."

"I'm serious Draco," Harry said as he jumped up and started to rub away the sting. "I won't stand for you humiliating me like that. I was wrong to stun you, and probably did deserve a spanking. But don't do it again in public or I'll make sure Papa returns the favour!"

The seriousness in his tone had the veela pausing and turning to look at him. Within himself, Draco found himself fighting down the inner-veela and with it all of the dominance he had been exuding the last few minutes. Now that he was thinking rationally without the anger and urge to correct his mate, Draco could see that he had been overdone it, going above and beyond what was necessary.

"I won't," he agreed softly, much to Harry's surprise at the easy acceptance. "I'm sorry about that okay. I let my veela side take control. Forgive me?"

Harry was about to nod before he saw an opportunity and like the good Slytherin in training he was; he grasped it with open hands. "I will if you forgive me for what happened."

"I already have," the blonde indicated, as he straightened, holding a fresh pair of pyjamas.
"Oh?" Harry inquired, drawing him back to his earlier threat.

"I did not mean it. I just wanted to stop you from fussing anymore. We're done with the whole thing, though I warn you never to hex me like that again."

Harry nodded sagely. "I won't. It was a kinda spur of the moment thing..."

"I see. Now go on into the bathroom for me Stinky."

"Hey!" Harry pouted. "I do not smell!"

"Sure you don't," Draco agreed, shoving him lightly out the door. "Hurry up and bathe. Then it is straight to bed with you...and me. It's been a trying night and we're both tired."

"Is that why you got us the day off?" Harry asked.

"Yes cub. Now go on," he urged before turning away to head into his own room while wondering if such a thing as a time-adjustable age line that he could set in front of the entrance. And when, that afternoon when his godfather summarily grounded him for two weeks for his actions in the hall, Draco discovered that he had just the time to find out.

*

"Have you seen Draco?"

Marcus Flint looked up from the latest edition of his favourite Quidditch magazine.

"Hello Harry," he greeted easily, reaching up to ruffle the boy's head. "It's been a while since you've been down here in the snake den."

"I know. Blaise and Millicent tend to come to our rooms so I don't really need to come down here anymore."

The Quidditch player feigned a hurt expression. "So I am not worth visiting?"

"Oh no, I didn't mean that!" Harry corrected with a quick headshake. "Oh, you're teasing!"

"That I am," Marcus agreed with a soft chuckle. "Draco is in Zabini's room. Do you want me to go with you?"

"No, I remember the way. I just wanted to make sure he is here that's all. Thank you."

"You're welcome," the Slytherin responded, returning his attention to his magazine once the boy had disappeared through the doorway that led to the extensive Slytherin dormitories.

As Harry passed a set of stairs, from the corner of his eyes, he saw Pansy glaring daggers at him. Smirking, he stuck his tongue out at the girl, chuckling lightly at the angry sound she made. Really, harassing her was so easy, he thought, as he disappeared from sight.

She never won any of these exchanges they had, and he himself never instigated any. So why wouldn't the girl take a hint and simply ignore him? Putting her entirely out of his mind, he focussed on his surroundings before he got lost. He was here to surprise his mate; it would not do for him to end up sending a signal of distress for the boy to come find him.

The Slytherin dorm was unlike those of the other houses in one essential way. With the benefit of having the entire dungeon area at their disposal, in decades past, the then Head of House had
expanded the holdings of the House so that it was not strictly necessary for students to sleep among their years. As such, it was considerably larger than the other house dorms and it was relatively easy for one who did not traipse through them regularly to get lost.

As Harry searched for the right door, he snickered as his mind drifted to the contents of the letter stuffed into his pocket. The details were too amusing for him to wait until later. Plus, it would help him get Draco back a little bit for the embarrassment he had caused him a while before.

Knocking briskly, he entered the room when bid to. Blaise was lying on his stomach on the bed, his feet swinging idly as he looked up from his book. Next to him, Draco was leaning against the headboard, his own book propped against a raised leg.

"Hi Harry."

"Something the matter cub?"

Settling on a free spot, Harry handed over the letter. "I just thought you'd like to see this," he said, careful to hide the mischievous glint in his eyes.

Blaise spotted it and arched him a questioning look, whereas Harry simply motioned for him to observe the veela. Just as he had expected, the colour was slowly but steadily draining from the blonde's face as he read on.

"Is something wrong?" the Italian whispered to Harry, who by now was struggling to keep his expression neutral.

"Nothing's wrong," he replied, before raising his voice to catch the pale-faced veela's attention. "Right Draco?"

To Blaise's surprise and Harry's pleasure, the veela's voice was shaky. "N-nothing's wrong!" he finally managed after several attempts. "D-did you not read this!"

"Of course I did," Harry smiled. "There's nothing particularly bad about the letter...well we are going to miss the Ravenclaw-Hufflepuff match."

"What's this all about guys?" Blaise asked curiously.

"Mama says that we have to get our vaccines updated."

"Oh..." Blaise nodded although the question was obvious in his tone. What in Merlin's name was so bad about that to garner such a reaction from the pair? Harry's mirth and Draco's apparent fright seemingly contradicted the letter's content.

"Draco doesn't like needles," Harry supplied helpfully.

"He doesn't?" the teenager asked in surprise, eyeing the veela with wide eyes before the irony hit him. Draco Malfoy, the veela they were all warned not to aggravate for fear of his wrath was afraid of something so rudimentary as needles?

"Seriously?"

"Seriously," Harry confirmed.

"So," he began contemplatively, thinking of how he could use the information to his advantage. "If I was to say, accidentally summon a needle and..."
"Don't even think about it," Draco warned, composing himself enough to glare at his mate who shrugged innocently, "Regular needles don't bother me. It's when someone tries to poke me full of holes with metal under the guise of treatment that I have a problem."

"He had a bad reaction to a vaccine once," Harry added, reaching out to pat the veela's knee. "He ended up sick for a few days and he's been afraid of them since."

"Well that is understandable," Blaise allowed, while Draco shot his friend a grateful look.

Harry sniggered slightly. "Last time we went Papa had to threaten him and he accidentally set the healer's clothes on fire."

The Italian guffawed at that while Draco blushed in chagrin. Ruefully he allowed himself to see the humour in the incident and cracked a smile.

"I wonder if she still works there," he murmured, drawing forth another round of laughter.

"She might quit once we go in," Harry quipped.

Rolling his eyes, tossed a pillow at Harry, hitting him square in the face. While the boy squawked indignantly, struggling to fight off the pillow charmed to continue assaulting him the veela went about extracting a promise from his friend not to use the information against him.

"Did you really have to do that?" Draco grumbled hours later as he dropped down besides Harry.

Clad in purple starred pyjamas, Harry shrugged as he moved into a more comfortable position against his pillows. Sighing lightly, the veela settled as well, turning unto his side so that he could still watch the Gryffindor staring absently at the ceiling.

"It was funny," Harry eventually said, turning his head to observe him.

"For you maybe," Draco retorted, although there was no trace of annoyance in his tone.

Harry caught the underlying meaning in the veela's words and his eyes darkened slightly. "I didn't mean anything bad by it Draco," Harry whispered, reaching over to play with blonde hair. "Why do you always worry about pureblood protocol?" Harry finished on a sigh, "Blaise does not think less of you for it."

"I have to think about it Harry," Draco responded. "I have all the responsibilities of being the Malfoy heir. When I first met Blaise, we were barely three."

"I know."

"We weren't introduced because our parents wanted us to have people our own age to interact with."

"Then why?"

"It was a strategic move. Friendships among our class are crucial. It pays to have eyes and ears in all areas, to know exactly what is going on among the purebloods and understand the impacts it can have on you. At that time our parents primary concern was ensuring that the bond of friendship between the Malfoys and Zabini's were cemented for another generation.

"Why do you think I have to tolerate Pansy cub? Although the Parkinsons are a lower ranked family, if their eldest marries right, their status can increase and thus it is prudent to remain on cordial terms."
"Aren't they indebted to us?" Harry murmured, reluctantly remembering some of his lessons.

"That's right. The Parkinson holdings suffered considerably for their open and willing support of Voldemort. After his defeat they were on the brink of financial ruin but Father decided that it would be better to ensure that they remained our allies and thus essentially bought them out."

"How?" Harry interjected softly.

"He bought out the majority of their invested stocks or else loaned him the money to keep his smaller businesses running. Their continued elevated status is based on Father's kind-heartedness, something that will continue unless they either repay all that was invested or their eldest daughter's husband is able to deal with it."

"What do you mean by elevated status? They're purebloods, so what does their money have to do with status? A pureblood is a pureblood no matter their wealth."

"Ah my little lion, wealth has everything to do with it. Think of Ronald. He is a pureblood is he not?"

"Yes."

"And yet before Hogwarts we never met him at any formal events. Additionally, his manners are generally uncouth and he lacks the grace of a cultured pureblood."

"Don't insult him," Harry argued, not liking the veela's words.

"I am not insulting your Weasley," Draco reassured quickly. "I'm just answering your question. While his blood gives him rank and will undoubtedly open many avenues once he begins working; I honestly doubt he will ever circulate among our social class because he does not have the finances necessary to flit through our arena. Blood purity while important, will only get you that far."

"And where does that place me?" Harry asked curiously, as he tried to grasp the intricacies of what Draco was explaining to him. "And why has Papa never explained any of this to me?"

"Well for one you've never been quite interested in it, and two, I started learning all these little details when I turned thirteen. No doubt Father will do the same for you."

"Oh...but you haven't answered my first question Draco. I think that you are saying that Ron wouldn't be of use to you like Blaise because he isn't rich, even though he's a pureblood. But I'm a half-blood, so where would that put me?"

"You're my mate Harry," Draco said simply, as if that explained everything.

"But I'm a half-blood," Harry repeated, sitting up. "If I was not your mate, what would I be to you? For that matter what about Hermione, a muggleborn?"

"Well I would never have been friends with her if it wasn't for you, that's for sure," Draco said openly.

"Because she's not a pureblood?" Harry demanded. "That's prejudice Draco."

Affronted by the word, Draco sat up as well. "If I was prejudiced I would not be her friend now and neither would I have let you."

"Yet you're saying that I'm the only reason you talk to her," Harry pointed out, trying to keep his
"Because there would not be a need to!" Draco snapped, while wondering how the conversation had shifted into this. "You are friends with her and naturally I got to know her and now I consider her a friend too. Why is this bothering you?"

"Because," Harry ground out, searching for the right explanation. Not finding one, he returned to a previous argument. "Answer my first question Draco. What would I be to you if it were not for this bond? Me, a half-blood. What could I have offered you Mr. Pureblood!"

"Well for one, we wouldn't have been in the same year so my interactions with you would already be reduced. Moreover, if you were a Gryffindor as now, then I would rarely cross paths with you."

"Your point?" Harry asked tersely.

"Given those circumstances you would be nothing more than another student to me. One that I would be grateful to for saving the wizarding world, but another student nonetheless."

Harry argued further, crossing his arms. "And what if we ended up somehow meeting each other for one thing or another? Would you have befriended me besides my blood? Or not bothered because I wasn't part of the 'circle' the Malfoys move in."

"We could be friends," Draco allowed.

"Why? I'm a half-blood."

"But your father is from a strong pure-blooded family. Had your parents lived, he no doubt would have worked to ensure that your mother would be accepted. We may have therefore crossed paths, especially if the host of whatever event we were at were light or neutral."

"Yes you are a half-blood, but given your accomplishment in defeating Voldemort, all but the darkest of families would easily accept you. The Potter name included in the mix would more than compensate for your blood status and any pureblood would be on friendly terms with you, including me."

"And if I wasn't Harry Potter, and just another half-blood?"

"Why are you being so difficult?" Draco ground out, growing weary of defending himself. "Asking all of these questions? Look Harry, I am sorry you think so but I am not being prejudiced. This is how the society runs and I – we – are a part of it. I need to know all of this in order to continue to bring honour to the Malfoy name. With time you too will learn these things as befitting the heir to the Potter Estate."

"I don't agree with it," Harry declared. "Blood status shouldn't decide how a society runs. There should not be this division. But answer me this. If Papa feels this way, why does he allow me to be with Hermione, go to her house, let her come to the manor? Is it because I like her? Does he only tolerate her because of me?"

Draco's eyes narrowed. "Do not try to label Father Harry. Do not go there."

"Then what am I supposed to think?" Harry asked. "He's the one teaching you these things so obviously he believes it. Don't contradict yourself Draco."

"Harry, Father accepts that Hermione is a muggleborn and it in no way affects his interactions with her."
"So if I wanted to invite her to the next ball we throw, will he allow it?"

"He would," Draco said firmly, "If only to make you happy."

"But would it upset him to have her there? Would it be a faux pas?" he sneered.

"No. Think about it. More and more, Father and Mother are extending hands of friendship to more light families. Most of them, like your father embrace muggleborns. Changing traditions take time Harry. Father does not agree with everything he is teaching me, nor do I, but I need to learn it Harry, if only to understand the people I will one day associate with.

"I wasn't espousing my beliefs Harry. I was just telling you how our society runs. Not interacting with a muggleborn is not the same as despising their existence. To do that would make me no better than Voldemort," he said sincerely.

"Times are slowly but surely changing Harry, but to pave a new future we have to learn from the past. Harry, I am friendly with students from all of the houses, as are you. Ten years ago that wasn't possible. In the past few years, inter-house friendships have increased dramatically. Do you know what that means?"

"Tell me," Harry bid.

"It means Harry that there is a chance that such unity will continue even after the students leave, with every formed friendship between a Slytherin and Gryffindor, with every marriage between a pure blood and muggleborn, the whole notion of pureblood supremacy is shaken. Cub, I hate to scare you, but according to Father, our eventual bonding will have far reaching consequences."

"The first Malfoy to marry a half-blood?" Harry asked dryly.

"No, Harry Potter marrying into the Malfoy family. You know the gossip surrounding us. It is only the last two or three generations of Malfoys who have disregarded the notion of pureblood supremacy. Only Father and Grandfather moved away from being borderline black to neutral and because of you openly supportive of the light side. We fall amongst the top ten wealthiest families in Britain cub; your family is included in that. Do you know what that means when we merge completely?"

"We would be influential."

"Exactly and can herald the paragon of change."

"So much depends on us?" Harry asked softly, after a few minutes. "On what we share?"

"It does," Draco replied, reaching out to stroke his cheek. "But I don't want you concerned about that okay? That is still a long time away."

"Okay, but isn't it scary?"

"What is?"

"What you said. How much we can change. Aren't you just a little bit concerned that we might screw it up?"

"No," he answered with surety. "And I know that because I love you and that is all that matters. Everything else is secondary."
The surety of his voice was reassuring. "I'm glad. I love you too. And come what may, I will always love you."

"As I with you," Draco said tenderly, before moving closer. Carefully he raised Harry's head slightly, allowing him to seal their lips together in a long slow kiss that left the both of them slightly breathless.
Chapter 40

Draco’s sheets laid in crumples around his waist as the blonde twisted restlessly on his bed, a fine sheen of sweat on his face as in his mind, menacing voices and dastardly pleas resonated unceasingly. What he was hearing was terrifying to say the least. That voice, though one of an old woman who seemed on the brink of death was laced with such malice and hatred that the slumbering boy felt chilled to the core, reaching out instinctively for comfort.

In the next bedroom, the veela's mate was in a similar state, loud whimper's filling the bedroom as the pre-teen curled himself in a fatal position, hands painfully covering his ears in a futile effort to stem the sounds from within. On top of that, the boy was facing the most horrifying sight he had yet to see. Laying on a throne-like structure was a grey skinned old woman with eyes a deep dark red. More than those eyes, which were eerily similar to a pair he had seen before was the fact that the woman's flesh seemed to be disintegrating. The woman was gesticulating wildly to the kneeling subject with more ferocity than Harry would have expected given her condition. And yet, even as she lashed out with her hand, a blob of flesh loosened.

Although the woman seemed not to notice, Harry stared in sick fascination as the flesh started hanging down further and further. He cringed and felt a wave of nausea rising within him when the skin pulled apart, revealing tissue as the flesh slowly disconnected itself from the arm until it was hanging on only by a thin thread of muscle. Already frightened, Harry decided he had seen enough when the woman paused, stared almost absently at the hanging flesh before ripping it off with nary a cringe and flinging it at the kneeling man, hitting him squarely in the face.

Harry gagged, even as he felt a familiar presence deep within him calling. Gratefully he latched on to that presence and tugged at it, allowing it to pull him away from the nightmarish scene and firmly into reality. Seconds later, Harry's eyes flew open and he found himself breathing harshly. Moments later, as the last scene drifted into his mind, his nausea returned and the eleven year old barely managed to roll to the side of the bed before he threw up, the images flashing through his brain causing him to heave harder as his body relieved itself of his dinner.

In between painful retches, he vaguely heard his door flung open before his dominant's presence settled besides him. It was slight comfort to him when he felt a hand settle on the small of his back and another firmly on his shoulder, steadying him even as the veela called for their nanny-elves. Twin pops were heard before the frantic voices of the elves, but still the lion could do little but succumb to his body's urges. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, his body calmed enough for him to try to straighten. Immediately the elves shot into action, Dobby banishing the entire mess while Trix pressed a cloth into Draco's hands, knowing that he would want to do it.

Despite the fact that the veela's hands were trembling terribly, the veela still managed to wipe the mess from Harry's face, before taking and tipping the vial of mouth cleanser Dobby handed him into Harry's mouth, ordering him in a slightly strained voice to swish and spit into the bowl Dobby held. Throughout the ministrations Harry was oddly quiet, just short of being unresponsive, moving automatically as Draco stripped him of his pyjamas before redressing him in a simple nightshirt. There was a moment's panic when Harry dry-heaved, but with his stomach now completely drained there was nothing to dispel. Knowing most likely what had occurred the veela, disregarding his own state for now, pulled his submissive into a tight embrace before issuing orders. In the minute it took the elves to return he crooned softly to Harry who did little more than whimper softly and tighten his grip on the blonde's damp shirt.

He gave a small cry when the elves re-entered the room, earning them a slight glare from the veela.
even though he honestly knew that they could not be faulted. Harry was just so disturbed by the experience that he was extremely sensitive. "Where are they?"

"Master Severus is not in his rooms young master, but I brought these," Dobby offered, resting four vials on the bed.

"Headmaster Dumbledore is not in Hogwarts," Trix continued, twisting her ear painfully in retribution for her seeming inefficiency.

Draco made a disgusted noise. "They are never around when we need them anymore," he muttered to himself as he gently disengaged Harry from him to take a vial. Even then, Harry's grip on his shirt remained constant and his eyes when they met his were full of fear and vulnerability. Uncorking it, the veela once again found himself feeding his little mate the potion, Harry refusing to release him to take the vial. Draco honestly could not fathom what the boy was going through. He had only been privy to voices and had been terribly shaken. Just what had Harry, who both heard and saw gone through in the minutes it took them to establish their bond and break free?

Although at first they had down played the dreams, the rate at which they occurred seemed to be increasing, the last before this incident had been a week previous and with each one they seemed to have to struggle harder to break free of it. More than that, none of their family seemed to be available in the aftermath of one of the dreams and when they were around, they were too busy or preoccupied, leaving the boys unwilling to burden them with any more issues. However tonight had been the worst occurrence yet, and once again they were left on their own. Draco could only be grateful that the school year was quickly ending, and with it, they would be back in the care of their parents, where the matter could be dealt with.

Harry's tentative voice broke him out of his thoughts. "You're clammy," he whispered, his eyes meeting Draco's thoughtful ones.

"I'm fine," he said automatically, glad that the calming potion seemed to be taking effect. He should probably take his own, he added idly to himself.

"No you're not," he countered softly, turning to regard the elves standing in wait. "Master Draco needs fresh pyjamas Trix."

The elf brightened considerably and released her now slightly discoloured ear. "Understood Master Harry!"

"I told you I am fine," he protested although he did not struggle while Harry's fingers unbuttoned his shirt. Dobby, wanting to be useful handed him one of the vials and he downed it quickly, sighing once it took effect.

"Dobby, a quick cleansing please," Harry directed, signalling Draco's sweat covered body, too tired to even consider doing the act himself.

"Understood."

Five minutes later Draco was dressed similarly to Harry and both with slight smiles allowed the elves to usher them under the covers after the sheets were changed. Once they had ingested the Dreamless Sleep potions, their servants were dismissed, leaving them to attempt to salvage the remainder of their night.

With their already drained state, conversation was scarce between the pair as they settled against each other, letting their actions speak for them as they reassured themselves that they were safe and could
come to no harm.

"Dray?" Harry whispered as he moved, so that his head now rested on his dominant's chest, right where he could hear the steady thumping of his heart.

"Yes cub?"

The eleven year old shifted, letting his eyes flutter close as he drifted of to sleep. "One more night like this and someone's bedroom is going to become storage."

That remark brought a surprised chuckle from the veela before he kissed sleep-ruffled hair tenderly. "Storage it is pet," he confirmed, pulling Harry even more securely against him before he closed his eyes and allowed himself to rest.

* Severus Prince Snape was exhausted beyond imaginable belief. So tired was he that when his lovers returned to Black Manor after a night of scouring known Dark areas for information, they found him asleep, still in his travelling clothes on their bed, so deeply unconscious that he gave not the slightest stir when they dropped down besides him, eyeing him in concern.

Remus' wand was out in a flash, running a scan over his body. Thankfully, the results were negative, indicating that he was suffering from no real ailment. Relieved, the men disrobed themselves, relying on spells to remove the dirt and grime from them for now before doing the same for the slumbering man, dressing him in boxers only before settling him beneath the covers, tucked safely between them. A breath of air that could be mistaken for a sigh escaped the raven-haired man before he turned to his side facing Sirius nestling his head into the pillow, breathing in their scents no doubt, before he settled once again.

Obviously he had a rough night, and Remus spared a thought to wonder how the headmaster had fared if this was the condition Severus had returned in. He mentioned to Sirius that they would have to check up on the man later in the day and make sure that he was not pushing himself beyond reasonable boundaries. It would not do for the man to be spearheading their operations only to die from stress before it was completed. No, Albus Dumbledore was needed for a long while yet and they would make sure that that happened.

Even more surprising to them than Severus' exhaustion was the fact that his mental shields, usually impenetrable even when asleep were lowered to an almost critical level. Was it his tiredness that triggered it or was it that Severus trusted that he was safe enough to lower his shields? Sirius muttered that he hoped it was the latter, gaining him a nod of agreement from the amber-eyed man who carefully delved into Severus' mind, waiting for his vague consent before watching the night's events. Once he was withdrawn, he shared the findings with his long-time lover.

"We should stop him from going out again," Remus said in a worried tone as he ran his hand gently through the shoulder length hair Severus sported. "Unlike us, he works full-time. This on top with schooling..."

Sirius wholeheartedly agreed, but unfortunately knew that it would be futile. Albus had offered to relieve Severus of his teaching duties for the remainder of the year, telling him that this was more important. He had staunchly refused, citing that for one no other teacher could be found so late in the term, and more than that, he would not have Draco and Harry unprotected. They needed him around (although with the increasing amount of time he spent outside of Hogwarts this was becoming an increasingly moot point). More often than not Severus was flooing into Hogwarts minutes before a scheduled class and leaving immediately afterwards to follow up on leads in regards to the
Horcruxes.

Albus had discovered that sometimes it truly paid to be old. With the numerous connections the man had garnered over his lifetime, it had been a matter of weeks before Albus confirmed first that Voldemort, then little more than Tom Riddle had sought out information on Horcruxes during his last years at Hogwarts. Further leads and Albus’ expanded knowledge about Voldemort’s past made it that they had a good idea as to the items Voldemort had used in his quest for immortality. With that information, their task had turned towards locating and claiming those items. Eradicating them was secondary, for now it was good enough to have them in their possession.

It was a chilling discovery for Albus, after summoning the innate magic of the school in the dead of night and requesting memories of Tom that he discovered that one of the items was within the school, right under his nose all of that time. Locating the room was no issue although it took him a good few days to manipulate the room enough for it to replicate it to how Voldemort had had it, making the retrieval of the item possible. The diadem was now secured, awaiting destruction. Lucius had located the second item, recalling vaguely an inner circle meeting where Nott had been given something to safe guard for the Dark Master.

Although he was not certain, the memory nudged at him enough. Consequently, he had cornered Nott, and after a quick Imperius Curse (while inwardly he cursed himself for the necessity of the Unforgivable) a bound diary was handed over to him. After obliterating the man, Lucius hurried to Albus. It had only taken a five-minute conversation with the diary to confirm that indeed, it was a Horcrux, somehow retaining Riddle's sixteen-year-old self before it joined its counterpart.

Despite the success of his venture, Lucius had spent a good few hours locked in his bedroom with Narcissa, his head firmly in her lap while he struggled to come to terms with the fact that he had resorted to an unforgivable. The entire episode shook him deeply and reawakened a fear of old in him that he was not the Light wizard he strove to be. Riddled with fears of being unworthy of his family, the light dimmed in Lucius' eyes until finally in desperation, Narcissa had his memory altered with Severus’ aid. Without that bit of knowledge, the Malfoy patriarch quickly returned to his normal self, aware that something was missing but fully accepting of his wife's assurances that he was better off without the memory.

The third item fell onto Narcissa to recover and she continued to work diligently on the task. Despite her elder sister's imprisonment, accessing her Gringotts account, where they were certain that at least one of the items was hidden was not an easy task. Despite the Kiss, her body lived on and it was enough to prevent the goblins from granting the Lady Malfoy access to it. There was the option of Sirius officially accepting the role of Head of the Black line, in doing so putting Bellatrix under his control. With that power, he could easily recall the contents of her vaults, as was his right as patriarch. However, to do so would tangle Sirius into the politics of the world, something that he had no desire for. Unlike Lucius, he wanted nothing to do with the seats being Lord Black would entitle him to and thus that was a method for last resort only. Until then they would have faith in Narcissa’s negotiations with the goblins and hope that an agreement would come.

"We've already done so much in so little time. And surprisingly this time we have Ministry support," Sirius commented lightly, glancing at his amber-eyed lover.

"Indeed. Lucius never did mention how he gained Fudge's backing in the whole issue so quickly."

"Well," Sirius mused. "He is a high profiled pureblood, has custody of the boy-who-lived and let's not forget that he probably has enough information that could land half the officials in Azkaban."

"I go with the last," Remus said seriously. "Merlin be thanked that Lucius is on our side in this matter. Imagine if Fudge was against us."
Sirius mock shuddered. "Don't even go there Moony."

"Hmm...he is beautiful like this isn't he?" the wolf animagus said smoothly, effectively changing the conversation away from dreary matters.

"He is," Sirius agreed. "Beautiful... and ours."

"Forever."

"And beyond," came a sleep-laden voice. Both men smiled gently as Severus' eyes blinked open and he offered them a drowsy smirk.

* 

"Grandpa's angry," Harry murmured as he stabbed absently at the food on his plate, grimacing when he realised that he was chewing broccoli. Glaring at Hermione who shrugged innocently, he continued his discrete perusal of the headmaster, unnerved by the gloom he felt radiating from him.

"How can you tell?" Ron asked around a mouthful of food. As far as he could see there was nothing different about the headmaster. He seemed his normal cheerful self as he ate his meal.

"I just know," Harry sighed after swallowing some mashed potatoes. "He's been that way for the last few days, I wonder what's wrong."

"Hopefully nothing for you to be worried about," Hermione said, throwing her bit into the conversation. "You shouldn't fuss about it Harry. Adults have their own issues to deal with. Sometimes it's best not to pry."

"I don't like him unhappy," Harry murmured.

Ron and Hermione gave him fond looks. "Mate, you don't like seeing anyone unhappy," Ron jibbed lightly, earning himself a small scowl.

"I'm immune to that," Ron smirked. "Besides, keep that up and Lavender and Parvati will start back cooing at you."

The boy dropped the glare immediately at the thought of the other two third year lionesses. "How can you survive in a dorm with them Mione?"

"Numerous silencing spells," she replied with an eye-roll. "Otherwise I'd be spouting out Witch Weekly word for word."

"Like every other book," Ron whispered loudly, before ineffectively trying to dodge the tap she sent his way. "Oh come on Mione," he protested. "Harry doesn't study half as much as you do and he ranks higher!"

"I don't only study wizarding books," Hermione countered, shoving a math textbook towards him to prove her point. "I told you that my parents want me to do muggle exams. I have to study them whenever I have the time so I don't fall too far behind."

"Why bother?" Ron questioned as he flipped through the book. "You're a witch."

"A muggleborn witch Ron," she said with another eye-roll. "As much as my parents support my being here, I did make an agreement with them that I would not turn my back on my muggle heritage. Before my Hogwarts letter I was all set to go to their secondary school and become a
dentist. I owe it to them to gain at least my muggle credentials. Moreover, the alibi for Hogwarts is that I attend an exclusive all girl school, it would be odd if muggle certificates don't pop up around the house eventually."

"Oh..."

"That's a lot of work Mione," Harry remarked. "But I'm sure you'll do brilliant on the Muggle exams anyway."

"Thank you Harry," she beamed. "Now if only someone else could be so supportive," she scowled with a jab to the oblivious Ron. Harry chuckled as they descended into light-hearted bickering.

It only took one witty statement to send the pair into a debate. However, lately Harry noticed that their eyes sparkled with something more than their usual merriment, as if their verbal sparring had a deeper undercurrent to it as they parried. Absently, he observed them with a cocked head. The little gestures they made, the way Hermione was now leaning closer towards the redhead as she replied, poking him lightly to accentuate a point, it seemed awfully familiar to him. And as Ron sent his eyes heavenwards in an undoubtedly amused expression, Harry made the connection.

They were acting surprisingly similar to how his mama and papa did when they were being particularly playful with each other. True Hermione was not giggling and prancing away from Ron the way Narcissa tended to do, and Ron was not growling playfully and lunging at her, but the atmosphere around the pair was the same. As he took a bite of his chicken, Harry vaguely wondered if they would end up like his parents someday. It would be nice, he decided, especially if it meant they would always have each other the way he would always have Draco.

Time passed and soon enough the pair, along with the rest of the student body flung themselves into examination mode and every spare moment was spent quizzing each other or studying diligently from their books, as they prepared for the two or so weeks of stress before they reached the vacation period.

As usually occurred, while Draco threw himself full force into studying, Harry often had to be prodded into doing the same. At those moments it became painfully obvious the strain being ahead of his age group put Harry under, especially when the veela noticed him throwing morose looks towards the first years who were still milling about cheerfully, while he was dragged off to the library. The third time he had done so, the veela found himself riddled with guilt so much so that he promised Harry a new book would be waiting for him at the manor. He was relieved when the sad expression cleared from his face easily and he seemed slightly more enthusiastic about studying.

The exams went as well as they could have expected and none could be happier than Harry when the last scroll was handed in and he took off running, dragging his friends behind him for a well deserved evening of fun on the school grounds away from anything academic. Their carefree behaviour lasted the few days remaining in the term, reminiscing on the past year and the unfortunate fact that it was highly unlikely that they would see each other as a complete group until the new school year.

Blaise was returning to his homeland for the entire holiday period while Millicent was going to Australia for a few weeks. Ron was heading to Romania for a month and Hermione was set to explore Europe with her parents. Harry and Draco were ignorant to any foreign trips as always. The Malfoys always preferred to surprise them. Indeed the last two years they had been apparated out while sleeping, awakening to find themselves in another of the Malfoy's numerous estates. Venice had been a blast, Draco recalled and he certainly was looking forward to see where they would go this time. Soon enough the leaving feast was upon them and the group of friends settled casually in a row of seats, Harry half-leaning on Draco as the headmaster served as Master of Ceremonies for the
evening.

"And so we end another year. For some, this will be your final night in Hogwarts. For others, it will be home to you once more come September. However, no matter where life's journey leads you from this point onwards, know that you are special and that you all have your marks to leave in this world. We at Hogwarts salute you and know that you will be missed."

Polite clapping arose from the Hall, as the headmaster raised his glass in toast to the outgoing seventh years before nodding slightly at the fifth years, some of whom were not guaranteed to return to the school to pursue NEWTS. There was always the odd student or two that performed so dismally that there was no choice but to expel them. On the other hand, there were also a few who left for other ventures, choosing apprenticeship in a field that Hogwarts did not offer. Either way, Albus was certain that at least five of the fifth years he was looking over would not be returning to Hogwarts.

"And now," he continued, after the toasting glasses disappeared from the students' hands. "May the prize giving ceremony begin as I call forward the top five students of each year! When I call your name please come up and receive your award from Professor McGonagall."

Unlike other years, there was not much as much tension in the room. With an overwhelming victory over Ravenclaw in the Quidditch finals, Slytherin was a sure win for the House Cup. It would take no snake entering the top five of their year and the majority of students coming from one particular house for the snakes to be dethroned and as that was highly unlikely, the school had already accepted that it would be Slytherin colours that graced the walls of Hogwarts by the end of the ceremony.

There was very little variations from the previous ceremonies, Harry noted as he reclined idly against Draco. The majority of the students who went forth to accept their awards were the same, with the exception of the first years. He sent a small smile at Brussels as he accepted fifth place and the first year waved brightly back. They weren't half bad he thought, reminding himself to try to interact more with them come the next year.

By the time Albus had gone through four of the seven years, only two newcomers joined the ranks of those being honoured, and Draco scowled at the sneers of the students they had displaced. Really, there was no need for such behaviour, he groused, clapping automatically as the next name was announced. Cho managed to advance in the rankings of the fifth years, placing second behind Cedric. Quite an accomplishment for someone who had skipped a year, Draco murmured to his mate as they cheered loudly for the friendly badger.

In keeping with his random selection of years, (something that always earned him a withering look from McGonagall that he pointedly ignored), the third year's were next to be announced after Cedric had retaken his seat. It was with great reluctance that Harry straightened himself, sighing at the loss of Draco's warm touch. The veela gave him a sympathetic look as he fixed his tie, murmuring soothingly that it would only be five minutes at the most. Two seats down from them, Hermione was also brushing at her robes, smiling gently at Ron when he tucked a rebellious curl behind her ear.

"In fifth place," the headmaster began as he unrolled the scroll, "Terry Boot, Ravenclaw."

"Fourth place, Blaise Zabini, Slytherin!"

"Congratulations on making it into the top five Mr. Zabini," the deputy headmistress informed the Slytherin, handing him his award. "I hope that to see you in it from now on."

"I'll try," he said around a bright smile that only grew brighter at his friends loud hails at his accomplishment, Millicent impulsively kissing his cheek when he sat, an action that drew blushes from the both of them. Mildly embarrassed, Millicent clapped a tad to hard for Hermione who was
daintily climbing the podium, not that she noticed until Blaise settled a warm harm over her hands, his chocolate brown eyes sparkling as he met her lighter ones, a hidden message in their depths.

Harry eyes widened slightly at the display and he tugged Draco nearer to whisper in his ear. The veela shot a startled look at his friends before shaking his head lightly in amusement, especially when the Slytherins straightened abruptly and refused to make eye contact for the remainder of the ceremony.

"There is no second place," Albus announced cheerfully, drawing the group away from their own talks as they focussed on him with expressions ranging from confusion to amusement. "Instead there is a tie for first place between Harry Potter, Gryffindor and Draco Malfoy, Slytherin."

The said boys shared incredulous looks before laughing loudly as they rose from their seats, murmuring to each other as they crossed the floor.

"We never catered for this in our bet."

"I know. So who buys the frogs Dray?"

"Mother and Father?"

"It's our bet," Harry pointed out, before smiling as he received his prize, stepping aside for Draco to claim his. "Why should they buy it?" he continued once they were off the stage.

"Fine. We buy each other one then."

"Cool."

"You know that no one else can get away with that right?" Blaise whispered a few minutes later, gesturing to how Harry was coddled up against his mate, legs drawn up under him.

"Well no one else are mates," Draco shrugged. "Besides no one can tell if we need to bond or just feel like touching."

"And," Harry added, rubbing his cheek against his mate. "I love my pillow and I won't be denied it."

"Imp, I am not your pillow."

"Of course not," Harry snickered. "But you love me so you don't mind."

"Indeed," Draco chuckled, kissing his hair.

For the next few minutes, the mates lost themselves in their own little world, sharing a hushed conversation that drew blushes, soft smiles and even mild laughter from each other as they revelled in each other's presence. "I am so proud of you little one," Draco murmured eventually. "It pleases me that my mate is on equal footing with me."

A warm trill ran down Harry's body at the words of praise. "Thank you dominant," he replied, a bit shyly, lowering his eyes for a minute while he absently played with a button on Draco's shirt. "But how did we manage it?"

"I'm guessing that although we scored differently in the subjects, at the end of the day our overall marks equalled. However, I do know that our marks were higher this year. It bodes well for our OWL exams if we can maintain this."

"Sure," Harry replied noncholantly, not at all concerned with the fifth year exams, nor would he be
for quite a while.

"Professor Snape is glaring daggers at you," Blaise interjected.

Startled back into reality, the mates looked around, before wincing at the truth in the teenager's words. The scolding in his eyes was easily readable and prudently, they feigned interest as the head boy and girl gave a small speech. When they had reseated themselves, and green and silver banners decorated the hall, the school waited for the headmaster to lead them into a rendition of the school song before declaring the year closed. However, the wizard held a staying hand before speaking again.

"There is one last announcement before I end tonight's proceedings. I am sure many of you have heard at some point about the Tri-Wizard Tournament and I am...pleased to say that it will recommence come the following school year."

Only Harry and Draco noticed the slight pause the man made and shared a speaking glance. The man was all but lying, he was not happy about the tournament, and they could only speculate why.

"The tournament will be hosted by the Durmstrang Institute for Magical Learning and alongside ourselves, the third school participating is Beauxbatons Academy of Magic. Students who will be seventeen by the Tournament's opening ceremony will be allowed to vie for the honour of representing Hogwarts as school Champion with approval from faculty. All those who meet the age requirement will be sent letters the necessary letters in the holidays and we expect responses from interested students no later than August 14th.

"All sixth and seventh year students who have maintained an average of at least seventy five percent are entitled to attend the Tournament as spectators once written parental approval is given. I will add that such persons as well as the Champion will be residing at the Institute from October to early June. I ask that this be taken into consideration. Further details will be issued to respective students in due time."

"Are you disappointed we can't go?" Draco asked much later as he and Harry settled on his bed. "I can't blame you if you are. It is a good opportunity."

"Actually I'm not," was the honest response as he gently pushed the veela backwards so that he could rest against his chest. "The tournament sounds wonderful, but Papa told us about Durmstrang remember? Fur coats year round, no school grounds, very strict. That doesn't sound fun at all. I don't want to stay there for months on end. Maybe I would be a little jealous if it was in Beauxbatons, but still, Hogwarts is home. Besides," he added cheerfully. "Imagine how much fun we can have with so many less people in the castle!"

"That does sound entertaining," the veela allowed. "I hope Uncle isn't going. Grandfather will definitely have to, he is headmaster."

"That's true," Harry murmured. "We'll have to ask him."

"Yes we will...you have packed everything right?"

"I believe so."

"Don't believe, know."

"It isn't like we can't floo back," Harry grumbled.

"Other students wouldn't have that chance," Draco pointed out.
"Other students wouldn't have gotten Stinging hexes on their bums for talking either now would they?" he countered with a pout.

"Well, Uncle was a tad unfair," the veela agreed, squirming slightly as he recalled the nonverbal hex the man had thrown their ways as they left the Hall.

"We'll have to get revenge," Harry decided. "Uncles will help us."

"Oh, so you're talking to them again?"

"Of course I am, as long as they don't mention you-know-what."

"Fine," Draco agreed with an eyeroll. "But you will be bored while I am learning with them."

"Mama will amuse me," he said glibly.

"Of course she will," he sighed, knowing full well that the woman would melt once Harry turned wide doleful eyes on her, perhaps even throwing in a quivering lower lip for good measure. But then, the veela had to admit, it wasn't as if he could resist the expression himself.

*Clad in fur lined dark red robes, one of Durmstrang’s prized students, second only to his older brother, walked stiffly along the hallways of his military-like school, the slight narrowing of his eyes an expression of satisfaction as students cleared the way to allow him free passage. The last one who had failed to move had landed himself in the medical ward for a few days and since then the students had learnt their lessons. Viktor Krum was not one to tamper with. Ignoring the insignificant persons around him, he allowed his mind to drift back to the conversation he just had with the High Master. Back in the High Master's office, Karkaroff, pale and trembling, had informed him of his selection to partake in a mission that would return the wizarding world to its rightful state. Intrigued, Krum had listened intently to all what his High Master had to say before agreeing to join the cause. It was not everyday that one had the chance to be of service to a soon to be reborn Dark Lord. Voldemort had been the most fearsome Dark Lord the wizarding world had come across and it would be an honour to secure a place in the man’s favour. As such, he had remained with the High Master for a further two hours to be completely briefed on what he was expected to accomplish.

The mission at first glance seemed simple, but the efforts that would be required to see it successfully accomplished were substantial, not that Krum minded the challenge. He had almost two years in which to fulfil his mission, and it was a time he would use wisely to ensure success. He would not be a disappointment to the Dark Lord. He would serve him to the best of his ability and reap the rewards it would garner him. After all, which fifteen year old could safely say that their future wellbeing was assuredly guaranteed without parental aid? He could and he surely would not lose the opportunity.

The rooms he shared with his older brother were empty when he entered, no doubt Dimitar had been summoned to receive a similar offer. Being the school’s top ranked student, Viktor had no doubt that when he returned they would be exchanging information about their missions.

However only Igor Karkaroff, hours after briefing the Krum brothers would recognise that it was not a cause for celebration as the brothers believed. Only he knew that for at least one of the brothers, the successful completion of the mission would bring nothing but shame and disrepute, not only to themselves, but also to the Durmstrang name. However, as the man had long learned, sacrifices had to be made, even at the cost of his favoured students.
From a corner of the station, Viktor Krum stood in the shadows, carefully hidden away from all the cheerful wizards as he laid in wait for the train's arrival. His mission had already started. Searching the crowd, he sighted whom he believed to be the Malfoys. Tall, blonde and dressed in clothes that reeked of wealth. Yes, he was certain that they were whom he thought. Keeping their location in mind, he allowed himself to search for other noteworthy faces among the gathering crowd. A balding man with clear patches of red hair came through the barrier with a pleasantly plump witch at her side. Although their clothing was no where near as sophisticated, they greeted the Malfoys warmly, exchanging pleasantries.

"Interesting," he murmured in his native tongue, writing quickly on a spare bit of parchment. Every bit of information could prove crucial later on. In the next few minutes before the train arrived in a billow of steam, Viktor perused the information he had been given and what he had added to it. An itinerary of the Malfoys' habits were the most useful thing to him now. Today was only a scouting mission, to identify visually his target. Contact would not be made for a while yet, not till their trip to Diagon Alley, which usually occured a week after they returned from their holidaying abroad, that, if all went according to plan would be happening a week and a half from now. They would not leave the manor before that time as a family.

As noisy students started disembarking, the Bulgarian native slipped his parchment and quill away, ensuring that the disillusionment charm was still active. Satisfied, he focused once more on the Malfoys. It took a while, indeed he was beginning to grow impatient as they crowd swelled and gradually decreased before his target emerged. He seemed tired, Viktor noted, for he rubbed an eye sleepily, grasping at the wrist of a blonde at least a head taller. "Draco Malfoy," he whispered. Four students climbed out behind them and they all took a moment to either hug or shake hands (Potter hugged all he noticed with a slight frown) before separating, shouting last minute goodbyes to each other before they reunited with their respective families.

How quaint, he sneered, as the little boy seemed suddenly energised as his eyes fell on the Malfoys and in a quick flash he raced to them, flinging his arms around the male Malfoy who lifted him in one fell swoop into an embrace. The disgusted feeling Krum felt died abruptly as Malfoy's body twisted slightly, the angle giving him a clear view of the boy's face for the first time as he pressed a kiss to the man's cheek.

Viktor found himself blinking in surprise as he noted the boy's features. Shoulder length black hair wafted around him, escaping a loose tie at the base of his neck that Malfoy was removing. A swat of hair with a slight curl reached just under his chin and as he moved to answer the man, Viktor saw a hint of the famous scar, standing out against the pale skin of the boy. His cheeks were round and seemed pinchable, which was exactly what the female Malfoy was doing as she leaned over, temporarily blocking his view as she kissed him tenderly. The slight flush that stained the boy's cheeks was surprisingly endearing, Viktor thought, not realising that his perusal of the boy was going beyond what he strictly needed to know. However it was his eyes that struck the Bulgarian to the core. No where in his reports was it stated just how striking those emerald eyes were. They were not even trained on him and yet, Viktor found himself captivated by them, impressed by the way the light played of them, making it seem as if there were stars embedded in the boy's gaze.

Harry Potter was beautiful, Viktor thought, long after the family had disapparated and he returned to the house he had taken temporary residence of. Even at eleven, there was an appealing air around the boy that was tantalising, and surprisingly, Viktor found himself wondering if personality wise the boy was as appealing as he looked. It was a shame he would not live to meet his fourteenth birthday, he pondered, and it was even more disturbing that he would play a part in his demise. Yes, it was a shame he agreed, as his memory drew forth the boy's image, that those eyes so bright would one day
grow dim with death. But it was necessary, and Viktor would not grow distracted by the boy's appeal. Indeed, he decided as he pulled his curtains close against the evening light. That little kernel of emotion that had filled him at the sight of the boy would only further serve to help his plan, lending him the credibility he would need, if his mission was to succeed.
Lucius Malfoy was finding it extremely difficult to focus on his day's work, which was unfortunate given that he had brought it home in the hopes of finishing it in the shortest possible time. But then, what could he have expected given that it was the weekend his sons returned from Hogwart? He went through this every end of year, bringing home almost a week's worth of contracts and documents, hoping to run through them in the course of one or two days, leaving him with ample time to reacquaint himself with the boys.

And as always, that plan flew out the window as soon as he locked himself away in the office, and the pangs of jealousy towards his wife started. Even now, she was probably laughing at whatever antics the pair had gotten themselves into during the term that Severus had not informed them about while he was stuck in here working. Already an hour had passed and in that time, what had he done? Signed a grand total of one contract and read all of five inches of an over ten foot report. Instead of concentrating on the potential risks and benefits of buying over a struggling apothecary line before turning it over to Severus to manage, the patriarch instead sighed wistfully (not that he would admit to it), at the thought that his children were home, safe in the manor where they belonged.

That thought brought back memories of years gone by, when the pair barely reached his waist, appearing at the doorway at random moments, be it to inquire about his activities and then stare at him in awe while he expounded on what he did (Draco of course) or to present a book or game of some sort with a hesitancy that had him pulling the boy to him for a good cuddle. Either way, whatever he happened to be working on at the arrival would be summarily shoved aside once a head, be it blonde or brunette, appeared, peering hopefully around the door in a blatant plea for affection.

Not that it was any great effort on his part to spend time with them. He thoroughly enjoyed it, the interactions between them, the pleasure he felt when he discovered yet another facet to their personality, the coaxing out of laughs and chortles that reassured him that the boys were fine but more importantly happy. It had been a joy for him then, and it certainly still was now, even though one was a teenager - fourteen the past few weeks he reminded himself, while the other was heading for the age of twelve in a little while. He wanted nothing but to go and be with them,

"So why am I here sighing like some forlorn witch?" he grumbled in vexation, dropping the report that he had been holding idly while he contemplated on the past.

"Because you are under the delusion that you are answerable to someone," was a wry reply from above him.

Startled, Lucius spun in his chair, the expression slowly replaced by a comforted look as he saw his father looking down upon him from his portrait frame. "I thought you were asleep Father."

"With you griping so?" came the sharp reply as Abraxas arched an eyebrow at his son that in his childhood had him ducking his head in shame, waiting for the inevitable scolding coming his way. "Are you not Lord Malfoy?"

A small smirk graced the man's face. "Well you are dead aren't you?" he quipped, the smirk widening at his sire's surprised laughter.

"Don't sass me boy," he warned good-naturedly. "I am still your father no matter my two-dimensionality."

"Always."
"Good boy," Abraxas praised, smiling at the sincerity in the words. The pride in his voice managed to raise a slight blush on the current patriarch's face, something he chuckled over before returning to the matter at hand. "Good boys heed their fathers do they not?"

"Yes they do," was the immediate response. "Although I wonder what that leaves for the daughters?"

"Cheeky boy," he scolded softly. "Well since you are a good boy, and I am your father, you will listen to me now."

"Within reason."

"Well this is reasonable. You will put away those documents you've been sighing over for Merlin knows how long. You are not getting anything done and I will not have you crumbling the Malfoy Empire because of a lack of focus on your part."

"Highly unlikely."

"Silence boy. You are not to old to grace a corner with your presence."

"And when will I be?" he asked noncholantly as he spun his chair around, reaching for the cap of his inkwell. "When I'm one hundred and two?"

"A hundred and five and don't you forget it!"

"I won't," he agreed, waving his wand to neaten the desk. "And as you see, like the dutiful son I am, I am heeding your instructions father."

"Of course you are," he replied, nodding in approval before his tone softened marginally. "Go enjoy your wife and children my son. I don't want you anywhere near this office until Monday. Anything crucial let your personnel handle. That is what they are being paid for after all."

"Understood," Lucius agreed as he stretched, sighing in pleasure when bones cracked in all the right places. Walking gracefully to the door, he paused with his hand on the handle, turning his head until his father's portrait was in full view. "Thank you sir," he murmured with a slight bow, before leading, letting the door close automatically behind him.

"Think nothing of it my dear Lucius," Abraxas said to the empty room, allowing a fond look to enter his expression as he remembered a time when Lucius was nay high and mumbling the same thing to him in thanks for one thing or another. It was a pleasant memory, he thought as he rocked back into the chair in his portrait and closed his eyes, determined now to finish sleeping now that his little Lucius was not around to disturb him.

"Father!" Draco said excitedly, as the playroom door opened and the patriarch sauntered in, dressed casually in a pair of trousers and a deep blue button down shirt rolled up to his elbows. Jumping up from his spot on the floor, he all but ran to the man, gripping his arm as he stared up at him with the same hopeful expression he had in his younger days. "Are you done for the day?"

Ruffling his hair fondly, he nodded, a warm feeling rushing through him at the brilliant smile he got in response before he made his way to the window seat his wife was seated on, Draco still gripping his arm. Near to the woman's feet, Harry looked up from his puzzle, giving him a brilliant smile before his head ducked downwards again. Apparently it was more interesting than him, Lucius thought wryly as he dropped down. Oh well, he shrugged, Harry would tire of the game eventually,
but his love for him would remain always and that was what was important.

Sitting a few inches away from his wife, the patriarch was startled when Draco dropped down besides him, leaning abruptly against his arm. Blinking down at him for a moment, he raised the arm and let his son rest against his torso, where he resumed reading the book he had not even noticed him holding. Draco butted his head lightly against his chest in affection before losing himself in the narrative.

Draping his arm around the boy, he turned a questioning eye to his wife who shrugged lightly, a twinkle in her eyes. Curling his fingers in a come-hither gesture, he waited until the veela closed the small distance between them. "Hello love," he murmured, as he used his free hand to wrap around and cradle the back of her neck, pulling slightly until their lips could meet in a gentle kiss, a wave of tenderness passing between them. A slight giggle caught their attention as they parted, and turning their heads, they say Harry looking at them with his head cocked.

"Work on your puzzle little voyeur," Lucius chuckled while Narcissa rested her head on his free shoulder.

If anything, the inquisitive look on the child's face increased. "What does voyeur mean papa?" he inquired, the innocent question drawing surprised chortles from Narcissa as she buried her head in the crock of her husband's neck, unaware of the reaction that little action was having on the man. Resisting the urge to smack himself and trying to concentrate despite the warm breaths wafting across his skin, Lucius stifled a curse when Draco pulled away, a slight frown on his face.

"I've never heard that word either," he said musingly. "Is it a derivative of voyager Father?"

"What's that?"

"Traveller cub," he replied immediately, averting his attention to his mate.

"Then just say that," Harry requested pertly. "I am only eleven you know."

"Wasn't it just last night that you insisted that you were as good as twelve?" he asked rhetorically. "And besides, we came across the word already in one of our books."

"A textbook?"

"No."

"Then I was probably half asleep," he declared wryly, tilting his head in what he hoped was a haughty way and failing miserably. His attempt did earn another round of laughter from Narcissa who had barely regained control of herself and the groan Lucius gave was not entirely out of annoyance as her lips brushed against his skin. Unfortunately, for him, despite the light bickering, neither boy had forgotten the question as he had hoped.

"Papa you did not answer," Harry reminded him. "What is a voyeur?"

"Yes Lucius," Narcissa smirked, as she pulled away, her eyes sparkling madly in a way that under different circumstances would have found her tossed on their bed in seconds. "I seem to have forgotten the meaning myself. Enlighten us dearest."

The lack of support drew a low growl from Lucius. Shooting her a heated look only got him a wink in return and another call from his boys. "A voyeur," he explained finally. "Is someone you will never be and that is all I have to say on the matter!"
His attempt at a stern tone earned nothing more than another chuckle from his wife. That was it. Standing abruptly, he swooped the witch up before she could think to counter, holding her firmly around the waist and dangling her off the floor.

"Lu-Lucius!" she gasped, kicking her feet out as she looked down on him. "Put me down this minute!"

"You madame," he declared. "Refused me support on the matter. I seek recompense!"

Putting actions to words he spun around the room, the witch letting out a shriek before she gripped his shoulders for support, shouting his name while the boys shared amused looks at their parents' antics knowing that they were playing.

"I plead for a bargain," she called eventually and immediately the man paused, looking at her speculatively.

"And what are the terms madame?"

"I don't know," she pouted, her finger tracing his shirt idly. "A dictionary to aid in your explanations!"

"And still I am sassed," he growled, spinning around once.

"What else am I to do?" she asked pertly. "It is our duty to tease our mates, is it not Harry?"

"Of course mama," was the swift response from the grinning child. "Draco does so blush!"

"I do not!" Draco sputtered, poking Harry's side where he was especially ticklish. "You take that back!"

"He gets that from Lucius I believe," Narcissa said, wrinkling her nose down at her mate. "My, aren't we strong?" she murmured softly, the heated words for his ears only.

"Why thank you," he replied in an even softer voice, before raising it. "I do not blush!" he guffawed, mimicking his son's earlier words as he spun once more. "Admit it my love and I will release you. Tell the boys that Draco's pretty flush is entirely your doing."

"I do not blush!" the veela protested, even as his face heated, a fact Harry oh so helpfully pointed out.

"Harry," Draco hissed, reaching for him.

Easily dodging the grasping hands, Harry nimbly sprung to his feet, running out of the room with the veela in pursuit.

"Can't catch me!" he called over his shoulder as he ran down the hallways, his mate at his heels.

"Oh yes I will," Draco promised, a glint in his eyes.

Back in the playroom, Lucius finally set his beloved on her feet, holding her steady while she regained her balance.

"That was fun," she commented as she wrapped her hands around his neck, tiptoeing slightly.

"Indeed," he replied huskily, letting his forehead drop to meet hers. "I have yet to be compensated though."
"You brought it on yourself," she countered softly, as she kissed the corner of his mouth teasingly. "But I will thank you for coming."

"Hm?" he asked distractedly, distracted by her close proximity to him, the bond between them flaring as his desire for her increased.

"For coming here," she clarified. "The boys wanted you here, not that they complained. Surely you saw how happy Draco was to see you?"

"Mhmm," he replied, storing away her words for later for when he could process them without the distraction of her pressed against him. The only thing registering in the man's mind currently was the fact that the woman sounded grateful, a fact he could no doubt manipulate in his favour. He was after all a Slytherin. "You are grateful no?"

"Immensely," she purred, placing another teasing kiss against his lips, mewling when his head turned fractionally and their lips locked together.

* *

"Let's make another trip round the manor okay?" Draco whispered quietly to Harry as they peered into the room and saw the embrace the couple was locked in. "They're busy."

"They're only kissing," Harry countered but followed along nonetheless. "And why was Papa's hands on mama's chest?"

The veela missed a step at the question, groaning at the image. That was not something he needed to picture. And just how had Harry managed to see that anyway? Groaning slightly he pulled the boy along. "That's just something people do Harry...but only to their mates!" he added hastily, picturing Harry running up to Hermione and grabbing her...no that was not up for consideration. Or maybe it should have been he decided seconds later when Harry asked innocently.

"So I can touch your chest then?"

Fighting against the spike of emotion that line had sent throw his body, Draco determinedly broke into a run, knowing that the abrupt change in activity would serve as a distraction long enough for Harry to forget. In between dodging Harry, he swore revenge on his parents for putting him in the awkward situation.

* *

Vaguely, somewhere along her bond, Narcissa sensed two presences approaching, their essence different from that of the man who's tongue she was dueling, but still familiar. The boys, she thought regretfully, even as a moan slipped passed her lips as Lucius slowly drew them backwards until he could fall against hte seat they had occupied earlier, pulling her down on top of him. Regretfully, she pulled away, burying her head against his neck as she breathed harshly.

"Love?" he breathed in confusion, his voice rough.

"We will have company in a bit," she said with a soft sigh as she angled herself so that she was no longer straddling his lap but was now situated upon in a more chaste position. As the man grumbled, she straightened his shirt where she had gripped him and gave him a small peck, promising that they would continue later. She was after all immensely grateful for his presence.

"Hush you," she chided softly. "Unless you wish to answer more questions?"
"Hell no," he muttered, startling her with the explicit, no matter how mild.

Oh well she shrugged, Lucius never had that much control when it came to his wants, and she nipped his neck apologetically seconds before the pair barreled into the room, their cheeks flush with their exertion. Luckily for the couple, given the way they were naturally affectionate, the boys saw nothing remotely out of place with the intimate position and instead shot them smiles before flopping down and without a word, pulling Harry's puzzle to them.

"You two are awfully quiet," she pointed out a minute later and unsurprisingly they looked up with slightly guilty expressions.

"What have you done?" Lucius asked mildly, as he leant back slightly.

"We already fixed it," Harry pointed out. "It's as good as new!"

"And what did you break this time that necessitated it to be fixed in the first place?"

"That vase Lady Malden sent you for Christmas," Draco supplied easily. "But as Harry said it's fixed."

The elder wizard's eyes drifted from one to the next for a few seconds before he settled on a way to alleviate the pressing desire he felt. "Rooms, now," Lucius said shortly, ignoring the small thump Narcissa gave his chest even as the pair gaped at him.

"But why?" Harry protested with a slight whine. "It's not like you like it anyway."

Oh no, he was not losing the opportunity he decided. "Exactly my point," the man said. "You fixed it. Never heard of a banishing charm?"

"Lucius do not encourage them!" she chided, rolling her eyes at the pair even as she gleaned the man's primary motive. "Your father is being unreasonable. Take your game and carry it to your room. I will deal with him."

Shrugging and glancing at each other, the pair rose and trotted out with the game in hand, the door closing, but not before the parents clearly heard Harry whispering, "They just want to snog more!"

"Smart boy," the patriarch snickered as he stood, scooping the woman nimbly up into his arms.

"That was not nice Luc," she scolded even as he walked.

"Extra helpings of treacle tart and cake and I'm sure I'll be forgiven," he said judiciously.

"By them not me," she sniffed playfully. "I don't feel particularly grateful any more Lucius Abraxas."

"I think I will be able to change your mind my lady," he leered the look drawing a contented moan from her as they disappeared for the evening.

* *

Viktor Krum was most assuredly bored. At least Dimitar had something to do, practicing to improve his skills even further in preparation for the upcoming Tournament. But what did he have to do beyond draft plans there were many moons away from coming to fruition? Nothing, absolutely nothing.

"Should have stayed in Britain," he groused as he turned on his side, facing a wall. At least then he
would have been able to explore the place better. But no, he had to return home to try out for the Quidditch team, only to be told that no matter how skilled he was, the rules could not be bent enough to allow a fifteen year old on the team, especially one participating in the World Cup. So why had he been issued the invitation in the first place?

He sneered at the absent wizard coach, who had remorsefully broke the news to him. Viktor had flown circles around their measly seeker, and yet here he was, not even on the reserve team because of a miscalculation in birth? Moreover, he huffed, he would not even have the pleasure of seeing his brother, who definitely had qualified as a starter chaser in action because Dimitar had unceremoniously refused the spot with the excuse that he would wait until Viktor could join him. The excuse had been readily accepted with a few commenting on how sweet it was to see to brothers so close to each other but in truth it was only a lie.

The real reason for Dimitar's refusal was that he had too much to learn for the tournament to be bothered by anything so plebeian as a sport no matter how good he was at it. The try-outs had been little more than a way for him to reassert once again his dominance among the Durmstrang students, that he was so powerful he could refuse such a position without qualms, making it so that the country was in waiting for him to grace them with his presence.

Excellent plan brother, Viktor thought with a hint of pride, especially when, with his none to subtle inclusion of Viktor, he had elevated his status as well, not that Viktor particularly needed it. However, who was he to complain? In the upcoming school year he and Dimitar would rule Durmstrang, something to which they were both looking forward. And more than that, his plan would hopefully be well on the way and he could start his work on the boy. Speaking of which...

"Accio photograph."

Seconds later, a moving picture of his target landed in his waiting hand. He did not know who had taken the picture, nor did he particularly care. The point was that he had it. A full frontal shot of one Harry James Potter, reclining against a tree with a cheerful smile on his face as he waved at him. Well not at him, Viktor corrected with a small chuckle, remembering that Karkaroff had told him that his attention was on his mate a little distance away.

If this was the effect being around the veela had on the boy, Viktor had to admit that he was impressed. For one so young, he was terribly attractive, he noted, analysing the figure who was now staring at him with a bright smile, head cocked slightly as his emerald eyes glinted. Like gems in the sunlight, Viktor mused, absentmindedly tracing the pink cheek with a finger, laughing lightly when the boy blushed in surprising tandem with the actions.

"Beautiful," he murmured, as he fell back against his pillow, lifting the photograph above his head. Once again, the Bulgarian found himself lost in the emerald gaze that seemed so kind and welcoming, which he was, if all the information he had on him was right. He was a trusting little thing, and as long as one was gentle with him, he was like putty in their hands. He had a temper though, although he could see no sign of it in that little face once again smiling. Was it possible for a cherub like him to get angry?

Harry Potter, he thought, his lips moving automatically to form the words. Boy-who-lived, defeater (if only temporarily) of the Great Lord Voldemort. The saviour of the wizarding world. Looking at him now Viktor could not see it. The boy seemed to be one that would cry at a scraped knee or harsh word. And yet, he had somehow held the dark lord at bay in a duel a little more than two years before. It had to be an exaggeration, he scoffed, rolling to his side once again. Perhaps he had managed a spell or two before his mate or the headmaster took over.

Even if he was proficient in wandless magic, he had been naught but nine then and would soon be
twelve. Certainly, he was no real threat to Voldemort, at least not in his youth. His family was more of a concern, if the teenager was honest with himself. The child had certainly surrounded himself with capable wizards and witches for protection. That was undeniable and mildly frustrating. Getting around them would take some doing especially his pet veela, but as he had said earlier, he had time. Time to concretize the tentative plan he had outlined. For now, his main goal was to find a way to isolate Harry, if only for an hour or so. That would be enough, more than enough to lay the foundation of his mission.

His mission.

When had his thoughts changed, he asked himself abruptly as he sat up, looking at the picture in disbelief. Instead of contemplating on his future actions, he had sat reminiscing about the boy in the photograph. His target! And since when was his target Harry and not Potter? If anything, he should be contemplating on the boy with nothing but contempt and mild glee at the fate that awaited him. And here he was, thinking of him as a cherub, pondering at his actions, the rumours that surrounded him. Nothing that bared any true significance on his mission.

"Merlin be damned," he cursed as he stood abruptly, crossing his room to fling back the curtain and stare beyond.

He had his mother's sentimental heart he grimaced as he eyed his reflection in the window. No matter how unyielding and vindictive his mother could be, at heart the woman was as loving as they came, doting on everyone she called family. Even now, he grimaced, she was probably looking for some poor little bird that had fallen from its nest and was finding it a few worms before she levitated it back home. His father was her antithesis, he thought with a hint of pride, as ominous as they came, his love for his family shown in his harsh standards for them, the successful meeting of them gaining his sons a rare pat on the shoulder and a significant increase in their already plentiful allowance.

Dimitar was one hundred percent their father, Viktor acknowledged, raising a hand to rest on the ledge. He however bore, no matter how small, a tiny bit of his mother's nature, the part that loved cuddling and caring for small helpless beings. That part of him rarely manifested itself he sighed, and most certainly had never been directed towards a human. As if in response to his thoughts, his cat, lovingly called Misery for the condition he had found her in, sauntered into the room and nimbly jumped onto his bed, curling on Viktor's pillow.

Misery had been used as Dimitar's practice dummy for some of his darker spell work. He had thought her dead after a particularly brutal session, but somehow when Viktor had made to dispose of the body, the cat had twitched slightly, a pained mewl erupting from its mouth that brought out his mother's nature. And with it he had found himself a pet, under a permanent disillusionment charm that only he and the house elves could see through, ensuring the straggly thing's safety. Yes, Viktor knew that he had a weakness for seemingly helpless beings, Misery the perfect example, and now apparently, he was feeling something similar for Harry Potter.

A good hour of contemplation later, a grim smile settled on the Bulgarian's lips. He was in balance once more, he thought, as he moved away from the window and summoned the picture to him once again. Dropping on the bed and absently petting the cat with his free hand he smiled down at the grinning boy, a bit of affection in the movement but also grim determination. His seeming affection for the dark haired boy was not as bad as a thing as he originally thought. Indeed, it could prove to be advantageous in the extreme, especially if the reports on the boy's personality was true.

Yes, he could work with this bit of fascination he had for Harry. It could only serve to bolster his plan, as long as he kept that fascination with the boy in check. He was at least ninety percent his father, and as long as he could maintain that equation, his small feelings towards the boy was
meaningless and would have no impact on his overall behaviour. That decided, he traced his finger down the cheek once again, nodding in satisfaction when he felt no emotional response. Already he was back in control, a state that would ensure that Harry Potter would die.

"Enjoy your life while you can Harry," he whispered, tucking the picture away. "For soon it will be mines for the taking."

Miles away, Harry abruptly sneezed, disrupting the silence of the room. "Sorry," he apologised as his mate and tutor's eyes turned on him, one in concern, the other reflecting mild annoyance.

"Okay cub?" Draco inquired, resisting the urge to check for an incoming cold.

"I'm fine," Harry reassured quickly, flashing him a quick smile before he turned to the tutor. "Sorry for the interruption sir."

Their Wizarding Ettiquette teacher nodded. "Accepted Mr. Potter. Return to your readings. Lord Malfoy expects you to have a perfect grasp on all the protocols before you disembark on your trip. And no Mr. Malfoy I am not at liberty to say when exactly you will be leaving."

Rolling his eyes the veela heeded him, but although Harry obediently lowered his eyes to the text, his mind was far away, as he recalled something Hermione had once said.

"Muggles have a saying Harry," she had said. "If you sneeze for no reason it means someone is talking something important about you!"

And given that he was in perfect health (how could he not be after there visit to the healer not two months previous?) he wondered if it could be as Hermione had said. That someone somewhere was talking about him? If it was true, he decided, as he finally concentrated on his notes after a pointed look from the tutor, he certainly hoped it was something good.

Only time would show him how wrong he was.
"One more time Draco and we're done for the day."

Remus looked kindly down at the teenager who lay splayed on the floor, his body covered in a sheen of sweat, the sounds of his harsh breathing clearly audible in the otherwise silent room. It took several moments for the veela to acknowledge his words as he raised a slightly shaking hand up to his forehead to wipe away the sweat there before he struggled to sit up.

"O-okay Uncle," he managed between pants, as he wiped at his damp skin once again.

Helpfully, Remus cast a drying spell on him, something that earned him a grateful look from his honorary nephew as his breathing finally settled. However, instead of restarting the process as the amber-eyed man expected, Draco emitted a heartfelt sigh and lowered his gaze, his fingers fiddling with each other. Seeing the melancholic look, the elder wizard dropped into a crouch before the teenager and gently carded his hand through the slightly damp hair encouraging the boy to meet his warm gaze.

"You are doing fine Draco," he reassured him. "Learning to be an animagus does not come naturally to some people and you are just one of them. You should not be discouraged. You will learn at your own pace. You know the theory, it is just for your body to accomplish what you mind knows.

His words seemingly did nothing to comfort the veela who only dropped his gaze once again before asking softly, "Did anything even happen that time?"

"A patch of hair appeared on your left arm. It's a step up from yesterday Draco, you should be proud of yourself."

The look the boy shot him spoke wonders and with slight amusement Remus reminded himself that Draco was a Malfoy and Malfoys did not take kindly to mediocrity, a level at which he was certain the teenager believed he was performing.

"I don't need to be coddled," he said bluntly. "Something is wrong. No where did it say that the transformation would be stressful."

"You've been doing extra research I see," Remus murmured, moving so that he was seated cross-legged in front of the fourteen year old.

"Of course," he replied shortly. "I saw the looks you and Uncle Sirius were giving me recently. I figured something was wrong the same way I knew you would not tell me. I am not Harry you know, I can handle the truth, no matter how harsh it is. So just tell me?"

Amber eyes met silver-flecked blue ones for a long while before finally the adult sighed, reaching up to rub behind his neck. "We are worried," he said finally.

"I knew it."

"You are right," he said quietly. "The transformation should not be as stressful as it is on you. You exert so much energy trying to initiate the process that there is hardly any energy left for you to produce - far less sustain any change for a long length of time. Those hairs I mentioned lasted for about twenty seconds. Sirius has never seen anyone respond to the process that way and mind you he has witnessed many transformations."
"What am I doing wrong?"

"You aren't doing anything wrong Draco...that's what Sirius and I was monitoring the last few days. Your magic is reacting as it should when you begin your attempts, but within a few minutes its strength decreases and it is as if you're forcing it to respond whereas it prefers to retreat. If we hadn't seen first hand Draco how hard you were trying to make the transformation, we would say that you are fighting against it."

"But I'm not fighting it Uncle," the veela countered, letting the frustration he felt lace his tone. "I'm trying to transform so badly it hurts, but every time I try..."

"Every time you try what Draco?" Remus probed when the boy's voice trailed off into silence.

"It doesn't feel natural," he finally admitted, eyes slowly meeting the wolf animagus'. "I am fighting, but not against the transformation. All the books said that transforming should feel natural, as if I am slipping into a second skin. But it doesn't! It feels as if I am trying to fit into a too-tight shoe and my body fights against it. And the more that I try to transform, the harder my magic rebels."

The man's head dipped in thought for several moments as he processed what the veela had stated. Draco was right, what he was feeling certainly did not correspond to how the animagus transformation was supposed to go. On the other hand, he knew that sometimes a wizard was his own greatest enemy. The Malfoy heir was not one used to failure, indeed things came naturally to him. It could be that the veela was working against himself, lambasting himself for his inability to perform to expected standards and in doing so, he was actually keeping himself back.

He was a veela dominant after all, and Remus understood the instincts of a dominant. No doubt it was a bruise to the boy's ego that Harry had managed his transformation with no difficulty (although he was still convinced that the kitten was not his righteous form). No matter how proud Draco himself was of his mate, the veela in him no doubt was ashamed that his submissive had easily accomplished what he could not. The wizard could not bring himself to decide which scenario it was that his honorary nephew was suffering from and he knew that prying further information from the veela would be a futile task. Finally, he decided that it would be best to converse with the teenager's parents, Narcissa particularly on the matter. After all, if it was indeed his veela nature that was holding him back, only she would be able to resolve it.

"It's getting late," Remus said finally, drawing the boy out of his thoughts.

"You said one more try?"

The sandy haired man shook his head lightly as he rose nimbly to his feet before pulling the veela to his. "Let's call it a day...or a week for that matter."

"What?" the veela asked in shock, his eyes widening. "No! Uncle...I can't quit!"

Remus raised a placating hand. "I am not dropping the training Draco, but I do need to look into this further. Until we can determine what is going on with you, I think it best to take a break in the interim. As soon as a solution is found, we will resume the training."

Draco stared at him for long moments, no doubt discerning the sincerity of his words. "We will resume?"

"Once a solution is found," the wizard repeated.

"O-okay then," the veela capitulated.
Grasping his upper arm in a loose grip, Remus led the teenager from the training room, escorting him back to his quarters. "I asked Severus to leave a calming potion for you," he spoke once they stood outside the veela's bedroom door. "Take it and relax in the shower. Technically we still have half an hour of our session left and no one would expect to see you for about an hour after that. Use the time as you wish. And Draco? Please do not get discouraged."

The blonde head bobbed slowly and a smile that did not reach his eyes graced his face. "I won't Uncle Remus. I will do as you ask."

"Good boy," was the soft reply as Remus clapped him on the shoulder before releasing him and leaving.

The veela stared at his retreating back for long moments before he finally let himself into the room, to head into his bathroom for a long bath. He needed to think and somehow he figured the bathroom would be the ideal place to facilitate such an action.

"Does Master Harry need anything else?" Dobby inquired.

The eleven year old looked around him critically, making a quick inventory of all what was around him. "No, this is everything. Oh! Wait, be sure to tell Trix not to get him until I say okay? I want everything to be perfect!"

"Certainly Master Harry," the elf bobbed before leaving the boy to his plans.

Setting himself to work, Harry went about arranging the gazebo as he wanted it, putting his magic to use to summon jets of water to shoot randomly in the air in a makeshift fountain, before arranging the spread as he thought best before he summoned Draco's elf, asking her to fetch him.

The boy had thought long and hard about this surprise for his dominant. His mate had been stressed the last few days after his animagus lessons, so much so that he was short with him at times. However, understanding the cause of the unpleasant behaviour Harry had neither retaliated nor rushed off to his parents to complain and instead had tried to come up with a way to lessen Draco's increasingly foul mood. Finally, he had settled on this, a picnic of sorts for the two of them, during which he could, hopefully, coax his mate into a better mood, if only for a little while.

Nervously he patted at his clothing, straightening and neatening it. Dobby, once he had learned of his plan had suggested that he go all out and dress the part. As such, he was wearing one of the outfits the veela had chosen for him, an emerald button down shirt and a simple black trousers. His shoes lay in a heap on the side of the gazebo and as he waited for his veela, Harry moved to the side facing the pond, glad to see that the water sprouts were as strong as ever. Logically he could have asked for one of his parents to help reinforce it, but he wanted this to be solely his work.

Nibbling his lip anxiously, he went about adding more sprouts, in the hopes that not all of them would falter. So distracted in his work was he that he did not notice the arrival of his mate, who observed the spread with a surprised and then tender gaze as he climbed the steps before removing his shoes. A soft smile quirked his lips as he padded gently across the wooden floor, stopping a mere hairsbreadth away from his mate before swiftly he pressed his hands over the emerald eyes he loved to look at, chuckling when the boy squeaked, his hands, previously dancing about gracefully, shot up to grasp his.

"Dominant?"
"Who else?" Draco replied as he released him to capture his hands instead and spin him around, looking down into the round face of his mate. "Is this for me?" he murmured, transferring one of Harry's hands so he could free one to gently stroke along the boy's cheek, chuckling fondly when his cheeks flushed and his eyes averted in slight embarrassment. "None of that Harry, talk to me."

"It's for you," Harry all but whispered, his heart rate accelerating slightly at the intimacy of their hold. At times like this he felt his affections for the veela changing, the love he felt for him flaring in a way that he did not understand but nevertheless left him slightly breathless and wanting to defer to the veela.

His mate however, fully understood what Harry was experiencing and so the tenderness in his gaze increased as he slowly released him, taking a step back for him to collect himself. In the interim, he took a greater stock of what was laying around. A few large pelts were artfully arranged at the centre of the gazebo and upon it, several oversized cushions were thrown. To the left of the little area were several platters of food along with drinks.

"Do you like it?" the raven-haired boy asked softly, drawing Draco's attention back to him. The boy was back in control of himself, his face anxious as he sought approval.

"I love it," Draco said adamantly, offering him a brilliant smile. "But what is the occasion little one?"

By then Harry had already taken his hand and was leading him to the pelts, gently pushing him down unto them before he dropped down besides him, crossing his legs easily. "I thought you needed a break from everything," he explained, idly tracing a pattern on the veela's knee as he spoke. "Everyone has been pushing you so hard the past week and well...I think you deserve a vacation from this vacation," he finished with a small chuckle.

"Harry," the veela breathed, as the boy's words sunk down into him. All this effort his little mate had extended was out of worry for him? "You are the greatest," he declared, "you take such good care of me."

"I try," the boy responded pertly as he wrinkled his nose at the veela. "Are you hungry? I hope you are, I made lunch."

"You made lunch?" he asked in disbelief. "Are you sure it's edible?"

"Very funny," Harry glared, lifting a platter cover to reveal an assortment of sandwiches. "See, nothing harmful."

"Well I suppose not even you can mess up a sandwich," the veela teased as he reached for one. He took a bite out of it and then, startled his cub by presenting it to him for a bite. "Good is it not?"

"I think it is excellent," Harry retorted primly after swallowing, reaching for his own. "It's more than you've ever made!"

The veela shrugged. "You're right, if it wasn't for potions I probably wouldn't know how to boil water."

"Lazy dominant," the younger of the pair tsked around a mouthful, even as he celebrated inwardly the easy look on the teenager's face. Even now, scarcely ten minutes after his arrival, Draco looked much more at ease, and the teasing attitude he had was a great improvement from the day before. "How ever shall you provide for me?"

"I'll think of something."
"So how was your day so far?" Harry asked a few minutes later as they sipped on their drinks. "Well after Etiquette I mean."

Draco sighed, nursing his drink in one hand. "Stressful as always. Mother isn't certain that it's my nature preventing me from transforming...but then, according to her, veelas usually have no need for an ulterior form. She contacted the council and they told her that there are not any known veela animagus'. However they didn't say that a transformation was improbable."

"And what do you think?"

Once again another sigh escaped from the veela, prompting Harry to discard his drink and close the small space between them until he could hold on to the veela's free hand, stroking it comfortingly, a gesture that earned him a grateful kiss from his mate.

"I think it's a waste of time honestly," he eventually stated, focusing on Harry's smaller hands as they played with his own appendages absently, now and again rising to trace the silver wristband he had gifted him with.

Speaking of which...resting down his own drink, with his free hand the veela reached out, unbuttoned the top few snaps on Harry's shirt, ignoring his sound of confusion, until he could free the chain and pendant from beneath it, and finger it, allowing the natural lighting to glint off it. Beneath his own shirt, his matching copy suddenly seemed warmer against his skin, warmth he cherished.

"Keep this out for me?" he requested.

"Yes Draco," was the swift response.

"Thank you cub."

"You're welcome...but dominant...why is it a waste of time? It's not like you to give up on something."

For the next few minutes, Harry listened intently as the blonde explained in detail, more so than he had with Remus, exactly what was going on in the lessons and how uncomfortable and unnatural the transformation felt. "It's like if it isn't really a part of me," he finished softly, looking into Harry's thoughtful eyes.

"Now you know how I feel," Harry murmured, averting his gaze.

"What?"

Harry shrugged lightly. "I never did tell you why I was so against changing my form did I?"

"Other than yelling that you were a kitten and so you shall remain?" he inquired with a hint of wryness. "No you didn't."

The younger of the two laughed softly as he tucked an errant strand of hair back behind his ear. "I am a brat when I'm ready, aren't I?" he asked rhetorically before sobering. "What you just described dominant, is exactly how I felt when we did that whole meditation thing the first time. I was scared, still am about what my "true" form really is and I wanted...want nothing to do with it. I admit now that my response could have been a tad better, but still, I know you. You wouldn't have accepted my word for it and insisted I try to transform and I just wasn't having that. That tantrum of mines...well...you never push me when I behave like that."
"So you prefer the punishments such behaviour garners?" the veela asked, lifting an eyebrow.

"Well not all of the times I do it deliberately," he admitted flushing slightly. "Besides, Uncle Sevvy told me once I'm too old to be having tantrums."

"It doesn't seem to deter you," the veela countered mildly.

The boy's eyes darkened slightly. "Am I that childish Draco?"

Shaking his head, Draco reached out and lifted Harry's head. "Sometimes," he allowed, "I think you are all of five with the energy you expend. At others, you seem to be the wisest person I know. You are not childish as much as you are...innocent little one and it is an innocence I find unbelievable endearing. Do not be so quick to lose it nor see it as being something bad, even if it does mean I have to suffer through an occasional honest fit of temper because someone forgets his polite words and manners."

"Then honest tantrums it shall be," he quipped.

"I am so grateful," Draco replied dryly. "However, I will agree with you. I was all set on turning you over for the training with Uncles, with bribes or threats if necessary. But with the way you acted, I know you were against it, so much so that you were willing to be rude to me. And that is why I stopped pressing you, Had I known what I know now, I would never have brought it up."

"That's good to know."

"Yes it is. I know I can be overbearing at times Harry but it is out of my love for you that I act like that."

"I know. You love me and that is what drives your actions. I don't always agree with it and I rarely admit it but it is nice knowing that there is someone always looking out for me."

"Rightly so," was the sincere response. "Will you tell me your form?" he eventually asked after they spent considerable time doing absolutely nothing.

"Will you tell me yours?" Harry asked instead, propping up on his elbows.

Despite the solidarity he had felt with his mate at the realisation that their experiences with the transformation were more the less the same, Harry really did not want to even hint at the terrible beast that supposedly sat in his core personality and judging from the brief flash of distaste that crossed his mate's features, he could tell that it was the same for him.

"Look," he stated, "You don't think that the form you're trying to achieve is yours right?"

"Right."

"And I feel the same way."

"Yes," he agreed, curious to see where Harry was going with the matter.

"So, let's just say that whenever we find our real forms we'll tell each other okay? That way there's no need for unnecessary alarm right? And you know...ignorance is bliss?"

The simultaneous hesitancy and hopefulness in the boy's tone was the first thing that clued the veela into the true purpose of his request but a part of him shrugged it off, glad not to have to admit out loud what exactly it was he could potentially become. Such the method was a coward's one, but for
Merlin's sake he was no Gryffindor and Harry was just a cub. They were allowed to be scared, he told himself and gave his mate a firm nod.

"Fine Harry, it will be our own individual secrets for the time being...but you will help me get out of these lessons right?" he requested. "I tend to put forward a logical argument..."

"That can be logically countered," Harry finished with an eye roll as he shifted forward abruptly so that he was pressed against the veela, the sudden weight tipping the blonde over so that they were sprawled against the cushioning pelts.

"I wouldn't quite put it that way Harry," the veela playfully frowned as he tapped at his nose with a finger. "But you catch my drift...and your tantrums are quite effective."

"Why thank you," he replied pertly causing them both to break out into laughter. "I can't see you pulling a fit of temper like me Dray, you are remarkably refined," he teased, "however I do know one way we can get you out of those lessons."

"Oh?" he asked, intrigued.

Harry took a second to reply in which he fished out Draco's matching pendant. "There, we match. Anyway, we never did tell mama and papa about our nightmares. That will be a distraction enough to tear them away from those 'joyful' lessons."

"The nightmares are no joking matter Harry James. We haven't experienced any in a while but that does not mean we shouldn't take it seriously."

Taking the reprimand in stride Harry continued. "I know that dominant, but aren't you a Slytherin...taking advantage of opportunities? Well this is a chance, and like you said the nightmares are important. Even if we don't tell them, they'll find out the next time it happens because trust me Draco Lucius, Papa will have to pry me off of him."

"Of that I have no doubt."

"Good, so you understand? We tell them now...it becomes a priority and the animagus thing gets pushed aside. Eventually I suppose we'll have to submit to whatever they'll try to stop the nightmares, but at least then we'll be together again right?" he wheedled.

"Where do you hide this sneaky side of you Harry," Draco asked, rubbing his hand along the smaller boy's back. "I rarely see it but it is oddly terrifying when I do."

Harry offered him a saccharine smile. "It's also the side of me that leads me into trouble," Harry pointed out. "Or does the troll not ring a bell?"

"Indeed it does," he agreed. "Fine. We'll go along with your little scheme although we have yet to find a way to explain why we haven't told them yet about the nightmares. We've been home almost three weeks now after all."

"That's your job," Harry said simply, rolling away to grab the snack tray while Draco sat up.

Dropping it in his lap, the pair nibbled on the assortment of fruits, several times feeding each other, leading to giggles and laughter. In between chewing a pear slice, Harry shot the veela a hidden look and felt his heart soar when he saw the pure pleasure on the veela's face. Their long discussion had unburdened the blonde, leaving him once again in a stable and more importantly happy frame of mind. Congratulating himself, Harry decided to keep the conversation light from there on, something Draco easily facilitated by pulling him to his feet and leading them out of the gazebo so he could
watch more closely the work Harry had done to the pond.

"You outdid yourself," the veela said with slight awe. Where the light hit the streaming water precisely, faint colours shone and sparkled, adding another depth to the beauty of the surroundings.

"It was worth it," Harry murmured tucking himself under the veela's arm and snuggling close. "I'm glad you liked it."

"I like it, this, the gazebo, the sandwiches. This – this was perfect Harry," and lowering his voice so his mate would not hear he continued, "I couldn't plan a more perfect date if I tried."

Against his side, Harry nodded, staring out at the pond with a small smile. Looking at him like this, with the wind gently rustling his hair while he pressed his warm frame against the veela's side, the pendant he had given the boy shining against his pale skin, Draco was moved. This was his mate, the gracious, helpful person he would spend his life with.

"Harry," he breathed, staring intently at him.

Although quietly issued, the word reached the boy's ears and Harry turned his head up to look at him, his eyes shining with love and peace. It proved too much for the veela who gently pulled Harry around until he was before him, his head tipped up by the veela's warm hands.

"Draco?" Harry whispered, the unfamiliar feeling he had felt earlier rising once again at the intense look he was receiving. His veela was beautiful he thought, loving the way that laced with emotions, the blonde's eyes seemed more silver than blue, the hair that now passed his collar with gently curling ends gave him a slightly roughish look that perfectly counterbalanced his aristocratic features. But now, the veela was speaking, drawing him away from his thoughts. "What?"

"I-" his dominant repeated, "May I kiss you Harry?"

The question, issued in that slightly husky tone of voice brought a heated flush to Harry's face as he nodded shakily. Needing no further confirmation, the veela bent, Harry surprising him by tiptoeing slightly, so that their lips met halfway. Draco barely suppressed a moan when Harry's hands gripped handfuls of his shirt and when he meant to pull away, the boy gave a slight mewl of protest, leaving him with no room but to kiss him again, releasing his face with one hand to lower it till it was over his mate's heart, feeling the sturdy beating.

Just when the veela felt that he would be overwhelmed by the feelings coursing through him, it dissipated, giving him full control of himself once again. The pleasant feelings declined at a slow but steady pace until his reactions to the kiss felt no different from when Harry pecked his cheek or mouth. He felt calmer and soothed, the love between them now a gentle wave and not the crashing storm of feeling like before. Indeed, when they broke the kiss, the feelings were like a distant memory to him and instead he was filled with the joy of Harry being close to him. Apparently, it was the same for Harry given the way he was now smiling impishly at him, no hint of his previous emotions apparent as he pulled away from the veela with a laugh, yanking him neared to the edge of the pond and encouraging him to wade in with him.

*I*

"I told you!" Narcissa hissed at her husband from their spot a few metres away.

The couple had disillusioned themselves and come to the garden after Trix had warned them that both Draco and Harry's allure were flaring. Despite her informing the man that the boys would be fine and that nothing untoward would happen, Lucius had insisted they investigate just to be sure and
by the time they had arrived on the seen the pair were engaged in what appeared to be a heated kiss. Lucius had made to go break them apart, especially at the little sound Harry made, but the stilling hand Narcissa placed on his arm stilled him.

Just as she had told him, less than a minute later, the pair had pulled apart and within seconds of that were back to their usual temperament, the allure, which even she admitted, had been quite strong, dissipating into nothing.

"Harry's too young!" he protested, even as his wife pulled him away to give the boys the privacy they deserved. "And where did that picture come from?" he demanded, watching her fingering it.

"For the album," said simply, not at all perturbed by her husband's mood. "Harry, is almost twelve in wizarding terms and thirteen in veela terms. That is not too young to start exploring or do I have to remind you about the alcoves in Hogwarts?"

"That was different," he spluttered, blushing despite himself.

"Oh, just because your son has the finesse not to nearly break Harry's nose while trying to snog him you're jealous?"

"Of course not – can we get back onto the matter at hand?"

Snickering at his obvious discomfort she complied. "I don't know why you are so worried. Their veela instincts will guide them, keeping them – as you just saw – well in order."

"Doesn't mean I have to like it," he grumbled, as he allowed her to push him down unto a chair before she claimed the arm of it. "They are too young!"

"Oh hush," she chastened. "You are not muggle husband. You have a good thirty or so years left before the mid-life crisis should be hitting you. So let the boys have their fun, stop worrying about greying hair and leave the grouchiness to Severus! Understood mate?"

The patriarch sighed, knowing when he had been overruled. "Fine, I understand."

"Good boy," she grinned.
Although their three weeks in Brazil proved to be the best vacation yet for the veela mates, neither were overly saddened to return to Britain a good week before scheduled. Malfoy Manor was home and no matter how fun being away from it was, the pair were most eager to return to its sprawling spread and enjoy the comfort it afforded.

The first day or two after their return was hectic at best. Barely had the international portkey deposited them in the Entrance Hall was the Malfoy Patriarch bidding them goodbye as he headed off to deal with the crisis that had cropped up in his absence. Lady Malfoy left them to go about reopening the Manor, leaving Harry and Draco with the remainder of the day to themselves. Luckily, things settled from there and the family was able to spend an isolated day together before reality intruded once again.

Somewhere in between his own vacation abroad with his lovers, Severus had come across a probable solution to the boys' nightmares, one of which they had suffered during their brief stay in Brazil. As Harry had warned, the Malfoy parents found themselves with an unrepentant extra companion in their bed in the middle of the night and minutes later, Narcissa had coaxed an embarrassed Draco into the room join them, his father whispering to him after Harry had drifted off that he would never be too old for comforting.

That however did little to alleviate his condition and as Narcissa told him the next morning, they had to keep in mind that their veela son was coming into the last stages of his development. Soon she warned him, they would have to be on the lookout for his majority and it was not difficult to believe that given his nature, he would become more self-reliant. The fact did little to reassure the man and indeed he fairly whimpered when his gaze landed on Harry and he imagined his more hyperactive boy hitting puberty. Somehow he was (selfishly) grateful that the boy would be in Hogwarts the vast majority of his time where he could unleash himself on others and not him.

Severus' suggestion of Occlumency was met with slight scepticism at first and a blatant groan of despair from Harry whose dislike for mind magic was renowned. Draco took to it like a fish to water, for Harry it was like trying to give a cat a bath. The boy was doubtful, even when his Uncle reassured him that since to a degree they already understood and practised facets of Legilimency, he seriously doubted that they would have much problems mastering its partner.

In private, Draco reminded his mate that he had told him that there was a distinct possibility one set of lessons would be traded for another, a statement that found the veela summarily sunk into the floor to his ankles while an annoyed Harry (who did not like having his plans backfire on him) stomped off for tea and biscuits with Sirius who cackled madly at what he had done and willingly hid him when an irate Narcissa flooed over to Black Manor for her wayward son.

Given that the majority of the family was well versed in the arts, there was an unlimited amount of persons around to offer tutelage and, after the boys had submitted to reliving all of the nightmares, the lessons were placed on high priority although the mates were not informed why.

"What bothers me Albus," Severus said seriously, as he paced the length of the man's office, "is why Draco is experiencing them as well. Nothing explains this, nothing."

Lacing his fingers casually, the headmaster inquired, "And there is no chance that this is not
nefarious?"

"Highly unlikely," the potions master sneered. "I would recognise that scumbag anywhere. That servant is Karkaroff. Voldemort is up to his old tricks, but that is not my concern. Obviously, this is not part of his plan, why would he want the boys to know of what is occurring with him, especially in his times of weakness?

"No Albus, the boys share some sort of connection with Voldemort that is producing these...these visions. I am surprised that they, especially Draco did not recognise it for what it was, but then again, he is young and is still innocent in many ways. What is this connection Albus and why now has it chosen to emerge? And what of Draco, and please do not tell me it is because of their bond. We place far too much blame on their relationship I fear because of its uniqueness. Come on old man, you always have an answer, this is the time for it."

"I had always wondered," the man began softly, ignoring the derisiveness in his colleague's tone, "how it was that Harry survived. So many theories occurred to me, the best one being that Lily, by resisting Voldemort and ultimately sacrificing herself evoked the most powerful type of magic, the one driven by love. That love I believed, shielded Harry, creating a barrier that overpowered the most deadly of curses leaving him with naught but a lightning scar on his head.

"I am afraid my boy, that I cannot agree with you that we must completely disregard the notion that their relationship has no influence on this. I am not saying that it is the answer but I cannot help but remember the first time I saw Draco, the night we saved Harry. Surely, you recall the imprint of Harry's scar on his forehead in the exact location? That was, after all the breaking point what led me to agreeing with you."

"I remember," Severus agreed tersely, unwillingly recalling the battered condition Lily's son had been in. "We never did find out why that happened."

"Indeed we did not my boy," Albus seconded. "In the aftermath of claiming Harry and the weeks of stress undertaken in acclimatizing the boy to a new, painless environment, it became a non-issue, easily explained as a gift by magic granted to us to save our precious boy's life. However I do regret never having paid much more detail to the fact, nor inquire if it ever happened since or before that occurrence."

"Narcissa would be the best judge of that," Severus sighed as he dropped into a free chair, stroking Fawkes absently when the phoenix perched on his knee. "Lucius and I were rarely around for Draco before Voldemort's initial defeat and afterwards? We were in such strains salvaging what was left of our lives that though I am ashamed to admit it, neither of us paid the lad the detailed attention we do now."

"We all did what was necessary," Albus reassured him patiently, "and that does not negate the fact that you have such a close relationship with the boy now. I admit that you are right about Narcissa, through it all her attention on her son, as is the way with all mothers, was that of a hawk. I am sure that if pressed she can recall a time if any where Draco should such a sign of reaction."

"But to what purpose Albus? What sense does Harry's mark appearing on Draco have to what is occurring now?"

"Of that I am not certain my boy, but it will not hurt to try. Any lead, no matter how small may be important later on and none should be ignored. I will do my best to gather any information I have on the matter, but in the interim, please work your best with the boys to master Occlumency. Although it may be advantageous to us to have this working link to Voldemort, I will not even consider using it as it causes the boys nothing but distress and with time I fear, Voldemort may even become aware of
the connection and somehow use it to his advantage. Yes my boy, sealing their minds may be the only way to protect them for now and it is a skill they must learn, no matter how painful the process."

The easiest way to master Occlumency, as Albus had hinted, was through pain. A person forced to relive their worst memories continuously and suffer the humiliation of knowing that someone else was seeing them at their worst was motivation enough to drive even the worst of students into mastering the skill. Unfortunately, the tried and proven method was impossible to use on a fourteen and barely twelve-year-old boy, especially when the former had already suffered under the control of mind magic and the latter had an early past so terrible that reliving it could shatter the carefully structured security net that surrounded him.

As such, the process that some persons, in pure desperate mastered in days, was projected to take weeks or even months for the veela mates to master if the efforts of four days of training was used as a measuring stick. Draco, as expected was the better student, faltering quite a bit in the beginning, but by the end of the forth day of training, some ground had been broken. A barely visible barrier now surrounded the veela's mind, one easily detectable and breakable, but at least it was a promising start. More importantly, Draco had mastered the capability of detecting another's presence in his mind, making it so that it would be impossible for someone to access his thoughts without him being aware.

"But what does this have to do with our nightmares Father?" he asked after their first session.

"Occlumency creates an impenetrable barrier around your mind son. Your godfather believes that whatever outside force influencing your dreams will not be able to get through your mental barrier. We are tweaking the function of the art for our particular situation."

"Oh, I see," the veela agreed.

Much to the men's chagrin, it was Narcissa who had reached the initial breakthrough with Draco. As Draco explained it, there was something about the idea of his mother rummaging through his thoughts that alarmed him enough to create the required shield. There were some things you simply did not want your mother of all people to know and although his words did little but push her further to find such memories, Draco managed to throw unimportant memories at her, a successful diversion. It was a fact that both irked and pleased the veela mother, especially when Lucius, glad to have an upper hand on her for the first time in weeks, refused to share what was in their son's mind, a quirk on his lips when he spoke of father-son confidentiality.

Harry however had little success. Rarely did he even attempt to use his mind to fight back the unwanted intruder. Indeed more than once, his tutor was forced to scramble aside or hastily cast a shielding charm against whatever hex shot reflexively from Harry's fingers. It appeared that an effect of Harry's formative years was emerging. The boy had an instinctive fight or flight instinct and in this situation, it was the former holding precedence over his reactions. The moment whoever it was approached a sensitive memory for the preteen, his magic lashed out. In the case of Lucius, who had been dealing with him on the third day, the man had gaped in horror at the younger boy as he patted flames from his robes, asking the boy, in a shaky voice just where he had picked up Fiendfyre – a spell Harry retorted that he knew nothing about.

His sincerity was obvious and caught up in the new mystery Lucius did not nothing. James, who had been quietly observing the proceedings from a corner, slipped out with a guilty expression, hurrying Lily away from a conversation with Narcissa for a frantic conversation regarding their son's powers. If possible, Lily's face would have paled especially when she heard which spell Harry had unconsciously used. A part of her sided with James in warning their living family of what was to come, but as James reminded her, Destiny's timelines made it impossible for them to reveal the truth.
without risking screwing up with the future. Thankfully, no one sought to question the resident spirits and the matter was summarily dismissed in favour of the fact that another horcrux had been added to their growing collection.

When the morning of the fifth day of training dawned, Sirius found himself in charge of a most frustrated twelve year old. After Harry blasted him away at the first hint of intrusion, without even bothering to attempt it the right way, the Black patriarch decided that a day-off was necessary and after writing a note to Narcissa who was in a different area with Draco, he bustled his godson into a day robe and led him through the floo. A trip to Diagon Alley, he declared, with nothing but relaxation would put Harry in the perfect frame of mind the tiring lessons, a fact that earned him a grateful hug from the boy.

"Thank you Uncle Sirius!" Harry repeated for the umpteenth time as they languished outside on an available bench, licking at the ice-cream cones Sirius had bought them.

"You're welcome," the man replied, kindly. "With the number of times I sneaked out when I was your age, it would be remiss of me to deny you the same opportunity once in a while."

"Uncle Sirius?"

"Hmm?"

"Is it wrong...is it wrong that sometimes I wish I never saw the gates of Hogwarts?"

"Harry-"

"Is it wrong that I wish to be normal, just another student having to worry about homework and not losing house points? Is it wrong that I want to be like them?" he finished, gesturing with his cone to a group of boys across the street, crowded around the quidditch store's windows pointing at the latest model of broom that had been one of Harry's birthday gifts.

"Harry," Sirius breathed, as he followed the boy's gaze. Harry never had that, Sirius realised, seeing the look of envy the boy wore.

Harry was as happy and cared for as anyone could hope to be, but in all that, the boy was under such immense scrutiny that he never had the chance to muck around like a regular child, exploring with friends the popular areas of the wizarding world like other little witches and wizards could. While children his age had little to worry about in terms of safety, Harry's outings were carefully relegated. Days like now, when Harry was spontaneously whisked away for a treat was few and far between and (despite knowing that Narcissa would probably have his head for what he had done) Sirius was glad he had brought Harry here, where he could relax.

So much was placed on the small shoulders of the twelve year old that Sirius honestly questioned at times how the boy could going around with such a cheerful demeanour. He could remember his own school days, the way he felt swamped with work and gratefully sprang out doors to enjoy the ambiance of Hogwarts' grounds just to get away from it all for a little while, be it by himself, or with others. Harry did not have that option, not without reprimand at least. Sirius recalled appealing to Albus once for that ban on Harry to be lifted, after all, Voldemort was unlikely to return to Hogwarts a second time, he was not a person to recycle plans. And just about when he had gotten Albus to relent, the whole mess with Voldemort's essence near the school was back, leaving the restriction in place.

But, more than that, was the fact that Harry, barely twelve, was one year away from his OWL year. His godson was intelligent, his ranking alone proved that, but the man could not help but wonder
what was the downside to Harry's brilliance. When would Harry collapse under the pressure placed on him? His mind could not perpetually keep up with his body and, he recalled, despite Harry's rank, Draco had mentioned that actually getting the boy to study was a chore. Was it little wonder why? Sirius knew that if it were him personally, forced into a higher year, he would be at the bottom of the group, simply because he would do no more than he thought necessary, refusing to keep up with those beyond his age.

But, once again, Harry did not have that luxury. His position was a necessity, lest the both boys be withdrawn from Hogwarts. All in all, Sirius was surprised that Harry was the well-mannered boy he was despite all what he endured and the man reminded himself that come the new school year, he would whisk Harry and Draco out of Hogwarts periodically to ensure that they would not buckle under the pressure.

"Uncle?" Harry called, tugging on the man's pants leg to pull him out of his thoughtful daze. "Uncle Siri? I'm sorry...I should not have said that."

Shaking his head quickly, Sirius plastered a smile on to his face. "No Harry, I am not mad, it just gave me something to think about. I wish you were a normal child too Harry, but circumstances and destiny made that impossible. That's the best I can say. We are naught but threads interwoven in the tapestry of life and we all have a bit of colour in us that helps complete the portrait. Some people like you, are a lot more colourful, all in an effort to make the tapestry as brilliant as possible. And because you are colourful, you have a lot to bear and us paler threads have to carry you along."

Emerald eyes widened before the boy asked dubiously, "Where did you hear that?"

Sirius guffawed at the Snape-ish tone he had adopted, although pleased that Harry had accepted his words without question. "I can come up with words of wisdom on my own you know!"

"No you don't," Harry retorted, wanting to forget the entire issue. Things like that were not to be brought up, he reminded himself, not when everyone was trying so hard. And thus he went about distracting the man. "You could not have made that up!"

"Fine," he grumbled. "Remus may have been reading aloud."

"Thought so," Harry laughed. "But I appreciate it nonetheless."

"Your welcome," he smiled, ruffling his hair with his free hand. Looking across at the boys still at the window he turned to his godson. "I will not be upset if you choose to join them you know," he offered softly.

"Nah," Harry declined easily, "I didn't mean them particularly Uncle Sirius."

"I see," Sirius said softly, not realising that the ice-cream was now dripping down unto his robes. "Harry?"

"Yes?"

"If ever you need a break...no matter what reason, just let me know and I'll come get you okay?"

"I will," he promised.

"Good," Sirius replied. "Now let's finish up here and go exploring. If we are to be scolded, we might as well enjoy it thoroughly!"

"It might rain soon," Harry pointed out, eyeing the quickly greying sky.
"Pssh. No rain is going to stop us, right? Padfoot and Prongslet lives!"

"Right!" Harry agreed with a laugh. "We will conquer it all!"

"And make the world our minions!"

Engrossed in their plans for world domination, neither Sirius nor Harry noticed when a dark cloaked figure stepped out from the crevice between two shops and pointed his wand at the adult, muttering a spell before retreating, a satisfied smile on his face.

"Where is he?" Harry muttered to himself as he scanned the crowd for a sign of his tall companion.

He and Sirius had been separated in the crowd somewhere along the line of their explorations. He had not been too worried in the beginning, after all, Diagon Alley was one of the better protected areas of the wizarding world and so, with the money Sirius had given him earlier he had gone about buying one or two knickknacks for himself and Draco, half expecting the man to wander into whichever store he was in. But now, half an hour later with still no sign of him, Harry had gotten worried and after paying for his book at the counter and shrinking it, he went about finding the man, only to get disoriented among the bustling persons who were rushing against the rain that looked like it could descend at any moment. Harry knew that it was only a matter of him going to Leaky Cauldron and flooing home, but still, how could he leave, knowing that his Uncle was probably drifting around, looking for him?

Maybe he should have let the man put the tracking charm his parents used on him whenever they went out. But then, neither he nor the man had found it necessary at the time. He was, after all, twelve and such charms were for toddlers, something he definitely was not. And so, resolutely, he looked for his godfather, all the while trying to put himself in the man's shoes and figure out where he would possibly look. How was he to know, that under the influence of a spell, his Uncle was now enjoying himself in a pub towards the end of the Alley, unaware that he had come with his godson, a fact he would not recall for another hour and a half until he noticed the ice-cream stain on his clothing.

As is, Harry was getting slightly worried as the shops started closing against the incoming downpour. Forget his uncle, he thought grimly, he needed to get to shelter himself. Nodding determinedly, he weaved his way through the town square, planning on heading to the park area that existed on the outskirts of the town. It was situated on a magical fault, he recalled, one that channelled light magic making it virtually impossible for dark spells or wizards to approach the area and because of that, Harry was certain he would be safe there until the downpour ceased.

Luckily for him, the crowd had thinned considerably and those left were not paying particular heed to a rather elegantly dressed wizard boy darting amongst them. Just as the heavens burst, Harry reached the shade of the park's largest tree, one that, with a canopy diameter so large, would protect him from the downpour. Slightly out of breath, Harry removed his robe and, after wincing at the scolding it would likely get him, set it on the ground before sitting, absent mindedly casting a shield around him to keep out any droplets that might penetrate the thick canopy.

Watching the rain was oddly soothing he mused. Completely surrounded by the white pelting rain, he marvelled at the melody it produced and pondered on the possibility of replicating it somehow. It seemed the perfect thing to drift off to at night. He chuckled softly as the wind speed increased making the rain drops dance for him. It was a chuckle that died seconds later when a person of medium built and average height suddenly appeared in his periphery vision, racing through the rain towards his tree, gasping loudly as he reached its haven.
Harry raised his hand instinctively at the robe-draped person a few feet away, but when he saw that the person was paying him little heed, instead focusing on drying himself, Harry relaxed. Just an unfortunate person who got trapped in the downpour and probably sought shelter here as he had done. Quietly he watched as the person - a teenager he now recognised - cast a final drying charm on himself before he visibly relaxed.

Harry's head cocked thoughtfully to the side when he heard the teenager speak in an unfamiliar language and curiosity aroused, he stood, the movement finally alerting the other to his presence for he spun and trained his wand on him. Harry felt a moment's fear before he relaxed. He had startled the person, it was obvious they would be on the defensive. He waited patiently for the few moments it took the person to scan his being and obviously deem him a non-threat before the wand was lowered and pocketed.

"I am sorry," he apologised in a heavily accented English tone, his voice raised as he competed against the rain. "I did not see you there. I hope I did not startle you?"

"I should have said something," Harry countered, unconsciously reaching out with his allure to soothe the teenager's nerves. The veela in Harry, while willing to trust the wizard instincts that predominated him, still took a defensive stance and moved to eliminate any bad mood the teenager might be in. "Did you get caught in the rain?"

"Yes I did," he grimaced. "It was fine this morning and I thought to explore the woods." He pointed to the trees beyond the park. "I want to see how different it would be from my home and I get trapped in downpour. Is this English weather?"

"It is unpredictable," Harry offered. "You just get used to it."

"I will never," he declared. "You were sitting no? Do not let me disturb you malko zhertva."

"Mal-what?" he repeated in confusion. For a moment, he had believed he had heard his family's name but the pronunciation seemed wrong.

"Malko zhertva," he repeated with a crooked smile as he leaned against the tree bank. "Forgive me, my people tend to endear little children. I cannot break habit it seems."

"I just turned twelve!" Harry protested. "I'm not a little child!"

"I am sorry," the teenager apologised quickly, raising his hands in submission even as he stepped close to the veela mate. "My English is not good. I use wrong word perhaps?"

"Where are you from?" Harry inquired curiously, distracted by his voice. "I've never heard it before. It's – nice."

"It is Bulgarian," the teenager replied with a hint of pride. "I did not introduce myself. I am rude. I am Viktor Krum."

"Harry," the boy replied as he took the hand extended to him.

"No last name?" the teen - no Viktor - Harry corrected, inquired with raised bushy eyebrows.

"Er..."

"Ah," he said knowingly. "You not supposed to be here are you not?"

"Not really," Harry agreed, latching on to the excuse and running with it. "I am not supposed to be
here. Wouldn't want to be found out."

"Then you may keep your secrets," he said easily, "I will tell no one I have met a Harry. You do not mind to sit no?"

"No, I don't," he agreed dropping down and feeling comfortable as the Bulgarian followed suit. "You seem nice."

"There is a saying," Viktor countered, a crooked smile pulling at his mouth. "What is it? Deceitful appearances can be. You know?"

"I know," Harry agreed. "Are you telling me you are not to be trusted?"

The elder boy shrugged, not meeting his gaze as he stared out into the rain. "You know me not and yet are at ease. For all you know I might be killer."

"Out to get me?"

"It is possible!" he added swiftly. "No child allowed out free like you in Bulgaria. It is dangerous and not done. Were I you, I would dance to my father's belt."

Despite the seriousness of the teenager's tone, Harry could not help but smile. There was a concerned edge to the Bulgarian, one that Harry interpreted as worry towards a supposedly wayward person he had just met. The veela mate reprised his original opinion that the person seemed nice.

"I am not usually on my own," Harry reassured him. "But I still say you are nice."

The Bulgarian shot him a disdainful look. "Children are stupid," he declared. "You know me not and yet show no fear."

"You won't hurt me," Harry said simply, in a tone laced with certainly. Indeed, a smile was pulling at his lips, one that hinted that he knew a secret that he was loathe to reveal.

"And what gives you that idea," Viktor asked with genuine curiosity. "Explain to me your logic."

"No one with an evil heart could enter this park and those woods," Harry said seriously. "These areas are sacred if you wish and light magic guards it as its own. You are in here so you are not evil. You can not hurt me and so I have nothing to fear of you."

The Bulgarian eyed him strangely for several moments before turning back to the now blinding rain. He had no response to match that statement and thus said nothing. Eventually though, the pair started a tentative conversation that grew deeper and more lively than the ones you would make with someone new whom you were simply passing the time with. So much so, it came as a shock to Harry when the rain ceased and, when his mind ran on his godfather and he hurried to leave, Viktor asked him quietly if they could speak again, he was, after all, so close to the little brother the sixteen year old wish he had had. Not seeing how it was possible, but mildly echoing the sentiments, Harry nodded, before running off to find a frantic Sirius looking for him. The wizard was suspicious about his earlier memory lapse, but after being assured by his godson that nothing more had happened than him seeking shelter and talking to someone who joined him, his godfather took him home.

* 

One week later, an incessant tapping awakened Harry from his rest at the break of dawn and drowsy-eyed, he stumbled to the arch windows, opening them wide to the falcon who flew in and landed gracefully on his bed, a large package securely attached to his leg. Surprised by the
strangeness of the occurrence but knowing that the wards would not have let anything dangerous into the compound, Harry untied the package and the bird took off, soaring through the window.

It was a book, Harry discovered as he tore off the packaging, and upon opening the cover, a letter dropped out. Curious he opened it and skipped to the bottom, a startled but pleasant smile creasing his mouth as he noted the signature. The Bulgarian had been serious? Reading the script brought a fond smile to Harry's face as he remembered their conversation that day and once through, he put it aside to summon a quill. Writing a quick greeting and thanks, he set it aside as he went about dressing despite the earliness of the hour. Just as he finished with the last button of his shirt the book glowed and moving to it quickly, he chuckled as a new line, written in the same style of the letter printed against the pages. Grabbing the quill, he took a seat and pulled his gift to him.

_I told you I desired to keep in touch with you Harry. As long as you do not mind?_

_Of course not. I can always use another friend. Are you still in England?_

_No, my duties are finished. I am home now, waiting for school to reopen. There are two weeks left before I start my sixth year._

_Me too! Well, not the school part. I have three weeks left before fourth year._

_Forth? You are twelve no? That is what you tell me last week. Or is Harry no-name lying to me?_

_I did not lie! I am twelve...and I am in my fourth year!_

_You are very smart malko zhertva._

_Thank you, but that is not why. I needed to be in my mate's year._

_Mate?_

_I didn't tell you? Weird, I always talk about Draco._

_You did. I thought he was your brother._

_No! Draco is my mate, he is a veela._

_Really? So young you are mates? How is that possible?_

_It's a long story..._

_I have the time._

_Well then, okay._

_And so the conversation went back and forth until breakfast, more than an hour later, forced Harry away. Securing the book, he went down, his uncharacteristic happiness for the day drawing an inquiring look from his mate, whom immediately forgot it once Harry surprised him with a kiss, before running off laughing. That day in lessons, Severus commented on the vast improvement Harry had made from the previous day, urging him to keep up with whatever he was using as motivation to block his mind._

_Since it wasn't like Harry could explain his budding friendship with Viktor and his desire to keep it private he simply smiled sweetly. Viktor was the first friend he had made that had not to some extent screened by his family. No doubt, they would not approve and so he knew secrecy was paramount. Viktor was a nice person, he had decided, based on his own interactions with him and the location
they had met on. He was determined to hang on to him as a friend for the foreseeable future.

In a different country, one Viktor Krum was rereading with a smile the conversation he had had with Harry James Potter that morning. Phase one of his mission was complete, he laughed and phase two was well on the way. Not only had contact been established, but Harry was already confiding in him, a lot more than he honestly expected for their first day. It spoke well for his acting skills he thought, that Harry had been so completely endeared with him that day under the tree that he was talking to him so easily. It seemed that his plan, no matter how sloppily arranged given his shock at finding him in the Diagon Alley with relatively little protection, was a success. He had planted the seed and now all he had to do was let it sow.

"You can not hurt me Viktor. I have nothing to fear of you."

"How wrong you are Harry Potter," the Bulgarian whispered as he stared at the photograph he possessed of the boy. "How wrong you are."

He had not been lying when he had told Potter that children were foolish. Those little words of his, so innocently spoken proved it further. Only a child, cushioned from the reality of life would allow a stranger so easily into his person. Just as the reports had indicated Harry would do. The child's heart would be the end of him, Viktor pondered grimly, while wondering why that thought left him feeling slightly cold. Damn the boy for being so beguiling he thought, and damn him for not even realising the hypnotic quality of his gaze.

"You will die Harry Potter," Viktor murmured, tossing aside the picture and those beautiful eyes. "For you, foolish boy, are my little victim."

Chapter End Notes

The endearment Viktor uses roughly translates to "little victim".
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

So I will be very honest. Formatting for AO3 is not at all the easiest thing to do, especially for a chapter like this. It is the only type of this kind in this story. On ffnet the chapter is better formatted with italics and underlined sentences so you could clearly differentiate between who is speaking. Frankly, I do not have the time to sit and manually insert all of the codes required for me to do the same on this site (plus half the time I always have to go back in and do a second reformatting).

It is though, pretty clear who is talking in each bit of dialogue. If it is not as crystal clear who is speaking as it is to me, you have my apologies and I suppose you can just check the chapter on the other site.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I want to go home.

Whatever for Harry?

I hate it here. I HATE IT!

I thought you loved Hogwarts?
Not any more, it's not fun.

School is not for fun only Harry. You should know that.

It isn't fair Viktor! I shouldn't even have to be doing this crap!

Harry, there is no need to be-

Don't you dare start on me too Viktor Krum. I'm warning you! I won't put up with it. Not from you on top of everyone else!

.

.

.

You are calm now?

Harry?

I yelled at you didn't I?

From the fury of your strokes I think so.

Viktor, forgive me?

You are frustrated, I understand.
No. I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry.

It is fine.

You mean it?

What would you have me do to convince you? Set you lines to write?

No! I wouldn't have the time to do it. I hardly have time for myself anymore. It sucks.

OWLs are a serious examination Harry.

So everyone tells me but I do not care!

Harry!

No Viktor! I'm twelve. Why should I have to worry about this stuff? I'm tired of researching and writing essays and taking quizzes. I want to have fun!

Take a break.

I can't! Everything just piles up and then Draco starts nagging and as much as I hate it I understand. He doesn't deserve having to deal with my schoolwork on top of his. I want to go home!

Harry, we cannot always have what we want.

I know that! Does not mean I like it!

Shall we talk of something else? Something that would not anger you?

I yelled again didn't I?

You did.

Sorry.

It is fine, new topic?

Fine, what?

The fact that your headmaster dresses like a rainbow?

Harry?

Sorry! Was laughing. That's Grandpa for you!

Grandpa? You are related to Dumbledore?

Not directly.

Harry, your family confuse me. You live with Malfoys yet are not Malfoy. Your godfather is guardian yet you no live with him. Now you have grandfather who is not grandfather?

It sounds so confusing when you say it. Shall I explain?

Please do.
This tournament is annoying me.

Why?

I see Hogwarts students wandering about and think of you. Why could you not come Harry? Certainly your grandfather would have brought you if you asked.

It isn't so easy Viktor. No one knows about you. Why would I randomly want to go to Durmstrang?

To explore?

You know me well. That excuse would work but they would never let me. Rules or not.

They?

My family.

Why would they not send you?

Probably because it would be a security nightmare.

Security? Why?

Err...

Something else you cannot say?

Sorry. It must seem that I do not trust you.

You trust me?

I do, but still...

It is fine. Family before all. I understand.

I'm sorry.

It is okay. I still wish you were here.

Me too.

* *

My brother is champion of Durmstrang.

Congratulations! Well him anyway.

Offer me your condolences malko zhertva. For now I am going to be dragged into endless practice sessions with him.

It'll be fun. Besides, he'll need all the help if he wants to beat Hogwarts!

You do know Hogwarts has rarely won?

That's besides the point.
Silly child. Do you even care to know who is your champion?

No. It wouldn't do if I'm not surprised when they announce it in the morni

Harry?

Are you there?

Sorry, Draco came in.

You still have not told him about me?

Are you mad? He would, at the very least burn the book!

And the worst?

Hey!

I am curious. Your mate fascinates me.

Why?

He seems so different from you.

He is. We're different but it is what makes us special.

Strong words from a twelve year old.

Hush you. Draco is my mate. I will be with him forever.

You should not speak so decisively. Things can change.

No they can't. Draco is mine, now and forever.

And if someone tries to steal you away? Or him even?

Been there, done that.

What?

I never told you? There's this witch in our year, Pansy, she's bonkers. She thinks – after all these years, that she is Draco's mate not me. She even got a howler for it back in first year.

She tried to take away your Draco?

Still does. Last week she actually tried to kiss him. She read – Merlin alone knows where - that a touch from a true mate will spark a bond between them. It does...just not with her.

Was she disappointed?

She didn't get near him.

I sense an evil grin.

You got that right. I hexed her.

YOU? I would have thought your veela would have reacted.
Didn't give him the chance too. I got so mad when I walked in Slytherin and saw her pushing up on him. Draco was trying to reason. I just hexed.

Why would you do that?

Draco is MY veela. No one but me is allowed to kiss him. Well Mama does and Papa but that's beside the point. I didn't want her anywhere near my veela.

You sound as if you staked a claim on him.

I did...at least that is what Uncle says. I kissed him. Right there in front of everyone. Blaise – Dray's friend swears that I growled at Pansy before I did but I don't remember it.

Growling? Veela submissives do that. It is a warning against potential rivals I believe.

And you know that how?

You said your mate is veela. I was curious. How you know veela behaviour elludes me.

I'm part veela, I don't get claws when angry like Draco does but Mama says I have some characteristics embedded in me.

Were you reprimanded?

By Draco? Of course not. He was too busy blushing. He's funny that way. Sometimes he gets all cuddly and other times I swear he could glow in the dark.

And you do not?

Kinda. But it's funnier when it is him.

I suppose so. But I meant teacher.

Oh no. Everyone was warned what not to do around Draco. The school cannot intervene if Draco's veela instincts lead him to react. They didn't count on my reaction but the principle is the same.

And the girl, Patty?

Pansy. Another howler and a day in the Hospital Wing.

What did you do to her?

Boils...among other things.

Remind me to stay on your good side.

I will.

* 

Tomorrow is first task. Care to bet on the winner?

Hogwarts of course.

Durmstrang. My brother will annihilate the other schools.

In. Your. Dreams.
We will see. And the bet?
You're on. Terms?
You win, I answer ten questions. I win, you do the same.
Viktor.
Harry, we have been friends what, two, three months now. I want to know more about you. Please?
Fine, but I want to be able to refuse a question – should by some miracle Durmstrang win.
I will afford you the same. So a deal?
Deal.

We did not cater for a tie.
What was the task anyway?
Potions.
Huh?
They had an hour to create a potion.
That's simple.
Not really. They were on this timed platform. The potion had to be precisely made, even a second too late adding an ingredient risked it being ruined. For every error or time lapse the platform was lowered. It was an easy way for the audience to keep track of the progress.
Still not difficult.
Did I mention the fact that the potion was an antidote to a slow acting poison given to students from their schools.
WHAT? Grandpa would not have allowed it.
Well I suppose that they had the antidote on standby in any case. My brother finished first but Hogwarts potion was stronger and more effective. That balanced out to a tied mark of 45. Beauxbatons followed with a 41.
The tournament sounds difficult. How did they choose the students?
Persons the champions were close to. The champion of Beauxbaton, his brother was used. Hogwarts' best friend and Durmstrang, well me.
You! Viktor, you should have told me! Are you alright? You were healed right?
Yes yes, I am fine although I did have words with my brother for that runny potion. I had to remind him that I was not his zhertva.
So you're fighting.
No more. We do not stay mad at each other for long.

Harry?

Sorry, Draco needed something. I can't stay much longer, I have an essay to write over.

That is okay. How much time you have left?

Fifteen minutes.

Good enough. What about the tie?

Since we both technically won and lost, why don't we send each other a list and we both answer?

Fine. Go on now and write your essay. I can give you pointers if you wish.

I will keep that in mind. Bye Viktor.

Bye malko zhertva.

You have to tell me what that means by the way.

My secret, go now.

Do you have a middle name?

No. They used them all on Dimitar.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

A wizard to be reckoned with.

Do you like Durmstrang?

It is acceptable for me.

Is it really a Dark Arts school?

We do teach Dark Arts but it is not our main focus. Durmstrang produces quite a number of heroes. Might I point out that the only Dark Lord to come from us was expelled in his sixth year?

What are your hobbies (quidditch does not count!)

Exercising, broom riding (not quidditch!), reading, studying, acting.

Did you like puberty?

Harry you could have asked me this directly. I would have answered. Puberty was puberty. Not the fuss I expected it to be. Things enlarged, I got taller and no longer sounded like a strangled chipmunk. (You are a cute chipmunk). Remind me that we need to 'talk'. Your question is disturbing.

Have you ever been in love?

Harry should I be worried? (kidding) Love, no. Infatuated? Maybe. There is a difference, make no doubt of it.
What do you think about me?

Hmm. Shall we start from that very first day? You fascinated me. Never have I seen someone like you, so bright and cheerful. You draw people to you and I believe you can coax a smile from a rock. I think you are a good person, too good, the kind of person whose very nature leads them into trouble. You are too trusting, but for that I am glad for you are in my life no? You fascinate me. Never would I have thought I would be fascinated by someone so much younger than me.

I thought you would annoy me, that I would be humouring you but in fact...you draw me to you each and every time we talk. I want to get to know you more. You are like the little brother that I can never get annoyed by, a pup that I can't scold no matter how naughty it has been. Knowing you so far has been an interesting experience for me, more than I expected. I am glad that I have gotten to know you, more than I probably should. But then, I am more than my father's son.

Is this enough Harry? For I fear there is little more that I can say that will not sound sappy. Cross out any of my questions and add this instead. I am curious as to your response.

*I can't believe it's taken me over a week to answer this! Sorry, school you know. On with it?*

Are you happy with your family?

More than I can ever hope to be. Without them I would never have lived.

How did you end up with them?

No one outside the family knows this...Fine, I will answer it, but no more on the matter okay? My parents died when I was a baby and I was sent to live with my mother's sister and her husband. They abused me, plain and simple. I nearly died, but somehow my bond to Draco brought my parents to me and I lived. I meant it literally before. I'm still not completely over it, but...I've moved on. I won't let it hold me back any more than necessary.

How did you get a mate so early?

I explained that already I suppose. I bonded to Draco the night they saved me.

Last name?

Not yet Viktor. I will tell you eventually. When I'm sure you'll like me for me.

Favourite subjects?

Charms and Transfigurations. They were my birth parents' best subjects. They were going to pursue masteries in it eventually. I guess its my ode to them. DADA and Potions are my next best.

Who are your friends?

I talk to a lot of people. I'm closest to Ron and Hermione, but there's also Blaise and Millicent. They're Draco's best friends and we think they like each other, I mean LIKE like but they haven't done anything about it yet and Draco says not to tell them. I hope Draco doesn't Like like anybody else but me. I'll hex them to the moon. Oh, there's also Fred and George (whom got me spanked in front the ENTIRE SCHOOL last year. I never did get revenge on Draco for that. Remind me?) Oh and Cho and Cedric. There's a rumour that they're soul-mates but they have never confirmed it. Oh and well, you.
How do you feel about your mate?

I love him. Even when he annoys me or is extra stern, I can't help but love him, because underneath it all, he does it because he cares for me. Draco is the one person I honestly want with me forever. When he's disappointed in me it hurts so bad. I give him trouble I suppose but mostly its to get a reaction out of him. He's too serious sometimes, mostly when we're in Hogwarts, but still.

Sometimes I feel pressured by him, especially when he wants me to work when I don't want to, but still he loves me so its understandable. What I don't like about him? He's too strict like I said sometimes and occasionally he lets his veela side take control. I know he's my dominant, but I get annoyed sometimes. But after it all, there is nothing I would change about him. He is my veela, my dominant and I will always love him for that fact. Plus he's the only one who falls for my pouts these days.

Meh...three left! Let's get this over with.

You say you and your mate are good at quidditch yet you are not on teams. Why?

Firstly, the rules said that first years are not allowed to play. Given that I was well below the typical age, it is only this year that I am actually legible to play, and guess what? With the tournament, the school's stretched too thin to make quidditch feasible this year.

Next, the teams practice on different days at different times. The time that Draco and I need to be together will be cut down. A strain on our bond is never a good thing, he gets crabby, I get weepy.

Thirdly, what happens during matches? If we faced each other either I or Draco would defer to each other in the end, especially since we're both suited to the seeker position. It wouldn't do in mid-dive for me to decide my dominant should win or vice versa.

Next (yes another) the first bludger sent my way will land the beater in the hospital wing. Nuff said.

All in all, we're better off watching.

Does it annoy you to have your family in the school?

Nope. I can't imagine not having Uncle here to run too. I miss Grandpa enough as is.

Hey there are more than ten here! Or did you add in some because you thought I wouldn't answer others? Well, I'm in a giving mood. I'll answer them but you owe me!

Scariest experience?

Too many to name. Lets go with a recent time okay? Facing down a troll first year. At least when I fought for my paper-weight my family was there. I was all alone with the troll. No further comment there.

Happiest moment?

Whenever Draco kisses me. It proves how much he cares.

What do I think about you?

You're the big brother I always wanted (Draco's my mate, he doesn't count.) You confuse me sometimes, always asking about my family and such, but then I'm inquisitive too. You seem like a pessimist though, always with those 'warnings' of yours, but I'm sure I'll make an optimist out of you
in no time. Meh, I'm not too good at this. I like you. You are there to talk to whenever I want
to...well not literally but you understand. I'm really glad I met you!

There, done. Now tell me about the Yule Ball that's coming up. Do you have a date yet?


What? I don't believe you. There is absolutely no way you were your brother's date! Nice try.
Anyway, I may not be able to reply for a while. It sucks that there isn't anyway to get a present out to
you, so I'll just wish you a Merry Christmas. Tell me what you got and I'll do the same!

By the way, you're calling me malko zhertva more often now. Is that my permanent nickname?
Laters!

Perhaps I am using it to remind myself who you really are to me. And I will not tell if I was lying. I
could very well have danced with Dimitar, our customs may be different from yours. Somehow I
will survive a Christmas with no gift from you, but I demand a poem for my birthday.

As for my gifts, I have been informed that I have a spot waiting for me on the national team once I
come of age next year. Sucks that it was not in time for the world cup this year, but I can't complain.
Are you still having your nightmares? It worried me when I woke to find vomit splatter on the pages.
Oh and see? I actually used a contraction!

When will you let me live that down? And yes, I still have the nightmares which means more lessons
for me. Urgh! Good boy!

Lessons?

Oh! You're there? And here I was going to ramble on for a bit.

I just came in to get something when the book chimed. Don't mind me, my parents are waiting for
me. I will read your ramblings later malko

Hey, you forgot zhertva!

Perhaps I have. You are my malko zherta. I cannot forget that.

You better not! Now shoo, I have some rambling to do.

Indeed Harry. Farewell.

Anyway, and you better not be sitting there reading this! Draco and I used to have nightmares at
some point and so Uncle found a way to stop them. But Draco's better than it than me and now I still
have them, not as bad as before but it still happens. Uncle was mad – not at me, the situation so now
I have more lessons to continue learning...

Harry, it has been a week. Why have you not answered me yet? Is school so busy for you? Never
mind, write me when you can. The next task is in three days. Dimitar is busy preparing (which
means me as well). Write me soon. I am worried. Goodbye.
Viktor, sick, badly. Talk when better. Good luck Dimitar.

What is wrong with you? Answer when better, I understand. Speedy recovery malko – Harry.

Dimitar won with 41 points. Hogwarts placed third with 32 and Beauxbatons got 35. The task was hard. There were dementors, sphinxes and boggarts. I suppose it was to see how best they could function under stress. Hogwarts boy lost at stage two. He could not get past the sphinx after the boggart. His fear was a headless corpse apparently. It resembled him somewhat I suppose, perhaps a family member? You would know. The French got to the end but the Dementor overpowered her. They got her out before he could kiss her though. Dimitar won on speed. He too faltered at the dementor but he at least managed a mist and that gave him the needed boost to first place.

You grandfather was not at all pleased at the task. He is scary angry. You are still ill? I send my blessings to you. Get well soon. I hope Draco is taking good care of you.

Hey. Still sick. Had to do this though.

Under a tree, you met me.

You told me Krum, my reply left you glum.

Since I don't want to be a dotter,
I'll tell you my name is Potter.

Dotter is the only thing I could find what rhymed, sorry. Draco reached his majority the same time I got ill. He's not around as much as he can be, but Mama needs to help him control his powers.

Congrats to Dimitar. I'm going back to sleep now. When I said I wanted out of Hogwarts, I certainly did not mean like this.

Harry you are scaring me now. Just what is wrong with you and just how bad are you? Answer me please whenever you can. I am not sure whether I should be offering congratulations to Draco...it seems to me that his majority has a role in this? I am not pleased.

You are out of Hogwarts? I thought you were in the medical ward.

You've got it backwards, my illness forced his majority. I can't explain too much. Too tired and I probably should tailor what I say first anyway. Sorry to be worrying you like this.

No, I was brought home the day of my illness. Just before it came on actually. There were enough signs to get me out of the school. It's been – two weeks now? It sucks, I'm so weak it isn't funny. You can see how shaky my handwriting is.
It's unlikely that I'll be back in school for the rest of the term. Draco is still working on his powers anyway. Remind me to describe him for you? His veela form is beautiful.

*I*

I do not understand why I am so worried about you, but I am. It panicks me to know that you are ill. Are you in pain, hurting? Can I help in any way? Is your mate better?

*I*

Draco is almost back to normal so now he's constantly by me. He's so pretty now. His eyes are pure silver. Somehow I can't bring myself to miss the blue. He hardly leaves me now so I can't write as often. I mentioned you...he thought I was delirious so our secrets are still safe.

You can't do anything for me except support Dimitar. Please do, even though Durmstrang is the 'enemy' I still want him to do well. He is your brother, he must be as nice as you. I am getting stronger, but my scar is still bleeding and the headaches are constant. I spend more time sleeping now than being awake.

You never said anything about me being Harry Potter.

*I*

You could be Harry Snotter for all I care. You are hurt and I care not for anything else. Were it possible I would be there for you malko edno.

I am no longer your zhertva?

You are there?

For a little bit. Sleeping potion not active yet. Answer.

I am not sure.

Cryptic much?

You must be getting better. You are cheeky.

And you're glad of it. It's good to FINALLY speak to you when it isn't delayed. Draco is helping me with the headaches. His majority allows it. One more thing I have him to thank for. The pain is less now.

That is good then. I have class now. I must go.

Have fun.

*I*

Your grandfather looks worried Harry. He has been for weeks. He must love you a lot.

He does. He probably wishes he were here. Letters are not the same.

Are you caught up with your schooling?

Enough. Mama is tutoring us daily. I'm behind, but that's a given. I'm only up half the time anyway. Draco's fine, he could probably go back to Hogwarts part-time if he wanted but he won't leave me.
It's both of us or none.

That is sweet. Dimitar needs me.

Go then. Goodbye.

You hate me no?

Of course not. You are not your brother. I will not blame you for his actions.

I am ashamed of him. Mother and Father have disowned him. He died shortly afterwards but it still is hurtful. No sympathy for him. He deserves none.

Fine. Your family reputation is safe?

I am surprised you know this. It is.

Malfoys remember? By renouncing him immediately it shows that you condemn the actions. It must still hurt though. He was your brother.

Had I only knew what he planned –

You could not have known.

It is a disgrace too. One that Durmstrang will struggle to live down. A champion who chose to cut down his opponents rather than fight nobly. Dimitar is no blood of mines.

You aren't capable of such cruelty. You are not him. Do not hurt yourself because of him.

Of that I am not certain.

I'm sure.

I am pessimist.

And I'm optimistic.

. . .

I still cannot decide.

On?

What you are to me? Edon or zhertva. I do not know.

Perhaps if you tell me the meanings I might help?

How are you feeling?

Diverting the subject, how quaint.
Harry...

I will allow it. It is not like I am being completely honest with you.

You are better? Fully?

Seventy percent I'll say. The headaches are finally gone completely, and I don't need Draco to block my mind for me – forget I wrote that.

I will not pry.

Thank you. I am fine now, still tire easily and I still haven't gained back all the weight, but I will be fine. I'm looking forward to Hogwarts next year, work and all.

It must have been hard, missing the majority of your year.

I suppose. I still have about a quarter of the syllabus to cover, but Mama thinks I'll be caught up by Mid-July. We are starting fifth year work in August, so I will not be as stressed next term. Uncle was not pleased how I was handling the pressure the first term. The school board has agreed with Papa's proposal to let Draco and my holiday lessons count towards our Hogwarts work. Grandpa needs to finalise it, but there is no reason for it to be rejected. We'll be doing the majority of our essays and assignments in the holidays, freeing us up considerably next term.

Harry, will you ever explain your illness to me?

Someday perhaps. When I have a better grasp of it myself. Have I distracted you sufficiently from Dimitar?

You have. Thank you Harry.

No endearment at all? You must be confused. Goodbye.

* 

You're coming to Hogwarts!

Yes, it was announced this morning. Because of Dimitar's actions, the results were scrapped. The tournament will be reheld and since Hogwarts was ranking second, it will be held there. Which means...

I'll finally see you!

And I can see for myself how you are faring, and see this pretty mate of yours.

About that...

Hmm?

How exactly are we going to explain knowing each other?

We will figure out something. You are better?

Almost. The day I can go completely without a nap I will consider myself healed.

*
Viktor?

Harry?

How do you know when you like someone?

Like?

I mean LIKE like.

Why do you ask?

I think I LIKE like Draco.

I see.

Harry, remember what you asked me a while ago?

Must I flip back to find it?

No. You asked me what you are to me. Zhertva or Edon.

Oh that. Will you answer me now?

You are supposed to be my zhertva. But right now, I think you are neither my zhertva or my edon.

What am I then?

I think – I think of you as my surste.

Is that a bad thing?

It is a good thing and a bad thing? I do not know. Forget I wrote this. I should not have. I will talk to you soon. I have a practice match now.

Okay, but seriously, one of these days, you will tell me what those words mean.

I will.

Chapter End Notes

Malko - little

Zhertva – victim

Edon – one

Surste – heart.
Chapter 45

Viktor Krum was quickly learning how much more he was his mother's son than his father's. When exactly had the tables been turned on him, he wondered as he stood in what used to be his brother's bedroom. Just when had Harry Potter gone from being his victim to the one he was most preoccupied with? The situation should have been the reverse with Harry craving to be with him. And yet here he was, not a good ten minutes after conversing with the now thirteen year old, counting down the minutes until they could talk again. Where had it gone all wrong, and why did it feel so right?

He was in love with the boy. He had realised that fact somewhere along the line, when his concern for a lack of response from Harry was not caused by fear that his plan was falling apart, but instead from genuine fear for the state of his well being. Harry was being very cryptic within recent months, talking openly about all subjects save his peculiar illness that necessitated his withdrawal from Hogwarts barely two months into the second term. Did it have to do anything with the Dark Lord, he asked himself not for the first time. Harry's illness had come on the first week of February and it was early March when Karkaroff informed him with a small but nervous smile that the dark lord was newly arisen and wanted word on his mission.

Somehow, he could not bring himself to share the glee Dimitar had felt – Dimitar a brother now dead, by command. Really, was it his getting to know the boy he was destined to betray the reason for his hesitation towards the Dark Lord, or was it the fact that not even in control yet, the Dark Lord had already shown a willingness to sacrifice his followers for his own benefit? The entire tournament, Durmstrang and his brother had only been a stepping-stone for Voldemort. One that would grant access to Hogwarts and more importantly to Harry.

And why did he want the boy anyway? What harm could the child cause him? Would it not be more feasible to have Harry assassinated if he so wanted him dead? That mission could have been accomplished in mere minutes, hell Viktor himself could have tortured and killed the boy trice in the time they had shared beneath the tree on that rain soaked day. But no, the orders were clear, Harry Potter was to be kept alive. It seemed a waste that so much lives and reputations had to be spoiled in order to get access to Potter, and even now that he was no longer blinded by the promises doled on him, Viktor could see that the plan was haphazard at best and so many things could have gone wrong along the line. It was virtually a miracle that everything had gone as smoothly as it had, Harry now trusted him and the tournament was being repeated, this time in Hogwarts. But had it been worth the cost?

Durmstrang's reputation was all but destroyed because of Dimitar's actions – actions done on the orders of the Dark Lord himself. Viktor had watched with horror as red sparks were shot up in the air and the wizarding officials rushed into the maze, not to find a champion in difficulty with a creature, but one barely alive with his throat cut, managing only to gasp out Dimitar's name before he succumbed to his injuries. Minutes later, the officials came across Dimitar locked in a duel with Hogwarts' champion, barely faring better than the Beauxbatons. The officials tried to stun him, but it had been too late. Tired of playing the elder Krum cut down the other champion with the killing curse and then turned the wand on himself.

As the horror of the situation unveiled itself, Viktor was pulled from the stands by his grim faced father and weeping mother, only to find himself taken to a half-dead Dimitar's side. His father had asked nothing of his elder son, not even his mother, who by now was sobbing and did more than glance at him before turning away. And Viktor was numb as his father drew his wand and incanted, severing any ties the elder Krum had with the family, leaving him nameless and without any magical
ties, safely insuring that the Krum name would not be sullied. It was as if he no longer lived.

To say his name aloud in the house would be taboo. His presence in any picture was removed and his bedroom converted. It was as if Dimitar Krum had never existed, and none would dare utter his name in the presence of his former family. They had done the honourable thing, showing their contempt for his actions by renouncing him and in doing so, their reputation remained in tact.

Karkaroff and the other officials had stood by with not a word as the rites was complete but despite their best efforts to save the murder's life, if only so he could face punishment for his crimes, he died, safe in the knowledge that his mission was complete. And Viktor, who had been expecting censure or at least a warning not to fail in his own task when he was summoned to the highmaster's office several days later was shocked to learn that it had all been planned. Dimitar had gone into the task knowing of his imminent death and the shame that would come from it. He had done it willingly, safe in the knowledge that upon the dark lord's glorious return, his name would be uplifted and in death, he would be honoured for his part in the process. Viktor had been physically ill that night and the mere thought of his brother's unwavering loyalty to the dark lord, following him to his death had been an eye-opener for him.

However, was it enough to deter him from the part he had started on? He was not sure. Karkaroff had assured him that his mission was less ominous and he had sensed no lies from the man. He was destined for greater things than recognition in death he had been informed and slightly reassured he had left. Unlike Dimitar, a future serving the Dark Lord held great promises for him and that thought alone should have quelled any misgivings he had. And it would have, had it not been for the fact that Viktor Krum had fallen for his own trap and fallen in love with his would-be victim.

The question for him now, as he walked away from his former-brother's room, was if he, in the future could go against his heart and follow his ambitions, putting glory over love, and lead the one he cared about into certain doom when the time came.

* 

It had been a long few months and even now, Harry was not certain his struggles were over. Viktor had his own problems, what with learning all that was necessary of him now that he had ascended to being the Krum heir. He should do little more than support him, keep their conversations light and steer it away from dismal topics such as his health or rather lack of it. How swiftly life could change, Harry mused as he looked across from his spot against his window seat, transfigured so that it was more like a recliner, offering him much needed support. It had been an upgrade from the bed he had been all but ridden to for the past four or five months. Truth be told, he hadn't even been out of his bedroom since his arrival here on February, his only take on the outside world was what he could see beyond his windows.

He was still underweight, by a good ten pounds or so, but he was no way near the scarecrow condition he had been in before, when his only energy source came from nutrient potions that despite their namesake could not stop his body from degrading. One would wonder why he could not just heal himself, but frankly it wasn't worth the effort it would require on his part. His magic was still finicky despite the time that had passed and beside he was not sick, at least not in the way he had led Viktor to believe.

His 'illness' was in no way caused by a flu or virus, instead his body had been racked for months by Voldemort's invasions, a process that rendered his magic uncontrollable and making it lash out at him to his own detriment. Thankfully, the gateway to him that Voldemort had enjoyed exploiting for months had been closed. However, it remained there, a constant warning to Harry that it could reopen again. The pain he had felt in those times when the dark lord invaded his body was akin that
his reaction to the rat bite so many years before, only multiplied by infinity.

Harry shuddered as phantom pain raced through his veins from the memories and forcibly he tried to shove them away, calling on Draco to assist him when he could not manage it. He breathed a sigh of relief when his mate's presence filled his mind, carrying him on a cloud of bliss above the bad memories until he was calm and in control. Thanking him Harry returned to staring out the window, pulling the blanket around him closer as he leaned against the cool glass, wondering when it had all changed.

It had been building up, that much was certain. In the days leading up to that eventful day, Harry had experienced an increasing awareness that something was not completely right. Little by little, his nerves were shortening until it only took an unexpected noise to startle him and have him clinging to his veela who on every occasion looked at him curiously and as time went by with concern. He had shrugged it off in the early stages, so what if he was feeling antsy? There was probably just some thing he was forgetting to do and this was his body's way of trying to remind him. Or probably it was the niggling guilt he felt from hiding Viktor from everyone. He certainly hoped that that was not the problem.

Despite the holiday lessons, Harry's mental barriers paled in comparison to Draco. His mind was easily breached, but that was not the purpose of the lessons. The barrier that Harry now possessed was strong enough that he was at least aware of when a nightmare approached and he could wake himself up from it in time. More than that, when penetrated, Harry could successfully divert attention away from potentially critical memories, laying a false trail for the intruder so much so that they retreated, thinking him none the wiser. The fact that only once in the first term that Harry was forced to wake himself from a potential nightmare lowered the priority of the lessons, something Harry was most grateful for as it decreased the chance of someone finding out about Viktor.

Also there was the fact that now more than ever Hogwarts was a struggle for him and he needed every spare minute that was available. The content of the subjects was not the primary concern, it was the sheer workload that being a forth year entailed that threatened to send Harry crazy. On any given day, they were assigned no less than two essays, research questions, and were under the constant threat of surprise quizzes. Not to forget the scheduled midterm exams along with course work assignments.

More than once, completely frustrated by the seemingly endless demands on him, Harry found himself at the brink of tears, either tossing away everything in a fit of anger or running to his mate and demanding his attention. And if that wasn’t enough, there was always Viktor to pour his heart out to and complain of the unfairness of him needing to do all of this work before his rightful time. Viktor was ever understanding and helped him to his best ability, going so far as allowing Harry to write him drafts of his essays with him editing and forwarding it back, leaving the preteen with little more to do than rewrite it. This could only be done occasionally though, and Harry never took up the Bulgarian’s offer to do the same for credit assignments. He was not above taking help, but he would not cheat, no matter how tempting the offer was.

The new year came eagerly for the then twelve year old, if only for the fact that it meant that he was so much closer to the summer vacation once again, free from the castle and all obligations for two whole months. It was right around the middle of January when things started to go downhill. The nightmares returned and with such ferocity, that Harry could do nothing to stop himself from being plunged into their depths, fighting ineffectually to rise above it. Luckily for him, Draco, although now protected for the voices, still felt his distress from their bond
and hurried to him, shaking him forcibly awake. It was the third time it happened, not a good two
days since the previous assault when Draco could not draw him back into reality, that real concern
was raised and the Occlumency lessons resumed with increased urgency and hardly any positive
results.

It was not for a lack of trying on Harry's part. He was desperate to create a perfect barrier and spare
himself the horror of the nightmares but if anything his attempts at shielding his mind increased the
effects of the nightmares. Harry felt physical pain as the nightmares shattered his shields and drew
him into their dark depths. His agonised screams that final night had brought not only Draco but their
Uncle to his side, the man forced to use a stinging hex to finally jar him into reality. He had spent the
rest of the night weeping raggedly on his Uncle's knee with Draco pressed near, begging between
tears for them to find a way to stop him from sleeping.

It wasn't worth the pain.

Severus had done the opposite, starting him on a potion regiment that forced him into such a deep
slumber that an antidote had to be admitted to raise him from it. It worked, the fog of the potion left
him safe from the nightmares. The problem? The solution was highly addictive and Severus warned
that he could only use it consecutively for two weeks maximum. They never had a chance to reach
that limit though, for only a few days later the creepy feeling started assaulting him and finally on a
Wednesday in the middle of History of Magic, it happened.

Somewhere in between him doodling on the edge of a parchment and whispering to Ron, Harry felt
a sharp tug within himself, radiating from his core and swiftly spreading outwards. Within seconds, it
had begun to consume him and he could only manage a quick cry before he curled in on himself,
assaulted by waves of pain as it seemed like someone was trying to pull him apart from the inside. So
entrapped was he in the painful sensations, the worried cries of his classmates escaped him, nor did
he feel his best friend's arms lift him before he was carried swiftly from the classroom.

Harry was aware of nothing but the pain now wracking through every fibre of his being. Everything
hurt, from his toes to the tips of his hairs and finally overcome, Harry screamed, the sound chilling
everyone in the hospital wing even as they struggled to stop the trashing he was unaware he was
doing while the healer forced a combination of potions into his system. The pain increased despite
their efforts, building to a crescendo where Harry, despite the restraints, arched his back and released
a final hoarse cry before he slumped, the pain rendering him unconscious.

His next moment of lucidity came hours later when he cracked stinging eyes to see a cream and gold
roof staring down at him. He was home? His entire body felt battered and his movements were
sluggish as he forced himself into a sitting position, marvelling at how difficult the task was. When
had he last felt this way? At best, he could liken it to that time Uncle Vernon had kicked him in the
guts, throwing him backwards into the wall, where he had remained until he could struggle to his
feet. But he had not been attacked, he frowned, as he looked around him, wincing at the sore feeling
the movement ignited, a soreness that masked the pain he felt bubbling below the surface.

He had been medicated, he realised, heavily so if the state of his body was any indication. And it was
those potions what dulled the pain to the level it was now. Harry cringed wondering how bad it
would get when they wore off. He was thirsty, very thirsty and his voice croaked when he finally
managed Dobby's name. The elf was frantic when he popped in, but it was not the water Harry
asked for that he fetched. Instead, it was a worried Lucius who all but ran into the room, dropping
down besides him and cradling his face tenderly as if he were frightened that the slightest touch
would pain him. It probably would, if not for the relief his father's warm touch gave him, Harry
would most likely have cringed at the sting that loving gesture evoked.
"Papa, what's wrong with me?" he managed after he drank his fill of water, not even complaining when Lucius held the glass to his lips.

"We don't know yet," came the terse reply as he was gently tucked back into the bed. "Something or someone is cursing you that much we know. We're trying to counter it, but until then we will keep you here."

"Draco?"

"Is sedated. He was most frantic about you and was doing himself more harm than good. He should be up anytime now and will come to you then."

"It wore off so quickly?" he inquired as he fidgeted, stopping when the action brought nothing but a dull ache.

"Harry, it is almost six in the afternoon. You've been unconscious since mid-morning."

"I don't remember much," he murmured as he closed his eyes shortly. "I was in class. Then I felt – it felt like if someone was trying to tear me apart from the inside. I couldn't even try to stop it. I didn't know how. It hurts Papa."

Lucius, as gently as possible rest his hand against Harry's head, closing his eyes for a moment as he fought to contain the agony the pain laced words of his son caused him. When he was certain that he could speak steadily, he replied. "We're trying Harry. Severus has been in here countless times scanning you. Sirius and Remus are with him. Mama is by Draco's side, and I am overseeing the potions Severus has brewing for you. We will find out what is causing this Harry, and we will stop it."

Everyone was so busy, Harry thought dismally. He knew intuitively what they were doing was important, but he couldn't help but wish they were here by his side. He was scared and in pain; he wanted as much of his family with him as possible. "Stay with me?" he settled on asking, shooting a watery look to his father who nodded immediately.

Harry dozed for a bit afterwards, awakening when he felt a touch, that while painful, caused his spirit to soar and motivated him enough to open his eyes to see Draco's worried silver-flecked gaze observing him. "Dray?"

"Harry," the veela breathed, climbing into the bed besides him, but stopping short of pulling him into his arms, reminded of his father's warnings about Harry's current sensitivity. "How badly do you hurt cub?"

"Everywhere," he mumbled, the tears from before breaking free immediately as he felt the veela's presence.

There was no need to pretend around Draco, he could cry if he wanted. And cry he did, sobbing out the details that he had not mentioned to their father, how the pain had robbed him of his very awareness so much so that even his bond with Draco, usually a quietly burning flame in the back of his conscious, dimmed to a mere flickering light. He mentioned the alien-ness that was slowly intermingling with the pain that seemed stronger now than when he was awake previously, a pain that felt as if someone was trying to penetrate his very being, for what reason he had no idea.

And Draco listened, careful not to touch him, but close enough that his presence was felt. Despite the heavy burden it cost him, the veela managed to restrain his instincts to bundle Harry up to him and instead stayed still, not at all interrupting as Harry spoke, his sobs eventually easing, his tears ceasing
and he drifted back into a potion induced sleep, a crinkle in his brow indicating the level of his discomfort even when unconscious.

It was only then, with Harry once more deeply asleep that the comforting mask of the veela crumbled as he searched within himself, seeking out that link between him and Harry, growing frantic as he had been earlier when it felt muted. Something was denying him access to Harry and his veela side raged at the fact. Whatever it was was doing more than that, inducing pain in the boy while simultaneously dampening all of Harry's faculties including his ties to his mate. Was it any wonder given the circumstance that Narcissa had to sedate her son lest he unintentionally harm his mate in trying to discern and remove the problem?

Even now, Draco knew that he was allowed into the bedroom only because there was no one else to remain with him. Harry's unspoken request not to be alone was being diligently adhered to, and so despite his reservations, Lucius had left his youngest in the care of his mate while he went about completing the batch of potions simmering in the laboratory.

Forcing himself to remain calm, Draco sought out his link to Harry once again and this time, rather than call to Harry to respond, he carefully nudged at the end of it. He frowned as a slight shock radiated through him. A barrier?

Nudging again led to the same results and with each subsequent poke, the inner veela within the Malfoy heir rose in rebellion. What was keeping him from his mate? Whatever it was, it needed to be removed. With an unconscious growl, Draco launched an attack at Harry's end of the bond, trying to break down the blockade. The reaction was immediate.

The block was unable to stand up against the pure strength behind Draco's volley but it did not give easily, instead triggering a reflexive reaction from Harry's magic. Hours spent combating the alien essence had effectively rendered Harry's magic wild and so it lashed out indiscriminately not recognising in its state that Draco was no threat. Even as the veela forcibly tried to reconnect the bond, Harry's eyes flung open and a pained moan tore from him as his magic struck out.

Alongside Draco, that other presence was back with a force that was startling. It was morbidly curious, rummaging through Harry's mind, unknowingly dislodging the veela who's rage increased at the action. Far off, in an old woman's house, the newly reborn dark lord had recognised within minutes of his resurrection that the odd feeling in the recesses of his mind was a link to another person, the very one who had damned him to such an existence. With malicious glee he had probed it, pleased when he found easy access. Undoubtedly the boy's blood (finally retrieved by his hapless servant) was the cause, but currently he felt no need to close it. It was an easy way to terrorise him and he latched on to it, snickering darkly when Potter's magic failed to seek and remove him, instead unknowingly attacking Potter himself, causing him a pain that Voldemort found delightful. He was most curious to see if he could kill the boy from afar simply by playing with the link but quickly checked that thought. Such a quick fate was not good enough for Harry Potter. He would settle for tormenting him instead.

Harry's body was now wracked with tremor after pain-induced tremor as his magic assaulted him, trying in vain to rid the body of all unwanted intrusions, battering the boy in the process. The boy struggled to control his magic but it would not be tamed, continuing on it's reflexive actions, moving outwards to create a physical barrier that surrounded Harry's entire bed when Draco tried to touch him. Nothing, absolutely nothing would be allowed near the boy until the intrusion had been removed.

Draco's animalistic screeches as he threw himself continuously against the barrier brought the adults running into the bedroom. Sirius, arriving first swore loudly as he took in the situation, Narcissa
seconds behind him transformed quickly and grabbed the wild-eyed Draco who nearly clawed her with his talons.

"What the hell is going on?"

Narcissa did not reply, instead struggling furiously with her son who was screeching in the language only veela's spoke, crying out to his blocked mate, protesting at the barrier and swearing to tear it down. The more she tried to restrain him, the harder he bucked against her and his protests grew louder, especially when the men took to trying to tear down the barrier surrounding Harry that prevented them from aiding him and hopefully ceasing his cries.

"Child, heed you elder and cease this!" she told the struggling teenager in as stern a tone as she could manage in the situation. "Your mother orders it!"

She expected immediate obedience. It was the first time she had spoken to Draco thus in the native tongue, but traditionally she knew, children were bound to obey the directives, would feel compelled to do so. The fact that Draco did not seem in the least fazed and she had to duck a blow from him, a move that allowed him to attack the barrier physically before she could grab him again was frightening. A veela child would always heed their elder's words. The only exception would be if that veela was no longer considered a child. That realisation hit her and even as she tried crossing her arms over his chest, shaking a warning head at Lucius as he made to come aid her, she recognised the truth.

Draco was changing, literally beneath her arms. Harry's pain and his inability to help him was sending his veela nature crazy and it was seeking control of his faculties in a way that his human body could not facilitate. And so, his veela characteristics, previously dormant, was taking root, changing his body as it prepared for that first transformation into his true form. And Narcissa knew there was no way she could stop it.

"Dammit all to hell!" Severus cursed as yet the barrier absorbed another round of spells. Just what was powering it and why was it that four fully grown wizards could do little to penetrate it? The magic behind it was all Harry's he knew, and the fact bothered him. Was all of this power really contained in the boy's small frame? And why was it that he had on some level labelled them the enemy and was blocking them like this?

Somehow, Voldemort was involved, he thought grimly as he lowered his wand, not wasting his energy. There was no use in attacking the barrier, it was best to find a way around it to get to Harry. Were they in error trying to smash it? Despite Harry's obvious pain, would it be better to let it continue until it drove him into unconsciousness when it would hopefully fade? He was at a loss for what to do.

The other three wizards abruptly stopped their assault when a high pitched wail resounded from across the room. Diverting their attention from Harry, they watched with varying expressions on their faces as Narcissa slowly backed away from Draco, an unreadable expression on her face. That loud sound that drowned out even Harry's screams was emanating from the Malfoy heir who head was flung back.

His entire frame seemed to be rippling and magic started to radiate off his body in waves that caused objects in the room to rattle and shake. There was a pause in the wail in which the teenager seemed to take a hitching breath and then it happened. A burst of light surrounded the veela, having all but Narcissa blocking their eyes against its intensity. The light show lasted for a good minute before it faded away and tentatively, hands lowered to stare at the spot where Draco had stood.

However, the Draco they were familiar with was gone and in his place stood a fully matured veela.
His skin had darkened somewhat, looking as if he had been kissed by the sun, and his hair floated about him to his shoulders in an absent breeze. His face was more refined, his features slightly sharpened, highlighting his aristocratic blood even as his now silver gaze turned and stared piercingly at the shimmering barrier around the bed. His height was the same, but his shoulders had broadened considerably and beneath his shoes and the hands clenched tightly into fists one would find nails sharpened to points. But the most telling feature on the veela was the wings that fluttered slightly behind him.

Unlike his mother, he possessed four wings, two arched upwards to the heavens and a smaller pair that curved downwards. It had been two in his younger days Lucius noted as his perusal of his son continued. Draco carried himself with an easy grace that would put many to shame as he crossed the floor and with glinting eyes examined the barrier. He uttered a string of nonsensical words in a purring growl that many would find irresistible and his wings fluttered in agitation as his hand was repelled with it touched the barrier.

The response was instantaneous. An angry shriek tore from Draco's throat as within seconds he underwent a second transformation. The wings darkened from silver to a dull gray and the feathers seemed to merge together giving the wings a leathery appearance. The bottom two disappeared completely and Draco's hair now flew about him in an angry furrow as he snarled, revealing fanged teeth as he lifted on long taloned hand, slashing downwards with a sharp movement.

They all watched in shock as the barrier rippled for several moments before it shattered, drawing a satisfied growl from Draco as he jumped nimbly unto the bed and grasp Harry tightly, stunning them all by biting into his neck, an act which abruptly cut off of Harry's screams. Scared for the younger boy, Lucius made to raise his wand only to pause at Narcissa' warning. "No Lucius, do not interfere!"

"But-"

"It must be done," she reiterated although her voice was shaky at best.

Unwillingly a memory rose in Lucius' mind of a time when Narcissa had done such to him and thus he relented understanding the reasoning. They all watched quietly as Harry tensed beneath the veela's assault before going limp suddenly, one last moan passing his lips before he sank into peaceful oblivion. A keening purr erupted from Draco as he placed his mate calmly down against the seats, satisfied now that he had claimed ownership of his mate and Harry on some level had accepted it anew.

Reaching out through the bond, the veela found the barrier gone and was content. In peace now, he shifted into his less startling form and looked across at the gaping adults, smiling serenely at them before the adrenaline rush faded and the exhaustion of the transformation hit him, causing him to keel over Harry in a deep and undisturbable sleep.

It gave the adults the opening they needed to work on Harry and Narcissa in a show of strength lifted and carried Draco from the room, warning them not to enter the his bedroom until she gave them leave to. Although distracted now, Draco would be overwhelmed by his new found abilities when he woke up. It was up to her, as her duty as his veela elder to instruct him in controlling it. He would be allowed around no-one, not even his mate, until his control was assured.
Chapter 46

The funny thing about the human mind was that it never truly forgets anything. Not even an obliviate cast by the most skilled wizard can completely erase what a person experienced. Remnants of it always remained, manifested as feelings of déjà vu among other things. An even more unfortunate fact was that, when faced by a similar or equally daunting experience, the mind tended to bring forth that hidden and often painful memory. This fact explained why anytime Harry opened his eyes, they shone with barely contained fear and distrust – an expression that only faded when he was certain that he was indeed in his bedroom in Malfoy manor and not locked into that small cramped cupboard under the stairs.

For the painful sensations Harry now experienced whenever he was in the waking plane was not a new feeling for him. Once upon a time Harry Potter had few pain-free hours in the day. Falling asleep and waking up with painful twinges had been a way of life. The first time when Harry had slowly surfaced and felt an ache throbbing throughout his body, his heart had sank and somehow he feared that everything he recalled had been naught but a glorified dream on his part. That magic was not real; he did not have a mate, nor was he loved. Those painful thoughts had kept his eyes clenched for countless minutes as he prepared himself to awake to the long-legged spider he had long claimed for a pet. When he had finally braced himself and opened his eyes only to find that it had not been a dream, confusion filled him. If he was with his family, then why was he feeling so much pain?

His father's words of comfort had brought forth only confusion. Harry could not recall what the blonde-haired man was saying. A barrier, Draco transforming? None of that registered to him and he, in a shockingly hoarse voice, told the man this before turning his attention to the porridge placed on his lap. He didn't mean to sound so terse with the man but he was tired and aching, he did not want to hear anything at the moment, only wanting to concentrate on the hot porridge and figuring out just why his body was betraying him.

However, barely had he made a dent in his plain meal did the dull ache increase, startling him with the intensity of it. Immediately the fog of confusion he felt faded and a shriek worked its way passed his lips as he twitched, barely feeling the heat of the porridge spilled across his lap. That sting was naught but an ant's bite compared to what he was feeling on the inside. And somewhere in the back of his mind, separating for the roaring intensity that was his pain, Harry heard a maniacal laugh. Someone was taking great pleasure in his pain, and he had no way of stopping him.

Acclimatizing a newly matured veela to their new powers was a daunting task during regular circumstances. However, added to the stress of worrying about a mate, Narcissa Malfoy was finding the task of helping her son cope virtually impossible. Draco wanted nothing more than to be by Harry's side and that was not something she could allow at the moment. With his powers running rampant as it were currently, there was little doubt that the newly turned veela would only cause Harry harm, no matter how unwittingly done. More than that was the fact that the second Draco saw his mate in anything but perfect health, his hackles would most assuredly rise and none of them, especially Harry, needed to be around an enraged veela at the current time.

Of course, calmly explaining this to her son in a proper manner was proving to be a futile task and, had it not been for Narcissa fully understanding the stress the teenager was currently dealing with, the veela mother would have turned him over her knee post-haste for the deplorable behaviour he was showing, newly turned veela or not. Draco had already made it a necessity for her to transform
whenever she entered his room, for his first actions would always be to attack the 'enemy' keeping him from his mate.

Already for this visit the veela mother had nimbly dodged fireballs, whirlwinds and elongated claws. She tempered herself against responding in like, it would only anger him further and that was not what she wanted. However, talking to him in a calm even tone in their native tongue was not doing her much good. She needed him to allow his wizarding side, now lying dominant, to take control and give her son the control necessary to behave properly. Much like when he had been immature, Draco had to constantly manage the relationship of his inner selves. Before his change, it was his veela instincts that he had been forced to carefully manage. He had had to have an equal balance between the two. Now however, Narcissa needed for him to let his wizarding half dominant his veela form, or else he would be at the mercy of the whims of the magical beast.

Veelas were magical creatures, there was no doubt about that fact. Much like humans, the species had evolved over time. In the early years, veelas ran amok in the wilderness much like hippogriffs, werewolves or even fairies and elves. It was almost a millenia ago when the first human beings had stumbled across the wild creatures and through their interactions, the veela species started to evolve. They became, for a lack of a better term 'domesticated' the more time passed. A little over a hundred years after their first interactions, the veelas had taken the first major evolutionary step, abandoning their wilder form for the much tamer version that in modern days was the primary form of a non-enraged veela.

It was a few hundred years after that veelas and humans first mated, the occurrence that had spurred that first copulation still unknown. With that union, the veela gene pool had expanded considerably and with time, veelas were able to wield magic like wizards and also gained the ability to mimic their physical appearance, suppressing their true forms that were only accessible once they reached maturity. However, their ancient nature still held sway on them, especially on the newly transformed veelas who had never before experienced the power of that inner beast.

During the initial transformation, the veela was no better than that first primitive ancestor, it's only desire was to copulate with its chosen mate and protect them to the death. Such veelas lost their human ability to rationalise and it was up to an older veela to guide that part of their being into focus. To do so would leave the veela virtually harmless to all that it bore no ill will to. Those were the veelas that walked freely among society, with the rights of every other law-abiding citizen. However, there was always the odd case or two that cropped up now and again, where a veela's wizarding half was unable to wrest control and the veela remained dominant. Those persons were carded off to the Veela Council who from there would determine whether they could be aided. If they were help was rendered, but more often than not they were simply taken to an unplottable location where they would live their lives as their ancestors did, roaming the wilderness like animals. Periodic checks were made on such veelas occasionally to determine if their human nature had regained some degree of control. That was rarely the case and indeed, more often than not, the freedom their natural habitat provided often drove the last remnants of human inklings from the person, leaving them essentially wild. Such persons were often registered as deceased, as, for all purposes, they truly were dead, lost forever to the wizarding world.

That was definitely not a fate that Narcissa wanted for her little boy and she would prevent that from happening at all costs. Under regular circumstances, she would have little to fear for Draco. He already had an advantage in his transformation. He had a mate and even before his maturity, two of the four bonding stages had already been met. His link to Harry alone should have been anchor enough for his wizarding side to fight through and claim dominance. However, whatever it was that had happened that night, whatever change Draco had felt in his bond to Harry that drove him so far that his transformation had been induced had also angered his veela side so badly that it had claimed total control.
This could not continue much longer she knew, as she dodged yet another fireball. The minute his transformation had begun, a change in his status in the Veela Council records had been made and so, time was against her side. In situations like hers had been, when the veela blood in her family had been dormant so long that there was no mature veela around to help her, a representative had been sent who aided her through the process and taught her all that she needed to know. However, with her presence, it fell to her to teach Draco, but the time frame in which she had to at least get Draco tame was quickly elapsing. She was not positive, but with two days already gone, she knew that she had little less than a day or so remaining before the records caught the attention of someone and from there it would only be a matter of time before someone showed up to see if Draco needed to be taken away.

The panic and frustration this last thought caused led to her capturing the next fireball sent her way, and instead of destroying it, she flung it back at her son, who barely dodged it. Two could play at this game she decided grimly, as she let her wizarding side meld away. Reasoning was yielding no benefits and she would destroy the council single-handedly before she allowed them to take her son. No, if Draco could not be talked to, she would force his submission. Perhaps if restrained or at least dominated, her son's wizarding half could gain enough ground to tame the veela within. As she dodged a gust of wind, Narcissa unwittingly snarled in amusement. Son or not, Draco was a worthy opponent, and no matter how critical the situation, she had not battled against another veela in years. It would be fun.

In the end it was only with the aid of Lily and James that Narcissa escaped her son's bedroom with her life. It was a bittersweet moment. Pride for Draco's strength battled against the fear she had felt at the raw power her son exhibited once she openly challenged him. She should have known better she thought ruefully, nursing both her injuries and her pride. Given the strength of his mate, she should not have underestimated him. Veela mates were compatible on a number of scales, and although the closeness of their souls was one indicator, magical prowess was another factor.

Harry was a powerful wizard, surprisingly so given that, while his parents were brilliant in their given fields, their magic levels were only slightly above average. It was usually easy to judge a child's possible prowess by taking an average of their parent's power. Nevertheless, Harry's powers exceeded what was expected by far and a long time ago Albus had noted that such power could increase once again when Harry reached his magical majority. Given the way the child played around easily with magic that most adults struggled with, it was a scary thought and it was quite beneficial to the Light that he was on their side.

Draco's magic was not anything to scoff at either. When he had hit puberty, his magical range had expanded exponentially, making it so that he and Harry were put at the same level. With his transformation, it was almost guaranteed that he was now above his mate's level and would increase once again when he reached wizarding maturity as well. The Malfoy line was particularly renowned for their magical prowess, not the Black line contained anything less than extraordinary wizards themselves. From the start, Lucius and Narcissa had known that any child of theirs would be strong. The fact that he had followed his mother's nature as a veela only compounded that.

However, knowing that a child was powerful was completely different from experiencing that power first hand. Narcissa had felt a real moment of fear when Draco's talons had sliced into her side, throwing her off-balance. He was moments away from landing what could have very well been a fatal blow before James and Lily flew through the roof, Lily somehow gaining control of Draco's body by flying into him, dislodging his attack while James formed a sort of barrier around her, diverting all subsequent attacks until she could flee the room, the added ward preventing her son from doing the same.
With that roughish grin on his face, James had sent her off to heal herself, reassuring her that they would be able to help Draco. Having already come to the realisation that she was helpless against him, Narcissa could do nothing but obey, cleaning herself off as best as possible before going to her other son while waiting for word from the Potters. Tears sprung to the woman's eyes as she looked down at Harry's form.

Only two days and her boy looked a mere shadow of himself. His hair hung limply about him, skin a sickly colour while his face was contorted into a semi-permanent grimace as if even in his sleep he was plagued. Everyone was working to help him, trying to determine exactly what was causing Harry's episodes and subsequently how to counteract it. The best person to explain what was going on was possibly Harry himself and failing that Draco, however the latter was dealing with his own issues and the former, well he just wasn't in any shape to respond.

Severus was certain that somehow the Dark Lord was involved. It was too coincidental, the dreams increasing intensity followed directly by this. It was all linked he argued, however just how eluded him. It was a mystery that needed solving immediately. The timing of Harry's condition was bad for everyone, but it could not be helped. With the staff at Hogwarts already considerably thinned, Severus was needed at the castle now more than ever. The most he could do currently was set up the bases for the potions and leave careful instructions for how they were to be brewed. Luckily for them all, Remus' senses for potions had not considerably dulled over the years and he proved a worthy substitute for his lover, tending the potions with an admirable grace. Added to that, Remus browsed through Severus' journals, looking for viable substitutes to the potions they were currently using. It would not do for Harry to grow addicted along with everything else.

Lucius had all but turned over the running of his businesses to his second in command while he delved into the infamous Black libraries researching everything he could find on cursed scars based on Albus' advice. So far, he had not crossed anything remotely near what Harry suffered, but it was still worth the effort. The headmaster was most apologetic for his absence but wracked his brains from his place in Durmstrang for anything that could prove remotely helpful. More than once he thought that one of Durmstrang's students paid him a bit too much attention, but with Harry on his mind he did little mulling over it.

Most surprisingly was the fact that Sirius, the goofball among the adults had all but taken on the leadership role, corralling them all so that they did not neglect themselves in their desperation to aid Harry. It was he who chased Remus out of the laboratory periodically for fresh air, he who made sure that Draco was being fed and Narcissa given a respite from her attempts. But most importantly, with journals spread across his lap for reading, he kept vigil over his godson, carefully wiping him down when his body grew sweaty, warmed him when his skin grew clammy and placed the now required tongue depressors into his mouth so that he was not in danger of suffocating whenever a wave of pain hit him. He took his duties of godfather seriously after all.

There were many drawbacks to Lily and James continuous stay in the realm of the living, the most troubling was that they were no longer privy to the information they received while on the other side. As it was, it was only for an odd flash of recollection Lily had from one of the timelines they had been shown a few years back, that the redhead had pulled James from their primary mission and led them back to their family. Her intuition had been right. Barely had they crossed into Malfoy Manor did they feel the turbulence radiating out of Draco. This had been what Lily remembered seeing – Narcissa gravely injured by her own son whom for some reason was overwhelmed by what he had become.

And so, she and her husband intervened, sending Lady Malfoy away. After all, unlike her, there was
nothing Draco could do against them. It only took them a few minutes to determine the necessary course of action. Draco's veela was too enraged to allow any coherent thought other than to attack. All that was necessary was giving the blonde's logical side a moment of coherency and the veela would be tamed. The problem arose because, enraged or not, the Occlumency shields that had been taught to the Malfoy heir remained raised, and had to be overcome first in order to help him. The Potters took turns battering at the shields, trying to create a sliver of a break in it, one that would allow them access to his mind.

It took considerable effort on their parts but finally there was a breech and immediately Lily surged inwards, immersing herself in her blonde son's mind. Inside it, she found only chaos and confusion, animalistic thought patterns merging with more sophisticated ones. After only a few seconds, she grimaced. Had her mind been that chaotic, she would have been wild as well she thought wryly. Manoeuvring proved most difficult as she could not pinpoint the fragment of Draco's mind that she needed to act upon. Wading through his mind while simultaneously deflecting his automatic attempts to push her out proved wearisome, but luckily, James was there to offer assistance, ensuring that the created crack in his shields remained open.

Finally, after what seemed like an endless search, she stumbled across the place where the bond between Harry and Draco connected and gently touched it. It sparked in recognition, the faint traces of Harry's soul that resided within her essence urging forth a response. Touching it again she was bombarded with memories and emotions and through that link she watched with sorrow as to the condition of her little boy. So that was the crux of the matter, Draco the wizard had been unable to help his mate and so the veela had taken over, determined to do what he had not managed. Well, as noble a thought as it was, she could not allow it. The wizarding side had to reign supreme. With that in mind, she reached out following the bond to where Draco was being repressed and tugged firmly. In that split second, where she distracted the veela raging by her unexpected touch, Draco surged forward, guided by the familiarity of her soul and took route. The veela was now under control. With Lily's help, it had been tamed.

From the outside, James saw the immediate effect. Although still in its veela form, Draco's eyes cleared, losing the crazed look even as his body relaxed. As Lily emerged from him, the blonde started swaying, the shock of once more regaining control too much for him. As he keeled backwards, James forced him backwards with a burst of power and so he dropped onto his bed, asleep within seconds.

"At least one of our boys are better," Lily sighed as she slumped against her husband, smiling as his hand wrapped around her waist.

"I only wish helping Harry could be as simple," James sighed, nuzzling her hair slowly as they walked through the walls until they were in their son's room. Narcissa was asleep, bent forward until her head was cushioned against the bed. "She must be exhausted."

"Indeed," Lily agreed, "although I hardly remember how exhaustion feels. Shall we wake her?"

"There is no need, let her rest for now. We'll look over Harry in her stead."

* *

With the intervention of the Potters, Draco's training went smoother even as Harry's condition worsened. Even as Draco mastered the skills he needed, everything from learning to keep in control of himself to matter the situation, to controlling his allure which now assuredly could render people insane, to more mundane tasks like learning to retract his wings so that he could move about while transformed unhindered and mastering the few aspects of the veela language he had not inherently acquired, Harry faced more pain.
By the end of the first week, Harry was already a pale shadow of himself. They had reached the threshold with his first potion regiment, and unfortunately, the next one that Severus hoped would be most effective could not be taken for at least two days while the current one completely left Harry's system. That left forty-eight hours where Harry was forced to endure the pain as best as he could. Unlike the first few days, the attacks were not constant now, Voldemort having put his torment of him on the back burner in favour of moving house to his old base and summoning the few followers of his not imprisoned.

This left Harry on most occasions simply nursing the after-effects of having one's magic turn against you. His hands were weak and trembled noticeably. His appetite had all but gone and already he had lost three pounds. His nerves were shot, the easiest noise frightened him and his skin was extremely sensitive. He could hardly bare any touch, not even a light caress any more and that fact pained him deeply for what he wanted most was to feel himself wrapped in the comforting embrace of an adult and held and squeezed until he felt safe and loved. The pain denied him such.

At first, the respite in the pain came as a welcome relief to all. It was only halfway through his second attack free day that Harry realised just how wrong that assumption was. With little left to do currently while he waited for his called servants to arrive, Voldemort in his boredom had sought Harry out through their link. The pain this time was worse than ever. Harry quickly learnt that constant pain was a blessing over sporadic ones. For, in the few pain free hours, his body had relaxed and lost the small resistance it had built up from the continuous onslaught. And so, from the very first twinge, Harry screamed, hurting his already raw throat.

Lucius, the nearest one, ran to him immediately, but as always, there was nothing he could do. Touching Harry not only caused him further pain, but risked another barrier. A sleeping spell was not strong enough to put Harry deep enough asleep so that the pain could not touch him and potions were still out of the question for another few hours. And so, there was absolutely nothing Lucius could attempt. And so, he stood there, completely helpless while he watched his child's back arched as he struggled to bear the pain, tears running down his cheeks as he waited for the pain to reach its threshold, that point where, Harry, unable to bear it anymore would retreat into the safety of his mind and fall into unconsciousness and gain a temporary reprieve.
Harry's bedroom was quiet, the only sounds coming from the lightly fluttering curtains in the breeze. Two figures lay on the large bed, one breathing shallowly, eyes closed as he tried to relax as much as possible in the twenty minutes or so he had left before his next potion, one that would render him unconscious for twelve or so hours, giving him respite from his current aches.

Besides him, a mere inches away on his stomach lay a blonde teenager whose current looks would make the hearts of teenage witches throb madly, not that such a factor currently or ever would be important to him. He laid as close as possible to his smaller mate as the situation allowed, not risking worsening his condition by touching him. Instead, his left wing hovered a hair's breath over his mate, almost covering his body entirely. It was the closest thing to a hug they had managed in a long time, but at least they were close to each other.

Propped on one elbow, the veela's eyes roved over the one who meant the most to him, a slight smile creasing his face as memories of their past waved through his mind, times that they had shared together and he would savour forever. A pendant glinted from his mate's chest and he reached out to gently stroke it. Only he and Harry could remove it, it was a sign of ownership. Harry was his and he was the boy's. The pendant around his own neck symbolised that.

Harry shifted slightly, his head slowly turning so he could give a wane smile to the person besides him. "You're so beautiful," he said softly and sincerely, inspecting the face before him.

Draco looked like an angel, and not simply because of his wings. There was an atmosphere around the boy; one that Harry could only describe as being heavenly. No matter how much he was suffering, Draco's presence made everything seem better. He loved how his mate looked now, and had a few days previous asked him to remain so as much as possible. As far as he knew, the veela had yet to change back.

His eyes were the deepest shade of silver Harry could ever remember seeing. The warmth and love in those eyes drew him in and he felt as if he could look into them forever. And Draco's face on a whole, even more aristocratic seemed infinitely more beautiful to him. His skin fairly glowed, and his hair, now as long as his own, gave him a slightly roughish look even among all the aristocracy. Were it possible, Harry would run his hands through his mate's hair, just to see if it were as soft as it looked.

"You are quite adorable yourself pet," the veela responded softly, in that recently acquired purring tone that sent an unfamiliar tingle down Harry's spine. He could listen to that voice forever, letting it's quality roll over him and comfort him.

As he spoke, the wing above Harry fluttered, creating a gentle breeze that wafted softly over him. Harry sighed in thanks, his eyes softening the slightest bit even as his lips tightened minutely. "I am not," he murmured, turning his face back so that he could stare at his ceiling, "you shouldn't lie to me dominant. I look like a scare-crow."

"No you don't," the veela said sharply, his tone slightly aggressive. His mate was perfect and he would not stand for anyone insulting what was his, even if the person doing it was the boy himself. "You are beautiful to me, do not dare say otherwise." Harry's only reply was a mild snort as his eyes drifted close.

Harry's physique had changed, Draco thought, but he was no less beautiful to him. So what if his face was almost gaunt? The dimple on the corner of his mouth, the one that was usually barely
discernible amidst his baby fat was clearly visible with the slightest movement. Yes, he had lost considerable weight and his skin was a sickly colour and his voice gritty and hoarse. Despite it all, Draco still saw him as the most appealing person on the planet; that would never change, no matter what.

"I love you not for what you look like Harry James," Draco said seriously, "but for who you are. Skinny or fat, tall or short, you will always be beautiful to me."

"I feel so useless," Harry said tiredly after a brief silence. "Plus I'm lying to everyone. I don't like it."

"You aren't lying," the veela countered, "you're just withholding the complete truth for your own safety."

"Also known as deception?" he rebutted, "something you often chastise me for?"

"This time it is different Harry James. It is out of necessity that you must continue to do so. What do you think the result will be if word gets out to the public about your condition? Whether we like it or not cub, many people believe that you are the saviour of our world. Once it goes public that Voldemort is back, they will expect you to step up to the task once again, no matter your age or the fact that no one knows how you vanquished him the first time.

"We cannot have mass pandemonium in the wizarding world, especially with a threat to our safety once more present. It is as I told you before Harry. You will be very influential in our world one day. Sometimes the things we do must be done with others in mind."

"What's the story anyway? If I am not 'that' sick, why aren't we back at Hogwarts?"

"My majority," Draco said with a slight quirk to his lips, "gave the perfect reason. As far as the school knows, Draco Malfoy has become so strong that intense training is required. Obviously his dedicated mate will not leave his side and so both have temporarily withdrawn from the school."

"Oh," was Harry's only reply as he closed his eyes for a bit.

His friends at Hogwarts were not the only persons he was referring too. No, there was also his secret friend who even now had probably written to him, not that he was in any shape to respond, with or without Draco's presence besides him. Viktor was concerned for him, very much so and the false information he was feeding to his Bulgarian friend was starting to grate on him. As far as his friend knew, he was suffering from continuous debilitating headaches whose cause had yet to be determined.

He highly doubted that the Bulgarian believed him past the fact that he was ill. Unless there was dark magic involved, there was no probable way for him to still be sick and it was something that Viktor had very much hinted at the last time Harry had squandered a few of his precious minutes of wakefulness to read. Harry did little more than reassure him that he was on the mend, albeit at a slow pace and that he was not privy to the research his family was conducting trying to help him. The Bulgarian had accepted his words although Harry could almost feel the reluctance radiating from the message.

"It's time for your next dose," Draco said presently and Harry felt slightly bereft as the winged teenager moved away and off the bed, returning a few minutes later with his potion. "Can you rise?" he asked softly.

"Barely," Harry grimaced as he sat up, pointedly avoiding looking at his hand as he accepted the potion. Carefully he sipped it until the vial was empty before slumping back down again; marvelling
at how such a simple action had rendered him almost exhausted. "Come back here."

"Just putting down the vial," Draco reassured him and seconds later, he settled back down into his previous spot besides his mate. "Now relax and let the potion work. I'll be here when you wake up, I promise."

"Wish you could hold me," Harry mumbled. The potion had taken effect by now and he found himself slowly drifting away from reality as sleep neared, Draco's voice slowly fading away until nothing was left but that peaceful darkness that thankfully contained no pain.

And when, minutes later, Draco was positive that Harry was too deep asleep to feel anything, he bent over and kissed his lips softly, wishing that he could offer such comfort to the boy when he was awake.

* *

If anyone had ever told Severus that his office would be in total disarray and that he would not give a damn, he would have laughed in his or her face. Nevertheless, that was just the situation the man's office was in now. There was hardly a place in the room that was not covered by some text or note he had made and stuck up at some point, all in his attempts to help his little bratling.

And the funny thing was, he did not need half of what lay around. He had read through them all so thoroughly and repetitively that he could probably quote whole books word for word. And still there was no answer to his dilemma and time was quickly running out for one Harry James Potter.

It had been a little over three weeks since a panicked Narcissa had called her husband to Harry's side. His breathing was erratic and at times he seemed to be struggling for a next breath. And that was exactly the case the family healer confirmed once he had been summoned. Under an oath not to reveal anything, Healer Madison was provided with all the information that they had managed to gather and had set to work.

His prognosis was grim. While they had been treating Harry for the pain, none of them had considered that there were further ramifications. Pain was an indicator that something was wrong with the body, the man lectured them even as he scanned Harry, revealing that everything, from his organs to nerves were under pressure and were starting to degrade. That explained his trouble breathing; his lungs were under too much strain. And that was only the start. His blood when tested showed too many toxins, a signal that his liver was malfunctioning. The only organ seemingly unaffected was his heart, a fact that mystified the healer but was deemed a good sign.

A potions regiment was set up for Harry, one that was religiously followed. Nutrient potions replaced the food that was now too painful for consumption and three different healing potions were to be either fed or spelled into him daily to prevent further damage, especially in the aftermath of another episode. It was already clear that until the attacks completely stopped, Harry's body could not heal. However what was equally evident was the fact that if the attacks were not controlled soon, the damage Harry suffered would exceed the potions' capability, and that was not a situation that any member of the family dwelled on too deeply these days.

Every possible explored avenue had turned up nothing thus far and with each passing day, the family grew more and more frustrated. Harry was not suffering from a curse, hex, poison, nor could anything be found in his genetics that would explain what he suffered. Voldemort was the cause of it; he had stated that from day one and still stood by his belief. Every indicator supported that fact and even though he had yet to show it, he had proof now to support his claim.

From his desk Severus drew a shrunken parchment and enlarged it, dropping it uncaringly over the
unmarked essays on his desk and perusing it. He had drawn a timeline, one that he carefully added to with each attack on Harry and the Death Eater movement. For Voldemort was back, somehow once more alive. The rumours had started circulating in dark circles somewhere in early March. Lily and James were able to confirm the validity days later after they returned grim faced.

More and more, wizards and witches baring slight remnants of Voldemort's essence were emerging; essences that radiated from their left arms. And, as Severus knew first hand, there was only one wizard whom could create and embed the Dark Mark into the skin of his followers. There was no denying it, somehow or another the man was back and with his return, the Order of the Phoenix was thrown into activity. He was recruiting heavily, much as he had done in the early days but at least this time, they had fair warning. Thanks to Lucius' influence on the Minister, efforts were already being established to stem the man's reach. More than that, he did not know as he had skipped the past few meetings in favour of his current task.

It was around April when a pattern in his timeline finally emerged. He had taken careful note of everything, every 'accidental fire' or unexplained muggle death and finally he saw it. Obscure at first, the link was easy to miss, but there, laid out before him was the proof that it was Voldemort causing Harry's pain. For, on the days with Death Eater related incidences, Harry suffered no additional pain. The same held true for the days immediately before and after each instance. The reverse was also true. In the lag between attacks, Harry found himself randomly writhing in pain.

The meaning of this fact was easily explainable to him once he recovered the penseive from the first war and delved into it. Voldemort always kept muggles and muggleborns around for entertainment. Hooks around his throne and meeting rooms hanged them and whenever he was bored or thinking, he tortured them. He did it with the enthusiasm a child would show a favoured toy, a malicious smirk creasing his lips as he heard them scream or watched them writhe futilely against his assault until he finally killed them. It was obvious that somehow he had gotten to Harry and now used him as his entertainment.

Whatever he was using to access Harry linked back to the nightmares the boys had suffered from. Wait. Severus' brows furrowed over that last thought and with a look of contemplation on his face, he dropped heavily unto his chair, squishing a quill that had somehow ended up on it. He had used plurality. Harry had not been the only sufferer of the nightmares. Draco had been plagued with it as well. Severus' eyes widened at the sudden realisation. Both Harry and Draco had been plagued with visions, something that he still believed the Dark Lord knew nothing about. This meant that he had not done anything to prevent Draco from feeling pain as well. So how was it that he was unaffected?

It did not add up, he thought. Both mates suffered from the visions and if it was the same connection being utilised, it meant that both should be in pain. But only Harry was. What had changed, he mused. Something obviously was protecting Draco, and if he could figure that out, he had the answer to Harry's situation.

It was another hour before the answer came to him and he stood abruptly, grabbing a hand full of floo powder to head to Malfoy Manor. It was a random image, one of Draco wrapped around Harry to gave him the answer in the end. It was the night – one of the boys' last in Hogwarts when Harry had been crying hysterically over a vision. Draco had been comforting him when he had run into their quarters and when asked, shook his head lightly and said that he was not affected. That was the answer!

The only thing that had changed from the visions start to now was that Draco knew Occlumency. Voldemort's connection to Harry was a mental one, proved by the fact that once Draco mastered it, he was unaffected. The answer had been there all along. He was certain now, that if his godson lowered his shields while Harry was being attacked, he too would feel pain, and if the nightmares...
were anything to go by, it would be to a lesser extent than Harry would feel.

The mystery was solved. They knew what caused Harry's condition. The problem now? Harry struggled with the mind arts while he was in a healthy state. In his current state though, the chances of him mastering it were squarely none.

"Ah!" Everyone in the room flinched when Draco doubled over, gasping for breath as pain coursed through his veins. More than once eyes flickered over to the boy grimacing on the bed and back again for several seconds, and just when Harry erupted a small moan, Severus signalled Draco to raise his shields and seconds after he did, the veela dropped to his knees, breathing heavily.

His mother was by his side instantly, fussing over him with tears in her eyes while Lucius kept a light touch on Harry's chest, hoping that somewhere in the midst of what he was going through he would feel his papa's touch, one of love and comfort. Draco was standing by now he saw, the silver in his eyes dark with rage.

"I'll kill him," he hissed in a deadly serious tone so that none in the room doubted him. "I will kill him for what he has done!"

"It really is Voldemort?" Severus asked unnecessarily, simply wanting to hear the truth from someone else. "He is hurting Harry?"

"Yes it's him," Draco spat, his talons lengthening and darkening. "He's happy. Happy that Harry can't stop the pain, happy that he's hurting. It's a game to the bastard and he will pay!"

"He will," Lucius agreed, his own silver eyes glinting as they met his son's. "No one hurts Harry and gets away with it. Not the Dursleys and neither will he. Dark Lord or not, he will suffer for this."

"But how do we stop this?" Narcissa asked tersely, bringing them back to the matter at hand. "How can we stop Harry's connection to him?"

"Draco can do it," Severus said simply. "It will be difficult and I don't know if it will work, far less if it has been tried before."

"Yet you are certain I can do it?" Draco asked dubiously, looking at his godfather.

A shadow of a smile crinkled at the potions master's lips as he responded. "Draconis Lucius Malfoy, if there is one thing that you and our little brat has taught me over the years is that impossible is not a word that applies to you. The mere fact that it is difficult reassures me that you can and will succeed. You are too stubborn not to."

A subdued chuckle circled the room at his words but all the occupants could hope for, as the pain receded from Harry for now was that the man was right and the veela could truly surmount the impossible and help his mate.

He had been warned not to try it without at least one person present in case he got drawn into the link himself inside of pulling Harry from it, but Draco could wait no longer. Not after the third attack in one day, the last of which had tears running down Harry's cheeks, even in his unconscious state. No, not another minute, he thought as he crept towards his mate's bed, turning on the lights with a click of his fingers as he walked. Not when he knew the answer, not when he could prevent Harry's pain. It was going on two months now, two months too long and he was determined that when
Harry's eyes opened on the first of June, the new month would herald a new start for him.

With that in mind he gently crawled unto the bed, sitting aside Harry, his legs and hands straddling him as he leaned close. Harry was deep asleep, potion induced, but at the minute that did not matter, Draco was positive he could rouse him. And rouse him he did. Harry's instincts were innate, only death could stop him from answering his dominant's directives.

He leaned nearer, his wings fanning out around him as he placed his lips near to Harry's ear, his warm breath fanning over it. He thought carefully, drawing up those ancient words that would make Harry completely obedient to his will, unable to do anything but heed him. Yes, there it was; the words he had not learnt but still resided in his heart.

In a tone radiating pure authority, Draco spoke. "Submissive, you will obey me fully for I am your dominant and I have your best interests at heart. My will must be obeyed."

Beneath him he sensed a subtle shift in Harry. His mate was now aware, listening carefully to what was required of him. "Good boy," he praised, his tone lighting slightly. "Wake for me Harry. Rise above the drug, it does not matter, only me. Open your eyes submissive and look upon me."

A wave of relief washed over Draco when he felt Harry shift off before his eyes opened. They were unseeing as first, but he was patient and soon Harry was blinking slightly as he met his silver gaze.

"Open your mind to me," Draco commanded in that same tone, moving so his eyes was only inches from his mate's. "You will not fight me in this. I am your dominant, I will be obeyed."

Patience was required, that much he knew. Harry was not fully conscious and his mind was still consumed by the drug. It would take time for him to lift away the barriers the potion had created and allow Draco, the one with the right to possess him so, to enter. Finally a part way was created and Draco's eyes dilated slightly as he slipped into his mate's mind.

It was a new experience to say the least and he was bombarded with memories as they flitted pass. A hint of amusement ran through him. His mate's mind was similar to his personality. There was no apparent order to his memories but Draco was certain that to Harry this disarray was perfectly logical. A part of him was tempted to peek around a bit at Harry's experiences, especially at that far corner that was partially hidden away. It could not keep him out if he truly wished to see it, he knew, Harry would do anything for him in his current state, but, as he reminded himself, he was not here for that. Indeed, Harry's memories were the least of his concern.

With that in mind he sent a silent message to Harry, ordering him to lead him to the part of his mind where bonds and connections were established. In moments all the memories rose in a rush, creating momentary chaos before all that was left were several threads, some no bigger than a string, others Draco would not be able to wrap both his hands around. He was particular pleased to know that that thread, a bright golden one, was his connection to Harry and happily he skimmed his over it, warmth radiating in his heart immediately. He had no doubt that it was doing the same to Harry.

Patting it one final time Draco walked passed it, idly touching the others to discern their links. The next thickest bonds were linked to their family he saw. They were no where near as strong as his with Harry. At most he guessed that these were the links between family members, the ones that bonded them together in love. Some of the thinner ones were to Harry's friends. Ron, Hermione, Blaise, Mallicent and all the other persons that Harry cared for.

However there were two that he could not trace. One was a dull purple colour, no thicker than his finger but as he neared it, he felt a mild repulsion that had him frowning. Why did he feel this way? Why did his inner veela feel disgusted by this bond Harry felt to someone, urging him to severe it?
He almost gave into the urge but repelled it. He was not here for that. Scolding himself mildly for becoming distracted he moved to the last bond, black and oozing with evil. Here it was, Voldemort's connection.

Pausing slightly Draco ordered Harry to move his other connections to safety and soon he was left facing the dark thread, thin compared to the rest but, as he was sure it would be stronger than them all. Eradicating it would be virtually impossible, not with Voldemort in his current state. And it would not do for the man to realise that someone was manipulating his connection to Harry. That was the difficulty his uncle referred too. The Dark Lord was legendary at the mind arts and severing the link to Harry would do little but aggravate it. Indeed, his godfather had feared that if he chose to, the Dark Lord could possibly kill Harry before they could even get half way through the severing process.

Nevertheless, Draco had no intention of cutting the connection or even attempting too. It was not worth the risk. He had thought long and hard about what his godfather had suggested, but in the end, observing the bond as he was, he decided that it was not the best way. What Severus wanted him to do was try to isolate the connection, creating a 'mental cage' within Harry's mind that it could be trapped in, one that Draco controlled. The Dark Lord would still be able to enter Harry's mind though, however in that 'cage' no harm could be done, leaving Harry safe.

The problem with that plan Draco realised now was that the cage could be broken if Voldemort tried hard enough. Who was to say that there was absolutely no other connection in Harry's mind that the man could slip through? That was a risk Draco was not willing to take, and so, he modified his uncle's plan.

Instead of focusing on the connection yet, he walked along it till he found the source, the point at which it began. He was careful not to touch it in any way, but as he neared the ending he heard it. Soft at first but with increasing volume the more he walked. Voldemort's hissing voice as he spoke to unseen persons. Severus had been right. He did not know the connection existed. This could work to our advantage, Draco thought idly as he stopped.

Now for the hard part. Draco concentrated, finding his own mental self amidst Harry's. It took a while to differentiate the two, but once he did, he grasp at it fully, bringing to mind every technique needed to create an Occlumency barrier. And then he started to duplicate it and push it out of himself and into Harry. Time had no place for him as he worked, first dropping his own shields to the size of pea before creating another that he 'planted' in Harry's mind.

From there he took the time to create the controls needed to manage both. Finally when he was certain that he was in full control of the two shields, he started enlarging them, spreading them wide until all of their memories were surrounded, free from plunder. And then over the connections, all of them until only the one too Voldemort remained. He paused for a while, moving slower than before as he neared the connection point. If done too fast the Dark Lord might notice the muting and react. It had too be done gradually and a gradual rate it was. Unknown to Draco it took almost two hours of real time before at last his barriers surrounded the connection and pinned it shut. The connection now blocked, much like a clogged pipe.

He worked quickly from there, spreading out the shields until their entire minds were encapsulated in it, totally protected from assault. None could breech their minds without his permission. He had done it. But it was not time to relax yet, he reminded himself as he moved slightly, calling for Harry to bring back to light all the other connections. He moved once more to the golden thread and lay a hand on it, stroking lightly.

"Harry," he ordered, "you will not fight my shield. It is for your own safety. You will not in any way
try to alter it without my consent." The thread throbbed once, Harry's agreement, he supposed and satisfied, he started retreating from his mate's mind.

He was exhausted when he finally emerged, blinking dazedly. Harry's eyes still stared forward at him. "Mate I release you from your dictates, but remember the shield must not be touched."

The result was instantaneous and Harry's eyes shut as he slumbered once more. It was only when Draco tried to roll off the boy that he realised just how drained he was. So tired was he that he could do little but slump sideways, ensuring that all of his weight was not on his mate before he fell into a deep slumber. Draco fell asleep with a smile on his face, as for the first time in months, he could fulfil Harry's wish. He was holding his mate in his arms.

Neither Narcissa nor Lucius thought it strange when Draco did not show up for breakfast, he tended to spend his time in Harry's room as off late. They had worked him relentlessly the day before, trying to expand his capabilities in Occlumency so that he could better treat Harry, so they assumed that he would take a lie-in. They would carry a tray for him in a little while they decided and continued with their meal.

It was at its conclusion that their world took a turn for the better. Twin pops startled them as the boys' elves stood before them, struggling to speak over their sobs. Dobby barely croaked out Harry's names before the Malfoys, fearing the worst apparated to his bedroom, bracing themselves. Narcissa entered first, tears already watering in her eyes only to stop abruptly, Lucius nearly knocking her over at the sight before her.

There, in the centre of the bed, laid Draco fast asleep, his wings fanned out about him. But that was not what pulled them up short. It was where Draco's head laid. The veela's head was cushioned in the lap of his mate, a boy they had been unable to touch for weeks. But Harry was touching him in return, his hands carding shakily but continuously through the blonde locks as he crooned softly, his hoarse voice barely there but nonetheless music to their ears. He was sitting up, stiff yet, but without that stoop to his shoulders that indicated that he was barely restraining his pain.

"Harry?" Lucius whispered in a tone mixed with both hope and disbelief.

The boy's head turned slowly and the married couple clutching instinctively at each other as they waited for his eyes to meet them. Narcissa's knees buckled when they did, forcing Lucius, barely in a better state, to support her. His eyes were alive. The tiredness was still there but the emerald orbs were brighter than they had been in recent times. There was no pain, no sign of suffering, none of the fear he felt but refused to verbalise. And immediately they knew that the connection was closed.

Sometime in the dead of night Draco had disobeyed them, had breached Harry's mind and blocked the connection that had been the root of their troubles. Neither Malfoy could bring themselves to be angry at the fact. Not when Harry's hands was slowly extending towards them, the invitation clear. How could they even phantom being angry with their son's disobedience when right now they were seated on either side of Harry, Draco's wings brushing at their legs as he slept on while they cooed their boy, raining kisses all over his face until he protested...then invited more.

"No, the only thing either Malfoy could think about, in between happy sobs and teary questions was that their little boy was back, free once again from Voldemort's embrace. Yes, the battle was far from over. Voldemort was once more mortal, or immortal depending on how one viewed it and soon enough the world would be terrorised by his presence. Yes the road to recovery for Harry would be a long one as his body struggled to heal and regain the strength that it had lost. True they would undoubtedly face more difficulties as time went on, how could they not with the child of the
prophecy snuggled now in their arms.

But none of that mattered at the moment. The only thing that was important was that, for now, Harry James Potter was once more safe.
Harry really could not pinpoint the exact moment his feelings for his mate changed. It might have been that one afternoon when he had rested with his head cradled in the veela's lap, while said veela fed him slowly, easing bites of fruit past his lips with a tenderness that left Harry feeling loved.

Or even that one time when, completely frustrated by how far behind he was with his assignments, he had retaken his habit of pelting his books. Draco had brought him up short, grasping his raised hand before peering down at him with a masterful look that did little to chasten him but rather made his inner veela stir curiously.

Yet again, there was that evening when he had been so reluctant to part with Draco for even those scant thirty minutes it would have taken him to shower. For the first time in weeks he had wandered out of his bedroom and into his mate's, only to feel his cheeks darken when his dominant wandered out without his shirt, tousling at his hair. There was something about the image he presented that had left him stammering for several minutes, his flush only increasing when Draco shot him a lazily indulgent smile.

No, the exact moment was not discernable, but if there was one thing that Harry knew for certain, it was that he did not feel the same way towards his mate as he always had. There was something deeper in his emotional reactions to his mate, something that he had yet to fully grasp but still welcomed, and he placed it as another change in the dynamics of their relationship. Getting used to his new Draco – or dominant as he found himself referring to him more and more with time was a daunting task.

In the first week or two after he had been given a new lease on life as he tended to look at it, he had done little more than recover. It had taken almost three weeks before the healer pronounced his body to be in a stable condition. That fact had shocked Harry to his very core. Since when did potions not offer a quick fix? It only proved how badly his body had been hurt. But what was worse in Harry's opinion was the fact that his magic had been affected by his prolonged exposure to Voldemort.

It was not as if his powers had decreased, it was all there and available to him. The problem was that Harry could not quite make it work up to his normal proficiency. He had been unable to heal himself at all, and, his first attempt to transfigure his pillow had been paltry at best. However as time passed his control of it was improving, to the point that he was certain that he would be up to his usual standard whenever they returned to Hogwarts.

Draco had been most understanding in that first and hardest period, shushing him gently on the nights when he had been afraid to sleep, still not fully trusting that his mind was secure. That same veela valiantly made the seemingly endless amounts of potions he required daily seem like a less than arduous task, distracting him by kissing him tenderly after each vial was drained. That thoughtfulness and consideration still existed to this very day.

Even now, his veela was out persuading their parents that Harry would not come to harm going onto the grounds for an hour or two. Yes his immune system was still woefully fragile, but surely with a bubble charm or the sort completely surrounding the gazebo, germs could be held at bay. Harry had little doubt that his dominant would not get his way. Draco was a stubborn veela, more so now that all of his instincts were awakened and therefore, what his submissive wanted, his submissive would get.

That thought brought a small smile to Harry's mouth. Mama had warned him that Draco would not always be this flexible. His indulgence to Harry's whims was based solely on the fact that he found
nothing threatening in their current environment. With little danger on the horizon, he saw nothing wrong with spoiling his mate with the leniency that he was denied in school. If Harry did not feel to complete his essay then so be it, he could do it another day. If he wanted chocolate for breakfast, well, it was not as if he did not have a good few pounds to regain.

In fact, in recent times, the only sign of his stricter mate, the one who something made Harry want to bop him a good one or two, came when he acted out to an extreme level, such as his episode with his text. And even then, Draco's annoyance had been directed more to the fact that Harry had been expending needless energy that could set back his progress more than any true anger towards his actions in itself. The veela had a one track mind these days and that was getting Harry back on his feet and racing around the manor like the little hellion he was.

This mature Draco was a person Harry loved to look at, and luckily for him, his mate facilitated it. He was fascinated by Draco's new form; there was no other way to put it. It was not as if he found it strange and too different from how he was accustomed to seeing him, it was the fact that now that he had seen his mate as such, his human self seemed...inadequate. It seemed almost unnatural and restrictive to see his mate's pure beauty secreted away behind his wizarding appearance.

Not that he was any less impressive then, but there was something about the way he carried himself in his true form. He exuded a radiance and aura around him that immediately made him the most noteworthy thing in a room, something that one could not turn their eyes away from. And those wings, those silver delights that Harry giggled over as he ran his hands along the feathers, embedding each contour into his mind. They were personally his favourite new toys, especially the way Draco teased him with them, fluttering them against his face in a gesture that tickled, or otherwise creating an unexpected gust of wind when Harry least expected it. And of course, there was that one day when Harry had looked out his window to see Draco flying a few feet above the ground, his mother by his side as she taught him control.

Few veelas bothered to learn the task; indeed, his mama had mentioned that quite a few chose to have their wings magically removed to add inconspicuousness to their appearances, even when transformed. Harry would have hexed his mate seven ways to hell had he even mentioned it. Those wings were a part of his nature and there was no way he would see them removed. Some wizards – well veelas in this case – were extremely lazy. Two days previous their mother had started to teach Draco how to retract his wings into himself, only bringing them forth when needed. It was a tiring exercise and took remarkable concentration to keep the massive wings hidden away within his flesh. It was why most chose the easy way, but Draco was learning it regardless.

The door was opening now, and Harry turned his head, a smile playing at his lips when Draco entered. He was dressed casually in a dark blue trousers and a plain white shirt rolled up at the sleeves, with the first few buttons undone. His mate had reached the age where he was starting to take pride in his body. Even though his maturity had toned his frame, Draco had taken to sparring with whomever was available so that his body was slowly taking on a lean yet muscular hue that was admirable. The fact that Draco refused a robe in order to show off his firmer frame was proof enough of that fact.

"Mother says that we may go," he said easily, even as he scooped the veela mate into his arms, chuckling softly when Harry gave a shocked gasp before wrapping his arms securely around his neck. "We are to take care of course, but then again, I always take care of you."

The tone Draco used, a mixture of authority, casualness and even teasing brought forth a soft flush from Harry that the veela could not help but comment on, earning him a mild glare before Harry dropped the gaze. He did not even protest against being carried like this while Draco strolled through the manor, and out onto the grounds, heading in the general direction of the gazebo.
"You are good to me," he murmured softly, his fingers playing through the ends of the blonde's hair before he rest his head against his shoulder. He could have walked, he acknowledged, but undoubtedly he would have been exhausted by the time they reached the gazebo. Besides, he rather liked his position, cradled against his stronger, more resilient mate. He felt surrounded and secure, as if his whole existence had narrowed down to simply being the two of them. It was a feeling he would willingly experience forever.

"What was that sigh for?" Draco asked as he glanced downwards at him, bending his head slightly to nuzzle Harry's cheek for a moment with his nose. "It was a happy one I assume?"

"A contented one," Harry corrected, rubbing his face against the shoulder he was using as a pillow. "This feels nice, being here with you."

"It does, doesn't it?" he asked rhetorically as he climbed the few steps until they were shaded away from the summer sun. The elves had worked quickly, Harry noted as he looked around. They had put a nice seating arrangement for the pair. It vaguely reminded him of his own arrangement months before. He squeaked when, rather than placing him down, Draco carefully sat, manoeuvring him so that he was using the veela's lap as his seat, a position he relaxed into immediately.

His back was to the fifteen year old's front, his head reclining backwards against his shoulder as he trusted the veela to support his weight. Draco's arms were loosely wrapped around his waist, and the blonde dropped his head so that he could inhale the scent wafting from Harry's hair before he rubbed his cheek against the softness, feeling a wave of love for his little submissive rise up. The feeling overtook his entire being as he went about instinctively showing his mate that he was loved.

Harry's breath hitched when Draco's hand moved. His left remained curled gently around his middle, with enough pressure to offer comfort, while the other rose, first stroking his arm gently before moving up so that the warm appendage was pressed against the opposite cheek. Harry sighed in pleasure when the hand rose to run through his hair while Draco shifted slightly so that he could kiss the tip of an ear, murmuring words that seemed nonsensical to Harry but yet, the meaning was still clear. Eventually he found himself becoming overwhelmed with the feelings Draco's hands and words were evoking, and as gracefully as possible, he turned so that he was facing his mate, staring into silver eyes dark with love for his little submissive rise up. The feeling overtook his entire being as he went about instinctively showing his mate that he was loved.

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The kiss was sweet and full of love, and for several seconds, time seemed to freeze. There was no other movement between them. Harry was still too young to understand that there was a whole other dimension to kissing than just pressing their lips together and Draco, who had not yet experienced such, but whose nature gave him a vague understanding, knew that neither of them were ready for anything more than what they were currently doing. So while gentle and expressive, their kiss lacked the fire they would someday experience and instead, was just a way for them to express fully their love for each other.

Eventually Harry pulled away, his cheeks rosy. The shade increased substantially when Draco smiled at him in a way that had him looking away. There was an indulgent love in that gaze that met his. Something in that look revealed how Draco felt about him. He was his precious mate, adorable and feisty in his own special way, but still delicate enough to respond so beautifully to their bond. Draco loved indulging him and would do so eternally were it possible.

Unconditional love was promised in that gaze and Harry hoped that that look would never fade away.
Harry gently ghosted his hand along Draco's face, a contented smile on his face. Today, on the afternoon of August 9th, his veela had decided upon a nap and had promptly used his lap for a pillow, repayment undoubtedly, for all the time Harry had taken advantage of him thus. However, forty minutes into the veela's rest, Harry could understand why Draco never complained. He looked completely relaxed as he was now. Draco looked innocent, his hands curled slightly in sleep even as his nose crinkled occasionally. His breathing was even and there was such an atmosphere of tranquility around him that Harry could almost wish for him not to wake. Something had stressed the veela he knew, something that had brought him into his bedroom a good hour before time, leading him to uncaringly toss aside the essay Harry had been working on before claiming his lap like this instead, asking him to talk of anything arbitrary until his temper cooled.

And Harry had done it, his hand gently sweeping through the hair that framed his mate's face, brushing at it lightly before moving on to soothingly stroke his face until Draco had sighed deeply once, in that second losing whatever anger he had felt. He had offered no explanation and Harry had not asked for any. His dominant had sought him out to escape whatever it was. He would not press him for anything that would make him distressed.

Consequently, when Draco had yawned before snuggling deeper against him, Harry had only bent and kissed his cheek softly, whispering his love for him into his ear before summoning a novel (smiling broadly when it only faltered once before it reached him) before in his best voice, read aloud until his mate was lulled asleep to the words of Wordsworth, a muggle poet he could not help but be fond of.

He had read on longer than was strictly necessary, breaking off only when Dobby had appeared (thankfully quietly) with his potion and a cup of tea to wash it down with. Resignedly he took it before banishing the elf, not wanting anything or anyone to interfere with the current situation. He wanted his dominant fully rested for him. As such, he let his mind drift in the remaining time it took him to rouse, and analysed the veela and his own reactions to his mate.

He could only come up with one possible action for his feelings, and that was that he liked his mate. Not in the 'Draco-is-so-good-to-me-I-love-him' way, but instead in a 'he-makes-my-heart-grow-warm' one. It surprised him to say the least, because in his own honest summation, Harry found that he was not acting like how Ginny and Luna said people who liked someone did. Yes he blushed and was slightly shy around his dominant, but in his own opinion no more so than before. He was not stuttering or tripping over things around him, nor did he find himself checking out his appearance before his mate appeared.

But then again he mused, normal teenagers did not have what he did with Draco. He had lived with the veela for years after all, and they had seen each other at their best and worst times. There were no games between them that persons who liked each other played, no acting elusive or mysterious. There was no need for that. Harry would readily admit that the person who knew him inside out was Draco and the veela would most assuredly say the same.

And so, that was why Harry was surprised by his feelings for the veela and he thought hard about it before dismissing it. It seemed a natural progression. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he had always acknowledged that one day he and Draco would be like mama and papa. Currently he could not see himself like them, not in the way they tended to snog each other senseless when they thought that no one around, nor the glances they shared that he had no clue how to interpret but seemed to have the other adults rolling their eyes at them. But he knew that one day their relationship would be similar, and he did not doubt that at that time, it would seem as natural to him as the transition he was going through currently felt to him.
Draco was his veela, his mate, his dominant. Their relationship would constantly change. When he had first met Draco, the seven year old had been his hero and mentor. He had latched onto him from the get go and heeded the blonde's every word as if it were law.

Eventually, as he became more comfortable and sure of his environment, Draco went from being mentor to friend – his 'bestest' ever friend as he used to say then. That Draco had mucked around besides him, despite his reservation aided in sneaking frogs into Narcissa's dressing room and then smirked secretly at him from his corner while Harry struggled not to chortle in his as the blonde woman had still been scolding them.

That friend Draco had eventually become the big brother who had guarded him as if he was his very own. He stayed by his side whenever they ventured into public and was prone to release the Malfoy wrath on any of the other children who dared speak an unkind word to him at social gatherings. That was the Draco who had given him a piggy-back ride when he had skinned his knee and was yet too distraught to heal it himself.

From there they had entered Hogwarts and big brother had become a strict yet loving companion, a mixture of all the above. And none of those transitions had seemed even remotely daunting to him, indeed, looking back Harry was shocked to find that he could barely discern the change. It was not as if, as they aged, he had lost parts of Draco, the same way, he knew that Draco still saw hints of that frightened five year old in him. No, nothing had changed, it was just that those aspects of their younger days seamlessly blended into each other, adding layer upon layer to their beings, making them whom they were today.

And that was why Harry had not noticed that his love for Dravo had changed slightly. He was not 'crushing' on him as Ginny and Luna put it; at least not in the traditional sense. While Draco could indeed leave him several shades darker, it was only at small instances, during the times when Harry acknowledged him fully as dominant. But that was not all Harry saw him as, and thus his reactions to Draco changed to suit. He could still tickle his mate without the slightest compunction if he chose to, would do little more than giggle if Draco pounced on him, growling lightly in that playful way of his. But in the same light he could blush and look away, overwhelmed momentarily by an awareness of his mate and the station he played in his life.

Draco was Draco, Harry finally decided, as the blonde's eyelids fluttered, and while it was true that his feelings were slowly changing, it was nothing to put to much attention on. Whatever was meant to happen would, and worrying would do nothing to change that fact.

"Finished," Harry breathed in relief as the final roll of parchment wrapped itself up before moving to his desk. He was now caught up with his work, well ahead of his peers given the arrangement his family had made.

It was worth the stress he decided. The sacrifices he had made now would ensure that his workload was considerably lighter come the new school term, barely a week and a half off from now. He had even finished it all before schedule, a fact that ensured that he and Draco would have the days completely to themselves now for the next few days.

He was really looking forward to it. The past weeks had been like the best vacation ever for him. Draco was hardly away from his side, like a shadow he did not want to get rid of. He loved it, the feeling of constant companionship. It was a good feeling, a wondrous one even that he did not want anyone to disturb. Not even his secret friend.

As such, he shot the book an apologetic look before he locked it away once more in his desk. It was
glowing almost constantly, but still he did not answer much less read what was in there. He was sorry yes for ignoring him. Undoubtedly Viktor was sending possible ways for them to meet each other, but currently Draco was his world and nothing else particularly interested him. He would deal with all the realities of life eventually, but eventually was yet to reach. All of the concerns of the real world were beyond him now, and at the moment he would not dwell on them. He ceased thinking at all once he entered Draco's room, smiling at the mate who patted the space besides him invitingly.

No, nothing mattered now for Harry except being in his mate's embrace. Everything else could wait. All he wanted was Draco and because he had him and refused to release him anytime soon, the world's concerns would just have to wait in line until he, Harry Potter, chose to listen to them.
Draco heaved a final sigh before seemingly slipping directly into a troubled sleep. Gradually the hand on his back stilled and after a moment of hesitation, his younger mate bent gently, brushing aside a strand of hair from his face and placing a tender kiss on his cheek.

"Rest well dominant," Harry whispered into his ear, before easing himself off the bed. Fetching a pair of slippers, the thirteen year old moved quietly about the room, making himself halfway presentable (Well as presentable one could look in a pair of pyjamas) before heading out the door after shooting his mate one last look.

This had gone on long enough, he decided, an expression of determination crossing his face as he padded down the corridor.

"Still in pyjamas whelp?" a voice asked from the wall.

Turning his head slightly Harry nodded in greeting to the previous Malfoy patriarch. "Yes sir. I'm hardly out of my room so I don't see the need to dress."

"That's true enough," Abraxas replied as he walked along, keeping pace with the dark haired boy. "What are you about? That look rarely means good when it comes to you."

Harry ignored the slight ribbing. The man always had a sarcastic edge to his words. With time, he had learnt that he meant nothing cruel by it. It was just part and parcel of who he was.

"Who was Draco speaking to?" he queried, shivering slightly as a wind blew through an open window before pursing his lips at his instinctive move. Really, there was no way his family would consent to his return to Hogwarts in less than a week if his condition did not make a vast improvement soon.

"My grandson deserves a sound whipping," the man declared, causing Harry to roll his eyes discretely at the familiar line. The only difference was that it was directed at someone other than himself for once. "Speaking to Lucius as he did. Were I alive –"

"Sir," Harry interrupted before the man could break out into a full rant. "Can you tell me where papa is currently? And do you know why Draco is so upset; it's the third time in as many days."

"Your mate refuses to see reason," Abraxas supplied, before glaring mildly at the interruption. It receded though when he saw the slight breathlessness of the child. "You're still too weak to be about so. Call your elf and head back to your room. Lucius will come to you."

The boy shook his head slowly. "Draco is there and besides, I'm fine. Where is papa?"

"In his office; I'll go on ahead."

Making a vague sound of agreement, Harry continued on, wondering if the man's office had always been this far away or was it just the fact that he hadn't gone to it in so long. A moment later, he was startled by a soft crack before his father pulled him to him.

"You should not be out of bed," Lucius scolded mildly, bending so he could study his face.

"I'm fine Papa," Harry protested, although he did not fight when the man scooped him up. "I need to talk to you."
"About Draco – Father told me," the wizard stated as he turned and headed to his office, setting Harry carefully down onto an armchair before ordering him a cup of tea. "What has Draco told you?"

"That's the problem," Harry mumbled around his cup, shooting the man a careful look. "He won't tell me anything although I gather it's about me. What is it papa?"

The elder wizard hesitated for a long moment. In truth, they had had no plans on involving either boy in the issues until absolutely necessary. Draco had found out by accident and just a day later the article had appeared in the newspaper and Harry had seen it. The family had all agreed that the boys would be less resistant if one simple directive was given to them. But to involve them from the planning stages was problematic, as Draco's reactions had long since proved. Really, did he want to tell Harry, the more emotional of the two?

But, as he sighed, Harry was more inquisitive and now that his curiosity had been aroused, there would be no stopping him. Harry would dog each of them in turn until he got the answers he wanted. Perhaps it would be best to simply tell him and get it over with.

"It's about the tournament Harry," he finally said, eyeing his dark haired boy carefully.

The boy cocked his head slightly. "Why would Draco be mad about that Papa? It is not like we're going to be involved with it at any level. Well watching maybe."

"It's not that he's particularly worried about the tasks son although I suspect should any prove particularly dangerous and gruesome he may protest your attendance. However it is more the people who will be coming to Hogwarts that has him worried."

"You mean Durmstrang," Harry stated, a hint of sadness in his voice. "Is it because they teach Dark Arts?"

"Partly Harry," Lucius agreed, "but it is more than that. Draco is not being prejudiced. Obviously, there are good students at the Institute the same way that Hogwarts and even Beauxbaton possess a few rotten apples. What has your mate primarily concerned is those rotten apples."

A tingle ran up Harry's spine as he wondered if Viktor would be included among the ones his mate was suspicious about. "Does this have to do with the last tournament?"

"Not really," the man revealed much to Harry's relief. "The actions of one cannot reflect those of the whole school. Harry it is the staff of the Institute that we and by extension Draco is concerned with. Their High Master especially." Lucius paused a moment, choosing the best way to broach the topic that had brought about Harry's illness. "Son, do you remember your 'nightmares'. The one about the servant?"

"Who cut off his hand? Yes Papa," Harry agreed with a small wince. That memory was still disturbing.

"Severus was able to identify the man Harry. His name is Igor Karkaroff, the High Master of Durmstrang."

Goosebumps erupted over Harry's skin and instinctively he wrapped his arms about himself. To see that man in person, Harry thought, knowing what he had done for Voldemort. Wait- "Why would Grandpa allow him into the school?"

Lucius sighed, rocking back in his chair. "And that Harry is exactly what has Draco angry. We all know he is a death eater, the one who resurrected Voldemort at that. But Harry, it is a good strategy.
Albus hopes, that by allowing the man free passage into the school without censures it will lull him into a false sense of security."

"B-but what if Voldemort tells him to do something?" Harry asked, a bit of panic in his voice. No wonder his mate's anger. To let a death eater into the school...Harry would never be comfortable with that. "Can't his deputy come instead?"

"His deputy is another well known death eater," Lucius revealed. "Rossier escaped persecution here by seeking asylum in another country whose government was a Voldemort sympathiser. Frankly, knowing Rossier as I do, we are better off with Karkaroff in our midst, no matter how uncomfortable the thought."

"I don't like this," Harry whispered, feeling unnerved. Without a thought, he rose off his chair and moved to the eldest Malfoy, his eyes appealing. Understanding immediately, Lucius pulled Harry up onto his knee, wrapping his arms around him in a tight hug.

"You're safe," he whispered, resting his chin on the boy's head for several moments. "I'll tell you what I told your mate. We will make sure that you are safe Harry. Durmstrang is bringing their own accommodations, I won't tell you what it is lest it ruin the surprise. Their presence in the castle will be limited, unless they choose to befriend our students. The seventh floor of the castle has been set aside for the use of the French students."

"Hogwarts has a seventh floor?" Harry asked in surprise, pulling back.

"It does now," the man chuckled. "As headmaster Albus is allowed to alter the castle if needs be. He has decided to assign a new floor for the Beauxbaton students."

"Grandpa is strong," the teenager said in a slightly awe-toned voice.

"That he is," Lucius chuckled, sharing a slightly amused look with his father when the boy was not looking. "So now do you understand why Draco is upset?"

"I do," Harry agreed, his expression thoughtful. "He thinks I'll be in danger with the man's presence. But Papa, Voldemort is back."

"Yes he is," he agreed, encouraging his son to speak further.

"Doesn't that mean that some of the families will go back to him?"

"You're concerned about your own fellow students," the man said knowingly. Smart boy, he thought, not even Draco had realised that bit. "Harry due to the efforts of many the past few years, myself and your uncle included, quite a few of the Dark Lord's army from the previous war were kissed. A few lesser death eaters are still in possession of their souls unfortunately.

"The major difficulty we now face is the new death eaters. We have little intelligence as to their identities although we along with the Ministry are working assiduously on that front. You are quite right in your question child. There may very well be students who have taken or will soon take the dark mark."

"And Grandpa will allow them to continue in school."

Lucius' eyes darkened suddenly and he raised Harry's face to meet his. His voice was slightly strained when he spoke next. "Harry, Albus must give them a choice. You must understand, the possibility will remain that some of those students may be forced into the mark, much like your uncle and myself was. Son, if it were not for Albus' trust in us, we would have very well found ourselves
in Azkaban along with the rest. We cannot condemn them all Harry, not from the get go. Unless they prove themselves to be a danger, the governors will allow them to remain."

There was a brief period of silence before Harry asked the question he had never even considered much before. "How papa? How were you forced?"

The patriarch visibly deflated, shocking Harry as he slumped back into his chair. Above them, in his portrait, a pained expression crossed Abraxas' face before he fled the portrait.

"Papa, I'm sorry!" the teenager apologised quickly, tugging at the man's shirt frantically as his silver eyes dulled. "Papa!"

"I-it's okay Harry," Lucius said after a moment, collecting himself. "It's a painful memory that's all."

"I'm sorry I asked," he said, his tone heavily remorseful.

"No, it's all right," the man stated, reaching up to rub the back of his neck for several seconds before he emitted a heartfelt sigh.

"It was during my last Christmas at Hogwarts," he began. "Narcissa had just gone through her majority and her parents sent a letter saying that she wanted to see me. I did not put it together at the time, but Narcissa had realised that I was her mate. You see Harry; it is possible for a veela to have romantic feelings for another before their majority. Luckily for us, those feelings remained once she changed and she called for me. The second we touched..." The man drifted off for a moment, and as Harry watched, a look of nostalgia crossed his face for several seconds before he collected himself enough to continue.

"It was one of the best days of my life. I sent an owl to my house immediately that I would be away for longer than expected. I stayed until Christmas. The next day Narcissa flooed here with me, so I could re-introduce her, this time as my mate. Father was ecstatic and I know that Mother, were she still alive would have felt the same way. Severus was not with us, he had chosen to stay at Hogwarts to finalise some things with the then potions master. It was the 29th of December that it happened.

"I had gone off to a ring maker. I wanted to propose to Cissy just as the New Year arrived, and somehow none of the Malfoy family rings seemed good enough. I spent hours harassing the man until I got the perfect one. And then I flooed home..."

Harry laid his head comfortingly against his father's chest when his breath hitched, and did not protest when the man's arms tightened almost painfully around him. If it offered him comfort, he would not protest.

"Voldemort," Lucius continued eventually, "Voldemort came to our house. He was recruiting purebloods, especially the rich ones. He wanted not only me but my father. He had little use for Narcissa. That was, until my father refused him. Father – he was dead by the time I arrived home. He had refused Voldemort and because I existed, he saw no reason to keep Father alive. With his death, I automatically assumed the role of head. I was in control of the finances, the wizarding seats, everything. But of course, he knew that I would refuse too.

"And so Narcissa became a hostage. He would kill her if I did not join him. I-I could not let her die. I just could not. Even if he killed me too, I couldn't let Cissy die, not because of me. She begged me not too, pleaded for me to let her go. I would survive without her, I was more important than she could ever be. But I just couldn't go through with it. Narcissa...Narcissa was always a part of my life. We grew up together, she was always there and I couldn't exist for a single second if it meant that she would not be with me. So I did it. I submitted to that madman, became his servant because it
spared her life.

"And days later, I found out that the man had done the same thing to Severus. A recruit of his grabbed my brother from a Hogsmeade trip. Although not a pureblood, Voldemort was suitably impressed by Severus spell creation ability and his knack for potions. Severus refused at once. He had not liberated himself from an abusive home only to fall prey to a madman. But like me, Voldemort forced the choice on him, using me as bait.

"He lied, told Severus that he had me at ransom and would kill me if he refused. Draco wasn't born yet you see, and somehow the man had found out the blood ritual me and Severus had done. When I say that Severus is my brother Harry I mean it literally. Severus and I bonded through blood, making him irreversibly a Malfoy even if he never chose to adopt the name. And Voldemort used that against him. Family means the world to Severus and when offered the choice he chose servitude to the man, hoping that it would save me. He was devastated when he found the truth, but found relief in knowing that I did not condemn him. How could I when I bore the same mark as he did?

"That was the worst period of my life – our lives. The minute we graduated Hogwarts our lives became his. The things we had to do – hardly a day passed without either of us retching at the horrors. And when it became too much we sought out succour from Albus, who granted it willingly. We became his spies, working with a purpose to bring down the Dark Lord. Sometimes I think that is one of the few things that kept me sane, knowing that with every person I attacked, it brought me closer into the man's folds opening another opportunity for information that could hopefully bring him down.

"And then you were born Harry, born under a prophesy that cost you your parents, but liberated us all. I was never more grateful to you than that day Harry. I was free. Free from servitude and a madman who threatened to destroy the word. But Harry, if it wasn't for Albus, I along with Severus would have never made it to see this day. Without him we would have been rotting in Azkaban – or perhaps not even been alive at all.

"So you see child? Why I must agree with Albus allowing them back to Hogwarts, marked or otherwise? Everyone needs a chance Harry. Even if there are some who took that mark willingly, they may change once they see what is involved. Is it right of us to deny them that chance, a chance that was afforded to me?"

"No it isn't," Harry said softly, reaching up to touch the man's cheek. "You were very brave Papa, so brave."

Those words, so innocently spoken, but completely sincere tore at the man's heart and he pulled Harry closer to him, kissing his head tenderly. When enough time passed and he was once more in control of himself, he broached their earlier conversation.

"Draco isn't pleased about our stance. But Harry, as I have been trying to tell him, should you go back, we will do everything in our power to keep you safe. Albus is already working on it, and you have an animagus form. Plus you and Draco will share the same schedule once again. There is no reason for you to be unprotected in the least. You will be safe should you return."

"Why 'should'," Harry questioned. "Don't you want me to go back?"

"It's entirely up to you child," Lucius said seriously. "It is the same thing I told you in your first year. If you feel that you are safer home, we will not hold it against you. At anytime you can choose to leave."

"And that's why Draco is so angry," Harry deduced. "He doesn't want me to have that choice. He
wants us here, home where it is safest. It's okay Papa," he said quickly, knowing that the man would try to defend his son's choice. "I understand Draco's reasoning. But I can't agree with that. I want to go back to Hogwarts. I love being home, I really do and maybe eventually I'll change my mind and leave, but for now I want to go back. I have already missed so much. I want to see my friends, want to help Professor Flitwick with his charms and visit Hagrid and his pets.

"Is that selfish Papa, my wanting to go back? I mean it would be easier for everyone without me there."

"It would," Lucius agreed, "but you are not being selfish in the least. Those things you mentioned are an integral part of a teenager's life and Professor Flitwick will be terribly disappointed if you don't return."

There was a mild edge of something to Lucius' last words that had Harry looking at him curiously. "Why would he papa?"

Lucius smirked slightly. "Maybe I shouldn't tell you this yet," he said teasingly, "after all you should be receiving a letter from the school anytime now."

Now completely curious Harry poked his father. "Tell me Papa," he begged, "what is it."

Giving in easily, Lucius ruffled Harry's head. "You know that part of the tournament is to give the host school a chance to show off if you will?"

"Yes."

"Well, the governor who accompanied Albus to Durmstrang decided that Hogwarts needs something to give the school an extra edge. You see, in Beauxbatons, there is no number limitation for students in authorial positions."

"Huh?" Harry said bluntly. "Talk plainly papa."

"You have no head for subtlety do you?" the man mock frowned before he complied. "As long as a student met set criteria, come fifth year they are selected as prefects. Their system is more comprehensive than ours, of which I'm sure you'll learn more eventually. Hogwarts sorts students upon entry into Houses and although there is quidditch and the school cup, our house system is nowhere as competitive as theirs.

"Although they have four houses like ours, from the prefect body, six per house are selected to hold house positions, ranging from house captains straight down to treasurers. The houses battle monthly in a variety of challenges and at the end of every term, the house with the most points wins and is afforded a number of privileges the next term."

"Though we are not in agreement of altering our school's traditions simply to seem more advanced than Beauxbatons, the board does agree that from the outside looking it, it may seem that Hogwarts has a limited number of students who excel. Twenty four students out of a student body of about six hundred appears very unbalanced."

"Papa," Harry interjected quietly, "won't it also seem that our school rewards only the most advanced students in each year with authority?"

"A plausible argument my son, but trust me when I say politics is a nasty game. Undoubtedly, Beauxbatons will overlook that little facet and so we the governors have come upon a way to advance Hogwarts' appearance while still upholding our positions. As such from this year onwards, in addition to the prefects, the professors are allowed to choose a student from the upper years to
serve under them. Such students who may or may not be a prefect will assist the professor whenever they are called upon to. Whether it is by correcting essays, helping teach a class or assisting in any other way the teacher may require."

The man stopped there, waiting for Harry to make the connection. When the boy did a wide smile spread on his face. "Professor Flitwick chose me?" he gasped, his eyes sparkling.

"Without a second thought," Lucius beamed, happy for his son. "Your marks are the highest recorded since your mother attended Hogwarts and your practical work can put a seventh year to shame. Your position gives you the same privileges as a prefect. You may duck points or assign detentions. You are allowed out after curfew for up to half an hour and you now have limited access to the restricted section of the library without a note from a teacher. You will still come up for consideration come seventh year for the position of Head Boy. However, unlike a prefect you do not have patrol duties nor are you required to carry out dormitory searches or inspections."

Harry nodded quickly at the information, storing it away for further analysis later. For now, all that mattered was the Charms part. Without a doubt, he loved the subject and wanted to pursue it as far as possible. Transfiguration was a close second and he would have been happy too if that position had been offered to him, but Charms was dearest to his heart.

"What about Draco?" Harry asked suddenly. If he had been chosen then it was obvious that his mate would have been as well. "Did Uncle Sev take him?"

"Five points to Gryffindor," Lucius chuckled. "Draco was the perfect choice for Severus, and no one can accuse him of favouritism. I believe there was quite the argument between Severus and Professor Vector, but in the end, Severus won out with the argument that your mate's Potions marks were consistently higher. Might I add that both of you caused quite a stir among the teachers?"

The teenager laughed at that. "Let me guess, Hermione ranked first in everything she took and only because we weren't there?"

"Yes," Lucius agreed. "Your friend is a clever witch, but she was the third most sought after student after you two. She is both Gryffindor prefect and assistant in Arithmancy."

"Is there anyone else I know?"

"Hmm...Ronald is the other fifth year prefect; Neville Longbottom is the Herbology assistant."

"Neville?" Harry asked with mild surprise. From what he knew of the chubby boy, he was average at schoolwork at best (and certainly terrible at potions).

"Mr. Longbottom ranks third in the subject Harry, above Miss Granger and only a few points below you."

That detail surprised the dark-haired boy, but he easily shook it off. It was nice knowing there was something the boy was good at. Now that he thought about it, Neville always seemed to be zipping down to the greenhouses. For a moment, Harry reflected on the fact that it was because he loved the subject so much, the same way Harry felt for Charms. Herbology to Harry was just a subject. True he paid it the attention it was due and was careful in the greenhouses, but Harry knew that he would not carry it forward past this year.

"The rest of students came from the higher levels," Lucius said presently, unaware that his son's mind had drifted off. "The only other fifth year prefect that you may be interested in is Mr. Zabini."

"Blaise?" Harry clarified. "That's great!"
"It is indeed. You boys have surrounded yourselves with some very competent people and I am proud of that fact."

"Thank you papa," the teenager chuckled, butting his chest affectionately. "Now I'm really looking to go back, death eaters and all!"

Lucius smiled at the boy's enthusiasm. Harry was so easily placated sometimes, he thought fondly. "I'm glad you are," the man seconded. "But there is still the matter of your mate."

Seconds later the man blinked at the very Slytherin-like smirk that crossed Harry's face. "Leave Draco to me Papa," Harry said, a glint in his eyes, "I'll make him agree."

*]

It was only when the train pulled out of the station that it occurred to Lucius that he should have asked his younger son just how he had gotten his mate to agree. But then, he thought, recalling the glint in the child's eyes, there were just some things that were better off unknown.
Draco shot his mate a fond smile as they moved along the crowded corridor in the search of their mutual companions. The task would have been much simpler had they not been so popular, he thought with mild amusement. Many of their peers were stopping them, either to question Draco on his condition or to comment on the fact that Harry seemed a bit paler and peaky than they remembered. Their concerns were dismissed quickly with the contrived truth the mates had agreed upon sometime before.

Harry for the last week or so had come down with a particularly vicious strain of the wizarding flu. The reason was readily accepted, and, as the veela had pointed out, it would give them an excuse for Harry's leftover tiredness and weight loss. He still had about three weeks of potions left to take, but other than that he was in a good state of health – a task their uncle had wryly claimed had come about simply out of Harry's sheer determination to reach Hogwarts.

Although initially Draco had been concerned about his reactions to others interacting with Harry, he found himself easily keeping his instincts in check. He found that focussing solely on Harry and the happiness the boy was exuding reassured him. After all, there was nothing more that he wanted than to see Harry in a contented mood.

Finally, after what seemed to be eons, the corridors cleared enough for them to enter their usual carriage (well the one they used the few times they actually journeyed to the school in the traditional manner). Draco found himself smiling as a greater spike of emotion radiated from Harry before the boy let out a small yell of happiness. In seconds, the dark haired teen was sprawled across his best friends in a group hug, babbling happily to them and they doing the same even as they held him close. Letters couldn't hold a flame to this the veela noted even as he opened his arms to accept Millicent, the Slytherin hugging him tightly for several seconds before she pulled back to analyse him and the obvious changes to his frame.

Finally satisfied, she moved away and Blaise, that lazy smile on his face, stood gracefully, offering his hand to his best friend. Across from them Harry had turned away from his friends long enough to watch them, rolling his eyes slightly at the formality of their greeting. There would be none of that, he decided firmly. Draco wasnot going to re-embrace that princely front he preferred to don at school if Harry could help it. He wanted his veela as relaxed and easy-going as he had been at home.

Smirking lightly, Harry waved two fingers, happy now that his magic was back to normal and in control (although his healing ability remained severely dampened, but then, not everything could have gone back to normal that fast). As he desired, the two Slytherins stumbled abruptly, automatically reaching out and steadying the other. Having felt the invisible push, Draco turned to glare at his mate, but lightened it at the arched brow Harry shot him. Surrendering, he pulled a surprised Blaise into a full hug, one that shortly was returned with the same fervour.

"Missed you," Blaise muttered roughly, "Hogwarts wasn't the same without you here."

"I missed you too," Draco murmured in reply before pulling away.

And it was true. Although while at Malfoy Manor he had been perfectly content with none but Harry and his family around him, sparing little thought for the outside world save a few letters, the impact of his separation hit him now that he was actually once again with his friends. All of a sudden memories of their times together ran though his mind, and incredulously he wondered how he had not until now missed them. However, it was something that would be rectified post-haste if he had anything to say about it.
"Awww," Millicent said in a teasing tone as she pulled them down to the seat, Draco in the middle of them. "It's nice having the entire gang back together again isn't it?"

"Yes it is," Hermione agreed, running a hand through Harry's hair even as she beamed at him.

"Hogwarts was too quiet," Ron teased, elbowing Harry slightly.

"Hey, I don't make that much ruction," the veela mate mock pouted, bringing forth a round of laughter from the group.

The rest of the trip to the school passed along much in the same vein. The prefects among them left for a meeting about midway in the journey, and by that time, having grown tired, Harry weaselled himself until he was resting comfortably on Draco's lap before he fell into a deep sleep, leaving his mate and Millicent to continue their discussion in hushed tones.

"So what's been going on in Hogwarts?" Draco asked, "I want to hear from a student's perspective."

"Slytherin based assessment or generally?"

"Both."

She nodded in agreement, and adjusted her position so that they could easily see each other. "Hogwarts' changed," she allowed slowly. "Everything was as normal as can be expected at first after you all left, but then it started to go downhill. First there was a spur of withdrawals from the school."

The veela arched a brow at that bit of information. He certainly hadn't known that.

"I think in all about twelve people left between February and May. Nine of them were seventh years," she said, her voice drifting off slightly as she tried to recall the information as precisely as possible, "six snakes and three eagles in all. The other one was a sixth year."

"Any reasons why?" he asked carefully, keeping the suspicion out of his tone. Sixth and seventh years, he thought quickly as he compiled the facts. Their identities were unimportant; it was the age that mattered. The veela had a sneaking suspicion that all of those who had left Hogwarts had been of age. After all, Voldemort never marked a minor. What good was a restricted witch or wizard to him?

"The other was a fifth year Gryffindor. He was the only one I think I was not surprised at. Finnegan," she added quickly when Draco frowned. "It wasn't until he left that we found out all the details but apparently he's been one step from failing out anyway for the past few terms. His mom ended up pulling him out. From what I heard, she wasn't pleased with his performance and decided that the wizarding world wasn't for him after all. Rumour has it she asked Dumbledore to bind his magic before he left too."

The veela found himself oddly pleased that he had left the school. He had never forgiven him and his partner for what they had done to Harry. Draco was quite fond of holding grudges against people after all – especially when it concerned Harry. News of his departure served to lessen the darker mood that had settled upon him with the revelation of the students who had left the school.

"Anything else noteworthy?" he asked eventually.

"Nothing of substance...well, the defence professor's auror husband got killed on duty and she left a month before the term ended."
"And the curse continues," Draco sighed, shaking his head lightly. It really was bothersome the way teachers for that class changed so frequently. Although, he would admit he was rather pleased that none since the first had shown any signs of being as bad as Quirrell.

"And, of course," Millicent continued, her tone softening slightly, "there was the murder of our champion. The school was in chaos for days after that. It was so hard to believe. I mean, we all know that people can die in the tournament, but it wasn't a task that killed him."

"Understandable," Draco agreed, empathising with her words. Had he had more time earlier, undoubtedly he would have been as horrified by the news of what had occurred at Durmstrang. As is however, he had been more preoccupied with Harry, and although it may appear to be callous, he found that he was almost indifferent to it. Other people were secondary to him. While he believed the killing unjust and irreprehensible, he would not be among those students rallying for a Hogwarts victory for the sole purpose of avenging their fallen student. He had bigger things to worry about, and so, although he had offered a moment thought for their former champion, he had moved on.

"That's the general news about the last two terms," Millicent shrugged eventually, "although on a more personal front..."

"What is it," he half asked, half demanded when his friend looked away, obviously unwilling to speak.

What was it that she was hesitant to say, he wondered. When her reluctance continued, Draco decided that it was the outside of enough. If she had mentioned it, it was vital. After repeating his question and she hedged again, he sighed, directing his powers towards her. He controlled it carefully, only wanting to make her more open to suggestion. Millicent insane from his allure would do him no good. And of course, there was the fact that his releasing powers were having an effect on his mate, Harry shifting restlessly against him in the moment's it took him to gain Millicent's obedience.

"What do you want to tell me," he said in a purring tone. "Come on now Millicent, tell me. You want to."

Nodding dreamily, she met his eyes easily. "There's something going on with the Slytherins. You and Harry need to be careful coming around. I think," she stated, "it has something to do with You-Know-Who. You and Harry need to be careful," she repeated.

Draco's lips tightened, a knot-like feeling entering his stomach. His father had warned him of this. Several families always leaned towards the dark side or at least remained neutral in the war. Several of them had children at Hogwarts. Neutral families were of little concern to him, unless there were signs of them being swayed towards the dark side. But it was those who were openly dark that would need watching. However, although Millicent's warning was appreciated, Draco knew that in this situation it was unwarranted.

Everything was planned perfectly. There was a system in place to ensure that they would be safe and failing extenuating circumstances, the system could not be compromised. However, Draco had to admit to feeling reassured by the witch's words. Although Draco knew that the possibility of her or Blaise, betraying him was low, it was still good to see them openly throwing their support behind him and his mate. They were good friends, he thought, not for the first time.

"Thanks for telling me Millie," he said sincerely, gradually decreasing his hold on her so that she emerged from it slowly, unaware that she had been virtually forced to talk to him. "Anyway," he smiled, distracting her in case she felt any lingering effects, "was Blaise surprised to make prefect?"
"He was," she laughed, latching on to the topic easily, "I was spending the week with him when it came. We knew it would have come down to you and him, but it was still a shock. It made sense though when we heard about the apprenticeship. This way you and the little one won't have to be out and about too late." Saying this, she leaned forward slightly to ruffle Harry's hair. "I've missed the little bugger," she snorted.

"More than me?" Draco inquired, arching a brow with mock menace.

"Of course," she stated pertly, wrinkling her nose at him. "who else am I supposed to complain too when you and Blaise insist on studying all the time. This one's naturally brilliant, he doesn't need to."

"Calling me dunce witch?" the veela growled lowly, his silver eyes filled with mirth. On his lap, Harry stirred again and he shushed him gently. "Sleep little one. Millie is just being a witch that's all."

The teenager grumbled sleepily before he settled back down. Millicent cooed at him, drawing an eye roll from the veela. If she thought this sight was adorable, what on earth would the witches of the school do when they saw them about? If anyone thought the mates affectionate now, they would fairly faint at the amount they almost felt compelled to do now that Draco had matured.

* With September 1st falling on a Friday, the students of Hogwarts found themselves with an unexpected two days before work actually began. However, the upper year students, especially those selected as apprentices found themselves with their respective professors, discussing plans for the year.

"What about a remedial class Professor," Harry suggested as he munched on a biscuit. If this was what it meant to be an apprentice to the man, he saw no problem with it. The easygoing professor had within minutes of his arrival, summoned a tray and they both ate leisurely while overlooking plans for the upcoming year. "I mean sir, if students are genuinely struggling, won't it be easier, instead of slowing down the entire group, to pull them out, say twice a week for separate lessons to bring them up to standard?"

"An excellent idea my child," the small wizard beamed, jotting it down quickly, "while I have yet to start with the first years, there are quite a number of students below fifth level who worry me tremendously. I'll have to clear it with the headmaster but that will be no problem. Although I wonder..." the man paused, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "If they failed to learn with me the first time, wouldn't it be plausible that they may not understand it the second time around?"

Harry tilted his head thoughtfully. "That is possible sir," he agreed. "But then, we help each other all the time. Can't a student assist you sir? I mean, we tend to bring across things a lot more easier than a professor might do it."

The thirteen year old found himself laughing when the man jumped excitedly on his chair. "Perfect Harry!" he beamed, "take five points for sheer ingenuity. The class won't be mandatory," he decided, "I won't have you teaching anyone unwilling."

Harry blinked at that before shrugging, he should have expected being put in charge of it. It was his idea after all.

"We'll start with a trial run of two weeks and after that we'll see how it goes from there."

"Yes sir."

For a next hour or so, the pair sat, hashing out a pseudo curriculum to use with the remedial students. Harry chuckled slightly when he realised that he would actually have to use his wand for the class, if only for demonstration. He would have a bit of studying to do actually, he told himself as he pulled the parchments to him. He had not actually needed to concentrate on wand – well hand movements for a while now. Magic was all about the intention behind it. One could make something happen out of sheer will. It was the same way that a toddler could summon a baby bottle to them if they were hungry. They did not know the 'accio' spell, but their desire fulfilled their wishes anyway.

Vaguely Harry remembered his Uncle Severus telling him that once when he was three, Draco had forcibly apparated him from his potions lab to his bedroom when he had wanted the man. There was something disturbing about being called that way the man had chuckled ruefully, but then, it had been a sign of how powerful his godson would be.

"I think Harry," Flitwick was currently saying, "with you in charge of the remedial class, the only other things I may require of you is grading essays for me now and again. Do you have any free periods?"

"I have Wednesdays free before lunch and Fridays afternoons sir," he replied promptly.

"Ah," he nodded. "And on Wednesday mornings you only have Charms regardless. Good. I think this apprenticeship programme will work out wonderfully child. I may actually have more time for my Ravenclaws this way."

"That's wonderful sir," Harry beamed.

Two hours later, while Draco relaxed with Blaise and Millicent, Harry reached for the book he kept carefully stored away.

A small smile on his face, he opened it, reaching for a quill automatically as he flipped to an empty page. Everything was back to normal now, he thought contentedly. He'd apologised for ignoring the Bulgarian those few weeks, but Viktor had been quite agreeable with the whole thing. And now that he was back in Hogwarts, Harry began putting more thoughts towards the dilemma they faced. In a little less than two months, the other schools would descend onto Hogwarts.

Although Harry still felt understandably nervous about a few of the characters that would be about the school, Viktor's presence was something to look forward to. He had not seen his foreign friend in person since that stormy afternoon under the tree and he was looking forward to it. In his own way, the Bulgarian had earned a spot in his heart Harry acknowledged, an absent smile on his face as he reread a line of conversation before turning again.

Viktor was his big brother, fulfilling a role Harry had not even realised he wanted. The most embarrassing questions he could think off went to the quidditch players. He had Draco of course, and his rather large family, but there were just some things he could not see himself asking without turning red in the face. And Viktor answered him easily and with an honesty that left Harry with no doubt to his sincerity.

In all honesty, Harry planned to use the very safety mechanisms his family had placed on him to get to Viktor. Unwittingly they had given him the very tools that he had needed. Moreover, now with the apprenticeship and the scheduling he and Flitwick had worked out, he even had the time (if he planned carefully) to secret himself away with the Bulgarian. The only problem he faced was his mate. Draco would almost immediately know he was up to something. Harry just couldn't lie to him forever and would eventually be forced to admit his friendship. The only thing he could do was to
ensure that Draco received the information from him on his terms. And that would mean that the way they had met, this book that they used for conversation, would have to be hidden.

Not only would it get him punished, it would cast suspicion on Viktor. No matter how much he loved his family, Harry would readily admit that they were slightly paranoid when it came to him. He could see his Uncle's nostrils flaring as his mind immediately thought of some elaborate plan Viktor could be apart of. His mama would undoubtedly decide that no person could, after an hour or so of conversation feel the pressing need to keep in contact with someone he had just met. He did not even want to think beyond that.

No, there was no way on earth that he could allow Draco to find out exactly how they had met. And that was where Viktor would help. The next few weeks would be spent concretising the story that would explain their friendship. If only it could be as easy as it was getting Draco to agree to come back. A few kisses, a lot of puppy eyes (complete with tears and trembling lower lip), promises of being perfectly obedient and not get into any mischief (he crossed his fingers with that part of course) and agreeing to have their elves keep a eye out for him (could pose a problem when Viktor arrived) and there, they were at Hogwarts.

To bad that wouldn't work in this situation. Oh well he decided, it was time to get planning. Putting action to thoughts, he turned to a blank page ad tapped his self-inking quill against it, activating the instrument.

*Hey Viktor, back at school. What are we going to do about...*

"Come here cub," Draco called lazily, patting the space behind him.

Harry was only too eager to obey, closing his charms book without hesitation as he crossed from Draco's work table and climbed into bed besides him. "Yes dominant?" he inquired, with a playful smile on his lips as he rocked back into a sitting position.

"We won't be seeing much of each other tomorrow," he said, reaching out with one hand to open Harry's top button and pull out the pendant that it had hidden. "You have your classes to teach, I have my potions to brew with Uncle Sev. And then Granger and Weasley seem determine to drag you from me for the afternoon."

The mate laughed softly as a note of petulance entered the veela's tone. "We still have breakfast and lunch dominant," he reminded him, grabbing on to the hand that still held the pendant. Bending slightly he placed a kiss against it, his eyes playful. "And I promise to escape my friends after an hour or two."

"Good mate," he grumbled, as he freed the hand and cupped Harry's face. "Are you nervous about tomorrow?"

Harry shrugged. "A bit I suppose," he said eventually. "Professor has decided that I'll teach two classes. One exclusively for first and second years and another for third and fourth. None of the fifth years seem interested."

"They're probably embarrassed," the veela pointed out. "I'm surprised that any fourth years agreed to it as well. You are younger than them."

"That's stupid," Harry frowned. "I've gone over Professor Flitwick's notes and there are twenty three second through fourth continuously scoring below acceptable. And only eleven are willing to come?
If I was being offered help, I'd take it, no matter whom from."

"Not all people are as sensible as you," Draco smiled, gently pulling Harry forward so that he could press his head against his chest. "You'll do fine cub, although I don't envy you in the least. Imagine Uncle Sev asking me to run remedial potions."

"You'd go veela on their ar-bums in minutes."

Draco arched a brow as he looked into emerald eyes. "I noticed that Harry James."

"I didn't say it," Harry pouted, widening his eyes in what he hoped was an irresistible look. Only a week and the twin's influence were threatening to get him in trouble already.

"But you were going to," he countered mildly. "Just where did you hear that plebeian word?"

"Around," Harry said vaguely, adding that tremor to his lip as he traced idle circles on his mate's chest. "Dra~co," he whined softly. Moving closer he pressed a soft kiss against the veela's cheek, chuckling mentally when he tensed slightly. He continued, pecking along the veela's face teasingly. "I didn't say it," he murmured eventually, his emerald eyes looking downwards into the teenager's slightly darker eyes.

"Next time it's the corner," he growled, reaching a hand up to wrap into Harry's hair. Snickering slightly, Harry moved, kissing the corner of his mouth, before doing the same on the other side. "F-fine," he corrected, "another warning."

"That I could live with," Harry thought happily, before pecking his mate's mouth, not complaining when Draco stopped him from pulling back for a long moment. "Why couldn't his mate always be this easy to persuade?"

* *

In the quarters he used to share with his brother, Viktor Krum slowly closed his communication book, a thoughtful expression on his face. It was all coming to fruition, he pondered darkly. He had Harry's trust, so much so that he was willing to risk angering his mate come October. That was perfect, exactly the point his interactions with the boy should have been at that point.

But Viktor wasn't happy in the least that that was the scenario. The thought of Karkaroff's pleased face the next time he updated him caused an unpleasant stirring in the Bulgarian's stomach. Yes, he was happy to be seeing Harry soon, but not for the reasons his High Master was. Karkaroff was glad because it meant that their plan was succeeding, bringing the Dark Lord one-step closer to achieving his goal. The wizarding society revered Harry James Potter as the one who brought them out of an age of darkness. Voldemort thought it suitable that he should welcome his second wave of terror with the death of the one who had bested him the first time. Killing Harry Potter was something all the death eaters desired, if only because that was what their master wanted.

However, Viktor Krum was not a death eater and he no longer saw his interactions with Harry as part of any elaborate plan. Viktor Krum was pleased to be meeting Harry, but only because he could see the one he had fallen in love with.
For the first time in months, Viktor felt something akin to horror burning in his stomach as he once again wondered what exactly he had gotten himself into. His High Master had sacrificed his hand to the Dark Lord? The thought sickened him, and the Bulgarian found that the last remnants of respect he had had for the man fade away into nothingness. Who in their right mind would defile themselves to such an extent for another person?

To the quidditch player it made little sense.

But then again, he pondered, was he not, in his own way, doing the same thing? He was risking it all for a mission that could literally make or break him. What seemed worse was the fact that the mission itself had little importance to him anymore. Unlike his initial meetings with Karkaroff, the Bulgarian's answers were often vague and he found himself hard-pressed to keep an air of malice about him whenever he spoke of Harry. Luckily the high master was not the most suspicious person in the world, and so, the slight overtones of affection the Bulgarian could not hide in his voice was mistaken for his fondness for the task he was expected to complete. Viktor did little to sway the man's belief away from that train of thought.

However, his feelings for the dark haired seraph were only one of the things the Bulgarian was hiding from his superior. His reports were severely tailored as he refused to reveal any real details of his conversations with Harry beyond the fact the boy trusted him enough to deceive his family in order to be with him. Karkaroff was immensely pleased with the fact, and while he cackled, Viktor forced a smirk unto his face that could pass as a malicious one. He no longer cared that he withheld information from the man for he was positive that the wizard was doing it as well. It was for his own safety Karkaroff had assured him. After the previous incident, security would be at a maximum during the tournament and they could not risk anyone skilled enough delving into his mind and sourcing the information.

Viktor was passable at occlumency, but not even his skills could protect his mind from the likes of Albus Dumbledore. And so, he wore a rune inscribed band around his right upper arm, one designed to scramble his thoughts enough so that anyone peering into his mind would discover nothing valuable. The device would work long enough for him to escape before the person could decode his thought patterns. Viktor was grateful for the protection, but not for the same reasons as his high master. His mind needed protection he knew, but not only from the light side. It would only take Karkaroff one peep into his mind to discover that Viktor was not as loyal as he purported himself to be.

For Viktor was in love with Harry Potter, and he knew perfectly well that neither the light nor the dark side would be pleased with such a situation.

And so, while Karkaroff believed that he was plundering swiftly through the school's library in search of material for his mission, Viktor was instead seeking a way to have his love returned. Harry James Potter was the love of his life, and he wanted himself to be in that position in the boy's heart. It did not matter to him that his chosen partner had a veela mate; he would simply have to find a way to woo Harry away from the veela. The plan was risky and undoubtedly, his beloved Harry would suffer greatly in the process, but the Bulgarian firmly believed that it would be worth it in the end. Viktor knew that in his own way Harry loved him. All he had to do was find a way to sever the bond between his love and the veela Malfoy and then he could work on changing Harry's feelings for him from being platonic to something more.

Harry James Potter was the love of his life, and Viktor was determined that he and not Draco Malfoy
would have the pleasure of being the boy-who-lived's eventual spouse.

"Uh...Remus," Severus gasped softly, the sound turning into a moan when from behind, he felt a nip on his neck. "No...marks..." he managed shakily.

Above him, the older men shot each other amused looks. "None where meddlesome eyes will see," Remus allowed, before bending to claim thin lips once again in a heated kiss. Behind the potions master, Sirius leaned back, watching appreciatively as his wolf drove their lover mad with fluttering touches and deep kisses that brought forth the most interesting sounds from the normally stoic man.

Sirius was content with being a voyeur for now; after all, watching his two men stirred an indefinable emotion within him that, at the moment felt better than passion. He loved seeing his partners like this. Locked away like this in Black Manor, the universe narrowed down to the three of them. Remus lost that scholarly air he bore about him and allowed his instincts to come forth, leading him to dominate over the ones he had claimed as his. Even without his lycanthropy, Remus still retained some wolfish instincts, not that his partners minded in the least.

In truth, it was rather enjoyable the way the amber-eyed man fussed over them at times. Azkaban had been a cold and unyielding place and even years away from it now, Sirius was want to fall into bouts of depression and loneliness. It was at those moments that he enjoyed Remus the most. Without him uttering a word the wolf animagus always seemed to know when all was not right with him mentally and went about reassuring him.

Nothing seemed to plague Sirius when Remus claimed him as he did at those times. The actions were loving, tender and always unique. Sometimes Remus would do little more than pull him onto the bed and cradle his head in his lap while his rough hands ran through his hair. Other times Sirius would find himself pampered to a frothy bath, Remus playing the role of the dutiful valet, a comforting presence as Sirius forth for control of himself once again. How Sirius loved it when Remus took control of him at those moments. And he knew that in the same way as he did, Severus appreciated the man's actions as well.

Severus still, after all this time proved to be a finicky partner. His love for them was assured; it was just that, with his less than pleasant past, the man seemed lost as to how to react to a romantic relationship. And, when Sirius was want to lose patience with Severus' skittishness, it was then that Remus would intervene. There was something calming in Remus' aura that Severus never seemed able to resist. With little more than a few words or a simple caress, the barriers around Severus would drop.

Often enough after that, the black eyed man would turn, something almost rueful in his expression as he crossed the small distance to him, his eyes not fully meeting his as he apologised for his standoffish behaviour. And, what could he do at those times but nod and accept the words, especially with Remus' entreaty above Severus' head. They had all suffered in their own way at some point in their lives, and it was only expected that they would react to it in different ways. And besides, Sirius thought, there was something extremely amusing in the difference in Severus' behaviour in the outside world. It was if the man projected over-aggressiveness in public to compensate for his seeming complacency whenever he was at home with them. The man was an amusing contradiction Sirius thought fondly.

But somehow, something seemed to be missing, Sirius pondered. With a small smile, he grasped the damp hand that Severus had flung unwittingly against him and lifted it to his lips, kissing the skin gently. In the midst of what Remus was doing to the man, he honestly did not think that Severus would notice the fleeting caress, but his prince proved him wrong. The man's head turned towards
his and for a moment Severus' passion clouded eyes met Sirius' thoughtful ones. Smirking, Sirius repeated the gesture before lacing the hand with his, joining in the union in this simple way. Abruptly, their eye contact was lost by a particularly hard thrust from Remus that caused the younger man's head to fling back as a half strangled cry erupted from his lips. The fingers clamped down but Sirius bore the pressure easily, watching as the two reached the climax of their beautiful dance.

It was only when they slumped, Remus over Severus, his sandy brown head pressed in the space between Severus' neck and shoulder did Sirius finally realise what it was that seemed to be missing. They were partners now for almost five years, and that did not include the four or so years he and Remus had been together in their teenage years. Wasn't it time for them to take their relationship to the next level? That idea was very appealing. A hand dropped suddenly over his and Severus' linked appendages and, lifting his eyes, Sirius watched Remus as the man gave him a lazy grin. Yes he decided, as he returned the smile, it was about time they moved on with their relationship.

Harry's lips tingled slightly from the departing kiss his dominant had given him at the end of the corridor. Draco always knew when he needed comforting Harry smiled as he walked towards the classroom he had set up the day before. He was so nervous about his upcoming lesson. Professor Flitwick had already gone through and approved of his plans for the day, and Draco had ignored his own work for Uncle Severus in favour of helping him prepare for this, but still his nervousness remained.

He was thirteen – not a figure of authority. It was at times like this that Harry really questioned the authority he had been given. Did he really deserve it...had he earned the right? Although he hated doing it, he could not help but remember the situation that had occurred in previous years with the then first years. Did people – well at least some of them – really see him as that, a person granted privileges that may or may not be truly deserved? Thinking about it, Harry saw that he had numerous benefits not afforded to other students.

He had his own personal quarters. He had two family members on staff. Professors made allowances for him. Just this year alone he and Draco were exempt from the majority of assignments because of the intensive studying they had undergone during the holidays. Harry was two years below his peers – something that was rarely done at the school. He never lost house points or earned detentions – the rare problem had always been transferred to his uncle or headmaster. And, while Harry sometimes thought that he would rather have a detention than answer to his family, did other students find it unfair that while they scrubbed at trophies or whatever other task was assigned to him, Harry Potter and his mate got away – well at least that was what they thought?

It was not like either one of them broadcasted the punishments they received on occasion. Harry could never see himself walking into Gryffindor and announcing that he got his bum smacked for hexing Mrs. Norris or had to sit in the corner for fifteen minutes for daydreaming during class. And he was certain that Draco never shared those details with his friends either.

Harry knew that the professors showed favouritism towards him and his mate on occasion, but he thought it justified. Cuddling up with Draco was as natural as breathing to him. And because of their bond the teachers never commented when he all but sat on his mate's lap in class, going so far sometimes as to claiming his shoulder for a pillow. And there were times when one of them refused to take notes at all, like that one time Draco had laced both his arms around Harry's waist in the greenhouse, leaving it up to the younger one to record anything substantial. Did they have to do those things, no. But they wanted to. They were affectionate because they had a legitimate reason that the teachers could not question. It was not like if they flaunted the fact that they could get away with such public displays of affection. Most of the time, they hardly ever thought about what they
But still, wasn't this whole apprenticeship going a bit too far? The thought plagued the veela mate as he went about automatically arranging the parchments he would need for the day. Looking at it from a different perspective, Harry could not help but wonder at the convenient timing of the system's introduction. Was it really because of the tournament, or did it have something to do with himself and Draco? He was not being narcissistic about it, but the fact remained that out of all the persons in his house's year, he knew that he was the best. Undoubtedly, the prefect badge in normal circumstances would have been his and not Ron's; he would not delusion himself about the fact. And the same could be said for Draco.

And yet, neither of them were prefects but still were given roles that put them on par with them. Some students would actually argue that that the apprentice role was more prestigious than the prefect given that the apprentices worked more closely with the teachers. Once again, it seemed convenient, Harry noted. The one year he was recovering his health, dealing with bouts of tiredness that could render him useless, he was given a position that would not necessitate him out past curfew...and his family appointed bedtime. His position allowed him a flexibility prefects did not have; he could all but choose his own time to fulfil his duties.

And there was the fact that now he worked completely independent during charms class, something that not even Draco had achieved yet. It was only the day before that Harry – upon organising a file for the professor, had realised that the charms he practised on in class were of NEWT level. He had never questioned the work his professor assigned to him before, after all, he always seemed to pick up on it after a few tries, but to realise just how advanced he was had been a bit daunting. Did it come across as show offish to his classmates? Would it not have been better for the professor to have him working alongside his friends on the same things they were doing, so not as to discourage them? It would have made the class extremely dull, but still, was he being granted extra favours?

Harry was forced out of his thoughts by the realisation that the students he was to tutor would arise in a few minutes. His thoughts had left him understandably depressed and he needed the time to rally himself back into a better mood. Even if he was being favoured – it was not like he could do anything about it. Things were as they were, and maybe he was better off not contemplating on it. Or may be he should? Either way, now was not the time to decide, he recognised, as a knock sounded on the door. Plastering his trademark grin on his face, Harry forced away all negative thoughts and went about the matter at hand.

Even as he waved them in, Harry reached for his wand, eyeing it with mild annoyance. He had spent the previous night having Draco drill him on wand movements and the likes until he could name them all offhandedly. Wielding the wand again though, felt weird and Harry willingly admitted that it did not respond to him as it had the first time he had used the slender wood. But then again, his magic had grown accustomed to funnelling itself directly from his body. To try to make it flow from an artificial means was extremely uncomfortable for him. Harry could only hope that his students would understand the spells easily enough. He was not looking forward to using the piece of wood any longer than necessary.

Once all of the students were seated and an appropriate length of silence had passed, Harry went about the introductory speech he had prepared.

"Thanks for coming. You are here because Professor Flitwick believes that you can accomplish a lot more in his class than you are currently doing. I am here to hopefully fulfil that belief. My name as you may know is Harry Potter, and I hope we can work together to accomplish this goal.

"Before we start, would you like to introduce yourselves? We'll be working alongside each other and
There were some small nods by a few of the students and Harry smiled encouragingly at them even as he sighed mentally. A few of those first years were eyeing him with something bordering on adoration and the sight forcibly reminded Harry of some of the rumours being bandied about by the wizarding press. Thanks to papa his name hadn't specifically been mentioned, but there was little doubt whom was being referred to given the not to subtle allusions journalists made to him.

Apparently, some believed that he would save the world once more from Voldemort (something he found ridiculous given that he had no clue what he had done the first time around). While he did agree that he had put up a powerful fight against the man in his first year, he did not see how that qualified him for the position and he knew quite well that his parents thought the same thing. And so he had not given the articles a second thought. They were mainly speculative and the things that they had actually gotten right about him weren't damaging in the least. Mainly the information about him had been sourced from students of the school and few save his closest friends knew anything about him that could be potentially damaging to his image.

However, safe in Malfoy Manor, recovering from his harrowing weeks of pain, Harry had been isolated from the adoring eyes of the public. He was used to the stares from his years with the Malfoys; there was always someone who wanted a handshake or the chance to thank him for what he had done. But now it was different. Looking into the first year Hufflepuff's eyes, Harry saw more than the usual curiosity about him. What he saw in the girl's eyes was an expectation, that he would bring the wizarding world back into the light once again. And Harry found that he did not like that expectation in the least. He was a thirteen year old boy just wanting to have a normal school year. He didn't want to see what people expected of him. He just wanted to relax and experience life.

Harry was lucky for his multi-tasking ability for that was the only way he managed to ponder on his thoughts while simultaneously hearing what the students were saying about themselves. Once the pleasantries were over with, the real work started. Professor Flitwick had advised to literally start from scratch with them and that was exactly what he did. There were some protests from the three second years at the spell, but Harry quickly put an end to that.

"Why don't you show us it then Mitchel?" he asked the Slytherin who had been the most vocal in his protests.

"Fine," the boy sneered.

Shrugging noncholantly, Harry waved a feather to land on his desk. "Go ahead," he said simply, correctly guessing what would happen.

"Wingardium Leviosa," he intoned firmly, pointing his wand at his feather. Seconds later his face coloured when the feather did absolutely nothing – not even a twitch.

Harry was smart enough not to rub his failure into his face and instead channelled his critique into a mini-lecture. "Everyone needs to practise spells continuously if they are to be effective. I don't mean to insult anybody or make it seem that I believe that you guys don't know anything, but you have to trust me. If you don't completely understand the basics behind a branch of magic, you'll only find your problems increasing as you reach more difficult ones.

"Mitchel," he continued, smiling encouragingly at the twelve year old so that he would not feel singled out, "Your wand movement was incorrect. It is flick and swish, not a jab. There's a simple enough formulae that you can use to remember. Charms tend to require more graceful, defined wand movements in comparison to the spells we learn in say Transfigurations or Defence."
It only took Harry a second to realise that he had lost the students with his analogue. Thinking quickly, he tried to find an alternative explanation but was interrupted by a first year Ravenclaw raising her hand.

"Harry?"

To be completely honest, Harry had been shocked initially when he had seen the girl's name on the list. Ravenclaws were generally purported to be the house of the intelligent and although he did not mean to be stereotypical, Harry was admittedly surprised that an eagle would be present in a remedial class. It was something he would have to mention to the Charms professor he thought.

"Can I ask something?"

"Sure Kathy," he said immediately.

"Are you trying to say that wand movements differ...because of the type of magic you're doing?"

"Exactly that," he agreed enthusiastically, latching on to her reasoning. "Each branch of magic requires the witch or wizard to draw on different fundamentals of their magic. For example, let's start with transfigurating stuff. You need to focus really hard to make sure it works. But in charms, if you say the spell, you'll still get a response – well most of the time anyway," he added, remembering the difficulty Ron had had in the last class. "Transfigurations requires you to imagine the object you require and then go about coaxing your magic to change it into what you desire."

Seeing that they all seemed to be following what he was staying, Harry pressed on. "Charms are a lot less focus oriented. Yes you have to keep in mind what you want your magic to do, but the key to casting correctly – with a wand – is doing the movements correctly and saying the right incantation." As he said the last bit, a smile tugged at Harry's lips as he thought of the nonchalant way in which he casted. Movements, speed, rhythm...none of that mattered to him. If he wanted something done, his magic automatically tailored itself to suit his needs. "As such, in this class you must pay attention to wand movements and incantations. For example..."

Harry waved his left hand at a feather, moving it to his desk before he pointed his wand at it. "Were I to say wingardium leviosa, the feather would float as it is now doing. However, if I were to mispronounce it like this, wingordirum levosia...that would happen," he chuckled. An empty spirit's bottle was now floating a few inches above the table and after a second he vanished it. "So always remember...wand movements and incantations are what you need to succeed. Follow that simple rule and you should find Charms a lot more fun. Now, ready to practice?"

The agreement from his students was immediate and one by one, they went about practicing the spells. As the lesson went alone, Harry felt increasingly confident with himself, especially since, by the time the first class exited the room, they had managed to master three charms. And, after he had seen similar results from his second class, Harry slumped back against the teaching chair, tired but content.

"I think I can do this," he murmured to himself, surprised at just how enjoyable he had found his task to be. "This teaching thing doesn't seem half bad," he continued thoughtfully.

Maybe, just maybe, he could change the minds of any detractors about his position by producing excellent results. And, as the weeks passed and September melded into October, Harry achieved his goal. By the time his first month of teaching had ended, the number of students had almost doubled as word spread about how effective the lessons were. And although slowly the lessons seemed to morph into a more club like tone, with the furniture pushed aside for people to spread out and practice on objects or even on each other, Harry could care less. The reward for him was seeing
people who all but hated the subject learn a new appreciation for it. He was helping others learn to appreciate what the subject he loved. What more could he ask for?
"You're late Mr. Potter," Ron drawled in a fair imitation of the resident potions master.

His attempt though did little except draw a round of laughter from the younger Gryffindor and Hermione, even as he dropped down in between them, his lips quirking with mirth.

"Forgive me Professor Weasley," Harry said with false anxiety, "I would have been on time but my mate was reluctant to let me go."

And that in fact was an understatement. It had taken Harry over fifteen minutes to get from his bedroom to the exit with the way Draco had tried to delay him. His veela had grown spoilt, he thought wryly; he had grown too accustomed to his presence. After being apart from him for the entire morning, his dominant had been loathe to let him go once again. He had started with small things, insisting on feeding Harry their dessert and then proceeded to give him the grapes one by one with painstaking slowness. And after that he had determined that Harry simply could not wear his uniform any longer. It was the weekend after all.

Resultantly, Harry had to endure his mate going through his wardrobe. This shirt was too thin for the weather, this jumper too thick. Harry had been amused at first, and had sat there patiently while the blonde continued tossing his clothing about. But it had been the outside of enough when the veela had suggested that he bathe as well – with particular concentration on his hair. Thus, he had dressed amidst the grumbles of Draco who lay grumpily across his bed, not the least bit helpful.

Harry had thought it to be the end of the matter, but no, Draco had decided to prove that he could be every bit as stubborn as his mate if he chose to be. And so, he had pulled all punches and transformed, knowing very well how irresistible Harry found him in that form. He of course had been right. Almost immediately all thoughts of his friends had fled Harry's mind as he played with the wings that so amused him. His dominant would have succeeded to, if not for the fact that he let his satisfaction show on his face, breaking Harry out of his state.

With a growl and a scolding look, Harry had made to leave, but Draco had been hot on his heels, raising his allure even as he spoke in a purring tone, reminding Harry how much he preferred being by his side rather than his silly little lion friends. Harry had been forced to ask Merlin for patience at that point, reminding himself that mature veelas tended to be protective of their mates and liked monopolising their attention. His dominant wanted to keep him here all to himself; however, Harry, no matter how much he loved him, truly missed his friends and had been looking forward to a few hours with them alone. Besides, there was the fact that Draco was supposed to meet his own companions in Slytherin, not that he particularly seemed to care about that little detail at the moment.

In the end, Harry had been left with no choice but to pull an old tactic with the teenager. Swifter than his mate could realise, Harry turned and launched himself upwards, stretching on tiptoes until he could meet Draco's lips. The sudden move worked wonders. Draco melted into the unexpected caress, his wings fluttering slightly in reaction. Harry himself was lost in the pleasant sensation for long moments before he reminded himself that this kiss was not for some random reason. With that in mind, he withdrew slightly to nuzzle his dominant for a moment before reclaiming his lips. The move worked well as the silver eyes deepened before falling close. Harry kept up the movement for a few more seconds before withdrawing. As he had hoped, a slightly silly grin worked its way onto Draco's face.

Despite his own flushed appearance, Harry could not help the pleased smirk on his face as he turned and raced out the entrance, calling over his shoulder that he would be back in a few hours. He could
not help his snicker when Draco's annoyed growl came from within, however the veela made no
move to follow him.

Ron tried vainly to simultaneously arch an eyebrow and furrow his face into a frown, but only
succeeded in bringing forth more laughter. "I guess I should leave the glaring to the professionals," he
allowed ruefully, running a hand through his red hair.

"You should," Harry agreed, his green eyes sparkling up at the redhead easily. "Uncle would not
approve of any competition from a dunderhead redhead."

"Yeah well," he shrugged, "this will be his last year with this particular redhead." While saying that,
the sixth Weasley of the current generation flopped backwards so that he was cradled against the
slightly damp grass.

"How come?" Harry asked curiously, not complaining when Hermione manoeuvred him so that she
could wrap an arm around his shoulder.

The lioness had become overprotective of late, not that he could blame her. He vaguely remembered
her coming over to their quarters some time during the week. He had been in a dozing state, his head
firmly ensconced in Draco's lap. He had been neither completely awake nor asleep, but instead had
been in that state where one felt disconnected from his body. Later on when he had been more lucid
he had inquired about her visit, but his dominant had quieted him easily with the assurance that she
was just concerned for his overall health. He honestly had not been surprised by that given his
continued state. It was a tad bit annoying the way his lethargy continued.

Only the day before, Professor Flitwick had sent him to his office during their last double period. The
tiny wizard had done so under the premise that he had work slated for his apprentice to do, however
once Harry had closed the door behind him, a note appeared before him, with the instructions that he
was to rest himself on the man's couch. It had been embarrassing, the way he had been basically
excused from class to nap, but Harry willingly admitted that it could be worst.

If all that remained from his pain was the occasional bout of tiredness as his body burnt his resources
faster than they could be replenished, then he would accept it. Draco had done his part for him,
extending his occlumency shields so that they encompassed his mate as well. Harry would do his
part and try to recover his health completely as swiftly as possible.

"I'm rubbish at potions mate," Ron was saying presently, drawing Harry away from his musings.
"You know that. I'm only scraping by with Acceptables because of Mione here. Once the OWLS are
through I'm done with potions."

"But I thought you wanted to be an auror?" the thirteen year old asked in confusion.

True it had been almost a year since that particular conversation with his friend, but surely not so
much had changed since then.

It was Hermione however, that answered his question. "The criteria for aurors has changed due to
the recent...uprisings, Harry," she said softly, dancing around the critical issue. "The standards have
been loosened considerably so that potions is a recommended subject but not necessarily a required
one."

"Yup," Ron agreed cheerfully, "so no potions for me!

"Potions is a nice subject," Harry protested, looking up at the bushy haired witch for support.

As expected, she nodded firmly in agreement.
"I'm not saying that it isn't a good subject Harry, I'm just saying that it's not a good subject for me. We can't all be geniuses now can we?"

Despite the rhetoric in the question, Harry could not help but discern an odd note in Ron's tone. There was an emotion in that sentence, but at the moment, he could not define it. Nor was he given the opportunity to do so, for he felt Hermione's arm stiffen minutely around him. A quick peep upwards showed that the witch was glaring at the redhead, but the expression quickly smoothed when she saw Harry observing.

"Ignore the grouch Harry," she bid with a cheerfulness that seemed a bit forced. "The Care of the Magical Creatures project has been driving him insane the past few days. I'm really glad Professor McGonagall talked me out of taking all of the courses offered by the school."

Harry nodded slightly, his agreement towards the sentiment a given. He remembered the end of their second year, and the day in particular Hermione had been summoned to their head of house's office. The then thirteen year old witch had emerged from the meeting considerably upset and had dragged him off to a classroom where she had ranted at the unfairness of it all. To his credit, even at his tender age Harry had been able to sympathise with the witch. She wanted to learn everything about this new world she had found himself in, however, as he had told her then, her desire would cost her tremendously if she did not reign it in.

Muggle Studies really wasn't necessary for a muggle born, no matter how curious she was about how wizards viewed her world. Indeed, one weekend visit to the Burrow had taught her all she had needed to know later in the summer. At the time though, it had been the only subject she had willingly dropped. However, by the second week of their third year, she had dropped two others. Like Harry's family, she had quickly decided that Divination was a waste of a subject and had dropped it scant days before Harry had done the same. Care of the Magical Creatures had quickly followed. Hermione was not an outdoorsy person, moreover the closest she liked coming to animals was in the form of her half keazle pet whom disliked Ron just as much as the wizard hated the cat.

Harry knew that at first Ron had been peeved that his best friends had dropped his electives but he had eventually gotten over it. It did not mean though that he did not grumble on occasion when he had no one to fall back on for help with those subjects – not that he usually allowed them to help him anyway. In all honesty, the only reason the Weasley boy allowed Hermione's help was because she gave him no choice. Hermione could be ruthless when it so suit her and after the first time he had argued and she had left him stuck to a chair in the library with a pile of text books, he had learnt to simply go along with the witch's desire and the schedules she made for him.

Harry on the other hand, was a different matter completely and the redhead absolutely refused every single offer of aid Harry made. Sometimes Harry wished that he could succumb to his urges and hex his friend into compliance. What was wrong with accepting aid from someone who was better at something than you? Could Ron really not see that he was better off swallowing his pride and letting someone who in other circumstances would have been his junior offer him aid.

Harry would never have used it against the redhead, and in all honesty, it disturbed him that the wizard was passing through Hogwarts with mediocre grades, and not like Neville because he was incapable of doing better. The Weasleys were a smart bunch, a simple look through the achievements of the older siblings showed that. The fact was that Ron did not particularly care about his grades and it was something that both Harry and Hermione found annoying at times.

The thirteen year old shook his head slightly to rid himself of the thoughts and instead focussed on what Hermione was now saying.

"The school's buzzing about the tournament," she said, with slight disdain in her voice. "Hardly
anyone seems to care about the history associated with the tournament and the prestige it bestows upon the victorious school."

Ron snorted slightly from his spot on the ground, "Mione you need to stop reading, seriously. The Triwizard Tournament is just an excuse for schools and Ministries to blow galleons and pretend that their school is superior."

"Ron!" Hermione gasped in a scandalised tone, but before she could continue, Harry interjected.

"He does have a point Hermione. Originally the tournament was exactly as you said it was, but it went out of practice for a reason. Ron is right about that fact. The tournament just facilitates cheap politics at the expense of a few students. Imagine what it would feel like to be champion of your school? Originally the tournament was just between the schools, a friendly competition if you will to give the participating bodies a chance to intermingle. But eventually the ministries got involved and warped the whole thing. Instead of being a school competition, it's expanded to the point that the champions feel as if the good name of their country rides on their victory. It's stupid and puts unnecessary pressure on them. I'm all for the tournament, that is, if it followed the traditional movement, but as is, I think it's just a glorified farce."

"Strong words mate," Ron whistled. "Where'd you here that from? Malfoy Senior?"

"Partly," Harry shrugged, leaning his head against Hermione's shoulder. "When I asked him about it he got me some archives. You should check them out Hermione, they give you the real story behind the tournament, not just the glossed version the books provide. I can have Papa send a copy for you if you want."

"I'd like that," Hermione agreed, although the corners of her mouth were slightly drawn.

It was the witch's downfall, Harry noted, even as he shifted gradually so that he was reclining, his head on her lap. Hermione tended to put all her faith in what she got out texts, not allowing for the facts that authors rarely were completely objective. A memory tickled at him from their first year. Hermione had thoroughly researched him, and to his amusement, Harry had learnt that none of the biographies about him mentioned that he was a veela mate far less that he was under the guardianship of the Malfoys.

The last references to him stated that he was still living in the muggle world. The funniest one had been an author saying that he had been 'sighted' playing a muggle sport. Really remarkable in the circumstances, given that at the time he had been 'spotted', the Malfoys had been vacation in Australia. The witch had not learned her lesson from that, which was quite unfortunate. Hermione was a brilliant witch, he could easily attest to that, but her limitation was her greatest drawback. Whereas Harry and even Draco relied occasionally on intuition to guide them in their works, the witch followed the textbook definitions religiously, often to her detriment, given that some of the instructions were questionable. However, Harry had long since learnt that there were some things that were better left unsaid and this in particular was one of them. And so, wisely he said nothing, instead leaving Hermione to tread the part she had chosen.

"Really Ron," Hermione hissed, almost a half an hour later.

Harry had drifted off a few minutes before, growing tired despite the fact that they had been doing little more than sitting there and talking among themselves. But then as the witch reminded herself, he had spent the morning tutoring, and for someone still in a convalescent period, it had to be
stressful. As such, she had signalled to Ron when she had first noticed him drifting off in her lap, and gradually they had softened their tones until they thought him to be deeply asleep.

Now, minutes later, and certain that he would not awaken, Hermione directed a glare at her partner. "Did you have to say it like that?"

"I didn't mean anything by it," he rebutted in a fierce whisper. "I can't help...well you know."

"No I don't know Ron Weasley," the teenage girl hissed back, eyes narrowing. "Harry's done nothing against you and I won't have you upsetting him by your pettiness."

"I am not being petty," Ron grumbled, his voice rising slightly.

"Oh," Hermione asked, arching a brow at him, "so you can honestly tell me that you don't have a grudge against Harry? Not even the slightest hint of one?"

The teenage boy's silence was speaking and Hermione sighed, looking downwards at the smaller boy laying partially on her. "It isn't his fault Ron," she said eventually, meeting his glance.

"I know it isn't his fault," Ron huffed, turning away slightly, "but that doesn't change anything Hermione. You don't understand..."

"What I do understand Ronald Weasley," she retorted, "is that you are casting blame on Harry who is innocent in this whole thing. Harry didn't do anything to start those rumours and you need to recognise and respect that. Harry's perceptive Ron; I'm sure he's already realised something off about you. He doesn't need this right now – at all. So grow up!"

Ron's retort was cut off when the said boy shifted slightly and both of their eyes widened. Had he roused enough to have heard them? Both teenagers held their breaths anxiously but after several seconds, Harry settled back down, twisting slightly so that he was on his side.

They both sighed in relief, but that was the end of that particular conversation for them both. This was not the time or place for such a discussion although it was clear to Ron from the look the lioness gave him that the conversation was far from over. They would simply continue it out of Harry's possible hearing range.

"Anyway," Ron began, "when are we going to tell him about us?"

Hermione shrugged lightly, her hands playing with strands of black hair. "I'd hoped to tell him today, but I doubt it'll be possible. He'll only want Draco once he wakes and once they're together the world takes a back seat."

Ron crinkled his nose at the prospect of that. He was used to seeing Harry and his mate wrapped around each other, but somehow the way Hermione put it made it seem incredible romantic and he could not help but sniff at it.

"Well you're right about that," he grumbled, tugging absently at blades of grass. "But we should tell him soon."

"You'll only be confirming what he already knows," an amused voice stated from above.

Both teenagers jumped slightly as Draco smirked down at them from his spot a few feet higher. His amusement increased as they gaped at him and easily he lowered himself, wings flapping gently until he could land next to them.
"Harry called," he said by way of explanation, gesturing at the still slumbering boy. "You'll catch flies Hermione," he added mildly when the girl continued to stare openly at him.

Not that he could particularly blame her, he supposed. There was a rather marked difference in his wizard appearance and veela one, wings not withstanding. Honestly, he hadn't planned on using his veela form at the school in public, but, after days of being in his natural state, the blonde's veela side had wanted out. The few hours with Harry in their room seemed not enough to satisfy his urgings, and thus, when through their bond, Harry had sent a sleepy call to him, he had responded instinctively, choosing to release his wings and soar the distance it took to get to him.

He supposed, with some amusement, that he had caused quite a stir, especially when he had passed over the quidditch field, deftly catching and returning a quaffle on his passage. It was not something he would usually have done, but there was something about being airborne after so long that left him feeling slightly mischievous and so he had and still was indulging them. He could have given Harry's friend warning, but somehow he wanted to see that look on their face. He found now, a greater appreciation of the mischief Harry so liked. There was something exhilarating about it.

Kneeling easily, he wrapped his arms around Harry's torso and in one fluent movement stood with him cradled in his arms. Still asleep, Harry moved instinctively, grabbing fistfuls of the veela's shirt securely.

"I'm here little one," Draco said reassuringly, kissing his forehead. "Harry's had enough of out here," he said smoothly, directing his attention to his peers.

"How'd you know?" Hermione inquired, finally bringing herself out of the mild trance his state had put her into. From the look in the girl's eyes, Draco could tell that she would be racing to the library as soon as possible to compare his form to the vague descriptions the texts provided. "He seems fine to me."

"Oh I'm not disparaging your company," he said with a smile, "it's just that Harry and I have grown a little too accustomed to being together now. You'll find that our normal five hour span has decreased significantly. Harry was about at his limit and called me. I would stay here with you," he continued graciously, "and nap as well, but then, I'd think you'd prefer some alone time." The last was said with a slight smirk that had the pair blushing.

"You don't really need to worry about informing Harry," he said graciously, "my pet has noticed the closeness between you two...has since third year if I'm not mistaken. You'll find that our normal five hour span has decreased significantly. Harry was about at his limit and called me. I would stay here with you," he continued graciously, "and nap as well, but then, I'd think you'd prefer some alone time." The last was said with a slight smirk that had the pair blushing.

"You don't really need to worry about informing Harry," he said graciously, "my pet has noticed the closeness between you two...has since third year if I'm not mistaken. He won't be upset, although I hope you aren't when he bags you about snogging and the likes. Our parents are his primary examples I'm afraid and he's bound to expect you both to model after them. Silly minx has yet to connect our own relationship to theirs though, but that's entirely another matter."

"Third year?" the pair said simultaneously, causing the veela to laugh richly, even as he turned away, adjusting Harry in his grasp.

"Yes third year," he agreed, still chuckling. "My little one is very perceptive to matters that do not concern him. Now there is only Blaise and Millicent to go and then our little group will be all paired off. He'll be up and about by five," he called over his shoulder as he walked. "If you wish, you can join us for dinner later. We won't be heading to the Hall."

"We will," Hermione agreed, for indeed Ron was too busy trying to remember his actions back when they were thirteen.

Silly redhead, she thought fondly as she scooted over to him in order to distract him once the mates were out of sight. Jealously problems and pride set aside, Ronald Weasley really was a nice wizard
and an even better boyfriend. Now if she could only get him to ignore the words of others – then their relationship would be perfect.

"Harry?" a blonde teenager asked drowsily, as he forced himself to open his eyes.

His bedroom was dark, the only source of illumination coming from the remnants of the fire that earlier had been blazing in the common room. However currently little more than embers remained, and consequently, it was only through his bond that he was aware that the shadow standing besides his bed was his mate.

"What's wrong cub?" he continued, the sheets falling as he sat up. Although sluggish, the veela easily reached out and pulled down the silent teenager until he was sprawled across the bed.

"Dominant," Harry whispered, his hand moving to clench at Draco's chest, "my dominant."

Draco fought against his lethargy, directing all of his focus towards his mate. He was tired, extremely tired from the long evening he had had. The potions master had pushed him relentlessly that evening, forcing him to brew three complicated potions simultaneously. Although he had appreciated the challenge, and understood that his godfather had been trying to make him live up to his ability, the four hour long brewing session had left him exhausted.

The only good thing was that it was a Friday, and thus he had the opportunity to sleep in the next day. He had been looking forward to a long uninterrupted sleep, and had purposely persuaded Harry into a sleeping potion to ensure that he would not awaken before him and crave for his presence. However it seemed that somehow his plan had backfired, for here was Harry, murmuring in a tone that clearly indicated that all was not right with him, and even now was burrowing his head beneath the veela's chin, his cooler skin a slight shock for the sleep warmed veela.

"Yes, I'm your dominant," he murmured, his voice sleep roughened. "What's the matter Harry. Bad dream?"

"You're my dominant right?" Harry asked, ignoring his mate's question completely in favour of his own. "No one can take you from me. You'll never leave me?"

The hesitancy in his tone fully roused the veela from his lethargy. Draco was alarmed. Why would Harry even consider asking such questions? He was Harry's, always had, and always would be. There was nothing that could ever change that; he had thought that Harry understood that. So why was it that his mate was casting doubtful eyes on him, the emotions in them clearly discernable despite the darkness of the room? He would have his answers, Draco decided, however first he would reassure the mate that was now starting to tremble slightly, obviously disturbed by his continued silence.

"I'm yours Harry," he whispered fiercely, his tone ringing with surety. "I am you mate, your dominant, and I will forever be so."

"No one can take you away?" Harry repeated, his hands clenching in the veela's nightshirt. "You're my dominant?"

"No one," Draco reaffirmed, his hands moving so that he could wrap them about Harry's upper arms. "I'm yours as much as you're mine Harry. We will never be apart, come what may."

"Promise?" the veela mate pushed, although this time his voice was slightly more confident.
"I promise," Draco said solemnly, leaning forward to kiss Harry softly. "What brought this about?" he asked when they parted and Harry seemed content.

The thirteen year old was suddenly shy, his head dropping forward as he refused to speak. The veela sighed softly and fell back against his pillows, pulling Harry down with him so that he was lying on him.

"Tell me Harry," he half asked, half demanded. "You've woken me up to ask questions that you know the answers to. Who put those insecurities in your head little one? Tell me, I promise I shall not be cross with them."

Draco felt, rather than saw the finger Harry traced against his clothing. He allowed it with mild amusement. Harry always made the gesture when he was trying to decide the best way to speak his mind. With patience the veela waited for the minute or so it took Harry to gain the courage to speak.

"Lavender and Parvati were talking about Beauxbatons," Harry began softly. "And how beautiful their veela students would be. And I thought that maybe you would like them more than me. I'm not a veela...what if you chose them instead of me. I can't do anything compared to a veela Draco. You're so beautiful, any other veela will be the same. And then you might decide that you rather not be my mate any-OW!"

Harry's words ceased abruptly in favour of that cry when Draco's hand suddenly connected with his bum with surprising fierceness. His eyes widened as he looked down. Draco's eyes were laced with anger, and every ounce of it was directed his way. "Draco?"

The blonde teenager sat up, forcing Harry off him. He did not speak for long moments, instead, reaching across to illuminate the bedroom, before he returned his full attention to his mate.

"What?" Harry tried again, hesitant at the sudden shift in his mate's demeanour. How could he have shifted so quickly from being coaxing and understanding to this?

"That's the second time in recent months I've heard you debase yourself so and I will not stand for it Harry James," Draco declared sternly.

The said mate blinked in confusion, not understanding what Draco was talking about. He wasn't debasing himself, he was speaking logically. Despite his case and his Papa's, the vast majority of veela's tended to mate with each other. So was he farfetched to worry that the same wouldn't happen with Draco? Logically he knew that mates were inseparable and that there was no way Draco could choose another, but what if someone better came along, someone who made him regret whom his chosen mate was? That thought had been plaguing him for a while now, so much so that the potion had little effect on him. Finally, he had come here to his veela for reassurance, and had gotten it – along with a smack. Why was that?

"I wasn't debasing myself dominant," he frowned, although his voice was hesitant at best.

"You were," Draco rebutted, eyes glinting. "Insinuating that someone else is better suited to be my mate is debasing yourself. Saying that I might find someone better is doing the same thing. I don't know where these insecurities of yours pop up from but I will not have it. First it was you saying that you were too ugly for me – a scare crow I believe you called yourself. And now you are here worrying needlessly about some silly veela chits from France. I don't care if the veela queen comes here Harry James, I will care less. You are my mate, no one else. Nothing will change that fact, absolutely nothing.

"I know pet that you have trouble sometimes believing that you deserve to be loved – no don't
protest – you know it's true. But this is the outside of enough now. I love you, or family loves you and nothing will change that fact. You need not concern yourself with other people Harry because I will never let you go. Haven't I proven that to you already? Pansy’s tried and I've ignored her, and there have been countless other witches and wizards who've at some point approached me. Have I done anything besides laugh at their ignorance? No. Because they are fools.

"You are mine and I always protect and cherish what is mines Harry James. So get any thoughts of me leaving you out of your head right now mate, I will not leave you. Now, tell me, are you convinced or must I use other methods of persuasion? I will not have you doubting me, nor will I have you troubling yourself with inconsequential things."

Draco's speech broke off and he stared downwards at his mate with an arched eyebrow. Harry's breathing was slightly erratic as he strove to compose himself. His eyes were slightly glossy, but there were no signs of tears in sight. Draco was patient, watching through his mate's eyes as he processed all what he had told him.

Finally, after long moments Harry's head bobbed. "I'm sorry dominant," he offered, "I doubted you. Forgive me?"

The veela searched his mate's gaze for long moments, trying to discern whether Harry had took his message in the vein he was supposed too. He seemed to have and Draco accepted that, nodding regally.

"I forgive you silly mate," he muttered, leaning forward to kiss Harry's forehead even as he tussled his hair. "But I am serious Harry," he warned, pulling back. "No more of this doubting yourself. There is no one else I could ever want but you."

"I won't," Harry promised.

"Good," Draco declared, his eyes reflecting his pleasure. "Now cub, unless there's any other matter you'd like for me to clear up, can I dim the lights and salvage the remainder of this night?"

"Can I stay?" Harry all but whispered to him.

"Of course you can silly," he retorted, already reaching for the lamp switch. "My bed is yours whenever you desire. Now settle down, I'm tired."

"And cranky," the veela mate pointed out softly, snuggling down besides him.

"Slightly" Draco allowed, even as he fought a yawn, "although I'd have smacked you regardless. Now hush and sleep."

"Yes dominant," Harry murmured. "I love you."

"Love you too."
Durmstrang seventh years are in chaos. The high master still will not say which of us will journey to Hogwarts. He is being most secretive on the whole matter. I think he still does not know who will have the best chance to bring glory to our school once more.

So there's no guarantee that you'll be coming?

I am coming. The high master would be mad not to have me there. I am the best student in my year.

Vain much?

I speak truth not vanity.

It was a joke Viktor.

Such things are not conveyed through writing I suppose.

Then, it's a good thing that you'll be coming. You'll be able to appreciate my humour all the more then.

Will I?

Of course you will. What sort of question is that Viktor?

I have been thinking.

A worse sentence I have never heard.

Be quiet. I am serious now. Can we meet? Our plans are - what is the word? – sketchy at best.

We'll work something out. I won't have you here for months and not speak to you. I told you, the problem is not how we interact but how we explain those interactions. It needs to be valid enough to stand up to my family's scrutiny. Then we'll be okay.

You believe your family will not object to our relationship?

They might. You are a stranger after all, but, then again, I'm very social. One of my uncles joked once about me bringing home a Beauxbatons student just so I can improve my French. It will not be too surprising; we will just have to make you seem trustworthy.

I am trustworthy.

I know that, it's just my family that will need convincing.

By family you mean your veela.

I hear the derision in your tone Viktor.

I am sorry.

What do you have against Draco anyway? You've never liked him, I can tell.

It is difficult to explain.
Want to try?

When we meet perhaps. I can edit more quickly any wrong word I say.

Your English is darn near perfect! It is my Bulgarian that sucks.

You do not know any.

And whose fault is that, Mr. I-call-you-names-you-cant-understand.

The word, Harry, is dictionary.

I want you to tell me.

I will one day. I swear.

You better had. Oh, Draco's calling. Grandpa wants us. Talk later?

Go on.

Bye.

Bye.

* 

"What were you doing, sewing that robe?" Draco grumbled as Harry ran from his bedroom, hurriedly straightening his clothing.

The thirteen year old directed a glare at him, before lightening it when Draco rolled his eyes and slung an arm around his shoulders.

"I was busy," he said pertly as they headed from their rooms to amble towards the headmaster's office. "You can't expect me to drop everything when you call."

"You usually do," the blonde pointed out, waving to an upperclassman as they passed him. "I'm starting to think you're hiding something from me the way you secret yourself away." The veela chuckled at his own joke, not noticing the way Harry's eyes widened slightly. "But then, you never could keep a secret for long."

"Is that why you haven't checked on me?" Harry asked carefully, cautious to keep his voice as natural as possible.

"Well partly I suppose," Draco allowed, his fingers tapping gently on Harry's shoulder, "but then again, I trust you. We are all entitled to our little secrets. That is, unless you've taken one of Hagrid's runespores and are hiding it in that mess you call a room?"

"Hey, my room isn't that messy!" Harry protested, even as relief coursed through him.

The teenager neglected to mention that the messiness was deliberate. A strange object was less likely to be noticed in a chaotic room. Moreover, Draco believed that he was just going through a phase and did little to either clean up the mess or urge him to do the same.

"Of course not," he drawled, "you like tripping over things. The elves will have a field day once they arrive to service us. I'd expect a letter from mama if I were you."
"I'll have it clean by then," Harry promised, as they arrived before the gargoyles that guarded the entrance to the headmaster's office. "Blood Pops," he enunciated carefully.

"Disgusting things," Draco grimaced, as they stepped unto the moving staircase.

"Not if you're part vampire," Harry quipped cheekily, earning him a small kiss from his amused dominant.

"Ah, here are my two favourite boys," Albus bid jovially as he waved them into the room. "Come now, have a seat."

"I'm your favourite right Grandpa?" Harry asked teasingly, shooting an impish wink towards the man. "After all, I appreciate your lemon drops more than Draco ever has."

Albus laughed loftily. "That's a ploy for my sweets if I've ever saw one," he declared, sliding the bowl towards the dark-haired boy who helped himself immediately to the treats, a contented hum passing his lips at the unique flavour.

Draco looked on with amusement as the headmaster all but mirrored his mate's actions. Honestly, they were the only two persons he knew whom enjoyed the tangy sweet so much, far less gorged themselves on it, the way these two were prone to do. It was good, he decided, as he rocked back to await their leisure, that Harry did not venture up here to often any more, or else he would have required regular visits to check the state of his teeth.

Finally, when it seemed the pair were contented for the moment, the headmaster moved on to the matter that had led to the summons in the first place.

"As you know boys," he began, rocking back in his chair, "or guests will soon descend upon us. Before the chaos ensues, and I become entrenched in all the little details this tournament will undoubtedly demand, I thought I'd have a nice chat with you both, and in doing so, shed light on the security arrangements we have set up for Harry here."

"You mean there's more?" Harry frowned, a sinking feeling in his heart. Just how much obstacles would he and Viktor face before they could meet?

"No need to sound so put out Harry," Albus reassured him, eyes twinkling softly. "The measures are nothing too difficult nor do they require much of you."

"Let's hear Grandfather out before you start to pout cub," Draco put in with a reassuring smile, as he reached across the stroke Harry's cheek.

"Fine," he sighed, relaxing slightly. Surely, there would be nothing so innovative in their plans that he would not be able to find a way around it.

"Well, as you already know, your elves have once again been called up as active duty. Along side their normal responsibilities towards you both, they have been instructed to protect you from any dangerous situations to the best of their ability. Should a situation arise, one will fight while the other summons aid. This should surely give us a time delay in which to reach you.

"Secondly there are the restrictions upon you Harry. I know that we ask too much of you child, but I am afraid there is no way around this. There are the rules you are familiar with already such as the one relating to the grounds. We are now adding to that. At no time may you wander the castle alone at night. This will mean that the apprentice privilege in relation to curfew no longer applies to you for the foreseeable future."
"I've already consulted with Filius. You'll floo to either your quarters or down to Severus's dungeons depending on the time your responsibilities end. I ask that in the daytime you stick to the more populated areas of the castle or at least do not wander about without being accompanied by either Draco or at least two of your friends. Furthermore I'd like you, as much as possible, to stick to a routine. This will make it easier for us, at any time, to track your whereabouts."

"Grandpa," Harry interrupted with a frown. "Now that isn't fair at all!"

"Cub –"

"No dominant. I won't abide by that. Already the grounds are all but banned to me and now I can't explore the castle as well? That is not fair. I've had fewer restrictions when grounded!"

"Cub–"

"Now, now Draco," the headmaster said in a placating tone, looking at the veela over the rim of his glasses. "Harry is justified, I'm afraid. I've all but erased any privacy for you have I not my boy?"

"You have," Harry agreed petulantly. "I like having fun by myself sometimes."

"Your Uncle catered for this luckily," he smirked softly. "Severus warned me that you'd not accept it lying down, although not even he had foreseen such an outburst from you. He expected to find you wandering around within a day. I must say this is more refreshing."

The implications of that statement left Harry flushing for several moments. He really could be miserable if it suited him, he allowed. "What's the solution then?"

"James left in my care a family heirloom of his, several months before he passed away. He asked me then to keep it safe in case something ever happened to him, and to pass it on to you when I thought the time right. Perhaps now is that time after all."

Abruptly he rose, and headed towards his private quarters, apparently in search of the mentioned item.

"You shouldn't have interjected so," Draco scolded mildly, "it's rude."

"Oh poo," Harry huffed, folding his arms. "It needed to be said, and haven't I taught you by now that diplomacy doesn't always get you your way?"

"Nevertheless –"

"Not arguing are we boys?" Albus inquired, as he returned, a bundle in his arms.

Without a word, he slid it into Harry's lap, motioning for him to open it.

"I dare saw it is eager to return to its rightful owner," he smiled as he settled back into his chair.

After sharing a glance with Draco, who nodded slightly, Harry worked quickly on the string surrounding the wrapping. It fell off after a moment and with it, the paper. Within seconds, Harry found himself holding a shimmering, lightweight cloak. The material was one he had never seen before; it felt as smooth as water and all but glided through his fingers as he ran his fingers through it.

"What is it Grandfather?" Draco inquired curiously, while Harry manipulated it. "A protection cloak?"

"Close enough," Albus smiled. "Child, why don't you don it? I'm sure you'll enjoy what will
The secretive edge to the man's words captivated Harry, and without a thought, he stood, pulling the cape around him. The effect was immediate, and Harry found himself gaping down at blankly at his body – or rather – the lack of body. "An invisibility cloak," Draco said with slight awe.

"A genuine one at that," Albus agreed. "It is resistant to all summoning charms, is virtually indestructible, is self cleaning and bonds with its owner."

"Bonds?" the veela asked on behalf of his mate.

Said mate had now completely dismissed the two and was now amusing himself by rendering random body parts invisible.

"The cloak can never be taken from Harry unless he willingly parts with it. It can track him and, should he ever need it, the cloak will appear to him."

"I see," Draco mumbled, "it will give Harry the ability to wander about as he usually does undetected."

"It's more of a precautionary method," Albus agreed, "This way, should he find himself alone, he can at least have the element of surprise on hand. He should be careful though. The cloak does nothing to disguise sound."

"He should be listening to this," the veela stated cryptically, eyeing his mate who bore a slightly silly grin, "but then again, he never pays attention when he gets a new toy."

"I do so!" Harry protested, glaring at him. "Grandpa said that it doesn't hide sound."

"I stand corrected," he said wryly, "but for now let's finish hearing Grandfather out okay? You can play with your cloak afterwards."

"Fine," Harry grumbled, dropping back down onto his chair. "Oh but Grandpa, another thing is that I can transform if needs be. No one has of yet grown suspicious about the black kitten that runs about every now and again."

"Another thing I did not cater for," Albus said thoughtfully, "but you are right. I'll have to at least inform the teachers of your form, so they'll not take you for a runaway, but it is a feasible venture."

For the next twenty minutes, the three wizards continued their discussions, identifying potentially problematic areas and finding alternatives. Finally however, the headmaster handed them a copy of all the regulations that now surrounded both Harry and his mate.

"I've been careful," he revealed, "to inform the incoming headmasters of the nature of your relationship. Beauxbatons is quite familiar with veela relationships so I doubt that any issue will arise from their front. Madame Maxime though has asked to, at some point, meet with you both. I hope this is acceptable?"

"It is."

"Sure Grandpa."

"I will however, advise caution in relation to our other guests. I'm sure by now you understand that
the majority of our restrictions are directed primarily towards the Institute. I do not foresee any immitigable problems from them, but still, I ask you both to err on the side of caution.

"Draco, although it is fully in your rights, I must insist that you reserve physical aggression to only the most extreme cases. And Harry, I do not doubt that you'll befriend at least a third of the Institute by the time our guests are ready to leave. However, do be selective alright? Not everyone is to be trusted and I must insist that you keep all of what we've discussed today in mind."

For a moment, Harry found himself shaken. What the elder wizard was saying was so eerily similar to just what he was planning to do that he wondered, if the man had an inkling about it. However, when he did not press any further, Harry found himself relaxing considerably. It was naught but a coincidence he reminded himself. Besides, he did have the penchant for attracting trouble to himself. The warning was not too unexpected.

"Other than that," he said presently, "I have nothing more to say to the two of you besides wishing that you enjoy the tournament. Of you go now, and remember, my door is always open to you."

"Yes Grandfather."

"I'll remember Grandpa."

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"Lucius," Albus inquired, "any significant changes at the Ministry?"

"Voldemort is definitely reverting to his old tactics," the patriarch said firmly, his elegant voice carrying easily to all the Order members despite the fact that he was not speaking particularly loudly. "He is trying to infiltrate the ministry once again although currently I believe that it is not his primary concern."

"What's he done?" Alastor Moody asked gruffly, his magical eye swerving.

"Several junior workers have either died, 'disappeared' or currently have no desire to continue in their fields."

"Let me guess," Bill Weasley interjected, "the muggle-borns are dying, the half bloods vanishing and the light purebloods imperioed?"

"Basically," Lucius agreed. "He has made no move thus far to start secreting in legislations, but I do believe that he will start that soon enough."

"Ensure that all bills must either pass through Fudge or the Wizengamot for approval," Albus ordered shortly, receiving a nod from the man. "Narcissa?"

"I've finalised the transaction with the goblins. The cup is ours."

"The stipulations?"

"Nothing of consequence," she said dismissively.

And it was true. The Lestrange family were all but finished excepting a few squib members who could not inherit regardless. In the end, Narcissa had thought little of surrendering the assets to the goblins in exchange for the cup and the tommes contained in the vault. Besides, the more capital the bank possessed, the greater the returns on the money they themselves had invested with the institution. It wasn't a bad trade off in the end.
"Good," Albus nodded. "Although it is worrying the spate at which Voldemort is recruiting, I must say that I am pleased with our efforts thus far."

"You shouldn't worry too much about the recruitment Albus," Severus interjected softly, from his space between his lovers. "I doubt that half of them will be left standing by the end of this."

"How so Severus?"

The question was put forward by Arthur Weasley.

"Look at whom he's recruiting," the potions master drawled, "misfits from Knockturn, students barely out of school. And there is that lead we're following now of him trying to break persons out of Azkaban. He's in a desperate position at the moment. His elite servants are either dead or lacking souls. Fewer than ten of his inner circle are currently at his disposal if my memory serves me right, and even then, they are the ones without the influence and rank he requires for a political upheaval."

"His recruiting is a calculated, yet desperate manoeuvre. Notice that he has yet to do something truly catastrophic. Instead he's sticking to small raids, on mostly muggle territories where opposition is few."

"He's training them," Sirius murmured.

"Exactly that," Severus agreed. "They're little more than soldiers to him at the moment. The losses do not truly affect his goal significantly, and I'd even wager that they should not be our true target."

"Severus is right," Lucius murmured, twirling a quill absentely as he spoke. "Voldemort, for all intent and purposes has been too quiet. I have now realised that. I doubt that he has changed tactics that much, so that leaves me with only one belief."

"He's planning something big."

"I trust your judgement," Albus said, a hint of weariness to his voice, as he sat down. "I suppose what we need to do then is find out exactly what it is that he's planning."

"And for that we need a spy," Lucius said grimly.

*Molly won't like this," Arthur warned, less than half an hour later, shooting his third son a shooting look. "She'll be against this from the get go."

"I'm the logical choice," Percy argued softly, after the Order meeting had officially ended. "I fit the criteria of what he wants Dad. Pureblood; magically gifted. And, it helps that he already has persons in the Ministry. I'm sure we can stage something that is bound to get me at least noticed by them. I can do this Dad."

"I know you can," Arthur sighed, after looking into his son's earnest eyes. "And that is what scares me. There's nothing you can't do once you've set your mind on it. I am worried though, if the consequences will be worth it. Only you can decide if you go through with this son. No one will hold it against you either way. It is your life on the line after all."

"I know that Dad," Percy said softly, reaching out to clasp his father's shoulder, "but I need to do this. You and Mom have always told us how difficult the last war was, and the sacrifices that had to be made to win in the end. So many people died, Mom lost her brothers – if there is something, I can do to aid this time around, I want to. And I think this is the best way I can."

"I understand son. I'll – your mother and I will support you, no matter what you choose to do. But please, consider carefully."

And Percy considered it carefully for several days, but in the end, he knew exactly what he needed to do. This was war, and everyone had to contribute in some way, and this would be his effort. And so, Percy Weasley found himself tasked with the mission of infiltrating Voldemort's ranks. It was a dangerous and potentially deadly task, but, as he had argued, it was far easier for the light to plant a spy among the Dark Lord's ranks, than finding a recruit no longer disillusioned by the wizard's promises.

The time passed slowly and torturously, and as the weeks went by, Percival found himself wondering if he had made the right choice. But then again, he reminded himself as he stared down at the bloodied face of the muggle child he had just slain, sacrifices needed to be made for the greater good. Even if it cost persons their lives, or he his sanity, he had to continue.

For there were just some things that a wizard simply had to do.

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"You wanted me High Master?" Viktor asked smoothly as he stood before the man, keeping his balance easily despite the turbulence with which the ship was currently dealing.

"Yes," Karkaroff drawled, indicating that he should sit. "I want to go over some last minute procedures with you. The last time we met, you raised the issue of you not being selected as champion."

"I did," Viktor confirmed neutrally.

"I am taking no chances," the Bulgarian said decisively. "Although I doubt that there is anyone else the cup will consider; you are right in that we should cater to all avenues."

"Your solution then sir?"

"Yours shall be the only true name entered for our school."

"Surely the other students will object to that," he pointed out negligibly, not that it truly mattered to him. He would hex the first one who dared speak ill to his face – or within his hearing range. The other wizards were beneath his notice really. He did not care for their feelings on the matter.

"That is my concern, not yours," he declared. "Your only concern currently is establishing contact with Potter and fostering it. Our plans –"

"I know the plans thoroughly high master," he interrupted firmly, yet respectfully. "I have no doubts that they will succeed. However," he smirked, "I crave your indulgence should you be...approached by any Hogwarts representative."

"Oh?" Karkaroff inquired.

"I do not plan, beyond a certain point, to be subtle about the whelp and I. I hope you understand."

The high master chuckled maliciously. "You have my blessings then. Extra credit to you if you incur the wrath of Snape or Malfoy. Those traitors will pay for their betrayal to our master."

"I will aim to do just so," Viktor smirked, even as he laughed internally.
His foundation was laid. Any reports returning to the high master of his meetings with Harry were thus covered. He really did not intend to tailor his behaviours around the boy in public. However, should he succumb to his urges and act more affectionately with his little love than what was strictly necessary, the high master already had his reasoning.

No one could say that he was not crafty, he thought fondly, even as he strove to appear interested in what the man was now planning. He was determined that Harry Potter would be his love, and he would have him no matter what. Harry would be his – completely his. Nothing would stand in his way.

Hours later, he found himself looking out of his cabin window as he felt a subtle shift in their altitude. True enough, as he had thought, they had arrived. Slowly their craft was descending, and with it, the Bulgarian got his first look at England's best wizarding school and the sometimes home of his love Harry.

A pleased grin graced the Bulgarian's face as he took in the scenery. Soon he would have all that he wanted.

"Look out Hogwarts," he whispered, "Viktor Krum has arrived, and I'm here for what is mine."
Chapter 54

Harry was happy. Viktor was here and so, all was well with the world. Sighing contentedly, the thirteen year old sat up from the grass, turning to bestow a fond smile on the bigger male eyeing him indulgently.

"You are happy malko surste?" Viktor asked in that accented voice of his that so amused Harry. Somehow Viktor made English sound so poetic; it was something he could not help but admire.

"I am very happy Viktor," he responded, bending to peck his cheek lightly. "How could I not be with you here with me?"

"I will stay with you forever," the Bulgarian said sincerely, and a warm feeling blossomed in Harry's heart.

Well aware that his emotions was splayed openly on his face, and embarrassed that they were being so easily read, Harry averted his gaze, ignoring the Bulgarian's rich laughter at the blatant move.

While waiting for his blush to fade, Harry looked up, taking in the brilliant sunshine. It seemed that even the environment was content to share in his happiness. How he adored moments like these, when the world seemed to narrow to simply him and Viktor. No one else but them, lying here, free of all concerns. No Hogwarts, no schoolwork, no Draco. Here, now, next to his Bulgarian, Harry was free to relax with someone he cared so much for.

He jumped slightly when a large, calloused hand settled on his cheek. Turning, he found Viktor regarding him worriedly, something that further increased that warmness within him. Here was someone who cared so much for him.

"Your face grows sad," the seventeen year old remarked. "What troubles you Harry? Share with me."

The half question, half demand, had the desired effect, and with a sigh, Harry shared his thoughts, admitting that thinking of the veela had broken him out of a serene state. "But enough about him," he declared. "We have time enough yet before I am missed. You're sure that that golem you made of me will last the afternoon?"

"Until night if it needs too," Viktor reassured him, pulling him closer. "We have hours left yet should you choose."

"I do," Harry smiled.

"Then we shall enjoy it."

And enjoy it they did. Moving from one topic to the next, the pair lay there in the grass, surprisingly lush for the time of the year while they regaled each other with tales of their life thus far, and their hopes for the future. Some might consider it boring, but for Harry it was ideal. That is, until he felt a change within his friend, on whom he was now resting on, using him as a living pillow.

He was not certain when he felt the change in his friend. One moment, the strong chest beneath him was heaving with laughter at the quip he had made, the next, the arms around him tightened almost painfully as the Bulgarian's eyes narrowed as he looked over Harry's shoulder. Concerned, Harry forced himself away, craning his head for a sight of whatever had changed so abruptly Viktor's mood.
Sighting it, his heart plummeted.

For quickly bearing down upon them was Draco in all of his enraged veela glory. A bolt of fear raced down Harry's spine. The veela looked absolutely murderous, and every ounce of that rage was directed on the man below him. Not that Viktor at this point was much calmer. Harry found himself being tossed off the Bulgarian as he reached for his wand, a dark glint in his eyes that terrified him.

"No!" he screamed, even as he saw Viktor's lips moving, calling out a spell meant to devastate. He had no doubt that it wouldn't given the grim look in the Bulgarian's eyes. And yet, simultaneously, Draco had launched an elemental attack, the force of which would also cause harm should it make contact.

As the two attacks barrelled at each other, Harry found himself shrieking once again, although who's name exactly he called, was lost in transmission. "NO!"

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"No!"

Harry was unable to restrain his scream even as his panicked eyes flew open and he took in his environment. He was safe in his bedroom, the light state of it indicating that it was still afternoon. But that did little to reassure him now as he clutched at his chest, struggling to calm him breathing. His dream had been so disturbing on multiple levels, he did not even have a clue how to start analysing it.

A small scream tore itself from his lips once again as he suddenly found himself surrounded by softness. He relaxed after a moment though, for surrounding him was none other than Draco's soft wings, not a hint of the blackness in his dreams present on the soft feathers. Sighing in relief, Harry twisted and buried his head against a welcoming shoulder, mewling lightly as arms thinner than the ones in his dreams enveloped him.

"Dominant," he breathed, his voice cracking slightly.

"I left you to nap little one," Draco rumbled from above him, his tone slightly teasing as he tried to lessen his dismal mood, "not to scare me out of my wits with your screams. I thought somehow someone had gotten past me."

"Sorry," Harry murmured, missing the humour entirely, too busy trying to disassociate himself from the dream.

It wasn't real he told himself, but yet it had been so vivid he could not shake it. He was not out there on the grounds, but instead safe in Draco's arms, where he belonged. But still, it remained, that blatant distaste of him for Draco in his dreams. Why would he choose another over his veela? It made absolutely no sense to him. Yes he cared for Viktor and looked forward to his arrival in a few hours to reaffirm their friendship. However, he would never, ever, choose anyone's company over Draco's. It made no sense to him. Draco meant the world to him. No-one could ever take that place.

"What did you dream of little one," Draco asked softly, resting his chin on Harry's head in comfort as he spoke. "Whom was I fighting?"

The statement had Harry tensing, and resultantly, Draco's grip on him tightened.

"What do you mean?" Harry probed carefully, wondering if somehow Draco had seen snippets of his dream through their bond. He was not sure if that was possible, especially with the mental
shields, but then again, he had a habit of making the impossible happen.

"You shouted my name," the blonde told him, lifting Harry's chin gently to peruse his face. "You also said victor. Did I win whatever skirmish I was in?"

"I don't know," Harry said honestly. There was no use trying to deny Draco's interpretation of his shouts. He had had a nightmare, and given what he had said, it would be instantly suspicious to Draco if he attempted to concoct a different story. "I woke before it ended."

"Hmm..." the veela said noncommitally.

He slowly fell backwards, taking Harry with him until they reclined against the bed. Silence reigned for several minutes as Harry tried to collect his thoughts while his mate's hands continued to roam over him, offering him silent comfort. He was aware that the veela was thinking as well. There was that barely discernable crease to his forehead that signalled deep contemplation.

"Dominant," he asked eventually, wanting not to dwell on the dream any longer. "What are you thinking about?"

Draco was silent for a moment before he responded. "I was just pondering on the schools' arrival this evening...and what that has to do with your dream. Oh don't tense so," he urged, rubbing a little more firmly so that Harry settled back down once again, although his green eyes remained hooded. "It's just that I can't help but think it has something to do with your dream. You weren't completely honest with me just now little one, but then again that's only to be expected."

"I don't understand," Harry whispered, as he pulled back, the veela allowing him. He moved so that he was seated on his haunches besides the veela, who laced his fingers lazily along his chest as he observed him through silver eyes. Had Draco known more about his dream than he was letting on?

"How was I not honest with you?"

Draco tilted his head slightly. "You do know what you dreamt, but you don't want to tell me. I can't help but think that this has something to do with our previous conversation some nights ago. Cub, you are not to worry yourself about this tournament. And don't deny that you aren't. The fact that you had a nightmare a few hours after word came of their imminent arrival is proof enough of that. Plus, the way you said my name..." the veela's brows furrowed for a moment before he continued.

"There was fear in your voice. You dreamed something that disturbed you, but you won't tell me what it is. No, its fine cub. I've said it before. We all have our little secrets. But please remember what I have told you. Those veelas that are coming mean nothing to me, nor will they ever. Mated or unmated, beautiful or otherwise. It is you that I love and want. You have nothing to fear. You will not lose me."

But he had in his dream. Or at least there was the possibility that he could have. He did not know the spell that Viktor had uttered, but from the look in his eyes, Harry knew that the spell was more than a simple defensive one. It could very well have hit his mate...and with it, he would have lost him. Dream or otherwise, it was a scary prospect. Draco was his life. He could not imagine a day without it.

Feeling suddenly vulnerable, Harry rocked forward, resting his forehead against Draco's chest, not caring at the unnaturalness of the position. "I can't lose you," he whispered into the fabric. "I need you Dominant. You can't leave me. Ever."

The blonde shifted slightly so he could free a hand to lay upon Harry's head. "You won't silly cub. I've told you this numerous times, but then again you're stubborn and need constant reminding."
The light teasing in his tone was lost to the veela mate. What he feared at this moment was more profound than a petty notion of Draco choosing someone else over him. This was greater than that. What he felt right now was despair at not having the veela...because of death. Suddenly it was now all hitting him, the precarious situation that he was in.

The Dark Lord was back, and undoubtedly Harry - and by default - his family would be a priority to him. There were all these security measures imposed to protect him, but truly, what was there to protect Draco? Precious few. What if something happened and it was Draco, and not him who suffered? What if someone cornered him alone somewhere, and Draco, sensing his distress, came to his aid, only to give himself up in his stead. His mate was a veela, he would do so. Veelas would give everything to protect the ones they loved – even their lives.

What if it came to that someday?

He never wanted that possibility to come about.

Harry gave a hitching breath, alerting his mate that there was more than he realised going on now.

"Harry?" the veela asked in concern, the hand on his hair tightening brief. "Cub?"

The thirteen year old shook his head slightly, refusing to answer the unasked question. How could he, when he was not even sure how to start explaining why he felt the way he was?

His veela moved, gradually shifting him downwards as he sat up until Harry's head was buried in his lap and he could caress him.

"You haven't been in this state in a while," the veela said reflectively, as his left hand started thumping gently on his back.

Draco was well aware of what was happening. Something was going on in his little mate's head, and whatever it was was overwhelming, so much so that Harry did not know how to deal with it. Trying to talk to him at this point would be useless, for he would not know how to express how he was feeling. What the teenager required now was quiet and support from him. All that was needed was for the boy to understand that he was not alone, and that there was someone waiting to comfort him whenever his thoughts sorted themselves.

He was right. Such a need had not emerged for several years, but this situation was unique enough to be memorable, and as such, he knew what to do. If his memory served him right, the last time Harry had found himself in such a situation was when their father had taken him with him to a trip to Diagon a few years back. They had been gone for a little over two hours, however, when they returned, Harry had been strangely quiet and the corners of his father's lips had whitened slightly.

As it turned out, they had come across a father doling to his son a particularly hard slap across the face, and immediately Harry's mind had been thrown back to his childhood. Despite the quick whispered words of reassurance Lucius had given him, Harry had fell into an unnaturally quiet state, until the man was forced to conclude his business early out of worry for his son.

And that worry was justified for the boy quickly fell into a troubled state, fussing at every little thing but refusing any form of comfort or distraction. Finally, their mother had pulled him to her, and despite his struggle (something surprising in itself) she eventually settled him on his side with his head in her lap. The veela-mother had said nothing, only caressed him tenderly. Surprisingly it had worked. Several minutes had past in silence, but eventually the then little boy had broken down into small sobs, in between which he had explained the effect the sight had had on him.
Frankly, Draco expected something similar to occur now. All the signs were there. All he was waiting on was for his mate to draw whatever conclusions he needed, before he spoke...or cried depending on how profound the revelation. It took a few minutes longer, but finally the veela got the expected reaction. Harry shifted slightly, indicating that the hand on his head was no longer welcomed before he rolled so that he was looking up through glazed eyes at his mate.

"Be careful Draco," he said softly, his eyes serious. "I can't survive without you. I need you by my side."

This time the veela caught the deeper undertones to his mate's words, and his eyes widened slightly. Why did his mate dwell on such facts? He had tried, as much as possible, to exclude Harry from the war. Yet here was his mate, contemplating on death?

Why? He knew though that this was not the right time to ask such a question. There was an open vulnerability in Harry's eyes; one that clearly implied that his mate was on his wits end despite his bout of reflection. What his mate needed now was not questioning, but plain old comfort.

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The boys weren't in the Hall.

Severus came to that conclusion after making a third pass through the room, looking for the telltale signs of his godsons. There was the bushy head of Granger in the fifth row with a fire-haired, freckled face boy besides her; seven rows down on the other side of the Hall sat Zabini and Bulstrode, but no where near either set of friends was either a blonde or brunette. Something must have come up, he decided, clapping automatically as Albus went through his welcoming speech for the two schools.

He was not too surprised, and perhaps, in all eventuality, it was better that the pair had not shown. Karkaroff had made a grand spectacle of himself during his entrance, but to those that knew better, that silver hand that brandished a wand as the man led the Durmstrang students in a fire show was not mere decoration, but a sign of his loyalty to a mad man. Severus really did not want to have to deal with a frantic Harry, whom he recalled had been privy to the events that had garnered the high master that silver hand. The boy would have enough issues as is with him in the school.

However, on the other hand, his boys would have enjoyed the considerably more elegant performance of the Beauxbatons students. The French school was well known for its all-round educational programme. Unlike Hogwarts, it focussed on producing students skilled in the arts, sports and academics. Numerous times, it had been suggested that Hogwarts do something along a similar line, but it had yet to pass. Perhaps this would be the inspiration for the school to adopt the same? Time would tell.

The students, he was glad to say, had maintained proper decorum throughout the performances, neither gaping openly at the obviously half-giant headmistress (something he wished Hagrid could have managed so well) nor were they either daunted by the show of power by the Durmstrang students or openly showed their disdain for the school that had rendered the previous champion dead. That lesson had been the hardest to inculcate into the students. The entire Institute could not be blamed for the actions of one...it was a bitter pill, but Severus was glad to see it had mostly been swallowed.

The Institute would be carefully watched this time around, for a plethora of reasons, but he would hate for any student of Hogwarts to partake in some ridiculous scheme of revenge. He himself did not much care for the tournament, but he agreed with the general mentality, that if the school wanted vengeance, they were best served by throwing full support behind the champion, whoever he or she
might be.

But now, he saw, the Hall was clearing. Somewhere amidst his thoughts, the Welcoming Ceremony had ended. They had foregone an actual feast as Halloween was but a few days away. And tomorrow, he thought with a sigh, as he rose from his seat, would come a new set of problems. For undoubtedly students would try to deceive the Triwizard's Cup, now in its resting place, and enter their names for the tournament. It would be a futile task, Albus had long ensured this. Spellwork that would do even Merlin proud was layered over the entrance to the Cup, and no-one, absolutely no-one not meant to enter their name would.

Of course, that did not mean that some, particularly the Weasley twins, would not try. And so, he had set a little extra in place for those students who chose disobedience. After all, he was not in a relationship with two former Mauraders without learning a few skills. He had ensured that anyone trying to cross the barrier would be clearly visible to all, and then, he would get his amusement watching them scramble around for counters to the charms and spells before handing them a good few detentions before ridding them of it.

Yes, tomorrow would bring its positives and negatives, but for now, he looked forward to doing nothing more than flooing over to Black Manor and enjoying the night with his loves. Alas, it was not meant to be. The small smile on his lips faded as he stepped out of the fireplace to shouts from the bedroom.

What on earth?

Concerned, Severus made his way into the bedroom, looking on at Remus and Sirius as they shouted as each other.

"I have to do something Remus!" Sirius yelled, gesticulating wildly.

"Not like this you don't!" the wolf animagus rebutted. "And why didn't you tell me or Severus?"

"Because you would have stopped me!"

"Stopped what?" the potions master interjected, although his quiet tone was momentarily lost to the two.

"Who says I won't now? It's too dangerous!"

"Stop what?"

"You can't stop me now. And that's the point. Why can't you support me on this?"

"Because I know what will happen! You'll get yourself killed!"

"I..."

"DOING WHAT?" Severus shouted, tired of being ignored and disconcerted as well at what he was hearing.

Sirius had done something? Something that had Remus fearing for his life? Either way, it did not sound good at all.

Abrupt silence fell in the room, as two heads turned to stare at him in shock. Remus' eyes quickly faded into satisfaction, as if he was certain that the potions master would support him, while Sirius' eyes looked wary, as if he expected him to do just that.
"What's going on?" Severus asked softly now, crossing the distance so that he was nearer to the two men. "You have done something Sirius?"

He looked his gaze with the slightly taller man, inviting him to speak. "I haven't done anything Severus," the Black patriarch sighed, folding his arms loosely, "Remus just found something that he – both of you were not meant to see yet."

"It's a good thing I did," Remus snapped, causing Severus to put a quelling hand on his shoulder.

"What did he find?"

"A letter to Amelia," Sirius muttered, looking away.

Abruptly Remus spun away, grabbing a crumpled parchment before thrusting it at Severus. "See for yourself," he bit out, before storming out of the room.

The obvious anger in his gait was shocking to the potions master. Out of the three of them, Remus was the most levelheaded. For him to be in such a fit of temper that he would not even remain with them any further was disconcerting to him. Sirius' expression was disturbing for him as well. There was a sully, defensive air about the man that he rarely recalled seeing, and never this serious. He was torn between comforting the man and reading the parchment to discover the root of the problem, but Sirius took the decision from him.

In a swift move, Sirius had pulled him close and claimed his lips in a rough kiss. There was a welt of emotion in that kiss; anger, hurt and confusion, and Severus found himself experiencing them all as he clung on to his lover, the parchment falling unnoticed to the floor. It was a long moment before Sirius pulled away, panting slightly as he pressed their foreheads together.

His eyes had fallen close and his voice, when he spoke, wavered. "Amelia's asked me to re-join the aurors. I've agreed."

Immediately all confusion cleared. This was not the first time, Severus recalled, that Amelia had sought Sirius out. The first letter had come mere weeks after his release. But Sirius had refused her then, and continued to do so with every letter she had sent. Remus' anger was understandable now, and honestly, Severus did not know how he himself felt about the situation. He understood where Remus was coming from, some of the very people in the force had dragged Sirius away from him, carried him to Azkaban without a trial. But, more than that, was the situation the wizarding world was currently in. During a period of relative peace Sirius had refused the job offer, and now, when the world was in its worst possible period, he wanted to join?

"Why?" Severus whispered softly. "Why now?"

Sirius gave a shuddering breath as he opened his eyes, boring into the dark ones scant inches from him. "It's the right thing to do."

A simple enough sentence, but it was laden with meaning – a meaning Severus understood. Sirius felt useless, as if his contribution to the Order was not enough. He needed to be on the front line, not simply be a background person. He knew enough of the man to not be entirely surprised by this. As long as he had known him, Sirius had had an outgoing personality, something that was ideal for an auror. He was efficient yet understanding, cunning yet brave to the extent that, in his brief tenure of auror, he had been among the best, his closest rival none other than James Potter himself.

And arguably, now more than ever Sirius did indeed have a reason to join the force. Voldemort was back, and undoubtedly, with time, he would target Harry. Even he himself could at any moment find
himself a target to the mad man. Sirius would want to protect him from that. And since, at the moment, there was little he could do to remove Voldemort from the face of the earth, he could do something else. Like remove some of his death eaters, sending them to the very place where he had suffered so long.

He understood what Sirius was feeling, and unlike Remus, would not damn him for it. Truly, more than once, Severus felt a pang of regret at the lack of mark on his hand. No, it was not that he wanted to be a Death Eater once again. It was the missed opportunity. Before his demise, he and Lucius had been among the man's most trusted servants. Had they still the marks, he may have been able to resume his role as spy, giving the light side crucial information. As is, the order was all but shooting blindly into the dark.

The horcruxes were still the primary goal, but only because there was little else they could do. Percy Weasley was still a mere recruit. Merlin alone knew how long it would take him to gain enough rank among the death eaters to glean important information. Well, there was a faster route through which he could improve his rank, but thus far, neither he nor Lucius had had the heart to mention it. Severus doubted the teenager's sanity could handle what would have to be done to earn that higher rank in the shortest possible time.

"Severus?"

The potions master took a deep breath, before he met his love's eyes firmly. There was no way he could stop Sirius on this, not even if it earned him Remus' anger as well. Unlike the amber-eyed man, he understood Sirius' position, and as such, would support him on it.

"Be careful," he said simply, seeing the moment his lover recognised the deeper meaning of his words.

Sirius kissed him once again in gratitude, glad that he was understood. There was Remus to contend with though, Severus noted, even as he bent to scoop up the parchment. This night would not be the peaceful respite he had hoped, but then again, life always came with challenges, and this was simply another one they would have to face.
"You would have loved the schools' performances Harry," Hermione stated with a hint of regret in her voice. "Why didn't you attend it?"

Although it had been two days since the welcoming ceremony for the two visiting schools, today was the first time the trio actually had an opportunity to converse outside of class, and the Gryffindor latched on to the opportunity.

The shortest of the group turned, so that he was walking backwards while he spoke. "I didn't feel like attending it. Draco said it was okay for us to skip it, so we did."

"You didn't get into any trouble though? I would imagine that such a thing would be mandatory." she asked worriedly, even as she turned him around, earning herself a slight eye roll from the teen. "It's not you who will have to answer to Draco if you're hurt," she pointed out, although Harry could see that she was joking – mostly.

Even after all these years, his friends still held a respect (bordering on fear) when it came towards his mate. They knew what he was capable of, and was well aware of the fact, that when it came to Harry, Draco cared for nothing else, and would do anything to those who allowed harm to befall his mate...friends including.

Harry shrugged nonchalantly. "I suppose it was," he agreed, "however Uncle said nothing about it."

A few steps behind Hermione, Ron snorted abruptly, drawing attention to himself. Both caught the slight mutter he made before he hurried averted his gaze when he caught them watching. Harry eyed him curiously, slowing down slightly. He missed the sharp look Hermione shot the redhead's way though, as his attention focussed on his friend. He had been particularly quiet recently Harry noted, which was strange in itself. However, what was stranger was the fact that he seemed as chatty as usual whenever Harry sighting him conversing with someone else.

"Well once you didn't get into any trouble," the witch said after a pause, trying to draw him away from the peculiar redhead. "Anyway, how did you do with the History essay? I think Professor Binns isn't paying attention to the assignments. I've gotten the same mark for the last three essays."

"Maybe you just didn't improve?" Harry teased, an impish grin on his face as he dodged the playful tap she sent his way. "I don't remember my mark though," he stated eventually. "We submitted our assignments during the holidays remember? Draco would know."

Hermione blinked a moment before chuckling ruefully. "I forgot about that," she admitted. "You too are way ahead of us."

"What else is new?" Ron grumbled, drawing the attention back to himself once again.

This time Harry frowned as he turned to him. There was not a hint of humour in the teenager's words, and even Hermione, when he glanced at her, was tense and a scowl was present on her face.

"Is something wrong?" Harry asked tentatively, moving closer to him.

The redhead shot him a sharp look before glancing over his head. His expression visibly relaxed. "Nothing's wrong," he said gruffly. "I'm in a bit of a mood that's all."

"He is upset about Ginny Harry," Hermione interjected quickly, wrapping an arm around his
shoulders and turning him away even as she latched on to Ron's hand and squeezed it tightly in warning. "He's not at all pleased that his little sister is dating, although I told him he has no reason to be so upset. The littlest things seem to bother him these days."

"Ginny's got a boyfriend?" Harry inquired curiously.

"Well, she's dating," Hermione agreed.

"Who?" the thirteen year old pressed on, temporarily distracted.

However, before Hermione could respond, their attention was diverted by hurried footsteps from further ahead. Turning curiously, Harry's face drew with worry as he saw Cho walking swiftly but gracelessly, rubbing furiously at her eyes.

"Cho?" he called out worriedly.

The sixteen year old looked up abruptly, and Harry saw the glimmer of tears in her eyes as she approached him.

"What's wrong?"

The Hufflepuff looked at him for a long moment, and Harry got the feeling that she was searching his eyes for something. He allowed it, and after a moment, the Asian muttered something before coming to him. "Are you busy now?" she questioned, her voice thick.

Harry and his friends had been on their way to the library, however, Cho's state no longer made it a priority to him. Hermione seemed to realise his decision for she squeezed his shoulder lightly before releasing him. "Join us later if you can," she said simply, before nodding to Cho and walking of, Ron at her heels. The teenager had not even spared him a backward glance, however currently, that was the least of Harry's concerns.

Without speaking further, Cho walked, leaving it up to him to follow her, willing to let her take him wherever she felt most comfortable.

The seventh year led him to a rarely used corridor of the school before drawing her wand. Walking along the left side of it, she started tapping on each door they passed, searching for one not warded against students. After a minute or so, one of the doors clicked open, and she entered, he following right behind.

Closing the door behind him, he turned to the witch now pulling herself up onto a table, uncaring of the dirt on it. She seemed not to care about the darkness and muskiness of the room either, and therefore it fell to the Gryffindor to wave his hands and cleanse their environment.

"Can you cast a privacy charm as well?" she asked abruptly, and nodding, Harry heeded her.

"What's wrong?" he inquired, moving over to sit on a bit of furniture across from her. "Can I help?"

The sixteen year old gave a dry laugh as she tossed her head back. "You're the only one I can talk to Harry," she said in a thin voice. "I'm glad I ran into you. I think that you may be the only one who can possibly understand what I am going through right now."

"Not even Cedric?" he said unwittingly, however, he could not blame himself. The pair was almost as inseparable as he and Draco were. He would have thought that he would have been the first person Cho would have turned to if something had upset her.
"Especially not him," she huffed, running her hands through her hair. "Only you can relate..."

"To what?"

Harry was so much younger than the teenage witch he was seated near to, and usually, it was he who turned to his elders for advice. However, she had already said that he was the only one who could help her, and after all that she had done for him in the past, this was the very least that he could do for her.

"Cedric..." she said abruptly before choking slightly. "He-

The Asian witch's voice cracked, and she closed her eyes for a long moment, a tear trailing down her cheek. Without thinking Harry called forth a bit of his allure, encouraging her to control her emotions. It worked, for the witch took a shuddering breath before meeting his gaze again, this time considerably calmer.

"Cedric has decided to enter the tournament," she told him, "already has actually."

"Um..."Harry was not sure how exactly he should take that bit of information.

On the one hand, he felt happy for the Hufflepuff, for indeed, it was a good opportunity. However, on the other, the tournament was a dangerous event, and literally, anything could go wrong. The Triwizard Tournament could bring a participant glory and fame, but also disillusionment and death.

"He didn't even tell me he was thinking of entering," she continued presently. "I didn't have a clue he was interested in it or else I would have stopped him, or tried to. You know how stubborn mates can be right Harry?"

A look of shock crossed Harry's features at the implications of that last statement. The rumours surrounding the pair had been true?

She seemed to read the question from his expression for she nodded slightly, the barest ghost of a smile on her lips. "Congratulations, you are the first one outside of our families who knows that Cedric and I are mates – soul mates. Yes, I know. The rumour mill actually got something right for once."

"I won't tell," Harry promised after a long pause. He did not know the reasons why they had chosen to keep the nature of their relationship secret, but he would respect their need for privacy.

"Well none besides Draco," she amended, with another small smile. "It's hard to keep secrets from them."

"It is," he agreed, "But Cho, why does Cedric's actions bother you so much?"

The witch took a moment to collect her thoughts coherently before she responded to him. In the end, she answered his question with one of her own. "If Draco decided to enter a competition that could at the very least injure him and at the most kill him, would you be against it? Even though you can understand why he wants to do it, or an at least come to understand it, could you support him? Knowing that at any moment you could lose him? After a lifetime together, having your other half by your side, could you sit back and watch him put himself in danger, all for the sake of glory? Could you Harry?"

"I couldn't," he replied without hesitation. His mind ran back to his previous fears, and suddenly, he found himself completely sympathising with her. "I would be too afraid for him."
"That's how I feel now," she admitted, tears welling up in her eyes. "Cedric thinks I'm overreacting. We had a huge row actually, and I walked off – and found you. I'm really glad I did. You can relate, completely relate and just not sympathise."

"It's like you're losing a part of you just thinking about it," Harry murmured, reaching up unconsciously to knead at his chest.

"Exactly," she agreed, taking a deep breath. "It's not as if I doubt Cedric's ability. He's brilliant, one of the best in our year. And that is why he wants to enter."

"Huh?"

"He wants to bring glory to Hufflepuff," she explained. "We are the underdogs. Despite everything, we still have that reputation of being the 'weakest' house. A win for Hufflepuff would level the playing field so to speak, and that is why he entered it. We haven't won anything the past few years, and Cedric wants that to change. He wants to do something to put the badgers back on an equal playing field with the rest of the houses. I don't know what to do...there's noting I can do actually."

"Maybe he won't be selected?" Harry offered.

"I can only hope," she sighed. "But it'd be wrong of me to wish him ill. He's my mate and I should support him in all his ventures."

"And that's the problem. How can you support him in a venture that puts him in constant danger. He should be safe with you, but you'd be doing him an injustice if you don't stand by his side."

"Exactly," she nodded. "You understand perfectly. I knew you would."

"I wish I didn't."

"There's nothing I can do," she declared after a long pause in which they had lost themselves to their own individual thoughts. "I have to support him in this, especially if he is selected. I can't do otherwise. Even though I hate the situation, he's mine, and I will stand by him."

"Maybe you should tell him that," Harry suggested.

Cho laughed softly. "I think I should. I might have overreacted in the first place."

"You didn't," Harry declared. "I yell at Draco sometimes when I get upset."

"And feel miserable an hour later?"

"Or sooner," he quipped, causing them both to break down into rueful chuckles.

The pair drifted off into their own thoughts once again, reminiscing on their own various experiences with their mates. Eventually Harry checked the time and saw that the last period of the day was just about ending.

"Where do you think Cedric is now?"

"Probably looking for me," Cho mused. "I should go meet him. We have a lot to talk about."

"You do, and you should," Harry seconded.

The Asian witch reached over and kissed his cheek causing him to squirm slightly. "Thanks a lot Harry. You were a great help."
"Your welcome," he smiled, glad to see her in a better mood.

"Is there somewhere I should drop you?" she asked, as she stood, straightening her robes.

"No," he said quickly.

He hated the small dishonesty, but, at the moment, it was more important for the Asian to meet her mate and work out their issues rather than waste precious time escorting him somewhere. He would be fine on his own.

"Are you sure?" she asked with a slight frown.

"Positive Cho," he stated firmly, "Forget about me and go make up with Cedric."

She hesitated a moment longer before shrugging, obviously agreeing with his sentiments. "you won't stay here right?"

"I'll find my friends now," he promised.

"Good. Then I'll see you around?"

"Yup," he smiled. "You have to tell me more about your bond!"

"Of course," she nodded, before leaving.

Harry waved the door shut behind her before raising his arms in a prolonged stretch. It was nice to be of service, he mused, looking around him idly. Hopefully they would reconcile and their relationship set back on even foundation. The veela mate sighed and flopped backwards, closing his eyes briefly. There was time left to meet his friends at the library, however, Harry did not particularly feel the desire to join them.

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After taking one last look around to ensure the corridor he was in was empty, Viktor waved his wand, murmuring softly. Within seconds the Disillusionment Charm was cast. It rendered him invisible with only seconds to spare he mused, when a few young giggling witches suddenly came down the corridor. It would not do to draw attention to himself – at least not so soon he amended, as he started walking, carefully muffling his footsteps.

This was his second trip through the castle in the brief time he had been in England thus far. Unlike the other Durmstrang students, he had no restrictions placed on him – the High Master had ensured that. He did not have classes to attend unless he chose to do so, and he did not have a particular curfew. It was not as if he planned to ignore his schooling, for Harry would need providing for, and he, despite his parents wealth, wanted a career of his own. However, at the moment, his education could wait in favour of this task. Karkaroff agreed with him, and although he knew there was mild discontent among both his teachers and fellow students, he was not in the least bothered. Their deductions were true regardless. He was being moulded as the Durmstrang champion. The full validation would come on the night of Halloween.

Hogwarts was, as Harry had told him, truly beautiful, and, on his first trip, he had done little more than admire it. More than that, was the fact that his little one had spent his time here, and he wanted to observe it carefully, and hopefully come to appreciate it as much as his love. The castle was larger than Durmstrang (but then again they were more selective with their students and thus needed less space). However the castle itself seemed to have an aura that resonated from it, one that was lost in his own Institute that felt as cold and unyielding as its High Master.
He was not sure which he preferred.

And then, there were the students. Even the French had commented on how different the Hogwarts students appeared. They had long since labelled the Gryffindors as boisterous and rowdy, the Slytherins as exemplifiers of grace and maturity, the Ravenclaws as scholarly and slightly reclusive and the Hufflepuffs as good-natured persons. It was a curious mixture, and yet, for all the differences, there was an air of camaraderie and companionship throughout the school, as if they were united under the banner of Hogwarts. That certainly did not exist in Durmstrang where the only one you could truly rely on was yourself.

Viktor had spent considerable time analysing the staff. Harry's explanations were a big help to him in that regard. Most of the professors were insignificant to him. Truly, the only ones he immediately saw as potential threats to him were the Heads of Houses and the headmaster, all of whom (save the Hufflepuff woman) had a direct impact on his love's life in some way. Already, during meals, he had seen one or more of them shoot glances towards his Harry. Snape in particular was always on high alert, mapping his location every meal. The headmaster was less blatant in his scrutiny, but he too tended to direct his gaze towards them on occasion, and, more than once Harry had waved at him with a wide smile.

Viktor wanted that smile directed solely towards him.

The past days had been fairly torturous for him. The object of his affection was both so near, and yet so far. It hurt him almost physically to see his love sitting just across the hall as he could not (At least yet) succumb to his urgings and stroll across the space and claim what belonged to him, consequences be damned. It was Harry's hesitancy that had finally brought him to the point he was currently at.

He had ensured that he had had the starring role in the Durmstrang production, and had gone above the call of duty to impress Harry. Only, the boy had been absent from the Hall. Talking to him via the book was no longer satisfactory to him. He did not want to read written words when he could hear the soft tone of the boy's voice. Harry was apologetic about the entire situation, citing too many issues that complicated them meeting. Viktor had drawn hope from the fact that Harry had stated it was very possible for them to interact publicly, it was their 'first' meeting that needed careful staging. However, his love had yet to come up with a suitable situation and two days in, Viktor's patience was at an end.

By chance, he had noticed Harry with a few students earlier. At first he had been annoyed. Short of stunning the pair, there was still not way they could 'meet'. And thus, disgruntled, he had not bothered to follow them. However, fate seemed to shine down upon him, for scant minutes later, the pair passed him, arguing loudly, but most importantly, without Harry. The witch had hissed something about a Cho, and following up on it, he gleaned that Harry had exchanged two friends for one.

Now that was a situation he could handle.

This led him to his current point. Using a variant of a location spell, he had tracked down Harry's location, and was patiently waiting near the door. It was a big risk he knew, however, if he left it up to Harry, he might not be in his presence anytime soon. He could not scare him he knew, but still he hoped to somehow work the situation into his favour so that he could talk to him. Perhaps a Confundus to make the person wander away?

As it turned out, his planning was unnecessary.

The door had opened, and instinctively, he whipped out his wand. It was an Asian girl barely slightly red rimmed eyes, however, as she passed him, no one followed. A jolt of pleasure ran through him.
Harry was alone. Finally they could meet. Glancing around to ensure the corridor was still empty, he dropped the charm work he had conducted on himself, and, without knowing, he slipped into the room.

Immediately, he felt his heart rate increase slightly. Harry looked so beautiful as he lay there. His eyes were closed, with his left hand pressed against his forehead. He created a juxtaposition in his uniform, Viktor thought as he inched closer. The clothing had a slightly severe edge to it, and yet he knew the wearer of it was anything but. Harry's chest rose almost indiscernibly, and for a moment the Bulgarian wondered if he was asleep. However, given the short space of time in which the witch had left, he seriously doubted that he could have fallen asleep in so short a time.

His body had changed since he had last seen him, but that was only to be expected. He was a lot taller than he had been then he surmised. He was just about five feet now, average for his age, Viktor supposed. He was a lot shorter than his year mates, something that had amused Viktor thus far. He remembered some of their past conversations in which Harry had complained about how much taller his companions were than him. He was though, far thinner than he remembered him being, and that he attributed to his illness.

Finally, he was standing next to the relaxed boy, a smile gracing his face as he pocketed his wand. Only a few seconds more and then those beautiful emerald eyes would be gracing him with their beauty."

"Hello malko surste," he greeted, expecting a surprised shout.

Instead, he was forced to dodge sideways lest he be dangerously injured by Harry's sudden spell. Even though he had moved in time, he felt a sudden warmth on his cheek, and knew that he had been cut.

Harry nervously tugged at his robes, double-checking for any bloodstains. He had cleaned the robe numerous times over the past few minutes but he couldn't shake the feeling that the blood remained. More than the fact that it would raise questions from Draco that would be difficult to answer, was the guilt Harry felt at knowing that he had spilled his friend's blood.

Telling himself for the umpteenth time that the stains existed only in his imagination, Harry finally stated the password to their common room and walked in, his eyes automatically scanning the room for his mate. It was empty, and Harry did not know whether to be glad or alternatively bemoan the fact. What he really could use was a hug from Draco, but on the other hand, he had a momentary respite to collect his thoughts.

Sighing deeply, he dropped his bag uncaringly on the floor, and headed for his bedroom. "Dobby," he called as he walked, not even turning at the corresponding crack.

"Young Master Harry," the elf began without preamble, "you have been breaking rules this afternoon. Dobby must tell."

The thirteen year old's hand froze momentarily, before he shrugged, pulling off his robes. Without turning back, he tossed it in the general direction of the elf. "I'll be telling Master Draco myself when he arrives Dobby," he said curtly, continuing to undress.

The elf made a surprised squeak and Harry rolled his eyes slightly. Usually he would not be so curt with his servant, but, despite the pleasurable hour he had spent with Viktor, he was still unnerved by his actions. It had been a gift from Merlin that the wound had not been too deep. It had though, been
quite a messy one. He honestly did not know which one of them had been more unnerved, him for launching such a strong offence, or the Bulgarian for garnering such a reaction when all he had tried to do was surprise him. Either way, they had both learnt their lesson.

"Young Master will be telling the truth?" the elf continued, following him as he headed from his room to the bathroom.

"I will," the boy said, pausing to shoot the elf a look. "I met a Durmstrang student, attacked him, and helped him clean up the mess. We got talking and now I have a new friend."

He arched a brow, daring the elf to question him. He smirked seconds later at the defeated look on Dobby's face. Technically speaking he was being truthful, and avoided revealing any damning information, so there was nothing the house-elf could do. He was well and truly outwitted.

"The hat was right," Harry thought, as he closed the bathroom door, "either house would have suited me fine."

Minutes later, he emerged in a pair of pyjamas. Truly he had no desire to eat in the Great Hall. He turned to Dobby who was now neatening the area. "Dobby, Master Draco and I will dine here tonight."

The elf nodded. "I understand," he agreed, "however, Young Master Harry must tell Master Draco."

"I said I would," Harry bit out, glaring slightly at the elf who refused to cower at his obvious displeasure, and instead shot him a sharp look right back.

The veela mate shook his head lightly, reminding himself that this was the same elf who had assisted him in his first year. Dobby was his servant yes, but he was in no way subservient. If the elf truly wanted to, he could pose a real threat to him. Dobby usually submitted to his will easily enough, but only if it did not either contradict an order from Lord or Lady Malfoy or put him in a position of danger. At those times, the elf had free reign, and could do anything within reason to alleviate the situation. Harry knew he had to thread carefully, lest he find himself suddenly home in Malfoy Manor, facing his parents.

Sighing inaudibly, Harry dropped down onto the couch, beckoning the elf forward. "I know you're just worried about me Dobby," he said softly, "and I am grateful for it. But, I know what I'm doing this time."

"Dobby," he asked, "Am I forbidden from having friends?"

"Young Master Harry is not."

"Then what is the problem?" he inquired, arching his brow.

"I – is not right."

The elf was flustered, the veela mate realised, otherwise his grammar would not have degenerated.

"Listen Dobby," Harry tried again. "I am going to tell Draco about Viktor so I am not lying. Yes I
know him from before, but I trust him okay? He isn't going to hurt me. He cannot hurt me. I'm sure."

"How is you being certain?"

Harry smiled slightly. "I met him in Diagon Forest." He saw the moment when realisation hit the elf. "Now do you understand? He isn't a bad person. You'll see that, but I need the chance to prove that to you."

"Prove what?"

The new voice startled them both and Harry turned wide eyes to Draco, who was standing curiously just within the entrance.

"Dominant," Harry said by way of greeting, rising even as Dobby bowed slightly.

"Good afternoon Young Master Draco," the elf said, before shooting Harry a look. From his eyes Harry read a promise that the elf would keep his peace – at least for now. The boy gratefully nodded subtly before walking over to where his veela stood.

"I will be going now," the elf said, before disappearing.

"Prove what?" Draco repeated, even as he allowed Harry to help him out of his robes. "More than that, why exactly were you pleading with a house-elf?"

Harry nipped his lip slightly, choosing to push his mate into a seat before claiming the arm of it. He swung himself so that his legs rested on the veela's lap, using it as a footstool. The veela arched a brow at the move but said nothing.

"I made a friend today," Harry said finally, deciding to get directly to the point.

Had the veela not overheard, he might have 'softened him up' a bit before the revelation. A big hug, a few cuddles and perhaps a kiss or two and the veela would have been quite malleable to whatever he had to say. Instead, a clearly alert mate waiting for a response - and a viable one at that - faced him.

"Oh?" The veela looked at him carefully, trying immediately to connect the bit of information to the scene he had stumbled on. "And this has what to do with Dobby?"

Harry reached up to rub the back of his neck as he spoke. "Dobby wasn't sure that it fell within the rules. I was telling him to give me a chance to explain before he caused unnecessary panic."

"We kinda ran into each other," Harry shrugged, intertwining his real first meeting with the Bulgarian into the story. It was much easy to twist the story that way, while technically still being truthful. He had no doubt that his servant was lurking in hearing distance and the last thing Harry needed was for him to decide he was not being truthful enough.

"Kind of cub," Draco corrected.

"Whatever," Harry muttered, rolling his eyes slightly. "Anyway, you know how protective Dobby is, and he's taken papa's order a little too seriously and thought him a threat to me."

"From that I am guessing that this person is Durmstrang?"
The veela mate heard the edge to his mate's tone and barely contained a wince. He had been right in his summation. Viktor's affiliation would be a problem. His family, and especially Draco, had never even contemplated him befriending anyone from Karkaroff's Institute. And here, just two days in, he was bringing news that that was exactly what he had done.

"He is dominant," Harry nodded, "but that does not mean he's bad!"

Draco shot him a chastising look. "I am not a bigot to automatically label him evil cub," he pointed out, "but my hesitation is justified. He's under Karkaroff's influence one way or another."

"He's nice," Harry defended, leaning forward slightly for emphasis. "He said I was the little brother he always wanted and it was nice to meet a friendly face here."

For some reason, the veela noticeably relaxed when he mentioned the brother bit, but Harry ignored it for now. "I think he is a good person. He was nothing but polite to me and he's from a good family background. He didn't even react when I told him my name, but then again, he's met well known persons before."

"Oh?"

"He's a quidditch player," Harry continued, "professional too. He played a match for the Bulgarian National Team but has gone back to reserve status for now to finish schooling."

"Quite a lot of information you shared for so short a time," Draco pointed out, and internally, Harry winced slightly. That really was more than strangers would exchange on a first meeting.

"Well," he hedged, "I used my allure on him a bit. Just to make sure..."

The veela looked impressed. "Good move," he praised before growing slightly serious. "I'm not sure I'm in favour of this Harry. Could you really not have befriended a French witch?"

Harry shrugged slightly – his only response.

"Thought so," Draco sighed. "What's his name? I'll have godfather check his background..."

"Dominant!"

"There's no getting around that Harry," the veela said sternly. "I'm not ordering you to avoid him – yet – so you should be glad for that. If his past checks out...then we will see."

"You can't choose my friends for me," Harry grumbled, even as a part of him cheered slightly.

Secretly he had known that this conversation could have gone another way. His mate could have flat out refused to allow the friendship, and could have taken steps to ensure it. But instead, albeit clearly reluctant, he was willing to at consider the matter, and for that Harry was grateful. However, the veela mate had forgotten one little fact about Viktor, and particularly his family, that would draw considerable red flags. He missed it as he shifted so that he was fully in his mate's lap and cradled against him for further conversation on the meeting. In time he would wish he had remembered it.
Chapter 56

Sometime over the years, Ron and Hermione had forgotten some of their younger friend's ability. Harry was almost certain that it was because he rarely exhibited them in their presence. Their forgetfulness was something he was using to his advantage today. Otherwise, he would not have been able to spy on them as he was doing now. He was tired of this, the barely concealed barbs in Ron's words and Hermione's constant attempts to distract him from noticing. As such, after one such incident, he had excused himself. He knew the bushy haired witch well enough; she would lay into the redhead the minute he was out of sight – it was something he was depending on. She had waved him off almost distractedly, barely containing herself the minute or so it took him to vacate the corridor.

He sincerely hoped that she did not have the foresight to cast a privacy charm, or else his efforts would be worthless. However, by the time he had returned to hearing distance of them, choosing to hide in the shadows of a statue rather than mimic the actions of a wandering kitten, she was well into lambasting the wizard in loud tones. Briefly, Harry considered casting a privacy charm himself, if only to ensure no curious on-lookers. But then again, he highly doubted it was possible for him to cast anything in his current form, and thus he could only hope that no one interrupted them. Thankfully no one did – at least for the time he actually remained.

"I've had enough of this Ron," the witch said in an exasperated tone.

There was a hint of weariness there also, Harry noted. It suggested to him that this was a recurring incident.

"You're getting worse by the day. It will not take Harry much longer to notice. And then what? I won't have you jeopardising our friendship over this. Harry needs all the support he can get – not for his best friend to despise him."

Harry's breath hitched at the witch's words. Ron despised him?

"I don't," the redhead protested. "I don't despise Harry Mione. I just hate..."

"His life?" Hermione interjected wryly. "Why is this an issue now Ron? You knew that the Malfoys were loaded and it never bothered you. Why now?"

Ron shrugged lightly, raising a hand to rub at his neck. He moved away from his friend, walking to a window. Luckily, his voice did not soften or else Harry would not have been able to catch his next words.

"I don't think you understand what I said before," he stated, throwing a look at her. "Money isn't the problem."

The witch huffed loudly. "Then explain it in a way I can understand Ronald," she demanded. "Because currently, all I see is someone jealous of their best friend. Harry doesn't deserve that!"

Her words seemed to have struck a note with him, for he swirled, his features drawn. Harry had never seen such an expression on his friend's face before, and it bothered him immensely. That certainly was not his boisterous, usually ever cheerful and jovial friend. But then again, Harry had rarely seen that aspect of him in recent times.

"That's exactly the issue!" Ron grated out, his hands waving. "Everything always comes back to Harry Hermione, and I'm bloody sick of it!"
"What?"

"Didn't you hear yourself just now?" he demanded. "My attitude will affect Harry. You don't give a damn how I'm feeling."

"Of course I do," Hermione shot back, her tone rising slightly. "You're my boyfriend Ron. Of course I care about you. However I care for Harry too!"

That admission had been something the veela mate had been hoping for for months, his friends becoming a couple. He had always envisioned him finding out to be a happy occasion. Currently though, all he wanted to do was curl up into himself and forget that this was happening. He did not want to believe what he was hearing. Not only did Ron not like him anymore, they had kept something so important from him. Didn't they trust him enough to tell of their relationship?

"All everyone cares about is Harry," Ron snapped. "Everyone in this school bends over bloody backwards to please him and I'm sick of it. Even when he wasn't here, he was the centre of everyone's attention. And then You-Know-Who came back. Just when I thought I was free from a Harry Potter reference for the summer, he starts making the papers almost everyday and he hasn't even done a bloody thing!"

That had to be an exaggeration Harry noted absently. His family had mentioned no more than ten articles printed about him. But then again he thought, they did filter what he was allowed to know concerning the war. They were ensuring that he would have no part in it, and therefore, he needed no information other than what the average citizen knew. However, what his friend was saying disturbed him. Was he in some way making those around him miserable?

"That isn't Harry's fault Ron," Hermione argued. "You knew what you were getting into when you befriended the boy-who-lived. Publicity has always and will always follow him. Are you just mad that you didn't get a mention?"

"Of course not, I'm just his little side-kick! You should have been there Hermione. Dad's worked at that Ministry for years and do you know what people recognised me as?"

"I suppose you're going to tell me."

The sarcasm was lost on the redhead. "I wasn't Arthur Weasley's boy to them. Some bint asked if I was the Weasley who Potter associated with. I said yes and suddenly he was all friendly with me. Is that all I am? Harry's sidekick? Is my worth measured beside his? Because it definitely seems so. Do you know what Auror Kingsley told me? He said that he doubted that I would have a problem with my application forms. Nobody who's a friend of Potter can be rejected apparently."

"Ron," Hermione breathed, a hint of understanding in her tone. "He didn't mean it that way. Besides, people would kill for such a connection. Being Harry's friend will make it easier for you..."

"But I don't want that!" Ron shouted, startling both his girlfriend and Harry.

It was another dagger in his heart. He could feel Draco calling to him, undoubtedly feeling his chaotic emotions. Harry struggled to calm himself. He did not want Draco seeking him out now. Ron would definitely not appreciate it and he was not certain he could stand the confrontation that would ensue.

"I want to pave my own part – without help. How can you expect me to act normally around him, knowing that he has so much influence over me Hermione? How can I ever know when something I gain is because I deserve it and not just as a result of Harry? Even this," he said, tugging at his
prefect badge, "isn't mine. It was meant for Harry."

"Ron-

"Don't Hermione," he demanded, raising a halting hand. "I checked the criteria myself. I don't meet it. The only boy in Gryffindor who meets it is Harry."

"He's an apprentice." Hermione pointed out.

"Oh really," the redhead snorted. "Kind of convenient isn't it, that the very year Harry becomes legible to be a prefect, a new system is introduced. The school always caters to him. Hell, he and Draco are in all the same classes. I bet that the school couldn't make Harry prefect because of his age, but still had to give him something. However not to be blatant about it they implemented a new system and threw in other people."

"So I don't deserve it either" Hermione inquired darkly, her handing drifting to her second badge.

"You know what I mean," he grumbled. "I can't ignore it anymore Hermione, and I'm sorry that I'm not a good enough actor to hide it."

Hermione crossed her arms over her chest. "So you're just going to throw away years of friendship over this."

Ron cocked his head slightly. "I can't," he said simply. "Cuz then I'd be the boy-who-hurt-the-boy-who-lived. I'm --"

Harry did not hear anything further, because at that point he ran, unable to bear listening to another word the redhead chose to utter. Right now, he needed to be away from them – yes both of them. What he needed was the comfort of someone who cared for him and could help him deal with his current turmoil.

His current form was too cumbersome for him to continue in, and, without thinking, he transformed, neglecting to check for privacy. He continued running, not realising that there was someone now following him.

"Harry?"

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Viktor was almost tempted to rub his eyes to ensure that he had not imagined it. One moment a black kitten was pelting past him, the next it was gone, replaced by his little love. Dismissing that spectacular display of magic for now, he followed him. It was obvious that he was upset; whomever it was that caused it was in for a rude awakening shortly. It was obvious that the teenager was trying to run from his problems; however, as Viktor very well knew, running was never the solution. Thus, he called out to him, hoping that the veela mate would hear him.

"Harry?"

The boy literally froze before spinning around. Viktor saw that there was grief and pain in the shorter boy's eyes. However, before he could even think to comment, Harry's eyes widened before he took off again, this time toward him. Instinctively Viktor's arms open, and he braced himself for the impact before he held a faintly shuddering Harry to his chest. He reveled in having his beloved in the safety of his arms, and could he have it his way, the boy would never leave it. However, he wished it was under better circumstances. Certainly, the drawn face that was now peering up at him would not appreciate a display of affection. Thus, he satisfied himself himself with lowering a hand and rubbing
firmly on the small of Harry's back.

"When I said I wanted to see you this morning malko surste," he grumbled softly, "I had hoped it would be with smiles and not tears." As he spoke, his other hand rose to brush gently at Harry's lower lashes, pulling away with a hint of moisture. "Who has hurt you?" The 'where can I find them' was left unsaid.

His love did not respond immediately, choosing instead to press his face into his chest once again. Viktor tightened his grip around him, swaying gently. This was something he did not do often – offering comfort. There certainly was very few people in his life who he cared about enough to offer it. Definitely, had any younger Durmstrang student come to him as Harry had done, they would have found themselves hexed. But there was something about the boy he held, an allure to him that he simply could not refuse. It was all he could do to contain himself from tilting his head upwards and discovering the taste of Harry's mouth. A few minutes passed before he felt the slender body slacken considerably in his grasp.

"-friends," the muffled voice said eventually.

"What was that?" he asked softly.

Viktor felt the boy take a shuddering breath before he looked up at him. His expression was still morose; however, he seemed more in control of himself than before.

"I'm just a burden," Harry whispered. "I'm ruining my friends lives."

A dark scowl crossed the Bulgarian's face as his mind ran through the list of friends the boy had, fielding out the lesser ones. "They told you this?" he demanded, his anger rising as he pinpointed two likely suspects.

A swat of his hair shifted as he shook his head, revealing his famous scar. "I overheard them," he admitted. "Remember I told you they were acting strange? That's why. They don't like me anymore. They're hiding stuff from me."

"Then they do not deserve you," he replied swiftly and with certainty. "You should break contact with them."

"I can't," the boy protested. "They don't even know that I heard them."

"Does it matter?" Viktor asked, arching a brow.

"It does!" Harry protested. "They're my best friends!"

"Who obviously hold you in poor regard."

"Viktor!"

The Bulgarian realised immediately he had pushed his love to far as tears started welling up in his eyes. Cursing himself, he pulled Harry forward, burying his head once again. This was an important thing to remember, Viktor thought, even as he murmured softly to Harry in Bulgarian. His love was several years younger than him and that was something to keep in consideration when dealing with him. An event such as this which to him was negligible, was pivotal to a thirteen year old. Harry was still at that stage of his life where his peers had heavy influence over him; he relied on them for companionship and solidarity. He had been dismissing that, and in doing so, had hurt his beloved.

Harry suddenly stiffened in his arms, and Viktor frowned. What was wrong with him now?
However, before he could formulate the words to ask, Harry pulled away from him completely, rubbing furiously at his eyes.

"Malko surste?" he inquired.

The thirteen year old raised his eyes to him. "Draco is coming," he said, voice wavering slightly. "He'll blame you for this."

"I will explain the truth," the older wizard offered, not at all disturbed by the prospect. It was about time he had his first encounter with his rival.

Harry shook his head vigorously. "I'll get in trouble," he stated.

A scowl darkened on the wizard's face at the words. "What?"

"I'm not supposed to be around you until Draco approves," he revealed.

Viktor clenched his hands at his sides, fighting to hide his anger from reaching his face. "Why do you allow your mate so much control over you?" he asked.

His beloved eyed him strangely, even as he continued tugging at his robes. "He is my dominant."

"That does not make you his slave! You are your own person."

Harry blinked at him. "I think you're mixing your words Viktor," he replied. "Do you know what 'slave' means? I certainly am not that. Regardless, I must go. He mustn't find us together. It's just the way it is. I'm sorry." He suddenly raised his hand to his chest before frowning slightly. "He's coming. I'll write later okay?"

There was so much more the Bulgarian wanted to say on the matter, but already Harry was turning away. There would be other meetings, he comforted himself, and so he waved him away.

"Oh!" The brunnette turned towards him once again. "Good luck tonight!"

"Thank you," Viktor said. "I hope Hogwarts Champion is a strong one. It will make my victory all the much sweeter."

"If you say so," Harry called with a slight smile before leaving.

The Bulgarian moved to a wall and reclined against it. Judging from Harry's movements, he strongly believed that the veela would pass this route. He certainly hoped he did. His love was wrong; he had meant to say slave. Because to him, that was exactly what Harry was, and he hoped to prove this to him with time. Harry did not need an unnatural bond to a veela; a bond that left him subservient and bound to another's will. What his beloved needed was someone like him, a person who would love and cherish him for the unique individual he was. Unlike the veela, he would deny Harry nothing. Everything he could possibly want, he would give him.

At that very moment, a sound came from down the hallway and he glanced. That was him, there was no doubt about it. Tall, blonde and reeking of wealth. That was his love's mate...well his temporary one in any event. A small smirk played on the Bulgarian's lips as the veela past him. He wished that the creatures were sensory creatures; that way he would have scented his mate all over him and attacked. Then Viktor would have been rid of him one and for all. As is, the blonde spared him nary a glance before pressing on.

It would be the only occasion that the two crossed paths without some sort of confrontation.
There was nothing left for him here now, he thought, running a hand through his hair. He might as well go on to Karkaroff as he had been doing originally. The man would not care that he was almost half an hour late. Indeed, he would be ecstatic to know that he had been with Harry. That was another thing, the Bulgarian noted as he started striding through the castle. He needed to start planning what he would do with Harry come the New Year. He certainly was not going to let the Dark Lord kill him. So many things to do, he sighed, and so little time. And that night just added on to his list of things to do when his name was pulled out of the Goblet by Hogwart's headmaster.

His attention had drifted throughout the ceremony. What did he care for Dumbledore's words when he knew he was to be selected? His opponents did not matter; he would win the tournament. And so, he had, as discreetly as possible, scanned the hall for persons of interest. High on his list were a redhead boy and bushy-haired girl. He noted their faces for future reference. They had caused Harry grief, he would deal with them in time. Speaking of his love...

He started a sweep of the other side of the room, searching the thirteen year old out. He found the blonde first unfortunately, but that was fine. Beside him was Harry, who was sitting rather stiffly beside him. The fact that neither were touching the other was also glaring, at least to him. Those two always were in contact once in the vicinity of each other, and although he was glad not to watch someone else with their hands on Harry, it also disturbed him. He kept Harry in his periphery hoping for a sight of his face. He did not turn though. However, his opportunity came when the Goblet starting to release the participant's name.

"From Beauxbatons: Fleur Delacour!"

Viktor clapped automatically as he glanced briefly at his opponent. The French witch was already on her feet, smiling demurely at her schoolmates who were cheering in a dignified manner. She was graceful, he noted as she walked towards the podium, curtseying gracefully before leaving through the doorway Dumbledore had indicated earlier. He was interested in seeing how she fared in the tournament. Looks could be deceiving.

His name would be next, he knew instinctively. It had been the same with the tournament last year. The hosting school announced their Champion last. He was right. When the cheering for Delacour finally died done, the Goblet produced another name. His eyes briefly met his High Master who nodded almost imperceptibly to him.

The aged headmaster was speaking. Viktor stifled a snicker at the brief frown that graced the man's face. He doubted that, despite his family's actions, his name would garner much support. The enthusiasm in the headmaster's tone was less than before when he finally spoke. "From Durmstrang: Viktor Krum!"

As he expected, there was a brief pause that had been absent with the Beauxbatons witch before political correctness took over. His own classmates were cheering for him, and he stood, nodding regally. It took several seconds for the other schools to follow though – most noteworthy Hogwarts, whose previous Champion his brother had actually killed. He pretended as if he did not notice, and his smile remained firm on his face as he sauntered up the aisle. He stopped directly before his High Master and bowed deeply, a smirk pulling at his lips at the nod he received. He straightened and turned to exit from the Hall when his eyes met Harry's.

He did not stop lest he drew attention toward himself, but the brief look was enough. He winked at the thirteen year old, and chuckled when a small smile was returned to him. As the door closed behind him in the small chamber he replayed the image of Harry even as he greeted the persons in the room, shaking their hands. Despite the brief flare of happiness on his love's face, he seemed no less content than when he had left him. Indeed, Harry seemed to be in a worse condition, and his
veela seemingly was doing little to see about it.

He would be having a long conversation with him that night. He would not have his Harry worrying over worthless friends any longer. He would provide him with all the companionship he needed. With that in mind, he temporarily drove thoughts of his love from his mind, and focussed on his duties at hand. A minute later Hogwarts' Champion joined them - Cedric Diggory he later learnt. Another one of Harry's friends. Perhaps he could find a way to manipulate that to his favour? Time would tell.

"We can't intervene every time Draco and Harry encounter difficulties," Narcissa pointed out to her husband, sitting up on the bed. "They're old enough now to handle their own affairs."

Lucius looked at her dubiously. Severus' letter was still in his hand. "And what if they can't fix it?"

"Then we will assist," she said simply. "Now will you come to bed?"

"In a little while," he said dismissingly, turning his attention to the missive once again.

Sighing softly, she rose from the bed, and padded over to the recliner he was seated on, sitting on the arm of the chair. Gently she removed the letter and set it aside before raising his face to hers.

"Listen to me darling," she bid. "They need to learn and experience is the only way they will. We can monitor them if you desire but I really think we should let them resolve this on their own."

The woman's husband huffed, not at all reassured by her words. "I am not concerned by their argument alone darling. This entire situation disturbs me. I do not want Harry around this Bulgarian."

A small frown marred the woman's features at his tone. "And why is that? You do not even know him."

"I do not," he acknowledged. "However, I do know what his brother did earlier this year. I do not want Harry consorting with anyone related to a person capable of such actions."

Immediately the patriarch realised that he had said something wrong. His wife's frame stiffened and her hands dropped from his face. The witch stood, a shadow on her face.

"Narcissa?" he said inquiringly, rising as well. The woman walked away from him, avoiding his attempt to touch her. Instead, she crossed to the window, wrapping her arms about herself as she looked up to the night sky. He followed her slowly, trying to gauge what could have caused such a change in her demeanour. Gently he clasped his hands on her shoulders, frowning and tightening his grip when she tried to shirk it off. He exerted mild pressure until she turned in his direction. She did not meet his gaze though, and so, he had to bend to peer into her face.

"What is it my love?" he asked softly. "What have I said that upsets you?"

Narcissa sniffed, keeping her gaze firmly averted. "You don't even know," she murmured, trying once again to shrug his hands off her. "Let me go."

"I won't," he replied firmly. "Not until you explain what has gotten into you. It is not like you to act like this toward me."

"Gotten in to me?" she repeated in a thin voice. Her head whipped up, and Lucius swallowed at the anger radiating from her beautiful eyes.
"Darling..."

"Don't you darling me," she snarled, incensed. "This Krum fellow shouldn't be allowed around Harry because of what his brother did? You deem him a threat because of something his family did?"

Lucius blinked in confusion, his grip slackening minutely. She took advantage of it, throwing his hands off before walking away from him. Lucius thought quickly, trying to piece together the cause of her anger given what she had revealed. She was half way across the room when it struck him, and he muttered an oath.

"Narcissa," he called out. He half expected her to flee the room, leaving him to chase her around the manor. Luckily she paused, although she did not turn to face him.

"What?" she asked blandly.

"I didn't mean to insinuate anything."

"But you see nothing wrong with what you're thinking," she correctly guessed.

The man hesitated, before taking another route. "I was not casting aspersions against you," he pointed out. "Surely you can see where I coming from with this issue though?"

"What I see Lucius," she declared, "is you discriminating against someone in the same position that I was in at that age!"

"It is not the same thing," he stated, striving for an even tone, although the task was becoming increasingly difficult."

"I was Narcissa Black," she snapped, "one of the most notorious dark families of the time. Do you know how hard it was for me to create an identity for myself outside of that? And now you're asking me to join you in condemning a person – banning him from associating with one of our boys because of something his brother did?"

"Narcissa –"

"Tell me Lucius," she bid, interrupting him. "What if Bella hadn't been kissed? What then? Would you be worried about me? Would you find an excuse to ensure that Harry and I were never alone together to make sure I didn't take him to Voldemort? Does a name define a person's identity for you? Because if it does, neither Sirius nor myself should be within a mile of Harry!"

"I do not think that!" Lucius snapped, in frustration.

How had the situation gotten so far out of hand? All he had wanted at the start of this conversation was his wife's blessings to second his son's desire. That was all. With her consent he would have written to Harry, instructing him to avoid the Durmstrang boy and heed his mate lest he be removed from the school. However, instead he and his wife were here arguing about a completely irrelevant issue as far as he was concerned. More than that, there seemed to be no end to the discussion.

"I don't see what is the problem here Narcissa. I can't believe that you're making such an issue over this."

The woman's eyes narrowed. "Are you saying that I am overreacting then?"

"Yes," he admitted bluntly. Had his temper not been roused he may have cushioned his tone then. As it was, his wife's eyes widened in fury before a mask of coldness descended over her.
"Very well then," she bit out.

Faster than he could comprehend, she had passed him, and with quick steps headed for the exit.

"Where are you going?" he called after her.

"Away from you," she shot over her shoulder. "Obviously you will not listen to me so I am taking myself entirely out of this. Conspire with Severus as you please. But note, I will have no part of this. As long as this Viktor poses no threat to Harry I have no problem with them forming a relationship. Good night."

"You're being unreasonable," he began, but she paid him no heed. The door closed with an ominous click behind her, leaving him alone in the bedroom wondering how the night had taken such a drastic turn for the worst.

He was not given much longer to ponder on the matter though. Barely had he the time to pour himself a stiff drink that a house-elf popped into the room, handing him a letter. He knew it was important. The elf would not have dared disturbing him so late otherwise. Sighing to himself, and swallowing a large gulp of alcohol, he tore the missive open. His grip on the glass slackened at what greeted him.

It was from his solicitor, the one hired exclusively to deal with all publicity relating to the family. The man's note was only three lines long, warning him that a reporter from the Prophet had sent in an article and photograph relating to Harry. The printing of it had already halted, although with great difficulty. However the man had thought it enough to warrant the patriarch's personal attention given that it was a mere technicality that had stopped the publishing of it.

The man had been right, Lucius thought darkly as he drained his glass before heading in search of his wife. Damn their argument; this was more important. He would see what she had to say about this. Harry forming a friendship with another student was one thing, but this was something else entirely.

As he sought her out, his hands wrinkled the documents in his hand, thus bending a picture of Harry in the arms of a Durmstrang student with a caption under it.

    Durmstrang Champion caught with Britain's Favourite Student!

        By Rita Skeeter.
Chapter 57

Harry knew he was in trouble from the minute the summons came. Sighing softly, he penned a last line to Viktor. "I have a meeting now. Bye." Without waiting for a response, he shot and hid the book before heading for the bathroom. "Dobby, put out clothes for me please," he called as he left the room.

He did not wait for a response. None was necessary as the elf was always within hearing distance of him these days. Seriously, he needed to find a way around that. It was only getting him into trouble. But then again, he noted, as he stepped into the shower, this time it was not Dobby's fault but his own. He wished he had someone to talk to about the entire matter, but currently; it seemed as if he was on his own. It was this time yesterday, he thought, as hot water cascaded down him, that he had learnt of his friend's hatred toward him.

Well not hatred really. He had overreacted on that front. Ron was at odds with him, and Hermione was clearly divided on whom to side with. At this moment though, he wanted nothing to do with neither of them...and it was only partly because of their words. In a way, he could agree with Ron, he did demand a lot of attention. He had gained the impression that Ron was sorry he had befriended him, and, that concerned him greatly. It had always been a fear of his that one-day people would find him a cumbersome burden. Look at how much care he needed. What worried him was if others bore similar feelings – most importantly his family. Because of him, they were involved in a war. Because of him, the school had to pay added attention to security. Everything was because of him.

Harry took a shuddering breath and rocked forward, resting his head against a warm tile. He could not turn to Ron and Hermione in his time of need and Millicent and Blaise were too involved with Draco to be unbiased. Speaking of Draco...they had had their worst row to date last night – well two rows actually. The first had occurred minutes after Draco had found him. Leaving Viktor, he had headed to an unused classroom, quickly formulating the best lie. He could not tell him the truth about what was bothering him, he still cared enough for his friends not to subject them to Draco's rage. That left him concocting an unlikely story that would bring his mate's ire down upon him. In the minute or so he had before his veela would alight upon him, he had summoned Dobby, strictly forbidding him from contradicting what he was about to say.

The elf in no way seemed pleased but agreed; not before warning him that that deception would not extend to the family's patriarch if the matter came to that. Above all, Dobby was subjected to Lucius' will. Harry had absently agreed then, not believing that the matter would go so far. He should have thought of that. When Draco had found him, he had successfully roughed himself up enough. The lambasting that had ensued had been painful to bear and the day grounding even worse.

His cover had been fairly simple. He had read a few advanced Charms from a textbook and had decided to experiment without supervision. His sadness had stemmed from his inability to cast them successfully and his later shock and despair had resulted from another failed one that had 'attacked' him. Draco had arrived only a few minutes of him banishing the last one, thus finding him in this state.

That first one didn't really count as a row, Harry decided, as he straightened. He had only made token protests – the ones expected of him. He had even made the requisite whines when Draco announced that he was grounded to his side for the remainder of the day, so that he could be properly supervised. In reality, he had been grateful for his mate's presence, calming him even as he tried to find a solution to the issue with his friends.

The rest of the evening had passed amicably enough, that was, until their Uncle's response had
arrived. The man was not around them as much these days; indeed they rarely encountered him outside of class, or in Draco’s case, his apprenticeship duties. The war had him busy fulfilling his obligations. His note had been direct and to the point. Viktor Krum certainly was not a person Harry should be interacting with, and that he was to cease contact with him immediately. His heart had dropped at the news, and he knew that convincing Draco to do otherwise would be almost impossible. It was one thing if their uncle had suggested that he was a potential threat. But for him to blatantly order his godson to ensure that Harry avoided Viktor was another issue entirely.

Their fight that evening had been legendary, and, unresolved. They had sat stiffly beside each other at the ceremony, Harry refusing to make eye contact with any friend or family. He felt eyes on him throughout though, and, more than once had noted a subtle shift in Draco that indicated he was conversing silently with someone. Their uncle undoubtedly. The highlight of the evening, he supposed, had come when Viktor had been selected. His heart had soared instinctively, and he was the first of the Hogwarts’ students to start clapping. If anything, Draco stiffened tenfold, but in those few seconds, he could care less. He managed a smile for the Bulgarian, and his shoulders shook at the wink directed his way.

His slight cheerfulness would have lasted longer, if not for the sudden anger he felt through the bond. Discreetly he glanced toward his mate, even as he tempered his excitement. Beneath that polite exterior, Draco was furious. It did not take a genius to understand why. Draco had noticed Viktor's gesture, and had felt his response to it. The night would not be pleasant. Indeed he was right, for scarcely had the ceremony ended that his dominant all but dragged him to their quarters before laying into him, demanding an explanation to his reactions. One meeting the veela rationalised could not have created such a strong link between them already. It had taken him weeks to completely warm up to his other friends, and yet, in one meeting Harry had already formed a bond of friendship with the foreigner.

Harry could not admit the truth; to do so would have found him back in Malfoy Manor faster than he could recite his Grandpa’s entire name. Thus, he had responded with fury, trying to deflect Draco from the real issues with accusations of mistrust. Somewhere along the line though, the fury turned real, laced with his frustration. He was tired of it – had been for some time he realised. All the rules and regulations he had to follow – he was fed up. There was never a year that he could wander off by himself, never a time for him to be completely normal. Never a year he could be himself without worrying about some protocol. Harry loved his mate, but sometimes this life was so hard.

And now, Harry thought, as he dried himself, it seemed harder than ever. Dobby had laid out his clothes as requested and he slowly dressed. The missive had not stipulated a time, and so he relaxed, enjoying the peace before a second wave of arguments. Their parents would be there, he was certain of it. Sterling had delivered mail to their Uncle that morning, and his expression as he read whatever it was had been anything but pleasant. It appears that he would be on his own with this matter. Regardless, he thought, straightening himself and attempting to exude an air of confidence, he would not back down. They were overreacting. He would maintain his friendship with Viktor, with or without their approval. There was nothing they could do to prevent them from meeting; he would withstand whatever punishments they chose to gave him, but he would not back down. This was his life, and for all that he loved them, he needed the opportunity to act on his own.

It was as he expected. There, waiting for him in Severus' quarters were his family. Mama, Papa, Draco and Severus were there, all regarding him with varying expressions on their faces. He tried to maintain his confident demeanour as he walked into the living room.

"Good evening," he greeted neutrally, eyeing them as the greetings were returned.
Papa was angry; it was evident in the whiteness around his lips. Draco was looking smug, and Harry glared at him for it. The veela thought he had won. Ganging up on him like this, he believed that there would be no way for Harry to disobey now. He would prove to him how wrong he was. And then there was the potions master, whose expression at a glance seemed neutral. However, Harry knew him well enough by now to know that he was too angry to express one particular emotion. Mentally, Harry sighed. This would be a long meeting.

Finally, his eyes drifted to his mother and he was surprised to see the hint of rebellion in her eyes. That was odd. She and Papa always seemed to be on the same wavelength with issues like these. Yet, even now she was waving him over, sitting him besides her on the divan. Her arm wrapped around his shoulders and when he looked inquiringly at her, she offered him a reassuring smile, squeezing lightly.

For some reason she was displaying solidarity with him on this issue if the further darkening of his papa's expression was any indicator. Whatever the cause, he was grateful for it, and so he turned enough to kiss her cheek. "Thank you mama," he whispered.

"You're welcome my darling," she returned, her eyes sparkling for a moment.

"I'm sure you know why you're here Harry," Lucius said suddenly, interrupting them. "Why, we are here actually."

The clipped tone the man adopted was one rarely directed his way; Harry was slightly discomforted by it. It was the voice his Papa used when tearing strips off some negligent employee. It was not a tone directed toward his family. Regardless, with his mama's comforting arm around him, he found the strength to stand firm and not cower beneath his obvious disapproval.

"Unless I'm wrong Papa," he replied, "Draco's told you about my refusal to stop my friendship with Viktor."

"That is one of the reasons," Lucius allowed.

"You're being unreasonable," the potions master continued. "We are looking for your safety. This Durmstrang student cannot be trusted."

It was an argument he was tired of hearing and so he interjected. "You are saying nothing that I haven't heard before Uncle."

The man blinked at his rudeness before his eyes narrowed. "And yet you find it appropriate to pursue this further."

"I do," he declared. His mother squeezed his shoulder warningly, and he gentled his tone. It wouldn't do him any good to get grounded for rudeness on top of everything else. "I understand that you all are looking out for my safety, however what you're doing now borders on discrimination and I will not stand for it."

"How is this being discriminatory?" Draco snapped. "We're trying to keep you safe!"

"By barring me from people who seem to fit into a stereotype?" he shot right back.

"Well if he fits the mold –"

"Enough," Lucius declared, calling and end to the bickering match. "We did not bring you here to argue Harry," he continued, tone more casual. "You will end your friendship with this wizard. We have decided."
"Leave me out of this Lucius," his wife stated suddenly.

Harry turned to her in surprise. His mama was actually contradicting what her husband was saying? It was shocking. The two were always unified on such decisions. It was the one reason that he and Draco had learnt from young never to go running to the next parent if they found a punishment unfair. More often than not it would be upheld. Complaining was futile. Yet, with a matter as important as this he seemed to have the woman's support, for her eyes were glinting with determination.

"Narcissa..."

"You know where I stand on this issue," she pointed out. "Harry holds my support on this. Unless Krum displays something that makes him worthy of shunning, I will not ban Harry from interacting with him. He deserves an opportunity to make friends on his own turns. I trust his judgement enough to prevent anything on-to-ward from occurring." The witch turned to him then. "Harry, tell me that you will come to one of us the moment this friend of yours does something you consider inappropriate?"

"Of course mama," Harry agreed, glad for her support. "But he won't."

"I hope that proves true," she smiled.

"Narcissa, we cannot be divided on this issue," Lucius pressed. "It is too important."

"What is important to me, Lucius Abraxas," the veela declared, "is seeing my children happy."

"It doesn't make me happy Mother," Draco pointed out.

The veela-mother's expression softened as it fell on her son. "My child," she said, "you are not unhappy about Harry's new friendship as much as it bothers you that Harry is showing independence from you."

The teenager flinched slightly at her words, and Harry's eyes widened in comprehension. He had not thought of that factor, but listening to their mother, it certainly made sense.

"You are accustomed to Harry turning to you for final approval," she continued. "It upsets you that he is refusing your judgement in this matter and you want to regain control. Harry won't yield to you on this so you're involving others Harry respects to help you regain that control. Darling, is there something that wrong with Harry befriending this Bulgarian? You need not approve of it, and may continue to be wary. I am sure Harry understands this. All Harry wants is a chance to make a decision for himself darling, isn't this right my boy?"

"Yes mama," he agreed, before turning beseeching eyes on his mate. "Dominant, I love you. You know that, but I want to do this. Please, don't make me have to hide to meet him. I hate lying to you, and I don't want to hurt you. What's so wrong with me being friends with Viktor?"

"How would you feel if I became buddy-buddy with Parkinson?" Draco shot back.

Harry froze at that, caught unawares by the question. Draco with Pansy? The notion sounded absurd given his dislike for the girl. However, he focussed on the scenario he was presented with, trying to imagine his mate running off with Pansy for hours on end. He did not appreciate such an image in the least. The distaste obviously showed on his face before Draco smirked darkly at him. Harry bristled at that.

"That's different Draco," he pointed out. "You know why I dislike Pansy. You have no justification
in disliking Viktor. You've never even met him!

"But-"

"This is going nowhere," Severus sighed, drawing their attention to him. "Lucius, decide."

"So my opinion doesn't matter in this Severus?" Narcissa asked darkly.

The potions master sputtered, not at all liking the expression on the woman's face – nor the talons that was now glistening at him. "I didn't mean it like that Narcissa," he placated. "However, the decision does ultimately lie with Lucius. Even you must realise that."

"This decision lies solely with the boys," Narcissa huffed, falling back and pulling an unresisting Harry closer to her. "As I told Lucius last night Severus, I do not want to involve myself in this matter. I respect the fact that they are growing older and need to make their own decisions. Why can't you do the same?"

This debate was occurring on two levels, Harry suddenly realised. There were two issues that needed resolving; the first between Draco and himself, and the second between the adults. There was a secondary issues between his parents that they were indirectly arguing under the guise of resolving their children's dispute. He shot a glance to his dominant, and recognised that he had come to the same solution.

"If this was any other trivial matter I would concur dearest," Lucius said laconically. "As it stands though, this issue extends far beyond a simple spat between the two of them and that I will not have."

"What are you talking about Papa?" Harry inquired, drawing the man's attention to him.

Instead of responding, the patriarch reached to the side table near to him. Harry watched as he took up a parchment before floating it over to him. Curiously, he grasped it. A brief glance showed that everyone else had seen it before. He opened it, bypassing the letter in favour of the thicker sheet. He unrolled it, and promptly paled. Watching him was a picture of himself, secure in the arms of Viktor. As he watched, the Bulgarian lowered his head, and pressed a cheek to the top of his head, murmuring something. How had this happened? There was no one else on the corridor!

His eyes drifted lower as he took in the headline and story. This had made it to the press? His father seemed to read his question for he spoke in a clipped tone. "Gregory had the story pulled before it could be printed. However, I am certain you are aware of the potential damage this could have done."

"I told you to stay away from the Bulgarian!" Draco added. "You lied to me! What did he do to you to have you so upset?"

A cold shiver ran down Harry's spine and he felt as if he was trapped in a corner with no hope of escape. He was not sure where to start explaining. All eyes were trained on him. On the one hand, there was his father, furious that he had almost damaged his reputation, and in doing brought scandal to the Malfoy name. In recent times Lucius had slackened the controls on publicity surrounding him, letting previously unreleased details out, the most important being that he was the veela mate of the Malfoy heir.

Therefore, his actions had become a clear reflection of the Malfoy name and he was expected to act the part. In no way were the expectations on him as strenuous as the ones his mate endured. His primary duty was simple, act in a manner befitting someone of such an illustrious family and do not
bring dishonour upon the Malfoy name.

On the other side, there was his mate, who undoubtedly knew by now the extent of his lies, and had incorrectly assigned the blame to Viktor. Where should he start with his explanations? To tell of his encounter with Viktor would require an explanation of what was bothering him in the first place. That would place his friends in a precarious situation, one that he had wanted to avoid.

He knew that further lies were impossible. He did not put it past his family to check for the complete truth this time around, and that would only land him in hot water if he tried any further dishonesty. What to do? A deep sigh passed his lips as he dropped his gaze. Well, there was no way around it, he might as well get it over with and accept whatever they chose to do.

"I overheard a conversation between Ron and Hermione," he began softly, not looking up as he spoke. "That was what upset me Draco. I left where they were and ran into Viktor. Our meeting was not planned or anything. He realised something was wrong and hugged me. I didn't care about what you wanted at that point Draco.

"He was there and I took what he offered. When I realised you were coming to look for me I left him. It wasn't worth the trouble that would have happened had you found us together. I didn't want to tell you the truth because I knew you would get mad at Ron and Hermione, so I lied and said it was a Charms accident.

"Papa, I don't know how that photograph came about. Viktor and I were alone on the corridor. I'm positive about that."

That said, Harry drifted into silence. There was nothing else to be said. That was what had happened and they could either accept it or punish him for it. He had not meant for the photograph to be taken, however, he was not entirely culpable. He had never had to worry about his actions being documented. Countless times, he could be found in the arms of one person or another. He was naturally affectionate; they knew that. He hugged everyone from his mate to Hermione to Professor Sprout. Hell, if Mr. Filch wasn't such an unpleasant man he might have hugged him too if he felt the desire to do so.

In a way he understood his father's grouse – he had let his guard down. He should have known better, should have thought ahead as a Malfoy would have. In such a time at the school, where there were visitors and officials about, he should restrain himself, limiting his actions to his mate, the only person it would be politically correct to do so with. For this year he was not simply a student, he was a public figure and should act the part. He had fallen short in this regard and had thus opened himself in a sticky situation. However, Harry found himself recalling his earlier thoughts in the shower. Why had all of this fallen onto him? Why couldn't he simply be a spectator in the tournament, and not have to worry about his appearance. Could not the focus remain solely on the champions, and leave him alone? That was too much to ask for apparently.

"So you definitely did not plan to meet Krum?" Severus asked presently, causing Harry to raise his gaze.

"How could I?" Harry shot back.

The potions master's eyebrow rose at the statement, but he acknowledged his point regardless. "You are certain that Skeeter was no way in the corridor?"

"Positive Uncle," he stated. "We were alone."

"You're not supposed to be on your own regardless," Draco grumbled, "especially with him."
Harry's anger flared slightly, and he could not control himself from snapping, "Well why don't you just tell me the things I'm allowed to do Draco? That might be easier to remember!"

"Control yourself Harry," Lucius warned.

The thirteen year old turned his eyes on him, his face twisted into a scowl. "Or what Papa?" he demanded. "Just come out and say it. The only reason you're here is to take me home unless I promise to behave."

"Harry!" he snapped, but was cut off by his wife.

"Calm down darling," she bid him, stroking his hair. "There's no need to be upset. We can work this out."

"Mama," Harry replied, turning his eyes to her, "you understand don't you?"

The witch smiled softly and nodded. "I understand perfectly precious," she whispered. "It's only natural to want to test your boundaries. It has every teenager's right to do so. Circumstances are just preventing you from doing so and I understand that it is hard. However, there is no need to act out like this."

The rebuke was gentle, and Harry responded to it. "Yes mama," he agreed, before turning to the other males. "I'm sorry I snapped," he apologised, "however I'm not sorry about what I said. You can't choose my friends for me. I won't let you."

"But we can make sure you can't meet him," Draco pointed out.

"You do that and I'll never forgive you Draco," he replied. "I love you but I won't let you have that control over me. I have a right to make my own choices."

"And it's my right to prevent you from making a wrong choice!"

They were going nowhere with this, Harry huffed. They were both too stubborn to back down on this matter. The adults finally seemed to realise that, for Lucius spoke once again, directing their attentions back to him.

"You are right in that I had come here to take you home," the patriarch told him. "However, I can plainly see that doing so will anger not only you but your mother as well."

"And don't you know it," Narcissa murmured.

"I do however, stand by Draco on this matter. Viktor Krum has a questionable past, and I don't want you involved with him."

"With all do respect Papa, I plan to be his friend, with or without your approval."

"I know," Lucius sighed, "and Draco is as determined as you that you should not be. Severus, where do you stand on this?"

The potions master tapped his fingers on the arm of his chair for a moment before he replied. "I know my brat," he began, glancing at Harry. "Save taking him home he will find a way to meet this Bulgarian, no matter how much we try to restrain him. I for one do not want to spend my days punishing him for disobeying only for him to do it again. I understand, and do agree with Draco's concerns, and were you not so stubborn Harry, you would agree with them as well."
The thirteen year old's eyes narrowed slightly, but he held his peace. His Uncle was right. Either way, he would pursue this friendship and see how far it went. Nothing was going to stop him from doing it.

An hour later, Harry was alone in their quarters once again. He sighed deeply as he loosened his tie, waiting for the tea tray he had told his elf to get him. He had his victory. His father had agreed to keep him at Hogwarts, however, on a provisional basis. If he received any information that Viktor was not as he seemed, Harry would have to end the friendship. If they were caught doing anything that could be interpreted as inappropriate surfaced, they would have to end the friendship. And, if Harry refused to heed that dictate, he would be withdrawn from the school immediately.

Although discontented with the numerous restraints, Harry had agreed. It was better than nothing, and this way he wouldn't have to hide as much as he interacted with Viktor. His mate was not in the least pleased about it, and, undoubtedly, had launched into a tirade the minute Harry had excused himself. The veela mate was not particularly looking forward to Draco's return. He could envision a next argument, and honestly, he was weary of it. Dobby arrived with the tray, and, after looking at him with mild disapproval, patted out. Someone else not pleased with him, he thought, sipping at his tea. He needed to talk with Viktor. Hopefully, he would be available.

Refilling his cup and taking it with him, Harry wandered into his bedroom, pulling out the book. After waiting a few minutes, it became apparent that his friend was not near it. Harry had to satisfy himself with a delayed response however, that was all right. At least he was able to get his thoughts out on paper. Viktor could respond at his leisure. He had written almost four pages when he heard Draco return. Finishing the last line, he closed the book and hid it. Time for round two, he thought grimly, or was it three?

He had barely left his bedroom before Draco descended upon him, his eyes almost mercury with his emotions. Harry felt a brief moment of fear when the veela pushed him so that he was jammed against the wall.

"Draco..."

"You are mine," the blonde ground out. "You are my mate."

His mate's words were unexpected. Wasn't he the one constantly insecure about their bond? It seemed that a role-reversal was occurring for whatever reason, and he allowed it.

"No one can change that fact," Harry whispered, raising his hands and fist in Draco's robes. "I'm your mate dominant. But, I am my own person too. You can't tell me who to be friends with. I'm sorry if that bothers you, but this is my stance. It doesn't mean I love you any less."

The veela did not respond immediately. Instead, he lowered his head until their foreheads were pressed together, and Harry could feel his warm breath wafting over his skin in a soft caress. The younger wizard flexed his fingers, the movement seeming to finally draw words from his mate.

"That picture," he muttered harshly. "Only I can hold you like that. You seek comfort from me, no one else."

So that was the issue, Harry recognised. His mate was jealous, jealous of the fact that another had managed to provide a solace for him. Members of the family were all right, but an intruder was another story.
"I'll come to you next time," Harry promised, looking up into the stormy eyes mere centimetres from his.

"Why?" the veela demanded, pressing closer to him.

"You're my mate," the younger wizard responded, shifting slightly. "I turn to you."

He had said the right thing, for all at once the veela's expression cleared considerably. However, Harry was not given long to peruse the change, for an instant later his lips were claimed. He jumped at the suddenness of the move before relaxing completely in the grip. Kissing his mate was always an experience, but this was something else entirely. His veela was pouring out his feelings to him even as their lips brushed each other, and Harry found his breath hitching as the feelings bombarded him, both through their bond and the physical contact.

The veela pulled back, allowing them to breathe and Harry opened eyes he was not even aware had been closed. His entire body was trembling from the long denied affection. It was only now that Harry felt the strain on their bond, recognising that it had been almost a day since they had interacted with each other with anything other than aggression. In his mind he knew there were still issues to be resolved, however, the emotions pouring through their bond was too great, reminding him that he belonged first to his veela and then to anyone else.

"Dominant," he mewled, his tone conveying his thoughts.

The veela growled slightly before his head bent once again, claiming Harry's lips in another kiss that was as passionate as the first. When Draco pulled back this time, Harry felt as if every nerve in his body had awakened. He knew his cheeks had to be flushed, and his breathing was ragged as if he had run a mile. His dominant as well was affected. His expression was softer now, more affectionate as if he too found their previous anger at each other too cumbersome to recall at the moment.

"I love you," Harry found himself murmuring, and was rewarded with a briefer kiss.

"I know you do," the veela replied, raising a hand and stroking his cheek softly. "However, I don't think you love me in the same way that I love you...not anymore at least."

The fingers stroking his cheek were distracting him from his mate's words, and thus, Harry made a confused sound, not willing to deconstruct what his mate had just stated.

"It's all right," Draco cooed, pecking his slightly swollen lips gently. "You'll learn with time. For now, remember one thing for me?"

"Anything."

Draco's eyes darkened at his immediate compliance. "Remember that while you love me, I am in love with you and I will protect you as such."

"You're in love with me?" Harry repeated with a hint of confusion.

"That I am Harry James," the veela whispered, "that I am."

That said the veela withdrew completely, and suddenly the room felt several degrees cooler without his body pressed close to him. Draco stroked his cheek one last time before pulling away. "I'm going to have a bath now cub. Will you send for a next tea tray?"

The blonde walked away without waiting for a response. As the bathroom door closed, Harry raised his fingers to brush at his still tingling lips wondering at the differentiation of love his mate had just
posed and hoping that he would understand the difference, while praying that it would be soon.
Harry took a deep breath, bracing himself before he left his bedroom. Draco was as he had left him, perched on the armchair, one leg casually slung over an arm as he thumbed through whatever it was their uncle had given him as part of his apprenticeship. He scratched slightly at his arm as he approached the veela. He was standing by his side for a good few seconds before the blonde acknowledged him.

"Meeting Ron and Hermione?" the veela inquired without looking up.

The brunette stifled a sigh. This, like every other time for the past week would be an extremely difficult one. Couldn't his mate just understand?

"No," he replied softly, not saying anything further. They both knew where he was going. Was it necessary to have this stilted banter every time?

"Oh." Draco said nonchalantly, turning another page. "Off to meet him again. Try to remember that you had other friends before your little Bulgarian arrived."

Harry's hands fisted against his sides at the insinuation. So his mate believed that he was abandoning his friends. Typical Draco, he supposed as he growled, heading for the exit of their quarters. His mate only saw the larger issue and did not concern himself with minor details. He obviously still had not noticed the passing remark he had made in regards to his friends during the meeting with their family. Resultantly, Draco had capitalised on the impulsiveness he had exhibited in his younger years and had decided that he was ignoring his friends in favour of a new, more interesting person. He was so far from the truth it wasn't funny; however Harry was unwilling to toss in yet another issue into the strained peace between them.

His life had gotten so complicated recently, he bemoaned, as he strode down the corridor (the lack of farewell by his mate was glaring he noted absently). In a way, the complications all tied back to Viktor, and, he supposed, a different person would have sacrificed the Bulgarian in order to restore their life to a previous harmonious state. However, Harry refused to do that, for a variety of reasons. Thus, with his usual stubbornness, he was ploughing straight ahead into the future, hoping that something would give with time and improve the entire situation. Fat chance, he snorted, ignoring the looks he was garnering from those around him. With Draco's current attitude, he could envision this tenseness lasting straight until Viktor left Britain, and continuing afterwards, as Harry did not intend to end the friendship anytime soon.

Speaking of the Bulgarian...

Harry wondered what was so important that Viktor fairly demanded that they meet. Not that he would have refused anyway, but this time there was a sort of urgency in his message. As far as Harry knew, his friend was supposed to be training with his High Master today, preparing for the First Task. Yet, he suddenly had the time to demand a meeting with him? Well, Harry allowed, he would have his answer soon enough. He was now on the third floor, heading toward the empty classroom at the end of the corridor. It had been their meeting area as of late. The area was not particularly popular with the remainder of the student body, and thus, it afforded them relative privacy.

Harry pushed opened the door without knocking; the Bulgarian was expecting him after all. As he closed it, he felt a slight crawling sensation on his neck and batted irritably at it. A small beetle fell from his skin, and for a moment, he stared down at it in bewilderment. He had not been on the grounds for the entire day. Just where had he picked that up from? It would probably die if he left it
in here, Harry mused, and so he bent and scooped up the beetle.

"You have found something Harry?" the Bulgarian asked, from across the room.

A smile formed on Harry's lips as he ignored the bug in his hand in favour of his friend. Viktor had widened the window ledge and was now using it as a seat. He had one leg pulled up so that he could prop a hand on it, and his body was relaxed in a way that suggested that he would be perfectly content with maintaining the position for a long time.

"A bug was on me," Harry explained as he crossed the room.

He opened his carefully closed palm, revealing it to him. The Bulgarian gently grasped his wrist and pulled his hand close to his face so he could examine the beetle. Harry resisted a chuckle at the studious expression on the seventeen year old's face.

"You like insects?" he inquired softly.

His question seemed to draw his friend out of his trance for he looked up at him in mild confusion before a crooked grin formed on his face.

"I have never seen a beetle like this," he admitted in a soft voice. "May I have it?"

The insect seemed to understand his words, Harry thought, for suddenly, it started scuttling across his hand, tickling the sensitive skin. However, it was unable to escape for Viktor's hand had darted out, securing the insect between two fingers.

"He doesn't like you," Harry teased.

"We will get to know each other with time," Viktor smirked. "Transfigure me a jar Harry."

"Can't you do it?" Harry shot back with slight mirth.

"Of course I can," the foreigner countered. "However, I want to see your magical brilliance at work."

The thirteen year old chuckled at that, and looked around. He crooked his fingers and summoned an old book to him. Transfiguring a large enough expanse, he opened it and held it out to his companion. The insect struggle resumed as Viktor lowered it into the glass, previously unseen wings fluttering in agitation. Correctly guessing that it would try to escape, Harry quickly shut the jar as soon as Viktor's fingers were out of reach.

"I should reinforce it," the Durmstrang Champion murmured, before incanting softly, tapping his wand (when had he drawn it, Harry thought) against the glass thrice before he declared it properly sealed. "This should keep it until I can test its identity."

"I think you mean 'species' Viktor," Harry corrected, as he laid the jar down on an empty table.

"If you will," Viktor replied vaguely.

Harry started looking around for a suitable seat for himself. His quest ended rather abruptly though, as the older wizard's hand latched on to his wrist, giving him a firm yet gentle yank. It was enough to displace him, and Harry found himself dropping down onto Viktor's lap.

"Hello malko," the older wizard whispered, snaking a hand around Harry's waist and pulling him closer.
Their final position was a fairly intimate one, Harry thought, as he shifted around slightly. The only person who had ever held him in such a way was Draco, and he felt slightly discomfited by that fact. However, it took him only a second to recall how his mate had been treating him currently and as such, he relaxed into the position, allowing Viktor to support his weight. He turned his head, and was startled briefly by the close proximity their faces were to each other. But then, the curiosity took over and he found himself enjoying a detailed perusal of the Bulgarian's face for the first time. His eyes particularly fascinated him. He had never noticed it, but his friend's eyes were not one solid colour as he had first believed; indeed, there were flecks of a lighter brown within the dark hue.

"Admiring me?" Viktor whispered teasing, raising a hand to touch his face.

Harry coloured lightly, even as he denied it. "I was just watching your eyes," he explained, eyes sparkling with mirth. "They're nice."

"Only nice?" Viktor mock gasped, pretending to be affronted.

"Vain!" Harry chuckled.

"I have never denied it," he smirked.

They continued with a light banter for a few minutes until Harry face was lightly flushed with laughter. By now the Bulgarian's fingers on his face was a familiar presence and he no longer felt a slight twinge of discomfort at it.

"What did you want to talk about anyway?" he inquired, drumming his fingers lightly.

His question altered Viktor's mood immediately, and he was barely restrained an apology for changing the mood. However, before he could formulate the words, Viktor was speaking.

"You are friends with the Hogwarts' Champion?"

It was an odd question, Harry thought. He nodded regardless though. Although he was more familiar with Cho, he and Cedric had shared enough conversations that he considered him a friend, if not a close one.

"I know Cedric," he confirmed, wondering where this would lead too.

"That is good," Viktor murmured, tightening his grip on Harry's waist slightly. "You will pass along a message for me?"

"A message?" Harry repeated. "What do you have to tell Cedric?"

"It is about the First Task," Viktor revealed. "I told you my High Master was training me today?"

"You did," he confirmed.

"Well," Viktor elaborated. "He did not train me as much as tell me what I would be facing on the 24th."

Harry gasped. "That is cheating!" he declared.

Viktor nodded seriously. "I know. That is why I want for you to tell your Champion. Beauxbaton's champion knows of the task as well. Your headmaster will not tell your champion; he will have a disadvantage. I do not want that."

"Wouldn't that be better for you?" Harry pointed out reasonably.
He knew how competitive Viktor was. It was surprising that he would not hold such information to himself.

"The advantage would be unfair," he pointed out. "I wish for this tournament to be perfect. I will not have my victory in any way sullied. You will tell?"

"I will," Harry promised immediately.

"Thank you," the Bulgarian said sincerely, stroking his cheek a little firmer. "The First Task will be dragons. No more would my High Master tell me, however it will help your friend. I am certain."

"It would," Harry mused. "He'd have a specific area to focus on."

"Exactly," Viktor confirmed. "You are very smart Harry."

"I'm not in fifth year for nothing," Harry quipped.

"Indeed you are not," Viktor agreed, although Harry could swear there was a hint of bitterness in his tone.

"Do you have to go back soon?" he asked, hoping the answer was no. He was not ready to return to his mate, whose sullenness would have undoubtedly descended into anger by now.

"My afternoon is free," Viktor smiled. "Is yours?"

"It isn't now," Harry declared with a smirk. It would be another hour and a half before Harry left him.

Once the door closed behind his love, the slightly silly smile on Viktor's face faded. He turned, striding quickly to the jar Harry had set aside earlier. Roughly, he snatched it up, uncaring that it jostled the insect in it.

"I wonder who you are," he murmured darkly, as he lifted it to eye level. "And why you would dare spy on my Harry?"

The beetle froze, its eyes focusing solely on him.

"I do not care for spies," he continued, backing up slowly so that he was near the window, and could more clearly examine the insect, "especially those on my Harry."

The Bulgarian set the glass on the ledge and retrieved his wand, levelling it at the beetle. He could see, even in its current form, the calculating gleam in the insect's eyes. Whoever it was believed him to be a fool. Chuckling maliciously, he murmured an incantation, laughing richly when the beetle morphed into a rather ugly woman—who remained the same size. The look of shock on the woman's face was palpable, and so, he tossed back his head and laughed richly.

"You expected to grow and break free did you not?" he asked rhetorically. "That is too bad. I have seen you before. You are that—what is the word?—publicist? It matters not. You photographed us and got my Harry into trouble. I nearly lost him because of you, and yet you do not learn."

"Harry's Papa was supposed to have taken care of you. He has failed if you are still following him
around. No more! I will have no-one interfering with my plans and you are interfering."

By now, the woman was frantically thumping against the jar, silently screaming at him. Viktor paused, amused. Currently the Skeeter witch was trying to break the glass by magic. "Stupid witch," he spat after a moment, "do you not listen? I knew you were human from the start. You are not leaving that jar unless I wish it. You British have no idea how magic should be used. You cannot even start to unravel my work. However, by all means do continue...or perhaps you should not."

The ominous tone he adopted to the end had the witch staring at him again, her wand limp in her hand.

"You think I would free you? I am Durmstrang," he declared. "The rumours about us are most assuredly true."

The wand fell from her hand at his words, and he smiled darkly. "My High Master has taught me well. I could free you," he allowed. "There are spells to make you forget this. I can even stop your interest in my Harry."

A look that could be categorised as hope flashed across her face. That had been his intention, and so he smirked. It was more enjoyable to lead her on before completely crushing her hopes. It would make his victory that the sweeter.

"I will not though," he decreed, enjoying her dumbfounded expression. The woman started pounding on the glass with renewed vigour. "I want you to remember; recall just why you are now trapped as you are. You hurt my Harry, and for that you will pay."

That said, Viktor raised his wand. Slowly and painfully, he forced the woman to return to her beetle form, before ensuring that the change the transformation was permanent. Only when he died would the spell lift, and, she certainly would be dead before him. A beetle's lifespan was considerably shorter than a human's was...although he was half-tempted to simply squash her now and be done with it. However, she would not suffer, as he wanted her to. A quick death was out of the question for this one. No, this was much better.

The Bulgarian opened the window and scanned the scenery. Perfect. The Great Lake was only a small distance away, and with the angle of the sun, no one would notice. He was just about to toss the glass when a last thought occurred to him. Chuckling at his own ingenuity, he created a hairline fracture in the glass. It was barely a scrape – however once the jar was underwater and surrounded by all that pressure... He laughed, lessening the strength of the unbreakable spell on the jar. It would stop functioning eventually; the water would take care of the rest.

"Good day Miss Skeeter," he said politely, staring one last time into the fearful eyes of the beetle.

He pulled his hand back and tossed the jar as hard as he could, before shooting off a burst of magic that propelled the glass prison. As he watched, it soared, over the Giant Squid before it hit the water. He could almost hear the thunk it made, he thought fondly as he pocketed his wand, completely satisfied with himself. There, one less burden for his Harry to deal with. It was too bad his little love could not know of his accomplishments. He could not see him agreeing with his methodology. It was all right though as all partners had their secrets. This would just be a little one he would hide from his beloved. Although, he suddenly recalled, he had yet to deal with Harry's little lion friends. He would contemplate on that later, he decided. For now, he needed to report his actions to the High Master.

As he left the classroom, he found himself chuckling once again. He could envision another headline:
Rita Skeeter Missing! Where has she gone?

But then again, he noted, hags like her would rarely be missed. She could be gone for months before she was missed, and then, it would be far too late. And, unfortunately for one Rita Skeeter, now scrambling around her prison that had settled on the Lake's floor, the Bulgarian's words would prove true.

As expected, Harry's good mood lasted until he entered the entrance to their quarters. Draco was as he had left him, reclining comfortably against the armchair. The only thing missing, he saw, was the book he had been reading earlier.

"Finally back?" Draco asked smoothly, his eyes following him as he moved around the mood.

"I was talking to Cedric."

"Oh?" the veela asked, with false surprise, "you remembered you had other friends?"

Harry pointedly ignored the barb, and instead settled for shrugging out of his robes. "Were you here the entire time?" he asked instead, settling the robe over a chair back.

"Uncle Severus sent for him. I was with him for a little while."

"That's good to know," Harry murmured, settling back. He pulled his legs up under him. "You don't usually have duties on a Saturday afternoon."

"He didn't call me to work. He called me about you."

There was something off in that tone, Harry noted. "Me?" he repeated, one of his eyebrows raising. "What about me?"

The question seemed to be the only invitation the veela needed to unleash the torrent he had been holding back. "You failed the last non-credit assignment," Draco said bluntly, his anger lacing his words. "You passed the one before that by two marks."

Harry winced slightly. He knew that he had not put much effort into the assignments but he seriously had thought he would have done better than that. His Uncle was the only professor who completely disregarded the work they had done in the holidays. Instead, he assigned them alternate assignments than their peers that they were expected to submit in tandem with them. It was to prevent them from becoming complacent, he had told them weeks earlier with his characteristic smirk.

"Nothing to say?" the veela invited.

Oh, he had a lot to say, Harry thought, however most of it involved his mate's current attitude rather than his marks. He settled on one of the lesser annoying issues.

"Since it is my work in question, why did he send for you?"

"He did Harry," Draco explained, leaning back and lacing his fingers. "Dobby informed me that you refused to take his message. I went in your place."

Harry cringed slightly at that. So that was what his elf had been trying to convey to him. He had waved him off irritably, believing that it was a message from Draco. Perhaps he had been too hasty there.
"Regardless, it was probably better that you did not go. Uncle is far from pleased with you at the moment. He wants them redone, by the way. Eight feet each."

Harry gaped at the pronouncement. "But the assignment was for three feet!" he protested.

"And now Uncle wants eight," his mate said glibly.

He would do that, Harry thought with slight despair. His uncle did hold them to a higher standard than the other students. A typical student would have gotten double the length – however, his boys-they got an extra amount tacked on because they were family. He could barely stifle his groan. "When does he want this by?"

"There is no time limit," the veela announced. Nevertheless, he continued before Harry could crow with joy. A slight smirk pulled at the corners of his mate's lips before he continued. "You are grounded until you are done though."

Harry felt his heart plummet slightly. With all of the readings they had to do, plus his apprenticeship duties and tutoring, he would need at least two weeks to complete sixteen feet of writing. And this time, he could not scrimp. His uncle would simply reject the essays if he enlarged his handwriting. The veela had won this round. He couldn't ban him from interacting with Viktor, but he could ground him. It amounted to the same thing in the end.

"This is your doing," he guessed correctly.

"And what if it is?" Draco challenged, a full-fledged smirk on his face now.

Why are you doing this?" Harry demanded.

"I am not doing anything," Draco corrected. "You were the one who failed to meet acceptable standards, and so, you are being punished. Don't blame your negligence on me. I certainly spent the necessary time on the assignments. That is, unless you want me to revert to our old standards? I'd be happy to check over your work mate."

He could hit him, Harry thought darkly, if only to remove that satisfied expression from his face. He was so pleased with himself, glad that he had once again gotten the upper hand over his partner. And, in this he did, Harry realised. He had the backing of their uncle in this, and there was no use in writing home. Even mama would second Draco on this issue. She had a zero tolerance policy when it came to grades.

"Instead of working yourself into a temper," the veela said presently, "maybe you should evaluate exactly why your work fell beneath its usual standard. Your handwriting was far from neat, the essays glorified summaries that lacked any real analysis. You even strayed from the actual topic numerous times.

"Let's consider, shall we? These last two assignments were given over the course of the past two weeks. All the essays Uncle gave us in September and October...what did you get? Es and Os. Now, what has happened recently that might have led to your grades take a sudden dive?"

"You can't blame this on him," Harry snapped, although the insinuation was not far from the truth. Had he not spent his usual study hours chatting with Viktor?

I can and I will," Draco declared, his voice rising sharply. "He is not good for you."

Harry had had enough. His afternoon with Viktor had been so enjoyable, and now Draco had robbed him of any of the pleasant feelings he had felt. He couldn't stay in the room a minute longer
with him. He would not be accountable for his actions if he did. Putting actions to his thoughts, he rose hurriedly, starting to storm off to his bedroom.

"Running away?" Draco mocked snidely.

Harry paused, before turning to shoot him a murderous look. "Leave me alone Draco," he warned. "I mean it!"

"Dinner starts in an hour."

"I'll survive," he ground out, as he continue walking.

"Mate?"

It was instinct that had him turning and he cursed himself for it. Draco had flung his essays at him, and he caught it reflexively. He should have just let them drop to the floor, letting his mate know exactly what he thought of them, and more particularly him, at the moment. However, he would have to satisfy himself with slamming his door with as much ferocity as he could manage, the sound echoing throughout their rooms.

* *

Draco dropped listlessly the moment his mate slammed his bedroom door. He buried his head in his hands, stifling a groan. Why did he always do this? He had not meant to act so aggressive towards Harry, but the moment he had seen his radiant expression, all rationality left him. For Merlin's sake, he was the only one who should be capable of drawing such emotion from the brunette. Everything had been perfect until that Bulgarian had arrived and seemingly bewitched his mate.

Jealousy was perhaps his greatest flaw, and it was the one aspect to his personality that he had the most difficulty controlling. It was partly the fault of his veela blood; Harry belonged to him; seeing him with anyone else was difficult for him. However, for most of his life, controlling the feeling had been easy. As long as he was certain about a person's intentions toward Harry, he was fine. It never bothered him (and sometimes even amused him) when he saw Harry being whisked off by the lions or tossed playfully in the air by Fred and George Weasley. And, of course, seeing Harry being fussed over by their family only left him feeling contented.

However, Viktor Krum...

There was more to him than what met the eye and Harry seemed to be the only one not able to recognise that fact. Hell, even his own schoolmates were wary of him. It had not escaped his notice how stilted the other Durmstrang students were in his vicinity. It was like they were afraid of their Champion, and, as far as he was concerned, they had good reason to be. After all, out of all his students, the High Master, seemed to favour Krum, and that was even before he had been declared Champion. He could only imagine what 'talent' Krum bore to attract such attention from the Dark Lord's servant.

Why couldn't Harry see what everyone else saw? How could he consider such a person trustworthy? Even though Krum seemed particularly enamoured with his mate, Draco could not discount the way everyone else who had grown up with him reacted to his presence. It could be that Krum was just disguising his true nature to his mate. What purpose that would serve Draco did not know, but it was bothersome. Yet, he acknowledged, as he rocked back and flung a hand over his eyes, that was far from his main issue with the Bulgarian.

No, what he despised most of all about the Durmstrang Champion was the way he looked at his
mate. No matter how platonic Harry's feelings towards him seemed, it was obvious to him that it was not what the Bulgarian wanted from his mate. It had only taken him one glance at the photograph to see that. The look in the taller wizard's eyes as he brushed his chin along the top of Harry's head was telling. That embrace showed more than the desire to comfort, no matter how Harry, in his innocence interpreted it. It was at that moment, seated at his father's side that he finally acknowledged that his feelings for Harry had shifted from brotherly love into something more.

Finally, he had come to see Harry as he ultimately would for the remainder of his days. Harry was his heart, the one person whose presence would sate him. His brunette partner was the one he wanted to wake up to every morning, lean over, and kiss deeply. Harry was the one he wanted by his side as they went through all of life's challenges...he would be his reason to persevere. And Viktor Krum was trying to jeopardise that for him. It was the reason for his passionate outburst in their room; the reason he had tried to pour out his feelings to Harry in that heated kiss that sent pleasurable shivers throughout his body. At any other time, he would have felt wry acceptance at Harry's inability to process fully what he was transmitting. He would wait however long it took Harry to mature and reach the same conclusion he had.

Yet, with the picture of Krum lurking in his mind, he could only feel dismay. Harry honestly could not comprehend the pain he felt every time he walked away from him into the arms of that Bulgarian student. It hurt him so much that Harry preferred another to him, defended him with a vigour that Draco had never before seen from him. His mate was sacrificing everything he held dear for the sake of a stranger, and it was hard for him to keep control of himself when faced with all those facts. Harry's dismal grades had been the straw that broke the camel's back, so to speak.

The veela seriously doubted that his anger would have been as great had it been some other subject. Nevertheless, the fact that Harry had chosen Potions of all classes to slack off on was disturbing. More than anyone else, Harry had reason to 'fear' Severus Snape. After all, he had been the man's occasional student since childhood, and knew what to expect from the man, and his strict standards. To fall below that was an injustice to himself and an insult to all the work he had put into teaching him for all the years. That was the breaking point for him, and he had done little to control his fury.

Grounding Harry was a spontaneous and yet ingenious move, he thought, moving his hand. Even as he espoused the decree, he knew that Harry would react unfavourably to it. But the look of pure loathing in his eyes, bordering on hate was almost too much for him to bear. He could not reneg on the threat though. He had to follow through with it, and hopefully, once Harry overcame his anger, he would realise just how much influence he was letting Viktor Krum have on him. Maybe then he would break off the friendship with him and they could resume their normal lives.

That was all he wanted, nothing more, nothing less.

Was it really too much to ask for?
When his mate truly put his mind to it, Harry thought sadly, he was ingenious. Completing the two essays had taken every spare moment he had had in the past three weeks. He was tired, and not merely physically either. He was both physically, mentally and emotionally drained. Unlike the majority of the other students, the thirteen year old could barely summon any excitement over the First Task that was now scant days away. That was particularly telling, given that he had more reason than the rest to be interested in the Tournament.

His tiredness was primarily his fault, he admitted mentally, absently jotting down something to keep up the illusion of paying attention to his Uncle. It had been stubbornness that had him pushing himself so hard to complete the work. He could have done the essays at his leisure; after all, being grounded was hardly the worst thing in the world. Heck, he had only apologised, his mate would have been at his side the entire time. Nevertheless, he had not apologised, and so, was literally alone for the entire period. That had given him the motivation to push through and finish it as soon as possible.

One of the reasons the punishment had been so irksome, he supposed, was his separation from Viktor, which had been Draco's goal. The separation had bothered him, especially as he had gotten quite used to being in the Bulgarian's company. Therefore, to be away from him so abruptly was slightly jarring. More than that, was the fact that the Durmstrang Champion had not sympathised with him. Indeed, Viktor had refused to assist him with his research. He still talked to him via the book of course, however, the Bulgarian limited their conversation to a mere half hour every few days. That had only made him even more appreciative of the time they spent conversing with each other. Nevertheless, it was no replacement for their more prolonged discussions.

However, more than that, was a second, more important, issue. His relationship with Draco was in shambles, and, it was entirely his fault. It was that fact which caused him the most heartache. The blonde hadn't then, and barely now looked at him, and, conversations were almost non-existent. Harry could not fault him for that. What he had done was wrong. He had been less than gracious in accepting his grounding initially, and he had mad no effort to hide that fact. He had locked himself into his bedroom whenever the veela attempted to talk to him, and ignored him when they were together. The breaking point thought had been the moment he had shrugged off the arm the veela had attempted to sling over his shoulders one day, growling at him not to touch him. Draco had taken him at his words literally, the dark haired boy reflected sadly, and had completely disassociated himself from him since then.

Something had to give between them, and soon. The tension was palpable now, and he doubted that there was a person in the castle who was not away of their dispute, even if they were unaware of the cause. Only a blind person would not notice something was wrong. Draco's temper was on edge. His face was almost perpetually in a frown, his responses in class curt and clipped. No one dared approach him, and there was a visible space between him and the next person when they sat in the Great Hall. Even Millicent and Blaise were avoiding him currently. They, more than the other students were well away of the depths of his temper and knew better than to aggravate him. And honestly, even a simple question could set the veela off in his current mood. Indeed, the only time the veela seemed even remotely calm anymore was after fulfilling his apprenticeship duties.

Undoubtedly, his godfather was counselling him and urging a reconciliation. In all actuality, Harry was surprised that his godfather had yet to mention anything to him. In their younger years, the man had always been quick to intervene, and now, it had been weeks and he had yet to say a word about it. Not that Harry needed a vocalisation of the man's disapproval of his relationship with Viktor. It was obvious in his expression whenever he looked at him.
Regardless, something had to change. Harry felt as if he was balancing on the edge of a knife blade, and, he certainly did not want to be cut. That was why he had written to his own godfather, all but begging the Black Patriarch for advice. Harry honestly believed that, out of anyone else in their family, his Uncle Sirius was the one who understood him the best. That belief stemmed from the fact that their personalities were intrinsically similar. It also did not hurt that Harry really did take after his birth parents in many ways, and that Sirius had shared a long relationship with them. Nevertheless, Uncle Sirius would have an answer for him, he always did. His solutions were always helpful. He sincerely wished that he would respond to him soon.

Sudden creaks from around the room jolted him from his reverie, and he looked around dazedly. The class had ended. He glanced guiltily down at his parchment. A two-hour lecture, and he had written all of five inches. Quickly skimming them, he was further disheartened to note that none of it particularly related back to the topic for the day. Sighing ruefully, and knowing that he would have another potions filled night, he rolled up the parchment before depositing it in his bag. Once it was placed, he rummaged for his two essays, taking longer than was necessary for the task's completion, as he had noticed Hermione subtly trying to get his attention. He did not have the time to deal with them currently, not that he even knew what he would do about them.

He still was not sure what he wanted to do with the information he had gleaned from them. However, he suspected that he would have to do something soon. His grounding had provided him with a logical reason to avoid them. Hopefully, after his conversation with the potions master, he would no longer have that crutch to hold on to. Finally, the bushy haired witch left the classroom. Ron had not even bothered to remain, he saw. The redhead truly did not care much for him any longer. Harry refused to let himself be affected by that realisation. He had familial affairs to consider. That took precedent over any friendship.

Briefly setting aside his essays, Harry secured his bag. "I have to speak to Uncle Severus," he said in a slightly hesitant tone as he glanced to the silent veela beside him.

Draco was still organising his belongings, although why he had brought so many things with him in the first place escaped the mate currently. The blonde did not even glance at him. Instead, he only shrugged slightly, before slinging the bag over his shoulder. Harry found himself biting his lip in mild frustration as the veela stepped from the desk. Was a simple response too much to hope for?

"I'll be done soon," he added.

This time, there was no response, not even the nonchalant shrug from before. He did not even give him a backward glance as he walked out of the classroom. The veela mate watched his exit with a sense of numbness. The closeness between them was well and truly gone. His eyes suddenly stung, however he refused to give into the feeling. Taking a shuddering breath, Harry tried desperately to construct even a passable occlumency shield. He did not want an elaborate one (not that he could construct such a thing in the first place). What he wanted was one strong enough to help him divorce himself from his emotions temporarily, so he could get through his meeting. As expected, he failed miserably at the task. However, at least his sadness had been replaced with annoyance and frustration at the ineptitude at the task.

Huffing, Harry glanced around, the now empty classroom. Wait... Empty? Where had the potions master gotten to? It should have been fairly obvious to him that Harry had wanted a word with him. But then again, the man would not have gone too far. More than likely he had just moved to his private office. To that extent, Harry walked to the hidden entrance to the older wizard's office before knocking. After a few seconds, he was acknowledged, although the man's voice was slightly absentminded. The cause of that was immediately known to him when he opened the door. The man was propped against his desk, reading avidly from something in his hand. Everything about him said
quite loudly that he was not to be disturbed and Harry would respect that.

Under different circumstances, he would have made himself at home while he waited for the man to acknowledge him. As is, he settled for walking around the office as quietly as possible, careful not to disturb him until he was ready for him. It was a few minutes later (although it certainly felt much longer) before the potions master closed the document he was reading with a determined snap before setting it aside. Harry, who had since moved to a shelf, jumped slightly at the sound, before turning to face him. He certainly had the man's full attention now, and he suddenly felt slightly nervous.

His professor did nothing to help him though, waiting pointedly for him to speak.

"Erm," Harry hedged slightly, "I- er..."

It was a lot more difficult for him to speak than he originally envisioned. He had never had to face his uncle for such a thing and it was very awkward. He shot the man a slightly pleading look after a moment, asking him to take control of the situation. Thankfully, Severus decided to have pity on him for he sighed softly, the sternness of his expression relaxing minutely.

"I assume you have something for me?" the older wizard asked.

Harry latched on to the man's words. The wizard did not seem particularly cross, or even annoyed. Consequently, he drew courage from it, and crossed the short distance to his side. Then, he offered the essays to him.

"I've finished the essays sir," he stated, using the honorific in deference to the current situation.

One by one the potions master unrolled the parchments, quickly scanning them. He was not reading for content as much as he was gauging the lengths of the essays. Harry sincerely hoped he would accept them as is, as he had barely made the requirement. It would devastate him if they were to be rejected on that factor alone. Unconsciously Harry held his breath, releasing it only when the man made a vague sound of approval.

"These are done to your usual standard?" he inquired, pinning him with a piercing look.

"They are," Harry confirmed.

There was no doubt about that fact. Never before had he ever worked so assiduously on bits of writing. Just remembering all the researching and cross-referencing he had done was tiring.

"For your sake I hope so," Severus said simply, although there was a hint of warning in his tone.

If the essays did not satisfy him, the veela mate knew that he would have to write them again with greater stipulations this time around.

He nodded slightly, acknowledging the mild threat. Harry lowered his gaze briefly, before tentatively raising his eyes to the man's black ones again.

"Sir? He asked tentatively, seeking permission to speak.

"Yes?" the man replied, not showing any emotion towards the honorific Harry had attached to him.

"I'm sorry," Harry said simply. "I disrespected you by not trying my hardest. I failed myself as well. I won't let it happen again."

A long pause followed his statement, in which the potions master seemingly scanned his face in a
search for sincerity. Harry hoped that he would find it in his expression for he truly was sorry for what he had done. He had allowed his fascination with Viktor to come in the way of his studies, and that was unacceptable. A soft voice in the back of his mind echoed that he had allowed the Bulgarian to interfere with something else as well, however, Harry refused to dwell on that fact currently.

"Yet you failed to pay attention for more than a minute in my class today?"

Harry barely resisted a wince at the derisive tone in the man's voice. He had noticed?

"Sorry," he mumbled, shifting slightly. "I didn't mean to."

The potions master sighed softly. "Just don't let it happen again," he stated.

The thirteen year old nodded his head vigorously, glad for the reprieve. "Am I forgiven sir?" he asked after a moment.

"You are," Severus confirmed. "I suppose you'll be wanting a hug as proof brat?"

The endearment drew a soft chuckle from Harry, and, true to the man's words, he leant forward and embraced him for a long moment, mewling slightly when Severus' arms tightened around him. He had been starved for affection from his mate, and currently a show of love from anyone was acceptable.

"Thank you Uncle Sevvy," he murmured, pulling back, grateful for the man's easy dismissal of the issue as well as the affection.

"You're welcome," he replied gruffly. "Now, off you go. I have work to do."

"Okay," Harry agreed, moving away to take his bag. "Love you," he called as he walked out the door, his mood increasing dramatically when he heard the words returned.

That good mood diminished considerably though when he left the potions classroom and entered the corridor. Despite the way Draco had ignored him earlier, he had still hoped that he would be out here waiting for him as always. But no, the corridor was bare of anyone, far less his mate. Harry felt a chill run along his spine and briefly, he hugged himself for comfort. He sincerely hoped he would receive would from Sirius soon. He needed help if he was going to sort this entire mess out. Slowly, Harry started walking, heading back to their homes.

Never before had the journey seemed so long.

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The letter Sirius received from his godson was nothing less than a cry for help. It took only a scan of the very first paragraph to show him that, and immediately the man knew a simple response would not be sufficient. It had been over a year since he had made the promise to his godson, but now, Sirius knew that it was time for him to act upon it. With nary a thought for the inconvenience it could cause, Sirius flooed the Ministry, declaring that he would be unavailable for duty over the weekend. His tone was authoritative and slightly condescending. His voice and nonchalant attitude clearly indicated that there was no refusing him. He was, after all, Lord Black (although he had yet to formally assume the position) and affiliated with the Lucius Malfoy who was bosom-buddies with the Minister (at least until Voldemort was permanently eliminated).

Regardless of all that, he noted after ending the call, Amelia would have been hard-pressed to refuse him. He had placed himself on constant call since he had rejoined the force. Amelia could not begrudge him one weekend, and, if she did, he would have to reconsider whether he wanted to be
part of such an organisation. Frankly, the Ministry needed him more than he needed them. He could always return to being a gloried vigilante if he found the job oppressive.

Wait, he frowned, didn't Albus' little organisation qualify as that already?

Oh well.

Pushing all of those thoughts aside, the man refocused on the key issue, helping his godson. He knew all about Harry's problems, had known before the boy had even written to him. Well, he amended, he had heard Severus' version of the events. And, although he knew his lover's information was reliable, it was also laced with bias. He personally had not given the whole Krum situation much thought. To do so would have stressed him unnecessarily. Harry could be a mini-James when it suited him, and, this was simply one of those times. It had been the same with his father once he had developed his crush on Lily. James had been like a dog refusing to give up a bone. He had followed and harassed the witch (no matter how much she hexed him) until she had finally gave in and agreed to a date. Indeed, Sirius was hard-pressed on the whole to recall an occasion where James had not gotten his way. His stubbornness had been legendary, and so, Sirius had decided not to waste his time worrying over the issue as the others seemed to do.

In truth, he had had to stifle a guffaw when Severus had blandly announced that Harry had their 'blessings' to pursue a friendship with the Bulgarian. They could have spared themselves the entire encounter if they had done what he had. There was no reasoning with a determined Potter, and so he had simply taken precautions. Within a day, Sirius had placed a tracking charm on Krum, (he would never admit to how he had managed that). Anywhere Viktor Krum went, Sirius was sure to know, and if need be, follow. And, if word got to him that the Bulgarian had even looked at his godson the wrong way, Sirius would have a 'new' volunteer for his spell work.

Harry was his godson after all.

There was nothing he would not do to protect him.

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The thirteen-year-old veela mate was lying on his stomach on the bed. His face bore a look of concentration as he determinedly ploughed through his History text. Without his own in-house tutor in the form of Draco to help him, he had no choice but to study it on his own. It was not as if he could just depend on his mate's detailed notes anymore. Harry's eyes drifted to the wall a few inches away and he sighed sadly. Draco was right on the other side of the divider. He could just go over to him and apologise (with some grovelling thrown in if necessary). Except, he had so many things to apologise for that he had no idea where to start. And, more than that, he was certain that there were issues his mate was also angry over that he had yet to decipher. To that effect, what good was a superficial apology? He knew that if he made such a plea for forgiveness, the veela would simply throw it back in his face. Although, there was the possibility that the veela would explain to him exactly why he was angry and then his apology would be sincere. Nonetheless, that was not what Harry wanted. The veela mate wanted to figure out in his own right all the injustices he had dealt his mate. Once that was done, he could make a true appeal for forgiveness.

Harry returned his attention to his book, taking a moment to make a note in the margin. He was startled by an unexpected pop, and twisting, he frowned lightly at his elf.

"What is it Dobby?" he asked, making sure to pay detailed attention to his servant this time around. It would not do to miss anymore important missives.

"Headmaster Dumbledore wants to see you young master."
"Grandpa?" he said with some surprise.

Why did the man want him? He would think that the wizard would be too busy with finalising events for the tournament to have time for social calls. Regardless, he had been summoned and would go.

"Is my mate awake?" he inquired as he rose from the bed.

"Master Draco is awake young master," Dobby supplied.

"And his mood?" he pressed further.

The elf wringed his hands together before responding. "Unchanged young master." Dobby hesitated for a moment before continuing to speak. "Shall I inform him of your absence?"

The elf's suggestion drew a startled laugh from Harry as he turned to look at him, putting on his robes automatically. "Trying to prevent an argument are you?"

"Young masters have been fighting a lot," Dobby defended. "I do not like it."

"Neither do I," Harry admitted after a moment.

"Then stop it," the elf declared.

"If only it was so easy."

"It is," the elf replied, following him from the room. "You say I'm sorry I was naughty."

Harry arched an eyebrow at him, pausing before Draco's door. "So this is entirely my fault?" he asked with slight derision.

"No," the elf said quickly. "But the dominant will not apologise."

The thirteen year old got the impression that his servant was talking about his parent's relationship as well as his and Draco's. "Hang on a moment," he bid before knocking at Draco's door.

After a moment, he rapped again, this time saying, "May I enter Dominant?"

A few seconds longer and he glanced down at his servant a dark glint of anger in his eyes. Why did Draco have to make everything so difficult? "Do you see what I have to put up with?" he ground out.

The elf squirmed slightly before saying, "Master Harry should apologise and then take control. Make Master Draco guilty for being mad at him in the first place."

Harry blinked slightly. "Is that how mama got to add a next wing to the manor?"

"Dobby will not say."

The veela mate shook his head ruefully before turning to the door once again. "Unfortunately Dobby, I don't have the time to apologise now even if I wanted to. Will you go ahead and tell Grandpa that I'm on my way?"

"No arguing young master," the elf warned before leaving the room.

"If only it were that easy," he repeated, before opening the door.
It was simple courtesy, he reasoned, to inform his mate personally that he was leaving. True either of the elves could account for his absence, but doing so himself was a step in the right direction, he mused.

His good intentions significantly declined though when he stood in the doorway. Draco was reclined against his pillows reading a novel, his novel. It wasn't that they didn't share everything, however, one would think if his mate was so upset with him, he would want nothing to do with anything that was even vaguely connotative to him. How was he to know that that was exactly why his mate was reading the book? Every page brought forth a memory of a better time for the veela, and though he savoured the passages of the narrative, not for the content, but because of the sentimental feelings he got from it. As is, Harry felt only annoyance. Draco would rather read than acknowledge him?

"Grandpa wants me," he said stiffly.

There was no response; indeed, the veela pointedly turned a next page, the sound audible in the quiet room. Harry sighed softly. It was hard to maintain his temper. However, he had told his elf he would control himself, and he would do so.

"Have a good day," he added tersely before leaving.

And, if he just so happened to close the door with a tad more force than necessary, he wasn't to blame. He had to release some tension somehow after all.

His original summation had been correct. Albus was extremely busy with organisation. However, it did not stop a wide smile from spreading on his face when his honorary grandson entered his office.

"Harry my boy," he smiled. "Dobby told me you'd be around."

"Hey Grandpa," he replied. "You wanted me?"

"Actually I don't," the man said, reaching for a file. Before Harry had the chance to ponder on the strange reply, he continued, "It's Sirius who wants you."

"Uncle Sirius?" he repeated in mild confusion before he recalled his letter. A smile of relief quickly worked itself onto his face. He had been expecting a long letter of response. But, actually having the opportunity to speak with his godfather was far better.

"He's waiting for you at Black Manor," Albus continued. "You'll floo through my network as Severus is absent from the castle presently. Sirius will return you later on in the day."

"Okay."

"Off you go then," the man bid, waving his hand in the general direction of the floo.

"I will," he nodded. "Have a good day Grandpa. And try not to work too hard."

"I won't," Albus acknowledged cheerfully before returning to his work as Harry went through the floo.

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Somewhere between chapter seven and eight, Draco's veela side wrested control of his being, fed up of the entire situation. The change occurred instantly, the book falling to Draco's side as he transformed. His features sharpened slightly, talons sprung from his fingers while his silver eyes darkened into a stormy grey. His wings were the most compelling feature however. They were tinted
black, a clear indication of his agitation and the glint in his eyes was purely predatory. With grace, the veela rose from the bed, sauntering from the room. In the back of his mind, his wizarding side protested slightly, begging him to see reason, but it was easily ignored.

The dominant was tired of it all. He had bid his time patiently, accepting the wizarding logic. Harry would come around on his own. A few days of silent treatment and the submissive would return to his side, understanding now exactly how Draco felt. The plan seemed, so far, to be failing miserably and the veela was done with it after the blatant lie his mate had told. There was no way Harry had gone to see the headmaster. The old wizard never called for him so suddenly. To do so would have meant it was an emergency. And, if that was the case, he would have been called for as well. No, what had happened was that Harry had decided to go find the Bulgarian, but needed a good reason to do so lest he forbid him from going until the potions master returned his work.

His wizarding side argued that a simple check with either of their elves would reveal the truth. The dominant however refused to do so. Even if there was the chance that Harry wasn’t with the Bulgarian, that did not change the situation. His competition remained and needed to be dealt with. If there was no Krum, Harry would return to his side. He might be a little annoyed at his actions, but his submissive would forgive him soon enough once he saw that it was for the best. Harry was meant to be at his side, not running around the school after some Durmstrang wizard. He would right their situation, return them to the happy, contented state they were in before the two schools had arrived.

He refused to take this anymore. Why was it that he was here, mopping in his room? He had been re-reading lines of Harry’s favourite scene in the book. With each line, he had recalled a little more of Harry’s expression, the slight widening of his eyes when the villain was revealed, the soft gasp when the hero was tossed aside, and his eventual soft sound of victory when the hero was ultimately victorious. It was at that point that he had snapped, and his inner veela rose to the surface, taking control. For weeks now the dominant had waited patiently, allowing wizarding logic to rule the situation. However, he was not putting up with it anymore. Truly, had he degenerated so much that he was relying on a novel for a feeling of contentment? He would stand for it no longer.

No, he had had enough. His mate was neglecting him, and Viktor Krum was the problem. The solution to the problem? Eliminate Viktor Krum. No one would blame him. He would be defending his mate. It was his right as veela dominant. They would understand, Harry would understand. He was too innocent to see it now, but, when the Bulgarian was out of his life, Draco would help him to understand. But first, Krum needed to be gone.

A dark smile curled at the veela’s mouth as he sauntered out of the room. He had a Bulgarian to find.
Chapter 60

Chapter Notes

Fleur is a full-blooded veela in this fic.

Although she was hard-pressed to admit it, Fleur believed that Hogwarts was a beautiful and fascinating place. The British school had a rustic feel to it that was simply delightful. Wandering around it was like taking a step backwards into the past, and, for someone like her who was positively intrigued by all things medieval, it was a wonderful experience. Unlike her companions, the witch was not going to loathe the school on principle - more than that, she had her own personal reasons for giving the school, and by large, Britain, and its culture, a chance (no matter how much she disliked the food).

Her school prided itself on refined elegance; it was interesting to visit a freer spirited environment where students did not run the risk of punishment for running about or laughing rambunctiously. Beauxbatons trained their students to act in a manner deemed appropriate for their social class. Hogwarts seemingly gave their students free reign. Then again, she thought, twirling gracefully, Hogwarts did not cater to a specific social class. The British school had no restrictions regarding admissions; rich or poor, pureblood or muggleborn, all found a home in this place.

She could not help but wonder what it would have been like to have been a part of such a diverse place.

Having lived for years among the affluent of society it was easy for the witch to spot the wealthy students of Hogwarts, and, observing them, she found it mind blowing the ease with which they interacted with those beneath them. Although the rich minority carried themselves in a manner befitting their status, they mingled easily with the less well to do members of the school, seeming, in no way disgusted by the uncouth behaviour some of them displayed. Such levels of tolerance were commendable.

The Beauxbatons students definitely did not have such patience, and, as such, rarely wandered away from their floor of the castle unless it was absolutely required. Being ogled by grimy little wizards and witches was in no way appealing, far less for the veelas among them who faced greater self-imposed restrictions. In their own school, there was no need for them to restrain their natural abilities. The palace had wards embedded into its very foundation that automatically diffused a veela's allure and other talents. As such, mature veelas could wander about the palace in their natural forms, and, could expel their magic as pleased them. Not only was it comfortable for them, it desensitised the younger ones to their appearance, as well as trained future veelas. Here, one had to fear a riot if they chose to release their inner nature, and so, they carefully regulated themselves.

It was extremely irksome.

Fleur finished her dance set with a series of rapid twirls before landing gracefully, bowing to an absent audience. It was the one thing she truly missed about Beauxbatons – the elaborate ballroom that served as the home of the school's Dance Club. As its current head, she was accustomed to spending hours in its ambience, relishing in her passion for dance while trying to inculcate a similar love for the art into other students. She hoped that the Club was functioning properly without her guidance – not that she would be at its helm for much longer regardless.
Sighing sadly, the witch summoned a damp towel to herself, gently tapping at her flushed face while she turned to the window. It was a gloriously sunny day. Britain's weather was unpredictable that way. Their first few days here, she and her classmates had not left their rooms without casting at least three heating charms on themselves as a defence against the frigid air. This morning though, the sun had apparently decided to ignore the call of Autumn and was shining down upon the land in all its glory. It was so tempting, she thought whimsically, feeling a stirring within her. How much of a spectacle would she create if she unfurled her wings and soared – even if for only a few minutes?

A veela in flight was a common enough feature of Beauxbatons, and she was certain the Durmstrang students would not react too strongly. But the Hogwarts brats – what would they think, and did she truly care?

As if in response, her wings sprung free, the cream appendages twitching in response to her shifting thoughts. She could already feel the cool caress of the wind against her skin, and the golden kiss of the sun. She wanted that feeling; it was proving too hard to resist. She just had to fly.

As if responding to her thoughts, the door opened, and the other veelas poured in, all in their natural state. A rueful smile tugged at her lips at the raised eyebrow Jacques shot her way. She had drawn them here to her with her allure. She had instinctively sought out company for her planned revelry, and they had responded.

"Madam Maxine says that we may go," a ginger headed veela purred by way of greeting. "She sensed the shift and informed Dumbledore. He has no issues with us and we may fly as we please."

"There is a veela among them," Jacques added. "He reasons that if he has not refused his own veela permission to fly, it would be unjust to do so with us."

"Have you sensed the veela?" another asked her. "Dumbledore claims he is mature, and yet he is too young to be. Do you know of him?" The scepticism in her voice was clear, and a few of the others nodded in agreement.

Fleur tapped her foot as she willed herself to recall the gossip of the veela court. "Malfoy," she said slowly. "His mate is famous in Britain."

"It is true then?"

"It is," she confirmed. "I do not know more than that though. Mother will not grant me access to the Hall of Records yet, so what I know is only from hearsay. However, why are we speaking of some foreign veela when we have permission to fly? We do have permission Jacques," she asked shrewdly, eyeing him. "This is not one of your little tricks?"

"We do," he confirmed, with a roughish smile. "Although would that have stopped you if we did not? Who would deny you?"

They all chuckled at that, while Fleur shook her head lightly in mirth. "That is true," she shrugged. "However, here I am just Fleur. Well champion too..."

"That you are," he agreed. "Shall we go?"

"Let's –"

The next half an hour or so was entirely enjoyable for them all. While the air lacked the crisp smell of the sea, it was a small price to pay as they few about, playfully attacking each other occasionally. The landscape was most intriguing for them, and it was extremely difficult for them to remain within the confines of the school when there was a village a little way away that looked quite quaint and
worthy of exploration as well. It was with great regret that she eventually signalled to them that they should head back to their quarters. After all, she still had a Task to prepare for, and they could assist with her training.

They were half way back to the castle when they felt it—well they felt it. Perhaps it was because Jacques and Antoinette were mated that they could relate to, and thus felt, the pained cry a fellow veela was emitting. Either that, or they were simply more powerful than her and thus were better able to pick up the echoing sound. Whatever it was, the pair froze midair (nearly causing a collision). That fact seemed to slip them though, too intent upon scouring the landscape in search of something.

"What is it?" she bid, flying nearer to the still pair.

"Someone has threatened a veela's relationship," Antoinette replied in a suddenly clipped tone. "He seeks vengeance."

"And we will assist," Jacques added, his green tinted wings darkening, as was his mate's.

Fleur made no move to rebuke them, for, there was an unwritten code among all veelas; forever they stood united. An injustice to one was an injustice to all, and so if there was a wronged one among them, they were duty bound to assist.

"It must be the British veela," Marie noted, flying closer. "He is the only unaccounted one."

"Indeed," she agreed, keeping an eye on the seeking veelas. When they settled upon a location, they would follow. "I had no plans on interacting with him."

"Plans go awry," she shrugged.

Further conversation was halted when Jacques abruptly screeched before careening off, Antoinette close at his heels. They had transformed fully, Fleur noted with slight alarm, their beautiful forms having shifted into something more grotesque. Even as she and the others gave chase, she sent off warning signals to them, bidding them to keep their temper and maintain their peaceful forms. Were they all to lose control as they were apt to do in a tense situation, it could prove detrimental. Veela Laws would protect any and all of their actions in this manner as long as the British veela had truly been wronged. Regardless, a scandal was the last thing any of them required at this time.

A minute or so later, were she so inclined, Fleur would have cursed with fluidity. A scandal would be almost impossible to avoid given the nature of the current situation. For, as her eyes alighted upon the Malfoy boy, currently throwing a bevy of fireballs toward his target, whom would she find dodging his attacks and trying to retaliate but the Durmstrang Champion, a look of pure malice upon his face?

From the start, he had been right. There was nothing good about Viktor Krum, and, once he was eliminated, he would go about proving that fact to Harry. Only one look into the larger wizard's eyes had proven that fact to him. It had taken the veela a good forty minutes to source out his target, and in that time, his resolve had only been fuelled, so that, when his eyes finally alighted onto the Champion, using a few trees near the edge of the Forbidden Forest as target practice, he was ready for a fight.

The brief look of surprise on his target's face had changed abruptly to barely suppressed glee. Draco's sharp eyes easily detected the shift in the Bulgarian's stance, and the fact that his wand was now being pointed in his direction. Viktor Krum hated him; that much he was certain. It was all the
validation he needed. For, why would someone hate a next person, especially one that they had never conversed, far less interacted with, unless there was something that that person had that they wanted.

Harry.

The Bulgarian wanted Harry, and he was naught but an obstacle in his way. He had been subtle about it so far, however, now that Draco had sought him ought, the Champion perhaps felt embolden enough to act upon his desires. He would have to have Harry checked for spells, Draco absently noted. That would account for his little mate's strange behaviour. Poor Harry, he lamented. Here he had been blaming his little love for his seeming betrayal, when it was quite obvious now, that Krum had been controlling his love one way or the other. Harry was a naive little thing, someone who needed constant care and protection. He should have known that Harry would never willingly choose another over him.

Speaking of which...

As discreetly as possible, while still keeping his target in his periphery, the veela dominant scanned the surroundings for a sign of his mate, and felt mildly perplexed when he did not see his slender form. Where was Harry? He had been positive that he would have found him with the Bulgarian. Nevertheless, his mate was nowhere in sight, and a cursory check through their bond revealed that he was nowhere near their current vicinity.

Which meant that Harry had not lied to him this morning - but did it truly matter?

No.

Although his mate might have been with the Bulgarian at this moment, he had in the past. The person standing before him had unjustly monopolised Harry's time over the past few weeks and that would end now. With Viktor Krum out of the way, Harry would be free of whatever spell the Champion had enchanted him with. With Krum gone, he would have his beloved, reasonable and agreeable mate back and all would return to how it used to be. Yes. He would have his precious Harry back, but first, this person before him needed to be removed from their lives.

With that in mind, Draco closed the distance between himself and his target, until only a few feet separated them. There was no need for the words that seemed to be a universal precursor to all fights. There was no need to list the grievances they had with each other. They both knew what they were. For Draco, Krum was the obstacle that was driving a wench between himself and his mate. For Krum, he was the only thing preventing him from having Harry. Both were obstacles to each other that needed elimination, and, no matter how abrupt and unexpected this upcoming confrontation between them seemed to have arisen, at the moment, neither cared but intended to fully capitalise on the opportunity.

This would be a fight to the end; the prize was one Harry Potter.

They both wanted him, and they were both determined to have him.

A dip in the sunlight heralded the start of their altercation. The moment a cloud briefly obscured the sun, casting a shadow down upon them, the battle begun. Draco's wrist flicked, the seemingly obscure movement creating a billowing gust of wind that moved forward, intent on slicing the Bulgarian apart. A pleased snarl passed his lips as his opponent attempted to deflect the attack.

Foolish wizard, Draco thought, even as he created two more such wind attacks, magic was almost useless against his primal attacks. For how did one expect to fight nature? Not even the strongest of
wizards could calm a tempest; did this plain wizard think that he could defend himself against his winds? A dark chuckle passed Draco's lips, as Krum was left no choice but to physical avoid his first attack, throwing himself to the side. That chuckle turned into all out laughter as the Champion was forced to scramble like a crab away from his subsequent two onslaughts.

It was heartening to see him grovelling like that on the ground, sulllying his Durmstrang uniform. That was where he belonged, on his knees. How dare he attempt to take from a veela her mate? That thought once again brought forth Draco's ire, but it also proved detrimental to him. For in that moment's lapse where he allowed his emotions to take reign, his focus on his target wavered, and the Bulgarian, spying a weakness, scrambled to his feet, shooting a hex the veela's way.

Too late, Draco saw it, and thus, was unable to deflect or avoid it. The blue hex caught him squarely in the chest, and a pained shriek tore from his lips as he was thrown backward, clawing at his chest at the sudden pain. It was as if a knife was being twisted in his chest, an invisible weapon that he had no hope against. It was pure instinct that saved him from a second onslaught. A veela's wings were not solely for flying or simple aesthetics. It also acted as a physical shield against most onslaughts. Thus, even as his inner magic fought against the hex, his wings expanded and formed an impenetrable defence, easily deflecting the second curse tossed his way.

It did not deter Krum for long, but the few seconds delay was sufficient for Draco to mostly throw off the effects of the hex and rise to his feet, more enraged than ever. A shriek tore from his lips as his wings retracted, revealing his once again to Viktor. His eyes flashed red, and, he tore a feather free, tossing it. The appendage sharpened to a razor sharp tip as it reached the Bulgarian, but allowing his rage to rule him, his aim fell short, simply grazing Krum's arm as it passed him. Regardless, the blossom of blood that rose to stain the wizard's shirt proved most satisfactory.

He did not have much time to gloat though, for the Bulgarian was retaliating. The battle went back and forth for the next few minutes, both veela and wizard utilising their skills to the best of their ability as they sought dominion. Krum had age and experience on his side, Draco acknowledged, as he docked behind a tree to escape a quick succession of spells from the Champion. More so, in a way, he was only operating at half of his full potential, as, in his current form, he could not tap into his wizarding magic. His mother had tried to train him to use his wizarding powers while transformed and vice versa. However, it was a trait she herself was only partially competent with, and so, passing along the art proved difficult. He had barely made any head ground into it. Regardless, he would give no quarter. He had too much riding on this duel to give up. He might not be the wizard's equal in terms of power, however, he had sheer tenacity and a desire to win that was doing him justice thus far in the fight. He was injured though, as was his opponent although none of the injuries were particularly serious. They had both done admirably thus far in avoiding any direct attacks, though the continuous fighting was tiring. Draco knew that, had he not been exercising frequently since his maturity, he would have succumbed to fatigue minutes ago. As is, he was winded, although, with a pang, he saw that the Bulgarian hardly looked out of breath. But then again, he noted, dodging yet another hex, Krum was as fit as they came. Being a professional quidditch player ensured that.

Krum was getting better at deflecting his tornadoes as well, he saw with slight anxiety. The Bulgarian had found the key. The best way to beat wind was with wind, and so, for every gust Draco flung his way, he threw fought a wall of air that stopped the attack short. It would not take him much longer, the veela thought, as he pulled and tossed a handful of feathers, to find a defence against those as well. For now though, they successfully pierced through the wizard's armour, one of them burying itself into his shoulder. Krum winced, before pulling the bloody feather free. Nevertheless, they would not do him much good for much longer, and so he would have to change tactics a bit. Veelas were elemental creatures and so far, he had been utilising only one aspect of it. If
wind would not do it, he would see how best the Bulgarian feared against fire.

As it turned out, he did not fear too well. Draco managed a snicker as the wizard struggled to put out the fire on his head. He had been aiming for his throat but this sight was amusing as well. Unfortunately, Krum failed to see the humour in it for he reacted with such vigour that Draco found himself tossed backwards, wincing as he landed on a sharp rock. He fought through it, and even though he was certain that the stone had pierced his skin through his shirt, he fired off a volley of fireballs even as he scrambled to his feet.

Something had to give, and soon.

He wiped at his brow, trying to draw a deep breath, but finding it increasingly difficult to do so. He could not last much longer. Not even rage could sustain a body beyond a certain point, and Merlin alone knew, he was near his limit. Harnessing fire was considerably harder than air, which was more readily available. While using air as a weapon called on him to gather it and direct it to do as he please, he actually had to create the fire from his magic, a draining task that he would be unable to keep up for a prolonged time period. If the altercation lasted much longer, he would be forced to revert to his wizarding form and hope that he was not too tired to wield his magic. Somehow though, he doubted that it would be the case.

Krum seemed to sense his weakening, for a deadly smirk graced his lips as he trained his wand on him, and started incanting. Whatever it was, would be powerful, and currently, Draco doubted he had the strength left to dodge it, and flying would both make him an open target, as well as be a sign of submission. He would not run. That left him with the sole option of creating a shield strong enough to resist whatever it was the Bulgarian was planning to toss his way. To that extent, he pushed through his wariness, and, using the vegetation around him as fuel, he started weaving a firewall, using the wind to help him shape and sustain it as he surrounded himself in the fiery cage.

This would be it, he knew. If he managed to withstand this blow, he would have to go in for the kill. To that extent, he tugged several more feathers free, keeping them in waiting. Once Krum's attack failed, he would launch the feathers and surge forward. Between the feathers and his talons, he hoped to bring Krum down. For if that failed, it certainly would be the end of him.

The Durmstrang Champion would have his Harry.

 Barely had he his defence in place did Krum finish enchanting, a large purple sphere of energy forming before him. With a primal shout, Krum pitched it forward, and Draco braced himself, his wings surrounding him in a secondary defence in case the first failed. And fail it did. For all his efforts, the sphere easily shattered his fiery defence, and in that moment, Draco knew that it was over and he had met his end. His eyes closed as the sphere reached his wings...

But it never hit him.

He felt himself being swiftly elevated, and heard the displacement of air when the sphere passed where he was just situated. He certainly was not flying himself. He panicked, thinking that the sphere had been a mere diversion for Krum's real intent, but then a voice spoke to him.

"We have you," the person purred to him, in the native language of the veela.

Draco's eyes flew open in surprise, as did his wings. He was held in the sturdy arms of a larger veela. One hand braced his back, while the other was firmly placed underneath his legs, cradling him against a strong chest. Looking up, his mercury eyes met the golden gaze of a significantly larger veela – his saviour. Confused, he looked down to see Krum fighting several other veelas now, all of whom seemed as enraged as he was.
"What?" he asked softly.

"We heard your call," he was told. "Your cause is just. We will assist."

For a moment, his rescuer looked past him, down to the scene unfolding beneath them, and Draco followed his gaze. There were four veelas on the ground, he saw now. Two of them stood as guards while the other two attacked Krum with a ferocity that was enviable. Where had they come from though, he wondered, not entirely ungrateful. They had saved him after all. But then again, why was he so calm? His rage at the Bulgarian had seemingly faded into nothingness.

"My allure," the male chuckled, shifting him slightly into a more comfortable position. "You have fought well Draco Malfoy though your opponent is stronger. We will help you."

"He is mine to beat," Draco protested, even as he felt relief at the words. He truly had no strength left to fight. Regardless, defending his relationship with Harry should be his duty and responsibility.

The veela seemed to read his thoughts, for he chuckled again, rubbing his cheek against his hair in a soothing caress.

"A true dominant knows when to ask for assistance," he crooned to him, descending until they were in a tree. The hands around him remained though, and, after a moment, Draco reached up and wrapped his hands around the veela's neck. "Very good," he praised. "My name is Gabriel. The ones attacking our target are Jacques and Antoinette. They have been mated a little over a year now. Watching is Marie, my cousin, and Fleur, our Champion."

"Oh."

The position he was in was strange, Draco recognised. In this man's arms, it was as if he were a submissive. He felt nothing but trust (strange as he did not know him) for his rescuer, and, he felt his concern for the entire situation fading away.

"It is not surprising," Gabriel told him. "We operate on a hierarchy. A weaker dominant will always submit to a stronger one. I am your senior, and I have protected you. You will give way to me in this. For you, the battle is over little brother."

Several loud cracks interrupted any potential response Draco could make, and redirected their attention to the battle below. The sounds had not come from the fighting trio though, but from a distance away. People were coming. At the helm was Dumbledore and Beauxbatons' Headmistress, followed closely by a few of the Hogwarts teachers, and, Draco saw with a wince his Uncle Severus.

Clarity abruptly returned to him at the thunderous expression on his godfather's face, and only now he found it strange that Trix had not intervened in the battle in any way. How could she, he thought, when she had gone for help.

"I'm in so much trouble," he murmured, resting his head against Gabriel's chest.

"You are not," he corrected, a hand rubbing soothingly against his back. "We are protected under veela law. Should you desire, charges can be pressed against Krum. That is if Marie leaves anything of him to charge."

"I know that," he sighed, pulling away and looking up into the golden eyes. His wings had slowly faded back to their normal colour, and now, the animalistic look in his eyes had cleared somewhat. "I meant with my family. I've acted rashly."
"They will understand," the older veela told him with surety. "You cannot be blamed for this."

Draco could not resist a snort at that, looking toward his godfather's thunderous face. "You don't know my family," he muttered, while wondering if Gabriel would mind very much staying up here with him – for the next year or so.

What he needed, Severus decided, was a tumbler of firewhiskey, mixed in with some muggle scotch...and a tall goblet of wine to boot. Perhaps that combination would numb him enough to the events of the day. Then again, his job was not complete. For, whenever Narcissa and Lucius returned from their mission, he would be tasked with the responsibility of telling them exactly what their precious heir had been up to.

Attacking Krum like that, Severus grumbled. He would expect something as irresponsible from Harry, not the aristocratic Draco!

At least his godson had come out of it unscathed, well, mostly. None of his injuries on their own had been truly detrimental to him, although when combined...

He would be fine, Severus reminded himself.

He had taken glee in pouring enough nasty tasting potions down his throat to ensure that. His godson would be sore for a good few days, and his pride had undoubtedly taken a beating with the chewing out he had given him there and then on the field, (regardless of the French veela he had tried hiding behind) but he would be fine. Well, he amended, until he and his parents got their hands on him. He should not have lost control as he had, no matter the provocation. It was something that could, and nearly did, prove deadly for him.

Had those French veelas not come around when they had...

He did not even want to think about it.

He had already viewed Draco's memories of the event, and that last spell... It was borderline dark magic, not enough to get Krum kicked out of the compound, Champion or not, but enough to put an even greater target sign on his head, as far as Severus was concerned. Krum too would be fine. His stamina and skill was considerably greater than his godson, and he knew that it would take at most a day or two for him to be fully recovered.

Which was good, he noted. It would not do for Karkaroff to claim interference from Hogwarts if his Champion was in less than perfect condition for the First Task. His claim would be groundless given the circumstances, however, the last thing they needed was for the media to get a hold on such rumours – not that he had seen Skeeter around much these days.

The floo network flamed to life, and, turning, Severus watched dispassionately, as his youngest came through the network. He was distraught, the potions master noted, his eyes wild as he met his gaze.

"Child?" he inquired, forcing himself not to transplant some of his annoyance unto the teenager before him.


For a moment, Severus wondered if Harry had somehow found out about the incident, although he dismissed it after a moment. Were he aware of it, he would have returned to the castle since morning,
and not now, in the late afternoon. More than that, how would word have gotten to him?

"He is in his bedroom," the potions master told him, leaning against his desk. "Although I doubt he is in any mood for conversation."

"I know," Harry lamented, wringing his hands together. "He doesn't want to talk to me; I know that. But –"

"That isn't what I meant," Severus interrupted, staving off a potential bout of babbling from the thirteen year old. He was not in the right frame of mind currently to listen to a thirteen year old's woes. "Draco is most likely asleep. The potions I fed him should ensure that."

The teenager blinked at him. "Potions?" he repeated dully. "Why would my mate need potions?"

"To help with his injuries," he replied dryly. "Draco saw it fit to engage in a brawl with Viktor Krum."

A look of shock crossed Harry's face before he paled considerable. Severus cursed himself for his bluntness. Perhaps he should have cushioned the words.

"He's hurt?" his pseudo-godson asked in a broken tone. "Draco?"

"He will be fine."

That was the wrong thing to say apparently, for Harry's expression darkened, and the eyes that met his was tinged with sadness. "I didn't feel it," the boy said, half to himself. "How could I not have felt it? What have I done?"

Before Severus could begin to question the boy's cryptic statements, Harry had run off, barrelling through the doors and (hopefully) toward his mate.

"Let's hope they work it out," a new voice said, startling him.

The potions master twirled, surprised to find Sirius leaning against the mantle, watching the door his godson had run through with sad eyes.

"I came through after him," he said by way of explanation, walking over and resting his hands on his lover's shoulders. "So Draco fought Krum?"

"It's been a long day," Severus sighed by way of answer, rocking forward into the man's embrace. "Any chance of Remus coming over as well?"

"Remus should be home any moment now, where I am taking you," Sirius declared. As he spoke, he raised a hand to massage the back of Severus' neck. "I'm sure you want to know what Harry and I spoke off and we certainly want the details about this fight of Draco's."

"And what if I don't want to talk about it?" Severus responded.

"You will," Sirius said simply, rubbing harder. "I've helped Harry sort himself out, so the boys should be fine. Shall we go?"

"You are certain they will be fine?" Severus asked tiredly. "I'm fed up of all of this. If I could, I would just de-age them back to eleven and nine. They were most agreeable then."

"Was that not the year when Harry found a troll?" Sirius chuckled. "They're just going through the regular teenage angst, well, quadrupled. It will all work out in the end, I am certain. So will you relax
and come home with me? Albus will not be too far in case something else happens."

It took Severus only a moment or two to agree. It would be nice to get away from it all for a few hours, he decided. A respite from the world was exactly what he needed currently. It might even give him a new perspective on things.

"I have to be back by six in the morning," he muttered, by way of acquiescence.

"Potions?" Sirius inquired, even as he activated the floo.

"No," the man corrected. "Detention."

"Who's the unfortunate soul?" Sirius asked. "The Weasley twins?"

"No," he grumbled, rubbing at his neck. "Draco."

Sirius shot him an incredulous look, but made no further comment. Just how badly had Draco acted to deserve that he wondered, even as he ushered the man through the network.
Chapter 61

Minerva McGonagall stifled her urge to scold as Potter ran past her as if the devil was at his heels. The teenager did not even seem aware of her presence, she noted as she watched him race down the corridor. She was not one to allow such rambunctious behaviour, especially given the fact that the castle was currently teeming with guests. However, the boy's expression had been far from playful; indeed, he seemed to be moving with a purpose and as such, she did not want to interrupt him.

As she continued along his way, it occurred to her that her third year student was heading in the general vicinity of his quarters. Perhaps he was on his way to the young Malfoy, she mused. She certainly hoped that was the case. Only a blind person would have missed the growing tension between the two mates – perhaps Potter was on his way to rectify the problem. She certainly hoped he was.

The timing of their dispute correlated with the schools' arrivals, and, looking through a nearby window, the Transfigurations Professor shot a mild glare at the Durmstrang ship. Why had this tournament been reinstated, she wondered for the umpteenth time? No good could come of it – no good had ever come of it. In the Tournament's long tenure there had rarely been a year when some tragedy had not occurred during it, and she, like others dreaded to see if this year's Tournament would generate the same result.

She did not want to think it was true, but the facts were against her in this.

As she reached her quarters, the witch could only hope that, whatever tragedy hit the Tournament (because she was almost certain there would be one), the school would be able to handle it.

* *

As Harry raced past his House Mistress, narrowing avoiding running her over, he made a mental note to apologise to her sometime. However, currently he did not have the few seconds it would have taken him to do so, for now his entire focus was on Draco and how he could best fix the rift between them.

He owed his godfather so much, he mused, as he raced towards their rooms, cursing the size of the school. The distance he usually enjoyed strolling along was now problematic, and there were no shortcuts he could take that would lessen the distance to be travelled.

It gave him time to think.

His meeting with his godfather had been beneficial on so many levels. Not only had it been great to get away from the castle for a few hours, it had given him the opportunity to speak with a completely neutral person when it came to the entire situation. It was unfair to his parents he knew; they had done so much for him. Nevertheless, despite the years he had spent in their care, Harry had yet to shake the feeling that he was not entirely theirs.

It was an old fear of his, one that manifested itself in subtle ways, the least of which was his inability to refer to the former Malfoy patriarch as Grandfather. The Malfoys might consider him their son, but legally, he was not theirs. They had never formally adopted him – to do so would have made his eventual mating to Draco unlawful according to wizarding traditions. Neither had they named him their ward. He was a veritable charity case whom they had taken into their home.

They loved him – that was certain. However, that did not change the fact that to a certain extent, he
did not belong. Sometimes he felt uneasy around them, especially when he and Draco were in dispute. He always had the fear that on principle, the Malfoys would side with their biological son, simply because he was theirs.

Truly it had never proven to be the case, however, the old anxiety remained.

The arrival of Sirius in his life had thus proven to be a blessing. With him, there was no conflict of interest. He could be as honest with the man as he wanted without fear of censure. He had fully embraced the opportunity, and had poured out the entire situation to him. And the man had listened, not commenting until Harry had at last fallen silent.

It was then that he spoke, his tone contemplative has he presented his own analysis of the situation. He had not told Harry what to do – he simply served as a guide, aiding his godson in reaching a conclusion. Eventually, Harry gained enough self awareness to finally recognise that something was lacking within him. He had gotten hints of it before; however, he had never taken the time to truly analysis it. Now he did, and the realisation had him dropping a half-eaten biscuit from his hand.

He could not feel Draco.

Alarmed he had dove into his mental self, feeling along the various threads that linked him to other persons. He sifted through them until he reached the thickest one – his connection to Draco. It was clamped and faded on his side. However, feeling along it he found that it abruptly returned to a vibrant shade after a certain length. The disconnect was on his side...he had locked himself off from his mate. Dazed, he had looked around him and identified another thread that was shining brilliantly. It was his connection to Viktor – he had put the Bulgarian above his mate to such an extreme that his connection was now the most important to him.

That was never how it was meant to be.

Draco had to have felt it, Harry thought as the entrance to their rooms came into view. It explained everything: his increasing irritation, his blatant demands that Harry remain with him and his angry outbursts at his refusal. The veela must have been conscious of every shift in their bond and must have felt Harry's closure of it distinctly.

Just what had he done?

Spitting out the password, Harry stopped in their common room, his mate's name hot on his lips. The words died abruptly though as he spied the empty room. The brunette blinked in confusion. Where was he? Draco was always in the common room during the day. He only ventured into his bedroom during the night. It was then that his uncle's words came back to him.

The fight.

Swiftly, he moved to Draco's door, knocking firmly.

"Draco?" he called out, "Mate?"

There was no response, and, he raised his hand to knock again. "Draco?"

"Master Draco is asleep young master," a voice said quietly from his side.

Jumping slightly at the unexpected voice, Harry looked down to see Trix observing him with a decidedly neutral expression on her face. She was not pleased with him, he noted. She probably blamed him for the entire situation.
"He is not to be disturbed," she continued.

There was a hint of anger in that last statement, Harry recognised. It confirmed his previous thoughts. He knew instinctively that it was only her station as servant that prevented her from launching a stinging tirade at him. He wasn't entirely certain that it was undeserved.

"Did he order that?" he inquired mildly.

The elf hesitated slightly. "Master Draco did not," she admitted. "But potions have him drowsy and he sleeps. Young Master must not disturb him."

"I want to see him," Harry responded, reaching for the doorknob. "I want to see his condition for myself."

"Young master," the elf began, however Harry cut her off with a sharp look.

"I will see my mate Trix," he declared, before gentling his tone slightly. "I am not going to disturb him, however I will see him. You cannot stop me."

There was an edge of authority to his tone. The elf was helpless to refuse him, and instead started wringing her hands together in agitation. She said nothing, leaving him free to enter the room.

It was dimly lit, and it took him some seconds to adjust his vision before he could discern his mate's form on the bed. He had tossed the sheets off himself in his sleep, and lay on his side facing the doorway. He wore only loose pants, giving Harry an apt view of his chest. Perhaps the clothing choice was because of the topical potions that littered his frame. The thirteen year old approached him slowly, his heart clenching as he noted a particularly nasty scar on his side. A slightly translucent glint covered it – indicating that someone had put a paste over it to prevent scarring. It would fade over the next few days he noted absently, his hand hovering over it.

Viktor had done this?

The dull thought echoed through Harry's mind as his eyes continued roving along his mate's exposed torso. There was a smattering of bruises along his chest and stomach and his arms bore the occasional scrape. Harry did not even think of lifting his pants legs to see if anything else would be revealed. What he could already see was terrible enough. There was no need to add to it.

His current position cast a shadow over the blonde's face, so slowly, Harry sunk down on his knees beside the bed to get a better look of it. His heart clenched as he took in his mate's visage, seeing it as if for the first time. The proof that Draco had felt the closed bond keenly was present on his face. Even asleep there was a tension to his brows, and, underneath his eyes, the skin was a dark shade, indicating a lack of sleep. More than that, Harry noted, as he brought up a faintly trembling hand, there were dried tearstains along his dominant's cheeks. As he ghosted a finger along his eyelashes, he pulled away moisture. His veela had cried himself to sleep.

Harry stared at the marks for a moment longer, before deciding that they could no longer mar his dominant's face.

"A wet cloth Trix," he whispered to the elf that had followed him in.

A moment later, the cloth was being pressed to his hand. The scent of lavender reached his nose and he nodded his thanks. It had been Draco's favourite scent as a child and hopefully, even asleep it would offer him some comfort. Gently, Harry rubbed the soft cloth along his mate's face, removing the evidence of his tears.
"I'm sorry," he whispered brokenly, stroking his cheek.

He was careful with his gestures, not wanting to rouse the blonde unnecessarily. Eventually he exchanged the cloth for a dry one, using it to pat his mate's skin dry. He rocked back on his heels after that, staring at him and wondering what else he could do.

Nothing came to mind.

However, he could not bring himself to leave.

Rising gracefully, Harry rose before claiming the armchair across the room. He curled up in it, preparing to keep a vigil on his slumbering mate. He would remain here and do whatever was necessary for his mate.

Somewhere along the line, he pulled free the pendant from within his clothing, stroking it for long moments before allowing it to fall open. For a moment he looked at the two pictures within it, of his captured image smiling softly at Draco who was returning the gesture. A sad smile graced his own face before he concentrated, changing the images. He spent the next hour or so looking at them in happier times, unaware of the slow trickle of tears that flowed down his cheeks as he slowly allowed the block he had placed on their bond to dissipate.

Gradually Harry was drawn from his deep contemplation by soft sounds from across the room. Looking up, his eyes widen slightly at signs that Draco was stirring. He dropped the pendant and unfurled himself, wincing minutely at the mild pain he felt from maintaining the position for too long. He felt something on his cheeks and brushed absently at it as he crossed the room, blinking in surprise when he released it was tears.

When had that happened?

Regardless, the awakening figure had his full attention now, and so, he hovered anxiously above him, as he waited for his fluttering eyelids to open. When they did, he met the veela's confused gaze. The blonde blinked slowly, his eyebrows furrowing slightly. The blonde raised a hand slowly, and Harry held his breath as the hand raised towards his face. But then, a look of realization entered the blonde's face, and abruptly the hand dropped and the older wizard's gaze hardened.

Harry swallowed at the reaction. "H-how are you feeling?" he asked hesitantly.

There was no answer. Instead his mate's silver gaze continued to bore into his own.

"Draco?" he asked.

The blonde licked his lips slightly before stating hoarsely, "Go away."

The words stung; nevertheless, Harry held his ground. "How are you feeling?"

"Why do you care?" came the terse response.

The words hit him harder than before and this time he recoiled slightly, not certain what he should do.

"Do you need anything?" he tried again, a hint of desperateness entering his tone.

"Leave," was the only response.

"Draco – "
"Young Master," his elf said suddenly, having materialised in the room bearing a tray. "Master Draco does not want you here, please leave."

Harry straightened, uncertain of what he should do. The elf would be well within her rights this time to kick him out the room now. Draco had made his stance quite clear.

Before he could fathom a response though, the elf was at Draco's side, offering him two vials.

"Master Severus said that these should be taken when you awake."

A small smile etched itself on the veela's face before he sat up (wincing slightly) and easily took the offered vials, drinking them slowly.

"Thank you Trix," he said sincerely, earning himself a bright smile from the elf.

"Does Master Draco need anything else?"

"I'm fine for now."

The elf's genial face faded as she turned to him. "Young Master will leave now?"

It was an order disguised as a request Harry thought, and, uncertain, he glanced toward his mate. Nevertheless, the veela seemed not to be paying him any heed; indeed, now he was reaching for a book that was lying beside him.

"D-Draco?" Harry said hesitantly.

"I've already said that I don't want you here," the veela said simply, flipping open the page.

"I have something to tell you," Harry began.

"I don't want to hear it," came the curt response.

"But-

"Trix, will you show Harry out?" the blonde bid before looking up at him. "I already know what you want to say, so kindly spare me. You wish to yell at me for what happened, however that is entirely unnecessary. I barely hurt your precious little Bulgarian, although I am certain this is old news to you, You'd have gone straight to him, which is exactly where you belong. Leave me and return to Krum. You've made your choice."

"Master Harry will leave now," Trix stated.

Harry felt a sinking feeling within him at the bitterness in his mate's tone. Had he really been acting like that recently? Had he so blatantly exhibited a preference for his friend over Draco that his mate would think himself unwanted? Well, he certainly had a reason to, Harry mused sadly, recalling all the times he ran out on Draco to seek out the Bulgarian's presence. However, he couldn't just leave. If he did, all would be lost; their relationship would never be the same again.

"Master Harry-"

"No!" he snapped, turning toward her. "I will not leave until Draco listens to me! My place is here with him."

"Your place is there," his mate rebutted. "You've made that abundantly clear recently. I give up, Krum won. Go to him."
"I'm not going to!" He said earnestly. "I'm staying!"

"You don't want to be here!" Draco retorted, glaring up at him, "You want to be with him. Go away."

"Young master..."

"Shut up!" Harry shouted.

In a moment of rashness, he flicked his wrist, banishing the elf back to Malfoy Manor. Following suit, he slammed the bedroom door shut before turning determined eyes back to his mate.

"I'm not leaving until you've heard me out."

"Then you'll be here a long time," Draco said decisively, turning away from him.

"Fine," Harry ground out, returning to his previous seat. "I'll stay here until you do. No matter how long it takes."

His mate's only response was a snort as he flipped a page.

Harry settled himself in for a long wait.

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He really was stubborn, Draco thought as he discretely glanced across to room. Harry was still there, even though it had been almost two hours since he had last asked him to leave. He was making good on his threat – he really wanted to talk to him.

A part of the veela was curious about what his mate had to say, but, he was also scared. He was tired of it: the silence, the fights, the glares and the lack of affection between them. And, despite what Harry had said earlier, he knew that whatever the veela mate had to say would be a continuation of some argument. He was always quick to defend the Bulgarian. Draco was certain that this occasion would be the same way.

This day ranked among the worst he had ever experienced, he thought, looking down to his book. He had lost spectacularly to Krum – the intervention of the other veelas did not negate that fact. Therefore, he had lost the stake of the match – his right to Harry. That fact in itself was terrible, but the severe lambasting he had endured from his godfather had only compounded that fact.

His saviour proved an adequate shield for him to hide behind. However, between the pain of his wounds and the humiliating threat of punishment by the man, Draco, with cheeks flaming had reluctantly left his spot behind the taller veela and allowed himself to be marched into the school, being scolded all the way. Honestly, the veela had expected the man to deal with him immediately after treating his injuries – as is, the man had simply bundled him through the floo and ordered him to bed.

Despite the strangeness of the entire situation, he had eagerly agreed.

His rest though, had been far from pleasant, as his mind took the opportunity to manifest all of his fears. He dreamt of Harry at Krum's side, the stronger wizard with his arms firmly around his slender mate, cuddling him close. And Harry looked up at the Bulgarian with love in his eyes – an expression that should have been reserved solely for him. That image had remained with him as he drifted into wakefulness, and despair settled on him as he realised that the situation was not that far from becoming true.
Krum had slowly been poisoning his mate against him. Harry had been constantly seeking his side, and thus, the blonde had had every expectation of his mate doing the same thing when it came to this. Finding him by his side had been shocking, however the blonde did not let false hope seize him. The only reason Harry was here, he rationalised, was because he wanted to continue to yell at him for the few scratches he had inflicted on to the Bulgarian. Once he said his piece, he would be gone. Consequently, he hardened his heart against him; he simply could not allow his heart to be broken by the abandonment.

That determination led to his curtness with his mate. He would not allow himself to be deceived by his show of concern. It was just that – a show. For all he knew, someone could have ordered Harry to remain at his side. He wasn't certain if the teenager was acting out of his own free will or at the bidding of the other, and so, he couldn't take comfort from his presence. Draco was tired of it all – the pain and loneliness that Krum's presence had brought. He wanted it to end, and separating himself from Harry seemed to be the only way to achieve this.

However, Harry would not leave, and save from throwing him out himself (something he could not truly bring himself to do), the only other way to be rid of him was to give him the chance to speak. But the question remained, did he truly want him to leave? The past few hours were the longest that the brunette had spent in his presence for days, and, were he completely honest with himself, Draco would admit to a deep-rooted reluctance to bring it to an end. Yes, they weren't speaking, and yes there was an unaddressed tension between them. That did not change the fact though that his mate was in close proximity to him.

They could not stay like this forever though. Even now, Harry's sombre eyes were on him, and it was growing increasingly difficult for him to continue to pretend to be fascinated by the book. Harry's desire to speak was almost tangible, and slowly his curiosity grew. Was it possible that Harry truly had something to say to him – something that could potentially soothe the intense hurt he had been feeling?

There was only one way to get that answer, Draco knew. He would have to break the silence, no matter how unwilling he was to end the uneasy peace between them. Regardless, this could not continue.

And so, almost reluctantly, he cleared his throat, setting aside the book.

"What did you want to say?" he asked softly, inviting him to speak.

A look of immense relief appeared on Harry's face, and the veela hoped that he had done the right thing.

"I-I" the boy paused, took a deep breath before starting again. "I wanted to say sorry for this entire situation. I didn't mean to put Viktor in front of you..."

Now that was exactly what the veela wanted to hear.

Harry latched on to the opening his veela had finally given him and launched into explanation.

"I didn't realise how much I was hurting you," he explained. "It started with me just wanting some independence from you...you remember what mama said?"

The veela only nodded minutely, but Harry was not fazed. At least he was listening.

"It just deteriorated from there. The angrier you got the more stubborn I became. I didn't realise what
was going on. I just thought you were mad I wasn't with you all the time. It's only now I've realised I haven't been with you at all. It became a cycle. I went to Viktor, you got mad, I got mad so I went back to him. I never thought – it didn't occur to me that something else was going on." Harry paused for breath, his eyes shimmering.

"I didn't realise I closed the bond Draco," he lamented. "Please believe me, I didn't know. I would never have let it gone so far if I'd realised –"

"Why did you?" his mate interjected softly.

Harry paused, taking a minute to understand what he was asking. "I don't know," he said honestly after a moment. "I just let it all get carried away..."

"You always do this," Draco sighed, crossing his arms.

"Draco-"

"You always get too engrossed with something until it becomes a near obsession for you. I have never minded before, but this time you've affected me. Do you know how I felt these past few days Harry?" he asked, allowing his pain to lace his voice. "You wouldn't speak to me; you wouldn't even let me touch you. Do you know how many times I tried to get your attention only for you to wave me off? I've tried talking to you so many times. When I had you grounded, I had hope you'd see reason. Instead you just locked yourself away and would not let me near you.

"Do you know how much pain that's cost me? It's reached the point I've had to wait till you were asleep to touch you. It's the only thing that's been keeping me sane, and you haven't even noticed? Do you care for me so little?"

The raw pain in his voice tore at Harry's heart, and slowly he felt a tear trickle down his face as Draco revealed how much he had hurt him. All this had been going on; his mate was right...he had not noticed. Not one time. He had become so preoccupied with himself and his own attempt at independence that he didn't realise how much he was hurting his mate.

"I'm sorry," he whispered tearfully, knowing that the words were not enough, but knowing that there was nothing else to say. "Draco," he choked, "I didn't mean to..."

"That's no excuse," the veela pointed out, his own eyes watering as well.

It was as if the barrier had broken within him; whatever strength he had been drawing from to keep his emotions contained was eroded and he was releasing it now. And Harry felt every ounce of it through the newly re-opened bond. He felt his pain, confusion, anger and misery. It was so strong he wasn't sure how the veela had managed to contain it all this time. The strength of it drew a small sob from him and Harry's hand reached up to rub the spot where his heart lay.

"I'm so sorry Draco," he cried, his tears blurring his vision of his mate. "Please, forgive me?"

"I don't know if I can," the veela said honestly, tears running down his own face.

Harry didn't blame him, were the situation reversed he was not sure if he could do the same thing. He was not in any way comforted by that fact though. He struggled to compose himself, not knowing if there was anything else he could say or do to turn the situation around. In a moment of rashness, he wished for a time turner, so that he could rewind time and find a way to change the entire situation. That was impossible though, so he'd just have to face the consequences of his actions, no matter how terrible they were.
He wiped at his tears as he forced himself to meet his mate's gaze. Draco's eyes were morose as well. However, they were resigned as well.

"Draco?" he asked tearfully.

"If that's all you wanted to say please leave," the blonde managed, although his voice wavered slightly. "Thank you for the apology."

"But it doesn't change anything," Harry finished dully.

A flash of pain shone in the veela's eyes, but he nodded regardless.

Harry felt cold and alone, but, this time, he did not protest when Draco waved his hand, opening the door.

There truly was nothing else to do, and so Harry finally heeded him and left the room.

Harry doubted that he slept much that night. Half that time was spent staring off into nothing as his senses were assaulted by the emotions flooding to him from Draco. Compounded with his own inner turmoil, Harry could not find any peace within himself. At some point Dobby had come to him, first with food (which he refused) and then to remind him that he needed to take care of himself. Harry had refused blankly. Something as trivial as bathing certainly bore no importance to him currently.

Eventually the elf had given up on trying and Harry felt a wash of magic over him as Dobby cleansed him, changing his clothes into loose fitting pyjamas. He barely managed the energy to thank the elf before losing himself to his thoughts once again. Sadly Dobby looked at him before vanishing from the room, leaving him alone to his thoughts. At one point, Harry turned his head toward his desk where a fain glow emitted from beneath a pile of parchments.

Viktor.

He had hidden their book there this morning and now Viktor wanted to talk to him, probably about what had occurred that day. Honestly, Harry could bring himself to care. He didn't blame Viktor for the current state of his relationship, for it was his fault it had degenerated to this level. If he hadn't allowed himself to become so preoccupied – well there was no use in lamenting on what he could not change. He stared for long moments at the desk, a sad smile on his face. He would be dishonest if he said that he was not concerned for the Bulgarian's condition. Regardless, it would be morally wrong of him to talk to him at this point. Therefore, with a regretful sigh, he turned his back to the desk.

"Sorry Viktor," he murmured, "but things have changed."

He must have dozed off somewhere along the line, for in his next moment of clarity he saw that the room was filled with light, indicating that it was morning. He blinked owlishly, as he sat up, the covers dropping to his waist.

"Dobby?" he called, raising a hand to his chest. Draco didn't seem as chaotic as the previous night, he thought, but neither of them was yet at peace.

"Master Harry?" the elf said by way of greeting as he popped in to the room.
"Where is my mate?" he inquired, rubbing at the spot absently.

Dobby responded quickly. "Master Severus has him for the day."

"What?" Harry asked in confusion. "But today is Sunday. Draco doesn't have any duties today."

"Master Draco is not working," the elf corrected. "He is being punished."

"What?" the thirteen year old yelped, his eyes widening.

"Master Severus has assigned him detention for the day."

"But."

It made sense Harry thought, letting the protest die on his lips. Draco would not escape some form of retribution for fighting, however, honestly Harry never expected him to get detention. Grounded for life yes – that, no.

"How long has he been gone?" he asked, hoping off the bed.

"Since six o clock," the elf supplied, following him as he walked from the room.

"And it's what time now?"

"Eight."

"Two hours!" Harry gasped, as he headed into the bathroom, waving the elf in after him. It wasn't as if he'd never seen him naked before anyway.

He stripped quickly, and bathed as fast as he could manage, talking to the elf over the water flow.

"What mood was he in?"

"He seemed sad Master Harry," the elf admitted.

"That's expected," Harry sighed, rubbing at his hair. "I've messed up."

"Master Harry should not blame himself so much," the elf protested. "Master must find a way to make amends."

"He won't forgive me," he pointed out, pausing to look out at his servant. "He's said as much. What I've done is unforgivable."

"Master is wrong," Dobby contradicted, earning him a curious look from the elf.

"It was not I who tucked you in last night," was all the creature said.

Harry blinked in confusion before the implication hit him. When it did though, a small smile worked itself on to his face.

There was hope after all, he thought. He'd just have to work hard to remedy the situation.

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If this was what people had to do for a living, Draco decided, as he looked around the potions classroom, he would thank his lucky stars everyday that he was rich.
He never thought that he would ever think it, but currently, if he had a choice, the veela would have willingly bent himself over his godfather's knee for a thorough spanking rather than do this. It was probably for that very reason that this was the task he'd been assigned. Being waken at the crack of dawn was not the most pleasant experience, especially when he was presented by this.

The potions master had very kindly glued all of the classroom's furniture to the roof, before clearing away all of the shelves. Then, with a smirk he had given his godson, a self-refilling bucket and a variety of cloths and rags before ordering him to get to work. He had left him then, shaking his head mildly at the stunned look on the blonde's face.

Manual labour was not something he was accustomed with, especially to this extent. And so far, two hours in, he had been doing a sloppy job at best. No matter how hard he scrubbed at the tile, the muck didn't seem to leave. He had barely gotten a quarter of the floor clean, and already he knew that'd he have to do it again because the result was far from satisfactory. The task was becoming increasingly frustrating, and finally, Draco slapped the cloth down with a growl, resisting the urge to kick over the bucket.

This just wasn't fair he decided.

He was certain that Krum hadn't been punished and yet he was here, forcing already sore muscles into unaccustomed work. Added to that the fact he had yet to reconcile with his mate, Draco Malfoy was far from content. He flopped down on to the floor, looking around him morosely. He'd only get into more trouble for lazing around like this, but at the moment, he couldn't be bothered – with anything.

Why hadn't he just forgiven Harry?

Certainly, he had wanted to. It was abundantly clear that Harry understood now exactly what he was going through. However he had not been able to bring himself to. For one thing, the hurt was still too fresh, the wounds to deep. Another reason was that he wanted his mate to suffer rejection the same way that he had. It didn't help him though that he could feel every ounce of the boy's despair and he had been hard-pressed last night not to go to him and accept the apology. But he had refrained from doing so, waiting until he was certain his mate was asleep before, like he had been doing for several nights now, venturing over to his room and looking at him.

Harry had fallen asleep sitting up, and would certainly have a crick in his neck if he was left to sleep in the awkward position. Gently Draco had lain him down, and covered him, sitting by his side for long moments. Unknowingly he had mimicked Harry's earlier actions, using a wet cloth to soothe his face before eventually leaving him with a soft kiss. He would not be able to hold a grudge against him for long. Indeed, all he had truly wanted was for Harry to acknowledge that there was something wrong between them that needed fixing.

It sucked entirely that it had taken him getting his bum handed to him on a platter for that to happen, however, it seemed now that Harry was aware of the fact and he was somewhat grateful that the incident had happened, even though it left him now in this unwanted situation. More than that, he had decided to have a long conversation with Harry that morning, one that would lead eventually to forgiveness on his path. Now he would be stuck here for however long it took him to finish this task. That did not please him in the least.

Huffing lightly, the veela reached for the discarded cloth, glaring at it. If only he could use magic, he grumbled, this would be done in moments. That was not what his godfather wanted though, he reminded himself, as he dropped to his knees once again and started scrubbing.

He was half way through spreading the grim around on one tile when the classroom door opened.
Draco felt a flush of shame wash over his face. He doubted that it was his godfather, which meant that some student was looking at him in his shameful state. He would never live this down. Tentatively, he turned, preparing to find a mocking face watching him. Instead, he blinked in surprise to see Harry in the doorway watching him, dressed in some of his older play clothes.

"What are you doing here?" he asked softly, dropping the cloth and rising.

For a second he considered replacing the aloft mask he had worn the day before; nevertheless, it was not worth the effort.

Harry shrugged slightly before a mischievous half-smile quirked the corners of his mouth. "I have detention," he announced, as he closed the door.

"No you don't," Draco said bemused, as Harry crossed the room to stop a few inches around him. "Look, if you're here to help me because you feel guilty you don't have to."

"But I do," Harry interjected softly. "I really do have detention," he stated, although his tone was far from repentant. "Uncle Sevvy caught me stuffing Mrs. Norris into a suit of armour."

"You've done that before," Draco reminded him. "He's never given you more than a smack for that."

"Oh he did," Harry confirmed, rubbing at his rear for a second. "But then he caught me charming the armour to attack people, and after that I started taking down the tapestry near the third floor..."

Draco blinked as his mate continued rattling off a list of crimes. A crooked smile started forming on his lips when he realised just what Harry had done for the morning.

"...after that he was going to spank me," Harry continued, "but when I set his robes on fire he said that that was outside of enough and sent me down here to meet you. So, I'm here."

The blonde looked down at his mate for long moments, reading the expression from his eyes. Harry was both hopeful and hesitant. He had gotten himself into trouble just so that he'd be able to be down here with him for the day. That was the only explanation for his misbehaviour. That truly was all the proof that Draco needed to confirm that Harry truly wanted to be with him.

Days earlier the brunette would have taken his absence as leeway to go off with Krum for the day. Instead he had bamboozled the potions master into letting him stay down here.

"You shouldn't have done that," Draco told him mildly, "this is a lot of work."

The thirteen year old shrugged as he looked around. "You shouldn't have to do this on your own," he said sincerely. "I'm as much to blame as you for the entire situation. I know that you can't forgive me for this, but I hope that through this you'll give me a second chance to make things right." The brunette's gaze dropped to the ground as he spoke. "I really am sorry Draco, and I just want to tell you that it's you that I want. No one else matters to me as much as you do. I hope you'll give me the chance to prove it to you."

The veela stared at the bent head for long moments before coming to a decision. Forget making his mate suffer. Harry's words were sincere and he wanted this entire situation to end.

"The pain I feel just won't go away," he pointed out. "It'll take time."

The boy risked an upward glance. "I know," he acknowledged. "It'll take time, but I hope you'll forgive me someday."
The fifteen year old shook his head lightly. "I have forgiven you Harry," he told him. "I really do. However, it does not automatically make things as it used to be. It'll take time..."

At his words, the boy's head lifted, and Draco felt relieved to see some of the sadness leave his gaze. "I don't care how long it takes," Harry said earnestly. "Just as long as you give me a chance to make things right."

Draco nodded. "We both have things to work on," he corrected. "You're not the only one at fault in this. I should have said something instead of getting angry all the time – "

"But –"

"No love," he said, "you can't take all the blame. We'll fix this together," he promised. "You and I."

"We will," Harry agreed, a genuine smile of happiness on his face.

As the veela watched, the teenager took a step forward before hesitating, uncertain if his touch would be wanted. Of course it was, the veela thought, taking a step forward to and closing the gap. With a small mewl Harry was firm against him, his arms wrapped tightly around him as, they reacquainted themselves with each others presence.

"I love you," Harry mumbled into his clothing. "I really do..."

"I know you do," the veela said softly, although his heart leapt at hearing the words. "I love you to."

It was long moments before they pulled apart, but both felt considerably lighter when they did. Still holding on to him, Harry looked around, taking stock of the work left to do.

"It's a lot," Draco confirmed, rubbing his back slowly. "I've hardly made a dent. The dirt is caked in..."

The brunette made a noncommittal sound as he looked toward the tackled area. Abruptly he gave a soft snort that turned into a snicker.

"What?" he asked curiously, wondering how on earth Harry could find humour in the situation.

"Dominant," he questioned looking up at him with faint humour; "did you by chance add soap to the water?"

Draco arched a brow. "I thought that was for me to wash up with..."

Harry barked out a laugh, his eyes twinkling in a way that made the veela want to bend and kiss him. "No wonder you haven't made a dent into it," he remarked, pulling him along with him to the wet spots.

"At least I had the sense to wet the cloth," he grumbled.

"At least you did," Harry confirmed.

The pair worked in tandem for the remainder of the day, taking the opportunity to talk some more as they worked. Harry told his mate everything that had happened over the past few weeks. There was nothing left, save the book that he did not mention to him. And Draco returned the favour, relating to him all what he had ignored while preoccupied with Viktor; both expressed surprise on how much they had missed about the other recently, and both vowing that it would not continue.

As they worked, in Harry's room, the book continued to glow, and Viktor Krum grew increasingly
angry as time went by and Harry did not respond.
Harry sat cross-legged on the ground in front of his bed, nibbling gently on the edge of his quill. Slowly he reread the hurried note he had penned to Viktor, sighing regretfully as he did so. He was careful not to look beyond the page he was on – currently he could not risk looking back at the numerous pages the Bulgarian had written him in the last three or so days. And the reason wasn't solely that he'd promised Draco to be back in a few minutes. It was more than that, he simply could not allow Viktor to take precedence in his life – especially not now when his relationship with Draco was now on the mend.

With that in mind, Harry stroked the page softly before closing the book. "Good luck," he whispered, giving the device a pat before shoving it under his bed, where it would remain untouched for several months to come.

Standing, Harry absently ruffled his hair as he looked around the room. Sighting the novel he had come from, he took it, and tucking it under one arm, left his bedroom. It would not do to return without it, given that it was the reason he had given his mate to leave his side in the first place. Harry felt a twinge of guilt for a moment, but dismissed it. Yes it was a lie, but only a tiny one at that, and it was the very last one he would tell. Viktor, for all intents and purposes, was now out of his life. He would continue to tell himself that he was pleased by that fact.

Pushing hair off his face, Harry knocked at his mate's bedroom door. It was a sign of how far that had still to go, the fact that he didn't simply barge in as he was accustomed. It was a left over of Draco's ordering him to leave, however he did not hold it against him. Nevertheless, it would be a while yet before Harry felt comfortable enough to take the liberties he had used to with the blonde, and, he knew for Draco, it was the same.

"Come in," his mate called, voice warm.

Smiling at the tone, Harry opened the door, looking toward the blonde reclining on the bed. "May I come in?" he asked regardless.

Draco nodded, patting the spot beside him. "You were just in here you know," he pointed out, as the smaller figure settled in.

"I was just making sure," Harry murmured, his eyes darkening for a brief moment.

He made a sound of surprise seconds later, for his mate's arms curled around his frame, hauling him until he was half on his chest, his emerald eyes only inches from his mate's silver gaze. "Draco?"

The veela said nothing, however, with his second hand, he gently lifted Harry's head until it was at the right angle for him to press a soft kiss to his lips. Harry's eyes fluttered shut, and he enjoyed the brief caress, understanding the message being conveyed. "I'm just being silly," he thought, as Draco pulled away. "He loves me."

When the blonde released his head, he leant forward until he could burrow his face into the crook of his neck, sighing contentedly. Draco seemed not to mind in the least, indeed, the older wizard went to work again, shifting Harry until he was lying fully on top of him, using him as a human mattress.

"Better?"

"Much," Harry agreed, shifting slightly so that he rest his cheek against Draco's chest. "I'm short though," he muttered after a moment, wiggling.
He felt the vibrations as Draco laughed heartily at the comment, patting his back comfortingly. "I've just hit another growth spurt," he explained.

"I haven't hit any," Harry pouted, although in reality, he didn't exactly mind the difference in height. It made using Draco like this infinitely easier.

"Uncle Remus said that your dad was short well into his fourth year. You've got time."

"I know," Harry accepted, allowing his eyes to drift close as he raised a hand to trace the pendant that lay hidden under Draco's shirt.

"I thought we were going to read?" his mate asked eventually.

"Soon," Harry replied indifferently, too comfortable to leave his current position.

"Lazy mate," the blonde mock-scolded.

"And proud of it!" Harry huffed good-naturedly.

Several more minutes passed in comfortable silence, with Harry listening contentedly to the beat of his mate's heart while Draco ran his hands through his hair, enjoying its texture.

"Harry?" he asked eventually, "are you sure this is alright?"

He didn't need to explain further, for his mate knew what he meant. Harry smiled sadly at the edge of hesitancy in Draco's tone. This was exactly the reason he had decided not to go. Draco was too fragile currently – too uncertain about their bond. Seeing Viktor would only unnerve him and raise questions about the soundness of their relationship. To avoid that, Harry had simply opted out of attending the First Task. Indeed, were their parents home, he would have suggested that they had gone there until it was all over. They could certainly use the time away in any case.

"I'm sure Draco," he murmured, shifting to look at him.

"You wanted to see it though..."

"And now I don't," he stated, his eyes serious. "I'm right where I want to be Dominant."

The blonde gave him a shaky smile before nodding. Harry raised himself a few inches to kiss him before settling down again.

"I'm just being silly aren't I?"

"You're not," Harry corrected. "You have every right to be wary."

"It's not that I don't trust you..."


"Once you do," the veela murmured, looking considerably more relieved. "I'm glad you do."

Harry had no response for that.

* *

The excitement Viktor felt when he heard the book chime faded almost instantaneously as he read the first line of the missive. Were he in private, the Bulgarian at the very least would have violently
thrown the book. As is, there was nothing to do but quietly seethe and vow revenge against Malfoy while simultaneously lambasting himself.

His Harry had abandoned him, and cruelly, on the day when he needed his support the most. Actually, he had given it, Viktor corrected, glancing down at the words once again, however, it had come at a price. Harry had no plans of communicating with him ever again. This was all Malfoy's doing, he knew instinctively, and, for a moment, he allowed his emotions to reign free on his face. He should have killed him then when he had the chance. Blast it! Why had he arrogantly thought to play with him?

He should have used the opportunity Malfoy had so conveniently given him to permanently rid himself of his presence. He could have managed it as well. Certainly none had noticed Skeeter's absence as of yet, and, on the off chance her body surfaced (for by now he was certain the jar had broken open), there was no way of connecting it to him. Who said he could not have managed the same with Malfoy? While his absence certainly would have been noticed, he'd been long dead by then, leaving him free to get Harry.

But instead, he had acted rash and engaged the blonde, only to be interrupted by those French veelas. He had lost the opportunity to rid himself of his enemy; however, more than that, he had given the blonde ample ammunition to use against him, which he had successfully done if Harry's missive was anything to go by. He didn't blame his love; Harry was too sensitive and prone to guilt. All it would have taken was the veela exaggerating his injuries, and Harry would remain faithfully at his side. Yes, that was what had happened.

Malfoy had taken advantage of his love's gentle nature, using guilt to manipulate him to obedience once again. Viktor growled at that fact, imagining his Harry in the blonde's arms. He had been so close too. A few more weeks, a lot more meetings, and he would have gotten Harry completely enamoured with him, so much so that he would have willingly left Hogwarts with him.

That had been the original plan, however now the Bulgarian did not see it coming to fruition. His mission was two-fold: get Harry from Malfoy, and ensure that the Dark Lord did not get his hands on him. There was no way in hell he was condemning his Harry to death. He was far too precious to him and he would protect him with his life. But to do that, he needed him away from here. Hogwarts was far from as safe as its inhabitants seemed to believe.

Being a Krum had its advantages.

While some might consider it too young, the Bulgarian already had a house of his own. It had come to him through his maternal grandmother, and although he had never inhabited it before, he had many plans for it. Already elves were working feverishly in it, bringing it up to his standards. He would not live with his Harry in anything but the best after all. Harry was a little prince – he deserved the best life had to offer.

The best thing about the house was that its location was hidden to all but his immediate family and was virtually unplottable. No one would ever find them, and, once the panic over Harry's disappearance ended, they would be free to live their lives. He doubted his parents would particularly care, indeed, he was certain his father would find a way to turn the entire situation in a beneficial way for the family.

Yes, he had had every last detail planned out, and then the veela had spoiled it.

The high master was not pleased with him as well, however Viktor truly did not care. He had endured the punishment and expressed 'remorse', but truly, he had no loyalty for the man, and
certainly even less for his master. Indeed, except for using it to vent his anger, Viktor truly did not care for his performance at the task. It was useless at the end.

So what if the one with the most points had a time advantage in the end? If he had his way (and he still planned on having it), he and Harry would be long gone before the Third Task, so why should he give a damn? Beside, if the Dark Lord's plan played out, there wouldn't even be a Hogwarts left to host the blasted thing. Not that they would be around to see that happening...

Well, he acknowledged, as he absently watched Diggory being led out of the tent, there was a point. There was no use in blowing his cover so early on, and he certainly did want revenge against those veelas, even if this was the only way. It would be good to shut up the veela who was, even now, sending him smugly superior looks. For now, he would ignore her, although, he was careful to add her to the ever growing list of people on whom he had to exact revenge.

Speaking of revenge...

He had never gotten even at Harry's 'friends' for making him cry.

That was something to remediate, he noted, hearing a collective grasp from the crowd. Diggory certainly was taking his sweet time...hadn't Harry assured him that he had gotten the tip about the dragon to him? But how? They certainly had not fixed their relationship – at least to his knowledge. Not that it truly mattered to him if they had...it did not change the fact that they had hurt him in the first place. But what to do?

Unlike with Skeeter, he had no plans of being deadly...they simply had a lesson to learn, and he would ensure they learnt it. A prank was beneath him – he was Durmstrang after all. Indeed, that was the perfect solution. He would deal with them just as he would have any other student who bothered him at his own institution. The only problem was, unlike there, he could not openly do it, leaving the victim with full awareness as to who was responsible for their injuries and the reason for it. However, he would get his message across regardless.

"Mr. Krum?"

The voice broke Viktor from his musings, and pasting on a pleasant demeanour, he turned to Bagman. "It is now my turn?" he inquired.

"It is indeed!" the man stated cheerfully.

As Viktor followed the man from the tent, his eyes caught sight of a slightly limping Diggory being assisted into the medical tent. What an idiot, he sneered, turning his attention toward the arena. How would he have feared without the hint? He probably would not have, he scoffed, briefly envisioning a tournament with only two champions.

Now that would have been interesting...

As he was greeted by the cautious applause of the audience, Viktor forced himself to clear his mind of all thoughts but the task at hand. He had a dragon to defeat after all, and an egg to collect.

And a Harry to win back.

* *

He was good, Fleur reluctantly admitted, looking at the Bulgarian in action. Not that she was supposed to be. However, it was only Bagman with her, and she was curious and with a brief flair of allure, he had willingly guided her to this place. There was something dangerous about that
Champion, and she didn't mean in relation to the Tournament. There was something off about him – he seemed to be obsessing over something, and that rarely boded well for anyone. Somehow, Fleur knew that she would eventually become involved with him. She didn't want to, but whenever she got these feelings, it usually proved to be true. She was not looking forward to it.

Five minutes later, the veela found herself walking into the stadium to thunderous applause. Genially she waved, pausing briefly to curtsey the judges while she waited for her dragon to appear. She chuckled idly at the applause from the Hogwarts students. They weren't cheering for her particularly, they were cheering for a victory from her. Even without seeing the times and scores, she knew Krum was well ahead of Diggory. He had emerged without a scratch on him, and in a fraction of the time. The dragon, she thought sympathetically, had not emerged as fortunate. The poor thing – Fleur knew it would be fine, dragons were resilient creatures after all. Nevertheless, having one's paw reattached had to be a painful thing.

For a moment, as she battled against her nesting dragon, Fleur felt regret for having prior information about the task. It really wasn't a challenge knowing what to expect. She was playing around, were she truly honest. Krum had clocked in at about seven minutes by her best summation...she was barely into her second. She would win this, easily so, however, there was no need to emerge as a fore-runner so soon. Slow and steady won the race after all, and she'd rather be the turtle than the hare any day.

Not that she planned to lose either...

A bale of laughter erupted from her as she nimbly avoided a burst of fire from the beast. Fire was her element after all, she could not be hurt by it. It was sad for the dragon though. The poor thing was just defending an egg that did not belong to it. Fleur stopped, lowering her wand. She had simply been riling the creature, trying to move it away from the next so she could focus on the eggs. However, looking into its eyes, she saw nothing but a mother desperately protecting its young. It was wrong, she decided, to involve the beast in this. The dragon was stringently defending her young, and Fleur knew that if she were in the dragon's position, she would not take kindly to be taken advantage of like this. Playing upon ones instincts for the benefit of another...she truly could not stand for it.

With that in mind, Fleur switched strategies.

She swung her wand in a graceful arch, and started incanting. Slowly a shimmering fog formed above her, slowly increasing as her chant reached its crescendo. The dragon and the crowd alike looked at the beautiful design in wonder, trying to decipher its purpose. Fleur moved her hand outward, and in a flash, the cloud moved, surrounding the dragon and rendered it unconscious. It would only last about a minute though. But that was all the time she needed. Pocketing her wand, she sprinted forward, easing herself around its massive frame before grabbing the golden egg. Pausing a moment to pat the beast reassuringly, she ran past it, heading for the exit.

Her internal clock told her that she had less than a minute if she were to beat Krum's time, however that was enough more than enough.

However, she never quite made it to the finish line.

She had been half way there, all of her focus on the exit and the victory it would bring her school when she felt it...something that made her stop mid stride, uncaring of her position or environment.

Her mate was here...

It took only a second, but the crowd was treated to the sight of her in her natural form, beautiful
wings outstretched behind her while her skin fairly shimmered in the sun. She turned, eyes dilated as she sought out the one whose soul called for her. Her world suddenly had turned grey, and as her eyes scanned the crowd, she looked for a sight of the one who would return colour to it.

Man or woman – it mattered not, she just wanted to see the one she was meant to love.

And then she saw him...seated in the middle of the guest section – his eyes likewise solely on her. He had felt it – in his warm brown gaze she felt his recognition of her. Undoubtedly, he was feeling exactly what she was experiencing. He was beautiful – easily the most beautiful man she had ever seen in her life. His hair passed his collar, and was the richest shade of red she could ever remember seeing.

Even from here she could see the smatter of freckles across his nose – something she could already see herself tracing with the tip of her finger, trying to find a pattern. She continued to peruse him, noting from his tan that, even if he were English, he had not been in the country for some months. There was a fang earring in his ear, one that lent him a roughish appearance. He was also tall, and while muscular, still lean. In a nutshell he was perfect, and he was hers.

Fleur's wings fluttered, as she felt a sudden urge to go to him. She needed to touch him – to be held in his arms and establish their relationship. She had never been certain of her status. Perhaps she would be dominant, maybe it was him. Else, they might have one of those rare relationships where their status was virtually equal. She didn't particularly care what it was – as long as it was with him.

But something was wrong, she thought, turning back to his face. There was now a look of alarm, and, through their fledging bond, she felt his fright. But why? There should be nothing but happiness now that they had found each other. His fear broke her out of her trance, and in a moment, reality returned in full force. Blinking, the concerned shouts of the crowd met her, and turning she felt a chill run down her spine.

Oh Merlin...

The dragon had broken free of her spell, and had sighted the egg in her hand. While she had been busy staring at her new mate, it had advanced on her, and now, with claws raised, had just about reached her. Now her mate's fear made sense. Biting back an oath, Fleur scrambled for a plan – but it proved unnecessary.

Suddenly several spells whirled past her, and the dragon handlers were running past her, attempting to tame the dragon. She jumped when a pair of arms encircled her, pulling her away from the dragon's proximity. She would have struggled, especially given the fact that she now had a mate. She wanted no one else to touch her but him. However, there was something familiar about the arms that held her, and looking upward, she found herself looking into a pair of brown eyes that were the same as her mate.

"Hello there," a much tanner redhead greeted her cheerful. "I know Bill's a looker, but that's certainly no reason to allow yourself to be run over by a dragon!"

The veela managed a small laugh despite the situation, allowing herself to lean into him, her soul recognising its familiarity to her mate's.

"I'm sure the judges will make allowances for this," he told her as he gently guided her from the arena. "After all, it's not your fault instinct took over."

"I have my mate," she murmured unnecessarily. "I don't really care."
"I know," he stated, releasing her as they exited the place. "I've interacted with a few veelas in my lifetime. I think I can understand. There he is."

Fleur turned in the direction the redhead pointed at, and indeed saw her mate – Bill – hurrying toward her. Behind him were a few of her fellow veelas, both concerned for her and curious to see how she would interact with him. They had all been looking forward to this day after all.

"Are you okay?" her mate demanded, stopping before her and grasping her upper arms.

His touch sent a shiver down her spine, and suddenly a blush worked its way unto her cheeks as she looked up at him. Well that answered the question about her status, she absently noted.

"I am," she responded quietly, her wings fluttering slightly. "I worried you no? I am sorry."

Soon she would have to return to the arena, and see how much damage had been done to her scores. And then there would be questions to ask and answer, letters to write to her family, explaining that she had finally found him. That was only the start she knew, but for now she could care less for any of those things. She leaned forward, and allowed his arms to wrap comfortably against her. All that mattered now was that she was in the arms of her mate.

"Okay guys," Harry called, drawing the attention of the students of the class to him. "That's enough for today. Dinner starts in half an hour."

There was a collective groan around the room – one that drew a chuckle from Harry as the students reluctantly ceased their activities. The Charms Association really had taken off, he thought fondly as he waved them out. It was more than a mere aid for weaker students, now it was an actual club with benefits. The Professor certainly was pleased to say the least. There wasn't a student left that was struggling with the class, for which Harry was glad.

As the final group left, Harry went about reorganising the classroom. There were always those eager to assist in the task, but truly, it was easier for him to do it on his own, given his power. What would take them minutes, took him only a few seconds as he directed the furniture back to their correct positions. It was almost December now, he noted, as he left the room, tugging his robes closer together. The school term would be over soon – to the pleasure of the upper school for that meant the Yule Ball. Harry was actually ambivalent about the entire thing.

He truly believed that the experience was novel for many of the others, hence the excitement and constant whispers about it along the corridors. But for him, it wasn't a particularly abnormal event. He was used to balls and functions, heck the Malfoys had a bi-annual Yule Ball that he often grew bored off. Being part of a wealthy and affluent family had its drawbacks, and socialising was one of those things. He had thought himself an oddity at one point, but then, his godfather had explained to him once that he simply took after his father, who often had to be bribed by his parents into good behaviour at these events.

Not that balls were intrinsically bad – the food was quite good, but the formality of it was stifling. Worse yet was the fact that he was no longer considered a child. Now his presence was expected for the entire function, which meant an extra few hours of boredom. He supposed the Hogwarts Ball would be different. For one, the number of aristocrats would be at a minimal and he was certain that his Grandpa would not bog the entire thing down with waltzes and foxtrots. There was even a rumour that he was getting a band to play. Harry was certain he would tell him if he asked, but in truth, Harry had not visited the man in a few weeks.
He would have to rectify that soon, he decided, nodding absently to someone who waved at him. But the old man was not the only one he had not seen for a while. There was Viktor who often shot him speaking looks in the Hall and corridors that he stringently avoided. There was also his friends – or former friends depending on how one looked at the situation. He never had resolved his problems with them, and honestly, the more time passed, the less inclined he felt to do so. Draco did not agree with him though. A few weeks ago, he had finally admitted to the veela what had happened, and, after a long period of silence, the veela had suggested that he speak to them.

He had not pressed the issue though, especially as they were still working on their own relationship, but the issue hung in the air between them. Harry never went to Gryffindor anymore – indeed, it had reached the point that the only lion classes he sat in were the ones shared between them and Slytherin. His classmates had long since noticed. Him being with Draco was not particularly strange, but eventually it became obvious to all that he was avoiding all things Gryffindor. He did not even eat at the table anymore – the twins recently had joined him at Slytherin, but even then, he had not gone off with them as he would have in the past.

The sad fact was that he had changed...for the better or the worst was undecided. He could still hear Ron's words in his mind, and had grown somewhat paranoid by it. He didn't want to be a burden, he didn't want to make anyone else's life problematic, and so, slowly he had distanced himself from them all, sticking only to his family and those he had known his entire life. It wasn't easy though, and truly, he did not like it.

A sad smile crossed his face at the thought, and pausing, Harry looked out to the grounds, taking in the multicoloured leaves that were beginning to fall. He looked over his friends at a distance. Ron had been stunned by the fact that his brother now had a mate, and for a while he, and the other Weasleys had had a jump in popularity. It was not every day that a veela was essentially added to the family. For that was exactly what had happened.

Fleur Delacour was slowly integrating herself into the Weasley bunch. The transition was far from smooth though. He had heard Ginny murmur once that she was something of a snob. But then again, she came from a completely different background, and indeed was from a different social class. It wasn't as if she could just give up her past, and in the same vein, she couldn't just expect the Weasleys to change just for her. He wished the veela luck in working out her situation.

A stirring rose within him, and, breaking from his thoughts, Harry placed a hand on his chest, concentrating for a moment. Draco was calling him. Checking the time, Harry was surprised to find that he had only a few minutes left before dinner officially began. Had he lost all that time in his thoughts? He sent a reassurance to his mate, urging him not to worry. They had improved in the past few weeks and were back to their previous state. Looking back, Harry could not conceive of how he had allowed it to slip away in the first place. Being with Draco made him feel so alive – so happy and contented. His time with Viktor paled in comparison to that.

"I can't believe I was about to throw it away," he murmured in disbelief as he started walking swiftly down the corridor.

Harry however, never made it to the Hall that evening. Midway there, he was intercepted by Professor McGonagall, who seemed to have been on the lookout for him.

"Yes Ma'am?" he inquired, as she beckoned him toward her.

"Mr. Potter," she stated, "I have been looking for you."

"I was with my Association," he replied, wrinkling his brows slightly. "Was there something you needed?"
"Can you verify that?" she asked, ignoring his question.

"Ma'am?"

The woman shook her head dismissively. "You need to come with me now Mr. Potter."

"Okay," he replied, although his confusion was evident in his voice.

The woman started walking, and after a moment, he fell into step behind her. "Where are we going?"

"To the headmaster," she replied shortly. "We'll sort this out there."

Now wasn't that cryptic, Harry thought dryly. "Sort what out?" he asked nevertheless.

The woman spared him a glance before looking ahead once more. "There has been an attack on two students," she stated, "and you, Mr. Potter, are the prime suspect."
Chapter 63

This certainly was not what Harry had planned for the evening.

He had envisioned a lazy night with his mate. He had wanted to snuggle with him, cuddle him and spend copious minutes kissing him (something he was seriously starting to enjoy more and more as time passed). Nevertheless, if the current situation was anything to go by, Harry was not certain that he would be back in their quarters before midnight.

Already he had been in the headmaster's office for an hour without a word from anyone. The Transfigurations Professor had left him at the statue, ordering him to go up to the office and await someone's arrival. He had expected a short wait, however, when a dinner tray appeared before him, the lion realised that he was in for the long haul.

He had mostly picked at the tray, unable to muster an appetite. It was hard to do so under the circumstances really. Other than her cryptic statement, the Professor had said nothing else regarding the situation, and frankly, Harry had been too shocked to press for more information. For a moment, a sense of déjà vu enveloped him as he recalled his second year. It quickly passed though, for now, without any doubt, Harry was certain of his innocence. He had nothing to fear.

He had been unable to relax despite that fact though. After all, someone had accused him of something heinous, and he was very curious as to why. His mind drifted to Pansy for a moment, as it always did the few times he found himself in a similar position. The years had not changed the witch one bit. Even though she no longer actively antagonised him, Harry was well aware of her continued resentment for him. She still believed she had a shot at being Draco's mate, and Harry always got the inkling around her that she was waiting for the right opportunity to make her move. As far as he knew, the only way for her to take his place would be to get rid of him in the literal sense and he was not certain that she was above doing so.

A slight shiver ran down Harry's spine at the thought before he dismissed it. Pansy wasn't involved in this, he decided, thinking rationally. Because then, the situation would have played out differently. Either the witch would have attacked herself and pinned the blame on him, or alternatively, she would have attacked another student and claimed to have seen him fleeing the crime scene. Neither scenario seemed plausible as it would accomplish nothing. Even if he was suspended, or at worst expelled, Draco would certainly leave with him, thus rendering her efforts useless. That is, unless she was banking on the Malfoys disassociating themselves from him?

That would never happen though. He'd be grounded for eternity yes, might have only fond recollections of sitting certainly, but they would never abandon him. Ever. Therefore, Pansy could not be a suspect in this matter.

Then who?

Harry was left wondering who had been attacked and why they would blame him. More than that, where were the teachers? He was tired of sitting here by himself.

Even Fawkes was missing, and Harry had yet to understand why he would be sent to his Grandpa's office if the man himself was no where in sight. It really didn't make much sense. The portraits were also of little use. All were either asleep or absent from their frames. There was no information to be gleaned from them, even if they knew anything. And what about Draco? Harry sighed, rocking back slightly as he thought of his mate. He hadn't felt too much of a reaction from Draco as time continued to pass. That meant that he wasn't particularly concerned that he wasn't in the Hall. But then, what if
the Headmaster was not there as well. Did his mate think that he was with him? Well, that was somewhat true, Harry acknowledged, allowing a rueful smile to form on his lips.

Five more minutes passed before Harry heard the sound of approaching footsteps. Looking toward the doorway curiously, Harry waited for it to open, half-expecting it to be his Grandpa. It was his office after all. However, his brows quickly furrowed as a relatively young witch entered. Harry stood automatically out of respect, although his mind raced for her name. She had joined the staff in the previous academic year he recalled – taking over the Muggle Studies class. Nevertheless, as Harry had not been at the school for the majority of his fourth year, he honestly could not recall her name, and felt slightly ashamed for it as the woman gestured to him to resume his seat.

Why was she here?

The woman sat herself in the headmaster's seat, something that prickled Harry the wrong way. That chair was his Grandpa's, and as far as he concerned, no one else belonged in it. The woman seemed out of place in the seat of authority, almost as a child would seem misshapen in an adult robe. He did not have much time to muse on it though, for the woman's piercing eyes met his. She had a decidedly stern look upon her, although, whether it was genuine or contrived, he was not certain. There was definitely no doubt when it came to McGonagall, but with this Professor he simply could not decide.

"Mr. Potter," she greeted, her tone curt.

"Ma'am," Harry responded respectfully, trying not to react to her tone.

"You must be wondering why I am here Potter," she stated, lacing her fingers together. "I was asked to lead the investigation in this matter simply because I am the only one on staff completely unbiased."

If that answer was supposed to alleviate his confusion, it certainly proved inadequate.

"I don't understand..."

A look flitted briefly on the woman's face but before Harry could read it, it was gone behind the stern demeanour once again. "I am the only Professor in no way affiliated with you Potter," she said bluntly. "You are neither my student, in my house, my apprentice or my family. Therefore, I have no reason to show any favouritism to you and can render an completely unbiased judgement in the matter."

For all the woman's words though, Harry got the impression that the witch was biased, however against him. The thirteen year old stifled a sigh at the thought. Why was it that people seemed to immediately like or dislike him? This would be more difficult than he originally thought.

"Now Potter," the woman began, interrupting his thoughts. "Account for your whereabouts this afternoon."

Harry's temper ticked slightly and he forced his expression to remain neutral. Anyone who knew him was well aware of two particular pet peeves of his – he hated being patronised or being treated highhandedly. Draco had learnt that the hard way numerous times and currently, he was being treated to both by this woman. This would not be a pleasant meeting he decided.

Patiently, and with obviously forced politeness, Harry related his whereabouts of the afternoon. The woman made the occasional humming sound, and much to Harry's irritation, seemed not particularly convinced by anything he was saying. It was as if the woman already believed him guilty, and was simply humouring him until she gained concrete proof of the fact. Harry's nails dug into the flesh of
his palms as he clenched them, unseen to her. When he finally stopped talking, the woman looked at him for long moments.

He met her gaze steadily...he had nothing to hide after all. He knew he was innocent; it was simply a matter of proving it to her, and everyone else.

"I see numerous problems with your little story Potter," the woman said eventually, a light smirk on his lips.

"Problems?" Harry repeated, arching a brow slightly.

"Yes," she replied. "For one, you claim that there was no one with you between three thirty and four when your little club began."

"I was prepping for the class," Harry stated calmly.

"A likely story," she shot back. "The timing is a little too coincidental."

"Was that when the students were attacked?" Harry asked, catching her connotation, "and who are they anyway?"

The woman's eyes narrowed. "I am asking the questions here Potter, not you."

The thirteen year old's temper raised slightly at her tone. Now she was chastising him? Harry's tone was several degrees cooler when he spoke next, and, as he usually did, he threw caution to the wind. "I thought you were supposed to be unbiased Professor?"

"Are you questioning my ethics?" she asked sharply, leaning forward in the chair to glare at him.

"I am," Harry retorted, his eyes narrowing as well. This woman was a bully, he decided, wondering who on earth decided to allow her to question him. "You're hardly being fair."

"Fair Potter?" she snapped. "There are two students in the Hospital Wing because of you and you expect me to be fair."

"I didn't do anything!" Harry shot back, his eyes shimmering with his anger. Within him he felt a sudden burst of concern from Draco, but did nothing to address it currently. At the moment, he certainly did not mind if his mate chose to arrive and deal with the woman for him.

"The evidence indicates otherwise!"

"What evidence?"

"A note was left by the students Potter – one that you wrote claiming that this was what happened when people stood in your way."

"What?" Harry gaped, shocked despite the fact that he had thought as much earlier. He was being framed – but why?

"Nothing to say now Potter?" the woman pressed. "Mr. Weasley and Miss Granger's recovery is uncertain and you ask me to be fair? Were it up to me you would already be expelled!"

The woman's words didn't register past the names of the victims however. Ron and Hermione? They were the ones who were attacked? Who in Merlin's name had anything against them?

"Everything points at you Potter," the woman continued, forcibly breaking him from his musings.
"Even without your little victory note it is clear. Your friendship disintegrated and you wanted revenge did you?"

"What?"

"That's why you did it," the woman smirked. "Did you have an argument? What are you called? The 'Golden Trio'? Were you angry at them and wanted revenge...was that why you hurt them?"

Harry's heart sank slightly at the woman's words. When looked at from that perspective, he certainly did have a motive for the crime...

"You can't even prove I wrote it," he said tersely, ignoring the comments regarding his friendship for now. He couldn't be worried about their condition currently, not when he was being held responsible for it.

"People can change their handwriting at will," the woman sing-songed. "Why don't you just admit you did it?"

"Because I didn't," Harry grated out, his frustration growing.

Draco was growing increasingly alarmed, he noted as well, and despite the situation, could not resist a small smirk. His mate really did not like when people messed with him – he would put the woman in her place.

"Potter –"

"I have nothing more to say to you," Harry declared, folding his arms pointedly. "You obviously think I'm guilty, so I won't say another word until you get someone else in here."

"Why you arrogant-"

"Hear now!" A portrait gasped, drawing their attention to her. "That's no way to speak to a student young lady!"

Both of their attentions were drawn to the woman. Their discussion had apparently awoken her, Harry decided, noticing that she was blinking rapidly in the way one did when fighting lethargy. Harry felt himself calming at her words. She had always looked after him, he thought fondly, had when he was nine and still did now. The woman was loudly chastising the professor. The witch was standing there, her cheeks darkening be it with anger or embarrassment. When the portrait paused to draw breath though, she seemed to find her voice, and sputtered "This student attacked others, how can you expect –"

"You've hardly shown any proof dearie," the portrait interrupted, sniffing disdainfully. "I can see that this is your first time dealing with a disciplinary matter. Yelling at the poor darling as you have been doing, the nerve!"

"But –"

"It's obvious that you're the Muggle Studies Professor," the former principal continued, pointedly ignoring her. "You're thoroughly bred in their ways..."

The woman's final words caused even Harry to gape. He would never have expected to hear a discriminatory word said against muggles, especially by a former headmistress. However, that was certainly what the portrait was implying. If he had not heard it for himself though, Harry doubted that he would have believed it. It seemed entirely uncharacteristic though...the woman was so nice, so
genial, how could she detest people for being non-magical?

"How dare you!" the Professor grated out, glaring at the portrait. "How dare you!"

"I dare," came the easy reply, as the woman rocked back in her seat. "Instead of just using a spell like a sensible person would do, you're interrogating the poor dear, riling him up needlessly. Living with muggles for so long will do that to you, and I suppose that you have otherwise you wouldn't be qualified for the post. Muggle ways are all fine and dandy, however, we do have superior methods to them. Did it not occur to you to perform a mere Compulsion Charm on the lad to ensure that he was telling the truth?"

The woman words stood like a cloud over them for a long moment. Harry corrected his earlier thoughts of the portrait, now understanding exactly what she was referring too, while the Professor found herself blushing once again, this time with rage. The portrait was ruining a perfect opportunity to sully the precious boy who lived. The witch barely suppressed a snarl. This was not her primary mission, however, when the deputy had summoned her, she had taken advantage of the situation. The master would undoubtedly be pleased if she could sow seeds of discontent within Potter, and she believed she had been doing so.

All that was necessary was to foster some doubt in the boy for the headmaster – after all, why would the old man knowingly submit him to such a harsh interrogation? It may seem quaint however, well versed in the way people operated, the witch knew that it would have eventually brought success. All that was needed was a small inkling of doubt – it could be easily built upon. Potter was famous for going against his family, especially when he believed them to be in the wrong. This would have been a perfect opportunity to foster some rebellion later on in the year – especially when the master's final plan was ready for execution.

However, before the plan could be put in full operation, the portrait had intervened, and now Potter knew that this was not how the investigation was meant to be. The bloody witch, he swore silently, glaring at her. Now she would have no doubt but to carry forth with a true interrogation and hope that Potter was not too perturbed to report her initial behaviour. As she forced a pleasant smile on her face and spoke to Potter, the woman fingered a bottle in her pocket, knowing that she had less than half an hour before she would require another dose to continue the facade.

"What do you mean?" Draco demanded angrily.

"Calm down Dragon," Severus bid, resting a soothing hand on his godson's shoulder.

He had honestly hoped for the entire matter to be resolved before the veela became aware of the situation. Honestly, what was taking Charity so long with Harry? They were gathered in the Deputy's office. He, Minerva, Albus, and now Draco. Although how the teenager had gained access to the woman's office, he was not entirely certain. However, what was known was the fact that he was not in the least pleased – with them or the situation.

"Harry didn't hurt anyone," he groused, calming slightly by the potions master continuous caress. "My mate can't even play a prank anymore without me feeling his mischief. I think I would have noticed anything malicious radiating from him."

Around the room, the adults traded glances. They all knew the truth in the boy's words. Indeed, none of them truly believed that Harry was the culprit. However, as his name was found at the scene, it made sense that they started with him – if only to eliminate him as a suspect. However, Draco wasn't giving them much chance to explain that to him.
"They were found by some seventh years," Albus said softly, distracting Draco from his temper by drawing his attention to him. "Miss Granger appeared to have suffered numerous hexes and jinxes. She'll be in the Wing overnight at the very least although Madam Pomfrey has assured me that nothing is serious. Mr. Weasley on the other hand seems to have suffered primarily physical injuries, however he too was hexed."

"The attack had some principles at the very least," Minerva sniffed, drawing a dark chuckle from Severus.

He caught her implication. The person responsible was, in a dark way, chivalrous. He had not technically, hit a girl, however, that had not absolved the witch from numerous hexes.

"He'll be in the Wing for at least three days," Albus continued. "But mostly because Poppy doesn't want him about before he's mostly healed. The Weasleys have a habit of not following her instructions."

"Did they say Harry did it?" Draco asked darkly.

"Neither has awakened yet. However, a missive was found on Weasley."

"This is what happens to those that hurt Harry Potter," Severus recited softly.

"It seems that someone – or some people have not taken kindly to the faltering of their relationship," Minerva stated.

"Do you have any idea who might have done such a thing Draco?" Severus inquired.

Draco folded his arms thoughtfully, reflecting on what Harry had told him. "It doesn't add up," he murmured eventually.

"What doesn't?" Albus gently probed, trying to get anything useful for him. After all, he could not simply tell their parents that they had not a clue as to who had attacked their children.

"The note," Draco stated, rocking back slightly.

Severus balanced his weight easily, although he glared slightly down at his godson. Did he look like a recliner?

"You said 'hurt Harry Potter' Uncle?"

"I did," he replied.

"It doesn't make sense," the veela said again, drumming his fingers while trying to ignore the feelings radiating from Harry. If he didn't, a mere formality or otherwise, he would barge into the Headmaster's office after the woman who was currently aggravating his mate. "No one knows what happened."

"Everyone knows what happened, Mr. Malfoy," McGonagall corrected tersely. "I think one would have had to been completely oblivious the past few weeks not to realise that there is discord between the three of them."

"That's not what I meant Professor," Draco murmured. "Everyone knows, but no one knows what happened – what really did. Except the attacker...but how could they know?"

"We need more information Draco," Albus requested.
The veela looked up at him. "The only one who knows why they aren't talking is Harry and I," he explained. "The note said that they hurt Harry. That's very specific to what happened. Unless they were there – and Harry said they were alone that day – no one else knows the truth. This person – they were avenging Harry. However, why would someone do that if they didn't know the whole story? I certainly didn't attack them – I've been purposely avoiding them for that very reason. My temper is uncertain in their vicinity currently. It's definitely not Harry."

"Which means that the person who did it is someone who Harry told?"

"That's the best I can see," Draco confirmed. "Although as far as I know, I'm the only one Harry's told."

"Which doesn't help our case," McGonagall sighed.

"We can always ask Harry," Albus mused.

"But will he cooperate? What I mean Albus, is that Mr. Potter had to have trusted this individual with the information. Would he not try to protect them?"

"I don't think so Professor," Draco responded. "At least I don't think he would. He might be at odds with Granger and Weasley, but believe me, Harry would never have approved of this happening to them. Harry would want justice for them – actually he'll blame himself for this happening in the first place. He'll think it's his fault that they were attacked, and in a way, it really is."

"Drac-"

"That's how he'll see it Uncle. You know that."

After a moment, Severus sighed, acknowledging the truth of the teenager's words. Harry really was insecure in those matters.

"I really don't know who Harry would have told about the situation," Draco continued eventually. "I mean, he and I were at odds until...he wouldn't..."

The three adults watched the veela for a long moment, waiting for him to express his thoughts.

When he did, the blonde seemed far from pleased. "The only one he'd have trusted enough to tell was Krum, he admitted reluctantly. "I wouldn't put it past him either," he added in a softer, almost petulant tone that had Severus patting him once in warning. Draco nodded slightly, forcing himself not to dwell on the Bulgarian. It would get him riled up unnecessarily and he needed to be calm for Harry.

"Are you certain there is no one else?" Albus pressed.

It was not so much that he believed Draco to be prejudiced on the issue. However, it was a worst case scenario if the veela's prediction proved school. Accusing a foreign student would be extremely problematic, especially if the accusation proved false. The school would never live down the disgrace.

The blonde shrugged after a moment. "There's no one else he'd tell as far as I know," Draco reasserted before dropping the issue.

As far as he was concerned, the teachers were better off waiting until Granger and Weasley could offer an explanation themselves. Otherwise, they'd just be going around in circles, working off scant evidence and harassing people unnecessarily, much as they were doing Harry now.
As his mind turned to his mate, Draco felt along the bond, searching for the feelings of frustration he had been getting from Harry earlier. He had been about to investigate it then when the teachers had interrupted his musings. He felt nothing now though, and felt reassured by it. Perhaps his little mate had simply been angered by the entire situation and the accusation. He definitely knew he would have been.

Ten minutes later, Draco found himself impatiently awaiting Harry. An elf had brought a missive stating that the investigation was complete, however, the veela was not given immediate access to Harry, having to wait till the adults finished speaking to him. He grumbled at the necessity of it all as he waited, pacing near the entrance to the office as he had stringently refused to remain in the deputy's room. As far as he was concerned, he had given them enough quarter by not barging in initially. However, they all knew his patience would not last much longer.

Just when the veela grew frustrated and was about to enter, manners be dammed, the door opened, and momentarily, he found his temper receding considerably as Harry snuggled into him, leaning up for a kiss. He obliged him, wrapping his arms firmly around his waist.

"I don't like her," Harry muttered to him after they parted, nodding his head slightly toward the Muggle Studies Professor.

Instinctively, Draco held his mate closer while glaring at the teacher who was calmly sipping from a vial. What had the woman done to make his mate dislike her?

"Did she hurt you?"

"No," Harry admitted, "but I don't like her. She doesn't like me."

"You'll be happy to know that Harry's been exonerated," Severus said from the door, preventing Draco's reply. "We'll have to fall back on our previous theories then."

Draco nodded curtly, allowing himself to be distracted from the Professor. "We can leave?"

"Yes," Severus conceded, not bothering to offer any further explanation. He knew that look good enough. Harry would relay anything else that was important.

"Then we will be going then," Draco said firmly, already turning.

With his grip firm on the younger wizard, Harry had no choice but to follow him, although he was not complaining.

Currently, he wanted as much distance possible put between him and the odd Professor, who was still sipping from the bottle, a neutral expression on her face.
"You'll be released tomorrow Ron," Hermione said comfortingly, stroking her boyfriend's hand. "Madam Pomfrey is just being extra cautious."

"I feel fine Hermione," Ron grumbled, boredom plainly evident on his face. "There's nothing to do up here. I've even finished all our assignments."

Hermione chuckled at his affronted tone, before leaning forward to peck his cheek lightly. "That just leaves us with more time to ourselves when you get out," she pointed out, before laughing lightly when redhead blushed.

"Did they find out who did it?" he asked after a long moment, effectively ending the light-hearted mood.

The witch sighed softly, crossing her arms across her chest. "Well, with us not seeing who did it, there's nothing much to go on. Professor McGonagall doubts that they can find out who did it, and, unless the person brags, we may never know."

"Of course not," he grumbled, his eyes darkening.

"It's not like they haven't tried Ron," she told him, tightening her grip on his hand. "They've questioned a few people – even Harry."

"Harry?" Ron repeated with slight disbelief.

"Yes Harry," she said, sighing once again. "The Professor thinks whoever did it wanted revenge for what we did to Harry."

"What we did?" Ron snapped, his eyes darkening. "We haven't done anything to him!"

"Well whoever did it disagrees."

"As do I."

Both turned at the cool voice, their eyes widening slightly when they saw Draco watching them from the entrance to the Hospital Wing. The veela came over, resting a package on Ron's bedside table before straightening.

"A get well present," he said simply, as they followed his movement.

"What do you mean?" Ron asked after a moment. "We never did anything to Harry."

"I have to agree Draco," Hermione added, twisting so she could look at him fully. "Harry may be your mate, but it isn't right that you automatically take his side in this matter."

The veela arched an eyebrow at her. "Have you ever known me to defend Harry when he was in the wrong?"

"You always have," she pointed out.

The veela looked at her for a moment longer before shrugging. "It's not as if you've seen us in our private moments," he murmured, running a hand through his hair. "Regardless, you have hurt my mate, which, as you just pointed out, is the motive behind your attack. I'm sorry for that by the way,"
he added. "No one deserved what happened to you, but it is especially bothersome that my mate was a factor in its planning."

"He should be the one saying that," Ron muttered.

The veela eyed him sharply for a moment. "Harry will, if I allow him to speak with you."

"Since when does he need your permission to talk to us?" Hermione demanded.

Even though it had been weeks since she had actually spoken to him, the witch was still protective of Harry, and especially the control the veela exerted over him. Long ago, she had decided that it would be her duty to ensure that Harry had as much freedom as the next person, and would not instead, live a life governed solely by the decisions of his mate.

"I told you once Hermione, that I care not who Harry is friends with as long as it is not detrimental to him. Allowing my mate around pretenders does not fall into that purview."

"What?" she asked confused.

However, the veela's attention was not on her anymore. Instead, the veela's silver eyes bore into Ron's.

"You don't consider Harry a friend anymore," he said flatly. He ignored the witch's gasp from beside him. "You resent Harry, and everything that he represents. He's a burden to you. He keeps you back."

The redhead paled. He had never mentioned those things publicly. The only one who truly knew his inner feelings for the young wizard was his girlfriend, and, judging by the pallor on her face, she certainly had not been the one who had told.

"I'm not entirely sure of your feelings Granger," he added, turning toward her. "However, what I do know is that you've chosen to stand beside your boyfriend on the matter. Admirable yes, I would do the same in your position. That, though, does not change the fact that your choice has hurt my mate."

"How do-"

"When we first spoke," Draco continued, speaking as though he had not been interrupted, "I told you. I warned you. Befriending Harry was not an easy task. I warned you of the dangers, of the possible threats against him. You chose to befriend him regardless. I gave you an option. When I told you the possibilities, you were free to back out. It would have been inconsequential. Harry was a child then. Yes he was fascinated by you, but I could have easily diverted that. You chose to be his friend, and, with your promise secure, I allowed it.

"I was never entirely certain what to expect, and frankly, a promise is far from a vow. Had you chosen, at any point over the years, to end the friendship, I would not have cared. As long as you made a clean break. Harry would have been sad, possibly even devastated. However, he would grieve, and eventually accept that it was not meant to be. As Gryffindors – the courageous, loyal ones, I expected that of you. And so, I didn't care when Harry formed a close bond to you. So close, that he even considers you to be his family.

"However, did you do the honourable thing? No, you didn't. Instead of coming straight out and ending the friendship, you pretended that it didn't matter. My mate is not stupid Weasley. From the start he realised that something was different about you. And your efforts Granger to divert his attention did not last for too long. He became suspicious, and rightly so. He started asking questions, small ones at first, but all you did, what you both did, was string him along.
"So much so, that he decided to listen in to a conversation between the two of you to see if he could figure out what was wrong – what he did wrong. Now, I don't know why, nor do I really care why you did not tell him that you had gotten together, that really is not my business. What concerns me though, is when someone Harry trusts, someone he loves, states quite plainly that his life, his future is being burdened by him. Worse than that, you cannot be friends with him for the same reason. For the world sees you as his friend, and to end that friendship would put you in a precarious position. So instead, you lie. You pretend to continue a friendship with him, or you would have had he not found out the truth and pull away from you."

Silence met the end of his words. Glancing between the two of them, he spoke again.

"Now, I really do not care what you choose to or not do. But I will state this now. I will not have anyone hurting my mate as you have most certainly done. If you no longer desire to be his friend, end it. However, if you get over your pity fest, and wish to continue your friendship with him, note this and note this well. I will not stand for this again. Hurt Harry, in any form or fashion..." the veela lowered his voiced to a deadly edge. "And you will not have to wonder who landed you in the Hospital Wing."

With that warning given, the veela turned, sauntering out of the room. He paused by the doorway before giving them a chilling smile. "See you in class," he said with false cheerfulness, before leaving. The closing door resounded in the quiet room.

Neither one said anything for a long while.

* *

A week later, Harry was once again the last out of the classroom after his Charms Association meeting. He hummed to himself as he worked, pondering if to have dinner at home instead of the Hall. He wasn't exactly in the mood to deal with a boisterous hall. More than that, he had some exciting news for his mate. Dobby had delivered the note to him at the end of his Charms class, however, by then, Draco was already out the door after giving him a quick kiss. He and their Uncle were working on a variation of a potion, and the blonde was extremely excited to see the progress that had been made.

Opening the note, he had struggled to keep a straight face, and thinking about it now, a huge smile plastered itself on his face as he quickly righted the room. His godfather was going to get married! Well, he amended, he would as soon as he proposed to his boyfriends. Harry knew the man had been contemplating it for a while, he had told him as much the last time they had met. However now, he seemed determined, so much so, that he had already bought their engagement and wedding rings. He was not going to propose to them immediately – he wanted it to be a special occasion, and, as he wrote, what was more special than the day he had gotten out of Azkaban, and had been reunited with the men that he loved? Thus, the proposal date was set for the last week of December, a few days before Christmas actually. However, he couldn't keep it to himself, and had had to share the news with someone. Narcissa and Lucius were out of the question, he had mentioned. The witch would not keep the secret for long – her excitement would give her away, and Severus knew the patriarch well enough to sense if he was withholding anything from them.

And so, his godsons would have to do. Harry laughed softly as he grabbed his bag. He had been to a few weddings before, but this one would be especially special as it was actually between people he knew and loved. He wondered absently if and where they would go for a honeymoon and for how long. And, would they make it a somewhat regular event. After all, he thought wryly, his mama was already contemplating where their tenth, eleventh and twelfth would be spent.
Harry was almost at the door when it opened. He blinked in surprise. He would have seen if someone had forgotten something, and certainly, besides his club, no one used the room on afternoons. He froze when two persons entered.

Ron and Hermione.

He certainly had not been expecting them.

He had not spoken to them recently, even in the aftermath of their attack. He knew Draco had visited them, and that had been good enough for him. He had not known what he would say to them anyway.

"Good afternoon," he stated automatically, manners emerging.

"Hello Harry," Hermione replied.

"Hi," Ron said simply.

Harry eyed him tentatively, trying to gauge his mood. "Can I help you with something?" he inquired.

"No, we're fine,' the witch replied quickly. "We – we were just wondering if we could talk to you for a bit. That is if you aren't busy."

"I'm not," Harry responded after a moment.

"Good, because there is something I – we would like to say."

"Okay."

"Ron?" Hermione bid, touching him lightly.

The redhead looked at him for long moments, and in that time, Harry analysed him. Before him was a wizard he considered his best friend. They had done so much together, had had so many good times. Harry allowed some of his hurt to surface. He remembered a time when this tension never existed. The three of them were like peas in a pod. There was never any tenseness, only happiness and laughter. He had ruined that simply by being Harry Potter. However, it was not like he could change that fact.

"Ron?" Hermione stated again.

"I don't hate you Harry," the redhead stated suddenly. "I never did."

"Draco spoke to us," the witch added. "We're sorry Harry. You were never supposed to find out – at least not that way."

There was no need for her to elaborate on what exactly he was not supposed to find out. "Why?" he asked simply.

"You heard why," Ron stated bluntly.

"I did," Harry confirmed, swallowing slightly. "It's my fault."

"It isn't," the redhead stated, surprising him. "I- I was being selfish, extremely selfish."

"..."
"What Ron means," Hermione continued, "is that we never considered you in any of this. Like I told Ron, and I know now that you heard, you can't control who you are, or what the world thinks about you. And, as Draco pointed out, we knew exactly what we were getting into beforehand, and continued regardless."

"I've always had to share everything Harry," Ron continued. "With so many siblings, it was inevitable. Actually, I think Ginny's the only one who has true ownership of anything and everything she has, and that's because she was born a girl. Anyway, ever since I was younger, I wanted something for myself, something that I worked for and earned, not something I got simply because of someone else. I've never had that. Everything came to me from someone else, and I decided a long time ago, when I grew up, I wouldn't have that.

"Everything would be something I worked hard for. That summer in the Ministry, I realised that could never happen being friends with you. At worst I'd expected slight favouritism simply because I had family in the Ministry. That really didn't matter, because, save muggleborns and some halfbloods, everyone has someone who could give them an initial start-up. I could accept that.

"You on the other hand. You're more than a mere boost. Just by being your friend I'm almost guaranteed entrance into the Auror Programme and I didn't want that. It was my home-life all over again. Did I truly earn this or was it simply given to me. My dreams were broken, and I started taking it out on you.

"Hermione's been helping me these past few weeks, however, it wasn't until Draco that I truly figured it out and realised how wrong I was. You aren't a curse to me Harry. I don't like the fact that your name can get me places, but, I only saw the negative aspect of it. I never realised how much of a help it was to me. Becoming an auror isn't easy. People try and fail at just qualifying to apply, and I have you to get me pass that. You can't make me an auror, but you can help me get the footing necessary to prove myself.

"But that's beside the point. I don't want you because of what you can do for me. I want you as my friend, and recently I've been too stupid to see this. I'm sorry I hurt you Harry, and I'm sorry for putting you in the position to choose between us Hermione," he added, turning to his girlfriend for a moment. "Hermione was never against you Harry, you must believe that. But I was selfish and monopolised all of her attention."

"By the time I noticed," Hermione added, "you had already pulled yourself away from us. If I had known it was because of this, I would have intervened. As if, I just thought you didn't want to be around us anymore..."

"Which is what I had wanted in the first place," Ron finished sadly. "Was that why you pulled away Harry?"

Harry nodded slightly, speaking for the first time in several minutes. "I didn't want you to be miserable," he said softly. "I thought that you'd be happy without me. I made myself not care so it wouldn't hurt."

"Oh Harry," Hermione breathed, tears shimmering in her eyes. "It wasn't the same without you with us."

"It wasn't," Ron confirmed. "Now that I got a kick in the bum I can see that. We missed you, just like we missed you when you were absent this year."

"So do you forgive us?" Hermione asked. "I know we don't deserve it."
"I don't deserve it," Harry corrected. "You got hurt because of me. You're better off without me. I just get everyone hurt."

"You don't!" Ron declared, stepping forward so he could clasp him by the shoulders. "The only one at fault for what happened to us is the person who did it. Not you Harry."

"He's right. You aren't to blame Harry. Please, don't be afraid for us."

"We knew it wouldn't be easy being friends with Harry Potter from the start."

"But we've never truly regretted having done so, and we still don't."

"We don't."

"Are you sure?" Harry asked tentatively, looking between the two. "I don't want to be a burden."

"You aren't Harry!" Hermione promised, leaning forward to hug him.

Ron did the same, pulling them into a three-way hug. Harry relished the gesture, and, after a moment, allowed the wall he had built up towards his feelings for them to dissolve. He did care about them, and he wanted to be their friend again.

Five minutes later the trio left the room together, talking lightly. However, before they completely rounded the corner, Hermione looked back, her eyes widening slightly when she saw Draco leaning against the wall watching them. Their eyes met, and after a moment, the veela nodded at her before turning away.

Hermione smiled slightly, silently thanking him for giving them the foresight necessary to fix the relationship between them and Harry. However, his threat still hung above them, she reminded herself. They could – and never would – hurt Harry again.

*M*

"Mama went overboard," Harry announced as he walked into Draco's bedroom, tugging lightly at his dress robes.

The veela looked up from his dresser, to observe him. "I like it," he said after a moment.

"You'd like me in a wet paper bag," Harry grumbled, before seating himself at the end of the bed. "Why aren't you dressed yet?"

"Father and I were finishing a chess match," he stated. "Besides that, we're early. The Ball doesn't start till six. It's barely four now."

"I know. However you know Mama will want pictures, and she's bound to want to adjust something."

"That is true," Draco agreed. "Do you know what time Ron and Hermione will be there?"

Weeks after their reconciliation, the trios' relationship had solidified, and, Harry would wager, even stronger than it had been previously. Hermione and her parents were spending the Christmas holidays at the Weasleys, giving her parents a chance to see exactly the kind of life their daughter lived outside of the muggle world.

"They're be there by half five," he supplied.
There had been some debate at first, but eventually the headmaster decided that, for the evening, the floo network to the school would be opened to all those who bore an invitation to the Ball (which had been issued on the last day of the term. This had been done to ensure that the upper years could still spend precious times with their families. What the school had not been told was that Order activity was increasing once again, and so, none of the members could truly deal with the burden extra students on the compound would cause. They already had to deal with two foreign schools after all.

"So will Blaise and Millicent," Draco informed him.

Likewise, the two were vacationing together, giving their families the opportunity to know each other better. Which, in pure-blooded terms, was a code for working out the value of the pair's relationship. They were quite serious with each other, Draco noted. He would not be too surprised if they were betrothed by the end of their fifth year and married soon after their seventh.

He could not be happier for them.

"I just felt like I should dress early," Harry said eventually, distracting him from his thoughts.


Harry chuckled at the invitation, but obeyed, allowing himself to be pulled on to his mate's lap.

"You haven't greeted me properly," Draco mock-pouted, drawing a small laugh from Harry.

"Sorry," he murmured, before kissing him for a moment, a warm feeling flowing through him.

"Much better," Draco praised, resting his cheek against his shoulder for a moment. "Now, answer me please?"

"I don't know," Harry huffed, playing with the blonde's fingers. "I just got a feeling..."

"Maybe Divination was for you," the veela teased, earning himself a light tap.

"Don't say such things."

" It'll be an easy OWL," Draco mocked, throwing Harry's words back at him.

"It's not too late to join Hagrid's class," the brunette warned, before laughing when the blonde raised his hands in surrender. "Know your place," he finished haughtily, before dropping his head back on his shoulder.

"Well at least you're in your place," Draco whispered, kissing his cheek softly.

"I'm right where I belong," Harry confirmed, sighing contentedly.

"At my side."

"Exactly."

Two hours later, Harry would reflect on the irony of those words when he found himself with his hand laced through Viktor's arm, waiting to open the Ball alongside the other champions and their dates.
Chapter 65

It was amazing what a simple change of clothing could do, Harry thought as he looked around the room. The school and its population looked entirely different. Gone was the customary sea of black robes Harry was accustomed to. In its place, people flitted about in a wide variety of colours and differing hairstyles. On the whole Harry decided it was nice to see his fellow students like this. It gave him an insight into their personalities, as after all, it was quite possible to judge a person by their appearance.

A pair of arms suddenly wrapped around his waist. Harry chuckled softly as he was pulled flush against Draco's torso, mewling slightly when he felt a kiss being pressed to his hair. "Did you find out where we were supposed to go?"

It was now minutes to five; considerably earlier than they had planned to arrive at the school for. Their plans had been derailed by a terse missive delivered through a house-elf. They were needed at the school as soon as possible. The note had been written in his Grandpa's handwriting, and, after scanning it, he had passed it on to Draco. Neither could discern a reason why they were needed, after all, they had absolutely no role to play in the evening's festivities. Nevertheless, they had heeded the missive and had come here.

Draco had left him here in the Entrance Hall, sighting that there was no reason for them both to head to the headmaster's office. Harry had agreed easily, and thus had spent his time observing the early-arrivers, waving at those he knew personally.

"We're wanted in the antechamber," Draco informed him, squeezing his middle for a moment before releasing him.

"Do you know why?" Harry asked, as he slid his hand into Draco's, allowing the veela to lead him to the specified room.

"I met Professor Flitwick halfway there," he explained. "He did not know why, however, he did say that to go there."

"For what?" Harry asked for the umpteenth time, as they reached the door.

Draco knocked, and after a moment, they entered.

Harry's eyes furrowed as he took in the occupants of the room. Seated around small tables were the Champions. In the far corner, Cedric and Cho looked toward them, confusion evident on their faces. Near them the French Champion and her partner eyed them curiously.

"Are we needed?" she asked after a moment.

"No," Harry replied, for currently, Draco seemed more interested in looking at – or not looking at, the person beside her. "We were told to come here."

"What for Harry?" Cho inquired.

"I don't know," he shrugged. "We hoped to find out when we came. You look pretty."

"And you look handsome," she shot back, waving him over.

Harry released Draco's hand, and, after shooting him a curious look, wandered over. Looking back
moments later, he raised an eyebrow as he saw the Beauxbatons boy standing over Draco, talking softly to him. What was that about, he wondered, before dismissing it, claiming a spot next to his long-time friend.

* "It has been a while little brother," the French veela purred.

Draco felt a blush heat his face, and embarrassed, he dropped his gaze. Like the previous occasion, he felt unbelievably shy around the man. Gabriel seemed entirely too amused by it, he decided moments later, when the man said something that only increased the flush on his face.

"You blush so prettily," he chuckled, stroking a finger along his cheek. "How are you doing?"

"I-I'm fine," Draco responded softly, finally meeting his gaze. "Thank you."

"It was nothing," Gabriel said easily, waving it off. "It is what anyone would do in the situation. Are you and your mate reconciled?"

"Fully," the veela responded with surety, a smile playing at his lips.

"That is good." As he spoke the veela's hand moved so that it was cupping Draco's face. After a moment, the blonde leaned into it. "I am thinking you lack a mentor Draco Malfoy," Gabriel said softly. "It is the only reason you react to me so."

"What?"

"It is hard for you no?" he inquired, smiling gently at him. "It has bothered me since that day. Here, you do not have a support base. In my school, there are many veelas. We help each other; assist through difficult times. You have no one to turn to. You are drawn to me."

"My mother is veela," Draco corrected, even as his eyes drooped slightly. Gabriel was using his allure on him again, he vaguely noted, however, it felt too good for him to complain, far less pull away. The room seemed to narrow down to the two of them, and he found himself captivated with every velvety word the veela spoke.

"But your mother is not always here no?" Gabriel pointed out. "You lack a support system. However you manage as best you can."

"I do," Draco confirmed.

"Are you certain you do not know why you are here?" he pressed. "I do not mind. I was wanting to check on you for a while now."

"I don't," he said, sighing regretfully when the veela removed his hand. "The headmaster simply asked us to come here."

Gabriel crossed his hands, a furrow appearing on his forehead as he thought. "I hope it is not the case..."

"What isn't?" he asked softly.

"Durmstrang," he all but spat, "is not here yet."

"You don't think..."
Gabriel nodded slightly, even as he reached out to grasp Draco firmly by the shoulder, shaking him gently. "Remain calm," he bid him sternly. "You do not want another hiding no?"

The fifteen year old blinked in confusion. "What?"

"Is that not what the man told you?" he pressed. "When you hid behind me?"

Draco groaned in embarrassment at that, docking his head. Of all things, the man had had to remember his uncle threatening to put him across his knee?

"My godfather was just mad," he deflected. "Nevertheless you are right."

"I am never wrong," Gabriel declared loftily. "Well rarely so."

Any response Draco could make was cut off by the door opening. All eyes turned toward the doorway, and after a moment, the missing Champion and his High Master entered, followed by the headmaster. Draco was surprised by the wave of resentment that immediately rose within him. Actually, he was certain that if Gabriel had not reached out to grasp his shoulder again, he would have snarled, or even transformed.

Time had not completely dulled his hurts, Draco acknowledged. His resentment for the Bulgarian was as strong, if not stronger than ever. It didn't help that the Quidditch player now had his eyes solely on Harry who seemed entirely uncomfortable with the situation.

"You will behave little brother," Gabriel breathed, leaning toward him.

Draco huffed a response, but nodded reluctantly when his hand tightened warningly. "I will not attack him," he promised. "Unless he aggravates me."

"You attack him and I will punish you myself," Gabriel warned softly, drawing another blush from Draco.

He was not sure why he reacted to him like this. Had anyone else spoken to him like this, the veela was certain they would have been taught a lesson in respect. As if, he easily deferred to him. Perhaps Gabriel was right about him needing a support base, someone to control his reactions?

"Ah Draco, Harry," Albus greeted, "you've arrived. Good, good."

"Hi Grandpa," Harry stated, smiled slightly at him. "You wanted us?"

"I do," he confirmed, "well rather, High Master Karkaroff does."

By now, Draco was well acquainted with the subtle changes in the headmaster's demeanour. Unlike his godfather, Albus Dumbledore did not need to manifest his anger. It was evident in the minute crease of his brow, and the barely there hint of resentment in his tone. What exactly was happening here, and would that blasted Krum please stop observing his mate as if he were a lamb for him to devour?

Harry tensed slightly at the words, shooting a furtive glance at the man who had taken a prominent part in his dreams the year before. He never would be comfortable in his presence, and, despite the fact that both Draco and his grandpa were near, Harry simply could not relax around him, especially since he apparently had a request for them. Briefly, he made eye contact with Viktor, before looking away with some guilt. After all, he had summarily broken their friendship. It was not the nicest thing to do, especially when they had shared so much together. Regardless, Harry reminded himself, Draco came first.
He always would.

"A situation has arisen," the man said in heavily accented English. "A family emergency means that my Champion has no date for the Ball. Viktor reminds me that he and you share a special bond. Therefore I ask that you be his date for the night."

Harry’s breath hitched, not so much from the man's words, but from the immediate surge of anger that wafted off from Draco. "Dominant," he whispered, knowing that despite the softness of the tone, he would hear him.

The older veela's hands tightened further around his mate, and while curious as to the closeness between them, Harry was grateful. The veela was controlling his mate in a way he could never have managed in this situation. Harry locked gazes with Viktor, noting the amusement in his gaze. He found the entire situation amusing, Harry realised in an instant.

Why was he doing this?

Viktor seemed far from sheepish, or even embarrassed as Harry imagined one would be were he in his position. For a moment, Harry wondered if Viktor had somehow set this entire thing up. He could not entirely dismiss the thought. Was the Bulgarian that desperate to rekindle their relationship? Harry felt saddened by that thought. He had done the Bulgarian an injustice even as he had repaired his relationship with Draco. In a way, he hated what he had done, and on occasion, he found himself wishing for Viktor and his odd sense of humour. The Bulgarian potentially could have become his best friend, in a way that neither Ron nor Hermione could ever be. However, he had cruelly dismissed him, choosing Draco.

Could he really fault him then, Harry thought, as his gaze drifted between his friend and his mate. He had hurt them both, and there was no way he could reconcile with one without further hurting the other.

"What Igor means," Albus said presently, drawing all notice to him, "is that we need you Harry to open the dance with Viktor. Once all the formalities are over, you can return to Draco and enjoy the rest of your night."

In principle it sounded simple, Harry thought, however, he doubted it would work out that way. Even now, he could feel his mate's annoyance raising – it was more than annoyance actually. Around the room, all of its occupants seemed to sense the rising tension. The Beauxbaton Champion was frowning, her eyes narrowed in a way that clearly indicated that although not involved personally, she did not approve of the situation. She was a veela after all, Harry reminded himself. Watching a fellow veela's right being usurped certainly would not sit well with her.

"Is there no one else who can be his date," she said pertly, eyeing him judicially. "Someone of your own school; someone who is unattached?"

Viktor shot the veela a glare, one that she plainly returned. Why was he deliberately stirring confusion, she wondered. While enchanting, there was nothing overly special about the Potter boy as far as she could tell. Could he not leave him be? There were a lot of others who would throw themselves at him. Why harass these two?

By now, Harry had eased himself from Cho's side and had made his way over to his mate. He gasped as Draco roughly pulled him to his side, but did not protest. Draco was feeling threatened, he would accept the rough treatment.

"Harry is mine," he declared roughly, shooting Viktor a murderous look.
Draco was not exactly protesting the request Harry noted, even as he fisted a hand in his robes, Perhaps it was because, like him, he had seen the inevitable nature of the situation? The headmaster would not have brought the issue to them if there was any way it could be avoided. As is, Harry knew that the matter was already resolved. He would be Viktor's date, and nothing could change that. Inviting them there truly had been a formality, and probably done to divert Draco's rage. Harry honestly would not be surprised if Draco was kept from the Hall, until after the opening. He had already proven himself to be rash around the Bulgarian.

"I am yours," Harry whispered to him, butting his chest lightly. "You know that."

"He doesn't apparently," Draco snapped.

"But I do," Harry told him firmly, drawing his gaze to him.

"He wants to take you from me," the veela told him, uncaring if those around heard his words. "I will not lose you to the likes of him!"

"You haven't lost me," Harry said earnestly, and with a hint of anxiety.

Draco had not been like this for weeks. Things had returned to normal, but only a few minutes in Viktor's presence was already bringing forth the worst in his mate. Harry hated the insecurity that was radiating off him. He wanted his confident mate back. "It'll only be for a little bit," Harry consoled. "A dance or two, and I'll be back with you."

"That will not do," Karkaroff stated, gaining glares from the entire room. "You cannot leave my Champion."

"Then you should find someone else," Cedric stated firmly, throwing in his own two-pence.

"Look here..."

"Hogwarts is right," Delacour added, rising to her feet.

The tension was slowly building in the room Harry noted absently, nuzzling Draco consolingly. "Calm down," he whispered, half-pleading.

"This is nothing but aggravation," the veela continued. "You know who they are – mates – yet you seek to divide them. Hogwarts is being most gracious in facilitating you...what is it. Get an inch and take a mile? In my school, you would get nothing Krum. Two dances – no more!"

Karkaroff stiffened. "Respect is lacking in Beauxbatons," he drawled.

"Common sense lacks in you," she shot back haughtily. "Veela rights reign supreme. I will not have them trampled. Headmaster Dumbledore, is there no other way?"

"It seems there is none," the man said regretfully.

Which, Harry thought dryly, was code for Karkaroff having backed him into a corner. Idly Harry wondered what exactly the High Master had used to coerce his Grandpa into agreeing.

"Then I have no choice," Harry sighed, even while sending the Bulgarian a reproving look. "I will dance with you."

A broad smile spread across his face, and for a moment, Harry felt his a tickle of humour. He looked like a child in a candy store. The thirteen year old shook his head, reminding himself that he could
not allow himself to become entangled with him again. Draco came first.

A knock sounded on the door, and momentarily it opened, revealing a person Harry knew fairly well.

"Bill!" Fleur gasped, her anger seemingly evaporating as she skipped across the room to him, latching on to his arm. "Why are you here?"

"I switched shifts," he told her, before issuing a general greeting to the room.

"It appears that I am not the only one without a date little brother," Gabriel stated, with an exaggerated sigh. The veela turned to apologise, but stopped at the wink he sent her. "Therefore, my dear Draco Malfoy, you will stay with me!"

"What?" both Harry and Draco asked simultaneously.

Harry instinctively tightened his grip on his mate's robes. What on earth was going on between the two of them, he wondered. And why had Draco never told him he had made friends with the French.

"It is obvious," Gabriel said haughtily. "Fleur has abandoned me, and Krum wishes to steal your mate. Therefore I will take you," he declared, placing a hand on Draco's shoulder. Harry resisted the urge to bat at it.

"Well I guess it is settled then," the headmaster said with slight hesitancy, confused, as were the others, to the Frenchman's motives.

Nevertheless, he was not about to waste the opportunity. It was better to have Draco confused than furious, he noted, hoping that the student could distract him for the entire night. Somehow he did not see that happening.

* *

"Usually you smile when you are in my arms," Viktor pointed out, deftly guiding them around Cedric and Cho.

Harry stifled a sigh, reminding himself that all eyes were literally on them currently. Where else would it be when Hogwarts' most favourite student was in the arms of the 'enemy'. How much longer would it last? It felt as if an eternity had past already, and yet the music continued. Harry wanted to get back to Draco. Gabriel certainly was sticking true to his word for he had gotten no angry spikes from his mate. Nevertheless, he wanted to return to him, because Viktor's presence was slowly but surely beguiling him.

Harry recalled a conversation with between his parents about a wizard who had gotten addicted to something – what it was he could not currently recall. What he did remember though was Papa mentioning that one never truly got over an addiction, and once exposed to it, the desire for it returned, and often tenfold. Harry was beginning to think that it was the case with him. He had forcibly quelled all of his emotions for Viktor; he did not speak of him, deliberately look at him, and as far as possible, tried not to think of him.

And he had succeeded – well at least he thought he had.

He was no longer certain.

Being standoffish to him was not working. Viktor always knew what buttons to push to draw a chortle from him. That had not changed. No matter how much Harry focussed on Draco, reminding
himself that this was just a brief job, he had to do, Viktor diverted him with little comments, forcing him to remember what they had. Indeed, Harry did recall being in the Bulgarian's arms, and snuggled on his lap while the older wizard talked to him of his homeland and how he hoped to show it to him someday.

And the more he recalled, the more sympathetic he became with the man whom he was dancing with. There was hesitancy in Viktor's eyes; he believed now that he had a motive. Viktor wanted to rekindle what they had – he must have missed him terrible, and unlike him, had not buried the feelings. Harry felt a pang go through him. Why did he always hurt the ones he cared about.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, meeting his eyes.

The Champion seemed to realise what he meant without him explaining further. His eyes clouded briefly before clearing. "It is not your fault I know," he responded. "It is your mate –"

"Yes," Harry confirmed, pausing as Viktor spun him around.

He caught a brief glimpse of his mate, and frowned when he saw the way Gabriel had his arms around him. That was a little too personal he decided, not at all realising or caring that he himself had been in more intimate grasps with Viktor.

"I had to," Harry continued once he was facing him again. "Draco –"

"Made you, I know."

No, Harry wanted to say. Viktor had the wrong impression. He probably believed that he had been forbidden from contacting him, which certainly was not the case. He had made that choice on his own; he could not have Draco taking the blame for him. It would only intensify the dislike Viktor had of him, and that, he knew was not a good thing. But now, the song was winding to an end, and quite contradictory from earlier, Harry now regretted its end. There was so much more he wanted to tell him – so much to explain.

"Dance with me again?" the Champion requested, his voice lowering softly.

How could he resist it, Harry thought, and sending a silent apology to Draco, he nodded. This song was far less formal, he realised moments later, when Viktor pulled him closer, leaving them scant inches apart. One of his arms wrapped itself more firmly against his waist, and for a moment, Harry allowed his face to be pressed into his robes before he pulled away to look into his eyes again. He allowed Viktor to lead him. Enough dance lessons had made him an expert at both leading and following. For now, he trusted his partner not to let him fall.

"I have missed you," Viktor murmured, easily avoiding one of the other couples who had now entered the dance floor. "Missed you so much. But I understand. I do not like it, but it is okay."

"Your English is better," Harry noted idly.

"I had good reason to learn. I knew you were not responsible, but it still hurt. Your mate would not let you from him; you could not come to me. There is so much I wanted to say to you."

"You weren't badly hurt that time were you?"

"No, I was fine. It did not hamper my Task."

"It meant nothing," the Bulgarian said seriously, "not without you there."

"Dance with me High Master?"

Igor's eyes narrowed as he took in the profile of the Muggle Studies Professor. What did she want, he thought. Regardless he bowed, and after relinquishing his goblet, offered his arm to her, escorting her to the floor. They danced in silence for long moments, however, it quickly became clear that she was the one leading him. He allowed it, knowing that she had a point to prove. Had for weeks now, he amended. It was the only reason the Dark Lord had had her infiltrate the school and replace a teacher.

"There," she said suddenly, all trace of humour gone from her tone as she discreetly gestured.

Following her gaze, Igor frowned as he took in the profile of his Champion. He looked completely enamoured with the Potter boy, and the thought sickened him. That was no mere act; the witch was right, and he hated her for it. Her arrival had been a slap to the face for him. The Dark Lord, increasingly frustrated by the Light's success in subverting him, had sent in a second servant to ensure that his true plan, his greatest endeavour, would be a success. Igor had initially scoffed when he had been first approached. The plan, as far as he was concerned, was foolproof.

But the Death Eater was unconvinced, and, through careful prying had come to the conclusion that Viktor was, intentionally or otherwise, a potential traitor.

"I told you he cares too much," the woman hissed. "The mission is compromised."

Regretfully, Igor was forced to agree. For all that Viktor was a pawn, he was somewhat fond of him. After all, he had made a good name for the school through his Quidditch, something he was passionate about. And that passion led to him pursuing it at all costs. If he felt the same way for Potter...he truly would not fulfil his mission and lead Potter to his death.

"We cannot abort," he hissed, spinning her. "The Dark Lord's plans..."

"It is still viable," the woman interjected. "Krum's role simply needs curtailing."

"What?"

"It will not be long before he tries to deceive you, wanting to 'protect' the Potter from the plans. We need to work around that; edit the plan enough that he still follows through with it, whether or not he wants to."

"Who are you really?" Igor demanded suddenly, as he had off and on during the last few weeks. The answer, as always, was the same.

"A friend," the woman said, offering him a saccharine smile.

The second dance turned into a third and fourth and fifth.

It would have been a sixth had Harry not grown parched. Immediately noting his discomfort, Viktor steered them off the floor.

"I will bring you a drink," he offered. "You will stay here."
Harry looked around, scanning the crowd for deep blue robes. "I should find Draco," he murmured. "He's bound to be concerned."

Viktor's features immediately darkened. "I have more to tell you," he protested. "I am now up to November!"

"Viktor –"

"There is no next ball for me to steal you for," the Bulgarian grumbled, lowering his voice to keep their conversation private. "Please malko suerste?"

It was the endearment that did it, Harry noted. The affection laced words had always enthralled him, and this time it did the same. Draco would be fine, he comforted himself. He wasn't feeling anything negative from their bond. He would be okay.

"For a little while," he compromised, chuckling when Viktor's face lit up. "But then I have to go back to him."

"Then I must fetch the drinks fast!" Viktor stated, before hurrying off.

Harry shook his head ruefully, looking around the Hall as he waited. In the distance he caught sight of his friends. Hermione looked beautiful, he thought, watching as Ron dipped her. It wasn't entirely graceful, he noted, but judging by Hermione's smiling face, she didn't seem to care. He'd have to talk to them before the evening was over, he noted, if only to pay the witch a compliment.

But where was Draco?

He started looking for him among the bystanders. He half-expected to find him with the Gabriel's arms around him once again. Draco had some explaining to do, he deciding, scanning around again.

"Here is your drink."

Viktor's return interrupted his musing, and, smiling his thanks, he guzzled happily at the cool liquid.

"Thank you Viktor," he said sincerely.

"There is nothing I would do for you," the Bulgarian returned. "However, you look for your mate?"

Harry nodded with chagrin. "I know I promised, but I just want to see him. If he's okay."

The taller wizard shrugged, sipping at his own drink. "He seemed fine to me," he said glibly. "He is dancing."

"With Gabriel?" Harry inquired, trying to identify him.

"The Beauxbatons? No. He was with Hogwarts girl. I have seen her at the Slytherin table."

"Millicent?" Harry pondered.

However that was not the case. He caught sight of the witch seated at a table beside Blaise. Then who...

Harry nearly dropped his glass when his eyes finally settled on Draco. He was dancing with Pansy?

"Why is he with her?" he asked hotly.
"You do not like her Harry?"

"Of course not," Harry snapped before gentling his tone. There was no need to be cross with him after all. "Draco doesn't like her. He knows I do not like her. Why is he with her?"

Viktor shrugged. "Perhaps she asked?"

"That had to be the case," Harry agreed after a moment. "He'd never have gone with her any other way."

The Bulgarian reached across and took the now empty glass from his hand, setting it aside. "It upsets you to see them like this together?" he asked, turning him away.

"Tremendously," Harry agreed, resisting the urge to go over there and do something – anything to stop the witch from smiling at his Draco as she was doing currently. "I can't look at them," he muttered, meeting Viktor's gaze.

He was as comforting as always, Harry thought a moment later when he cupped his cheek gently.

"Do not let this upset you Harry," he requested, pulling him closer. "I do not want you angry when we talk. Shall we go somewhere where you will not worry?"

Harry hesitated for a moment, but the thought of having to watch Draco with her, or even be in the vicinity, was too vexing.

"Fine," he agreed. "We do need to talk. But where shall we go? The place is crowded. We'll never get any privacy there."

An impish grin graced Viktor's face, and despite the situation, Harry found himself returning it with a small one.

"Where do you want to go?"

"Your headmaster made a garden outside," he said persuasively. "It is dark but it is private. Come with me?"

Harry nodded, and slowly, the pair made their way out of the room, not noticing that Gabriel's eyes were on them the entire way.
"I don't understand you Gabriel."

Draco said this while looking up curiously at his dance partner. A soft laugh escaped the French man, and quickly, he spun them around.

"Greater than you have tried and failed little brother," he quipped, pulling him closer once again. "What confuses you about me?"

Draco was silent for several seconds, using the opportunity to feel for Harry. It both irked and relieved him that his mate seemed perfectly contented with his present company. Draco would even go so far as to say that he was happy. While it meant that the Bulgarian was not taking unwanted liberties with his mate, it also meant that Harry was having a wonderful time with him. It had not escaped his notice that Harry had yet to return to him. He was having too good a time with Krum, which left the possibility open that Krum was starting to worm his way back into Harry's life. If that was the case –

"Oh!" Draco gasped, as he was spun almost violently. Startled, he gripped on tightly to his partner, looking at him with startled eyes. He held on for the few moments it took the older veela to return them to a more sedate pace.

"I do not like being ignored," Gabriel chided. "Your mate is fine. Your relationship will be fine. Focus on me. I know for a fact I am most pleasing to the eye," he ended with a roughish wink.

Draco's cheeks darkened, even as he chuckled at his joke. "You are handsome," he seconded, laughing when a wide grin formed on the man's face.

"You remind me of someone," Gabriel said a moment later, easily falling into a fox trot as the music switched. "One I left behind."

"A mate?" Draco asked curiously, wanting to know more about this foreign veela who had so suddenly entered his life.

He shrugged, a musing expression on his face for a moment. "He will be," he said eventually, tossing his head to the side. "He is fifteen, so I have two years to be certain no? Regardless, I am sure it will be him. He annoys me too much for it to be otherwise."

"Annoys?"

"He is most troublesome," Gabriel sighed. "I must always worry over him. He is always in trouble, and, it is my responsibility to deal with him."

"But it's not like you can be certain he is yours yet." Draco pointed out. "Why are you held responsible?"

"There are signs," he shrugged. "However, in my school we have a big brother – little brother system. Older students mentor younger ones and in a way hold responsibility for them. We teach them the rules, especially unwritten ones. We aid in their studies; we help with all difficulties. He became mines, so often, he is sent to me. It is thought that students police each other better. Although
since I have to get him from someone every few days I am not certain how effective it is."

"Harry was like that when we were younger," Draco laughed.

"And you are like that for me now," Gabriel replied slyly. "Every time I see you, some trouble you are having. You are as troublesome as him," he declared, wrinkling his nose down at him. "Good trouble though, for you, as does he, amuses me."

"Glad to be of help," Draco muttered, drawing a laugh from him.

"Do not look woe begotten," he urged. "I do not mind. Now, tell me of you. I have heard only the rumours. How did you get your mate so young?"

When Draco was through, Gabriel whistled appreciatively. "Now that is something to try," he mused before laughing at Draco's incredulous expression. "I joke," he reassured. "I am jealous though. Few know their mates as intimately as you do."

"I am lucky," Draco acknowledged.

They talked lightly on random matters after that and soon enough, Draco lost track of time, and most importantly, his worry for Harry. That was until Gabriel led them off the dance floor, surprising him by lifting and kissing his wrists. "Will you stay here for a few minutes?" he asked softly, smiling at him reassuringly. "There is something I must do."

"Do?" Draco repeated.

What had happened? Gabriel's cheerful mood seemed to have evaporated within a few minutes. Had he said something wrong?

"Do no worry little brother," he told him, petting his head, "I will be back."

After a few seconds, Draco nodded, reassured. "I'll stay here."

"Good boy," he praised, "although I did not mean it literally. Dance if you wish. Just ensure I can find you again okay?"

"Okay," he agreed, watching as he smiled before disappearing into the sea of dancers.

Being apart from him swiftly brought Draco back to reality, and within minutes, he became agitated and started scanning for Harry among the crowd. The only sign of him seemed to be coming from within, and he did not find the happiness radiating from him pleasing in the least. It left a bitter taste in his mouth, and darkly, he wished his mate would just come back to him. He was almost tempted to go find him, but then, Gabriel's missive stilled him. He would stay, and hopefully he would return soon. That would give him the much needed distraction so that he could remain calm until Harry finally decided to grace him with his presence once more.

"All alone Drakey?"

Immediately Draco's thoughts turned from Harry, and, as he plastered a polite smile on his face, he pleaded fervently for Gabriel to hurry back to him. He so did not want to be stuck dancing with Pansy.

"Hello Pansy," he greeted, bowing regally. "You look delightful."

The teenage witch giggled in that annoying manner of hers, causing Draco to reaffirm his wish.
"You look handsome," she simpered, inching closer to him. "And all alone at that," she pouted. "Do you need a partner?"

"I have one," Draco stated, "he's gone off for a bit though."

Pansy tossed her hair lightly. "That's too bad. Maybe I can take his place for a bit then?" she offered.

Briefly Draco contemplated rebuffing her. She was no less annoying now than she had been in their younger years and she certainly knew how he felt about her. Why then did she insist on doing this ever so often? The veela honestly wondered if she still thought herself a better match for him than Harry. If that were the case, he felt nothing but pity for her, although Harry would react angrily. Yes, he mused. Harry absolutely hated her anywhere in his vicinity...which begged the question. How annoyed would he be if he saw them dancing together – especially if they were having a good time?

It was a cruel thought, Draco acknowledged, even as he bowed graciously again before taking her hand and leading her out into the sea of people. Nevertheless, as he gave her a dazzling smile as another waltz began, he decided that it was well worth the cost. Harry would certainly see him, no matter which part of the floor he was with Krum. If not, word would surely reach him. Many students were well aware of their animosity. Seeing them together would surely cause a few tongues to wag. And once that happened, Harry would surely come running, if only to give him a thorough chewing out.

Draco was looking forward to it.

Minutes later, as he was leading the witch in their third dance, he felt a tap on his shoulder. Grinning secretly in victory, he turned, fully expecting to meet furious emerald eyes. Instead, Gabriel's hooded gaze met his. "You will come with me now," he bid, although in reality, he was already tugging him away from the protesting witch.

"What is going on?" he demanded, even as he waved Pansy away with a vague promise of dancing with her again later.

"Krum has taken your Harry outside," he said shortly, guiding them through the crowd to an exit. "What do you feel from him?"

Draco focussed for a moment before drawing in a startled breath. "Something is off," he declared. "How so?" came the swift reply, although there seemed no real surprise in his voice.

"Harry is – clouded. I feel him, but he's not as responsive as usual."

"As if something is muting him?"

"Yes! Do you know what's wrong?" he inquired, struggling to keep pace as the veela led them deeper into the gardens.

How did he know where to go, Draco thought, only to blink a moment later, when they past a Beauxbatons' student who nodded at them before retreating.

"Fleur arranged for our veelas to take turns observing your mate," he explained, navigating them past another who said something in French to them before disappearing as well. "She finds the entire situation distasteful. My cousin Marie saw Krum add a potion to Harry's drink. I fear that is the cause. We are almost there."

Draco's hands clenched at the news. Just what did Krum intend to do to Harry? He could only hope
that they reached in time to stop him.

"Viktor," Harry murmured, half whining as the Bulgarian's hand stroked along his leg. "We're supposed to be talking."

Beside him, the Bulgarian chuckled, lowering his head to nuzzle at the side of Harry's face. Harry's brow furrowed slightly but he did not resist the caress – could not actually.

"But I always touch you when we talk Harry," Viktor pointed out, increasing the firmness of his touch slightly. "It is what we do."

"I know," Harry agreed, meeting his gaze with slightly cloudy eyes. "But this is different."

"It is. A good difference."

Harry shook his head slightly. "I'm not sure about that."

It was funny, Harry thought vaguely, offering more protests as the older wizard continued to touch him. He was feeling strange, almost fuzzy. It had started shortly after they had come out here. It had been fun at first, the crisp air fogging their breaths and rendering his cheeks pink as they walked. Eventually Viktor had grasped his hand, and Harry did not protest, swinging their clasped hands loosely as they explored the enchanted garden. He did not talk much; Viktor's deep voice filled the silence instead.

He had not minded though; it was nice. He had forgotten how melodic Viktor's accent was, and how animated his features became whenever he talked of something he enjoyed. Gradually, his feelings changed, so subtle though that Harry did not realise what was happening until it had fully enveloped him. His energy had steadily decreased, and with it, his ability to focus on what was being said to him. It was not as if he wasn't perceptive; he simply could not react with his usual vigour. Indeed, by the time they had neared this location, he had been half-leaning against his friend, allowing him to shoulder his weight.

Viktor had brought them here then, to a circle of benches at the garden's centre. Gratefully, Harry sunk down into the seat, willingly going along with Viktor's suggestion to divest himself of his robes. A quick warming charm ensured protection against the frigid air. Viktor had not joined him immediately; instead, he had walked around the area slowly until his movements rendered Harry dizzy. At that point, the veela mate had called out to him. With a gracious smile, Viktor returned to his side, and their rather one-sided conversation continued. That however, had somehow led to their current position.

Time had not dulled his reactions to Viktor's touches, Harry was certain of that fact. Nevertheless, this time he felt absolutely no comfort from the hand stroking him. Instead of leaving him feeling warm and loved, the touch seemed almost unnatural, and Harry barely resisted the urge to cringe. There was also a glint in Viktor's eyes that he had never seen before. It was a far cry from the gentle affection he was used to. This was not simply comfort, Harry thought, but he was not sure how to end the contact without offending his friend. Worse was the fact that, by the time the touches had become intolerable, he did not have the strength left to stop him, but could only whimper and plead for him to stop, something that Viktor easily ignored.

"I don't like it," he whispered in distress, reaching out with both hands to still the one on his hand.

He honestly expected an apology from the Bulgarian. Viktor was always careful not to offend him
after all. What he did next though, stunned him. The Bulgarian's free hand descended to grasp the both of his, and with a quick yank, the other was free and used to pin Harry's hand before him.

"Viktor?" Harry gasped, alarmed by the tightness of the grip.

"You are so beautiful Harry," he whispered feverishly, startling Harry by pushing him backwards until he lay fully on the bench, his heavy frame towering over him.

"Stop it," the thirteen year old protested, wiggling forcible against him in an effort to dislodge him. His strength faded easily though – something he now realised was in no way natural. Realising that he was essentially captured, Harry whimpered pitifully, calling for Draco. "You're scaring me Viktor," he protested, his voice cracking as the older wizard's face moved closer to him so that he felt his hot breath wafting over his skin. "I don't like this game."

"But I am not playing," came the heated response. "I did not plan it this way," he explained, drawing a squawk from Harry when he transferred his wrists to one hand, leaving him free to roam his hands across Harry's body with the other. The thirteen year old twisted, trying to avoid it, but it was impossible. He bit back a frightened moan as Viktor's hand rubbed against his hip. This was wrong he protested, on so many levels.

"Viktor," he gasped, trying valiantly to fight him off. He even tried magically levitating him off his frame, but whatever had sapped his strength also seemed to be hampering his efforts to cast. Which meant that he was essentially left at his friend's mercy unless someone interjected. Draco, his mind whimpered, even as he bit off a cry as Viktor's hand shifted. His eyes widened in fright at that.

"No, no!" he yelped. No one was supposed to touch him there! No one! "Stop it!"

"It was not to happen this way Harry," Viktor breathed. It was only now that Harry realised that his breathing had deepened and a flushed look was on his face. Worse than that, Harry was certain that he felt something hard pressing against his leg, and he felt a wave of revulsion as Viktor's hand pressed more firmly against him down there.

"No," he moaned. "Stop it!"

"You will like it," he continued, pressing his lips against Harry's cheek in a kiss that did nothing but disgust his captive. "You love me. You will like it."

"Draco," Harry moaned, a tear trickling from his eye at the entire situation. "Draco!"

A second later, Harry yelped as Viktor's hand closed painfully. "Everything is Malfoy!" he spat, startling him with the depth of his rage. "You belong to me Harry! You are mine!"

Harry opened his mouth to protest, only to find it filled with the Bulgarian's tongue. He gagged as the wet appendage explored his mouth, rubbing against his retreating tongue. Harry felt a tear roll down his cheek at the unbelievable nature of the entire situation. Why wasn't anyone helping him – why couldn't he help himself?

"Pour l'amour de Dieu, lâchez le!"

"Harry!"

The voices were an answer to his prayer, and Harry felt another tear slip loose. Even as Viktor pulled back, spells were fired and Viktor was thrown from on top of him, pulling his hands painfully in the process. Harry cried out at the sudden pain, but struggled to sit up regardless, reaching out into the darkness. Were he able, he would have stood. As is, he could only sob and call out pitifully to his
"Draco!" he called out in a choking voice, "Please, Draco..."

Seconds later his mate was by his side, pulling him up and crushing him against his chest. Harry whimpered as his hands made contact with his mate, but, it mattered not. Harry gripped at him through the pain, babbling almost incoherently through his sobs. What he said did not matter. Draco understood him regardless, and soon enough, had lifted him into his arms, leading him away from the seats and the place where his friend had betrayed him.

The next few days were extremely stressful for Harry and his family, on so many levels and they all reacted to the incident in different ways. For Lucius, his anger for the hurt his son had endured was channelled through his persecution of Viktor. This was definitely one occasion when he was not shy about using the political ties he had in the Ministry.

From the start he knew it would be virtually impossible to have Krum convicted given the international scandal it would cause. More than that, he truly did not want the incident to become public knowledge – well more public. There were some whispers abounding the world from the relatives of students who had seen Draco and Harry return from the garden. However, as long as the Malfoys continued to act normally in the public eye, Lucius was certain nothing definite would arise from the issue.

For Narcissa, there was both guilt and outrage. Her husband and family had been right. She had locked herself away for a while the night of the Ball, wondering if this could have been avoided had she not argued for Harry. If he had not been allowed any further contact with Krum, could this have been prevented? Days later the witch remained uncertain of the answer, and, with the boy refusing all contact, she could not speak to him. Indeed, her only solace were found in the quiet moments of the night, when, with Lucius by her side (the forgiving soul he was), they stood watch over their slumbering sons, wondering just how much more they were expected to endure while simultaneously dealing with the fact that, no matter how much they tried, they would never be able to protect them from all harm.

For Draco, his time was spent solely in Harry's vicinity. He had joined him here in his bedroom during his self-imposed exile. It was strange. Immediately following the attack, Harry had clung to him, making his movements awkward as he would not lose contact with him. Explaining what had happened, getting him home, changed and into bed, all of this had been problematic with the brunette refusing to release him. Draco himself had been forced to remain in his crumpled dress robes until he was certain Harry had sunk into a deep sleep.

Yet, the next day, when he had reached out to touch him, his emerald-eyed mate had shied away from him. Draco had not despaired; he had absolutely no experience in the area, and yet, he was almost completely certain that this was normal. After all, Harry had trusted Krum and look what the outcome to that had been. Who was to say Draco would not hurt him similarly. Far from disheartened, the veela had sighed and settled himself in the corner of the room, willing to ride out the storm until Harry reaffirmed in his own mind that his mate – and by extension their family – would not betray him as Krum had done.

On the second day, Draco wondered if Harry did not want him there. After all, he still had not acknowledged him. Truthfully, he had not left the window seat, and, after he had fell asleep in it, Draco had snuck from the room long enough to get someone to enlarge him to cradle his form adequately. It was the only time he could leave the room – Harry simply would not allow him to. Once awake, the brunette used his magic to ensure it remained locked. The first time the veela had
tried to leave, a mild sting assaulted his hand – the essence of magic Harry's. The thirteen year old had not even looked at him, but Draco knew it was entirely his doing.

He was to stay here. Harry needed him to anchor him while he worked himself out. The veela had not tried to leave since.

Now today, on the third day, the veela could not help but think that he should have been more aggressive with his mate in the initial stages. On Remus' suggestion, Lucius had summoned a mind healer, however Harry had not allowed the woman past the doorway, creating a barrier around himself, the likes of which had not appeared since his problems with Voldemort the year before. She had been summarily dismissed, and only when Draco had re-affirmed continuously that she was no longer at the manor did Harry drop it. Most disconcerting was that, not once, did his mate look away from the window.

Looking at him now from his position on the bed, Draco could not help but wonder exactly what was going through his mate's mind, and how he could get him to talk to him. He knew this could not last much longer – it just was not healthy for any of them. Harry was almost a shadow of his former self – everything was done automatically. It was as if Krum had destroyed a part of Harry that night, and Draco was not entirely sure that he could pick up the pieces.

Despondently, Draco rolled over, placing his arm across his forehead as he gazed aimlessly at the ceiling. What could he do for his mate?

"Draco?"

It took the veela a moment to realise that his name had actually been spoken and had not simply been a manifestation of his mind.

"Dominant?" came the call again, and this time, the veela shot upwards, his head turning to Harry.

The thirteen year old's voice was hoarse – disuse would do that Draco supposed. However, that was not important now. All that mattered was that his mate had talked – had finally said something.

"Yes?" he asked cautiously, resisting the urge to cross the room to him. Baby-steps he reminded himself. It was best to let Harry take control in this situation. Slowly he moved until he was seated on the edge of the bed, not too close, but not too far either. "Mate?"

"Why don't you say it?" the brunette asked, his gaze still firmly outside. "I won't argue – I promise."

The veela blinked at the unexpected statement, trying to rationalise what Harry could possibly mean. After several seconds of thought, he gave up. "I don't understand what you're asking me Harry," he said honestly.

When almost a minute passed, the veela despaired that he had said the wrong thing. Perhaps he should have guessed an answer, if only to keep the conversation flowing?

"Harr-"

"I mean Viktor," Harry interjected. There was emotion in that statement, the veela discerned, although truthfully, he was not certain what it was precisely. Maybe it was even a combination of something, a reflection of his mate's emotional state. "Why don't you say 'I told you so'?"

The veela's heart clenched at his mate's words. Did Harry really believe him so shallow to find pleasure in the situation? Yes he would readily admit that he had foreseen something bad happening – certainly not this, but something regardless – but now that it had passed, did Harry really expect
censure from him?

"I would never say that Harry," he said seriously, willing the boy to look at him, if only for a second. "Never have I wished to be more wrong. If I could change this I would."

"But you can't," Harry finished on a dry chuckle. "No one can."

The boy took a shuddering breath, one that the veela heard from his position before pulling his legs up and wrapping his arms around them. Draco stared at the space left by his movement. It was the perfect fit for him, however, did Harry want him near? The fifteen year old did not know what was expected of him in this situation. His prayers had been answered – Harry had spoken. But where did things go from there? Should he stay here and wait for his mate to speak again, or should he take Harry's words as an invitation to enter the turmoil he had undoubtedly been living him and help him gain control of it?

"I should have listened to you," his mate said presently, and, as Draco watched, a single tear coursed down his cheek.

That decided it for the veela. Harry needed comfort and was in no shape to ask for it. It was up to him to offer it to him – it would be a lapse in his duty to do otherwise. Slowly he crossed the room, all of his actions slightly exaggerated so that Harry, should he choose to look, could actually gauge all of his actions, and hopefully not be afraid of him. Gingerly he sat on the window seat, and after briefly considering it, decided against mimicking Harry's position. Instead, he sat with his back to the window, and gently reached out to put a hand on Harry's knee.

His mood dampened slightly at Harry's flinch, but when no protest came, he patted it softly.

"Do not blame yourself cub," he whispered, looking at the averted head. "You are the victim here, not the culprit. I don't blame you, no one does and no one will."

The younger wizard's breath hitched and his arms tightened further around himself. "It's my fault," he said shakily. "I must have done something. Viktor wouldn't – he wouldn't..."

The teenager's voice broke off, and looking at him, Draco saw the quiver of his lip. He wanted to cry, that was plainly obvious. So why wouldn't he? He was certain that his mate would be better off for it. Draco knew he should respond, but truthfully, he did not know what to say. He did not think that Harry was defending Krum, but for some reason, his mate seemed to think that he was responsible for what happened to him.

"I should have said no," Harry continued. "I shouldn't have left the Ball. I should have come back to you when I promised to!"

The veela could bear it no more. Why was his mate punishing himself like this? It was no one's fault but Krum. Harry had not asked for his trust to be abused. Gently, the veela used his free hand to grasp Harry's chin, guiding his face toward his. He felt his eyes burn at the turmoil he read from Harry's arms.

"Oh cub," he whispered before moving to pull Harry against him.

He ended up with Harry curled in a foetal position with his head pressed in his lap. The boy was tense at first, but Draco persisted, running a soothing hand along his back, offering him comfort in the way – the only one he hoped might work. Gradually the stiffness left Harry's frame, but the veela did not still his actions.

"I'm sorry Harry," the veela whispered, his eyes burning as he looked down at him. "This is all I can
do for you."

A shuddering breath was the only response, but at least, Draco thought, they had made progress. His mate was allowing him to touch him – it was a start.

Eventually the veela realised that Harry was speaking. His voice was so low though, that he was forced to bend forward awkwardly to realise what he was saying.

"What do you understand?" he inquired, straightening.

There was not an immediate response. Harry shrugged and wiggled until Draco raised his hand and he could sit up. He remained close to his side, so that their faces were mere inches apart.

"I understand why you were so angry," he responded, his eyes downcast.

Once again the veela was confused. However, more than that, he got the impression that Harry had changed the topic. They were no longer talking about the attempted rape, but Draco was fine with that. He would cater to Harry and get him comfortable enough that he would allow the adults back into his life. Draco might be his mate, however in this situation; he was completely out of his depths.

"I mean when I was with V-Viktor," he continued, his voice cracking over the name. "I was so angry when I saw you with him."

The veela felt as if he were grasping at straws trying to make sense out of what his mate was stating. It took him almost a minute to make the connection. Harry was speaking about the Ball.

"Do you mean Gabriel?" he asked, bending to try to see Harry's eyes. When that failed, he chucked his chin, urging him to meet his eyes. "I like seeing those emeralds," he said softly, winking roguishly.

As he hoped, it evoked the barest hint of a smile from Harry, but for now, it was enough.

"Was that his name?" his mate asked rhetorically. "I didn't know."

"There was not much time for an introduction," Draco admitted ruefully. "But, what do you understand?"

"Why you were so angry," Harry said. "I-"

When the teenager gave no sign of continuing, Draco reached out again, stroking his check softly. "Talk to me Harry," he urged, his voice coaxing. "What's going on in that head of yours? Tell me?"

Harry looked at him for a long moment before nodding slightly. "When I saw you with him, and he touched you, I felt strange. I felt jealous."

"Jealous," Draco repeated, his brows furrowing. Just what was Harry trying to tell him?

"I wanted to hurt him," the brunette admitted. "I wanted to rip you both apart. He had no right to touch you like that I thought. I wanted to make him realise that you were mine."

"He's just a friend Harry," the veela insisted, butting his head gently with his own. "You know that."

The younger of the two emitted that dry laugh again. "That's what I said," he pointed out, lowering his head slightly.

"None of that," Draco scolded lightly, making him lift his gaze once again.
It was obvious that Harry couldn't meet his gaze though; whatever it was he had to say was unnerving him. Realising that continuing to protest against it was useless, Draco instead closed the small distance between them, startling Harry by pulling his head below his chin. His mate quickly caught on, and buried his head in the crook of his neck.

Now, without Draco's piercing eyes on him, the teenager found himself better able to speak.

"I know you weren't," came his muffled voice, "but I thought you were doing it to spite me. I mean, you have to admit it was similar to what I did to you. I thought you were trying to punish me."

"I wasn't," the veela breathed, running a soothing hand along his back. "I've already forgiven you for that cub. I won't bring it up again. Gabriel truly is only my friend – an older brother even. He was only trying to help. Trust me Harry."

"I do," he responded, "I wasn't thinking clearly then."

"Because you were jealous," Draco said, repeating Harry's earlier words.

He didn't mean too, he honestly did not given the seriousness of the situation, but a short laugh tore from his throat. Harry stiffened slightly; however, as his words repeated in his mind, the veela laughed again, a soft incredulous and somewhat happy laugh. This time Harry pulled back, looking at him perplexed.

"What is funny?" he inquired.

Here he was making a heartfelt revelation to his mate, and the veela found it funny? Nevertheless, Harry could not muster the energy to be either angry or offended. Instead, he waited patiently for an explanation, knowing that the veela would eventually provide one.

"I'm not making fun of you," the veela promised, stroking along the bridge of his nose with a finger. "Believe that."

"Then what's funny?"

Draco struggled to maintain a composed appearance, but a guffaw still escaped him. Chuckling, he raised a hand to his face, looking at Harry through it. It was a poor attempt at hiding the smile threatening to break lose. "You were jealous," he said after a long moment, joy evident in his tone.

"Yes," Harry confirmed. "But you haven't answered me."

"That's your answer," Draco said, causing Harry to tilt his head.

What exactly was his mate getting at? "Draco-"

Harry stopped when the blonde pressed a finger against his lips. "You know why I forgave you Harry? Why I will always forgive you? It is because I love you Harry James. I love you and I will never leave you. That's why I'm so happy now – that you were jealous."

The thirteen year old huffed lightly. While the declaration warmed his heart, he still did not understand the connection. "I thought you were in love with me," he grumbled, pouting slightly. He hated not understanding something.

"I am," Draco confirmed, his voice lowering to a husk. "I love you and I am in love with you as well." He paused briefly as a wave of emotion ran through him at what he had realised from Harry's words. "I'm very happy cub, because I think you're falling in love with me too. That pleases me very
Harry blinked at that, but smiled softly when Draco kissed his forehead. "I still don't understand the difference. How does being jealous make me 'in love'?"

"I told you once that you'll figure it out on your own. I won't help you in this cub; it'll come to you naturally."

"Can't I have a hint?"
Draco nodded. "Tell me again what you felt when I was with Gabriel?"
"I was jealous," Harry repeated. "I was mad...I wanted to rip you apart..."
"And then do what?" the veela pressed.
"I'm not sure," Harry admitted. "I just wanted him and you to know that you were mine. You belonged to me; no one else could have you."

"You're falling in love," Draco said happily, kissing him again. "Thank Merlin."

"Draco..."

"I'm being unkind to you aren't I," the veela said apologetically. "You must think I'm teasing you, but I'm not. I am happy, so very happy cub. You could never understand how much – how good this makes me feel. But you don't have to understand – not yet. I'll wait until you are ready, I'm just glad that you're starting to make the change."

The brunette looked at him before shaking his head. If the veela said he did not need to understand, then he did not, and would not worry about it. Although, he acknowledged, as he shifted them back to their previous position, the odd conversation had been a nice distraction from the thoughts that had been assaulting him earlier. Draco's presence like this was proving to be a welcomed distraction. He wondered how much better he would feel with everyone else around him.

He was mildly afraid, he would willingly admit to that, however he had been around these people for years, and he knew he was safe with them.

"Dominant?"

"What is it cub?"

"Maybe we could have dinner with mama and papa tonight?"

"We could have lunch with them. It's still morning."

Harry shook his head slightly. "I'm not ready yet. I want to stay like this for a while."

"I understand," he said, patting him. "I'll have Trix tell them okay?"

"Thank you," Harry whispered before closing his eyes, while above him Draco prayed that with time, everything would be all right.

* *

Viktor screamed out in pain, causing the elf tending his back to ramble out an apology before dabbing more of the healing potion onto his back. The Bulgarian bit into his pillow to stifle the
remaining of his cries until the elf finally finished and left him. Gradually the pain faded to a more bearable level. Karkaroff had been certain to let his displeasure known. He hadn't even thought him worthy of a proper punishment. Instead he had him whipped like a blasted muggle.

It was the High Master's way of ensuring that he knew he had screwed up and done irreparable damage. Only his quick wits had ensured that he hadn't landed a stint in Azkaban. Nearly raping Britain's sweetheart was not a crime taken lightly. Viktor sighed as he turned his head, looking at his school dormitory. He had not meant for it to go so far. All he had wanted was to make Harry more malleable, more open to suggestion so that he could worm his way back into a relationship with him.

However, between the atmosphere, and Harry's undeniable charm, things had gone too far. He did not regret it all. Kissing Harry had been the best experience of his life. However he had lost control, and with that, had certainly alienated Harry completely from him. Now that he was not affected by passion, he could hear the boy's whimpers and pleas and cursed himself for it. He had scared him, there was no reprieve from that. More than that, there was absolutely no chance of reconciliation. He had been banned from Hogwarts, and would only return on the days of the tasks and depart immediately after. Not to mention he was not to get anywhere near Harry, not that he was sure to get the opportunity to do so. Which meant his plans were ruined. Harry was meant to be his treasure in the second task, and he would find a way to smuggle a portkey onto himself. When the task ended, he and his love would be far away from England, where they would remain happily ever after.

That certainly was not happening now. Viktor realised that he should be grateful. His plea of having been under the Imperious Curse had gotten him off, and he was mostly free. No one truly believed it, however, in the First War in England, a precedence had been set. Those who claimed to be under the curse were often released with a mere slap on the wrist. Although it had pained the Brits to do so, he had had to be released and banished back to Durmstrang.

Well it did not matter, he decided, as he willed himself to sleep and ignore the pain. Tomorrow was another day, and he could always come up with a new plan that would secure him Harry. He would have to work doubly hard to regain his trust once again, but that was not his immediate concern. He would make Harry love him again – but first he would have to get him away from Britain. Well, he thought as he succumbed to sleep, he always enjoyed a challenge.

Chapter End Notes

Gabriel states: "For the love of God, release him!"
Chapter 67

Being dead had both its benefits and drawbacks. On the positive side, there was no need for food or rest, which ensured that one could work indefinitely. More than that, one could access places easily and often, without detection. Yes, those were but a few of the benefits associated with being dead. Nevertheless, as with all things, there were drawbacks. The most significant though, was the fact that time became relative for the deceased. There was no real difference between a minute and an hour, a day and a year. This proved particularly true for Lily and James Potter.

Neither truly remembered how much time had passed since their last visit to Malfoy Manor. Their last visit had been to inquire about multiple souls, only to be informed that those different essences of Voldemort indicated that he had created horcruxes, and many of them. With it, the man had gained immortality. After that they had left to scout throughout Britain for any horcruxes the Order might have missed. Eventually they had found one that their comrades would certainly never gain access to – Nagini. Once they had determined that she truly was a receptacle for his soul, they had stationed themselves at his headquarters, tracking the snake and devising a way to kill it.

There was a secondary task they could have, but failed to undertake. With their presence, there was copious information that they could have carried to the Order. However, they had never bothered to do so. On the one hand, they did not want to incur the wrath of Destiny by meddling too deeply into the affairs of mortals. More importantly though was the fact that Percy Weasley had finally (and tragically) discovered how to rise through the ranks of the man's army and gain a coveted place within his Inner Circle. Lily had winced in sympathy as he had cruelly tortured a muggle family in a tribute to his 'master'. His macabre creativeness had impressed the Dark Lord, and, once Nagini had consumed their remnants, Percy had been elevated straight to the Inner Circle.

Unknown to the redhead, Lily had followed him back to his quarters (another privilege afforded to him) and watched, with deepest regret and sympathy as the wizard proceeded to wretch horribly before descending into almost hysterical weeping. Afterwards, he regained his composure, and, to his credit, Lily could not recall another moment of weakness from him. Nevertheless, the dullness in his eyes was disturbing, as well as his new habit of muttering to himself whenever alone. It was her own personal opinion that the wizard was slowly losing his grasp on reality, but there was nothing that she could do to change that dismal fact.

Except for the brief moments she spent contemplating on Weasley and his fate, all of the witch's attention focussed on what could be done about the snake. She was the thinker in her relationship with James; all plans were organised based on her judgements. Regardless, she was hard-pressed to find a way to kill Nagini. To start with, both she and her husband could not fathom why Voldemort would keep a mortal object as a horcrux. Eventually the creature would die on its own (although they planned to make that even occur a lot sooner than expected). More than that was the fact that the snake was mobile and somewhat independent. Her movements were never tracked and so the serpent often came to and left the quarters as she pleased. There was nothing particular to her routine either and Voldemort never truly seemed to plan for her presence. If she happened to be there for a torture session, she was fed; there was never a time when he kept prisoners in waiting for her return.

They planned to take advantage of that factor in order to rid the world of her. Killing her on one such expedition was their best venture. They were certain that he was still unaware about the destroying of his other horcruxes, and such, would not be particularly bothered if she did not return on schedule. Nevertheless, they wished to keep the information hidden from him as long as possible. It would not
do for him to decide on replacing her. They were not certain if he could indeed create a next horcrux, after all, there had to be a limit to how much damage one's soul could take. It was not a thing they wanted to risk though, and thus a quick, silent kill seemed to be the best thing.

The Death Eaters were readily available experiments for them and, one by one, they used them to judge exactly how much power they had at their disposal. For some reason, they were invisible to them, and it was something they readily exploited. What they attempted was in no way revolutionary. They successfully tried entering the Death Eaters. After that, they experimented with how long they could remain within them. That turned out to be indefinitely. Only one ever realised that all was not right within him, and, after abandoning him, Lily had rightly guessed that he was talented at Occlumency and had noticed her rifling though his mind.

James though had been the one to decide to do more than occupy the body. Frankly, he had grown tired of their little game, and thus had attempted to gain full control of the body he was in. It was only slightly more advanced to the little tricks they played through Harry, but to their glee, it proved to be a success. Not only could they control movement, they could also use magic through their host. That had formulated their original plan, one though, that they eventually forfeited.

At first, they had decided to possess a hapless Death Eater and use it to kill the snake for them. Nevertheless, killing her on sight would create a host of problems for them, the least of which was the Death Eater being caught in the act. And so, they had gone with plan B. The only thing left for them to do was wait until they had the opportunity to carry it out.

Eventually the time came. Nagini was on a hunt, but more importantly, Voldemort had gone on a raid. Even if he sensed a disturbance from his pet, there was little he could do to return in time to save her. And so, minutes after he had left, they did the same, scouting out the snake. Possessing her though, had proved most difficult to accomplish. They had practiced on other animals; however, one with an extra soul was not the same thing. Voldemort's soul had rendered her more intelligent than the average serpent, and much like the man, Nagini had immediately recognised something within her and had reacted. That first time had been particularly frightening for them as they had done it in the throne room. Nearby, Voldemort had come quickly at her panicked hisses, although nothing had come of it. He had been more cautious with her for a day or two, but after that, everything returned to normal.

They had no fear of Voldemort any longer. Returning to a mortal body had severed any connection he had to the spirit realm and so they could easily remain near him. In truth, when bored, James had taken to dancing before the man, much to Lily's consternation. But now, all the trial practices were behind them. The moment was at hand, and they had to accomplish their mission.

Finding her was relatively simple. There was no other creature in the small forest that emanated the same darkness as her. For all of their practice, the actual act had taken only seconds. Combining their powers, they had both surged into her body, turning her against herself. Withdrawing, they had watched with stark pleasure as she injected herself with a copious amount of poison. Watching her painful that had been morbidly fascinating, but, it was a relief to them both, when his horcrux breathed its last breath.

"What now?" James inquired.

The pair had disappeared from the forest in which they had killed the snake. Stumbling upon a large pond, they had laid claim to it. Now they sat at its edge, enjoying the unique beauty of nature. The sun was slowly but surely rising, and with it, the forest was waking up.
"I don't know," Lily said honestly. "We should tell them that Nagini's taken care off. After that, I really don't know. This was the last thing I remember from what Destiny showed us."

James hummed in agreement, before throwing himself backwards and folding his hands beneath his head. "I wonder how much more timelines we've eliminated," he mused.

Lily mimicked his position. "Well Severus certainly isn't going to die because of Nagini now," she declared. "So that one is definitely out."

"What was the outcome of that line?"

"Our side won," she reminded him. "We lost so much though," she added sadly. "So many died."

"Then we've done well."

"I guess," she allowed.

James caught the hesitancy in her tone, and frowning slightly, rolled to his side so that he could look at her. "What's wrong Lils?" he urged. "Come on, talk to me."

His wife sighed, but after he repeated the request, she spoke. "Are we doing the right thing, meddling like this?"

"Of course we are," James said immediately. "Why would you ask such a thing?"

"We're changing the future," she pointed out.

"For the better."

"Truly?"

"What's this about Lily?" he asked seriously, not catching her point. They both knew that the future would change with each of their actions.

"I mean that we're deliberately changing it," she responded, closing her eyes. "But I wonder if there's a consequence. I mean, what if we're just exchanging one fate for another."

"You know how this works," he protested. "Destiny takes many paths, and with every action, the future changes. Nothing is entirely certain until it comes to pass."

"Yes, but what if with every timeline we help eliminate, another one crops up with an even worst fate. I mean, Merlin forbid it, but what if Sev's death meant something? Maybe he had to die. The same way that we had to for Harry to get the power he needed. Do you understand?"

"I do," he allowed, "but I don't agree with you. If we were doing something wrong, truly wrong, don't you think Destiny would have called us back already? We've seen it happen. People who try to interfere too much with their family affairs are pulled back."

And he was right. They had witnessed arguments between people and Destiny – one-sided though it had been. Destiny never banned anyone from returning though. Once the incident they had tried to meddle in had passed, they were free to return to the mortal realm. The only time the link between the worlds would truly be severed for the individual was when they had no ties left. Although, ties was a relative term. Hell, James thought, even Merlin himself still traipsed to the mortal plane on occasion to overlook his descendants.

"I guess you're right," she agreed, looking at him. "We're still here after all. Although, should we go
"Here or there?"

"There," she decided. "We may find out more information. Actually, I want to go back. I do not like not knowing what is to come, even if it's undecided. It's so...so..."

"Mortal?" he offered with a grin.

Lily laughed at it, but truly, the sentiment was true. "We'll head back to the Manor first," she decided. "Let's see what they've been up to, and then, we'll go back."

"Okay," he agreed, before resuming his former position. "But in a little bit okay. Let's stay here for a while."

"Alright," she agreed, snuggling closer to him as they watched dawn break.

* * *

"Darling," Lucius called, "Will you come here please?"

"One moment Lucius," Narcissa replied from her dressing room.

The Malfoy Patriarch seated himself in an armchair, content to wait for his wife to come to him. He had been putting off this conversation for some time, waiting to see if the veela would snap out of her behaviour on her own, or alternately talk to him about it. However, almost a week had passed now, and it was obvious to him that things were only getting worse.

Narcissa had changed since the incident with Krum. He had not noticed at first truthfully. Dealing with the legalities of the situation had left him little time to deal with his wife. However, that was now behind him, and free to focus on his family once again, he had been disturbed by the change in her. Narcissa seemed to have lost herself since the near rape. It had started with small things at first. She always took responsibility for choosing his clothing, however, by the second day, she had started taking out multiple outfits and asking him to select which he preferred. After that, she stopped planning the menus, stating that the elves could choose them. Small things true, but it increased exponentially from them until today, when she had refused to attend the Order meeting citing that she had "nothing to contribute".

That had bothered him tremendously, especially when he had returned to find her arranging flowers. That was more important than the meeting? One look at her though, showed that there was a deeper underlying issue. He was determined to resolve it before the night was over.

After a moment, the witch emerged from the room, tugging at her dressing robe.

"Come here dearest," he bid again, patting his knee.

He waited for her to sit in his lap before gently looping his arms around her middle. "We need to talk," he said simply.

She stiffened for a moment before replying. "About what Lucius?"

"Let's start with this," he stated.

Freeing a hand, he gently tilted her head upwards until she was looking at him squarely.

"Much better," he praised. "The Malfoy Matriarch must always hold her head up high."
"I'm sorry," she apologised immediately.

"That is the second thing," he declared. "Why are you acting this way?"

"I'm sorry Lucius, but I don't understand."

"Why are you constantly apologising?" he inquired. "And why are you acting so submissively?"

Once again, the witch tensed. After a moment, she squirmed, indicating that she wanted to be released. Instead, Lucius tightened his hold on her. "You will not get off me until this discussion is over mate," he informed her. "I want no more of this. What is going on with you? Why are you acting this way?"

The veela struggled for a moment longer, however, with a sigh she subsided. "I do not want to talk about it," she grumbled.

Far from being disappointed, a small smile tugged at Lucius' lips. That was the most emotion he had seen from her in recent days.

"And I say that we will," he declared, earning himself a small glare from her at his lofty tone.

That was more like it, he decided. This was his Narcissa. Unlike their sons, their relationship was equal. Neither deferred to the other more than the average couple would, and neither was overprotective, as dominants seemed to be. That was exactly why they needed this conversation. Narcissa was acting like a submissive, a heavily restricted one at that. It was not something that he wanted from his wife, and he would not allow her to assume that role in their relationship.

"Please Narcissa," he continued. "I don't like seeing you this way. Won't you talk to me?"

"What way?" she asked.

"This way," he repeated. "Why are you acting like this? I want my spitfire back."

The witch signed again. "I don't want to be in control," she said eventually, looking away from him. This time though, he allowed it, as she seemed truly unable to speak while looking at him. "I don't want to make any more decisions. No good comes of them."

She fell silent after that revelation, giving her husband the time to mull over her words. Exactly what was she referring to, he wondered, quickly scanning through his mind. "Do you mean Harry?" he asked eventually. "Is this about you agreeing with him?"

"Yes," she confirmed sadly. "I should have said no. I should have let you bring him home."

So that was what was wrong, he mused, pulling her closer to him, and tucking her head beneath her chin. His wife was plagued with guilt, and although some might find it ludicrous, he understood where she was coming from. They were usually united on all matters – rarely did they disagree on matters and truly, Narcissa's overwhelming support of Harry and Krum had been the last time they had not seen eye to eye. Regardless, it was only now that she had brought it up that he recalled the incident in question. Truthfully, he had all but forgotten her agreement on the matter, as it had not been brought up since.

But from the woman's perspective...

This was the most important matter that they had disagreed upon. She had asserted herself, and had been victorious, forcing them to see matters in her and Harry’s way. And the ultimate consequence of
that? Her son had nearly been raped. True things were looking up. After all, Harry no longer holed himself up in his bedroom, and had tentatively agreed with Remus' suggestion that the mind healer be called for again as he was in a more conducive frame of mind. Nevertheless, they all knew that some underlying issues would remain and eventually surface, and when it did, his wife would hold herself solely responsible for it.

However, he would not allow her to do so. It was not her fault. It was not Harry's fault. He had spent copious hours the previous day drilling into Harry's head that he had done nothing. He had never expected to find himself doing something similar with his wife. It was entirely necessarily though. Narcissa could not allow this guilt to weigh her down as it was doing. More than the fact that it was detrimental to her own health was the fact that they needed her.

Despite her proclamation, Narcissa was an intrinsic and crucial part of their team. They would need every possible resource available to them when the time came to fight, and as Percy Weasley had informed them, Voldemort was (as he and Severus had originally surmised) planning something huge. They still had little information as to what the mad man was trying to achieve, nevertheless, they all had to be on their guard at all times, ready to fight at a moment's notice. Currently, if the battle was to erupt, Lucius was certain that his wife would have to be left behind. And, no matter how much he hated to admit it, in this war, she needed to be on the battle field.

"You are not at fault darling," he murmured, moving so that his mouth lay near the shell of her ear. "This is not your fault. You have not your fault. You have not failed Harry; you have not failed me. You did what you believed to be right. You supported your son in something he truly wanted. No one blames you for that. Harry is your son and it is only understandable that you placed his happiness above all else. I do not fault you for that. You did nothing wrong, and I need you to understand that. Harry certainly does not blame you, so why do you blame yourself. Krum is at fault dearest, not you. You stood by your son; you tried to do your best for him. What happened is unfortunate but there is nothing that you could have done to prevent this.

On him, the witch shook her head, negating his statements. Lucius stifled a regretful sigh. And the witch thought Harry was stubborn, he mused idly. Pulling back slightly, he lifted her face to meet his face again.

"What should I do to convince you hmm?" he inquired, looking into her eyes.

"Lucius...I feel guilty."

"I realise," he told her, "and I'm sorry that I took so long to notice. We could have nipped this in the bud earlier if that was the case."

"You don't have to apologise for anything," she mumbled. "I'm the one to bl-"

The witch broke off at the dark glare her husband shot her way. "Lucius?"

"None of that my girl," he ordered. "We've already established that you're not to blame. And we'll sit right here until you believe the same."

"You can't make me believe anything," she retorted with some heat.

"Much better," he praised, kissing her forehead. "There's my girl. Now that your temper's back, can we find the rest of you?"

"You really aren't angry at me?" she asked minutes later. "You really don't blame me?"

"I never have," he confirmed, kissing the top of her head. Now they were going somewhere.
"No one blames me?"

"No one blames you," he confirmed.

"Oh."

Despite himself, Lucius stifled a smile at the simple reply. Narcissa seemed quite younger than her years currently, and he correctly attributed it to the vulnerability she had just expressed. She was a strong individual, and he loved her for it. Nevertheless, as with all persons, she had her limitations, and, at times like this when she broke down, he felt a surge of protectiveness rise within him, as he went about assisting her in picking up the pieces. This time though...

"Darling, would you do something for me?" he asked softly.

"What is it?"

"Would you be willing to speak to the mind healer when she comes? I mean no offence by it darling but..."

"It's okay," she interjected softly. "I think that I should speak to her too."

"Thank you," he whispered sincerely. "Shall we head to bed now?"

"I want to stay like this for a while," she protested, snuggling closer to him. "Hold me?"

"As long as you wish," he promised, and proceeded to hold her late into the night.

While Lucius sat holding his wife, in another part of the manor, Albus struggled to summon the courage necessary for what he knew he had to do. As it was a family only meeting, they had gathered here. Given the lateness of the hour, Albus had agreed to remain for the night, claiming his usual rooms. Originally, he had not planned to do this, however, after James' brief return, he knew that it had to be done. The thought had first occurred to him weeks ago, after, with Remus' assistance, he had destroyed the horcruxes in their possession. With each one's destruction, a faint essence rose from the item – Voldemort's soul – before disappearing. There was something vaguely familiar with it; however, it was not until the next time he had interacted with Harry, that he recognised it. It was the same slightly malevolent air as the Dark Lord's soul. The essence emanated from the boy's scar, and not for the first time, Albus regretted never having given the scar the attention it had disturbed throughout the year. Until James' words, it had never occurred to him that Voldemort would create a living horcrux. Resultantly, all of his hidden insecurities had resurfaced, and his thoughts had immediately reverted to Harry. Safe in the knowledge that horcruxes were all objects, he had allowed his fears regarding the scar to fade, certain that whatever link there was had a next origin. Now, hearing of Nagini, he was not certain if that was the case. For if a serpent could be made into a vessel, was it too farfetched to believe that a human could not serve as one as well?

Taking a steadying breath, the headmaster strode to the Harry's room, hesitating only slightly before entering. He took a moment to adjust to the darkness before retrieving his wand. Harry definitely should not be awake for this. After ensuring that the boy was deeply asleep, and would remain so until he lifted the charm, he illuminated the room. Albus hesitated briefly as he saw Draco there as well before ruefully shaking his head. Of course, he thought with mild fondness, where else would the veela be? Nevertheless, he was certain that he too was covered under the spell.
Crossing the room, Albus looked down upon Harry, his eyes twinkling sadly as he took in his features. His boy was little more than a pawn in fate's game; however, he could only hope that he had not been dealt an unfair hand. Reaching down, he gently brushed the hair off his forehead, revealing the object of his attention. Tracing it with a finger, the man could not help but dwell on his interactions with the particular affliction. The first time he had seen it, it was a bloody mess, raw and vivid as Harry screamed himself hoarse in the remnants of his nursery. Fast-forwarding through the years, he recalled its reddened and pained state in his first year; it had actually bled during the fight with Voldemort and he was certain that it was somehow connected to his painful problems months before. However, what exactly was the connection. He both hoped and dreaded the answer to that question, wondering if he would find it now.

The more he thought about it, the more he knew that it made sense. A horcrux had a connection to its owner. Harry certainly was connected to Voldemort. Time and time again that fact had been proven. A horcrux ensured that Voldemort was immortal, and so, to defeat him, he would have to be rendered mortal. Which meant that if Harry truly bore a piece of the man's soul within him, he would have to die. Albus already knew that it would come down to either Harry or Voldemort, but never had he ever expected it to be this way.

Despite the Order's best efforts, Albus had always believed that Harry would be crucial to the outcome. Perhaps, it would have to be him who dealt the man the final crushing blow. But what if he had been wrong? What if Harry was not the tool, but instead, a means to an end? What if that Harry's only real part in this entire affair was to die, and with his death, take away Voldemort's immortality?

And, if it truly was the case, just how would Harry meet his end? Would his death come naturally, or would it have to be assisted? Moreover, since Albus knew that if Harry proved to be a horcrux, he would not be able to tell anyone, he knew it would come down to him to do it. No one would sanction Harry's death if they knew the truth, and truthfully, a part of him died at the mere thought of it. He loved the boy he was looking down at, but, if it came to it, he would willingly sacrifice him for the greater good. He could see the greater picture, but he was not certain anyone else would. Any other person would refuse to do it or search for an alternate way. There was not time for either option. If Harry was a horcrux, he would have to act swiftly.

But, he reminded himself, perhaps he should find out the truth first before he dwelt on such macabre thoughts.

Swallowing nervously, he pressed the tip of his wand against the lighting bolt scar. Taking a moment to recall the right incantation, he started chanting, increasing the pressure slightly as he waited for the reaction. If the scar – if Harry – was indeed a horcrux, it would soon change colour, darkening to near-blackness, the colour of Voldemort's soul. If it was not, then no change would happen and he would be back to square one. He could not decide which outcome he truly wanted.

He almost breathed in relief when, after a minute, there was no visible change from the scar. He jumped slightly when Draco abruptly jerked, however, the teenager settled down easily enough although his brows furrowed slightly. Was he aware that someone was touching his mate? Regardless, the spell would keep him asleep. Returning his focus to Harry, Albus lifted the wand only to stop abruptly. In the time taken for him to observe Draco, a change had occurred with the scar. It was very different from the dreaded black, but neither was it its normal shade of pink. At the moment, the scar was scarlet.

Albus was dumbfounded uncertain of what it meant. Nevertheless, he breathed a scar of relief. Harry was not a horcrux. The scar was something though, what, he did not know. Perhaps the reaction had simply been the residual dark magic that inhabited the scar. Anything was possible, and right now, he willingly embraced those possibilities for it meant that his boy was safe for a while longer. More
importantly, the scarlet colour meant that Albus would not have to make himself a murderer.
Healer Alison Johnson carefully removed her glasses before looking toward Lord Malfoy. This was her third consultation with his ward Mr. Potter, and now it was time for her to reveal her findings to him. The said patient was lying still on a couch, deep in an induced slumber. It made it easier for her to treat him, as she required him calm while she examined his mindscape to determine the best course of treatment for him.

"After three sessions Lord Malfoy," she began, "I have concluded that Mr. Potter is in a good mental state. He is responding nicely to my treatment thus far, so much so, that the frequency of the sessions can be reduced should you choose to continue them."

"Should I?" he interrupted smoothly. "You do not see further treatment necessary?"

"Strictly speaking sir," she said carefully, "Mr. Potter is fine. There are no indicators of phobias related to the event, he responds easily enough and his social skills are not significantly affected. I do however recommend further sessions with him, especially once he has resumed his schooling. After all, his mental state might change once he is within the vicinity of the even once again.

"I must say though that I find the likelihood of this happening very low. He has a strong support system at home and at school. The fact that the perpetrator has been banned from the school is also significant. However Lord Malfoy, there is another issue with Mr. Potter that I discovered on my initial consultation with him. There is an inconsistency regarding the flow of his magic, and, with your permission I would like to address it."

"His magic?" Lucius repeated with a slight frown, looking briefly toward his slumbering son.

"I was informed of Mr. Potter's rather unique Occlumency shields upon my arrival. Thus, Mr. Malfoy's permission was required for me to penetrate his mind. Nevertheless. From the start I noticed that Mr. Malfoy did not lift all of the shields. Testing, I realised that it was not deliberate on his part, but rather a blockade formed without his knowledge or ability to control.

"It is a relatively minor blockage, regardless, I find its positioning problematic. A portion of Mr. Potter's magic is being restrained, and I believe that it eventually will cause him problems, if it has not done so already. Has he ever complained of a deficiency in some aspects of his magic? Perhaps he exerts more energy than usual? Or else, his casting ability is occasionally unstable?"

A thoughtful expression graced the man's face for several moments before he shook his head. "His magic has improved significantly in recent months...although... Do you know how old the blockage age."

"The shields about it are less than a year old."

"Within a year then," he mused, tapping at his chin. "Draco did implement those shields fairly recently. Although, has he mentioned – yes actually, he has."

"Really?" she asked, with slight pleasure, glad to be proven right.

"Yes," he confirmed, "although he used it so rarely as is I barely noticed its absence. Regardless, it is not connected directly to his magic, but rather is a special ability of his. You see, Harry has always been able to heal himself whenever the need arose. That disappeared after an illness – the same one which required Draco to protect his mind."
"And you agree that Mr. Malfoy is responsible for it?"

"I wouldn't doubt you," he said honestly. "Draco implemented them without or permission or guidance. Nevertheless, we were too elated at the time to worry about any ramifications, although, I am not too surprised that something went wrong. I take responsibility for it. I should have had him checked soon afterwards. When Harry noticed it gone, we brushed it off as a side effect of the illness. You say it can be removed?"

"It can," she said reassuring. "I think you'll be happy to know though that Mr. Malfoy's input is not required in this."

The man actually looked relieved. The woman easily understood why he did not want his son to be involved. After all, her own sister was married to a veela, and he reacted with overwhelming guilt whenever he did her some slight, no matter how small it was. A teenager's reaction was bound to be worse.

It was quite silly she thought fondly, although terribly romantic at the same time.

"Can you assure me though that no other shield will be affected? It is imperative that Harry's mind remained sheltered. If this has to be done at the expense of his ability, then so be it."

"There's no need for it sir. Only the blockage will be affected."

"Good," he said, offering her a thin smile. "How soon can this be done?"

"Immediately if you desire," she offered. "I already know the location of it, and I have training in the matter. It should only take me a few minutes to remove it."

"Then do so."

Silence reigned for the next few minutes. Moving, Johnson knelt beside Mr. Potter's sleeping form, pressing the tip of her wand carefully against his temple as she gently breached his mind. It was not the first time she had performed such an operation, and as such, she felt comfortable enough to simultaneously converse with the lord who was overlooking her carefully.

"You may ask me any questions Lord Malfoy," she offered. "I do not require silence to work."

The man remained quiet for a long moment before asking, "Does Lady Malfoy require long term treatment as well?"

"I do not see the need for it," she replied honestly.

Usually, the rules of patient confidentiality would have disallowed her from answering the question. Nevertheless, as the witch had insisted on her husband attending the meetings with her, she saw no need to keep quiet about it.

"Lady Malfoy's primary issue is self doubt. She lacks confidence in her abilities, worrying that she will make bad decisions that will negatively affect her family. There is very little I can do actually, and most of it, you have, and are continuing to do regardless. Time is the best healer – that and love. I recommendation remains the same. Whenever she shies away from her usual responsibilities support and encourage her. The more successes she has, the quicker she will recover her confidence."

"Thank Merlin," he breathed.
Looking briefly at him, Healer Johnson was astounded by the actual sincerity in the man's words. It was a novelty, she decided, to see a pureblood man like himself care for his wife. For most in his stature, the wife was but a tool to ensure succession, and any children mere pawns in a political gain to ensure continued prestige for the family. Thinking about it, Lord Malfoy seemed very different from the icy demeanoured man that stalked throughout the wizarding world as if it belonged to him. Perhaps that appearance was simply an act, she mused, one meant to ensure that no one put his family at risk.

"I think that Mr. Potter would make a fine healer one day," she remarked casually, "especially with his power. It would do the world a lot of good."

"I believe the world has enough expectations of my son already," he replied gently. "I doubt he would want another. Regardless, I know my Harry. I doubt he would last too long in the profession..." that is if he even worked, Lucius added silently. There was no need for it actually, however, if Harry chose to do so, the patriarch was certain it would be in some field that incorporated Charms into it. It was his speciality after all.

"Well you would know him best," the woman allowed before rising. "I'm done. Mr. Potter's power should work freely now."

"I am almost reluctant to tell him," Lucius said wryly, watching as she cancelled the sleeping spell on him. "He's bound to hurt himself just to make sure."

"He does seem the type," she admitted with a soft laugh. "But then again, I would if I was in his position."

Lucius smirked slightly before growing serious once again. The rest of the time until Harry awoke was spent discussing possible arrangements to continue Harry's treatments during the school year. And although Lucius knew that he needed to tell Harry about his returned power, he did not find the time to do so for the healer had scarcely left before he was called away to take care of some arrangements. As he left the boy with a soft kiss to the head, he made a note to tell him once he returned. Nevertheless, due to the stress of his afternoon, Lucius forgot to do so, leaving it up to Harry to learn of his powers one his own, and struggle to control it before he caused himself serious harm.

* *

Diagon Alley was a far cry from its normal bustling self. Formally, there used to be crowds of noisy witches and wizards; vendors peddling their wares while the stores displayed ridiculously elaborate styles. Currently, the number of people about were few and far between. And all of them walked swiftly, with a stiffness about them that indicated that they were anticipating something unpleasant at a moment's notice. And they were right to.

With a carefully neutral expression on his face, Sirius watched as a witch scuttled two children down the street, hissing at them to be quick about it. The woman seemed to feel the weight of his stare for she looked across at him with a glare – one that only softened slightly when she saw his uniforms. The Ministry was starting to appear as harsh and unyielding as Voldemort, Sirius decided, as he walked on in a mockery of a patrol. As far as the public was concerned, the Ministry was doing nothing to keep them safe. They never arrived on time to prevent damage, they were randomly grabbing and interrogating persons on suspicion of being Death Eaters – but worst of all – they were not sending out the Boy who Lived to save them.

The last had a sneer forming across Sirius' face. The bloody cowards, throwing their hopes behind a thirteen year old boy. Sometimes Sirius could not help but wonder if the lot was even worth saving.
It made absolutely no sense, but then again, neither did Voldemort's actions. The rate at which he was slaughtering people—both muggles and Light beings—was positively alarming. It was as if the man was perfectly content with governing corpses on the off chance that he actually won the war. And yet, he thought darkly, Severus and Lucius still insisted that the worst was yet to come. The death toll was starting to number in the hundreds, and yet, they hardly batted an eyelash, claiming that this was nothing to be disturbed over.

A part of him did not want to believe the pair, although he knew he had every right to do so. After all, they had worked under the madman. And yet, when he had helped clear up an entire street whose population had been slaughtered, he found it difficult to wrap his mind around the fact that there was more to come. At moments like these, when his fear gripped him the most, Sirius wished that he had bent to Remus' will and avoided returning to the auror department. The first few weeks, he had barely resisted flinching whenever a uniformed comrade approached him. It reminded him too strongly of his own incarceration. Then again, there was the awkwardness that remained, especially among the ones who had been there that fateful night.

Some had apologised, some simply avoided him, and some were want to pretend the entire thing had never happened, and that he had simply gone away on a vacation for a few years. He was not certain which group of them he detested the most. The sound of a window shutting drew him from his dismal thoughts, and with a start, he realised that he had been staring off aimlessly into space for the past few moments. That was not exactly the smartest thing to do in these circumstances. Someone could have attacked him while he reflected upon his dank cell and those horrid Death Eaters. No, he had to keep his head about him.

Straining his shoulders, Sirius decided to take one last stroll around the Alley before going home. It was Fudge's latest scheme in his floundering attempt to retain popularity. Let the Ministry's forces be seen out an about as if all was okay. It would encourage public moral and foster a sense of patriotism in him. It was nothing but a load of bettle dung; nevertheless, it meant that he had to strut around for a few hours, acting as if he was above the Dark Lord's wrath. All he was doing, and he was fully aware of it, was placing a giant target sign over his head.

"Fudge," he muttered darkly, "you are an idiot."

If possible, the street was even more deserted as he turned around and headed the opposite way. A quick time check showed him that it was now a little after midday. Any sensible person locked themselves in their houses at this time, for it was proven that the Death Eaters never attacked in the mornings. No one was quite sure of why, but at least it gave the society a chance to at least get the basic items they needed.

"Mr. Auror?"

The childish voice halted him in his place, and turning slightly, he looked around for the person who had addressed him.

"Yes?" he called out, forcing his tone into a pleasant one. There had been a distinct tinge of fright to the child's tone, and he did not want him frightened. "Where are you?"

"O-over here."

Looking across, Sirius watched as a lad around nine tentatively stepped out from the crevice between two shops. "I'm lost," he said pitifully, turning large blue eyes upon him.

Immediately Sirius felt his heart softened. The poor thing looked so scared—so vulnerable. He was one of the ones whom Sirius had wanted to protect when he had returned to the force. At least he
would have a chance to do so on this day.

"Come here little one," he bid, crouching down when the child reached him.

"What's your name?"

"Adrian," came the soft reply. "I've lost my daddy. Will you help me find him?"

There was something oddly familiar about his eyes, Sirius noted as he examined them. Perhaps someone he had known long ago? That particular shade of blue was not at all common – but then again, he had more important things to deal with currently.

"Well my name is Sirius," he stated, placing his hands gently on the boy's shoulders. "And yes I'll help you find your daddy. It's my job to do so."

"Mommy said aurors are nice," he offered, giving him a small smile. "If ever I was in trouble I'm to find one. And I found you!"

The hint of childish glee brought forth a small chuckle from Sirius and he resisted the urge to fluff the boy's hair. He vaguely reminded him of Harry, he thought as he straightened. He was about the same size when they had been reunited.

"How did you use your daddy? And what is his name?"

The boy's brow furrowed. "Daddy's daddy."

Sirius sighed mentally at that statement. Really, the mother warned him to find aurors, but didn't teach him what their names where? Nevertheless, he was certain that Adrian's father was not too far away, and probably frantically looking for him at that. He knew he would be in that situation – if only in fear of incurring the child's mother wrath for losing her precious boy.

"I'm sorry," the boy apologised, realising that Sirius was displeased."

"No, no, no," Sirius said quickly, "It's okay. We'll find him, I promise."

"I trust you," the boy beamed, before trustingly wrapping a hand in his robe.

Children were such a delight, Sirius decided, as they started walking. "Where did you last see Daddy?"

"He was talking to a man," Adrian explained, looking around him. "They were talking so long though."

"And you got bored and decided to explore," Sirius finished with a chuckle. "I ran away from my parents a lot when I was younger."

"You were small like me?" the boy asked incredulously. "Really?"

"We all are at first," he explained, putting on a slightly lecturing tone. "But then we grow up and learn to endure the boring conversations. Was it somewhere around here?"

"Up there – I think," the boy said, pointing near to the end of the library.

"You certainly wandered a long way," Sirius commented while wondering what kind of parent Adrian really had.
The boy had been in the middle of the street when he had come to him, a good few minutes from the place they were now approaching. How could he not have noticed him leaving in that time? Sirius was starting to think that he needed to pull aside Adrian Senior for a serious conversation before he returned custody of his son to him. Even in the best of times, it was just not something that one should do.

By now they had reached the seedier part of the alley, one that he reluctantly admitted, he himself patronised on occasion. Indeed, as he turned toward the bar briefly, he could see in the window a rough looking wizard that he had shot whiskey with before. Nodding slightly at him, he looked down at Adrian who had grown quiet in the past few minutes, seemingly content to look around while his saviour found his daddy for him.

"Are you sure he's around here?" he asked. "Perhaps he's on the other end."

"Oh no sir," Adrian replied quickly. "My dad is always down here. He goes into that house sometimes," he continued, pointing toward a shabby looking dwelling. "A witch lives there. I have to call her Aunty but mommy doesn't know. Daddy said I can't tell her. She always gives me milk and biscuits while she and daddy do business. Mister," he continued, "when you do business, do you always make noises and scream?"

Sirius nearly choked at the boy's innocent words. That confirmed it; the boy's father was a no good louse. For all he knew, the 'man' daddy dearest had been with was some knock off from Knockturn trying to sell off some illegal junk. Maybe Adrian was lucky he had walked away.

"Mister?"

"I've never done that sort of business," he grumbled, "at least not with a witch. Anyway, we should look for him in there."

"Okay," he agreed, pulling on him slightly to get him walking again.

"Auror Black!"

Sirius paused, turning toward the bar where the call had come from. It was his sometimes drinking buddy, standing in the doorway with a rather strange expression on his face.

"Come on over," he called. "We need another partner!"

Sirius chuckled softly, even as he shook his head. "On duty now mate," he called back. "Let me drop off this little one and I'll join you."

"You really should come," the man called again, "now Auror Black!"

"In a minute," he shot back with a little more determination. "Sorry about that," he told Adrian, as he led them toward the house. "My friends can get a little too enthusiastic on occasion."

"Auror Black!"

This time Sirius did not look back, only waving his hand vaguely in acknowledgement of the call. Adrian was now quiet, and when he looked at him, Sirius noticed a hint of tenseness on his frame.

"Don't be afraid," he said reassuringly. "I'll explain everything to your daddy. I'm sure he will be too happy to see you to worry about giving you a scold."

The boy did not answer; instead he tugged him forward. Shaking his head at the mystery of children,
Sirius allowed it.

"Auror Black! You got to come play with us now!"

The man's voice came from much nearer now, and from his periphery, Sirius noticed that he had left the bar and was hurrying across to them. Something was definitely wrong with him, Sirius decided. Reaching for his wand, he gave Adrian a firm tug, pushing him out of the line of fire should the situation truly become violent. As is, he was hoping that the man had had one drink to many, and had become fixated on him. That he could handle easily enough, and without traumatising a little kid too much.

"Auror Black," the man huffed as he neared him. "You can't go in there. It's a – "

The man never finished his sentence for a green light flashed passed Sirius, killing him instantly. Sirius reacted instinctively despite his shock. The Killing Curse had come from behind him – there were Death Eaters in the house – probably holding Adrian's father hostage. That explained why his drinking buddy had called out to him. Given the bar's proximity, he was sure to have seen something and wanted to give him forewarning before he had gone in.

He should have taken the time to listen – if he had, the man might have still been alive, and he and Adrian would not be in this dangerous situation. Regardless, he was determined that his fallen comrade would be the only victim to be lost tonight.

The door of the house had opened, although no other attack had come out. Confused, he cast a shielding charm, being careful to include the child in its perimeter. The safest thing to do for him was to get him completely out of harm's way. But that was not plausible currently. It was not as if he could leave and return, not with a dead man laying there and an unknown enemy within.

"Stay near me," he hissed at the little boy.

"Why should I?" the boy replied, in a voice that completely lacked any childish inflection.

Immediately, a chill ran down Sirius' spine. That was not the voice of a child – it was the voice of a man – a hardened criminal at that. Sirius spun around, training his wand at Adrian, only to be thrown back by an unforeseen kick to the ribs that sent him sprawling backwards. At least one was broken, he thought grimly, as he struggled to sit up, while keeping an eye on Adrian.

Except, it was not a child who looked at him anymore. In his place was a slender, yet surprisingly tall wizard, dressed in the undeniable robes of Voldemort's servants. Now Sirius knew where he had seen those eyes before. It had been on one of the wanted posters placed around the Ministry. His name was Adrian Valson – a renegade wizard who had a rather unique gift that had immediately earned him a spot on the auror's most wanted list. Not only was he a killer – and a gruesome one at that – he was something else, something special.

He was a shape shifter capable of transforming his body into any shape, size, animal, person or object that he desired, and there was no way to detect it.

But what was worse of all, Sirius decided, as he forth against his pain even as Valson raised his wand – was that he had fallen for the dark wizard's trap, and was now his prey.
When Harry heard his bedroom door open, he did not bother to turn around to look. Only his mate would enter unannounced. "I'm still working on History Draco," he said absently as he approached. "Go help Mama if you want something to do."

"But that is boring," Draco huffed as he sat on the edge of the bed, regarding him.

"That's my line," Harry pointed out, sparing him a glance. "You need to work on the delivery though. I'll give you a A for effort."

"Oh Potter," Draco chided, "don't be such a rotter! That rhymed..." he added belatedly, in a way that drew a startled laugh from Harry.

"I don't think that's actually a word," Harry said, as he turned, careful to hold the quill away from his essay. "And what is with the insult? You should be glad that I'm doing my assignments."

A disgruntled look settled on the veela's face as he stood, crossing the distance between them. Harry yelped in surprise when he grabbed the chair, spinning it around with him in it. Harry grabbed on to him for balance, raising an incredulous eyebrow as him when the blonde crouched down to met his gaze.

"But you're ignoring me," Draco complained, placing his hands on Harry's legs for balance.

"You poor thing." Harry leaned forward slightly to rub their noses together before pulling back. "But this is important."

"I finished mines days ago."

"Because you have had more spare time than me," Harry reminded, placing a gentling hand on his check.

"Copy mines," Draco huffed.

Harry blinked in surprise at that. The veela really had to want his company to offer to let him cheat.

"That's cheating."

"Only if we get caught," the veela retorted with a roguish grin. "Come on Harry. Take a small break? Just and hour? Or two? Or three?"

"Draco!" Harry scolded, even as he laughed at his expression. "What's gotten into you?"

"You have," he deadpanned. "I want to spend time with you now before we go back to Hogwarts. I'll have to share you again when we get there. I don't want to."

"Spoiled," Harry chuckled, patting his cheek. "You'll have me plenty at Hogwarts."

"And I'll have you entirely here. Why are we even going back?"

There really was no reasoning with his mate when he got into these moods, Harry decided. Nevertheless, he really did have to finish this. He still had two others to do. "Go away Draco," he told him gently. "Give me an hour."
"I want you now."

"And I'll be done," Harry continued, as if he had not spoken. "We'll go for a walk then okay?"

"You rather do work than spend time with me?"

"We can spend all the time you want together later."

"Later is too long." Draco grumbled as he stood, forcing Harry to tip his head backward to maintain the eye contact. "Let's go for that walk now okay? Just for an hour? Imagine it; you and me, walking through the snow holding hands. We can even build a snow man like we saw on Granger's telly last year. And at the end of it, we'll have hot chocolate. Three hours of bliss."

"We can get that now," Harry responded, although there was less surety in his voice now. It was hard to resist his mate now that he was looking at him with that glint in his eye. He could finish the essay later, he rationalised, and the snow was looking rather attractive. Of course, the best part would be cuddling up with his mate, but, he certainly did not need the excuse of cold weather to do so.

Draco seemed to notice his caving in, for he reached down and gently pulled him to his feet before hugging him. Harry leaned into it, before wrapping his arms around his mate, sighing contentedly.

"Let's just stay like this," he murmured after a moment.

"I've got a better idea," the veela responded.

Curious, Harry looked up at him. "What is it?"

"Well," Draco said softly. "We never did dance together. I think we should rectify that."

As he spoke, his hands shifted to rest lightly on his waist. After a moment, Harry's hands moved as well, to wrap themselves tentatively about his neck.

"Maybe we should," he agreed softly, offering him a beguiling smile.

Wanting no other encouragement, Draco freed a hand long enough to wave at the Wizard Wireless across the room. Immediately, the voice of the Weird Sisters filled the room, and Draco started swaying them on the spot.

"It's not exactly waltz music," he murmured wryly.

"It's a ballad," Harry shrugged, before pressing his cheek against Draco's chest once again. His eyes drifted close as he allowed the music, and then his mate, to fill his senses. Above him, the veela looked down into his face with an adoring expression, doing the same thing.

As the song changed, Draco changed their position slightly, guiding them into a Quick Step. Harry looked up at him with a smile, only to flush at the intensity of his silver gaze. Impulsively, the veela released his wings, smirking slightly at the pleased expression on his mate's face before he stepped closer to him. He allowed the appendages to teasingly brush against Harry's body as they spun, drawing a most delightful sound from him.

"Now I understand why Mother considers dancing so romantic," he thought idly.

"Holding Harry like this to him – feeling their bodies move in tandem around the room was absolutely heavenly. Added to the fact that the exertion was making Harry's face redden in a most appealing way made Draco immediately list dancing with Harry as a favoured activity. More and more, his brunette mate met his gaze, and gradually, Draco felt himself becoming intoxicated by his
As another ballad wafted through the room, he pulled Harry tight against him, leaving scant space between them as he guided his head beneath his chin once again.

"I love holding you like this," he murmured, knowing that with his close proximity that Harry was bound to hear him.

"I love you," Harry responded simply, twisting so he could see his face.

Their eyes locked for a long moment, and by some unspoken agreement, they stopped, even as the music continued. Harry felt the way his mate's hands clenched slight around him. There was something about this moment – the way that they held each other that made him want to share a kiss with his mate. And so, he tilted his head slightly in an unconscious invitation, one that Draco was eagerly happy to accept. The veela bent his head, brushing their noses together slightly before he moved toward Harry's fuller lips.

The younger wizard's eyes closed instinctively, as he prepared himself to feel the veela's touch. However, after a moment none came, and slightly annoyed, he opened his eyes to find Draco looking at him with slight concern.

"Are you sure?" he whispered softly. "Are you sure you want this? You're not afraid?"

"Of what?" Harry groused. "I want you to kiss me."

"Are you sure?" he reiterated, pulling back slightly. "I don't want to force you..."

"I love you," Harry whispered by way of answer. "I'm not afraid of you – I'll never be afraid of you. So kiss me – please?"

The slight pleading edge drove away any misgivings Draco had, and with a soft growl, he kissed him. Harry gasped slightly at the shocking feeling. This was even better than he could remember. And so, when the veela pulled away after a few seconds, he eyed him with some displeasure.

"More," he grumbled, looking at the lips that felt so good against his,

Draco's gaze darkened at his words, and when Harry's eyes met his, he felt a warm pool of heat settle in his stomach, one that only intensified when the lips descended again. This time it lasted longer, with Draco sliding his lips across him in a way that made Harry's entire body tingle.

His breath was slightly erratic when the blonde finally pulled back again. The veela felt a hint of pride at Harry's flushed skin. It was the most beautiful thing he had ever felt, and he wanted more of it.

Gently he used his thumb to brush against Harry's sensitive lower lip. "May I try something," he inquired, his voice husky.

"What?" Harry mumbled, his lip tickling Draco's thumb as he spoke.

The feeling caused Draco to steal another brief kiss before he spoke again. "Would you part your lips for me?" he requested.

Harry blinked at the odd request, but given the reassuring look in the veela's eyes, he obeyed. "Like this?"
"Not so much I think," he said honestly. "There...that is perfect."

The heat in his stomach almost boiled over the next second. What Draco was doing – what they were doing, was so different this time, yet so, so good. The veela was gently tugging on his lower lip, nibbling carefully on it in a way that had Harry's fingers curling in enjoyment. When Draco retreated slightly, Harry leaned forward, mimicking his actions. It earned him a low groan from his mate, that had him repeating the gesture a few times before the veela took control again.

"Merlin Harry," he gasped before sucking at his lip again. "Part your teeth for me?"

Harry heeded him without a thought, although for a brief moment – just as the tip of Draco's tongue penetrated his mouth – he was reminded of Viktor. Nevertheless, with the strong essence of his mate completely surrounding him, he was able to push away the memory immediately, and instead, gasp into Draco's mouth when his tongue traced against the sensitive roof of his mouth.

Harry felt the need to do something, even as he melted into the deep kiss. His hands, no longer passive, rose up to rub lightly against Draco's chest, firming the gesture after he felt a positive response from Draco. These kisses were quickly becoming insufficient to sate the building feeling within him. He wanted more, and he communicated that to Draco even as his tongue retreated, Harry's quick to follow into the veela's mouth to explore it.

"I love you," he murmured as they pulled apart for breath.

"Love you too," came Draco's ragged response, seconds before he descended again. His hands roamed up and down Harry's back, growing increasingly liberal at Harry's continued cooperation. Merlin, this was the best he had ever felt in his life – he wanted to do nothing but remain like this, losing himself in this embrace with his mate.

"Harry," he breathing, nipping at his now red and slightly swollen lip. "My Harry. So beautiful. Mine."

Harry ceased his mindless babbling with another kiss, leaning forward so much that Draco felt himself stepping back to maintain balance. He took another step and then one more. The bed suddenly seemed quite attractive and he wanted to experience what doing this to Harry would be like with them lying down. Harry followed easily enough, mimicking him if only to continue the delightful kisses they were sharing.

Finally, the back of Draco's knees hit the bed, and, tangling his fingers with Harry's he was about to tumble them backwards unto the bed – only to stop abruptly when the door banged open.

Lost in the moment, Harry had not even noticed, pecking along the corner of his mouth. Draco's fingers tightened warningly though, and looking up, he met the rapidly paling face of his father. Both stared at each other – Draco with both annoyance and alarm. The veela part urged him to simply wave the man out of the room. After all, there was so much more he and Harry could do together before their bond urged them to stop. His wizarding side though was mortified for his father to see him in such an intimidate embrace and though his father knew that this transition between himself and Harry was bound to happen eventually, Draco honestly did not believe he expected it to be so soon.

Finally realising that his mate was not focussed on him, Harry frowned, turning to see what had distracted him. His mind cleared immediately and a flush of a different kind coloured his face at his father's expression. A moment like this was not to be witnessed by another. It was extremely awkward.
Silence reigned for a long moment before the Patriarch seemingly composed himself, although his eyes still did not quite meet his sons'. "Severus sent a message. We're needed at St. Mungos as soon as possible."

"For what?" Draco asked guardedly, turning Harry into a more chaste position.

"He did not say much," Lucius explained. "Only that Sirius has been seriously hurt."

"Uncle Sirius?" Harry repeated worriedly. "Papa, will he be okay?"

"We'll know when we get there," he answered gruffly. "Change now and meet us downstairs."

"Yes Father..."

"Okay..." they responded, pulling away from each other, even as Harry snapped his finger for their elves.

"Don't dawdle," Lucius urged as he turned to leave. "Oh, and we will talk about this later," he finished.

He shot his sons a speaking look, lingering specifically on Draco before leaving the room. Seconds later, the pair scurried to dress, anxious to hear about their relative's situation.

* *

Like all other old families, the Blacks had their own private rooms at the hospital (generous yearly donations ensured that). As such, they were able to gather here in privacy, safe from prying eyes who would undoubtedly try to exploit the situation in any way possible. They all had been hoping for the best when they had come here – although, even from the start, Lucius had known that Sirius condition had to be grave. He had known it the second Severus' face had appeared in the floo.

It had been years since he had ever seen him look so withdrawn – his face so pale and eyes dull, yet tinged with anxiety as he met his gaze. As soon as possible, he had come here, to find Severus sitting in one of the hospital chairs in the corridor, arms wrapped around himself as he rocked back and forth. Breaking away from his family at once, he hurried to his blood brother's side.

"Severus?" he called softly, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder.

The man flinched slightly, obviously too lost in his own despair to have noticed their arrival.

"Lucius," he said tersely, looking up into his worried gaze. "He's...badly hurt. They won't tell us how badly yet. But...I don't think...he might..."

The disjointedness of his sentences spoke louder than words, and whispering an explicit, Lucius turned to shoot Narcissa a telling look. The witch paled considerably before pulling the boys too her.

It would do Severus no good to be bombarded with questions currently, although his sons seemed already to understand the gravity of the situation.

"Where is Remus?" he asked, sitting beside him.

"He's with him," the potions master responded slowly. "They only want one of us there to observe...they don't want to be held accountable if something goes wrong with the potential Lord Black."

'Do you know what happened?"
Severus shook his head, his eyes lingering on the door. "Remus answered the floo. All we were told is that he was hurt...some sort of ambush."

"For him?" Remus asked worriedly.

The potions master shook his head again. "For any auror," he said dully. "To send a message..."

"That Voldemort fears no-one," Lucius finished with a sigh.

Conversation lulled after that as they descended into tense silence, waiting anxiously for any word from within. It was almost another hour before the door opened and Remus emerged. All of their hearts sank, and Narcissa clutched Harry tighter against her at the expression on his face. Right behind him were the healers, all of whom looked sorrowful as well as they nodded toward the gathered family before dismissing himself.

"Remus?" Severus asked hoarsely. "Is he?"

Remus looked one step from crying Lucius saw, torn between going to him or continuing to remain by Severus who was now clutching on to him with shaking hands.

"He's going to," the amber-eyed man managed, his voice cracking. "There's nothing more to do. He won't make the night."

Lucius closed his eyes for long moment even as he heard a hitching sob from his sons.

"The healers – they said that we should say our goodbyes now. No more than two at a time."

"You go ahead with Remus Severus," Lucius whispered, and shortly, he watched with sadness as the pair entered the room to bid their lover and partner farewell.

When the door closed, he turned to his own family. Harry immediately dislodged himself from Narcissa, pressing himself against the older wizard. Lucius gratefully held him, glad for the physical contact which assured him that his immediate family was safe. The thirteen fairly shuddered against him, but there was nothing he could do beyond this. How exactly could he reassure him – reassure Draco and even himself for that matter, when there was absolutely nothing to improve the current situation. Words were fairly useless – none of it could or would change the fact that Sirius was dying.

Looking at Draco, he saw that a tear was trailing down his cheek. His wife was in a similar position even as she wiped at it. He himself knew that he would break down if he dwelt on it too much. Therefore he did not allow himself to do so. Someone had to remain strong and rally the family together. His heart clenched slightly as he recalled that at other times it was Sirius who assumed the role. No-one among them could even hope to fill in the resulting gap that would form once he died.

After Sirius' lovers emerged, he and Narcissa went in, holding hands tightly as they paid their respects to a man that had assumed an integral role in their lives. They returned almost fifteen minutes later, Narcissa unable to look at the man in this state for any longer, and finally – and with some reluctance – they sent the boys in, while hoping that this final image of him would not be the only thing they would remember of him.

If they had not been told that the man on the bed was Sirius Black, neither would have recognised him. The man lay only in his underpants on the bed to facilitate their failed healing efforts. There was not a part of him that was not damaged. His chest seemed to bear the full brunt of the injuries. There
was an unnatural dent on his torso, as if all of his ribs had been shattered so that the outer flesh simply caved in, given it a hollowed look. Further up on his chest was numerous lacerations, some so deep that potions had done little to heal it, while others looked shallow but still quite painful. His face was swollen, his lower lip healed in a way that suggest that it had been torn. A bit of flesh was missing in the far corner of his temple, and looking at it, one could clearly see bone.

His legs were not much more improved. One leg also had that slightly dented look which suggested numerous shattered bones, while on the other leg, the foot stood out at a rather unnatural angle. There were also what appeared to be burn marks on the leg and almost round pierces as if something had shot out through the legs – most likely those same broken bone shards. All in all, it was amazing that Sirius was alive at all – and it was quite plain that there was no chance of him living through this. Death, given his state, was almost a relief compared to the misery he would endure were he to survive.

A broken sob tore from Harry's throat as he dropped to his knees beside the bed, Draco joining him seconds later, tears pouring freely down his face now. The veela had nothing to say – could not start to vocalise the pain he felt at the state of his uncle. His chest tightened painfully, as his eyes continued to rove along Sirius' body, documenting his injuries. Who was so cruel to do this to another human being? Was there no humanity left in the individual who had done it?

"Uncle Sirius," Harry whispered brokenly after a moment. "Uncle Sirry...please don't...you can't. Please don't."

"He can't hear you," Draco told him tearfully. "But maybe he knows we're here?"

Harry sniffled loudly, reaching out to touch his left hand, which surprisingly was unblemished. It was a small mercy, he supposed. They were able to touch him without adding to his discomfort – that is, if he was even aware of his touch. After a moment, Draco's hand settled on top of his.

"Hey Uncle Sirius," he said after a moment. "It's me – Draco, and Harry. We're here...we're here to say goodbye to you. I love you Uncle Sirius, from the day I met you. You've done so much for us...I never thought it would come to this. But please know that I love you very much and that...I'll make sure they get who did this. I'll find a way."

The veela broke off after that, crying softly yet continuously.

"Uncle Sirry," Harry whispered again, "Do you have to leave us – leave me? I don't want you to go. Stay here, with all of us? We need you. We love you – love you. You can't leave us now. Please don't? Stay with us please? Don't die. Don't leave."

This way entirely unfair, Harry decided morosely. Why did everything have to happen to their family – what had his godfather done to deserve this fate? He had been sent to Azkaban unfairly, and now, just when he was at his happiest, he had to die. It was not fair, and Harry did not like it in the least. He was growing tired of it – of all the pain, loss and sacrifices his family had to make because of Voldemort. He was the root of all of their problems. If the man had not existed, he would not have been an orphan. Without him, Pettigrew would have never betrayed their trust and Sirius would never have gone to jail. If it wasn't for him he would not have to be constantly in and out of school because of some malady he was inevitably responsible for. If it wasn't for him, Sirius would not have rejoined the auror and thus would not be lying here in St. Mungos, waiting to die.

"I don't want it," Harry sobbed, turning toward his mate. "Can't we do something Draco. I don't want to lose him. Please? I can't lose him. Draco."

"I don't want to lose him either Harry," he told him sadly, squeezing his hand gently. "I want him to
live as much as you do. But you heard the healers. There's nothing they can do."

"Then why can't we do something," he cried. "We've always overcome everything. We always find a way. Why can't we stop this?"

"We can't stop death Harry," Draco explained sadly, not faulting his mate for his logic. Truly, he was wishing with every fibre of his being that there was something that they could do. Severus had always said that the only limitation of magic was resurrecting the dead. Didn't that mean that they could stop someone from dying? Even if it was possible though, there was nothing they could do.

"I won't give up," Harry said, determination shining in his eyes despite his tears. "There must be a way Draco. We can't just give up. Please, why can't you believe that?"

Draco wanted to – truly he did – but he knew the situation was hopeless. Clinging on to hope – false hope at that – would bring nothing but further distress. No matter how hard it was, he was starting to accept the fact that this needed to happen, that this was Sirius' time. He had to die. But Harry would not accept it. Even now he could feel the tension in Harry's hand as he clung to the man, probably wishing wholeheartedly for something to change, for someone to be able to do something to prevent the man's death.

Then and there Draco decided that Harry needed to leave the room. He had to get him out before he decided to do something rash, something that would leave him with an even greater heartbreak when the man finally died. With that in mind, he moved his hands from Harry and stood, prepared to gently pull him away. However, as his hands reached his shoulder, the veela stopped abruptly, staring at Harry's hand.

It was glowing. It was faint yes, but there; a blue glow that was slowly moving from his mate onto the bedridden man. And, the more Harry whispered to the man, the brighter it glowed. Draco stared at it for a long moment before turning to Harry. His mate seemed unaware of what he was doing – that his healing ability had seemingly returned with one magic difference. As he watched, a bruise on Sirius' hand was fading. Harry was healing him. Harry was doing the very thing he had declared impossible. He was helping his godfather.

"Please Uncle Sirry," Harry whispered. "Please live?"

"H-Harry," Draco said urgently. "Your hand – your hands!"

Harry looked up at him in confusion before looking down – his eyes widening as well. "Draco I –"

The veela felt a surge of happiness running through him, even as a smile started forming on Harry's face.

"Do you think I can?" he asked, brushing at his tears.

Even as he spoke, the glow was increasing, almost as if it was stored behind a wall that was starting to crumble.

Draco laughed incredulously, as his hands dropped to Harry's shoulders. "I'm starting to think you can do anything," he said honestly. "And right now, I think that you can do this."

"He can't die Draco," Harry said once again, "not now."

"Then save him," the veela told him, his throat tightening for a different reason this time. "I don't know how you're doing it, but try to do it more. You'll need more power than that to do this."
"I'll try," Harry said with determination.

He pulled his hand away, looking at it for a long moment. It did not dissipate thankfully. Harry did not know what he would have done had the healing power fading. He had no idea how to control it – wait – yes he did. This was his power, the one he had had since he had healed his bruises and fixed his eyesight all those years ago. What had he done then, and consecutive times throughout the years? He had willed himself healed, had directed his magic where he wanted it to do, bidding it to undo any damage within him. Exactly what sourced the power was unknown, but what was important now was that he knew how to control it. All he had to do now was direct it outwards.

His glance shifted from his hands, to his uncle on the bed. Were his hands the conductors, or was it simply because he was touching it that it was the easiest means to transfer his magic to him. Whatever it was, Draco was right. The power was not enough. Harry struggled to his feet, staring at his hands once again before extending them over Sirius' chest where the worst of his injuries lay. They were the most life-threatening, he decided, as he closed his eyes and willed his magic to flow through him and into his godfather, healing the man as it would have healed him. The response was slow at first, until Harry tweaked his image, imagining himself in the man's place instead. That seemed to be what was missing, for immediately Harry felt a surge of power rush through and out him. Yes, he thought contentedly, his uncle was being healed. Sirius would live. He would guarantee it.

Draco's happiness quickly changed to alarm within a minute. The glow surrounding Harry's hands had expanded itself until his entire being was a vibrant blue. The hue steadily transferred itself to the man although what surrounded Harry did not dissipate in the least. At first the veela was amazed and released. Before his very eyes the deep gashes on the man's chest was closing and bit by bit, his torso seemed to be filling out. It had to be painful though, he acknowledged, glancing at the man's face and seeing the grimace on it. He did not know if Harry was healing him as much as he was reconstructing what was within him, causing him further pain and injury as the bones realigned.

A moment later, he decided that was the case as the man's legs started bleeding anew. He felt a moment's panic, wondering if Harry was just making matters worse until the bleeding slowed and the newly formed cuts slowly congealed before sealing themselves entirely. While Harry was essentially creating new injuries within the man, he was also simultaneously healing it. He considered running outside for their family, so that they could witness this miracle first hand – but that might distract his mate, and so he decided against it.

So he stood there, the only witness to the event as Harry's powers healed his godfather. Draco was not sure how long passed, but the glow around Harry never diminished as he continued attempting to heal him. Sirius' chest was now rising and falling steadily, and his breathing lacked the raspy edge to it that indicated a damaged lung. More than that, the worst of the cuts were now closed although they were severely scarred; the veela knew instinctively that Harry would also deal with those in a few minutes.

Although...

The veela tore himself aware from the amazing sight before him to look at Harry. His mate was not looking too good – indeed, Harry was looking quite ill.

"Harry?" he asked, as a realisation occurred to him.

How had he been so stupid not to notice before? Harry was using his magic to heal the man – more precisely, he was feeding his magic into him, which meant that he was draining himself of a part of his being. Magic was a crucial part of a wizard's anatomy. Wizards needed magic to survive. It was why squibs existed – they were born without magic and thus, like muggles did not need it to sustain
them. However, wizards and witches – true magical beings – did require magic. It flowed through their veins, much like much needed oxygen. It was a substance that the body fed from and would shut down without. And Harry was currently giving away copious amounts of this essential thing to his uncle.

Draoc had to stop him.

Looking at his Uncle, Draco was certain now that he could survive. What Harry had failed to heal, the healers could surely manage. At least he hoped so. Even as he reached out to Harry, he saw how far gone he was. The boy was pale, and his hands trembled considerably – his entire being was trembling. And yet he did not stop. One of two things was occurring Draco decided, as he reached out to him. Either Harry did not realise the damage he was doing to himself, or he did and had no idea how to taper off the flow of magic escaping him. The problem? Draco did not know how to do so either.

Grabbing Harry, he shook him, gently at first but with increasing intensity. "That's enough Harry," he told him, "Stop it now. Uncle Sirius would be fine."

But there was no response – indeed, the veela was not entirely certain that Harry could hear him currently. "Harry," he called out again more urgently. It was imperative that he stopped the flow. Any more, and Harry was likely to drain himself completely of his own magic – landing himself in ward for a prolonged stay. "Harry!" He called again, not realising that his voice had now risen to a shout – one that was bound to be heard from outside the room.

His mind raced as he struggled for a solution. He had to stop his mate – but Harry seemed lost to the world, totalling engrossed in sacrificing himself so that another could live. Harry was not conscious to hear him, but there was a part of him that always would. Cursing at the necessity, Draco allowed his inner veela to emerge, and invoked the words that would force Harry to obey him above all else.

Between his shout and the flair of his veela powers, the adults rushed into the room, all stopping at what met their eyes. But it was the furthest thing from Draco's mind currently as he was to busy making Harry obey him. "Stop Harry," he ordered. "You will cease the magic transfer now. That's it mate. Feel your flow decreasing. Stem the tide and allow your power to remain within you. Good mate, a little more. There."

Draco's voice drifted shot as the last of the glow faded from Harry. Content, he allowed his own powers to recede, only to lunge forward immediately as Harry crumpled. He caught him and, following the movement, allowed himself to sink to the floor with Harry in his arms. He felt for his mate, sighing in relief when he realised that Harry was exhausted, both magically and physically. He was no expert, but he was certain that, with time and rest, Harry would be fine.

It was only then that he became aware of the bevy of voices around them.

"What's going on Draco," Narcissa demanded, even as Severus exclaimed with a mixture of joy and disbelief at Sirius' condition. Lucius was staring at his second son in amazement, realising immediately that this was what the Healer meant by his power shifting. It was a gift from Merlin he decided, even as Remus rushed past him to get a healer. The timing was perfect. Mere days after the revelation, Harry had employed his returned power to save his godfather. An incredulous laugh escaped him, even as he moved toward Severus, trusting that, between Narcissa and Draco, the boy would be fine.
Chapter 70

Regaining consciousness was a long arduous journey for Sirius, and as he fought through the intense lethargy, his equally sluggish mind attempted to make sense of what had happened to him. It returned to him in bits and pieces – his drinking buddy's murder; Adrian. It had been a trap; one that he had been ill prepared for. By the time he had managed to respond, it had already been too late. Within a few seconds, the man had had him lying in the dirt of the alley, screaming in pain as he was tortured. But how had it ended? Vaguely he recalled shouting...but had it been him or someone else?

Now, as he lingered on the brink of consciousness, he took stock of his body. Given what he could remember enduring, he was amazed at how he currently felt. Whoever had healed him deserved some sort of award. He could feel residual soreness in his legs and chest, and, as he rose further toward consciousness, he felt a slight pulling that indicating scars. Regardless, he was alive, and from his rudimentary knowledge in healing, he knew that, with time, he would be fine.

Finally opening his eyes, Sirius squinted against the bright light of the room. He batted his eyelashes furiously as he tried to adjust. As he had half-expected, he was in a hospital ward at St. Mungo's – a private one if the plush nature of what he saw indicated anything. He groaned slightly as he struggled to sit up. He moved carefully though, waiting for any signals that might indicate that he was pushing himself beyond his current limits. There was none, save the easily dismissible tug of healing skin on his chest.

His healer had to be a genius he thought adoringly.

He was covered by a light blanket. Easily he tossed it aside, looking at his legs. His assailant had used the Bone Breaker Curse on one of them...the pain of that was what had finally driven him unconscious. Moving them though, he hardly felt anything. A soft grunt from across the room startled him, and turning, his expression softened as he sighted Remus and Severus. The men sat together in an obviously enlarged armchair. Severus was using the taller wizard as a pillow, his head on his shoulder with an arm wrapped securely around his middle. Remus' cheek was pressed against his inky black hair, while an arm was slung about his shoulders.

The sight was familiar to him after all these years. The anxious expression on their faces – even in sleep – was not. Sirius sighed as he imagined the pain they must have endured when the call had come in about him – the panic they must have felt. He smiled sadly. As he had lost consciousness, Sirius had strongly believed that he was dying. The extent of his injuries at that time – the ones that were yet to be administered – yes, he had found himself at death's door.

He wondered how the two would have managed without him. Would they have moved on with their lives, or would they have wallowed in despair until they too could join him on the other side? Despondently, he reached the conclusion that they would have done the latter – Remus especially. After all, the man had holed himself away in Black Manor after his incarceration and had scarcely left it since. Sirius never questioned him about it, but he was quite certain that the only reason Remus had not killed himself was because he was still alive. Had he been dead though...Remus would have swiftly followed. Would Severus have been enough to convince Remus to remain in the world of the living, he wondered.

He could not decide upon the answer.

He had not feared dying. No, how could he when he had a fair idea of what awaited him on the other side? After all, Lily and James frequently cavorted about the living plain as if they still belonged there. Obviously the afterlife suited them – in it they had all of the freedom that Voldemort
had robbed them during their lives. Nonetheless, there was one thing that had frightened him, and he honestly believed that it was that what had left him clinging on to life.

How could he depart from this world without performing the most important ceremony of his life? Even as Adrian had tortured him, his hidden necklace had been a heavy weight against his chin – one that reminded him that he had unfinished business. There was absolutely no way that he was going to die before he had tied his two lovers to him irrevocably.

Sirius knew that he had been foolish to delay as he had. But then again, when he had first decided to marry them all those months ago, it had never occurred to him that he might not have lived to see his wedding day. And so – rather foolishly – he had decided to be romantic and spring the offer upon them on some special occasion...the anniversary of his release to be precise. But then the incident with Krum had occurred and it had not seemed wholly appropriate. That and the fact that he had been tracing the tracker spell he had on Krum, only to determine that Durmstrang's defences were superior to Hogwarts in that regard.

Thus he had planned to go with the most cliché Valentine's Day even though it was bound to earn him the wrath of Severus. And then this had happened. What on earth had he been waiting for? What was the point of a special occasion if there was the likelihood that he (or even one of them) would not be then to see it? Would it not be better to simply embrace the moment and live each day like it was his last? That seemed a lot more productive than sitting around waiting for something that might never happen. With that in mind, he reached up and unclasped the chain, allowing the six rings to fall unto the bed where he could finger them at will.

The bits of precious metal had found a home around his neck – a home they did not belong in. No, the rings were meant to be on his and his lovers' fingers, a testament of their enduring love. Looking between the rings and the slumbering men, a look of determination entered his face. He would not go a next day without them being married. It had to be done now.

"How are you feeling?" Narcissa inquired, gently touching the man's face.

Lucius was sitting in with Harry and the slumbering Draco in the ward next door, while she had decided to hold a vigil by his bedside. After all, they had fed a strong Sleeping Draught to Severus and Remus hours earlier – they would not awaken for a good few hours yet. Thus, someone conscious was needed to remain at his side, and she had chosen to do so. She had been shocked to find him awake when she opened the door, but then happiness replaced it as she hurried to his side. She had grown quite fond of her distant cousin over the years...she had dreaded losing him.

"I'll be fine," he reassured her, pulling her close to kiss her forehead. "The healers worked miracles."

The witch gave him a funny look; curious, he inquired about it.

"The healers had very little to do with your recovery," she admitted softly, tucking a strand of hair behind his ear. "They worked on you for almost two hours before they told us to say our goodbyes."

Sirius placed a comforting hand on her as she choked on a wave of emotion. Obviously it had been difficult on his cousin as well. His curiosity was at an all time high though. If the healers had deemed him impossible to save, why was he still alive?

"Then how?" he pressed when she composed herself.

"Harry," she told him. "Harry healed you."
"What...how?" he asked in confusion. "Harry."

"Yes," she confirmed. "He channelled his magic into you as far as we know. He could always heal himself remember? Somehow, he turned it around to help you."

"How is he?" Sirius asked worriedly.

Immediately after the woman's words, he had felt a wave of gratitude for his godson who had literally saved his life. Worry followed though. After all, it would explain exactly why Narcissa was still here by his side. He did not mean it in a bad way – but honestly, with him on the road to recovery, she had expected her to be at home with her family. After all, he had his lovers here with him...she really had no need to stay. Which meant only one thing...Harry was in the hospital as well.

"He's exhausted," she explained. "He drained his magic helping you but he'll be up and about soon enough."

"Thank Merlin," he breathed in relief. The last thing he wanted to hear was someone else being hurt protecting him. Speaking of which... "How did I get here? And what happened to Adrian?"

"Adrian?" she repeated in confusion, before the name registered. Her face darkened and her voice was laced with malice when she next spoke. "That scum is dead," she spat with satisfaction. "People in the alley intervened. In their zeal to assist you Adrian was accidently killed."

"Accidentally?" he asked with slight scepticism.

The witch chuckled darkly. "That is the official story," she smirked. "Unofficially, people are swiftly growing fed up of the Dark Lord's tyranny. They decided to send a message of their own. His robes and mask were found within his house. They were defaced and now have a place of honour in the middle of the Alley."

Sirius felt a burst of pride go through him at that. It was good that people were growing tired of the situation. While he was not encouraging vigilante behaviour, the time was gone when persons could rely solely on authority figures for their protection. They too needed to move out of the shadows and actively seek out the peaceful life they decided. After all, if the Ministry failed, they would feel the fallout the worst.

Nevertheless, he had more important things to dwell on currently than the wider populace – something infinitely more personal.

"I need your help with something," he said. Reaching for the rings he had hidden beneath his pillow, he deposited them into the witch's hands.

She stared at them for a long moment before looking at him incredulously. "Are these..."

"Engagement and marriage bands?" he finished. "Yes they are."

"Oh Sirius," she gasped in delight, shooting fond looks at the slumbering men. "When are you going to ask them?"

"When they wake up," he admitted with a slightly silly grin. "It'll be rather hard for them to say no to a guy who nearly died right?"

The witch chuckled at his humour. "They'd be mad to say no. So is that what you wanted? You want me to plan the wedding? I'd love too."
"That is what I want you to do," he confirmed ruefully. "Although I doubt you'll be pleased with me."

"Why not?" she frowned. "You know I love doing these things."

"Yes," he acknowledged. "But it's not like I'm giving you months to plan."

"When exactly do you want to get married?" she asked cautiously. "In a week? I can manage that."

"What time is it?"

"It's nearly one o clock," she answered, confused by the question.

He nodded thoughtfully. "Well actually, I was hoping that we could get married today!"

The witch waited for him to start laughing and claim that he was only joking. But when his face remained serious, she sighed.

"Only you," she grumbled. "Only you would expect me to plan a wedding in a day."

"What?" he half-whined. "I mean, all we need is an officiator right? Can't you go wake up Albus or something?"

The witch eyed him incredulously. "Men," she groused as she rose. "Do you have any idea how much planning goes into a wedding. I swear, you lot would send me mad if I allowed it."

"But you can manage right?" he asked hopefully.

"Barely," she frowned. "The elves will be in a tizzy and some poor tailor will curse my name to the heavens, but it can be done...it will be done."

"Great," he beamed, only to cow slightly at her glare.

Had she taken lessons from Severus to achieve such an intensity?

"Err...you know that you're my favourite cousin right?"

"Flattery will get you nowhere Black," she chided. "Now you will lay there and be quiet. The ceremony will be this evening and no, no arguments!"

"But."

"Hush," she ordered, glaring at him. "I'm not even sure the hospital will let you go today, and I refuse to have the ceremony here. Which means that you need to lay there and do your best to look healthy understood? You can faint afterwards for all I care. Merlin...less than eighteen hours to plan something like this – men."

"Family only if that makes it easier," he offered. "We don't need a guest list."

Another sharp look was her only response before she continued muttering to herself.

"Sleep Black," she ordered minutes later when she had organised a plan by which to manage the workload. "And make sure you actually ask these two to marry you. Not that they have a choice. After the stress I'm about to go through I will drag them kicking and screaming to you if necessary."

Continuing with her mutterings, the woman walked from the room, leaving Sirius to chuckle softly.
Narcissa truly was something, he thought fondly as he laid back, turning so that he could watch the sleeping men.

"Mines," he thought happily, looking at them before deciding the heed the woman and try to get some more rest.

Draco entered Harry’s bedroom, his brow creasing slightly with concern when he saw him in bed already. Quietly he moved to his side, not to disturb him if he truly was asleep. However, as he neared the bed, his mate's eyes fluttered opened and he graced him with a sleepy smile.

"Was waiting for you," he murmured, patting the bed invintingly. "Join me."

Draco easily obeyed, smiling fondly when Harry twisted to cuddle against his chest, sighing contentedly.

"Are you very tired?" he asked, rubbing along his back soothingly.

His parents had had to brow beat the healers into releasing both Harry and Sirius. The latter they claimed needed at least two more days of recuperation under their care. They were not certain that whatever Harry had done was truly permanent and wanted him to remain under observation until they were perfectly sure that there were no ill-effects. As for Harry, Draco had gotten the impression that they were more concerned with analysing Harry than treating him.

They had hinted as much. On the one hand, he could not fault them. If Harry's powers could in some way be harnessed, it would prove to be a benefit for the healers. Nevertheless, his mate was not some experiment to be poked and prodded at. Thus, after being warned not to use any magic for a few days and to rest whenever he grew lethargic, Harry was released as well.

The actual ceremony had been simple yet beautiful. Taking place in the gazebo the boys so favoured, the men had performed their vows to each other before performing the magical vow that bond them irreversibly to each other until death and beyond. Even as he had cheered happily for the men, Harry had found himself sneaking glances at Draco throughout the ceremony. He had assisted his godfather in preparing for the evening, and, with great interest had listened to the man express his feelings for his two lovers. It had given Harry a critical bit of information, one that he looked forward to sharing with his mate.

"I'm mostly sleepy," Harry admitted, fisting Draco's shirt in his hand while he talked. "Today was great wasn't it?"

"Yes. It was the perfect ending, given what happened yesterday."

"Hmm," Harry agreed. "Draco?"

"Yes cub?"

"Will that be us one day?" he asked carefully, toying at a button.

Harry felt his mate stiffen slightly beneath him. Nevertheless, his voice was warm when he spoke again. "Getting married? It will."

"Because we're mates?"

"Yes Harry," Draco confirmed. "Once we're old enough, we'll be bonded...and married."
Harry frowned at the odd phrasing. "There is a difference?"

He moved to look at the veela, but was stopped by a firm hand on his head, keeping him in place. After a token protest, he settled down once again, content to listen to what the veela had to say.

Somewhat," Draco explained, lowering his tone to a soft and soothing one – the perfect pitch to lull his exhausted mate to sleep.

"Explain," Harry grumbled, resisting the pull of sleep to hear the answer.

Above him, Draco shook his head at the stubbornness of his mate before responding.

"Marriage binds you legally, but somewhat artificially. People who have decided that they love each other and wish to become a ratified couple in every sense of the word perform marriages. It's the only way for regular people. We – couples drawn together by our souls – we are bonded. It's a natural process that culminates when the time is right. There is no real ceremony – it cannot be planned. The bonding is almost spontaneously. Nevertheless, only marriages are viewed as being completely legal and binding in every sense of the world. Hence many, as will we, will have a marriage and a bonding."

"It won't occur together?"

"It might," he allowed. "It didn't with Mother and Father. They bonded immediately after her maturity – the marriage didn't follow for almost a year. Either can be done beforehand. We can get married first and then bonded. Or we can get bonded and eventually have it standardised legally."

Harry made a noncommittal sound as he shifted slightly. Despite how fascinating he found the conversation to be, he was tired, very tired, and so, he felt himself drifting to sleep. Nevertheless, this conversation was leading directly into his earlier realisation, and he was determined to relate it before he fell asleep. This time though, his body overcame his determination.

"I realised something," he murmured, in a slurring voice.

"Just sleep Harry," Draco urged. "We can talk in the morning."

The thirteen year old shook his head slightly, and in doing so bought himself a few more moments. "I realised something," he repeated, struggling to make himself understandable.

Draco sighed softly, the movement jostling his head slightly. "Tell me then."

The veiled command prompted Harry to speak, seconds before he succumbed to sleep. "I'm in love with you," he murmured, before growing still.

Needless to him, even as Harry rested, one Draco Malfoy found himself wide awake.

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Severus hesitated as his hand reached for the doorknob. He had finished his nightly bathroom ritual before proceeding to clean down the area, just for something to do. He was nervous – very nervous – to leave the sanctuary the bathroom offered him. He knew that he was being silly, however, he felt strangely reluctant to return to the bedroom. It was ridiculous. He had lived here for years now, and there was nothing entirely strange about what he knew awaited him when he left the bathroom. Yet, he hesitated.

"What is wrong with me," he hissed, spinning around to glare at his reflection. "It's only Sirius and
Remus for Merlin's sake!"

However, that in itself was the issue. It was not just them anymore. The men who awaited him were
now more than his lovers, they were his husbands. That put an entirely new spin on their
relationship, and for all that he had eagerly married them, he was not certain about the change.
Everything had changed so suddenly. One minute he was brewing, the next Remus' frantic calls had
reached him. Then he had been in the hospital, watching Sirius fade away, only for Harry, by some
miracle, to save him. And then, he was married.

It had all happened so fast, and he was still trying to grapple with the changes. But, he reminded
himself, there was one constant in all of the recent events. His love for the two men remained the
same, and, new titles or not, the men had not changed. They were the same and he was the same.
Therefore, there was no need for him to cower in the bathroom like this. His partners awaited him.

Strengthened by the thoughts, he finally turned the doorknob, and stepped into the bedroom...only to
stop short.

"What the hell?"

The bedroom had been transformed in the time he had locked himself away in the bathroom. The
central lighting was off, and instead, dozens of candles floated around the room, creating a gentle
illumination. Looking down, he saw rose petals scattered across the floor and, as he sniffed, caught a
whiff of burning incense. All in all, it was a romantic scene, a horribly romantic one that had a smile
tugging at his lips. However, it was when his eyes settled on his husbands across the room that he
lost control.

Doubling over, he laughed heartily.

"I don't think that he appreciates our gesture Remus," Sirius said.

"I told you he wouldn't," came the pert reply.

Severus managed to curtail his laughter enough to look up again, only to laugh once again. The pair
had donned what appeared to be silk robes, opened to mid-chest. That in itself was acceptable;
however, the pair had chosen to pose on the window seat in a posture that came straight from one of
those horrendous romance novels that Narcissa had favoured in her younger days. The rose tucked
into Remus' hair, and the one Sirius held delicately between his teeth, only sought to amuse him
further.

"Please tell me you aren't serious?" he asked eventually, when his amusement died down.

"Of course I am Sirius," the black haired wizard quipped. "Now come here Severus."

Chuckling slightly, he obeyed, squeezing in between the pair.

"I take it you don't like romantic?" Remus said teasingly against his ear.

"A bubble bath is my limit," he admitted. "But you know that very well."

"We do," Sirius agreed. "However, when you decided to run away from us like a blushing virgin we
knew we needed to do something. And since we didn't want to upset your delicate sensibilities any
further, this seemed the best way."

Severus' eyes narrowed at his slightly mocking tone, but after a moment, he dismissed it. It was not
an untruth. After all, he had been hiding from them in the bathroom. It seemed even sillier now,
looking back at it. Nevertheless, he was not about to let that barb go unanswered.

"I'll show you blushing," he grumbled, leaning across to kiss Sirius.

His swiftness startled the man, and, taking quick advantage of the man's gasp, his tongue dived in to duel with Sirius'.

"That's the spirit," Remus praised from beside him, reaching out to grasp his hand, and brush his lips against the wedding band.

A moment later, the kiss broke and Severus smirked softly at the slight flush on Sirius' face. "I win," he whispered, before leaning in for another kiss.

He knew he had taken Sirius by surprise. Of the three of them, he was the least aggressive lover, and while he participated with full enthusiasm, he rarely took control as he was doing now. Usually he was content to allow his husbands the freedom to dictate the pace. After all, there was no need for him to take control in all things. Nonetheless, he told himself, as he turned his attentions toward Remus, who said he, like everything else, could not change as well?
"Um Draco," Harry murmured, "Papa and Mama want us to meet them."

"We still have time," the veela repeated, his gaze dark, as he looked up at his mate before bending to suckle at his neck once again.

It was only the second time that they were doing something like this, but Harry was quickly becoming addicted to the feeling. Were it up to him, he would never want his mate to stop. This hot, tingling feeling was one that he enjoyed immensely and he wanted it prolonged as much as possible. Groaning slightly, he pulled at the blonde's head, kissing him deeply when he was close enough. Draco moaned appreciatively, allowing more of his weight to settle down on Harry's body. The younger wizard did not mind in the least – the weight of the veela upon him felt very comfortable. He wished that he would never move from off him.

"Draco," he murmured, his lips a hairsbreadth away from his mate's. "We really have to go. They said it was important."

The veela's eyes glinted as he said hotly. "Mate, please do not mention others when we're doing this?"

Any potential protest was cut off by his lips, as he went about ensuring that Harry could not even think straight, far less dwell on someone else at the moment.

"Oh my..."

"Not again!"

Both froze at the pair of voices. Harry pulled away from the veela, a flush of a different kind gracing his cheeks as he saw their parents looking at them with differing expressions. Apparently they were very late, he thought absently as he pushed the very disgruntled veela off him. He patted him soothingly as he sat up, shooting the adults a sheepish smile. "Hello."

"What he said," Draco muttered darkly. Really was this going to happen every time he made out with his mate?

Narcissa was the first to recover, and said, "I guess we should have knocked harder."

"They're too young!" Lucius blustered, looking toward his wife in a slight panic. "Why aren't you upset?"

"Why are you?" she shot back calmly. "Go straighten yourselves boys."

"Separate bathrooms!"

Both wizards hurried to obey, but, as the witch turned to her husband, neither noticed when both snuck out toward Draco's quarters instead.

"This is the second time I've caught them like this Narcissa," Lucius grated. "This can't continue. And why are you so calm about it all?"

The witch reached up to stroke his cheek. "I can sense something that you can't my love," she told him. "Their bond has grown even stronger, which means only one thing. Harry has finally requited
Draco's feelings – fully at that."

The man pondered on the woman's words for a moment before grumbling, "That doesn't give them the right to be doing that. Narcissa that was bloody foreplay!"

The witch chuckled at the man's word choice. Personally she would have labelled it as heavy petting, and truthfully, she and her husband had done a lot more than that when they were teenagers. Although, they had never done so in a bedroom...but it wasn't as if they could have gone much further anyway. Harry still wasn't of age for that to happen and her husband very well knew that. Nevertheless, it seemed a mute point for him currently.

"Darling calm down," she bid, rubbing his back soothingly.

Vaguely she registered that the boys were taking a rather long time to return, but it wasn't important now. Stopping Lucius from doing something rash was.

"I can't calm down," he said. "They're still children for Merlin's sake. They should still be at the holding hands stage not sucking face!"

Narcissa resisted the urge to crinkle her nose. Just where had Lucius picked up such a plebeian term? "They're teenagers," she countered. "And they're at the age where they're discovering nuances of themselves. It's just that they're experimenting on each other."

"But-"

"Lucius," she said, derision entering her tone now. "I won't have you ruining this for them. This is an important stage for them, and nothing untoward will happen. We should be glad that Harry is responding well to Draco's advances. You knew I was worried that Krum would have had a lasting effect on him. This is good."

"I don't like it."

"You don't have to," she said. "Just do not take it out on them, understood? Besides, you talked to them about sex already."

"Actually Mother," Draco said from the doorway. "The only thing he told us was not to do it until we were thirty."

"That wasn't all he said Draco," Harry corrected. "He said that sex was placing body part A into body part B and to repeat that action as much times as necessary."

"Lucius Abraxas!"

"Are we interrupting?" Harry asked from beside him.

"Not at all Harry," she reassured, while shooting her husband a speaking look. This was not the end of that discussion.

"Don't be too hard on Father," Draco requested as he and Harry seated themselves. "Uncle Severus told us what sex really is."

"Although he seconded Papa's thirty."

"I'll talk to him too," she decided.

"But why are you so mad at us kissing Papa?" Harry pressed, looking at him. "We aren't doing
anything wrong. Draco's my mate, I'm supposed to kiss him."

"Multiple times," the said veela added with a slight smirk.

Now that their mother was there to 'control' Lucius, he had no qualms about making the man squirm. It was suitable payback for interrupting them – twice. Narcissa rolled her eyes slightly, correcting gauging his thoughts while beside her, Lucius spluttered.

A few minutes later, when Lucius had calmed himself sufficiently, and Draco had had his fill of revenge, Harry broached the subject of why they wanted to speak to them in the first place. It wasn't as if they did not spend copious amounts of time together, however, the few times they had been actively summoned like this, meant indicated that it was something serious. Harry did not know about Draco, but he rarely found such conversations pleasant. He was right.

"We're considering restarting your animagus training Draco," Narcissa stated. "It's been months since you've last tried, and we think this is a good thing. Your power has grown since then, and we think you will achieve a lot more this time around. Oh don't look that way Draco. The last Remus and I spoke, he was convinced that you can manage the form. It takes people years to master it. You shouldn't allow yourself to become disheartened by a few weeks of failures."

"We also want you to consider joining him Harry," Lucius added, looking at the frowning thirteen year old, "If only to see if you truly have two forms or are meant to have one."

Harry bit his lip in agitation, glancing toward his mate who sported an equally dark expression. To be honest, he had completely forgotten about that brief stint of lessons. So many more important things had happened since then. But now, his parents were reopening the conversation, and from the sound of it, the decision had already been made for them. Quickly, Harry ran through his options. His tantrum days were now past him...they would see through it if he even tried. There certainly was no other more pressing matter that he could subvert their attention by, and plainly stating "I don't want to" was not likely to gain him a favourable response.

Beside him, Draco was thinking similarly. Their words had come upon him like a thief in the night, and truly, he did not know how to react to it. What he did know was that he was not learning how to transform, absolutely none. He might be older, but his thoughts on the matter had not changed in the slightest. There was no way he was going to transform into such a horrid creature, no matter the fact it was virtually indestructible.

Both teenagers looked at each other for a long moment, recalling their last conversation on the matter. Both had vowed to help the other maintain their secrets, although, Draco had a feeling that he would have to break that promise. He was certain – very certain – that his parents would not push him on the matter if they understood exactly what he would become if they forced the change. He could not speak for Harry though. For all he knew his mate's form was a flubberworm and it was sheer embarrassment that led to his refusing to give up the more appealing kitten form.

"Boys?"

Draco glanced briefly at his father before focussing on Harry once again. "I can't do it," he said softly, the words meant primarily for Harry to hear. "I won't do it."

Harry nodded in agreement, although his eyes held resignation. Apparently Harry had no way from them to escape this. Unconsciously he had been depending on his mate to come up with some hairbrained scheme to buy them some time. But he knew that he would have to revert to his original plan.
"I'm sorry cub," he whispered.

The way his mate's eyes widened told him that Harry realised that he was about to break the promise they had made. By default Harry would have to do the same, unless he wished to endure the lessons solo. As much as the veela despaired at the notion of Harry learning of what he could potentially become, he knew that it was a small chance to pay. Harry knowing about it was far better than him being forced to become it, if only temporarily. After a moment, Harry reluctantly nodded. He would do it alongside his mate.

"We won't be doing any animagus training," Draco said firmly yet respectfully.

Lucius made to speak, but the veela continued before he could talk.

"Mother, Father, we know why you want me, and even Harry to learn the art. It would be a great benefit to us in times of difficulty. It'd make it easier to hide. But that's exactly the issue – well part of it. There is no way that I can hide from anyone in my form. Believe me, I will stand out no matter where I go to. The only advantage I would have is speed, but given the drawbacks, I don't really consider that a benefit at all."

Narcissa put a hand over Lucius, silently urging him to retain his calm. They had both decided that it was imperative that the pair learn it given the intensity of Voldemort's attacks. More than that though was the fact that Harry had been caught in a vulnerable position. He had shied away from learning more offensive magic, although he had brushed up on his defensive magic. It was a drawback of being a submissive partner – in his opinion he had no need to learn anything extra. It was up to his mate to protect him. It was an instinct she easily ignored, nevertheless, she had had to be self-sufficient for the majority of her formative years. It was no hard task to continue doing so. Harry though had been brought up to depend on Draco. It was something that she was now regretted but had no idea how to change.

"Draco," she said. "What we ask is not unreasonable of you. We just want you safe."

"You can't keep me safe from myself though," he countered darkly.

"What?" she asked, realising that there was an undercurrent to his words. "What are you saying Draco?"

Draco steadied himself. It was now or never, he reckoned. "I refuse to learn to transform Mother, because I will not let myself become a dark creature. The animagus form reflects who you are internally. If is Nundu is my inner self, then I will do my damnest to ensure that it never comes out."

Despite the shocked expression on his parents' face, Draco was more concerned with Harry's reactions. To his shock, he saw neither disgust nor censure. Indeed, Harry looked...relieved.

"Cub?"

"A Nundu?" Lucius finally managed. "Surely you're mistaken son."

"I'm not," he said firmly. "I double checked Father. It is who I am and I will not become it."

To many people, the Nundu was the worst creature that existed in the world. Entire populations had been decimated by the feline like creature. Its breath was toxic – a mere whiff of it was enough to kill a baby or poison an adult. It was a fierce-some creature and entirely impossible to control. Restraining it was a useless endeavour. It was too swift, its fangs and claws too sharp and resilient. And that was if its toxic breath did not affect one first.
Even now the veela had no idea how that horrid creature could reflect his inner nature...well, in a way he could. After all, when he had saw Krum on top of Harry, he could have easily torn him apart with nary a care. He had been that angry. But that he associated more with concern for Harry than any true evil on his part. That meant that he did not believe it to be a part of himself. He was not about to tempt fate. Currently he considered himself to be wholly light. To even try to become that creature was to invite trouble. He would not allow it.

"But that's impossible," Narcissa breathed, although Draco knew that she was not doubting him. He could not have made up something so ludicrous if he had tried. "Becoming a magical creature in itself is rare. For you to be that on top of it...it's not possible."

"I know," he confirmed. "Which I believe is why I had difficulty before. I never tried particularly hard – well I did. But I tried hoping that I would be wrong, that I would transform into something other than that. That's why the task became impossible."

"And you Harry," Lucius asked, looking toward the silent brunette.

"The same," he said with only a hint of hesitance. Talking about it was so much easier now that he knew what Draco was. He doubted that the veela would reject him, for his form was just as horrible. "Not the same creature," he admitted at the man's choked sound, "but the situation is the same. M-my form is a Grim. I don't even want to contemplate becoming that. I know I should have just told you the truth instead of how I acted, but I didn't want anyone to know. I was too ashamed. And yes Papa, I'm certain that it is my form. I doubled checked in one of Hagrid's books. It was there. The picture matched exactly what I envisioned myself to be."

Both adults seemed dumbfounded if their expressions were anything to go by.

"No wonder you didn't tell me," Draco murmured looking at him.

"I could say the same for you," Harry responded sadly. "If it helps, I don't think of you any differently."

"I was worried about that," the veela admitted. "But you shared my fears as well. Regardless, there's nothing that would make me stop loving you."

"I know that," Harry confirmed. "It's partly why I love you so much, and am in love with you."

The last was said with a secretive smile which considerably brightened the veela's mood.

He recalled their 'morning after'. Harry had been embarrassed when he had awakened. Apparently he had not been ready to tell him, but sleepy as he had been, it had simply slipped out. Draco though had been unbelievably pleased, especially when he pressed Harry to explain exactly how he felt about him. The words still brought a pleased smile to his face.

"How am I certain? It's hard to explain Draco. But, seeing Uncle Sirius like that made me realise just how empty I would be without you. I can't even bear the thought of losing you Draco. You're like my other half. Living without you – I might as well kill myself were that ever to happen. And then talking to Uncle Sirius gave me more clues. Whenever you're near me it's as if the world becomes brighter. In your arms I feel invincible."

"Nothing seems impossible with you around. You make me happy, you make me safe, and I love how I feel when I'm around you. That's why I'm certain I'm in love with you Draco. You complete me in a way nothing else will. Truthfully I think I was always in love with you, but I simply didn't realise what that meant until now. But yes Draco, I am in love with you...now and always."
Narcissa speaking again refocused their attention on them. "This changes everything," she mused allowed. "Lucius, I...what do you think?"

The man shot his wife a speaking look. Her hesitation was clearly evident. Patience was needed, he reminded himself. He could not expect her to revert to her normal behaviour so soon. It would take more time. But honestly, he was as undecided as she was. What exactly could he say to them? He certainly did not want them to become those horrid creatures, and more pressing to him anyway was trying to decipher the implications of those forms. There had to be a reason why both of them had such dastardly creatures as their inner beings – well their supposed inner beings, he amended. He knew his boys in and out. Neither had the propensity to become those creatures; something was desperately wrong with the entire scenario.

"I do believe you," he said as a starter. "I won't doubt you on this. And for that I'm going to agree with you. Was this mere stubbornness on your parts, you certainly would have the lessons. As is, I agree that you should not pursue the matter. It may prove detrimental."

The relief on their faces was palpable. "Thank you Papa."

"Thanks Father."

Lucius nodded. "I must say that I'm disappointed that you did not tell us this in the first place. It would have saved you unnecessary heartache. Regardless, what's done is done, but your honesty is appreciated."

"You must tell us these things," Narcissa added. "Boys we need to know these things if we're to help you. Imagine if we had forced you to continue the lessons. The outcome could have been disastrous."

Draco nodded his head, easily accepting the mild scolding. After all, it meant that he would not have to do the training. He would accept anything at this point.

"Then there's nothing else to discuss," she said, rising.

Coming over to them, she placed a kiss on each teenager's foreheads. "You are alright my darlings?" she asked. "Telling us was not an easy thing to do."

"I'm fine Mama," Harry reassured her. "It feels good actually."

"I concur."

Lucius too rose, tousling their hair when his wife stepped back to grant him room. "I don't want you too worry about this any further okay? Those forms are not you. Understood?"

"Yes," they responded in union, glad that their parents truly held nothing against them.

"We'll leave you alone then," he continued. "Harry, I believe you still have an essay to complete?"

"Yes Papa," he confirmed with a slight grimace.

"Try to complete it today okay? After all, you go back on Monday...you are going back right?"

"I want to," Harry reassured him. "Vik-Krum won't be there and I'll stay close to Draco or my friends at all times."

"Okay," Lucius said. "But remember, if you change your mind, no matter the reason, we'll pull you
out. Your OWLs can be written on your own time."

"I'll keep that in mind," the thirteen year old promised, leaning forward to hug the man.

"Thanks papa."

"Your welcome," came the tender reply.

"What are we going to do?" Lucius asked a few minutes later when they were in their own bedroom.

"Talk to Albus," she said, "and hope he has the answers we need. I didn't want to worry them, but really? A Nundu and a Grim? Those are evil creatures."

"I know," he sighed. "Why on earth would they have those forms? And both of them?"

The emphasis he placed on the word had Narcissa eyeing him curiously. "What do you mean?"

Lucius rubbed tiredly at his nose. "Were it Harry alone I would be less worried," he admitted. "It would make sense. He has that connection to Voldemort remember? But Draco...what does he have to do with it. This isn't the first time..."

"The nightmares you mean. And the pain Harry suffered?"

"Exactly my dear. None of these things should have happened to both of them. Harry faced Voldemort, not Draco. Harry has the connection, not Draco. So why in Merlin's name is it happening to them both? We're missing something – something big. More than that, I can't help but think that the answer is obvious. But what the hell is it?"

Narcissa had no response to that, and, after a few minutes, penned a note to Albus, telling him that they needed to talk – and urgently.
Chapter 72

Albus was tired, dreadfully tired, and it seemed that he would not have any rest anytime soon. Things were just piling up on him, so much so, that he now used a time turner to manage all of his responsibilities. He was not certain how much longer he could maintain that schedule. And now, to compound matters, the Malfoys had provided him with information that only increased his concerns. He seconded Lucius’ questions. What exactly was going on with Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy? Why was it that whatever happened to one, inevitably affected the other? There was no reason for the number of shared events between the pair, and yet, there was never an occasion when something did not happen.

Hell, he thought darkly, Draco was now overdue for discovering some new power. After all, Harry could now heal people. Then again, the pair seemed only to share negative traits with each other.

Albus knew that his thoughts were bitter, but currently, he could not help it.

He was clueless as to what to do regarding Harry and Draco. Their forms indeed boded ill for them – yet, at the same time, Albus could not help but recall the prophesy. Was this the power that Voldemort did not have? It was starting to seem so. It certainly sounded more feasible than his rather quaint ‘power of love’ theory. He had spoken to Lily regarding it, a conversation that had yielded no true results. Yes she had wished with all her heart that her son had lived. Yes she had willingly welcomed death. But no, she had not planned anything deliberate, far less knowing graced Harry with some special power to help him win. Yes, her sacrifice had made it possible to erect blood wards, but no, she did not know any other side-effects of it, and no, Destiny would not answer those questions.

They had to figure it out on their own.

But, could that be the way to beat Voldemort? An animagus form?

It was plausible, he knew. After all, when a person had a magical animagus form, they also had accessed to the powers of that being. So, were Harry to face Voldemort as a Grim, he might indeed be able to destroy the man. After all, like a Nundu, a Grim was a deadly being and none were known to survive its bite. But that raised another issue.

Harry facing Voldemort.

That would never happen – especially with the Malfoys having guardianship of him.

Albus knew his thoughts were unkind, but he could not help but note that his task would be far simpler if Harry had not had such a protective family surrounding him. As is, no one, save him, was placing any real value on the prophesy, and simply because they refused to have Harry fight. It sounded ludicrous, even to him, but Albus firmly believed in it. Harry was the only one who could bring down Voldemort, even though he was only thirteen now.

If the Malfoys had their way, Harry would never see the battle field, and the only time they would relent was when he was well into adulthood. The wizarding world would be in shambles by the time they decided to allow him to fight. That Albus knew, he could not allow. But legally or otherwise, there was nothing he could do to force his hand without bringing a swift end to their friendship and his political career. Not that he truly wanted his honorary grandson in harm's way, but as he had said before, sacrifices had to be made for the greater good, and if Harry needed to be sacrificed, it was something he was prepared to do.
But what was the connection?

Harry’s form directly related to his scar and whatever connection it gave to Voldemort. But what was that connection? Albus had not come up with an ulterior one since his whole ‘Harry is a horcrux’ theory panned out. A part of him still refused to dismiss it. After all, it made sense. Yet, his spell indicated that it was not so, and he had cast it a second time after the wedding, confirming once again that while there was a residue in Harry’s scar, it was not a horcrux. What was he missing? Albus slammed his hand on his desk in frustration. Everything was connected he knew but what he did not know was how.

As is, he could only express (in private) his displeasure at the Malfoys for not pressing the animagus issue any further. They were thinking with their hearts and not their minds, putting the needs of their sons before anything else. He did not fault them for that, but a part of him wished that they would use any means necessary to make the pair learn the transformation. What if that truly was the key to victory? Was the pair’s discomfort really too much to ask for when the world needed saving? He knew that, to Lucius and Narcissa, it was.

He could not decide if he was pleased or annoyed when his floo flared to life. Ultimately he accepted it, hoping that whoever it was would in some way alleviate the mental turmoil he was in. Alas, it would only enhance it further. The headmaster forced a neutral expression on his face as he waited for the caller to appear.

"Sirius?" he asked when the call finally connected.

"Yeah it's me," he said in a clipped voice. "We've got a problem. Well, you have a problem, but I think by default we do as well."

Great, Albus thought. Yet another thing to make his life more complicated. "Shall I floo you in?" he asked, striving to keep his irritation at bay.

"No," Sirius responded. "You need to come here – to the Ministry. Bring Severus with you; he might be able to help."

Albus resisted the urge to frown. Why exactly was he needed at the Ministry of all places? More than that, why on earth was Sirius being so cryptic? Nevertheless, pressing the point now would be useless. Already the man looked as if he was ready to disconnect the call.

"I'll get him," he promised. "We'll be there within half an hour."

"Good," Sirius replied simply. "And let no one know where you're going. It's that important."

"Fine."

"Where exactly is this Sirius?" Severus asked, crinkling his nose at the smell.

It certainly was not any part of the Ministry he had been privy too. The area was dark, with a slightly ominous air to it. More than it, there was a smell that seemed to permeate the room. Severus knew he had smelled it before, but could not precisely place it at the moment. Beside him, Albus looked around him, a frown firmly in place. In a way, he understood his annoyance. Barely had they stepped through the floo had Sirius started leading them to this place with nary a word. Indeed, save for a slight brushing of their hands, Sirius had not greeted him properly. To Severus, that meant only one thing. His husband had stumbled across something big.
"We're heading toward the Death Chamber," Sirius responded without turning around. "We house all found corpses here until they can either be identified or disposed of."

"Then why are we here?" Albus demanded.

"A body was brought in two days ago," he responded, stopping before a door and deactivating the wards. "It's by chance really that I found out about it. Auror Keith's wife went into labour early so I agreed to cover for him. Identifying the body was supposed to be his job. Let's just say I had no difficulty in identifying the witch."

"Who is it?"

By now they had stepped into the room, only to be assaulted by the smell of death. Albus gagged, while Severus forced himself to breath shallowly. Sirius though, was impervious to the smell. Having spent the majority of the day down here, it was nothing more than a mild irritant for him.

"If it wasn't for the fact that I'm at Hogwarts so often I would never have recognised her," Sirius said, coming beside a cloth covered body. "The irony is that she's been dead at least three months. Therefore Albus, would you like to tell me who the hell is teaching Muggle Studies?"

As he said the last word, he flipped back the covering, revealing the partially decomposed body of Charity Burbage. Despite the discoloration and bloating it was still easy to recognise her. The most compelling factor though was the fact that she was bald.

"Polyjuice," Severus said immediately.

"Exactly," Sirius seconded before glancing at the pale Albus.

"This isn't possible," the headmaster said, his eyes riveted onto the corpse.

"There's no room for error," Sirius told him, a hint of steel in his voice. "The only reason her body is in such a good condition is because of the early winter. She's been frozen solid for at least two months. Otherwise there would be nothing of her to find, far less identify."

"Where was she found?"

"In the forest behind Knockturn Alley. Aurors were conducting a raid and some wizards headed into the forest. I suppose they were trying to escape our Anti-Apparition wards. They were caught, and simultaneously, her corpse was found. Have you noticed anything strange from 'Charity'?"

A frown marred Severus' face. "I've never had much to do with her," he said, despite the fact that the question clearly was not directed toward him. "I really wouldn't know."

Both men turned toward the headmaster, waiting for his response.

The old wizard stared at the corpse for long moments, no clear expression on his face before he, almost reluctantly, started speaking. "I have," Albus admitted, weariness in his voice. "I should have thought something strange from the start."

"What?" Sirius asked sharply.

Although he was trying his best not to show it, the auror was very annoyed with Albus currently – and frankly, that was a bit of an understatement. How effective could Albus be if he did not even realise that there was an imposter among his staff. What about all of the added security the castle had? Especially given the presence of the foreigners? This was not the first time the old wizard had
come up short but to Sirius this was the most glaring.

Merlin alone knew what the imposter was getting into at the school, and here they were without even the slightest clue to their presence. The damage that had already been done. Through Severus he knew about the countless meetings the staff had, relating to anything from classes to security. At this rate, Albus might as well drop the wards to the school. Voldemort surely already knew of a way to gain access to the place.

His dark thoughts retreated slightly as he felt a warm caress on his hand. Looking down he saw his husband rubbing soothingly on the appendage, apparently sensing his anger. He took a deep breath, and determinedly shoved the anger from the forefront of his mind. Severus' unconscious message was clear. Now was neither the time for blame or anger. All of their energy needed to be focussed on how this situation could be fixed, or capitalised upon. Truly, he already had an idea on what they could do, but for now, he was not sure if he could trust the old man with it.

"Charity has been hanging around Igor a lot recently," Albus said in a dull tone. "I had thought it strange. Charity may be a half-blood – something that Igor would only barely tolerate, but she was our Muggles Studies Professor as well. He should have hated her instantly, yet instead they accompanied each other to the ball and they've been going to Hogsmeade often. I believe she's even been on Durmstrang's ship. I thought it was just a whirlwind romance, a very unorthodox one at that, but nothing that warranted any concern on my path."

"Look," Severus said, when Albus said nothing further. "Let's just get out of here for now okay? This isn't the time or place. Sirius who do you need to contact regarding her?"

"No one," he responded, tightening his grasp on his hand. "Charity has no family to speak of. Should anything have happened to her, she simply asked that Hogwarts' administration be notified. Consider that notification rendered Albus."

"You think this is my fault Sirius?" the man asked sadly.

"No I don't," came the immediate reply. "What I do blame you for is an imposter masquerading around Hogwarts. You are just damn lucky that she's never had contact with Harry or else I'd react differently."

"Let's go," Severus reaffirmed, tugging on Sirius. "Albus..."

"You don't have any more classes anyway," he interrupted. "Go home with him. There's nothing we can do immediately."

"Okay."

"We'll discuss this tomorrow Albus," Sirius added, as they left the room. "For now, do nothing. No one knows that Charity has been found. We have the upper hand now. This might be our best option to bring him down."

"Of course Sirius," he agreed.

Once back in his office, Albus dropped tiredly into a chair, calling Fawkes to him. Sirius' anger was justifiable, he supposed, although he did not agree with him directing it toward him. He was only one man after all, and human at that. He was bound to make mistakes. Perhaps, Sirius should be relieved that thus far 'Charity' had caused no discernable harm. It was a small comfort though. More important to Albus though, was Sirius' reactions, rather than the cause of it. If this was what he could expect from a blunder he did not directly cause, how would he – how would they – react if he forced his
hand, pushing Harry headfirst into battle.

It was something he ultimately decided to spend no more time dwelling on. He could not see the future. He could only live in the present while learning from the mistakes of the past. He knew what was needed to end the war. Perhaps it was time that he relented slightly, and stopped trying to find ways to invoke the prophesy. If it was meant to be, it would come to pass. He would stop trying to force it, but instead insure that all the players were in their proper places for whenever the battle that would decide it all began.

"Sirius that was unnecessary," Severus scolded, even as he led the man into the bathroom.

"It was completely necessary," he shot back, starting to disrobe himself.

"Albus could not have known that it was an imposter. I did not know. So are you angry with me as well?"

"Of course not," he snapped, something that earned him a scowl from his husband. "Dammit Severus, I was scared okay?"

That brought Severus up short, and he looked at the taller wizard in confusion.

"I was scared," Sirius repeated. "And it turned into anger. Severus, that person has been in Hogwarts for months and no one knew about it. Do you realise how fallible Hogwarts' safety is? Who's to know if she really is the only one huh? What if next week Trelawney's body shows up? You could have been hurt. If 'Charity' had shown up in your office, would you have had your wand ready, or would you just have rolled your eyes as you always do before fetching whatever she needed? What if our godsons' had some sort of interaction with her. 'Mr. Malfoy, please assist me with this?' or 'Mr. Potter, would you give me your opinion on XYZ?'

"Any of you could have easily been hurt dammit. What if she'd kidnapped one of you? No one would have suspected her! You would have been flung aside like a bad bunch of pumpkins until your corpse was stumbled upon. How can you not expect me to be angry? I could have lost you! I could have lost all of you! Oh!"

Severus tightened his grip around his stiff husband, resting his head on his shoulder. He said nothing, for truly nothing needed to be said. Instead, he only graced him with his presence. Gradually the tension with him slackened, and soon enough Sirius wrapped his arms around him in return, pressing his head against his hair.

"I getting tired of it all," he said wearily. "The fighting, the planning, the deaths. Every time sometime seems to be going right, something turns up."

"We fight because no one else will," Severus said, closing his eyes and relaxing into the embrace. "We fight because we want the fighting to end. We fight because we refuse to roll over and die. We fight for a time when we don't have to say we're fed up of fighting."

Sirius gave a dry chuckle before tightening his grip. "I've been a right arse haven't I?"

"Towards Albus? Maybe. I doubt he'll hold it against you though, I blow up on him all of the time."

Sirius chuckled again, pulling back slightly. "Let's bathe and get something to eat okay? Remus won't be back for some hours still."
Severus disengaged himself, but reached for the man's hand, brushing his lips against the wedding band there. "Shall we play the role of doting husbands?"

Sirius' eyes brightened slightly at the obvious diversion from his macabre thoughts. "Which kind my dear?" he drawled. "The kind who lavishes attention on him until he believes himself royalty, or the kind who waits anxiously before the floo, hoping that he'd appear and break the monotony of the day?"

"Whichever one you like," the potions master laughed. "For now, allow me to dote on you?"

"As much as it pleases you."

"How generous of you sir," Severus joked, only to feel his heart miss a beat at the heated look his joking term earned him.

He knew that he would pay dearly for that comment, but the price was too enjoyable for him to feel any true regret.

"Let's stay like this," Sirius grumbled, tightening his arm around Severus' stomach when he made to move.

The potions master huffed slightly, before settling back between the man's spread legs, laying his head on his shoulder. Sirius said nothing further, and after a few minutes, he looked up at his face to see that he was dozing.

"Only a fool would fall asleep in a bath," he groused, before resting his head down once again, deciding against disturbing him.

He found himself looking at his ring with a slightly silly smile on his face. It had been his for only two weeks now, and every spare moment had been spent observing it. Using his next hand, he brushed his fingers over it. He still found it hard to believe that Sirius had feared rejection.

"Silly mutt," he murmured affectionately. He certainly had not been expecting the proposal, but it had seemed the most natural thing in the world. There was no doubt that he would not have said yes.

Severus looked anxiously at Sirius, nothing the contemplative expression on his face. It had been there ever since he had awoken that morning, and he was concerned. He knew he was overreacting, but having nearly lost him, he believed his fear justified.

Crossing the room he placed a gentle hand against his forehead, searching for a fever. It was the usual side-effect from consuming so many potions at once. But his lover felt cool to the touch, and the smile he gave him was as cheerful as ever.

"No fever," he declared, speaking loudly so Remus, who had just entered the room, could hear.

"That's good," he said. "You'll be released within the hour. Mind you, they are not pleased."

Severus glared mildly at Sirius when he snorted. "I'm not staying here an extra minute. Today is too important!"

Remus came across to stand beside Severus, eyeing him strangely. "Narcissa mentioned something similar earlier."

"She did?" Severus asked. "What's more important than Sirius coming home? Don't tell me she's put together some sort of party? Not even she can manage something on such short notice. And what is
funny Sirius?" he ended, looking at the snickering man.

"You're partially right," the auror said, reaching a hand underneath a pillow. "She is planning something. I asked her to."

"What's she planning?" Severus asked warily, while Remus frowned as he took in his lover's clenched hand. There was definitely something within it, he noted.

Suddenly, the mirth fell from Sirius' face, and indeed, he seemed slightly nervous as his fist clenched periodically. "I-I have something to ask you both," he said, looking at them with wary yet hopeful eyes.

"What is it?" Remus asked cautiously.

"Well," he began, "we've been together for years now, and I love you both very much and I know you love me as well. I want to make it official. You are the most important people in my lives – I would do anything for you and I want you to be mine as much as I am yours. So, if it's not too much to ask, will you marry me?" Saying this, the auror opened his hand, revealing the rings that lay there.

"Yes I will," Severus murmured, repeating softly the words he had said then. "I would love to become your husband, but I will hex you if you call me wife."

"Hey," Sirius grumbled sleepily, surprising him. "I've yet to do that. I'm waiting for the perfect opportunity."

Severus chuckled, reaching up to cup his cheek and rub at the slightly roughened skin. "I thought you were sleeping."

"With you in my lap?" Sirius purred, carefully biting the tip of his ear, and revelling in Severus' shudder. "Besides, the water is cold now. We will have words for that, trust me," he continued. "As a proper doting husband, my bath should have been kept warm."

The potions master laughed softly before rising out of the water.

"Where are you going?" Sirius demanded. "I seek recompense."

"Which is why I am leaving," came the pert retort. "You'll keep me here for hours, and then who's going to greet Remus properly?"

"An elf?"

"Eww."

"Pervert," Sirius snorted, exiting the bath as well.

"You know you love me," the potions master shot as he walked from the room.

A soft look crossed the auror's face. "That I truly do."

* * *

"I believed you mentioned having a plan Sirius?" Albus pressed, looking toward the man seated between his husbands.

"I do," he confirmed. "As I said before, only we know of the imposter's presence. I think that we
keep it that way for now. My suspicions is that the person is a fairly high ranked Death Eater, perhaps even the one responsible for whatever plans Voldemort has for Hogwarts and its occupants. That is information that we need – and badly at that.

"What I am suggesting is two-fold. First we need to remove the imposter and break into their mind. We don't have the time for any real inquisitions and falsities. We forcibly take what we need to know and work with it. However, at the same time, we cannot let Voldemort know that we are on to him. Which means, his imposter will have to be replaced by one of our own. Whoever it is will have to have copies of the person's memories implanted into their own minds so their cover will not be broken. This way we have another spy as well as a way to circumvent any possible plans Voldemort has regarding the school.

"The Auror Department is currently looking at Hogwarts becoming a possible target for Voldemort. Only the Ministry is more strongly guarded, and thus far, we have successfully identified and curtailed the number of employees within it who are turning to the dark side. Taking out Hogwarts is a lot more feasible for him. If he gains control of it, the wizarding world will crumble. No one will lift a finger against him – not when he literally holds the society's future in their hands. The minute he gains the children, he has the ultimate bargaining tool."

It was a dire situation that none of the Order Members present even wanted to consider dwelling on. And it was exactly that reason that Sirius had put that bit of information on the table. He knew how squeamish Albus would be regarding his plans. It bordered on being illegal, but Sirius had a way around that. Nevertheless, the war would not be won if they continued to play based on morality. Voldemort certainly did not give a damn, and, if they wanted to have an advantage over him, they would have to start playing his way. He doubted that the headmaster would see it his way, but truly, it was a democracy. He could, and was certain would, be overruled in the matter.

"Is that even legal?" Minerva asked, eyeing him shrewdly.

"It would be," he said with certainty. "Fudge is getting desperate and Bones is already taking advantage of the fact. "She's already ignoring vigilante actions – which I might add has decreased Voldemort's ranks by ten since my attack. There are other things that she's done as well but that isn't really relevant to our cause. What I can say is that she would definitely assist us in this, if only for the fact that her niece studies Muggle Studies."

"And what exactly would Madam Bones do?" Albus inquired.

"Other than burying the reports on Charity's murder? She can assist us in 'storing' the imposter for as long as necessary. We're already at an arrest first, ask questions later stage. She can and will ensure that whoever it is remains secured however long it takes for this war to end."

Despite the surety in his voice, Sirius' hands clenched under the table. It was that very policy that had landed him in Azkaban in the first place. Nevertheless, he did his damn best to ensure that no one truly undeserving was arrested and rarely did he actually implement the policy himself. Now though, he was entirely willing to do so. He would do anything at this point to hamper Voldemort's efforts, no matter the cost.

"Any thoughts?"

"I agree with Sirius," Narcissa said after no one moved to speak. "Desperate times call for desperate measures and we need to act. Simply observing this person will do nothing. What if something has already been implemented? We may be able to stop it."

"What do you think Albus?" Remus asked, after several other members voiced their agreement.
The man pinched the bridge of his nose. "I'm not comfortable with doing this," he admitted, "but I do agree with all of your points. Sacrifices must be made though, so if the majority agrees, we will follow through with Sirius' plans."

A murmur of agreement went around the room, so the headmaster nodded. "We will go through with it then," he said unnecessarily. "But for now, we have a decision to make. Who exactly is going to replace 'Charity'?"
Chapter 73

Harry tapped his foot agitatedly, a thoughtful expression on his face. "I want to do something with Draco," he said aloud. "Dobby? Come help me decide what to do."

Immediately, a soft pop was heard before his personal elf appeared. "Young Master Harry calls for Dobby?"

"I did," he nodded. "Draco and I haven't done anything special since school's reopened. I don't like that, so I want to do something with him. But what?"

The elf eyed his master amusedly. "Dobby thinks that young master has been doing lots of things with Master Draco."

"Dobby!" he gasped, flushing slightly. "Kissing does not count."

"That be lots more than just kissing," the elf replied shrewdly, enjoying the way his master squirmed slightly before glaring at him.

"Stop channelling Papa," he bid, waggling a finger at him. "Would you believe he's asked Uncle Severus to randomly check on us? I swear, Papa is impossible."

Dobby twisted his ear slightly, trying to keep his amused expression hidden. He had served the Malfoy family for generations, and, over a dozen years before, he had a similar complaint, from Lucius himself. Vaguely he wondered if his former charge even realised just how much his behaviour mirrored his father's, and he wondered if, sometime in the distant future, another heir would be expressing similar sentiments.

"What are you smirking about?" Harry demanded.

"Nothing young master," he reassured. "Dobby just thinking."

"About what I can do? Good. I want something special."

"Kissing be very special."

"I know that," he said with slight exasperation. "But it's all we've been doing lately. It's fun- Merlin knows it is, but I want to do something different. We still can snog while doing it of course..."

Snogging his mate had quickly become his favourite pastime, and he was certain that it was Draco's as well. There was currently nothing more enjoyable than feeling his lips sliding along his while he traced his hand along his mate's chest. Just the thought of it had him unconsciously licking his lips. Dobby noted it with slight amusement but refrained from comment.

"You go home on Saturday young master?" Dobby asked instead. "You do something special then?"

"But that's so far," Harry whined, "besides, I still don't know what I want to do with him. Why is this so hard? It's Voldemort's fault! I wanted to ask him to go to Hogsmeade with me but it's too dangerous. Stupid Voldemort. I guess I can do something after the healer leaves...Can you set up the gazebo for me please? With a basket of food maybe?"

"I will," he promised. "I will make it very pretty for you."

"Thank you," he beamed, "but what about immediately? I want to do some cuddling."
"You do that nightly."

"Hush you," Harry demanded. "You know what I mean!"

"Perhaps Trix can assist?" Draco's elf asked, popping into the room.

"Yes," he said, before glaring at his own elf. "Dobby is being most disagreeable this afternoon. Have you been listening?"

"Trix has," she confirmed. "Master Harry, you be acting like Mistress used to. Mistress always was doing something with Master Lucius."

"Like?"

"She be sending him trinkets and writing little notes for him."

"Aww," he cooed. "I'll do that! But for now?"

"Trix thinks that you don't need to do anything."

"What?"

"Yous never be needing special for Master Draco before. You just be with him and talk before, especially near the fireplace. Trix means no offence, but Trix thinks it be very special."

Harry blinked as he considered her words. It was true, he supposed. He had never felt this kind of pressure to do something with his mate before, and he certainly knew that Draco did not mind either way. It just seemed that lately he wanted to do something more to build upon what they already had. It gave him an added bit of pleasure to see the veela's eyes light up when he presented him with something, be it a cup of tea when he looked thirsty or even something as simple as straightening his tie for him. Doing those little things never failed to make his heart flatter and bring a smile to his face. But yes, he supposed that she was right.

"Maybe we could just have tea and biscuits then?" he compromised. "I can light the fireplace..."

"Dobby be bringing hot chocolate," he said instead. "With treacle tarts and vanilla cake."

Harry smiled widely. "Thank you," he said sincerely. "It'll be great! Can you do it for when Draco returns?"

"Yes young master," he nodded, before leaving.

"Master Harry," Trix said, "you be having a fun evening...but you still have your essay to write."

Harry grimaced slightly, glancing toward his half-finished homework. "I don't want to," he grumbled.

"You will have nothing special if you don't," she pointed out. "Master Draco would not do it."

"Fine," he pouted, as he rose.

"Good afternoon Master Harry," she smiled, before disappearing as well, leaving to ensure that they would have the best possible weekend.
The next afternoon, Harry still found himself prone to random smiles whenever his mind drifted back to the previous night. The evening had been a great success. The look of pleasure on his mate's face as he had entered their common room had warmed his heart, and they had spent a good few hours reclining before the fire place, murmuring softly to each other in between gentle kisses. He had chuckled when the veela had gently taken his plate from him, determined to feed him. More than once Harry had sucked his mate's finger, enjoying the way that it had made his veela's eyes darken considerably.

"Harry...Harry..."

"Err what?" he asked, breaking out of his daydream.

He smiled softly at the second year tugging at his hand. "You're not listening Harry," she pouted. "I made the pillow dance. Look!"

Harry shook his head ruefully as he followed her to her work area. Getting distracted during his Association meeting was not the best thing to do, especially when the witches all eyed him with hidden smirks, undoubtedly correctly guessing what had had him so distracted. Draco had insisted on walking him here after all, and had held him in a way that had made the gathered students giggle or talk excitedly among themselves.

"You're still not listening," the girl pointed out.

"Sorry Samantha," he said, giving her an endearing smile. "Now let's see..."

After that, Harry forced himself to concentrate on his responsibilities, ignoring any thoughts of his veela for now. It really was amazing how much of a distraction his mate could be, but, Harry knew that he could not devote every second of everyday to his mate, no matter how much he wanted to.

Fifteen minutes later, Harry was assisting a couple of third years when Samantha called to him again. Her tone this time was decidedly mischievous.

"Harry, Draco is here," she sing-songed.

The veela mate blinked before looking at the door. Indeed, his mate was leaning casually against the doorway, a saccharine grin on his face as he watched him approach.

"What are you doing here?" Harry demanded softly. "Is something wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong," Draco reassured him, leaning down to kiss his cheek.

Giggle erupted from the nearby witches and Harry found himself fighting a blush. A discreet glance showed that the attention of the room was now on them.

"Back to work," he ordered, unsuccessfully trying to interject some authority into his tone.

Knowing that they would not obey as long as Draco was present, he pushed the veela outside of the classroom, closing the door firmly behind him.

"What are you doing here?" he repeated.

"Officially," Draco smirked, "you forgot your Charms books. How are you supposed to teach the little darlings without them?"

"But I didn't..." he stared down at the small bag Draco was holding out to him. "I packed those, I
know I did."

"Well you might have," Draco allowed.

"You took them from me," Harry frowned.

"Maybe," he said, shrugging innocently. "I needed a reason to come see you after all."

Harry swallowed when the veela leaned closer, struggling to remember that he was peeved at his actions. " Couldn't it wait another hour?"

"Hell no," he growled, pulling Harry snug against him.

Harry felt his annoyance melt away instantly, and wiggling slightly, he buried his head against Draco's chest, inhaling his scent. " Weren't you going to visit Uncle Severus though?"

"He wasn't there," Draco shrugged, trailing a hand down Harry's back. " It's a good thing that I was planning to visit you anyhow."

"You could have come here from the start," he pointed out. " Instead of being sneaky about it."

"But then I wouldn't have seen you surprised," he whispered, tightening his hold on him. " I was just returning the favour."

"At least I brought treacle tarts when I surprised you," Harry teased.

"I'm much better than a treacle tart," Draco declared.

"Only slightly so," Harry retorted, before laughing when the veela started to pop his rear lightly. "Don't, I'll behave," he chortled.

"Good," the veela grumbled, a devilish smile on his face. "Now, go back to your little darlings," he bid, "they've been on their own long enough."

"And whose fault is that?"

"Entirely yours," Draco retorted. " It's not my fault you're so irresistible."

Draco kissed him briefly before releasing him completely. " Go on, I'll see you later."

"Are you sure you won't stay?" Harry asked, suddenly reluctant to see him go.

"I'm certain. You'll be too distracted with me there. Now hurry up and go in. The quicker you resume, the quicker it ends."

"All right," Harry said. " I love you."

"Love you too," Draco returned before walking away, a satisfied grin on his face.

Within minutes, Draco found himself without a purpose. He could go back home... but the rooms felt strangely bereft without Harry there. He could go find his friends, but Slytherin seemed entirely too far at the time. Homework was also out of the question – he had done it already and it wasn't as if his godfather was around for him to go harass. So just what was a bored veela supposed to do?

"Why so lost little brother?"
Draco flinched slightly at the unexpected voice before smiling brightly as he observed the French veela heading down the corridor.

"Gabriel!" he said excitedly, swiftly moving near him.

"You are very happy," the older wizard noted, even as he hugged him briefly. "How are you doing? And is your little one okay?"

"Harry is fine," he replied, a brief shadow crossing his face as he recalled the last time he had been with the older veela. "How were your holidays?"

"Excellent. My family came to England so I was with them for a few days. Now, I believe I have been hearing some rumours about you and your Harry."

"Rumours?" Draco repeated, falling in step beside him as he started walking. "Not that nonsense about him being the 'chosen one' right?"

"Few people seem to believe it to be nonsense," Gabriel said mildly, "but no, it is not that. I have been hearing that you and Harry have been spotted kissing throughout the school?"

He laughed heartily at the veela's embarrassed look, slinging an arm around his shoulder. "I see they are true. Your Harry is very fine no?"

"He loves me," Draco admitted, looking up at him with a slightly silly smile. "He is in love with me. He told me over the holidays. Since then well..."

"You've been doing lovey-dovey things," he teased. "I am happy for your little brother," he said sincerely, "although do not rush okay? You are young still, your mate is much younger than you. Do not forget that."

"I know," Draco said, his smile fading somewhat. "It's a difficult balance."

"Hmm."

"It really is. Sometimes I don't think I can but...but..."

Abruptly, the veela turned into an open classroom, closing the door firmly behind them. "Speak to me," he urged, forcing Draco to meet his eyes. "You are hiding something within no? Speak to me."

"It's sort of embarrassing."

"Speak to me about anything. I told you that you need a mentor."

"Are you volunteering for the job?" Draco joked slightly, before quieting at the small glare Gabriel gave him. "You were right though. There are some things I just can't talk to my family about."

"Then talk to me," he said. "I will help you. Now, what is it that you find difficulty balancing?"

"Harry's so much younger than me," he said after a few moments. "Two years never seemed like much before, but now...it's hard to control myself when I'm with him, especially when we're kissing. I always want to do so much more with him, but I have to remember that he's still so innocent. Sometimes I think that kissing is just a new game for him – it's enjoyable so he wants to do it again and again.

"Sometimes I want to do more than just kiss, and I want to touch him even more intimately, but I know it's wrong. I shouldn't act that way when for Harry, it's nothing more than a fun time. And
please don't tell me our bond would stop us from going too far. I'm concerned about it. I don't want
to go too far but every time I see Harry I can't help but want to kiss him and caress him. It's hard."

"You are a teenager Draco," Gabriel answered once he had fallen silent. "You are veela yes, but you
still have urges. It is completely natural that you want to make love to your mate – and your control is
admirable. Yes the bond will prevent you from consummation but only that. And, as you apparently
have not heard, you can circumvent its will, which is something I think you have unconsciously
realised."

"What?" Draco gasped, both alarmed, yet intrigued.

"Draco," he explained, "the bond would only prevent consummation if both of you are not
physically, mentally or emotionally ready for it. If Harry were to decide that he is ready for it –
without a shadow of a doubt, then it can happen without repercussions. I suspect your mother has
deliberately not mentioned it."

"Why wouldn't she?" he asked, even as he dwelt on his words.

"Simply because if you knew you can, what would stop you from doing it?"

"What?"

"Think about it little brother, if there was no bond to worry over, would you stop?"

"It would be hard to," he admitted. "Pulling away from him, stopping my caresses is so difficult."

"And even as you do," Gabriel said knowingly, "a part of you wonders why the bond isn't kicking in
to stop you."

"Yes," he admitted, his eyes widening in understanding. "I am stopping it, not Harry?"

"Exactly," he nodded. "Your mother told no untruth. There was something stopping you from
moving your relationship forward, however it dissolved. Perhaps when your Harry realised he loved
you? As long as he was willing to do more, the bond would have relented. However, if you push
him beyond his comfort level, you would quickly find your passion fading..."

"Because he isn't ready."

"Yes," he confirmed. "As long as Harry is willing, the bond's restriction will not activate. If he
considers himself ready it could happen. You can go as far as you want once he is not frightened by
your actions. Does that make it easier for you?"

"Not really," Draco admitted, laughing dryly. "Now I'm more worried than before."

"That was not my attention," Gabriel frowned.

"Intention," Draco corrected automatically. "But no, the information was helpful – really it is. But
Gabriel, now I feel more pressure than before. Harry is so malleable, I know if I truly wanted I could
make him feel as if he was ready...and I think he would believe me."

The older veela reached out and patted his shoulder sympathetically. "That is where your
determination comes in. Do you love your mate enough to put aside your desire until he is truly
ready? Or will you be selfish and push him into something he is not truly ready for? Draco, I mean
no harm in saying this, but to do the latter would make you no better than that cur Krum."
Draco tensed at the reference before nodding resignedly. "You are right," he sighed, offering him a slight smile. "I would never push Harry before he is ready, but the urges are very hard to control."

"Then take it in hand...literally."

Draco frowned for a moment before the insinuation hit. A furious blush worked its way onto his face. "I never...I can't!" he spluttered.

Gabriel eyed him oddly for a moment before breaking down into hearty laughter. "You have never touched yourself?" he asked when he was more in control of himself.

"Not like that!" Draco hissed, his face still flaming.

"You amuse me Draco," Gabriel chuckled. "You are fifteen no? Why have you never tried it? Someone has to have told you by now how to go about..."

"I don't want to talk about this!" Draco half-shouted, not certain if his face could get any redder. "I've heard about it...when I visit the dorms. But no – I haven't...Oh Merlin..."

"Perhaps you are not the type to try it," Gabriel shrugged. "There are some like you. Although your mate seems more adventurous than you...I fear a nosebleed from you soon if you don't calm down Draco."

The younger veela had raised an alarmed hand to his mouth as he imagined Harry doing – no Merlin, that was not something he would think about. Imagining it would only increase his problems, rather than decrease it.

"I don't think I like you very much!" he snapped when he was slightly more in control of himself.

"And again you remind me of my little one," he said ruefully, ruffling Draco's head roughly. "He always snaps the same way when I tease him. Really, I am just offering advice."

"It is embarrassing!"

"And very necessary," he retorted. "Has you father never talked with you about such matters? Or your potions master?"

"Uncle Severus is still trying to undo the hexes my mother put on him," Draco said. "And I think that Papa is still in the guest room. Let's just say the 'talk' wasn't quite what it should have been."

"Dear Merlin," Gabriel gasped, shaking his head ruefully. "Your family is strange."

"Very."

Gabriel's expression grew decidedly mischievous. "Then shall I explain sex to you? I believe you can benefit from my tutelage."

"Gabriel!" Draco shrieked, his face heating up again. "Stop teasing me, please!"

"My advice is never taken when freely gived," he grumbled.

"Given," Draco said before glaring at him in a way that only made the older veela chuckle.

"Why do I always feel like this around you?" he grumbled. "I would hex someone else."

"It would be a cub trying to fight a lion," Gabriel tsked. "I can take anything you would try to throw
at me and you would never be able to withstand my returns."

"I do train you know," Draco grumbled, not at all pleased by the veela's insinuation.

Gabriel laughed again. "I do not doubt it little brother, but the fact remains that you cannot beat me. And please do not take it as an invitation to try. It would do little more than embarrass you."

"I get embarrassed anytime I speak to you."

"Then I am doing my job correctly," Gabriel deadpanned before chuckling. "Really Draco, just accept my dominance over you. It is not hard no? And in a few months I will be gone forever, and you will not have to recall the veela who made you submit."

Draco was surprised by the sadness he felt at Gabriel's words. How could he have forgotten? The Frenchman would be gone by July. Draco knew that he would miss him terribly when he left. "I can write you though?" he asked impulsively.

"If I am still around then you may," Gabriel said, a flicker of emotion briefly crossing his face. "But come, it is dinner time and your mate will be wanting you. I have had my amusement of you, and I think you are more knowledgeable now."

"I don't think I can even look at him currently," Draco sighed. "I'll keep imagining him doing that..."

"But you sleep together no?" he asked as they exited the room. "It is not possible for him to do it then...unless he does it in the bathroom...or an empty classroom..."

Draco nearly tripped at his words, before eyeing him suspiciously. "Are you speaking from experience?" he inquired guardedly.

Gabriel waggled his eyebrows at him before smirking. "Wouldn't you like to know," he said impishly before hurrying ahead, leaving a furiously blushing and spluttering Draco to follow him.

"Sirius this is not funny," Narcissa scolded, although truly, she too was fighting back laughter.

"Like hell it isn't," he gasped in between chortles. "Karkaroff, oh Merlin!" With that Sirius started laughing again.

He was not the only person who found the situation hilarious. All of them were either chuckling or smirking. It was a lighthearted moment, one that successfully severed the ominous air that had fallen over the room after the capture of 'Charity'. The imposter was now unconscious, and would not awaken until they required it. Forcibly extracting their memories was a lot easier without them actively struggling. So far they had only gone through the person's surface memories, gleaning nothing more than their identity and their relationship with Karkaroff.

And indeed, relationship proved an apt description. 'Charity' and Karkaroff were indeed in a relationship if the memories were any indication. They had sat uncomfortably around a modified pensieve as the memories flashed before them. Some of the positions they tried certainly were innovative, and had some of them shooting suggestive glances at their spouses. Nevertheless, it was not the memories that had them cracking up as they were as much as the fact that the potion had worn off, revealing the person's true identity.

Garrison Goyle.
The hilarious part?

Karkaroff did not know that his partner was actually a man.

Order was difficult to restore after that point, but eventually, they all settled themselves down enough to continue although some could not resist the occasional smirk.

Lucius though, was worried. He had retained cordial relations with the Goyles after the first defeat of Voldemort. They were not friends by any stretch, and he had long since severed any ties with him unless he actively needed something, but the fact remained, it was disconcerting to see him there, once again in Voldemort's service.

He was thankful now that Draco had never actively pursued a friendship with his son once he had entered Hogwarts. He had had some interactions with them before, but, after it had become clear that Harry did not like them (and justly so), he had been careful to limit their interactions.

He made a note to remind his son to be extra careful around them now. There was no telling if Goyle's and probably even Crabbe's father had given them orders regarding them. Lucius forcibly ignored the voice that murmured that were they home, such precaution would not be necessary. Their Hogwarts' education had been disrupted enough. He honestly hoped that this would be the year that they actually attended the school for the entire year. He could not even remember if they had had such a year since their second.

And, when they reached a crucial memory from the Death Eater, Lucius found his hopes dashed. If what they were currently watching truly came to past, there would not be a Hogwarts there for them to leave, far less return to.
Draco sighed softly as he shot a glance to the bedroom where Harry was dressing. He had a bad feeling about today. It was the morning of the second task, and, surprisingly, the pair was readying themselves to attend it. Their friends had been stunned the day before when they had confirmed their attendance for the event. They had assumed that the veela mates would go home for the day or at the very least, lock themselves away in their quarters until it was over.

After all, Krum would be there. Nevertheless, Harry had made it abundantly clear that he would not live his life in fear of Viktor. The Bulgarian would be there for one purpose only, and would immediately leave the compound afterwards. Therefore, he would attend. And, as for Draco's hatred for the older wizard, well, Gabriel had volunteered to remain with them and ensure that Draco did not act out on his urges. It was plainly understood though that should the situation become unbearable for either one of them, they would leave immediately, no questions asked.

Now, the morning of the task, Draco wondered if he truly had made the right decision. He had been feeling weird since he had woken up, and, at first, he had believed that only he felt it. He could not pinpoint exactly what was bothering him, but, he was certain that he was sensing something malevolent. A part of him wanted to dismiss it – maybe it was just tension at Krum's imminent arrival that had him feeling so. Another part of him though, warned against this, and so, after carefully analysing the ominous air that seemed to be cloaking the school, he had called for his elves, instructing them to be on high alert. He did not know what was wrong, and hopefully he was just overreacting. Nevertheless, it was better to be safe than sorry, and he was not about to take any chances when it came to his and Harry's safety.

When Harry emerged from his bedroom, fiddling idly with his tie, Draco recognised immediately, that it was not just him. There was a slight crease to Harry's brow as he neared him, and, when he accepted a brief kiss from him, he felt an undercurrent of tension from him.

"What is it love?" he asked softly, manoeuvring Harry so that he was standing in between his legs.

Harry did not answer immediately. Instead, he reached out to adjust Draco's tie – an act that bought him a few moments as he figured out the best response. "Something feels strange," he said eventually, meeting his mate's gaze squarely. "I've felt it before, but I don't quite remember where."

Draco's eyebrows rose in surprise. Harry could – possibly – discern the cause of the ominous air that he felt. Gently he dropped his hands so that they held onto Harry's hips, pulling him a bit closer to him. "Will you try to remember for me Harry?" he bid, allowing a bit of persuasiveness to lace his tone. "It might be important."

Harry nodded, before nipping lightly on his lip. Closing his eyes for long moments, he finally started speaking. "It was...it was...first year. That's where I felt it. It came...it came from Professor Quirrell, and later on you!"

"What?" Draco frowned.

"When you were under the curse," Harry explained further, opening his eyes to reveal worried orbs. "That's what I'm sensing...something bad. I'm sensing something evil."

"Dark magic," Draco mused, even as he pulled Harry into a hug, a reward for figuring it out. But why exactly was he – were they – sensing dark magic now?
"What's going on?" Harry asked, when Draco pulled back slightly. "Why is there dark magic in the school?"

"Maybe it's because of the task," the veela mused. Yes, that made the most sense. They knew from their father's words that the tasks usually involved dangerous situations. Perhaps they had brought together dark creatures whose auras were permeating throughout the school? It was one theory, he decided, and it seemed fairly plausible.

"Maybe," Harry agreed, when he shared the suggestion with him.

Draco noted the way Harry leaned into him, a sure sign that he was uncomfortable. Immediately he felt his protectiveness rise, and he raised his mate's chin to meet his gaze. "Harry," he said seriously, "we can go home now if you like."

Harry looked at him for a moment before shaking his head. "I want to stay," he decided. "Unless you want to go?"

"It depends entirely on you," Draco said firmly. "If you are uncomfortable, we shall leave."

"No then," he replied. "You are probably right. Whatever we're sensing has to do with the Tournament. Let's not ruin the day okay? Our friends will be disappointed."

"They would be," Draco acknowledged, patting Harry once before releasing him completely. "We'll stay then. But remember what we decided..."

"We'll leave the moment something goes wrong," Harry finished.

"Indeed," he nodded. "Let's go. We promised to meet Gabriel near the hall."

"Okay," Harry agreed, following him out the room.

He latched on to his mate's arm with both arms, in a way that plainly suggested that he still was anxious. Nevertheless, Draco did not comment. If anything went wrong, he was sure that he could protect his mate.

* *

Albus paced his office anxiously, shooting the occasional glance toward the lake. He did not have a good feeling about today. Something was wrong – very wrong, and not for the first time, he wished that he had argued with more fervour against a repeat of the Tournament – hell, he should not have allowed an occurrence of the one last year. Fear of a possible disaster undoubtedly was responsible for the nervousness he felt. There was a reason after all that he had long since forbidden students from swimming in the lake. After all, there were creatures within it that would terrify most things that resided within the Forbidden Forest. And yet, he, in a less than an hour, would have to watch while six people immersed themselves into the water – three as willing victims, and three as their rescuers. Why was he allowing something like this to occur?

Personally he thought that this task was the most dastardly to date. Not only would the champions be working under the assumption that their loved ones would die if they did not reach them in time, there was no room for assistance. There would be no intervention. The only persons allowed into the lake would be those six people. If anything went wrong – it would be up to the mer-people to intervene, and that had only come about after copious hours of pleading on his behalf. He would be indebted to the people after this, but it was a small price to pay if all of the participants emerged unscathed.
Sighing, Albus dropped down onto a chair, noting that some of his nervousness probably stemmed from Krum’s presence as well. From Goyle they had learned that Krum was a pseudo Death Eater. He was not marked, and, it was uncertain if he believed in Voldemort’s agenda. Yet, it was clear that he certainly was knowledgeable about the Dark Lord’s activities, and that alone, in Albus’ opinion, damned him. Nevertheless, without the telltale mark on his arm, there was nothing Albus could do against his presence. Had he borne it, the headmaster would have had him arrested on sight, international scandal be damned. The only reason Karkaroff was still about was because they believed him more useful on the outside. There own imposter had little of importance to report from him, but with time, that could change. And so, for now, he remained free.

Voldemort’s plans for Hogwarts was chilling, and Albus knew that they were extremely fortunate to have found out about them. Otherwise there would have been nothing to prevent a catastrophe from occurring. Voldemort seemed determined to bring down Hogwarts while simultaneously destroying the credibility of the British governmental system. His plan was chilling in its simplicity. Systematically, the Dark Lord was gathering an army of both human and non-human beings that collectively, the school would have had no chance against. Albus did not know what he had promised them, but even now, Albus found himself dumbfounded by the fact that giants, werewolves, elves and vampires had signed an allegiance with the man. When combined with his own blood-thirsty Death Eaters, it was an army that would strike a devastating blow. And currently, there was still nothing in place to deal with it.

The good thing was that they had time on their side. From all indications, Voldemort’s attack was timed for the final task, the opportune time given that the school’s security would be at both its highest and lowest. It was a contradiction yes, but it was absolutely true. The school would have the tightest security at that time. Everyone of importance from the Ministry would be in attendance, as well as several foreign dignitaries.

While there would be copious amounts of aurors about, it did not negate the fact that the most important people of the wizarding society would be gathered together in one location. If the Dark Lord could breach the school and wrest control, the Ministry and by extent the country would be under his control. Thankfully though, with the information in their hands, the Ministry, in conjunction with the Order, were working feverishly to prevent it from happening. There was still much work to be done, but hopefully, they would be able to stop the Dark Lord from destroying Hogwarts as it currently was in order to make it into the helm of his dark empire.

Albus knew though, that to ensure that this did not happen, he would have to pour all of his attention behind the venture, which meant that he could no longer allow himself to be sidetracked by the Tournament. No, after today he would turn it over in its entirety to Minerva, for he had a world to save.

"Headmaster?" Minerva asked a few minutes later, looking into the office.

"Yes my dear?" he replied, with a hint of tiredness.

"It's time," she said simply, while offering him a sympathetic smile.

"Thank you Minerva," he nodded, rising and following her from the room.

Fifteen minutes later, Fawkes trilled in annoyance as the floo flared to light and a frantic Percy Weasley popped into view. But the headmaster was no longer there, and, before Fawkes could try to gain a message from him, Percy gagged before a slew of blood flew from his lips, staining the headmaster's carpet. The phoenix trilled in shock and confusion, even as Percy’s head lolled forward before the call abruptly ended. Fawkes trilled once again before flashing out of the room, intent to warn Albus that something was terribly wrong.
Draco jumped slightly when Gabriel wrapped an arm around his shoulder, pulling him close. For a moment he contemplated squirming, but then, when the man leaned near to his ear, he realised that this was not one of his little games.

"You are as tense as me," the French man hissed into his ear. "You sense the darkness no?"

Immediately Draco stiffened and guardedly he met his eyes. "You sense it?" he whispered, careful to ensure that Harry could not overhear them. "You feel it as well?"

"I do," he nodded, even as his eyes drifted around the lake.

They were seated in the grass near it. They had already been briefed on what the Task would entail, and, after learning that they would not be able to view it anyway, had wandered over here to relax and wait for the Champions return. Many had copied their actions though, so that at least half of the viewing audience were in their vicinity. Draco paid it scant attention though, and would not realise until it was too late that this little detail would be crucial in saving his life minutes later.

"Harry says that it is dark magic," Draco revealed. "We thought that it was related to the task though."

"A good assumption," Gabriel allowed, "but it is not so. I have been sensing it since last night, a few of my friends have as well. The majority though seem ignorant of it."

"Why is that?" he asked, flexing his hand in agitation. Beside him, Harry turned, giving him a questioning look as he sensed his mood.

Draco took a moment to kiss him reassuringly. Harry looked at him for a moment longer before turning back to Hermione, trusting that his mate would inform him if something was truly wrong.

"Why can't everyone sense it?" he asked again, even as he wondered if the teachers could sense it. He certainly hoped that was the case, for, even as he was speaking to Gabriel, Draco slowly felt his hackles rising as if the amount of dark magic around was increasing.

"To sense it you must have felt the dark arts before," Gabriel explained in a level tone.

"And you've been exposed to it," Draco asked bluntly, before wincing at how accusatory his words had come out.

Gabriel though gave him an indulgent smile, and the arm around his shoulders tightened briefly in reassurance. "I never have dabbled in the dark arts," he said honestly, "and I will never do so. I have though been exposed. I am proud that you are cautious though," he praised. "It is a good attribute. England is not the only country with a Dark Lord little brother, and my family has been touched by his cohorts. It is something I will never forget." As he spoke, Gabriel's eyes darkened with remembrance, and in that moment, Draco was certain that he was being completely truthful.

"My town was ravished," he continued. "No one was unaffected – we all lost a beloved. The aftermath of it...it was as if a dark cloud hung perpetually over our town. Even now we feel it – the tinge of the dark. It is why I try to avoid Durmstrang. They use it routinely. To me it is as if they are smelly. I feel – what is the word? – revolted. You have noticed that Durmstrang are completely at ease? I doubt they even notice the presence, or else they believe it emanates from themselves. As for why no one else seems to notice – they have not been exposed like we have or else have dismissed it. How exactly have you been exposed?"
"The Imperious Curse was used on me in my first year," he admitted.

Gabriel hissed in response, before a look of respect briefly flashed across his face. "You must be very strong to have emerged from that unscathed."

"Hardly," he snorted, "I just was fortunate enough to have people around to help me pick up the pieces afterwards."

"Fortunate you are indeed," he agreed before redirecting the conversation to its original subject matter. "I hope your teachers have realised something is wrong though."

"I hope so too," Draco muttered, shooting an uneasy glance toward the school.

And when a few minutes later, he saw Fawkes landing on the headmaster, Draco's thoughts were confirmed.

Something was not right.

* * *

Viktor knew that the expression on his face bordered on being animalistic, but currently, he did not give a damn. Slowly but surely, he was working his way through the seated crowd, inching toward his beloved. Soon Harry would be safe in his arms and away from Hogwarts and even more importantly, England. Safe in his home, Harry would be away from all of the tribulations that would soon beset the country. There would be no dangers for him, no sadness. Unlike his family, Viktor knew that he would be able to keep his love safe.

He barely resisted a snicker as he heard someone mention his name. His disguise was perfect. No one would link the tall lanky teenager walking through the spectators with the notorious Bulgarian champion who was currently fighting for victory in the lake. The latter thought had him snickering as he dropped to the grass a few feet away from Harry. It was the perfect distance. He was near enough that he could reach him in seconds when the time came to grab him, but he was far enough away that they would not sense him – not that they would recognise him anyway. The Polyjuice had taken care of that quite nicely.

He knew that it would be suspicious if he continued to stare at the delicious form of his beloved, so he allowed his attention to wander as he took in snippets of the conversation around him. They were all speculating on what was occurring away from their gazes. Viktor could not resist a laugh. They were so far from the truth.

Currently there were 'three' champions in the lake, battling against Merlin alone knew what as they tried to retrieve their prized possession. That in itself was inaccurate for there was only one who Draco cared about and it was painfully clear that Harry was not awaiting him at the bottom of the lake. It would not have been possible anyway given his hasty actions of December. Nevertheless, he had easily worked around that limitation. He did not know who was waiting at the lake's bottom, but whoever it was, they would not in the least appreciate their rescue, for it would be the beginning of the end for them.

Viktor had easily overpowered one of the other Durmstrang students when he had bordered the ship this morning, having just arrived by portkey. No one had noticed, and, in only a few minutes, Viktor had fed his victim Polyjuice before casting the Imperious Curse on him, along with several other additions that would produce an explosive result. He himself had assumed his victim's facade and in short order, he had watched 'himsel' dive into the lake, a determined look on his face. Idly, Viktor checked the time. Twenty five minutes had elapsed. If his calculations had been correct, 'he' would
be reaching the bottom within the next ten minutes. It was then that the show would begin.

Under the guise of rising to stretch his limbs, the Bulgarian moved a bit before settling considerably closer to Harry, so much so that if he chose to, he could reach out and grasp a bit of his velvety soft hair. But that would attract attention and so he refrained from doing so. Instead, he let his eyes drift over the lake once again, noting idly that he was following in Dimitar's footsteps. Sometimes the ultimate sacrifice had to be made for one's beliefs. Fortunately, it would not be him making the sacrifice. He was just the coordinator of it.

At the very least, two people would shortly be dead. The casualty list could increase though depending on the skill or ineptitude of the other champions. If they were either too far behind or had already retrieved their hostage and were on their way back, then there was a possibility that they would survive. They would be hurt undoubtedly, for Viktor had ensured that the blast would be noticeable from the surface, but they would live. If they were too close though...their sacrifice would not be in vain.

As the time elapsed, Viktor felt his excitement build. Soon...a few minutes more and Harry would be pressed against him and he could persuade him of his love.

He had barely completed the thought when a loud explosion sounded. His eyes widened in disbelief as he looked toward the lake. But no, all was fine there. Immediately several others followed from different points – from within Hogwarts, from near the Forbidden Forest and from the area where the school's gates were. That certainly was not his doing, he thought with a sinking feeling, as he struggled to his feet as not to be trampled by the suddenly running students. He pushed a few aside to get a better look at the castle, only to swallow nervously when he saw the first of many death eaters pouring out from within it, wands drawn and curses and hexes on their lips.

"By Merlin," he breathed in disbelief. Voldemort was attacking now, but it was months too early.

Why had he not been informed? The answer came to him immediately as he sought out the high master and noticed the pallor on his face. The shock was not feigned. Karkaroff had not known about it either. Which mean that either the man had fallen from the Dark Lord's favour, or something had happened to cause a change in the plans. Speaking of which...Viktor swore loudly as he spun around, searching for Harry. Lost in his shock, he had lost sight of him. Cursing fluently, he started pushing his way through the crowd even as he heard a final explosion – his explosion.

It was bloody useless now, he thought darkly, as he roughly knocked aside people. It was imperative – now more than ever, that he get Harry out of here. For, he was fairly certain – no positive – that the dark lord was already on his way here, if not here already. He would not let Harry die, and he knew that, once Voldemort had the area secured, Harry would be the first to die. He could not let that happen. He would keep his love safe.

In that moment, Viktor caught sight of a scared looking Harry being pulled along by Malfoy. The French veela was with them, he saw, shadowing them as if he was their body guard. Where exactly were they going, he thought in annoyance, as he tried to close the distance between them. Had they not heard the explosion coming from the gates? Why on earth would they go there? They were not thinking, something that would get them, and a lot of other people, hurt or killed. It was useless to react by panicking. They were better off holing themselves away from the masses and wait for an opportunity to escape. Malfoy truly was not deserving of Harry if he could not figure out something that simple.

Even as he neared them, Viktor felt his body shifting. The potion was wearing off. It meant nothing at this point though, and actually, he thought, it might prove beneficial. Harry would be less likely to struggle against him if he recognised him. He would be easier to move that way. "Harry!" he called
out, hoping his voice would reach him through the chaos.

Surprisingly it did, for as he watched, the wizard faltered slightly before turning his face around, scanning the crowd until his eyes met his. Viktor felt his heart sink though when fear alighted in the boy's emerald gaze before he turned, obviously revealing his presence to his mate. Dammit, he swore, speeding up slightly. Malfoy must have completely poisoned Harry against him after what had happened. It was okay though, he reassured himself. Once he had Harry alone he would be able to apologise for his zealousness. Everything would be okay after that. But he had to get him out of here for any of that to work.

A plump witch knocked into him, and distracted, he fell to one knee. The witch hastened to apologise – the words stopping as he jabbed his wand into her throat, spitting out a hex before getting up. Blasted witch – he had lost sight of Harry again! Or not, he corrected a moment later. He could see Malfoy – or at least his wings. He was in full veela form now, he thought grimly, his wings curled defensively around Harry as they continued to move on. He was shielding Harry from him, he realised. But that would not stop him.

Viktor decided at that moment that it was time for him to stop playing games. Chasing after them like this was useless, especially as, even now, another person was barrelling into him, delaying his progress. No, he needed them to stop moving, and that was something easily accomplished. It was not how he had planned to bring about Malfoy's demise, but this would have to do.

Adjusting himself so that he had a clear shot of him, the Bulgarian spat out the Killing Curse, only to swear when a running wizard moved in the path of the green light, absorbing it. How much luck did the veela have, he groused, ignoring the shrill screams of a witch as she looked to him. She had seen him cast it undoubtedly, he thought and, almost indifferently, he hexed her as he pressed on.

Emboldened now, he continued to cast curses indiscriminately at the crowd, separating them, even as he noticed that it was starting to thin. In the distance he saw a rickety but large cabin looming into view. Was that wear they were heading, he wandered. It made sense, if there was a connected floo, and currently there were no death eaters – or vampires he added, noted a pair of the creatures gauging themselves on a hapless couple – near there. Nevertheless, if they reached the floo before he could reach them, he would lose his only chance. With that in mind, he flung out a slicing curse. Killing Malfoy was now too risky, not when his movements were so jagged that Harry intermittently crossed paths with him. No, he was not about to risk Harry's life...not when he was trying to save it.

The silver seemed to be on target, he noted with dark glee, but then, a last minute movement from Malfoy caused it to zoom by him and slash a tree harmlessly. He bit off an oath as the trio turned to see him. Harry's eyes widened and he clutched tighter toward his mate. The look in Malfoy's eyes probably mirrored his own he thought, and, even as he readied his wand, he saw a fireball forming in the veela's hand. However, a second later, the pair was roughly pushed forward by the French veela was was quickly creating some kind of barrier. He shot out a curse, only to see it bounce off the shield.

He seethed at the smirk the Beauxbaton's student shot him before he turned and barked something out to the pair that he was unable to decipher. The pair though took off and even as he shot another spell that missed, Viktor pressed on, only to stop abruptly when a fireball from the French man nearly hit him.

"You will not get past me," he said in a lofty tone, adopting a fighting stance.

Viktor looked beyond him, feeling his ire rise as he saw the two disappear into the cabin. He was too late. An enraged scream passed his lips, and his anger rose further as the veela actually laughed at his distress.
In that moment Viktor knew that he would kill him, and, putting words to action, he went about doing so.
Draco held Harry's trembling frame to him, whispering reassuring words to him, even as he forced himself to calm down. They were trapped in Hagrid's cabin, and he had no idea what to do to change the situation. Coming here had been a spur of the moment decision. It was obvious that they could not go to the castle, and the gates were too far away for them to safely reach. Harry had whispered shakily to him that Hagrid's home was the nearest, and so they had made their way here, hoping to use a bit of floo powder to escape. It was only when they were safely in the home and found the mantle bereft of the powder that they remembered that his cabin was not connected to a floo network.

Harry had whimpered at that revelation before clinging tightly to him. Draco did not know what was scaring his mate worst, the death eaters or Krum. There had been a distinct warble in Harry's voice as he had spoken, and in that moment, Draco realised that Harry truly held no love for the Bulgarian anymore. His elation though was short lived as Gabriel roughly shoved them ahead, hissing that Krum was - and had been attacking them persistently for the last few minutes. A quick glance backward had had the younger veela hurrying forward, for indeed, several witches and wizards lay directly behind Krum, having apparently taken the spells meant for him.

At first Draco had wanted to disobey Gabriel's edict to keep running. He had a score to settle with the Bulgarian after all, but, between Gabriel's glare, Harry's fright and more importantly the fact that a duel now could bring unwanted attention toward them, he had gritted his teeth and pressed on, after murmuring to Gabriel to hurry up and join them. The French veela had not responded, but Draco knew he would win. Now all he had to do was wait here for him and reassure Harry, all the while thinking of a way to get them out of here safely.

"Trix," he called, "we need you."

A small pop indicated the elf's arrival. Immediately she thrust forth two potions vials to him. "Me be bringing this for yous," she said, as he freed a hand to take it. "We be telling Master and Mistress and they be coming soon."

"And Dobby?" Harry managed.

"He be fighting outside," Trix said, a gleam in her eyes. "He be keeping the bad ones away from here. Other elves be helping him. May I be going also?"

"Please do," Draco affirmed, even as he pressed a vial to Harry's lips. "Drink cub," he bid, humming in appreciation when he swallowed the soothing syrup without complaint.

It was better for him to drink this than the calming draught, Draco decided, as he pocketed it. The latter would put his mate into a drowsy state and right now, he needed him to be completely alert. As much as he wanted to believe they could safely remain here until the battle was over, a part of Draco knew that they should prepare for the worst. From the little he had seen, they were at a disadvantage. Even if word got out immediately about the attack, it would take several minutes for help to arrive, and those few moments were critical.

Even as he cradled Harry's head close for long moments, rocking him slowly until the potion took full effect, he looked worriedly toward the door. They had been in here for several minutes now.
What was taking Gabriel so long to return to them? Surely Krum was not that difficult to beat? While Draco had struggled against him previously, Gabriel was a far better duelist than him if his claims were anything to go by. As such, he had envisioned and easy victory for him. But, as the minutes continued to tick by, and the distant screams and shouts increased in volume, Draco was no longer certain if this was the case.

Two minutes later, his worry got the best of him, and gently he set Harry aside. "I'm going to the window," he explained, when Harry turned wide eyes up to him. "I need to see what's going on."

"Gabriel is fighting Viktor still?" Harry asked softly, nipping his lip. "I hope he is okay."

Draco touched his face briefly before turning away and carefully walking toward the window. He jumped when he felt a brush of magic rush over him.

"A notice-me-not," Harry explained as he rose, "Just in case anyone is near here."

"Good thinking," he praised.

It took him a few seconds to find the two duellists, as his attention was immediately captivated by the castle. Was that flames he was seeing coming from the Astronomy Tower? Drifting his eyes around the grounds, he finally spotted the two near Hagrid's pumpkin patch. They were still engaged in their duel – a vicious one if their injuries were anything to go by. Draco's eyes widened as he saw the blood running freely down Gabriel's left arm. There was a deep laceration there – and was that bone he was seeing?

The veela's breath hitched as he continued to examine him. The only part of him that seemed uninjured thus far was his face. "No," Draco breathed, as he watched him take a purple spell to the chest, one that dropped him to his knees and left him vulnerable for a curse a moment later. "No!" he shouted again, louder this time as the veela was flung several yards backwards, before landing in a crumpled heap.

"What is it?" Harry asked anxiously, coming nearer.

"Stay there," Draco barked, not bothering to control his tone.

This was not something Harry needed to see...it was not something he needed to see actually. But he could not look away. "By Merlin," he breathed, dismissing his mate temporarily as Krum into view. There was scarcely a cut on him, Draco noted, even as a weight settled in his stomach. The only injury he could see on his enemy was a jagged cut along the right side of his face. Unless he had interior injuries, Draco knew that Gabriel was in a precarious situation.

As Draco watched his friend struggle to rise to his knees, he knew he could not stand here and be a simple bystander. Gabriel was out there fighting because of them; he had to go help him win. With that in mind, he started striding to the door, only to be halted by Harry calling out to him.

"Where are you going?" he demanded, panic clear in his tone.

The veela paused, shocked that he had forgotten about his mate in his haste to assist his friend. He turned to him, trying ineffectually to plaster on a reassuring expression. "I need to help Gabriel," he explained quickly. "Stay here and wait for me."

"But..."

"Cub," he interrupted firmly. "I need to help him...he's in trouble."
Harry bit his lip in agitation, a mixed expression on his face. Finally though, a look of acceptance settled onto his face. "Come back to me," he said softly, reaching out to hug his mate briefly.

"I won't be gone long," Draco reassured, leaning forward to kiss the top of his head before pulling away. "Stay in here," he ordered. "You're too much of a target and I can't help Gabriel if I'm worried about where you are."

"I'll stay here," Harry promised.

Nodding once, Draco left. After a moment, he turned back to the cabin, casting a locking charm on the door for surety. It wasn't as if he didn't trust Harry, but in case he himself got into difficulty, he did not want Harry to run out after him as he was doing for Gabriel. The battle would be hard enough for him without having to worry about where Harry was on top of everything else. After a brief moment's hesitation, he cast a spell on the windows as well, ensuring that Harry would not see anything he was not meant to.

However, by the time Draco reached the pumpkin patch, the battle was already drawing to a conclusion with Krum as the victor. Once again, a heaving Gabriel was on his knees, struggling to rise even as Krum, a few feet away started a vicious wand movement. As a purple sphere started to form in front of him, Draco had a flash of remembrance. This was the same spell the Bulgarian had shot toward him during their duel – the one that he had known instinctively he would have no defence against. His eyes darted to Gabriel and saw him struggling to incant something.

The gold shield though that formed was translucent at best and shimmered in a way that indicated that there was not much sustaining it. It would crack immediately should Krum's spell hit, and it was evident that Gabriel had not the strength to try to physically dodge it. And given how far away Draco was, he knew that he could never reach him in time to help. Swallowing deeply, Draco stopped running, and instead summoned a large fireball, praying that it would reach in time to negate the attack. He grunted as he shot the large sphere forward, before directing a blast of air behind it to propel it forward faster.

The sphere reached the tail-end of Krum's attack but still absorbed it. Draco had no time to breathe a sigh of relief though, for immediately the two attacks started reacting against each other in a volatile manner. It did not take a genius to know what was about to happen.

"Duck Gabriel," Draco shouted, even as he cast the strongest shield he knew before dropping down for extra protection.

The expected combustion happened seconds later, and Draco winced as he felt the resultant heat despite the shield. Gradually he opened his eyes, blinking rapidly at the smokiness. Straightening, he summoned a gale of wind to dispel the smoke before hurrying forward. Near where the two wizards had been, he saw burnt grass, but no sign of either of them.

"Gabriel," he called as he neared, wondering if the explosion had flung him far away.

After a moment, he heard a pained groan. He twisted, and caught sight of his friend lying among the pumpkin vines.

"Gabriel!" he shouted, hurrying toward him.

In his periphery he caught sight of Krum, but ignored it. He was clearly unconscious if his stillness was anything to go by, and right now, he needed to help the older veela.

"I'm here," he breathed, as he dropped heavily beside him. "Gabriel."
"Little brother," Gabriel gasped in a wheezing tone, meeting his eyes.

"How badly are you hurt?" Draco asked, even as he started to tap his fingers against the most visible injuries, performing a few basic healing charms.

"Don't bother," the French man said, reaching a shaking hand up to touch one of his.

"No," Draco protested. "It's not too bad. I can fix this."

Gabriel offered him a small smile, even as a small dribble of blood starting trickling from his mouth. "Look down Draco," he bid.

"What?" Draco frowned, before he heeded him. "Oh Merlin," he gasped a moment later, even as he felt his eyes started to burn.

There was a large gash across the man's stomach, one that was bleeding profusely. It was only now that Draco realised that the ground he was kneeling on was damp, and it only took a glance to confirm that it was Gabriel's blood that was providing the moisture. Draco felt his hands go limp as he watched the injury. It was beyond anything he could heal and already so much blood had been lost. He found it hard to believe that his friend was even conscious, far less was capable of talking to him.

"I'll get Harry," he said quickly, making to rise. "Hang on please. Harry can – Harry can heal you."

"No," Gabriel said with surprising firmness. "I am dying. There is nothing for you to do."

A chill ran down the veela's spine as his friend put into words what he had been thinking. Nevertheless, he did not want to believe it. His friend could not die, not because of them. "You don't understand," he stated, his voice thick with emotion. "Harry can heal people. I told you he healed his godfather. He can heal you too."

"I do not want him to," Gabriel managed, although his voice lacked its previous strength.

"Why," Draco demanded, grasping his hand in between his own.

A part of him registered that he had no reason to obey Gabriel currently. He could just get up and leave, bringing his mate here, no matter how gruesome the sight was. Yes, there was nothing stopping him from doing it. Nevertheless, he did not move. It was the same as everything he had been with the Frenchman. He found himself helpless to disobey him even though the situation was dire.

"Gabriel," he continued when he did not respond. "Let me get help."

"It's too late," he responded after a long moment, his voice a mere whisper now. Draco was forced to lean forward to catch his next words. The position caused his tears to fall onto the man's face, causing his eyes to flicker. "You cry for me little brother? You have not known me too long."

"Don't be stupid," Draco said shakily, pressing their foreheads together. "I care for you. You know that."

"That I do," he breathed, opening dim eyes to look into Draco's teary grey gaze. "You look so much like him."

"What?" he asked, but Gabriel continued speaking, seeming not to hear him as he slipped into his native tongue.
"Je t'avais dit que je te protégerai," he said, his voice taking on a dreamy quality, even as a bloody hand reached up to touch Draco's cheek. "Tu est en sécurité maintenant. Je ne t'ai pas laissé tomber cette fois mon chéri."

"Gabriel?" Draco whispered in confusion as the man's hand slowly stroked his cheek.

"Oui mon amour ?"

Another tear slipped down Draco's face, dropping to wet Gabriel's cheek as he finally realised that his friend was not really talking to him.

"D-Draco?" Gabriel murmured, blinking rapidly. "I thought – no, this is fine. I will be seeing him soon...now I think."

"See who?" he asked, barely suppressing a sob as the veela's hand fell away from him. Draco knew that it was almost over, but he could not help but try to prolong it, hoping that something – anything would happen to prevent his death, and knowing in his heart that nothing would stop it.

"You made my last days much easier," Gabriel whispered, his lips crinkling in the barest hint of a smile. "I thank you."

"Gabriel, no please," he sobbed as the man's eyes closed in what he knew was the final time. "Gabriel."

But there was no answer, and Draco had not been expecting any. Instead, he pressed his cheek against his as he sobbed, feeling the slight displacement of air as the veela's breath slowed and finally stopped altogether.

Draco cried for long minutes, allowing his grief to overtake him as he mourned for the man who had come to be an older brother to him. Their time together flashed through his mind, and, as he finally knelt back, wiping at his wet cheeks, he found it almost impossible to match the still, battered form to the cheerful teasing man he had known.

He leant forward after a moment, pressing a kiss to either cheek, and finally a brief one to his cooling lips. "I love you Gabriel," he murmured hoarsely, even as he waved his hand over him, transfiguring his bloody clothing into clean attire. It helped his psyche to see him like this. For a moment, he pretended that he was asleep, languishing in the sunlight as they had down earlier in the week while they talked about everything and nothing while Harry laughed with his friends a few feet away.

But he was not sleeping – he was dead, dead at the hands of Krum and the Dark Lord. Even as he rocked back, Draco's mind made the connection. Krum was tied to Voldemort somehow. The timing was too coincidental for it to be otherwise. Krum being here the same time that Voldemort attacked, he tracking them as he had done, attacking people indiscriminately and killing Gabriel. Krum was evil, pure evil, working to bring about a Dark empire. Draco rose, meaning to go to where he lay unconscious and secure him. He would bring him to justice he vowed, only to stop abruptly when his gaze fell to the patch where he had been laying.

There was no-one there.

And looking to the cabin, Draco felt his heart skip a beat as he saw a flash of green light from within the cabin window.

Krum was with Harry.
Harry had settled uneasily on Hagrid's oversized couch after his mate had left him. Despite his word to him, he had tested the door, only to sigh when he found it locked. A part of him knew that he could have easily cancelled the locking charm, but he didn't, acknowledging it as Draco's way of reminding him to be obedient in this matter. He had looked out of the window, trying to gauge what his mate had seen, only to find nothing of note. It struck him as being strange, given the slew of emotions that had radiated off him when he had stood there, but, he had not lingered there and instead curled himself on the couch.

He wrapped his arms around himself, resisting the urge to call for Dobby. He was scared, and he was not ashamed to admit it. One moment he was listening avidly to his friends' words, and the next he was being dragged away, losing sight of them amidst the chaos of the crowd. He had made to protest, only for the words to die in his throat as he caught sight of black robes and bone masks. He had followed him willingly then, knowing that he would suffer terribly should they get their hands on him. He doubted that Voldemort much appreciated the rumours bandied about the wizarding world that he would be the one to kill him, and undoubtedly, the man would want to target him, if only to crush their hopes.

Harry knew that Hagrid's cabin offered only a temporary refuse. From the sounds that reached him even here, the battle was as rampant as ever, and, away from it all, Harry had no idea who was winning. He whimpered at that, wondering if his friends were safe, wondering if Draco and Gabriel had successfully restrained his former friend, and hoping that they had not hurt him too badly. Harry stared blankly into the unlit fireplace after that for a while, even as he absently listened for a sign of his mate's return.

Should it be taking that long?

Eventually he heard a shuffling of feet outside and quickly, he sprang to his feet. They were back. The door opened even as he started to walk across, a question hot on his lips. He froze though when he saw who was standing there. It was not Draco, neither was it Gabriel. No, looking at him with a decidedly unhinged expression was a bruised and bloody Viktor.

"Hello my love," Viktor intoned, slowly stepping into the cabin, "I think it is time that I take you home."

"Viktor," Harry gasped, feeling a chill run through him at his appearance. Currently, there was nothing visually appealing about his former friend. Looking at him, Harry could not see the person he had been fond of in the previous year. There was no roughish smile, no artfully mused hair, and no air of security that had had him clinging to him during his fall-out with Draco. But, Harry decided, as he met his gaze, the worst thing about it was the look in Viktor's eyes. Harry was not entirely certain, but a part of him was doubting Viktor's sanity.

"Yes it is me," he said, giving him a dark smile as he stepped forward, seeming to favour his left leg. "Now come, we must leave now."

"I-I'm not going anywhere with you," Harry managed, backing away from the slowly advancing wizard.

He shot a futile glance past him to the door, hoping to see his mate coming to his assistance. But the entrance was painfully empty.
"What have you done to Draco," he demanded, as a wave of concern washed over him. He did not check through their bond for him; to do so would leave him vulnerable for several moments, and it was not something he could afford to do currently. "Where is my mate?"

"I did nothing to you mate," he spat, "more the pity for it. I had hoped to kill him, but no, I must not do that. You are more important."

Whatever relief Harry felt at the pronouncement that Draco was safe was lost by the spell Viktor shot at him. He had no time to deflect it, and instead felt himself go slack before Viktor's voice echoed in his mind. "You will come with me now and do not struggle." The tone urged obedience, but Harry easily shrugged it off, glaring at him.

"That's an unforgivable!" he snapped, raising his hand defensively.

Viktor looked at him in shock before a pleased expression graced his face. "You never fail to amaze me," he said with some fondness before his gaze hardened. "Do not make this difficult Harry. You must leave with me now. Voldemort wants you and I do not want you hurt. Accio Harry!"

"No," Harry yelped, snapping his wrist. A clay pot flew across the room, smacking Viktor in the chest and breaking the spell.

Harry breathed in relief before conjuring a shield to protect him from any further attacks.

"How do you know what Voldemort wants," he demanded, stalling for time as he waited for Draco to come. He knew that Viktor was far more skilled than him, and it would not take him too long to work a way around his defences. He needed his mate to reach before that happened.

"I know his plans," Viktor admitted, even as he flicked another spell, frowning when Harry's shield held. "I have known since he ordered me to befriend you."

"What?" Harry gasped. Surely Viktor was not saying what he thought he was?

"Yes," he confirmed, grinning darkly at him. "I was meant to secure you for the dark lord and I worked hard to do so. But then you made me love you, and I knew that I could not have you die."

Harry's mind raced as he tried to compute the Bulgarian's words. Viktor had befriended him on the Dark Lord's orders? Did that mean that their entire relationship had been – was – a lie? He had nearly destroyed his relationship with Draco for a man who served Voldemort. The dark lord was evil, he decided, for only a cruel, sadistic person could have organised such a dastardly plan. It was one thing to want him dead, but to do this, to play with his emotions, and to try to destroy his personal life. That was cruel – too cruel even for him, and Harry felt a rage building up within himself. He had let himself be played by the dark lord, had fallen for his trap.

His eyes smouldered as he took in the man before him, a mere instrument used to fulfil the dark lord's goals.
"Was anything true?" he repeated, his voice brittle as he tried to contain his anger. "Or was it all a lie?"

"It was all true," Viktor responded with a smile, seeming not to realise just how precarious Harry's emotions was currently.

It was the smile that caused Harry's control to snap. That belligerent smile used to create a warm feeling in the pit of his stomach. "I hate you," he said, even as nearby objects started shaking. "I hate you."

"Do not say that," Viktor ordered, walking forward. "It is Malfoy that has you speaking so. Once we are alone malko-"

"Don't call me that," Harry shrieked, thrusting his hands out.

A wave of magic escaped him, tossing the Bulgarian backwards until he slammed into a wall.

"You lied to me!" Harry yelled, as the Bulgarian straightened, his face now twisted in pain and anger. "You used me!"

"Do not do that again," he said in a deadly voice.

Harry's only response was a cutting hex that Viktor nimbly dodged before sending a hex of his own toward him. In his anger, Harry's shield faltered, and the stinging hex caught him in the side. He yelled at the pain, for the hex was much stronger than anything the potions master had ever hit him with, before returning the favour with a bone-breaking curse.

It caught Viktor off-guard, breaking his sternum, even as he shot out another curse, that Harry barely dodged. Harry vaguely recognised that Viktor was no longer concerned with not hurting him, and that, was yet another thing that proved how much of a liar he was. Now that the ruse was up, he saw no need to pretend. Undoubtedly he had hoped to sweet-talk him into leaving with him, under the guise that he was taking him to safety. Then he would have dropped him in the arms of Voldemort and never looked back. That thought only increased Harry's ire further and he lashed out, propelling a burst of raw magic toward him that sent him flying into a wall once again.

Harry followed through with another bone-breaking curse, not even questioning how he knew how to perform it. He smiled gleefully at Viktor's pained shriek, feeling vindicated. Why had he hesitated to this before? Hearing the man scream now was the most gratifying thing in the world to him. With that in mind, he cast it again, laughing when he heard a rib break. Yes, he would ensure that Viktor's pain matched his own humiliation at realising how much he had been used.

Lost in his dark merriment, Harry dropped his guard. Viktor took advantage of it, and sent a constricting curse that caught Harry in the throat. He fell to his knees immediately, clawing at his throat as he struggled to breathe. It was as if someone had wrapped their hands around his neck and was squeezing viciously. He wheezed, waving his fingers frantically against his neck in an attempt to end the curse. He managed to do so, but it lost him several previous moments. By the time he remembered Viktor, the Bulgarian was looming over him, a wicked smirk on his face.

"Where has this side of you been?" he purred in delight, grabbing Harry by the throat, and pulling him to his feet. "You are so beautiful right now."

Harry glared at him, even as he grabbed at his hand with both of him, choking slightly when he increased the pressure slightly.

"Behave," he cooed, leaning closer. "Your spells amuse me. I did not know you had such potential
in you. But it is enough now. Do not make me hurt you."

"You've already hurt me," Harry spat, pushing out with his magic.

Viktor grunted, but remained steady, squeezing tighter. "Malfoy has done this to you," he muttered, pulling Harry closer. "He has put this hate in your eyes."

"You put it," Harry gasped, pushing out again. Why wasn't it working?

"It is not your fault," he said. "He has turned you into this. But I will fix you. I will get my Harry back."

Harry's eyes smouldered at that. "I am not your Harry," he declared, lashing out physically this time.

He smirked as his hand connected with Viktor's broken rib. The pain caused his grip to slacken, and jerking, Harry broke free, running around him. Instinct told him to run out the cabin now that he had the chance, but, that darker part of him that had enjoyed tormenting the Bulgarian urged him to stay. He had yet to make the man pay fully for what he had done, and he would not leave until that was accomplished.

Harry headed the voice and aimed a curse for the Bulgarian's head. He turned in time to avoid it though, but it did clip his shoulder, ripping off piece of the flesh. Harry scowled. That was not what he had wanted. He tried again, but his shot was wide, perhaps because he was not concentrating as he should have been.

"Dammit," he cursed as he was forced to create a hasty shield to absorb the man's rebuttal.

Their fight continued for a few minutes more, until finally, Harry landed what he had expected to be a killing blow. He licked his lips unconsciously as he saw the blood flowing from Viktor's chest, but against all odds, the man stood, looking at him angrily.

"Harry," he said in a pained voice. "Come with me now."

"Are you deaf?" Harry shot back, hexing him once again.

Viktor did not fall this time though, but something seemed to snap within in for, when he lifted his gaze, his eyes were cold. "You would choose Malfoy over me."

"Every time."

Viktor stiffened at the surety in his tone, but Harry could care less. He was not the same wizard who had fallen for Viktor's trap. He knew who really loved him, who really treasured him, and he would never make the mistake of turning his back on him again.

"Draco is twice the man you will ever be," he goaded. "I will stand by his side."

The Bulgarian's eyes narrowed, and his grip on his wand tightened. "I love you Harry," he stated.

"I don't care."

"I love you," he repeated, even as he raised his wand. "I love you enough not to let Malfoy destroy you."

"He would never hurt me."

"I will kill you myself," he said. "Voldemort will not have you. Malfoy will not have you. I love you
too much to let anyone but me have you. You do not want to be with me in life, then we will be
together in death. No one can get you there. Avada Kedava."

Chapter End Notes

Translation

"Je t'avais dit que je te protégerai" - I told you I would protect you

Tu est en sécurité maintenant. Je ne t'ai pas laissé tomber cette fois mon chéri - You're
safe now. I did not fail you this time my beloved.

"Oui mon amour ?" - "Yes my love?"
Even as Harry continued to rebut Viktor's words, he felt himself grow conflicted. Why was the Bulgarian insisting on maintaining his facade? He had already admitted that he had just been using him, so why now, at the end of their altercation, did he see it fit to continue lying to him? Was he trying to get him to drop his guard so that he could coax him into compliance once again? Did he honestly think him so weak that, having found out his true nature that he would acquiesce to him? Harry felt his anger build further at that last thought. The man obviously thought he was a fool, although, Harry admitted, he had given him good reason to.

It all made sense when Harry thought about it. The fact that Viktor had been so friendly to him under the tree, the way he had gently but persistently pressed him for information before finding a way to remain in constant communication to him. He had slowly played with his emotions, drawing him further and further into his trap until he had him ensnared. Only the near-rape had not gone according to plan Harry decided, but obviously, the Bulgarian thought him so gullible that he believed that he would overlook that fact now.

That last thought had him clenching his hands, even as he swore that his love for Draco would always be superior and that there was not a chance in hell that he would choose him over his mate. He expected the anger of the response, indeed, a part of him had looked forward to it for it would give him a reason to lash out at him once again. What he did not expect though, was the casting of the Killing Curse. Fear immediately overwhelmed the anger he felt and instinctively, Harry dropped to his knees. His movement was barely in time, for the curse zoomed mere inches over his head. It was too close for comfort though, and so, Harry found himself raising incredulous eyes to the heavily panting Bulgarian, even as he felt his anger surface again and grow to an extreme when he heard footsteps.

He knew that it was Draco. There was no one else in the vicinity. However, as he thought about his mate nearing, he felt his anger rise another notch as he rose to his feet, throwing the Bulgarian backward with a backlash of his magic. He had dodged the Killing Curse, sending it careening out of the cabin – right where Draco would have been had he not been slightly tardy.

A slight difference in timing, and Harry would have found himself without a mate.

That, more than the betrayal and the near loss of his own life had Harry's anger building exponentially, so much so that, when Draco finally entered, he felt no relief, only more anger as he realised how close his mate had actually come to being hit. For the moment, Viktor seemed to be floundering, so Harry risked turning away from him, turning glinting eyes toward his mate. A growl tore past Harry's throat as he took in his mate's form.

Draco's clothes were bloody, although he saw no injury on him. The expression in his eyes though gave him the answer he sought. There was a deep-rooted melancholy in his eyes, along with drying tears on his face. He did not need to ask a question to know that Gabriel was dead, and the man responsible for it was behind him, struggling even now to his feet.

"I hate you," he hissed, turning back toward him. "I hate you so much."

He felt Draco step near him, but his presence did nothing to stem the building rage within him. This close, he could feel his mate's grief, combined with concern for him and anger toward Viktor. The Bulgarian was responsible for all this – it was because of him that they were in danger and that Draco had lost a dear friend.
The man needed to pay for all he had done to them, and Harry knew that he would not be satisfied with simply restraining the man and allowing justice to take its course. This was something they – he – needed to do.

After all, he was the one who had fallen for the trap. Maybe if he had not been so stupid, maybe if he had taken all of his family's words to heart from the very start, none of this would have happened. Amidst the anger, Harry felt self-loathing rise within him and he found himself struggling for an outlet for all he was feeling. Objects around the room rattled and shattered as his magic lashed out, but it was not enough. Something was building within him, something that this simple display of magic could not subdue. He could not help but remember how good it had felt to curse Viktor earlier – even now he felt a vague sense of elation as he dwelled on the possibility of doing it again.

Yes, hexing Krum nine ways to hell would probably alleviate the feelings somewhat, but it would not be enough.

Whatever it was that was rising within him did not want to be released. Indeed, Harry felt as if it wanted him to invert himself and lose himself in the feelings. It was the only way to find relief. The problem was, Harry was not certain he wanted to take the plunge. What he was feeling – it was not right. It felt as if it were a part of him – had always been a part of him. Nevertheless, it was not a part of his being that he was comfortable with. And yet, his desire to avoid it warred with his desire to hurt Viktor.

It wasn't until the Bulgarian shot another Killing Curse toward him – toward them – that he felt as if the decision was made for him. Draco summoned a table that easily absorbed the curse, but the move drove Harry to action. Even now the Bulgarian persisted in trying to hurt him and what he held dear, all with that crazed smile on his face. They were nothing but target practice for him – trophies to be handed over to the dark lord when he got his way. Harry growled again, not hearing the animalistic edge that the sound took on.

Draco did though, and, casting a protective shield, twisted slightly to look at his mate, startled by what he saw. Harry's eyes were blood red, his skin deadly pale even as short dark hairs seemed to be erupting all over his body. Seconds later, Draco saw his mate's features shift, bones realigning themselves as Harry's body slowly transformed. Suddenly Draco felt a tug deep within his being, something that he was helpless to escape. He felt a sudden pain radiate throughout his body, and glancing down, he was stunned to see similar hairs breaking out on himself, a shade darker than Harry's.

He did not panic though, for, even as he felt another internal tug, he recognised it as coming from Harry. Whatever was happening to him directly resulted from what was happening to his mate. Draco allowed his eyes to close as he let Harry take control. He felt the bond between them open fully and felt a flood of overwhelming anger and hate. Was Harry really feeling all of this? He did not have further time to dwell on it, for, the emotions seemed to speed up his own transformation. Draco grunted as his bones popped painfully even as he felt himself bending forward in a crouching position. Instinctively he channelled his own emotions across to Harry, vaguely noting that only the negative ones were successfully channelled.

Beside him Harry emitted a howling noise.

Forcing his head upward, Draco watched the last vestige of humanity flee his mate as a vicious looking beast appeared where he had stood. A Grim, he thought, even as he felt his body finish rearrange itself. Harry's pain had forced him to accept the part of him he had previously hated. In his desire for revenge Harry had embraced the very darkness they had feared and had allowed it to transform him into this creature of darkness. And, somehow, Harry's decision had forced his hand,
making him embrace his inner demon as well, and transform into the dreaded Nundu.

And somehow, given the frightened look on Krum's face, he could not bring himself to regret the transformation.

Harry gave a small bark beside him. Draco looked at him through his own blood red eyes before responding in like. What was occurring now was greater than him and his disdain for the form. No, that was irrelevant at the moment. On that point, he and his mate seemed to be in agreement.

Draco snarled as he turned his gaze toward Krum.

It was time to make the man pay for all he had done.

* * *

From the moment Fawkes appeared in front of him, Albus knew that something was wrong. There was no other reason for his familiar to abruptly appear like this, especially when he knew that he was doing something important. Nevertheless, he had not the time to ask a single question before the phoenix forcibly drew him into its mind, showing him a memory of what was apparently Percy Weasley's demise. Even as he mourned the vibrant young wizard's death, the old man felt a chill run down his spine.

There had been both urgency and fright in the young man's appearance, and given the little he could see of his body, it was clear that he had been in his death eater robes. That could mean only one thing. Young Percy had stumbled across some bit of information so crucial that it was worth risking his cover to share. Albus bemoaned the fact that the wizard had met his end before finishing his precarious goal. Even as he dismissed his phoenix to the Ministry, preparing to abandon his seat at the judging table, he wondered what exactly Percy had been trying to convey.

His answer came moments later as an explosion rocked his school.

Albus felt himself go numb as he saw smoke start billowing from a tower, even as the castle doors burst open, death eaters pouring out. "By Merlin," he gasped. How on earth had they gotten into his school without his notice?

There was scant time for thoughts after that. It took only seconds for the gathered crowd to realise that this was not part of the tournament before panic set in and they started scampering. Albus pressed his wand to his throat, prepared to cast a Sonorus charm on his voice, only to be disrupted by a thump on his back.

He rocked forward at the touch, but straightened, sending a questioning look to the frowning Madam Maxine. "Where exactly do you plan to tell them to go?" she demanded, seeming to read his mind. "Look. The gates are being attacked."

It took only a glance to confirm the woman's words and the old man felt his heart sink. There was no escape for his precious students. They would either have to fight or run, and if they decided on the latter, there would be only a small chance that they could actually avoid the death eater attacks. And, as he watched the first ones fall, he knew that it would be an almost futile task.

Nevertheless, he fought, and fought hard, Maxine at his side as they tried their best to protect the vulnerable as they waited for help to arrive. Older students were fighting. He observed this as he separated from the woman, making his way across the grounds turned battle field. He caught sight of some fourth years herding the little ones toward the greenhouses, the only untouched space so far. "Go with them," he ordered, as he came across some duelling prefects. "They're defenceless!"
"Yes sir," one agreed grimly, before running off toward them.

Albus took a moment to cast a powerful notice-me-not toward the general area. The students would be away from the battle there yes, however, they were also isolating themselves in an inescapable area. Should any death eater come across them there, they would be easy targets. Perhaps this way, they would be safe.

The headmaster engaged two death eaters, giving another student the chance to flee. He made short work of them, grimacing mentally as he watched their bodies slump to the ground. Normally he would not go for fatal spells, but the situation was dire. If he merely stunned, there was the chance of revival. This way, they were incapacitated, albeit permanently.

"Albus!" a rumbling voice called.

"Abe?" he gasped, turning to see his estranged brother heading toward him.

Behind him Albus saw several other Hogsmeade residents and felt a sense of elation as they joined the fray.

"I called for the aurors," his brother said without preamble, as they turned back to back, guarding each other, as they made quick work of the enemies around them. "We've been fighting since morning."

"What?"

"Vampires invaded us near dawn," he said grimly, neatly decapitating a short death eater, before wincing when the mask fell out. He knew that lad, he thought sadly. If he were not mistaken, it was a sixth year Ravenclaw. Voldemort certainly was recruiting young. "Had no time to call for help, but we handled it. We figured they were after new bloods. We killed them all though. Wish I could have gotten a message to you, but it was only when we saw the smoke that we realised that the new bloods were only a part of a greater plan."

Albus grunted in understanding before pulling away from him to move on. New bloods were newly made vampires – persons who still had remnants of their humanity running through their veins. The change took several days, and during that time, the new bloods, although blood thirsty and capable of creating others, maintained many of their human attributes, including the ability to withstand sunlight. Voldemort's motive immediately became clear. He had planned to unleash the new bloods unto Hogwarts, allowing them to wreak havoc as they satisfied their almost insatiable desire for blood.

Thankfully, if his brother was to be believed, that disaster had been neatly subverted.

Nearly ten minutes passed before Albus next felt real hope. The aurors had arrived, rushing through the newly reclaimed castle gates as they launched a strong defence against the death eaters. He paused for beat, concentrating on casting basic healing charms on the persons around him who showed signs of life. It gave him enough time to recuperate somewhat. He had only started again, neatly incapacitating a group of death eaters before he saw Severus making his way toward him, ruthlessly blasting away all in his path.

"He's hear," he said without preamble. "On the quidditch pitch."

"Voldemort?" Albus breathed, feeling a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach.

"Yes," he confirmed. "Worse yet, I'm starting to believe that damned prophesy. He's taken twice Killing Curses so far and kept on going. I don't there's a person here who can kill him..."
"Except the one from the prophesy," Albus finished grimly, tightening his grip on his wand. "Do you know..."

"Lucius and Narcissa just arrived with some Order members," he explained, even as he turned his back, leading the headmaster to where their enemy waited. "Harry and Draco are not with them and the elves are no longer answering any summons. We know that they are alive, but we don't know where we they are."

"Then I will fight," Albus declared, decapitating a dark wizard who neared him without second thought. "I will fight him and hope that destiny unfolds as it should in the end."

Draco wiped his muzzle against the grass, getting the last remnants of Krum's blood off him. Harry sat near him in the cool grass, his gaze shifting from Gabriel's covered body to the castle where smoke continued to billow. The Nundu crossed to him, nudging him affectionately even as his eyes landed on Gabriel. A wave of sadness passed through him, only to be replaced by grim satisfaction as he recalled the mauled state they had left Krum in. Gabriel had been avenged. He could only hope that he was at peace now.

Harry certainly was not though. His mate's hairs stood on end, and he growled insistently, looking off to the general area where he knew the quidditch pitch to lie.

"What is it?" he asked, allowing his thoughts to filter into his mind. "Krum is dead. You should be happy."

"Viktor was just a servant," came the short reply. "The master still lives. I am not satisfied."

"We are not strong enough," Draco pointed out, resting his larger head on Harry's. "The battle is over for us. Let them fight."

"No," Harry retorted, rising to his feet. "I can't sit here and do nothing. I know that we aren't done yet."

"Well we haven't changed back yet," Draco agreed, even as he acknowledged that his rage had not faded completely and Harry's burned as brightly as ever.

It had not been directed solely toward Viktor, and now he knew that it would not be assuaged until Harry had had his full revenge. Draco had found himself calming considerably as Krum's life left him. He did not regret what he had done – not in the least. Nevertheless, being the Nundu was disconcerting in how right it felt. It was as if he had slipped into a second skin, and it bothered him. Killing Krum had been almost pleasurable, and, only a small part of him had felt revolted. The rest of him had rejoiced in the gore.

Had he succumbed to the dark?

He was not certain of the answer to that. He was certain that his fit of rage had been directed solely at the Bulgarian. Indeed, he was certain that should anyone suddenly appear, he would not want to rip them apart – unless they were death eaters. It meant that his morals had not shifted dramatically. He still had his notions of what was acceptable and what was not – who were innocent and who deserved to be judged. But it still did not change the fact that to him, justice meant death to the offender. Something had shifted within him – moreso within Harry. Whatever it was had perverted them slightly, and he was not certain that Harry had noticed it as yet.

And he knew that trying to tell him about it now would be useless. Even now Harry was stalking
forward, forcing him to follow. He had only grown lucid after he had satisfied his desire for revenge. Perhaps Harry needed to do the same. The only good thing, he decided, was the fact that Voldemort was next on Harry’s target list. He had been underestimating their strength when he had claimed them too weak earlier. He could feel the raw power radiating through his veins. In this form, he was certain that they could bring the man down. Krum had tried to curse them as they had advanced, but, thanks to their creature abilities, they had been unharmed. Magic had no effect on them like this, it was one of the reasons their forms were so feared.

Yes, Draco was certain that they could easily take down the dark lord, and hopefully in doing so, rid themselves of the burning rage within them. And so, keeping that in mind Draco lunged forward after Harry who had broken into a fast sprint, acidic spittle flying from his mouth in his excitement to reach their new victim. Draco only hoped that, once they fulfilled that desire for revenge, that they would return to their normal form and that the untenable urge to kill would fade away.

As if by some unseen signal, all of the battles around the grounds halted, as all focus turned toward the quidditch pitch where the duel of the decade was occurring. The Albus Dumbledore versus the most infamous dark lord of all time – it was a match that would decide the turn of the battle. For, either side would crumble if their stalwart fell in defeat. Albus felt the anticipation and tension in the air, even as he lowered himself into a defensive position once again. Severus words had already proved themselves to be accurate. Nothing he cast truly hurt the man. The most damning blow thus far had been a cutting curse to the throat. Nevertheless, instead of severing his head from his shoulders, only a deep scar appeared on his throat, one that he easily healed.

Albus knew that he was simply buying time, putting up the strongest defence possible as he waited for destiny to unveil itself. The prophesy was true – it had to be true, which meant that Harry needed to appear from wherever he was and make his contribution. Whether it be that he kill the man (how he had no idea) or simply sacrifice himself to pave the path to victory, something had to happen and soon lest even more lives be lost.

The headmaster grunted as he took a curse to the stomach, groaning as he fell to his knees. It felt as if his innards were slowly being shredded, and, even as he acknowledged that he had never encountered this spell before, he tried his best to counteract it, all the while trying to keep an eye on his enemy who was bound to take advantage of his vulnerable existence. But, Albus needed not have feared. For, among the crowd of onlookers there were people who cared for him – not because he was their hope against the darkness, but because they loved him.

A grateful smile formed on his lips as he saw Narcissa rush past him, adopting a protective position even as her wings fluttered around her as she took on the dark lord. A moment later, Lucius was beside him, clapping his shoulder reassuringly before he jabbed his wand against his stomach, muttering the correct counter curse. The headmaster breathed in relief as the ripping sensation ceased, leaving a dull but bearable pain in its place. Lucius assisted with that as well by casting a healing spell before he helped him rise to his feet.

"The aurors are taking advantage of the situation," he muttered, even as his eyes darted to check on his wife’s state. She had not landed a blow on the man, but neither had she taken any damage. "They're encircling the death eaters. They'll pounce on them soon. It will make more chaos, but they hope to nab the majority."

"Whatever is necessary," Albus said grimly, even as he drew his wand once again.

Lucius’ hand fell away from him as he walked forward, moving past Narcissa to resume his former position.
The woman hesitated only slightly before she turned away, silently wishing him good luck as she retreated, although she was fully prepared to intervene once again should it become necessary. Except, Albus mused, as he raised his hand, the only one whose intervention could truly help was Harry's. And still, there was no sign of him.

Seconds later, Albus decided that he had been too hasty in that thought as he heard loud barking coming from behind him. He, along with several others turned, wanting to know where the hellish sounds were emanating from. The headmaster openly gaped as two canines burst into view, their vicious teeth bared as their red eyes fixed on one target and one target only – Voldemort. Immediately, Albus corrected his original summation. They were not dogs – at least not the non-magical variety. Racing toward Voldemort now was a Nundu and a Grim...Harry and Draco.

The prophesy was being fulfilled.

"No," Narcissa grated out, only to be restrained by her husband's stilling hand. "Lucius," she protested, looking at him.

"I don't think we can stop this," he said levelly, although she heard the concern in his voice. "We tried everything to prevent it, but still everything is falling into place."

"Damn the prophesy! I don't want them fighting –"

"We can only have faith," he interrupted, pulling her close as he looked across to where his sons were fighting. "Destiny has proven that she cannot be subverted. We can only hope that Harry is not the one meant to die."

Draco winced internally as he felt Harry's dark glee as he scraped the man with his long claws. He really was enjoying hurting him, he mused, even as he lunged as well, sinking his fangs briefly into the man, injecting as much of his toxins as he could. He regretted that he did not seem to have the poisonous breath that was usually associated with the Nundu, but as he reminded himself, it was only his first transformation. Perhaps he would have to work up to having it – although he hoped that that would never become necessary.

He successfully dodged a powerful kick from Voldemort, even as Harry inflicted another wound on him. Thus far the dark lord had not used magic against them, and he felt a growing suspicion that the man was well versed regarding their creature forms. It meant that they would not have the same advantage they had had with Krum. The man had panicked as they had attacked him, shooting spell after unsuccessful spell at them before they had finally ended it, putting him out of his much deserved misery. But Voldemort seemed far wiser, limiting his own assaults to physical attacks and the occasional use of elemental magic, using the earth against them. But his attacks were negligible at best. Yes it hurt, but not enough to dissuade them from attacking again.

Briefly Draco allowed himself to dwell in amazement at the ferocity of their attack. This was the man who had periodically factored in their nightmares – the one who had made them huddle close together in the dead of night, or alternately seek out their parents for reassurance. This was the man they had fought in their first year, yet now, Draco felt not a hint of fear toward the man. It was the benefit of hatred, he noted. It rendered fear as being useless, leaving them with only the desire to cause him pain.

He had to agree with Harry's sentiments. Although overwhelming, the feeling was wondrous.

With that in mind, he darted forward again, letting out a barking light when Voldemort trained his
wand on him. And here he had just been complimenting the man for being smarter than Krum. Oh well, he would learn the hard way.

Draco jumped, prepared to grab the man's throat when the dark lord hissed "Gladius acutus!"

He had never heard the spell before, but felt fairly confident that it would have no effect on him. A moment later he was proven false as a long, glinting sword sprang from the man's wand, shooting directly toward him. Even as he tried in vain to avoid it, he saw the man twist and cast the same spell again toward Harry, who, like him, was in no position to escape it. Draco felt fear shoot through him, even as the sword pierced through his body, lodging in his heart. He emitted a pain howl as he dropped mid-leap, and the last thing he saw before his eyes closed was the second sword sinking into Harry as well.

Harry knew instinctively that the sword would hit him with deadly accuracy, and so, when it pierced him, he accepted that his life was at its end. And so, he found himself looking about him in confusion when he found himself in a foggy train station. "Kings Cross?" he whispered, twirling about to get a better view of the place.

It was eerily empty, and, the only other thing that appeared to be there was a single carriage train that glowed brightly in comparison to the remainder of the area. "Where am I?" he asked. This could not be the after-life; it certainly was not the one his parents had described to him.

"I told you that you would be in need of my power one day."

The voice seemed to radiate from all around him, and Harry spun in vain trying to catch sight of it.

"Who are you?" he frowned, for, while the voice was familiar, he could not place who it was.

"Where are you?"

"I believe you referred to me as a paper weight," the voice answered in amusement.

Harry flinched slightly as a bright red light burst into view before him. When he looked again, he gasped as he saw a glowing version of himself standing there – with Draco beside him.

"Draco?" he gasped.

"Where are we?" his mate asked as he crossed to him, ignoring the red Harry for now as he reached out to pull Harry into a hug. "I know I died but-"

"You aren't dead," the pseudo-Harry said with a small smile. "I stopped it."

"You said that before," Harry frowned, clutching on to his mate as he watched him. "You said that you would help me."

"And I have," he nodded, "you and your family as I promised."

"When was this?" Draco asked, looking between the both of them.

"This is the red stone we fought for in first year," Harry explained. "Although, why can you talk, and why do you look like me?"

"Five years later and you now ask," he teased, before growing serious. "I can talk because you can. I draw from your own skills to communicate. If you could speak Spanish I would speak it as well. As
for why I look at you, only you can answer that. You created this area after all, not me. You decided what form I would take. But it doesn't matter now, for you have very little time left."

"To do what? We're dead."

"I just said you won't," he frowned. "I stopped it, but you need to decide if I should continue to do so."

"What do you mean?"

"That train," he pointed, "leads to the afterlife. If you want to die, board it. It will end my healing of you."

"Of course we want to live," Draco said automatically, turning to Harry. "Cub?"

"I was prepared to die though," Harry murmured. "Before the sword hit me – I accepted it. I didn't want to, but I knew it was inevitable."

"Which is why you have this choice," pseudo-Harry responded. "You did something that Voldemort would never do. You were prepared to die, and embraced it with no fear. Because of that your soul was not severed from your body – his was. That," he said, tossing his head to where a dark bundle laid, "was the piece of him that resided in you – the both of you. That died. Your soul remains within your body. It is up to you now to decide if you want to move on."

"Voldemort's soul was within me?" Harry frowned, even as a hand reached up to touch his forehead.

"And in me too? How?"

"Yes," he nodded. "Having resided within you as well Draco Malfoy, I can say that the answer exists within your mind. You will find it there. Now, the time has come. What will you choose?"

Harry rested his head briefly against Draco's chest as he thought about it. Moving on would mean that he would be free of all the grief he had endured in his life so far. He would be happy and contented with his mate at his side – but, he would also have that if he remained alive.

"I choose to live," Harry decided, feeling Draco's arms tighten around him.

The red version of himself nodded before dissipating and abruptly, the train station disappeared.

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Pain.

It was the only thing Harry felt as he became aware of his surroundings once again. Automatically though, he lashed out with his magic, letting it filter through and around him, erasing the damage that the sword, still lodged in him, had caused. As his strength slowly returned, Harry gingerly brought his hand up, reaching around where the sword was. Bracing himself, he pulled it out, gasping at the renewed pain it caused before his magic moved to heal it as well.

He groaned as he opened his eyes, belatedly realising that his vision was no longer the black and white one of the Nundu. It was only then that he realised that he was back to his human form, and the blinding rage within him was completely gone. Had Voldemort's soul been responsible for that as well he wondered, even as his eyes scanned the field. A little distance away he caught sight of Voldemort fighting his grandfather, even as his parents struggled to reach him, distracted from their goal by several black robed figures.
He finally found Draco, human as well and bleeding profusely. Panicking he reached out with his hand, hoping that the distance was not too great. It took a few seconds, but finally the blue magic reached him and he started healing as well. Harry struggled to a sitting position, the movement awkward given he still had his hand, the other over his own wound, directing the healing power. Draco twitched immediately, and then lifted his head, their eyes connected.

"Remove the sword," he said in a slightly raspy voice.

Draco seemed to hear him despite the distance and wincing, reached for and removed the bloody sword. Immediately Harry made to close the wound, even as he bent to pick up the sword, eying it critically. Something told him that he would need it. No one seemed to realise that he was on his feet, and he took advantage of it, hurrying to Draco and helping him rise even as the wound finally closed.

"Did I do good?" he asked worriedly, scanning him for any other injury.

"I'm tired," Draco admitted, "but the wound's healed. Thank you cub...and it's did I do well."

"No grammar lessons you," he muttered, kissing him briefly.

"Okay," Draco grinned, before growing serious as he saw a witch fall to the ground, clutching at her chest. "Harry-"

"I know," he said, his face darkening as he took in the battle scene. "We have to take him down I think."

"Explain," Draco demanded, casting a notice-me-not as he saw a rogue wizard glance their way.

"We had his soul," Harry said, gripping the sword's handle tighter. "And we killed it. Doesn't it imply that we should be the ones to stop him?"

The veela looked at him in silence for long moments before nodding slightly. "He seemed unhurt until we intervened," he allowed. "But we're doing it different this time."

"I don't think I could transform back anyhow," Harry shrugged. "I don't feel it anymore. I think it was tied to him."

"I agree," Draco nodded, before walking, drawing Harry after him.

"Do you have a plan?" Harry asked, noting the calculating glint on his face.

Absently the veela lifted the sword, still wet with his blood. "I was simply planning to return the favour actually," he said, weaving around some duelling wizards.

Harry glanced down to the weapon he held before shrugging. It seemed quite simply, but then again, they had nearly met their deaths at the blades. Perhaps it truly work for him as well. Harry was distracted by an angry shriek. Immediately he realised it as their mother's and turning, his eyes widened as he saw her tackling two persons. Her face was laced with grief, and with a pang, he realised that she hadn't seen that they were okay.

"Mama," he whispered, pausing briefly before Draco tugged at him. Regretfully he turned from her, comforting himself with the fact that her grief would soon ebb.

It took them a minute to reach where Voldemort was duelling an exhausted looking headmaster
"Give up you old fool!" Voldemort yelled, slashing his wand. "Your saviour is dead – your world is dead. You cannot win!"

Both mates glanced at each other before nodding. Even as Draco dropped the spell, Harry spoke, adopting a loud, lofty tone.

"Actually, we're right here."

The reaction was immediate. The Dark lord spun even as gasps and shouts of surprised erupted from those nearby. His red eyes narrowed, and he levelled his wand toward them. "This is not possible!" he yelled. "You're dead!"

"Obviously we're not," Harry shot back, allowing all the cheek and brattiness he had been known for in his younger days to colour his tone. He was goading the man, a risky move, but one he knew that was somehow necessary. He clenched the sword in his hand, waiting for him to cast his spell.

"You will die now Harry Potter!" Voldemort spat. "You will not stop my reign again! Avada Kedava!"

Idly Harry wondered exactly how much times the curse had been sent his way on this day, but, this time, he felt nothing but grim anticipation as it shot toward him. Swiftly, he flung the sword, grinning darkly as it neatly intercepted the spell. Simultaneously, Draco flung his own forward, propelling it with magic. Fixated on Harry, the Dark Lord had not even considered him, and so, there was nothing he could do to avoid it.

Harry winced slightly as the sword impaled him, directly through the heart. The man's face slackened for a moment, and disbelievingly, he looked down at the weapon protruding from himself. His mouth moved, as if he were trying to say something before he fell forward, his wand falling from his slack fingers as he hit the ground, impaling himself further.

It was over.

Pained screams filled the area suddenly, as all the assembled death eaters felt their magic and life being sucked from them. Harry and his mate could only look on in fascination at something only the Order members knew the answer to. The Dark mark was tied directly to the life force of its bearers. Whenever the dark lord was injured, bits of their essences were siphoned off to him, healing him. The amount needed to help him in the seconds before his death though was enormous, and though he was now dead, the mechanism had been triggered, and so, their life force was being continually transferred in a vain attempt to save him. Within a minute, they were all dead.

Harry sagged slightly, leaning against Draco as he felt all of his adrenaline suddenly taper off.

"We did it," he smiled, shooting an exhausted smile at the blonde who too was quickly growing tired.

"I know," he returned. "It's over. We saved the day."

"Yes."

They turned slightly as they heard their names called. He smiled again as he saw his parents rushing toward them. Albus too was also nearing them, and bringing up the rear were their uncles. Others were rushing toward them, but these were the most important people. Harry stretched out his arms to his papa when he came close enough, allowing himself to be lifted and crushed against him in a desperate hug.
"I'm safe papa," he murmured, as he pressed his cheek against his shoulder. "We're all safe."

Harry knew that there were several unfinished answers. There were questions to answer, questions to ask, and information to receive. But that would have to wait, he decided, feeling his exhaustion grow exponentially. All he wanted to do now was rest, and he processed to doing just that, Draco following him into slumber a few minutes later.
Chapter 77

Harry opened his eyes blearily, looking about him in confusion. He could only see darkness, but, as he shifted slightly, he felt the cool caress of sheets. He was home he mused, relaxing instantly. The last thing he remembered was his papa's warm embrace. He must have fallen asleep directly after. Gingerly he took stock of his body. He was fine, he decided, despite the fact that he still felt terribly tired. His mental state was another matter entirely. There was a faint residual taste in his mouth and he was certain that it was Dreamless Sleep. He smiled slightly at the thoughtfulness of his family. Without it, he certainly would have had nightmares. Nevertheless, as he took in the darkness, he could not help but wish for a potion to rid him of his memories, for now that he was awake, they all rushed back to him.

Voldemort was dead – they had killed him.

Harry felt relief at that. Voldemort had been a plague to their world for far too long, and he was grateful that once again he had been defeated, and hopefully permanently this time. But then, his mind drew him to another person he had killed, and Harry felt himself grow numb. He had killed Viktor – Draco had helped yes, but it had been his muzzle that had closed around his throat for the final deadly bite. Hurriedly Harry sat up as a feeling of revulsion went through him.

How could he have done something so evil?

He had killed someone – someone he had at one point loved. What compounded his feeling was his remembrance of the emotions that had surged through him at the time. He recalled the glee he had felt at his former friend's gurgled cries, the absolute relish in breaking his bones and cursing him with other spells that he was certain now was dark magic. How had he known to cast those spells, he wondered, and why had he allowed himself to descend into his Grim form, after he had vehemently vowed never to do so?

"Oh Merlin," he gasped as he recalled Viktor's horrified face as he had approached him.

He had put that terror into his eyes – recalling the expression, Harry knew that his former friend had been looking into the eyes of a blood thirsty monster and, no matter what he had done, he had not deserved that fate. And he had enjoyed putting that fear into him. Harry felt bile rising in his throat and, leaning over, he wretched, the reactions worsening as he relived his enjoyment of the bloody deed. In those moments he had been no different than the very Dark Lord he had feared and hated.

Abruptly the lights turned on, even as he heard Dobby pop into the room. He wretched again, giving a slight moan when he felt the bed depress before a large hand rubbed his back soothingly. His papa did not try to stop him, and instead only offered comfort as Harry's body finally calmed down.

"Papa," he croaked, looking up at the man despite his dirtied face.

Lucius said nothing, but moved to cleanse him even as the elf vanished the mess. After he had swished and spit out a cleansing potion, he allowed himself to be pulled unresistingly onto the man's lap. He didn't care if he was too old to be in such a position at the moment. He buried his head into the man's chest, feeling his body shake.

"Are you ill Harry?" Lucius asked worriedly, even as he rocked back and forth slightly. "The healer said that you were fine."

Harry shook his head, fisting the man's shirt. "Memories," he said, his voice muffled yet
"Of Voldemort?" his papa asked soothingly, a hand rubbing his back.

"Killing Viktor."

Harry sniffed loudly when his felt Lucius tense slightly, before pulling back hurriedly. What if the man decided that he was evil for what he had done and no longer wanted him to be a part of his family? After all, if he could do it once, there was nothing to say that he couldn't do it again. What if someone got him angry – there was no guarantee that he wouldn't turn into a grim once again to deal with them?

"Please don't send me away Papa," he begged, his emerald eyes widening. "I won't do it again. I swear I will be good, don't send me away?"

"What are you talking about Harry?" Lucius asked in confusion. "Why would I send you away? You're mine."

"I killed someone," he replied, unconvincing. "I won't do it again papa. Don't send me away!"

"Calm down," Lucius bid, rubbing his back firmly. "This excitement isn't good for you right now."

"But papa..."

"Harry James," he said firmly, "obey me please."

The tone broke no room for disobedience, and reluctantly, Harry quieted although his eyes still pleaded with the man.

"I am not sending you away," he said again, even as he summoned an elf for a calming draught. "I know what happened to Krum. You may not remember but we got you to copy your memory for us a few hours ago. We know exactly what happened. You did what you needed to survive son. Krum would never have left you ago otherwise."

"But I enjoyed doing it," Harry whispered in protest. "You should hate me."

"What has gotten into you?" Lucius sighed, shaking him lightly. "I do not hate you – nothing can make me hate you little one."

Lucius tucked the boy's head under his chin, even as he made a mental note to send for the mind healer in the morning. Harry was acting far younger than his years currently. He was certain that the boy had not realised that he had regressed somewhat. From his limited knowledge, Lucius knew that such things were fairly common, especially among children who had experienced trauma, but it was disconcerting, and he could not help but wonder if Draco would be in a similar position when he decided to wake.

A few minutes passed with him feeding Harry the potion and then talking softly, but reassuring to him. From what he could gather, his son truly was afraid that he was evil after what he had done. He knew that he needed to tell him about what Albus had deduced from the memories he had siphoned from both him and Draco, but at the moment, Harry was in no frame of mind to listen. Eventually, he felt the boy relax against him, and decided to settle him back into bed. It was still scarcely ten in the night after all, and he had hopes that he would fall back asleep easily and slumber until at least morning.

Unfortunately though, Harry clung to him tightly, refusing to be put on the bed. "I'm scared papa,"
he mumbled, "please don't leave me."

Lucius closed his eyes, asking for patience. He was not annoyed with the boy, not in the least, but he knew that he would be in a long night if Harry continued to let his insecurities get to him.

"What are you scared about darling?"

"What if I turn back?"

"You won't," he said with surety. "Trust me son, you cannot turn back into it."

"Can't?" Harry repeated, looking at him dubiously.

"Yes can't," he confirmed, kissing his forehead briefly. "I'll explain to you once Draco is up and about as well."

"What happened to everyone?" Harry demanded. "Is mama okay? I saw her...and..."

"Everyone made it through the battle alive darling," Lucius interjected softly. It proved pointless though, for a moment later, Harry was pulling away from him, with the obvious intent of going to search for them. Hesitating only slightly, Lucius decided to allow it. Unless he cast a sleeping spell on the boy, he highly doubted that Harry would settle down now without seeing that they were fine firsthand.

Luckily, save Albus, they were all in the manor.

"Come on," he bid, setting him aside and rising. "You'll satisfy your curiosity and then it's straight back to bed okay?"

"Yes papa," Harry said.

Lucius blinked as Harry eyed him speculatively before with a small sigh, he latched on to his hand, swinging it lightly as they walked from the room. "What was that look about?"

Harry shrugged slightly. "I was hoping you would carry me," he mumbled. "But I'm too tall and too heavy now."

His words confirmed Lucius' suspicion about his regression. After all, the last time Harry had been held that way was almost two years before. He had declared himself too old for it then after he had endured some light-hearted teasing from Ron Weasley.

"Do you want me to hold you?" he offered, deciding that it was best to humour him for now until he could enlist professional help.

The boy looked at him with wide eyes before raising his arms. Chuckling despite the situation, Lucius lifted him, grunting slightly as he settled his weight against him. Although it was worrisome, the man indeed was finding it comforting to hold his child like this. He had been terribly frightened watching the final battle, especially when he had seen them take the sword to his chest. It was good to feel his weight pressed against him, to feel the warmth of his breath and the beat of his heart that assured him that he was indeed alive, and would be well with time.

Harry graciously waved the door open for him as they neared it, chuckling softly when he pecked his cheek in reward.

"Someone refused to go back to sleep," he said by way of greeting as he walked through the door.
Several heads turned his way, and Harry smiled in relief as he saw for himself that they were indeed safe. "Mama," he called, wiggling for his father to put him down.

His last conscious memory of the woman after all was of her mourning for them.

"My baby," she cooed, pulling to her chest and peppering his face with small kisses. "Are you feeling alright my precious?"

"Mama," he said by way of response, unwilling to let her go.

Lucius walked around the couple, taking a seat beside a frowning Severus. "You see it too then?" he murmured, a half smile crossing his face as he watched Sirius and Remus took turns checking on the boy as well.

"He's regressed hasn't he?"

"Yes," he confirmed with a small smile. "I think the entire situation turned out to be too much for him. Given the situation he handled it admirably, but in the aftermath..."

"He doesn't want any responsibility."

"Exactly," Lucius sighed.

"It's happened before though," he murmured, shaking his head lightly as Sirius spun the thirteen year old around. "Every time something happened, he became clingy and dependent. It's just more extreme this time. As soon as he sorts himself out it will taper off."

"I hope so."

"Uncle Sevvy?" Harry said, crossing to him.

Severus forced a pleasant smile on his face, ignoring the fact that it had been months since the name had been used for him. "Come here bratling," he bid, chuckling when the boy launched himself at him.

"Are you okay?" he asked seriously.

"I am fine brat," he responded. "I suffered only a few minor things, all of which have already healed."

"Uncle Sirry and Remmy said the same thing."

"As has your mama and papa, I am certain," he said, going along with the boy's state for now. "I assume you pouted until Lucius brought you down here?"

"I had to be sure," he mumbled, pressing closer against him. "To make sure you don't hate me."

Severus arched a questioning brow at Lucius who immediately conveyed a memory to him. Severus frowned slightly, before he lifted Harry's chin so he could meet his eyes firmly. "What did I tell you in your third year?"

"What time?" Harry murmured confusion evident in his voice.

"The time you were being bullied. What did I say regarding my feelings to you?"

Harry's face scrunched for a moment. "Um, you would love me even if I burnt down Hogwarts?"
"Good boy," he praised. "And I will have you know that my beliefs have not changed since then. I love you Harry, never doubt that."

The boy eyed him for a long moment before he nodded. "I love you too," he murmured before reclining against him.

"You have a bed to sleep in," Severus declared. "Do not use me for a mattress."

"Don't wanna be alone."

"Come on Harry," Sirius said, reaching down to lift him up, placing a hand under his knees and one behind his back. "Let's get you in with Draco okay? Would you like that?"

Harry nodded after a moment. "You'll stay till I sleep?"

"I will," Sirius reassured, nodding to them as he left the room. Narcissa stared after them briefly before following.

"Remus," Lucius began.

"I'll call Healer Mason in the morning," he interrupted with a slight smile. "I'll see if she can schedule another to meet with Draco."

"And a third for Narcissa," Severus added wryly. "You do realise she's hasn't undone the ward on the floo yet?"

Lucius snickered lightly. "Narcissa wants all of us where she can see us," he said. "I don't really blame her; we are one of the lucky families. We haven't lost anyone in this battle. Other people can't say the same."

"What are you going to do about the Parkinson's?" Remus asked.

Lucius sighed deeply, pinching the bridge of his nose. The Parkinson family had put him in a difficult position. It had come as a shock to them all when the plot had been unravelled. Pansy Parkinson alongside several other students had been part of Voldemort's wider plans. They had, in the Room of Requirements, fixed a broken cabinet that served as a gateway for Voldemort into the classroom. With the majority of the population on the grounds, their movement through the school had been mostly unhindered.

Pansy's father had sworn an oath that he knew nothing about his daughter's activities, and, since she had not borne the mark, she was alive, locked in Azkaban alongside other supporters. Lucius had been most disturbed by the witch's motives for turning Dark. She had been promised that Draco would be kept alive and that he would be given to her. Lucius knew that his sons would feel some guilt regarding the witch, and a part of him wanted to withhold the information entirely from them. What had started off as a childhood crush, had developed into something so malevolent that the witch had willingly assisted in the widespread slaughter of many, all in the name of what she believed was love. Although, the parents were innocent, Lucius was not certain if he could continue to support their businesses as he had been doing for over a dozen years now.

"I'm not sure," he said honestly. "I'll have to talk it over before I decide."

"Take all the time you need," Severus shrugged, "you have more important things to deal with anyway. Fudge wants to give the boys the Order of Merlin, and I doubt even your solicitors can keep their names out of the papers any longer. I've heard rumours of biographies of them already."
"I know," he groaned, disgruntled. "They won't be able to get around it this time. I'll manage it carefully though and it won't be until they're in a better state of mind. Fudge wants them to become a symbol, but right now I prefer he concentrates on getting Britain back into a functioning state. Speaking of which, is Sirius continuing working for the Ministry?"

"For a few months more," he said, walking in the door, Narcissa's arm linked through his. "It wouldn't be fair to anyone if I resign so abruptly, especially when there is so much clean-up to do. I am going to leave by the end of the year though. After working in the Ministry I think I'm better off on the law-making side rather than the law-enforcing one."

Lucius arched an eyebrow at him. "Does this mean that there will actually be a Lord Black on the Wizengamont body then?"

Sirius playfully stuck his tongue out at him. "Honestly, I was going to give the title to Harry when he came of age, but that'll take too long. So yes, there will be a Lord Black there, blowing raspberries at you at every sitting."

They all chuckled ruefully at that.

"I'm retiring from Hogwarts in a few years," Severus admitted eventually. "I really only took the job as a favour to Albus, and there are several more potions master around now. I'll stay until the boys are out of the school system, but then I'm leaving."

"Well that means we'll have to speed up our schedule," Remus mused.

"Schedule?" Narcissa asked curiously as she settled on Lucius' lap.

The look Remus shot her was decidedly lecherous. "There are a few untried rooms left in Hogwarts," he said rougishly, "and we will try them all before Severus leaves."

"Pervert," Severus shot, even as he fought a blush.

"You love us," Sirius shot back.

"Unfortunately," he grumbled, drawing another laugh from those in the room.

"Welcome to the final Order of the Phoenix meeting," Albus said with relish, laughing at the cheers that went around the room. "Yes, Yes, I know you are all very happy."

"What's the point of this old man?" Sirius asked, earning himself a tap from Severus.

The meeting was family oriented. Only the Malfoys and Blacks were here. It was not as if they had deliberately excluded the rest of the Order. The Weasleys were in mourning and Albus really did not see the need to disturb them currently. The other members as well were busy reorganising their lives, and truly, this meeting really concerned those close to the heroes of the battle.

"How are the boys?" Albus asked, looking toward their parents.

The good mood in the room fell slightly before Narcissa responded. "Harry's responding beautifully," she said. "Healer Mason thinks that he'll be back to himself within a week or two. It's as Lucius thought. It was too much responsibility for him and he wants to be babied for a while until he can work things through."
"And Draco?"

"Draco's depressed," she sighed. "He's taken his friend's death really hard. He's guilty, he blames himself for Gabriel being there in the first place, and nothing we have said thus far has changed his mind regarding the issue. Healer Mason hasn't made much progress with him, simply because he isn't cooperating with her. Nothing thus far has convinced him that he isn't to blame."

"And Harry hasn't been able to help?"

"Not really. Draco responds to him as always, and whenever Harry needs him he performs spectacularly. Other than that though, he just keeps to himself."

"Well Fleur Delacur has asked to see him whenever he's available," Albus supplied. "She was dismissed from St. Mungo's today."

"How is she? And Bill?"

"With time they both will make a full recovery. It's a miracle that they survived actually. If it wasn't for her wings..." the man shook his head in remembrance of the scene that had met him when he had finally gotten a moment to venture to the lake.

There had been nothing left of the Bulgarian student (who they later learnt was not Krum) and his target but a few mermen had confirmed that they were in the direct vicinity of the explosion. There was no chance for survival. Likewise, Hogwarts' own Cedric Diggory and Cho Chang had met their ends. Cedric and the faux Krum had both been working on untying their victims when the explosion had occurred. Fleur, who had been in the lead, had been some distance away, swimming along with her mate. Instinct had had her wings curling around herself and Bill Weasley and though her wings were destroyed in the blast, she and her mate had survived.

"Thank Merlin," Narcissa breathed. "I don't know if Molly and Arthur could survive losing a second son."

"I concur," he said softly.

The floo call had not disconnected itself, and so, Albus had been able to follow through. Percy had been hit by a disembowelment curse that had killed him immediately. It was almost a relief, given that Voldemort was prone to torture traitors for days if not weeks. It spoke of the man's urgency in succeeding with his plans that Percy had been given such a quick end. It was no comfort to his family though, and he doubted that the Order of Merlin that would be given to them would compensate in any way for his loss.

"Regardless," he said, shaking his head to rid himself off the memory of Percy's mutilated body, "let's focus on the matter on hand. I've spent most of my free time going over the boys' memories, both for our sake and the Ministries. Many are curious as to how Draco struck the killing blow if the prophesy relates solely to Harry."

"It relates to them both," Narcissa stated softly. "I realised that last night."

"Then do enlighten us," Albus bid, "for as of yet, I still have no answer for that."

"It's simple when you think about it," she shrugged, "well at least to me. There is an old saying that relates to veelas and their mates. A veela lives half a life until they bond with their mate. It's horribly romantic, but it's true. I can't relate to it personally, but, in cases where one mate is years younger than the other, the elder has reported feeling incomplete. It's as if their world is black or white until their mate is born, adding the missing spark to their being. I doubt it was much different for Draco. In
a way, he was born or better yet reborn the moment Harry entered the world. In that way, the
prophesy does relate to them both."

"That makes sense," Albus nodded, "especially from what I gleaned from their memories..."

"About them both being horcruxes?" Lucius asked, his hands clinching at his sides at the thought of
that.

"Yes that," Albus said, his voice thinning slightly. He forced himself to remember that fate had taken
the situation out of his hands, something that he was eternally grateful for. He had not been put in the
precarious situation of deciding the fate of the two boys. "I still am at a lost for how they both are
though. I can explain Harry being one. Voldemort probably intended on making a seventh and last
horcrux, using the Potters' murders as the catalyst. I suspect that Harry's survival somewhat thwarted
his effort. His soul ripped apart yes, but instead of transferring to a planned vessel, the bit of soul
went into Harry, making him – and more importantly his scar – one. It is why his scar reacted
whenever he was in the man's vicinity, it explains why he always felt his moods or received diluted
visions from him."

"That also explains why Draco experienced them too. He probably had a significantly smaller
amount of Voldemort within him, which is why the effects were less pronounced on him. But the
question still remains of why he had the soul in the first place."

Several heads nodded at Remus' words. "I wonder," Narcissa said aloud in a musing tone.

"What is it love?" Lucius pressed.

"You came back immediately after Voldemort was destroyed," she said, looking at him. "I was with
Draco in the nursery...he wouldn't settle down. I remember now. He had been screaming as if he was
in pain. Trix didn't get me immediately, but from the state of his voice, I'm certain he had been crying
for at least ten minutes. He seemed to be in pain, but I couldn't sense any reason for him to be in
pain.

"The same thing happened the night we got Harry...except this time there was a scar imprint on
Draco's forehead. What if I missed it the first time? His head was on my shoulder the entire time..."

"The Killing Curse works by severing one's soul from the body," Severus mused. "Narcissa, is it
possible that Draco could have helped Harry that night? If Harry called out to him the same way he
did subsequently?"

"It is possible," she shrugged. "Lucius used to draw from me all the time. If Harry did the same,
evoking the bond and feeding off Draco, it is possible that a bit of Voldemort's soul could have
transferred through the bond into him."

"Well that explanation is better than anything I came up with," Albus declared. "We'll need to check
with Draco for confirmation whenever he is up to him, but for now, I consider the matter closed. Is
there anything else we need to discuss?"

"What about those curses?" Remus said. "Those were pure dark arts Harry was using. He certainly
did not learn that from us."

"It is like I mentioned to Lucius earlier," Albus responded. "Harry's scar gave him a direct link to
Voldemort. I think that, after Gabriel's death, Draco unconsciously loosened his control on Harry's
Occlumency shields. It left him entirely vulnerable to Voldemort, although he did not exploit the link.
On the contrary, Harry did. I believe that Harry reversed what Voldemort had done to him, he drew
from him, knowledge and emotions, all of which caused him to react the way he did. His anger, compounded with Voldemort's glee led to the successful casting of those curses. I will be surprised if Harry still recalls how to cast any of them."

"Does the same hold true for his – their – animagus forms?"

"Those were directly linked to the bits of Voldemort within them. The boys were right about that – those forms were evil. From what I deduce, Harry, heavily influenced by Voldemort's emotions, allowed the change. Draco was forced into it because of his bond to Harry. Those forms should be lost to them."

"Thank Merlin," Severus breathed, a sentiment many of them shared.

"What of the students?" Remus asked. "How many were lost? Have you gotten an official death toll?"

Albus' face fell. "In total, thirty seven Hogwarts students were lost. The majority were lower year students who went down in the first wave of attacks. Seven Beauxbaton students were lost, and Durmstrang lost three. Durmstrang also lost two teachers, not accounting for Karkaroff. Twelve Hogwarts students I also consider to be lost to us. They have all been sentenced to life term imprisonments for their crimes. All were trialled using the truth serum, and none showed any remorse for their actions. Fifteen aurors were also lost, although more are expected to die given the extent of their injuries."

All were quiet as they dwelt on the carnage caused by one madman.

"Hogwarts will be closed for the foreseeable future," Albus said eventually. "There will be a memorial service next week for those that were lost, but, Hogwarts will close. Between the repairs and the trauma of the attacks, I am seriously considering just ending the school year now. The Ministry is already prepared to put off OWLs and NEWTs. Come may, those who desire to take them may do so at the Ministry."

"Will everyone be held down a year then?" Remus asked.

"A solution will be worked out," Albus said. "That may be the most likely solution. But time will tell."

"Voldemort may be dead," Sirius added, "but I think it will be years before the wizarding world is finally free of his influence."

"And we will do our best to ensure that that time comes as quickly as possible," Severus said firmly, and around him, everyone nodded their head in agreement.

The war was over, now it was time for the cleanup to begin.
Chapter 78

As they neared the doors of the Receiving Room, Harry sped up his steps slightly so he could stand in front of his mate. He sighed softly as he saw the concerned expression on Draco's face; it had been there since Trix had announced that Fleur Delacur was there to see him. Draco had insisted Harry come along with him, and Harry did not need to ask to know that it was because his mate was afraid. This was the moment he had been dreading, and Harry knew that his mate honestly believed that he was about to be condemned but Gabriel's friend. He highly doubted that would be the case, but there was no reasoning with Draco when his mindset was like this.

"I'm right here with you," he said instead, keeping his tone both soothing and reassuring. "I won't leave unless you ask me to."

"She's going to blame me," Draco said in a brittle tone. "And she's right to. It's my fault that Gabriel is dead. If it wasn't for me, he would be alive now."

Harry closed his eyes briefly as he asked for patience. Draco had been saying the same thing off and on for the past week whenever Gabriel's name came up. Reaching up, Harry stroked his cheek gently. "I'm here for you," he told him simply, not bothering to contradict him now. He was hoping that Fleur would say something that would alleviate the guilt his mate was drowning under. He smiled when Draco's larger hand settled over his, squeezing it gently before pulling it from his face. He kept a firm grip on the appendage though, holding it even as they entered the room.

They made their greetings before settling down together on separate chairs although the veela retained the grip on his hand. In a brief moment when Fleur looked away to answer Narcissa, Harry lifted the hand, kissing it soothingly. "Relax," he mouthed, before straightening when the foreign veela looked toward them once again.

"How are you feeling now?" Harry asked curiously. "I heard you were caught in the b-blast."

Harry's tongue slipped over the last word as he fought against dwelling on the incident. Leaning of his friends' deaths had not been easy for him, and, days later, he was still filled with sadness whenever he dwelt on it. There was not even enough left of them for a proper burial, and so, their parents had settled for holding a private memorial service for them in the upcoming week.

"I am much better," she responded, "better now especially that I am no longer in the hospital."

"I'm glad," he said sincerely.

She was more fortunate than many. As he recalled, Blaise was carded to remain at St. Mungo's for a few more days. The healers had finally discovered the curse that he had been hit with, but reversing it's effects was proving to be difficult. Out of their four friends, he had been the worst afflicted, having done his best to protect Millicent rather than defending himself. The witch was now a fixture by his bedside, switching between being a doting caretaker and an angry witch, scolding him for putting her safety above his own.

"I am as well," she responded, "but mainly because I can now fulfil my obligations. I am afraid too much time has passed already, and you, Draco Malfoy have been made to suffer unnecessarily long because of me."

"What do you mean?" Draco asked guardedly, surprised that the witch had not already started to lambast him. "Aren't you here to seek retribution for Gabriel?"
Your mother warned me that you were expecting such," she said knowingly. "I am not here to seek anything from you. Indeed, it is at Gabriel's request that I am here now. You are a beneficiary in his Will and he has asked that I ensure that you receive what you are meant to."

"Why would he have a Will?" Harry frowned, "he's only eighteen."

"A valid point," she said, "but in a moment you will understand. Draco – if I may call you that – did Gabriel ever mention Alexis to you?"

Confusion shone on Draco's face for a moment at the abrupt change in conversation. "You mean his mate? Yes, he has mentioned Alexis to me before."

"In great detail?"

"No actually," the veela said with a slight frown. Now that he thought about it, he knew very little about Gabriel's mate. Truly his friend had mentioned him copious amounts of times, but he had been sparse in the details he gave regarding him.

"Can you tell me what he told you?" she requested, "it will make my task much easier."

"Um, Alexis was younger than him – my age really. Gabriel said that I reminded him of him. Our personalities were similar...we were both prone to getting into trouble. We resemble as well."

"Did he mention anything else?"

Draco thought hard for a moment before shaking his head lightly. "Now that I think of it, he didn't really tell me much about Alexis. He kept saying how he was looking forward to seeing if they truly were mates and that he was jealous that I already had Harry. He wished that he was older so that he could be completely certain that Alexis was him. But still, he never directly referenced him."

"It is as I expected," she responded softly. "Alexis was a difficult topic for Gabriel, even with you I suppose. Gabriel hardly mentioned him to us, except to say how you reminded him of his mate. You were very much a blessing to Gabriel Draco. I do not think you know how much."

"A blessing?" Draco scoffed. "Were it not for me, he would be alive still."

The witch shook her head. "No," she rebutted. "Were it not for you, he would have been dead long ago."

A brief silence fell over the room at her grim pronouncement.

"Perhaps you should explain more clearly," Narcissa suggested, shooting sympathetic looks to her son.

"You are right," Fleur agreed. "I should start from the beginning. It will make sense then no? I have known Gabriel for almost nine years now since our schooling lasts eight years to your seven. We met at our year one orientation, and became immediate friends. All of the veelas actually became quick friends. Gabriel was wonderful. From the start it was clear that he was the best in our year. He was intelligent, athletic and very responsible. Even as a year one student, he inspired respect, even from older students and was a stickler for discipline.

"Needless to say, there was not much Gabriel would put up with. Actually, I remember the scolding he gave me for almost failing my History exam once since I had spent all of my time dancing instead of studying. He was always like that. Thus when in our third year, Alexis entered Beauxbatons, we all knew that there would be problems. Gabriel had been named a prefect, unprecedented given his
age, but truly there was none better for the job than him.

"Alexis was a handful. From the start he caused problems. He teased the witches, pranked everyone, dressed sloppily and his school work was mediocre at best. Certainly he was not Beauxbaton material even though he had the right pedigree. A month or so passed before they interacted for the first time. Alexis had stolen something for a yearmate and was determined to put it in a tree. Hearing the commotion, we investigated.

"Normally Gabriel would have just punished Alexis and left the matter at that. It was what he would have done with anyone. But he did not. Gabriel fetched him from the tree himself, and he was angry – truly angry. Really, when he got him on the ground we were concerned for Alexis. Never had we seen him so angry. Gabriel started scolding him with a vengeance, berating him for putting his life in danger for the sake of a silly prank. Alexis retorted back – if possible Gabriel grew even angrier. He ordered him to be quiet, and surprisingly, Alexis did. Gabriel scolded him for everything, for by then we had heard tales of him. He told him off for his appearance, for acting out and for failing his school work as it was an embarrassment to both himself and his family. I do not know who was most shocked, Alex, or us.

"But there was more to come. You see, Alexis listened to no-one, not even the teachers. But when Gabriel finally finished, Alexis immediately returned to toy and even apologised to the student. Usually he would have thrown it and run off. The next day Alexis sought us – well Gabriel – out. His appearance had much improved and he had a fruit with him. He offered it to Gabriel, but as it had come from the Headmistress' private garden, Gabriel only scolded him some more, saying that he wanted nothing stolen, especially from him of all people.

"Alexis looked heartbroken, and for a moment I thought that Gabriel would relent, but he sent him away saying that he wanted nothing to do with him. That was not true, as after that Gabriel started keeping checks on him, telling us of his progress. He seemed not to even realise he was doing it, and by the third week, all of us veelas knew why. It became a joke for us as we wondered how long before Gabriel realised that Alexis was destined to be his mate.

"Alexis did not actually seek Gabriel out again until the end of term. He pushed his results under Gabriel's nose and demanded that he look at it. After scolding him for rudeness, Gabriel did. Alexis had much improved since midterms. He had passed everything and his behaviour had improved considerably. At that point we were all hoping for him. Surely Gabriel would acknowledge his improvements?

"Thankfully he did. He patted him on the head and congratulated him, saying that now he was a person he could interact with. Gabriel was bemused when he left us though, he could not understand why Alexis had been so happy to have his approval. We laughed at him but finally we explained. Alexis had disappointed his dominant...all of his actions was his way of making amends. Gabriel's face was hilarious then; rarely had I seen him so shocked.

"He became a regular addition with us after that, although once he had Gabriel's approval, it did not take him too long to revert to his former behaviour. Much to Gabriel's chagrin, everyone from teacher to student started sending him to him for discipline for it was plainly obvious that Gabriel was the only one he would heed. Eventually we learned the truth. Alexis was a bastard son, acknowledged, yet ignored. His bad behaviour was his way of getting his father to pay attention to him. It failed miserably though but with time and Gabriel's no nonsense policy he eventually changed his ways. That and Gabriel's family had all but adopted him.

"By the time our fifth year had started, Alexis was living with Gabriel fulltime, making them even more inseparable than before. Everyone enjoyed seeing them interact with each other, it was a joy to
witness. We all expected them to have the perfect fairytale ending. But then last year, it all went wrong. Gabriel's family is – was – heavily involved in politics and were most vocal against the rebel factions that currently exist in France. They decided to use them as a warning to everyone else." The veela witch closed her eyes briefly at this point, as if seeking strength for what she was about to say.

"Gabriel's sister had gotten married last year – they struck during the reception. No one was prepared – no one had expected it. Very few escaped with their lives, and of the Chevalier family...only Gabriel escaped with his life. Alexis had been inside at the time, but then the rebels started searching for anyone they had missed. You see, although a bastard, Alexis bore his father's distinctive looks, and the Dubois family were also politically affiliated. The opportunity was too great for them to pass up on. Everyone else they killed – Alexis they tortured. Gabriel tried to reach him in time, but by then our aurors were arriving. The rebels fled the scene but it was too late for Alexis. He died in Gabriel's arms.

"Gabriel was never the same after that and honestly when he survived the week we were shocked. For as you may know, while a mate can live without his or her veela, a veela could never survive without their mate. My grandmother decided that the only reason Gabriel was holding on was because they were not fully bonded, but that did not mean he would live, it just meant that his death would be prolonged. When the Triwizard Tournament was announced again, Gabriel rushed to enter. Some thought it was a sign of improvement with him, but we knew better. Gabriel hoped to be named champion in the hopes that he would die in a task. He came to England to die."

Fleur paused for breath, observing her captive audience before continuing. "The day Gabriel helped you Draco, was the day he smiled again for the first time in months. When he returned to our quarters he seemed cheerful and he chuckled at your antics. We were glad for the change, but wary. For a while we wondered if Alexis had simply been a precursor to you. There had been a case in history when a veela had two mates. But then we decided that you were just a replacement to Alexis. You were just giving him happiness in a way we could never have done.

"After Yule, Gabriel's mood improved even more. With each meeting with you he came back refreshed and happier. We knew he was still dying, but it was not as if he were simply wasting away anymore. Two weeks ago he asked me to do this. He was certain that his time was drawing to an end. He did not plan on telling you. He figured that he would live till March, June if he was that resilient. He had planned on leaving England, wanting not to distress us or you when the time came. He even gave me the option of lying to you, claiming that some great responsibility had taken him away and that you would not be able to contact him for months. He had hoped that over that time you would forget him.

"But then the attack came and he died protecting you. I am certain that he was happy to do so Draco. He was dying anyone, and dying to protect you was exactly how he would have wanted to go. He had failed Alexis but he had saved you. It would have been redemption for him, I know he would have felt so."

"He did," Draco said, in a voice thick with suppressed tears. "He said he was happy that I was safe...he thanked me."

Unbeknownst to him a tear slipped down his cheek. He did not even notice as Harry reached across to wipe it away, a sad expression on his face.

"He would have," she nodded. "My friends and I – we do not mourn for Gabriel. We had time to prepare for his death and we know that he is with Alexis now. Here," she said rising, picking up a previously unseen package. "He asked me to ensure you got this. He said that you will be able to use it in a way he never managed to."
"Thank you," he said shakily, accepting it.

His hands shook slightly as he unravelled it, revealing several items. One was an envelope with his elegant handwriting on it. A letter he thought, putting it aside. He would read it in private. The next thing he saw was a jewellery case. Tentatively he opened it, another tear falling as a pair of rings emerged. They were engagement rings, beautifully engraved gold rings that Gabriel had undoubtedly fashioned with his mate in mind. This is what Fleur had meant, he supposed. He fingered them reverently before glancing to Harry. He would put them to use in the future, he promised, before closing the case.

The next item was a photograph, of Gabriel and Alexis. They looked so happy together, Gabriel with a slightly silly grin on his face as he rested his head on the top of Alexis' head. He would treasure the picture, would treasure all of the items that Gabriel had left for him. He would do his best to ensure that he and Harry lived the life that the pair had never managed to do. It was all he could do for the man he had come to love. He would not mourn for him any longer. He would live his life and be happy, because he was certain that it was what Gabriel wanted him to do.

* 

Lucius braced himself as he saw Harry barrelling down the corridor. The brunette made a beeline toward him and, grinning slightly Harry threw himself at him, wrapping his slender arms around his torso.

"Papa," he purred.

"Hello darling," Lucius greeted, bending to kiss his forehead. "How was your animagus training with Remus and Sirius?"

A decidedly mischievous look crossed Harry's face, causing his father to raise an eyebrow in question. "There is no more training," he said loftily, "at least for me!"

"Oh?"

"I did the meditation. There is nothing there. I'm a kitten and nothing else."

Lucius chuckled at the smugness in his son's tone. "Congratulations my silly kitten," he told him, "although should you not have waited for Draco?"

"It was taking too long," he pouted, "also, Uncle Sevvy is quarrelling."

"With who?"

"With Mom and Dad. He's demanding that they show themselves...I did something."

"What?"

"I made Fiendfyre again," Harry shrugged. "He says that they know why. Can I go have biscuits with mama now?"

"Go on," Lucius said, releasing him. His brows furrowed as he watched the younger boy run off before heading to the school room. Draco was exiting the room when he neared it.

"Good afternoon Father," Draco greeted, leaning up to kiss the man's cheek. "Have you seen Harry?"
"He's gone to find Narcissa. Do you have a form?"

"No," he replied ruefully. "It's as Mama said. Veelas don't have animagus forms. Our natural form qualifies as one. You may want to talk to Uncle though. He's still yelling for Harry's parents."

"Fiendfyre?"

"Yes," he confirmed. "Nothing was damaged...Harry stopped it almost immediately."

"Well that's good," he said. "Harry's gone to find Narcissa."

"Okay. I'll see you later Father."

Lucius waved the teenager off before entering the room.

"Lily," Severus grated, "get down here now!"

"What's going on?" he asked guardedly, looking to where Severus' husbands sat, amused expressions on their faces. "And what's this about Fiendfyre?"

Remus looked away from Severus. "Sirius dropped something while he was meditating. Harry reacted by casting it. He stopped it immediately but then Severus started doing...this."

"Any idea why?"

"Apparently he saw something in the memories," he explained. "What, only he knows but he's been calling for them since. I've tried telling him that maybe they can't come. After all, Voldemort is dead...their mission may be over."

"I think they're hiding," Sirius added with some amusement. "Severus isn't too pleased with them."

"Last call!" Severus snapped, "don't make me hold a séance. Don't doubt me."

"Oh all right," Lily's disgruntled voice said as she floated down through the roof, landing nimbly before him. "I'm here."

"Took you long enough," he grumbled, "now where is James?"

"Hiding," she scowled. "He pushed me down here."

Sirius snickered at that, before cowering slightly at the glare she directed his way. "Now what is it?"

"As if you don't know," he snapped. "Why does Harry have your powers?"

The woman's attitude changed immediately as a guilty looked crossed her face. "You know," she hedged, "Destiny doesn't know I'm down here. I should..."

"Lily Marie Evans Potter," he interrupted smoothly. "Answer me."

"Oh fine," she harrumphed, dropping down onto a chair. "It's not as if it matters anymore. What gave it away?"

"I saw it in the boys' memories," he explained. "I was there for a lot of those times, but it's only now that I actually saw you two in it."

"Explain for the lost please Severus?" Lucius bid.
"Remember when you were trying to teach Harry the mind arts?"

"Yes, that's when he first cast Fiendfyre."

"Yes. And Remus, remember when Harry got frustrated and cast a Bombardment Hex?"

"He was eleven then I believe," the man mused.

Exactly. We all wondered why he knew those spells, far less how to cast them correctly. Well, going through the memories I noticed Lily and James somewhere in the background, usually looking guilty. In one memory though, they were actually speaking. This one," he said, glaring at Lily, "asked James if they should warn us in case it got worst. James decided that it wasn't important enough. Now spill, why does Harry have your magic?"

"He doesn't have our magic exactly," she responded, "more like he has some of it. Magic is like energy, it can neither be created nor destroyed but can be recycled. When a magic wielding individual dies, some of their magic is passed on to those in the surrounding environment. When James died, some of his went to Voldemort, some went to Harry and the rest simply diffused. When I died, the same thing happened. However, and I don't know how, Harry received more than our magic, he also received some of our abilities."

"Like?" Sirius asked.

"Fiendfyre," Remus noted. "James was particularly skilled at that."

"Yes," she confirmed. "It's why most of his missions were search and destroy. Harry deviates from the norm that way. Instead of just boosting his magic, he got some of our powers. I suspect it's why he gained his Animagus form immediately. Actually, it'll account for why he's so good at Charms and Transfigurations as well...those were our specialties."

"And why did you not tell us?"

"What would it have done?" she asked defensively. "The information wouldn't have helped with anything, and the last thing I wanted was Harry wondering if his talent was truly his own. Because it is...Harry was powerful even before we died."

"We aren't disputing that," Lucius said gently.

"Good," she sniffed, "because I was about to haunt your dreams. Anyway, maybe we should have told you, but I don't think it would have made a difference. So do stop glaring at me Severus."

"Fine," he grumbled. "I'm still not happy with you though. Although, Remus raised a good point. Can you still travel back and forth here freely?"

"Well I'm here aren't I?" she deadpanned before gentling her tone. "Destiny thinks that it's because of the Philosopher's Stone that we still can move back and forth. It gave us the power we needed, and as we still have it, we can move through the plains. We aren't supposed to though...the whole not allowed to meddle too much thing. But then again, She stopped us from warning you about the final battle, and that was the greatest challenge you would ever face. Really, there's no harm in us returning now. Although, tormenting Voldemort is fun."

"What?"

"Oh please, don't tell me you believe those muggle concepts?" she said with a slight sneer. "Voldemort ended up in the afterlife. Let's just say though that there were a lot of people waiting to
'Welcome' him. He's found out that the afterlife is considerably less enjoyable than his mortal life was.

"And that is justice," Sirius beamed, a sentiment they all shared.

"Anyway," Severus said, watching her carefully. "You're certain that there is no more danger? No other dark lord that's going to crop up again?"

"There will always be a next dark lord," she stated mildly. "Human nature does not change, and sooner or later, someone else will decide to reform the wizarding world. But, from what I've seen, this will not happen for a long long while. That battle will not be forth by this generation nor the next."

"Thank Merlin," Sirius breathed. "I'm too handsome to fight again."

"Sirius," Remus chided before chuckling ruefully. "It's good that it is over though...finally over."

"It is," Lucius agreed, sitting on top of a desk. "How many years have we spent fighting?"

"In this one or the last?" Severus asked dryly.

"The answer to that is too much," Sirius declared. "And as much as I'm glad the battle is done for us, I hate that in the future people will have to fight again."

"It's not like we can prepare for a dark lord," Remus pointed out.

"But you can prepare to stop them," Lily said. "Nip it in the bud. The problem with the last few dark lords, but Voldemort and Grindewald, is that society gave them the chance to reek havoc. If from the start measures were taken against them, countless lives could have been saved."

"That is true," Lucius agreed. "The only reason Grindewald was defeated was because Albus took a stand against him. Voldemort was different I suppose...Harry was destined to kill him."

"But destiny is always changing," Lily pointed out. "For each decision a thousand possibilities arise. Yes there was the prophesy, but what if society had made it so that it was never necessary. Thomas Riddle had all the signs of going dark...it was there from his childhood. Instead of someone recognising that and taking steps against it, he was allowed to gain power. And even when his tyranny started, few fought against him."

"That changed this time around," Sirius murmured, "toward the end everyone was fighting against him."

"It took too long to get to that point," she said firmly. "Society needs to change. I'm not saying that we can prevent evil from spawning, but we can do our damnest to stop it."

"That's something the Ministry needs to hear," Remus murmured.

"Oh they will," she said impishly. "Lucius, years ago you told Draco something that is true."

"What?"

"Our world lives for idols. Wizards are like sheep that must be guided. There was Merlin, and more recently Albus. Both of which ushered in a wave of change that for the most part improved society as we know it. It was Albus who regularised muggleborns and advocated for equal rights. It was Merlin who made the choice to hide the wizarding world from muggles, because it was impossible
for us to co-exist."

"And it will be Harry who leads us into a brighter future," Lucius finished.

"Exactly," she smiled. "Whenever a dark lord is defeated, the victor becomes a symbol of strength to the wizarding world. Luckily we have Harry...still a child yes, but he has the power. With time he will be a force to reckon with. Especially with the Malfoy, Black and Prince names behind him. And yes Severus, you will have to acknowledge your heritage. You all have the power to ensure that the next time a dark lord rises, they will have a hard time succeeding if at all."

"That's all fine and dandy Lily," Sirius said, "but it's not like we can just proclaim we know how to fix the world. Hell, we don't."

The witch laughed. "I'm not talking about the immediate time," she chuckled. "Trust me, with the Philosopher Stone's power still within you, you will be in the mortal plane for a very long time. Hell even Albus will start to crave for the next great adventure as he calls it. You don't have to force anything. The paths will unveil themselves with time, and, from what I have seen, Harry will set things in motion. You all just need to continue as you have. Support the boys, lend them your support and guidance. Help the world recover, and for Merlin's sake, get Fudge out of that office!"

"I've been telling Lucius that for days now!" Sirius laughed.

"We need more time," he said with aspiration. "We don't need political upheaval as well currently."

"But you are planning something?"

"Of course. My solicitor already has all the documents needed to unseat him. I'm just waiting for the right time to have the information leaked. Besides, don't you think we should find a credible replacement before you oust the man?"

"That is true."

"Good," Lily beamed. "Now, I am starting to think that Destiny allowed me down here just to make that speech."

"Why do you say that?" Remus asked curiously.

"James just told me that several paths were removed, which means that you're on the right track. Raise those boys right," she ordered, as she rose. "I'm going back now, and Severus next time don't yell."

"I'll try not to," he deadpanned.

"Good boy," she teased. "Until we meet again gentlemen," she finished before slowly rising out of the room.

"Later Lily," Sirius waved. "Now wasn't that an enlightening conversation? Our Harry is going to shape the world."

"Don't get all sentimental yet," Severus scoffed. "Let the boy get through puberty first hmm?"

"He is still rather short," Sirius agreed. "Lucius, don't you feed the lad?"

"Severus I am about to put your husband in the doghouse."

"Fine by me," he smirked, "just leave Remus alone. I need someone to sleep without tonight after
"Certainly."

"Hey!" Sirius protested, drawing laughs from all the gathered men.

Lily peeped down again at them, smiling broadly as she pulled back, actually letting herself cross the planes this time. "You did good," James said immediately, pulling her to him.

"Why thank you Mr. Coward," she quipped before kissing him gently. "Now, where were we before Severus yelled?"

"We were going to visit with Mother and Father," he reminded.

"Let's then," she said before linking her hand to his. "Let's pay old Voldemort a visit this evening hmm...I want to see what they've done to him today."

"Anything you want to do darling," he agreed, "We'll do anything you want."

"Good."
"This doesn't feel like Hogwarts," Harry said softly, flexing his fingers in Draco's grip.

"I know," his mate responded in an equally soft tone. "It is too quiet...and eerie."

"There's been too much death here," Harry sighed, pressing closer against him. "Grandpa all said that Hogwarts was sentient. I agree with him now. It's as if the entire castle is mourning for those who were lost."

"I don't blame Her," he admitted, "so much was lost. Maybe we shouldn't have come here. It doesn't feel right."

Lucius had unofficially been promoted to the position of Head Governor, and so, increasingly, his time was spent at the school making plans with Albus about how to best repair the school and return normalcy to its students. Bored, the pair had decided to accompany him on this day, and so, were wandering about the premises, taking stock of how Hogwarts had feared one month into the battle's aftermath. It did not take them too long to realise that there was still much to be done to return the school to its former glorious state.

To the teenagers, the school was eerily empty as they had never seen it void of its inhabitants. Only house elves abounded the place, and they were too busy with their duties to pay the mates any heed. In one corridor they observed them trying to scrub off scorch marks left over from spell work, and in another they found some fixing a whole in a wall. The Astronomy Tower was still little more than burned rubble, and, as they passed, Harry recalled their father mentioning that there was a debate on whether the entire area should just be condemned and rebuilt elsewhere.

As they descended to the lower levels of the castle, Harry was caught by an irresistible urge to visit the third floor corridor.

"This way," he bid, tugging Draco's hand to bring him along. "I want to go this way."

"Why?"

"Come on."

"No need to tug so hard," Draco said dryly, but his mate ignored him.

"This is where Cho and I were attacked by Quirrell," Harry murmured a minute later, looking up at him. "Do you remember? I was chasing a broom and it brought us here."

"I remember," he said grimly, his eyes darkening as he remembered Harry's crumpled and slightly bloodied form. "He cut off your braid that time."

"I remember," he said grimly, his eyes darkening as he remembered Harry's crumpled and slightly bloodied form. "He cut off your braid that time."

"Yes," Harry agreed, instinctively running his hand through his now shoulder-length hair. "The broom stopped there, and he made us go into that room there. We didn't want to but he was a Professor so we obeyed him. Afterwards I thought that Cho would hate me...that she wouldn't want anything else to do with me because I got her into trouble."

"Instead she bought you a present and dragged you off to Hufflepuff," Draco responded with a slight smile, even as he wondered why Harry was talking about these things. He had thought that Harry had long since put these things behind him. "You didn't even invite me along," he mock pouted.
"Poor you," Harry said with a sad laugh before turning away.

"Do you want to go in?" he asked curiously.

"No. Coming here was enough. I just needed to remind myself that I've overcome other things here and that this is just something else to deal with."

There was nothing the veela could say to that. Instead, he moved to put a guiding hand on the small of Harry's back, gently leading him away.

"You hid behind that tapestry once," Draco said eventually as they reached the second floor.

"I did," he agreed, "you pretended not to see me even though my legs were showing."

"You were just nine then," he laughed, "you're a much better hider now."

"Yay me."

"Uncle Severus caught you here. Remember? You were skating down the banister..."

"...while the staircase was moving," Harry finished. "Cho swore that I gave her a grey hair."

"And Uncle Severus nearly had an aneurism...I still don't know what that is."

"Who knows," he shrugged.

By now they had reached the Great Hall, but hesitated to enter. In the immediate aftermath, this area had been converted into a temporary hospital bay. Even outside of it, Harry could smell the lingering scent of dark magic and death.

"We don't have to come in here you know," Draco said, as he saw the indecisiveness on his face. "We can go back to Father now."

"No," he decided, "I have to see this, I think we both need to."

Swallowing nervously, Harry pushed open the door. In the back of his mind, he heard the ruckus that usually accompanied the meals, the shouts of friends from other houses as they tried to have cross-table conversations. But all he heard now was deafening silence, and looking around, the usual cheeriness of the area was completely gone. The house tables had been returned yes, but everything seemed out of place nevertheless.

"Voldemort did of all this," he bemoaned, "he's ruined it all."

"He's gone now."

"Not to me. Everywhere I look around here I can see him and what he did to us...to our world...to our friends. This place will never be the same again, at least to me. See there? That's where Cho preferred to sit. She and Cedric used to argue about that a lot. She wanted to be near the centre, he wanted to be nearer to the door. And Percy...Percy loved sitting nearest to the head table in case anyone needed him. The Creeveys used to wander the tables taking pictures...it was a game for them."

Draco nodded to the boy's words, even as he walked toward the window. His breath hitched as he twisted his head to catch sight of the pumpkin patch. Looking at it he could better understand what Harry was doing. His mate was trying to compensate for all of the dark memories this place now bore by reminding himself of the good times. Looking out, Draco struggled to recall the fond
moments he had had near Hagrid's house, but currently the only thing he could see was Gabriel's corpse. Desperately he tried to recall Gabriel's deep, throaty laugh, but all he heard was his wheezing breath as the end neared.

"You're crying."

Draco jumped at Harry's soft tone, and reaching up, was surprised that his cheeks were indeed wet. "You are too," he grumbled, looking down into Harry's glassy eyes.

"I know," he said, absently wiping at a tear. "I thought I was over all this...that I had finished mourning for them. But being here like this...I haven't."

"It's hard."

"Very. I guess we need more time. Although, do you think it will get any better?"

"It will," he said with conviction. "I think that there will be a day when we can look back at all of this and not feel this pain. But for right now I suppose this is all we can do."

"I don't like feeling this way...but I can't ignore it. I wish I was happy for every moment of every day, and I really want to be. But I can't. The smallest things can remind me of what we lost and I can't bear to feel any happiness."

"Let's get out of here," Draco said momentarily. "I can't stay here any longer."

"Okay."

* *

"This is so weird," Hermione stated, as she flipped through one of Harry's textbook. "I can't believe you're a year ahead of us Harry."

"Yes mate," Ron seconded, "we hardly see you anymore."

"NEWT classes have so much more work," Harry lamented, shooting his potions text a morose look. "I wish you all were with me. Draco doesn't pay attention to my complaining."

"That's because you always complain cub," he said wryly as he exited his bedroom. "It does get dull."

"I have every right to," he pouted as the blonde came nearer to where he lay, absently fixing his collar.

"Hey," Draco chided, "one would think you weren't second in the year the way you grumble so. Now, get that essay done. I'll be checking it when I come back."

"Since when do you check his work?" Hermione asked, a smile playing at her lips at their back and forth banter. "I thought you stopped doing that."

"I did," Draco said before smiling roguishly. "However he gets one kiss for every solid point..."

"And that's all the motivation I need to succeed," Harry finished with a smirk. "Although, I think I'm lacking motivation right now."

"Brat," the veela said indulgently before bending to kiss him deeply for a moment. "Be good and I'll consider giving you more motivation later."
Harry leaned up quickly, sneaking another kiss before his mate could retreat completely. "I will," he promised.

"My eyes," Ron bemoaned playfully.

"There, there Ron," Draco said with a smirk, "I'm sure that Hermione will soothe you later."

"I will do no such thing," the witch huffed playfully.

Chuckling Draco tousled Harry's hair before exiting the room.

"I wish you all were in classes with me," Harry sighed minutes later. "I have no one to study with beside Draco and you know how he gets."

"I know," Hermione sympathised, "but truthfully I'm just happy to be back at Hogwarts at all, even if I won't be leaving until I'm nineteen."

Harry nodded his head reluctantly in agreement. The Ministry had finally organised itself enough by June to consider allowing students to write their OWL and NEWT exams. The problem was that the majority had only had a little more than a term of schooling, and thus many petitioned to have the option of repeating the year. It was easily granted given the circumstances. Truly, Harry and Draco were among seven who had gone forward and sat the exams.

Had the situation been different, Harry was certain that Hermione would have done so as well. As if, the witch's parents had refused to let her return to the wizarding world, claiming that it was too dangerous. Without an owl of her own, and with Ron too caught up with grief to take the time to check up on her, she had been forced to dedicate her time to focussing on her muggle studies, and took the examinations.

It only was when the Ministry had sent the notices did she have the chance to plead for an intervention, a call Professor McGonagall had swiftly responded to. With her help, she had been able to convince her parents to allow her to continue her magical education. It was with great reluctance that they had allowed her too, but by then the period for writing the OWLs had passed and so, like the majority of the school body, she was forced to repeat the year.

"What I hate," Ron grumbled, "is the fact that I'm going to be stuck with potions for so much longer."

Harry shook his head ruefully. Ron had been grumbling about it off and on for the past few days. Now that the threat was over, the original Auror requirements were back in place, and now the redhead actually had to work hard if he wanted to achieve his dream.

"Hermione," he asked. "I know that Ron's going to be an auror. But what about you?"

"I want to work in the Department of Mysteries," she replied immediately.

"A lifetime of researching and inventing," her boyfriend said with a slight eye roll, earning himself a glare from her.

"And you?" she asked. "What are you going to do?"

"That's really an unfair question," Ron stated. "It's not as if Harry can work as soon as he leaves...are you even planning on working?"

"I'm not sure actually," he admitted. "I mean...I don't need to. Draco is going to take over from Papa."
But Papa is young so that won't be for several more years at least.”

"So Draco's being trained for the job?"

"Basically."

"And you?"

"No not me," he confirmed. "Draco will take charge of the Malfoy Enterprises. I suppose I'll have to do the same for the Potter Estate, but there won't be any businesses to run, at least not in the way Draco will have to."

"So you don't want a career in something?"

"I don't know," he said with a slight frown. "Professor Flitwick said I can apprentice under him for a Mastery once I leave school. I'm seriously considering it. But after that...I don't know."

"It'll be a waste if you don't do something career wise," Hermione told him seriously. "You're brilliant...the wizarding world can use whatever you can offer to it."

"I just want to be Draco's mate," Harry shrugged. "Nothing else seems important beside that."

"So basically you'll be the male equivalent of a house-wife?"

"If it makes me happy," he said glibly.

Hermione pursed her lips together for a moment before giving up the argument. "Anyway, we should focus on our work for now. I did promise that I'd help Millicent with History after dinner, so I need to get this done before then."

"Okay," Harry responded easily, while Ron merely nodded, glad that a potential argument had been avoided.

* *

"I think you've finally hit a growth spurt cub," Draco teased as Harry snuggled into him.

"Hmm?"

"Your hair is tickling my chin."

"Maybe I have then," Harry whispered, slightly distracted as he ran his hands along Draco's side, smiling slightly as he took in a whiff of his cologne. "But I'll still never match you."

"That's fine," the veela murmured, tangling a hand in Harry's head and tugging to pull his head back. "I like having you against me like this."

"I'd like it better if you'd kiss me," his mate shot back with some impatience.

Laughing huskily, Draco ceased his lips in an electrifying kiss. Within minutes, things became heated, and Harry, pushing slightly, angled them toward the divan before tumbling them down onto it. Draco gasped slightly at the impact, a sound that Harry willingly swallowed as he slipped his tongue deeper into Draco's mouth. He groaned when Draco's legs parted so that his lower body fell between them, bringing their groins into contact. Automatically he started undulating against his mate, in a movement he had adopted over the past few months.
They had been getting more and more intimate with each other's bodies as time progressed, so much so, that occasionally Draco's mind was drawn back to the information that Gabriel had given him. Nevertheless, he had never pushed Harry further than he seemed willing to go, which was why, more often than not, he allowed Harry to lay on him like this, letting him go at his own pace. And it was a pace that never failed to drive him to madness.

The veela bit back an oath as Harry pressed even deeper against him. "Minx," he gasped as he looked into his eyes. Harry's eyes were narrowed in pleasure. Yet, he was able to discern a hint of mischief in that heated gaze. Harry was enjoying making him lose control like this, he thought darkly, and, with a smirk, he thrust upward slightly, chuckling at the way Harry's eyes dilated. He reached a hand up to pull his mate's head down for another kiss as he decided to test his patience by rolling them over.

His reservation had faded with time. Harry was fourteen now, still young, but thankfully not as innocent given these activities. He himself had turned seventeen the week before, officially an adult in every sense of the word. Gently he pushed a hand under and up Harry's shirt, teasing his flesh with his fingers even as he bit into his neck, sucking hard. He growled in delight as a mark formed. He would have to wear a turtleneck the next day, he thought idly, before licking at the spot. Harry moaned at the touch and so he manipulated the sensitive area for a while longer, even as he felt his own arousal grow sharply.

"Draco," Harry murmured heated, pulling him up for a brief kiss before pushing his head down again. Taking direction easily, the veela started nibbling kisses along Harry's collarbone even as he freed his hands to play with his shirt buttons, releasing them. He followed with his lips, trailing kisses down the heated flesh while Harry twisted and groaned at the fire his touch ignited. He looked up, gently rolling one of Harry's nipples between two fingers. He smirked against Harry's skin at the jumbled moan he admitted, before gently nipping at the bit of flesh.

"Draco..."

"Hmm?" he mumbled, pulling lightly at it.

His breath hitched as Harry arched up against him. He could clearly feel the press of his arousal against his own, leading him to moan and thrust lightly against his mate, bringing their passions together. He glanced up to ensure that Harry was still comfortable with what he was doing. His mate reached out with his hands, and that was all the confirmation Draco needed. Lacing their fingers tightly together, he continued rocking their lower bodies together, gasping and groaning as he felt his pleasure rise swiftly. Bending, he bit into Harry's neck once again, moaning when he felt Harry tense before arching up into him once again with a harsh gasp before he shuddered.

Unknowingly, Draco completely opened their bond, and in seconds felt his mate's desire and pleasure course through him. It proved to be too much for him, and with a last straining moan, he peaked, tensing for a long moment before he all but collapsed on top of his mate, breathing harshly. Harry's slightly trembling hands curled around his torso, rubbing along his back even as he came down from his own high.

"That was wonderful," he breathed eventually, claiming Harry's reddened lips gently.

The boy hummed in agreement before grimacing slightly at the sticky feeling within his clothing. Freeing a hand he cast a cleansing spell before sighing in relief. Draco followed his actions before shifting so that his weight was no longer crushing his mate. This was only his third orgasm if he recalled correctly, but it had been the most intense to date. Fondly, he kissed Harry's damp cheek, still basking in the afterglow of their actions.
Feeling particularly affectionate, he started nuzzling Harry's neck gently, earning soft chuckles from the veela mate as he squirmed at his light touch.

"Draco," he murmured, twisting to meet his eyes.

"Hmm? Draco said, bumping their noses together playfully. "What is it love?"

"Nothing," he admitted. "I just felt like saying your name...don't Draco," he laughed a second later when the veela licked at the darkening mark on his neck. "It's too soon."

"I'm just playing," the veela said reassuringly before pulling back.

He pressed a gentle kiss to Harry's hair as he felt his ardour quickly cool at Harry's words. He wasn't disappointed in the least; he respected his mate's needs and so, he stopped the overtures and instead pulled him into a comforting embrace. He was impressed by his veela nature. It was so easy for him to switch roles. He could go abruptly from being Harry's potential lover to just his mate, holding him close.

"Shall we go home tomorrow?" he inquired, running his hand through Harry's head.

"We might as well," Harry said. "Everyone is busy studying for OWLs and Ron is bound to come visit if he knows we're here. He needs to focus...their potions exam is next week."

"You know Hermione will be aiming to meet our scores."

"Yes well I'm certain she can get all Os as well. Although, I'm still amazed I managed that O in History."

"Well the exam did focus heavily on the Great Goblin Wars. Even a second year would have managed an E in that paper."

"That's true," he agreed, "although I'm still glad I dropped it."

"Yes well it did seem rather pointless to continue it. Do you remember Blaise's face when he realised that it was the only thing we had dropped?"

"He still thinks that we're mad," Harry laughed. "And those sixth years faces when we walked in the classroom."

"I think Brocker is still mad at us," Draco chuckled. "He was top of the year until we arrived."

"Actually I think he detested us from the moment he heard our OWL scores."

"And it doesn't help that you're still doing advanced work in Charms."

"I didn't get the highest marks in a century for nothing," Harry quipped, shifting so he could rest his head on Draco's chest. "Professor Flitwick really wants me to do that Mastery you know."

"Well do it," Draco shrugged. "You've already completed the NEWT syllabus...you could write the exam tomorrow and shatter another record."

"Hmm...The future is daunting you know," he admitted, drawing circles on Draco's chest until the veela gently stilled him. "There's so much people want from me."

"Then you decide what you want for yourself," Draco said seriously.
"I just want to be your mate," he said, an echo to what he had told Hermione the year before. "That's my only plan."

"And a great one at that," Draco smirked, kissing his cheek. "You'll find something to do with yourself Harry – besides being with me. Don't worry about it. These things have a habit of working themselves out with time. Until then, you just focus on being a student okay? That's all you need to worry about for now."

"I suppose," he agreed, before reluctantly rising from Draco's arms. "I'm going to bathe. Cleansing charms only do so much."

It was only then that Draco noticed his own discomfort. He grimaced slightly. It was a small price to pay though, he decided as Harry ambled off. His gaze lingered over Harry's form before it disappeared behind the bathroom door. He truly was the most magnificent specimen he had ever laid his eyes on and he was glad that he was only and forever his.
"Hey Mama," Harry greeted as he came into the morning room, looking about him appreciatively.

His mother had always been an ardent fan of flowers, and now, as a favour to one of her friends, she was putting together about a dozen bouquets for a party she was having the day after. His mother looked beautiful, he decided as he approached her. The multicoloured flowers were a nice backdrop against her, and, when she looked up, cradling a bunch of greenery in her hands, he smiled softly at the scene.

Reaching her, he kissed her cheek gently, feeling a small burst of pride that he could now comfortably do so without having to tiptoe. It was one of the reasons he had mainly hugged in his younger days, he recalled. After all, spontaneous kisses like this were not really feasible if the witch had to go through all the trouble of bending to receive them.

"Hello darling," she bid, freeing a hand briefly to stroke his cheek. "Nice and smooth I see?"

"Mama," he groaned a hot flush forming on his face at the reminder.

The witch laughed and turned away, putting down the flowers.

"That was one time," he protested, leaning around her to pick up a blossom.

Contemplating it briefly, he broke the stem and put in carefully in her hair. He was certain that his father would appreciate the way it enhanced her appearance.

"But I want to look manly Mama," Narcissa said teasingly, repeating the words he had said a few months ago, even as she touched the flower.

Laughing Harry reached for an empty vase. The incident she was referring to was an especially embarrassing one and he was certain that it was one that would be recited for years, much to his chagrin. He had decided, after gaining a few inches, that he would look even older and 'manly' with facial hair. Thus he had refused to apply the necessary charms for almost a week, before proudly running off to seek someone for verification on how much different he looked.

The consensus? No one could tell the difference. Only Narcissa, with her particularly sensitive hands could discern the slightest hint of stubble, and clearly put out, he had given up the venture. It had only slightly soothed his pride when his godfather comforted him with the knowledge that James had been nearly hairless as well, but since then, he endured mild teasing regarding the entire incident.

"I'll stop for now darling," she promised. "Would you like to help me?"

"Sure," he agreed. "I'm finally done with my potions essay. Do you think Uncle Sev will come over today?"

"He might," she mused, "if only to get away from Sirius from a bit. He's decided to be muggle and has hung mistletoe all over Black Manor."

"The plant you kiss under?"

"Exactly," she laughed, "although Sirius has...expanded that concept somewhat."

"Mama!" Harry said, flushing when the insinuation hit him. "Should you be saying that around me?"
I'm only fifteen.

"I know very well what fifteen year old wizards are capable of Harry," she shot back shrewdly. "And I know what Lucius was like at that age as well. Therefore I am well away of what antics you two boys are probably carrying on with behind closed doors."

Harry's flush only deepened at her words. "Is that why you and papa don't come into our bedrooms as much anymore?"

"Well more so Lucius. I swear your father can be so hypocritical sometimes. Were it up to him I swear you wouldn't get bonded until you were thirty."

The young wizard shook his head ruefully at her grumblings while he gauged the flowers he had gathered. Seeing that it looked very similar to what his mother had created, he tied it off before depositing in a vase.

"Did you need something?" Narcissa asked eventually, after they had worked in silence for several minutes. "Other than a break from your assignments?"

"I actually wanted to talk to you about something," he said, stroking a flower petal absently. "Do you still keep in contact with people you went to Hogwarts with?"

"That's an odd question," she noted, looking at him curiously. "What's brought this about darling? Have you and your friends had a falling out?"

"No," he said quickly, with a furious shake of his head. "We've never been closer actually, even though we're in separate years now. But, that's exactly what I mean. Will we stay close like this?"

"You mean when you leave Hogwarts," Narcissa stated, putting down the ribbon she held to walk over to him.

Grasping his hand lightly, she led him away from the table before seating them on a nearby divan.

"How did this come about?" she inquired.

Harry sighed, tugging lightly on a strand of hair.

"Hermione said something the last day of school," he responded eventually. "About how these last two terms will be the last time we'll be together like we have always been. Draco and I leave Hogwarts this year. Blaise and Millicent will be leaving for Italy next year, and according to Draco, it will be months, if not years, before Blaise can transfer the bulk of his families businesses back to England and return. Yes, we can visit each other but it won't be the same. We're going to go our separate ways...I know it can't be helped. But...do you think that we'll remain friends?"

"And so you want to know about my friendships."

"Yes."

Narcissa smiled sadly. "I don't know how much my school life could help your situation," she admitted. "For one, I had few true friends there anyway and I'm already married to one. In school, I was closest to Lucius and Severus. Blaise's mother was a year younger than us, but as you can see, we've maintained our friendship...heck, she'll be here for tea at three," she said with a small laugh.

"I was on polite terms with Lily, but we were far from friends, and James...well, you know how that went. That was about it for friends. I was immensely popular among the Slytherins, but for all the
wrong reasons thanks to Bellatrix. Many expected me to follow in her footsteps, and so it was easy for me to decide who to associate with. Whoever agreed with Bellatrix's actions was someone to avoid. That literally left me with your father and uncle. So when I left Hogwarts, I suppose you could say I just took the two of them with me as friends, and, you see how we are now. Severus used to all but live here until he married those two, and even now they spend two or three nights here a week."

"Do you think I can have that?" he asked quietly, "that we'll always be friends, no matter what?"

"I think so," she said with determination. "You six have been through so much together. You've practically spent all of your life with Blaise and Millicent, and I swear, seeing you with Hermione and Ron, I would be hard-pressed to believe that you did not know them so long as well. Your lives may take different paths Harry. Maybe your friends will really marry each other, or maybe they may find other partners, but, a friendship like yours...no matter what happens I think that you will always love each other, even if time puts distance between you, they will always be in your heart. And we all know how big yours is particularly."

Harruy chuckled at the attempt at humour. "You're right mama," he murmured, moving to rest his head against her shoulder. "I'm being silly aren't I?"

"No you're not," she said firmly. "You're a loving soul my precious boy, and it's the best thing about you."

"It also gets me into trouble."

"Harry, sometimes I wonder if Trouble should have been your middle name. But I would never ask you to change."

"I'm glad, because I don't want to change."

"Good. Now have you made a decision regarding Professor Flitwick as yet?"

"I have. "I'm going to accept the apprenticeship. He's going to write the Guild for special permission though. Otherwise I would have to wait until I'm twenty one until to qualify to take the examinations."

The minimum age was set at twenty one in England because, usually, a person required at least two years of study before they could attempt to take the examinations. And, as persons usually left Hogwarts at seventeen or eighteen, that age level was set. Nevertheless, Harry would be leaving school at fifteen, and so the man would seek an exemption for him.

"So you would undertake the examinations at nineteen then?" she inquired, stroking his hair gently.

"Actually, he's seeking for me to do it at seventeen."

"What?" Narcissa gasped. "Darling, just how far ahead are you in Charms?"

"I successfully cast the Fidelius Charm on Hagrid's hut the last day of school," he shrugged. "And that's an upper level charm on the apprenticeship syllabus. Honestly, sometimes I wish I had written the NEWT last year as the Professor had suggested but I'm happy with helping others and doing my individual work."

"If you get permission, and I have no doubt that you will, you'll be the youngest Charms Master..."

"In a century," he finished with a smirk. "Professor Flitwick already checked the records. Too bad I have no idea what I will do with that Mastery...maybe spell creation?"
"There is no rush to decide," she told him. "I would hope though that, should you work, that you will stay away from Ministry positions."

"But what I decide to be Minister of Magic?" he teased.

"Well, perhaps that position is acceptable," she said with a laugh. "Now help me finish these flowers? We can go out for lunch today. Why should our mates have all the fun?"

"Sure thing Mama," he agreed, before rising and helping her to her feet. "Can we have treacle tart for dessert?"

"Will you ever outgrow those?"

"Nope," he declared loftily, and with a laugh, the pair returned to their task.

* *

"What is it Draco?" Lucius asked as a sudden frown marred his son's face.

It was a little after New Years' and he and the younger wizard were comfortably ensconced in his office while he continued to instruct him on the inner workings of the family business. It was a necessary evil, he thought, for even though he had no intentions of Draco taking over from him for the considerably future, he knew that plans often went awry. He honestly did not know what he would have done had his own father never given me these very lessons.

After all, he was certain that Abraxas had never planned to die while he was barely legal, but he had. Lucius knew that the future was uncertain, and, should something happen to him, he did not want his family placed in a precarious situation. Thankfully though, Draco seemed genuinely intrigued by the Malfoy businesses so far, and he could only encourage that interest. He knew very well how easy it was to collapse an empire if the persons running it felt little true love for the enterprises. But he knew that his son would not become one of those.

"Harry," Draco murmured, reaching up to rub absently at his chest. "He's upset about something...angry really...and hurt."

"He shouldn't be," Lucius frowned. "He and Sirius are in Diagon Alley. What on earth could be bothering him?"

"He's not answering me," the veela said momentarily, a slightly absent edge to his tone as he focussed on the emotions radiating from his mate. "He isn't scared though, so it's not like if he is in danger."

"Do you want to go to him?"

"And get hexed?" he retorted, giving his father his full attention once again. "Harry made me swear that I won't come running to his aid anymore the moment I feel something wrong from him. He promised that he will alert me if anything gets out of hand, and I will trust him."

"That is a good idea," Lucius agreed, falling back against his chair. "Narcissa gets the same way when she thinks that I am coddling her too much."

Draco snickered softly at that. "Mama and Harry are very similar aren't they?"

"Very much so. Sometimes I think they co-conspire against us."
"I know. But it's so hard to tell him no. It always has been but now...he has me wrapped around his finger."

"Such a pleasurable dilemma," Lucius acknowledged with a smirk. "Have you any immediate plans?"

"Huh?"

"Forget the papers for now," he bid, pointedly closing his own folder. "You'll not be completely at ease until you find out what upset Harry, so we'll just talk. We've done more than enough for the day anyway. Now tell me, do you have any immediate plans once you leave Hogwarts?"

Draco looked thoughtful for a moment. "I think I want to pursue a Mastery...Arithmancy most likely. Professor Vector's current apprentice will be sitting the examinations in a few months, and she said that she's willing to undertake me if I really wanted it. She told Hermione the same thing as well. Surprisingly she wants to focus on work first."

"Not everyone has the luxury of familial wealth behind them," Lucius pointed out mildly.

"I know that Father," Draco said with slight exasperation, "but I really think it has to do with her parents. They still aren't completely bought on her remaining in the magical world. After all, she had to agree to write the muggle equivalent of NEWTs before they agreed to let her continue at Hogwarts. She's afraid that they'll try to force her into a Muggle university...you know what that is right?"

"I do."

"She wants to work because it'll be harder for them to force her hand this way. They've an obligation to finance her until she's legally an adult in the muggle world. She's worried that they'll use that against her to force her to stay among muggles."

"All this from Voldemort?" Lucius asked with slight incredulity.

"Partly," he nodded. "They're saying that the wizarding world is decades behind the muggle world, and no offence to Ronald, but intermingling with his family didn't do much to persuade them in favour of her staying here. Her mother is afraid that she'll become a house wife like Mrs. Weasley, which is a waste in their summation. That's already gone out of fashion in the muggle world. So Hermione needs to prove her independence from them."

"The poor girl," Lucius lamented, although he could sympathise with her parents.

Having met the witch on numerous occasions, he knew first hand that she was brilliant and almost on par with his own boys. Truly it would be a waste to end up like Molly who had gone allowed motherhood to become her sole career. But to go to such an extreme to avert it...perhaps the witch was best off delaying her mastery for a few years until her parents were more amiable toward the idea.

"Anyway," Draco continued, "Arithmancy is an option. But there is also potions. And I can just start working with you full time if I am tired of schooling."

"Do you know what Harry said when Narcissa asked him?"

"He wants to be my mate," Draco responded with a blush. "He's so silly sometimes."

"I actually think he has the right idea," Lucius admitted. "It's what Narcissa and I would have done
had Father not been killed."

"Really?"

"Really," he confirmed. "When I asked your mother to marry me, we had made several short term plans. We would get married in December and then spend a year or two together exploring the world and just being with each other before I settled down to work on my mastery. By then we had hoped to have a little one to dote upon. A few years after that, I would step up and start helping Father with the businesses. As you know, that plan didn't come to pass. But there's no reason why you shouldn't consider it."

"But Harry's already working on his apprenticeship," he mused, leaning his head back against the chair. "So we would at least have to wait until he's done with that. He's determined to break the record after all. Although, there's no reason I can't start my mastery now as well. I could work hard to finish it at the same time as Harry. He'd be seventeen then anyway."

"Oh?" Lucius said, arching an eyebrow. "Is there some significance regarding that age that I should know about?"

The patriarch chuckled good-naturedly at the abashed look that crossed his son's face. Reaching across the desk, he patted his cheek affectionately, bidding him to meet his gaze. "Talk to me son," he encouraged. "I promise that I won't overact."

"You always do when it comes to us these days," Draco complained.

"That's because you take liberties you're not meant to until your forty five."

"I thought it was thirty," he snorted.

"And now it's fifty," Lucius retorted with a slight smirk. "But I promise I'll behave. So tell me."

"I want to ask Harry to marry me when he's sixteen, and actually hold the ceremony when he turns seventeen" he admitted, ducking his head slightly. "I...I've been doing a lot of research...and there's Gabriel's book. Our bond is three quarts complete."

"Heart, mind and soul," the older wizard murmured, before cringing internally when he recalled the final part of the bond...'body'. He bit back the urge to raise the age limit to sixty, reminding himself that he had promised to behave.

It was that half the time, he still thought of the two boys – no – young men, as his little wizards...the ones who ran to him when he returned from his office, or dragged him off for a game. It was hard at times to correlate the handsome wizard before him with the adorable toddler who used to put a plaintive hand out of his crib, in a silent plea for him not to leave until he fell asleep. And here he was, his little Draco, talking about marriage and sex with his other little boy whom he still treasured dearly. He had known from the start that these times would come, but somehow they seemed to have come to this point so quickly, and he was struggling to keep up with it all.

"I...I want to complete the final stage of the bonding when we're married," Draco continued, not realising that his father was lost in his memories of the past. "We'll do the legal marriage and then we'll consummate it and seal our bond. It's why I've been trying not to have too much alone time with Harry lately. I don't want to seal the bond until then...but it's hard...Merlin it's hard," he said with a slightly strained laugh, recalling how just this morning Harry had snuck into the bath with him...the actions that followed...

He shook his head furiously to dispel the thoughts. "Father?"
"I suppose that is a good time," he replied, struggling to focus on his son's words. "We Malfoys do tend to marry young. I'll have to withdraw our heirlooms from Gringotts nearer to when you'll be needing them. There are several that should blend nicely with the ones Gabriel left you. I assume you'll be using those to propose to him?"

"I plan to."

"Hmm. Narcissa will be in her element," he mused. "But there's time yet for that."

"So you don't mind?" Draco asked tentatively. He knew that the man fully supported their relationship, but still, he expected more of a reaction from him than this.

"Of course I don't mind son," he said sincerely, gracing him with a soft smile. "You two are meant for each other. I've always known that. I'm just being silly I suppose, wanting to hold on to my boys as long as possible. But never doubt that I don't support you."

"I'll always be your boy," Draco murmured, moving so that he could hug the man. "I love you Father."

"I love you as well Draco," Lucius responded, burying his head in his son's softer hair. "Never doubt that, I will love you always."

The family moment though was dispelled seconds later when the pair heard loud voices coming from beyond the office. Pulling back, Draco easily discerned his mate's angry voice. Seconds later, Sirius' slightly pleading one was heard. Sharing a brief look, the two blondes moved to investigate.

Harry's furious gaze met his immediately, and turning from his godfather, he walked swiftly to him. "They can't do anything," he spat out, clenching his fists. "Why can't they do anything? This isn't right!"

Instinctively, Draco reached out and firmly, tugged Harry against his chest. The brunette resisted, but, when he gently touched him through their bond, he calmed enough for the veela to ask, "Who has angered you so mate?"

"The Ministry," he grumbled, his anger slighted muted by Draco's presence.

"And what have they done?" he continued, starting to stroke his back gently, hoping to distract him from his anger. After a moment, he released his wings, wrapping them around Harry. As expected, the younger wizard reached to stroke one, and teasingly, he brushed it against his body.

"Stop that," Harry grumbled after a few seconds though. "I'm angry."

"And I want you calm."

"I can't calm down," he insisted, trying in vain to pull back from him. "Not when we have no rights!"

"Who has no rights?"

"We don't. Well not you...you're an adult now. But I don't and they certainly don't!"

"Perhaps you should explain?" Lucius finally asked, turning toward Sirius.

Said man sighed deeply as he raked a hand through his hair. "There was a wizard near Knockturn Alley whose idea of a spanking is beating a child to near-unconsciousness. We intervened and ended
up at the Ministry to sort everything out. As it turns out, there are no real laws regarding child abuse, and the ones in place are older than Albus. So in the end he got off with a warning even though the kid had to be seen by a Healer. Let's just say Harry wasn't too pleased by the turn of events."

"He wouldn't be," Lucius said darkly, looking to where his son was continuing to murmur in Harry's ear.

"Harry insists that something be done. I managed to get him out of the Ministry before he made a scene, but...well, you see how it is."

"I have to do something," Harry declared, his eyes flashing angrily. "That man is probably beating the boy all over again right now, and the Ministry can do nothing? What's the point of them if they can't help the most defenceless huh?"

"Harry..."

"No papa," he interrupted. "I won't be pacified in this. I'm going to find a way to help him – to help everyone in his situation."

With that declaration, he pulled away from his mate, and stalked down the corridor. Giving them a brief look, Draco hurried after him.

"I don't understand why he's reacting so strongly to this though," Sirius admitted.

"No one ever told you how Harry ended up in our care did they?" Lucius asked as he led the way back into his office. "Let me put it to you this way. That boy Harry saw would have been him had we not intervened."

Sirius' breath hitched at the implication of his words.

"Lily's sister and her husband abused him, so much so that he was gravely injured when he found him. It was why we took custody of him. Seeing that boy perhaps reminded Harry of the life he could have lived. He wants to provide him with the escape that he managed to find...he wants to do it for everyone in his situation. That's probably why he is so upset. He's found a new person to save and you basically told him it isn't possible."

"But it isn't..."

"For now," Lucius said shrewdly. "But I expect Harry to return in the hour asking how to amend the laws."

"He's just one person."

"He's the person," the blonde wizard corrected. "Remember what Lily told us? Harry's destined to change the world as we know it. It's highly probable that this is the start."

"Then we'll have to find a way to support him," Sirius said eventually.

"We will."
Draco’s patience was quickly running out as he followed his mate’s movement back and forth across his bedroom. Harry went from pacing and muttering to angrily flicking his hands at random objects, causing them to fly across the room and slam against the walls. Thankfully none of them had broken as yet, but Draco knew that it would only take his mate doing it one more time for his already thin control to snap. He understood that Harry was upset, from the little he had managed to gain from him, he too was angry at the shoddy treatment being meted out to vulnerable children within the wizarding world. Nevertheless, that did not excuse Harry’s current behaviour. He was acting more than a petulant brat than anything else, and it was not something that he would put up with for much longer.

It was at times like this that Draco was forced to acknowledge that Harry was still immature in several ways, which, he reminded himself, was okay. He had been far from mature at that age after all. But what was not acceptable was the way in which Harry was acting. Usually when his mate was acting a bit childish, he usually humoured him until he returned to normal. But this was far from his normal churlishness or bouts of angst. This bordered on ridiculous and when, Harry sent a book flying toward the corner, Draco’s control snapped. Swiftly rising, he was across the room before he even realised it, grasping Harry’s hand firmly in his and pinning him with a stern glare.

The abrupt movement was enough to stop Harry momentarily, but within seconds he recovered enough to direct a glare at the taller man.

"Let me go," he demanded, tugging against his grip. "I'm not in the mood to play any games right now."

"And I'm not in the mood to deal with this behaviour," Draco shot back immediately, drawing him in closer.

"What are you talking about," Harry frowned, tugging ineffectually once again. "Let me go."

"When we are done with this conversation."

"Draco-"

"Look Harry," the veela interrupted, "you're acting very childish currently and I won't put up with it any longer. I know you're upset – I really do understand, but that does not excuse the way you're acting now."

"You don't understand," Harry hissed at him, "I have every right to be upset!"

"I do understand," he continued in a much gentler tone, "You have every right to be angry but your behaviour cannot be condoned."

"I want to help..."

"And a tantrum is the best way of doing so?" he asked shrewdly. "All you are proving to anyone currently is that you're too young and immature to be let out of the schoolroom. You aren't a child anymore Harry...you're not an adult either, but still, you know what is expected of you and this is certainly not it."

"Don't talk to me like this," Harry spat, glaring at him. "I'm not twelve anymore."
"I treat you as you deserve," Draco countered, "and right now I think that you need me to be your dominant and not your boyfriend. Calm down."

Something in his tone seemed to get to Harry more than anything else for, for his mate took a shaky breath, visibly trying to calm himself. It was only then that Draco remembered that this was literally the first time in months that he had had the need to assert himself over Harry like this, which probably accounted for why Harry was striving to obey him. Harry had become unaccustomed to resisting him as he was want to do in their younger years. Overwhelmed by his dominating presence at this moment, he was helpless to disobey; Draco found himself relieved by that fact. Right now was not the time for an argument between them.

As his mate slowly calmed, Draco slackened his grip on his wrist, moving instead to wrap comforting arms around his waist before pulling him closer. Harry gave a token protest, before he rocked forward, leaving it up to the blonde to support his weight as he reached around him with his arms. Draco breathed a sigh of relief as he rested his chin upon Harry's untidy hair. Crisis averted he thought as he rubbed a hand along his back.

"Now isn't this better?" he whispered.

"I'm sorry," Harry said into his chest.

"There's no need for you to carry on so," Draco scolded softly, even as he continued the caress. "If you have a problem, find a productive way of resolving it. Distressing Uncle Sirius as you did, throwing your things around like an unmannerly child, you know better than this."

"Sorry," he said again, pulling back to look up at him. "I'm sorry dominant."

"Now you are," Draco sighed, as he kissed his forehead, "but seriously Harry. You have to stop acting like this."

"It won't happen again," Harry said obediently. "I let my anger get the better of me. But Draco, I have to do something to help!"

"And you will," he told him in a placating tone, tucking his head back under his chin when he saw anger rising in his eyes once again. It was not directed at him this time, but, he wanted his mate to remain calm and collected. "Do you want to tell me what happened?"

"You know..."

"I know what Uncle Sirius said," he corrected. "I want to hear it from you now. I have a basic understanding on what occurred, but please, I require more information."

"Yes dominant," Harry agreed.

Draco sent him off to change into more comfortable clothes while he sent for a tea tray for them. A few minutes later, he was reclining on the window seat, Harry tucked safely on his lap. The tray floated beside them, and occasionally Draco would select a morsel and press it to Harry's lips for him to consume.

"We had ordered something for mama," Harry said eventually, "and since it would only take an hour, we decided to kill some time until it was ready. There wasn't much left to do in the Alley, so Uncle Sirius decided that we should get some ice-cream. It was then I heard it...somebody crying out in pain. I knew it was a child...it was obvious. I ran to help. That man was punching him in the face...yelling for him to stop crying before he gave him a reason to. I didn't think...I just reacted and flung him across the alley. I didn't realise I could throw someone that far," he added almost
reflectively.

Draco pulled his head down so that it rested lightly on his chest before feeding him a bit of treacle tart. The distraction worked, and, after his mate swallowed, the slight waver left his voice and he was able to speak clearly.

"The boy's face was battered Draco. It wasn't his first beating for the day...the bruises on him were already old. His lip was split and when I reached for him he cringed away. I tried to tell him I was only trying to help...and he said to go away. That I would just be making things worse for him. Later in the ministry...he told me that others had tried to intervene before and it had just gotten him another walloping. I told him I wouldn't let it happen again Draco...I lied to him because even now he's back with that bastard probably getting beaten again because the Ministry doesn't give a damn about children's rights."

There was both regret and anger in the last few words, and quickly, Draco tightened his grip around his mate. He better understood Harry's anger now. His mate had given the boy false hope, and it was killing him to know that he had failed him. A part of him hoped that Sirius had gotten some of his friends to keep an eye on the man anyway. Physical abuse was apparently legal, but Draco was certain that if the man used magic against the boy that some real action could be taken against him.

"I failed that boy Draco. He's already back with that man...I can't let him stay there! I can't!"

"Because you got away," the veela said gently.

Harry stiffened in his arms, a dark look crossing his face before he nodded. Abruptly Harry twisted so that he was now straddling Draco's lap, wrapping his arms around his neck as he looked at him with sorrowful eyes.

"I was lucky," he murmured in a low voice. "You found me and took me away from them. You saved my life that night. If you hadn't reacted as you did and alerted Mama that something was wrong with me...I would have died. But how many people haven't had that opportunity Draco? How many have died or even now are hungry or hurting because they're misunderstood or a burden for their family? You're right...I was acting spoilt earlier...but what came out of it? A scolding. Another person would have gotten a broken bone for doing half of what I did...and while I'm here being loved by you, there are countless others like me who are suffering."

"Cub," Draco breathed, unsure of what he could say to his mate.

"I can't let this continue Draco," Harry continued after a moment. "I've never thought about it before, but now that I know that there are people like me out there suffering...I can't ignore it. I have to do something – anything to change this. What's the point being the wizarding world's hero if I can't help them? There are more evils in the world than Voldemort, and I'm going to get rid of all of them."

"And that is the way someone ready to leave the schoolroom talks," the veela said with pride, kissing his cheek. "It won't be easy you know."

"That's fine," he said. "I won't give up until I find a way to fix it. I can't leave that boy with his father anymore than necessary. I have to take him away – take them all away from that situation. Everyone deserves a chance to have what I've gotten over the years. I'll do everything in my power to ensure that they will get it."

Harry's heart lightened when he caught sight of Hermione. He was not certain if she would have
been here, after all, she did have an Arithmancy test the next day. Nevertheless, she was here in the unused classroom that they had unofficially claimed for their own. And, from the papers sprawled before her, he was certain that she was rechecking the drafts they had been working on for the past few days.

"Hi Mione," he said by way of greeting as he shrugged off his school robes. Free of his apprenticeship duties for the evening, he had planned to spend only the few minutes it would take for Draco to finish his duties here.

But, seeing his best friend here, he decided to take advantage of the time. After all, there was only a few weeks left until he said goodbye to his student days at the school. Yes, he would be back occasionally, especially to consult Professor Flitwick in relation to his studies, but it would not be the same.

"Hey you," she smiled, brushing his hand lightly when he claimed the seat beside her. "You look worried."

"Is it that obvious?" he asked with a chuckle, fingering a parchment.

"Tell me," she bid.

From the start Hermione had taken a vested interest in his endeavour. She had been horrified by his story, and expressed disgust at the entire situation. After all, the wizard world seemed to be light years behind in this matter, and she agreed with him that the situation needed changing. Harry knew that she was the reason he had not sunk into depression long ago. He had known it would be difficult...but not to this extent.

At first the reactions had been lacklustre. His family had supported him, although Lucius had declared that the onus would be on him to follow through with his plans. They would support him, but it was up to him to make it a reality. It was a challenge he had willingly undertook. However, from his very first meeting with his solicitor, he had despaired at how much there was to be done – how many people needed to be convinced. After all, the attitude had been the same as the other people who had not intervened for the little boy being beaten. It wasn't their child and so it wasn't their business.

And within the ministry, the attitude at first had been quite similar. Many believed there were better things to do than to write and pass legislation that would only help a fraction of the populace. Hermione had intervened at that point, and had come up with the plan to drum up public support and opinions for the matter. Harry had grimaced at her idea at first, but had ultimately agreed with her. And so, he had submitted to an interview with the Daily Prophet, clearly outlining the motivating factor for his decision to pursue this action before calling for information and support that would bolster his campaign.

The results had been almost instantaneous as he found himself all but bombarded by owls over the next few days. There were literally dozens of letters. Some were congratulatory, others actually provided him with information and pledges for support that he gratefully used, and some gave him their own stories of their abuse, thanking him for taking an interest in the situation. Of course there were some curses and hexes as well, such as the cursed letter that had left him bedridden for two days. Having Draco dote on him the entire time though had been quite nice and it was with mild regret that he started scanning his mail before opening it.

Drawing away from his thoughts, he answered the witch. "I was talking to Uncle Severus earlier," he explained. "He's willing to formally adopt his title as Lord Prince as it will guarantee another vote in favour of the Bill when it reaches before the Wizengamont."
"'When'?" she interjected, "when did we move from 'if'?"

"With this letter," he said with a smirk, handing it to her. "Minister Bones is officially supporting it. She's promised to sign it off as soon as possible. Uncle Sirius told me that a while back she had tried to raise the issue as well with little success."

"She didn't have the fame behind her."

Harry's brows crinkled in distaste even as he agreed. He openly acknowledged that it was his fame propelling forward the Bill more than anything else. He was utilising it to its fullest capacity currently, but it was something to dwell upon later. A society ruled by popularity risked rampant corruption becoming the norm...

"Anyway, so we're sure of the Minister's support, and so far we have five definite votes at the Wizengamont. Papa says that there are seven who are in favour of the law so we have the majority unless something radical happens. Merlin, I hope nothing happens. However, I'm hoping that these don't pass through on a simple majority. It'd kill me to know that some of our heads don't see the needs of children as being important."

"I hope so as well," she murmured. "But, what had you worried?"

"Uncle Severus," he sighed. "He raised a good point while I was speaking to him."

"And this is?"

Harry huffed a breath as he settled back in his chair. "Even if we get all the laws passed and in place, there won't be immediate implementation. Apparently simply passing a law isn't enough. You have to put mechanisms in place before they can be fully carried out. In our case – as Uncle Sev puts it – we can't expect them to start removing children from abusive homes unless we have a place to put them. I mean, Mama and Papa took me in immediately, but how many families are willing to do so? Besides that, how many are skilled in rehabilitation or are willing to learn how to?

"Mama and Papa ended up scouring the muggle world when they got me for help in dealing with me, and it's only been in recent years that I actually saw a mind healer...they simply didn't know that they should have gotten me one. It's not that I hadn't made progress on my own, but I have to admit that I would have been better off far sooner if I had access to a mind healer years earlier. Hermione!" he added in exasperation when the witch's arms encircled him and pulled him into a tight hug.

After a moment, he reciprocated, a smile briefly grazing his lips. Telling his friends the underlying reason for his determination to pass these laws had been a hard experience for him, and he had had to have Dreamless Sleep that night to keep any potential nightmares at bay. His friends had been stunned, including Blaise and Millicent who had known him since his young years. None of them truly had an inkling as to why Harry had come into the Malfoy's care so soon. They had – as had the wider world – simply assumed that he had been taken in because they had known he was Draco's mate. According to Blaise, he had thought that Harry had been with the Malfoys since the Potters' deaths, but they had only formerly introduced him to their social circle years later when they were certain it would be safe to do so.

"I'm sorry Harry," Hermione said, though her tone was far from remorseful. "It's just that it hurts to know that you went through that...I never even suspected."

"I'm a good actor when needs be," he reminded her. "Honestly my family had thought I was over it. It's only with my healer that they realise just how insecure I really was after all these years. I mean, I still never saw myself as part of the family...I thought that they could get rid of me at any time if they
wanted. Only when I became fully bonded to Draco would I truly belong." He shook his head lightly, before leaning into Hermione for a brief moment.

"Any way," he said, "enough about me. The point is that I got the help I needed, and it's time I ensure that others get it. So, we need to figure out a way around this time lag. I've written to Papa's solicitor about it. He hasn't got back to me yet, but from what I gathered so far, the more available resources the Ministry has at its disposal, the faster we can actually implement these laws."

"At the least we'll need some furnished buildings," Hermione mused. "A place to take them to...not exactly an orphanage, but a place where they can stay. We'll also have to have access to mind healers and healers on the whole."

"I'm planning on talking to Madam Pomfrey tomorrow. She's exclusively Hogwarts, and I'll like to find out how that came about. It's best if we can have some permanent healers with the children. Mind healers might be harder to come by, but if we can have some willing to split their time with us, that'll be great."

"Yes. But Harry, I was thinking about other children. I mean, the magical world doesn't have orphanages. So where do such children go?"

"I don't know," he admitted. "But if I go from my case, they're placed with the nearest family. Godparents can also take them...Uncle Sirius would have taken me then were it possible. But I see your point, there must be someone out there without anyone to take them in."

"They usually end up in Knockturn Alley," a new voice added.

Both gasped and turned in surprise. "Ron!" Hermione snapped, "don't scare me like that!"

"Dominant?" Harry asked, as Draco ambled in behind the redhead.

"We did knock," Ron defended, "but you were too busy to notice. But, to answer your question Hermione, they're mostly found in Knockturn Alley, and maybe other shady areas. The shopkeepers give them food and some money for working for them. Nicer ones even allow them to spend the nights in their cellars or shops. Otherwise they sleep in any safe place they can find."

"What about school?" Hermione asked, horror lacing her tone.

The redhead's shrug was all the answer they needed. The pair shared a look before spinning around, already reaching for sheets of parchment.

"Oh no you don't," Ron said firmly, crossing the room. "I didn't say that to give you something else to work on."

"Exactly," Draco agreed, as he gently pulled Harry to his feet. "You've been working entirely too much."

"Dominant," Harry protested. "I need to make a note of this. It's another thing that should be amended."

"And you'll take care of it tomorrow," the veela said smoothly. "You've done enough for today."

"For the week," Ron corrected, even as he took the quill from his girlfriend's hand. "I spoke to Lavender. You've barely been sleeping Hermione."

"This is important," she frowned.
"That goes for you as well Harry James. Don't think I haven't realised that you've been sneaking from our bed when you certain I'm asleep."

"Dominant..."

"Don't flash those eyes at me, I won't give in on this. You need a break from all of this and I need a few hours with my mate. You've been neglecting me terribly. So this is what's going to happen. You and Hermione are going to pack all of this up and give it to us. We'll return it after you've had a well deserved break. Then, you are going to come with me back to our rooms while those two head off to the Room of Requirements."

"For what?" Hermione inquired, arching a brow at the tall redhead.

"Some alone time. You've missed dinner, and I miss spending time with you. This is important Hermione, I know it is, but you're doing no one a favour running yourself ragged. Please don't be stubborn on this."

The witch eyed him for a long moment before glancing toward Harry. He shrugged slightly before leaning into his mate. He was caving in, she saw, and she was tempted to do the same. Her boyfriend was right; they could use the break.

"Fine," she said, smiling at the silly grin that formed on his face.

"Good," he whispered, kissing her forehead briefly. "Now let's gather this so we can get out of here. What Harry and you see in this room is beyond me."

"Help her cub," Draco bid, turning his mate away from him. "And do be quick about it."

"What have you planned?"

"You'll have to see," he said suggestively, his breath tickling over Harry's head before he carefully shoved him forward.

The brunette turned to give him a small glare before starting to pack the documents away.

"Well that went better than I expected," Ron admitted, as he moved to Draco's side. "I had images of me dragging Hermione out of here."

Draco snickered at that even as he nodded. "I think they realise how tired they are. Really, I don't know how good a night this will be. I can see the brat falling asleep half way through dinner."

"And Hermione will probably talk nonstop about whatever ideas she has," Ron added wryly, "but at least we'll be together."

"A sad lot we've become," he noted, "that we're grateful for the barest hint of affection from our partners."

"What do you think are our chances of getting them to Hogsmeade this weekend?"

"Next to none. And to think, there was a time when Harry practically dragged me there."

"If you're trying to make me feel guilty Draco, you're failing."

"It was worth a shot," he retorted, even as Ron sniggered.

"Honestly, you are acting as if we've completely abandoned you," Hermione grumbled, even as she
held out her bag for Ron to take. "We only spend a few hours a day on this."

"Of course love," he replied amicably, throwing an arm around her shoulders. "Are you ready?"

"I suppose so," she shrugged.

"We're good," Harry confirmed. "I suppose that new letter can wait...and we really can't do much until we get a response from Mr. Dalton anyway."

"I knew it," Draco sighed, pulling him against him once again. "You two are working yourselves too hard. We'll have to keep a better track of them Ron."

"Duly noted," he nodded, even as he walked toward the door. "Have a good night you guys. We'll see you for breakfast."

As the door closed behind them, Harry reached up to link his arms around Draco's neck. "So I've been neglecting you?" he asked pertly.

"Yes you have," Draco responded, wrapping his arms around his waist. "I can't even remember the last time you kissed me properly."

"This morning," Harry shot back, even as his eyes glinted with mirth.

"So far away," the veela mock sighed.

"Allow me to refresh your memory then," the younger wizard murmured, as he rose slightly to claim Draco's lips. After a long moment, he pulled back, licking his lips lightly. "Remember?"

"Vaguely," Draco said in a husky tone. "I think I need another kiss to fully recall. Or two...or three..."

"Greedy," Harry chuckled, even as he rose again.

"Unrepentantly so," he managed before losing himself in the pleasure of Harry's kisses.
Draco looked up from the record book on his desk when his bedroom door banged open. He was not too surprised; vaguely he had felt Harry's return to the manor, and knew that here would be the first place he would visit. He smiled warmly as his mate approached him, shrugging out of his robes, dropping them carelessly on the ground. Draco pushed himself away from the desk enough to make room for him on his lap. Harry dropped down onto him, his eyes sparkling with excitement even as he pressed a brief kiss to his lips.

"Has something happened?" he inquired, wrapping his arms around him before stealing another peck. "You seem very excited."

"Something has happened," he confirmed, joy lacing his tone. "I've just gotten back from a meeting with Papa and the solicitors."

"Did they finish checking your family records?"

"They have," he confirmed. "My Ancestral home is the only thing that cannot be sold or converted into something else. I am free to do as I wish with the rest of the estate. This is perfect Draco! I'll have to organise with Uncle Sirius to view the properties as he still is in change, but once I choose one, that matter is settled. They cannot give me any further problems regarding housing the children. We're one step closer!" he finished with a laugh, hugging him compulsively.

"Congratulations," Draco whispered, bending his head so that he could press a kiss to Harry's hair, an action that brought a contented moan from him. "I'm so proud of you Harry."

"Thank you dominant," he breathed, smiling at his approval. He closed his eyes, nestling his head into his shoulder so that he could inhale his scent. "I'll have to write to Hermione and let her know," he said eventually.

"She's in France," he pointed out.

"I'll have Dobby deliver it," Harry shrugged. "She asked to be kept informed, and this is a major breakthrough."

Draco nodded at that, knowing that the witch had a vested interest in the matter as well. "She will be glad to hear of it," he acknowledged. "Do you have anywhere else to be this afternoon?"

"No," Harry said, pulling back to look at him. "But you're busy?"

"These things can wait," he stated, waving his hand dismissively. "You're more important than it anyway."

"That's good to know," he said with a small smirk, placing a small kiss at the corner of his mouth. "Whatever shall we do with the time?"

"I'm sure we'll think of something," he responded huskily, claiming his lips gently.

Harry melted compliantly against him, parting his lips eagerly. Draco obliged him for a long moment before breaking the kiss, pressing his cheek to Harry's head instead. The brunette though made a dissatisfied sound, and, twisting slightly, sought out his lips again. The veela allowed it, however, too soon for Harry's liking, he pulled back, an act that earned him a mild glare from his mate.
"Kiss me," he demanded impatiently.

"That's enough for now Harry," Draco said in a placating tone, rubbing a hand down his side. "Come, let's take a walk outside hmm?"

"No," he grumbled. "I want to stay here with you and do this," he insisted, before kissing him.

The swift, passionate kiss caught him off-guard, and Harry took advantage of it. Introducing his tongue to his mate's mouth, Harry twisted so that he was now straddling the blonde's waist. His assault was too much for the veela to stop, and Harry smirked triumphantly when his arms tightened about his waist, and, when he broke the kiss briefly for a breath of air, the veela followed him.

He allowed his hands to become active, running them along his mate's torso before skilfully working on the buttons of his shirt, moving his head downward to kiss and nibble at his collarbone. Draco moaned, and tangled a hand in Harry's hair as he bent further, wiggling for more room as he worked his way downward, kissing ever bit of flesh he was slowly revealing. Draco's head fell back on a moan when he felt Harry's tongue flicker against his navel, however, when he felt his hand move lower, he came to his senses. With an effort, he straightened himself, even as he idly wondered when exactly Harry had slipped off his lap to stoop before him.

"That's enough Harry," he said, the words a sharp contradiction to the passion and need in his voice.

Harry paid him no heed; indeed, even as Draco tugged gently at his hair, this time trying to pull him away from his body, Harry nipped his stomach carefully. Draco's breath hitched at the action, and a part of him capitulated to the look of pure desire that Harry shot him before he gained control of himself once again.

"No Harry," he insisted, tugging persistently at him.

Harry's eyebrows rose in surprise, but he followed the movement regardless, rising. However, he did not stop as the veela wanted. Instead, he dropped into his lap once again, immediately latching on to his neck.

"No Harry," he said once again.

"What's wrong?" Harry grumbled, looking at him in annoyance. "Be quiet," he added before bending once again.

"I don't want this," Draco insisted. "Not now."

"You don't want this?" Harry repeated in an incredulous voice, the passion in his eyes being replaced by confusion.

Draco nodded his head, causing Harry's brows to crinkle in confusion.

"Are you not comfortable here?" Harry asked, "shall we move to the bed?"

"Yes – no, no," Draco stated, cursing himself for almost agreeing. We can't do this Harry."

"Why on earth not?" he demanded, anger slowly working its way into his expression. "Not this again," he huffed a moment later, smacking Draco on the shoulder before rising off him. Draco turned, even as his fingers moved to re-button his shirt. Harry dropped down on the edge of his bed, glaring at him.

"Harry-" he began, only to be interrupted by Harry's angry voice.
"What's your excuse this time?" he asked icily. "Do you have an appointment to keep with Papa? Or is there some document you just have to read right now?"

"I-" he started, before falling silent at the glare sent his way.

Really, he thought, looking at his mate, had his excuses really been so trivial?

"What is going on Draco?" Harry pressed, crossing his arms. "Anytime we do this you pull away. Don't tell me you've gotten prudish. We've done a lot more than this without fear and now you barely let me kiss you without flinching away."

"That was a lot more than kissing," Draco defended before flinching. That certainly had not been the right thing to say, if the look on Harry's face was anything to go by.

"Are my advances unwanted then?" Harry spat.

"Of course not," he said.

"Then what, pray tell, is the issue? I want you, do you not want me?"

"Of course I want you," Draco responded. "You know that."

"Oh?" Harry asked, arching an eyebrow. "And just how am I supposed to know that when you keep pushing me away?"

"I'm not pushing you away," the veela corrected. "I just...we can't do this right now."

"Why?"

"Because I don't want to."

Even as the words past his lips, the veela felt the urge to smack himself for it certainly was the wrong thing to say. Indeed it was, for a hurt look crossed Harry's face before his expression fell into a decidedly neutral one.

"Well that's something to know," he said almost contemplatively.

"Harry wait," Draco stated, rising from his seat. "I didn't mean that..."

"Yes you did," he responded, rising as well. "I'm sorry for disturbing you Draco. I'll leave you now."

"No Harry," he said, grasping his arm and turning him toward him. "That did not come out right. Let me explain – "

"Why my mate does not desire me?" Harry finished. "Let me go Draco. I'm in no mood to talk."

"Harry-

"Release me," he demanded, and, when the veela did not immediately heed him, he flicked his wrist.

Draco gasped as a force flung him away from his mate, although, thankfully, he was deposited onto the bed. Nevertheless, before he could scramble from it, the door closed with a distinctive click. Cursing himself, Draco hurried to it, only to swear loudly when it refused to open. Harry had charmed it shut, and given his skills, Draco was certain he would not be getting out of the room anytime soon as it would take some time for him to unravel the charms.
In the end it took him almost fifteen minutes to free himself, and even then, he had been seconds away from banishing the door in its entirety to gain his freedom. Breathing a sigh of relief, he quickly made his way to Harry's bedroom; however, as he half-expected, it was locked. A brief check with the portraits confirmed that Harry was nowhere on the floor, and, with a shake of his head, Draco moved down to the lower floors, in search of his elusive mate. Eventually he reached the family room. Harry was not in it, but, reclining comfortably in an armchair, he found his mother flipping her way through a magazine.

"Mother," he asked wearily, "have you seen Harry in the last few minutes?"

The woman looked at him for a long moment, seemingly deciding on an answer before sighing. "I do hate getting involved in these things. Yes I have seen Harry. He went through the floo and no, I will not tell you where to nor will I allow you to go flooing from house to house looking for him. He looked upset, as do you. As is, you'll do nothing but fight. So sit down, Trix will bring you something to drink."

The woman's tone left no room for argument, and so he heeded her, claiming a chair near the fireplace with the faint hope that Harry would return soon. He nodded in thanks to his house-elf who pressed a glass of Butter Beer into his hand before exiting the room with a soft pop. He sipped slowly at the drink, idly searching through the bond for Harry's feelings at the moment. He knew that, no matter how upset his mate was with him currently, he would never temper the bond to hide his feelings from him. As such, as subtly as possible, he probed it, and breathed a sigh of relief when he found that he was not too angry with him. It was a small relief though, for there was a deep underlying sadness there that bothered him. He had not meant to hurt him as badly as he had done.

"I think I messed up Mother," he admitted.

The woman did not answer immediately, but instead closed and set aside the magazine. "The two of you have been at odds many times in the past few weeks," she observed, finally looking at him. "What exactly is going on?"

Draco tapped his fingers against the cooling glass he still held, wondering where to start. "Has father mentioned my plans to you?" he asked eventually, "the ones concerning our bonding?"

"He mentioned that you've planned out a schedule," she confirmed.

"I'm determined to follow it," he responded. "I'm set to propose to him on his birthday and we'll get married after he's turned seventeen."

"What does that have to do with your spats now?"

"Everything," he sighed. "Harry...well, he's ready Mother."

"Ready?"

"He's ready to complete the bond," he elaborated, "has been for a few weeks now. But I don't want to consummate it as yet. I want to wait until we're married."

"I take it," she said, "that Harry does not agree with your plans?"

"He does not know about them," Draco stated. "I don't want to ruin the surprise for him. I've been refusing him resultantly. I don't want to put myself in the situation where I succumb to his – our – desires and complete the bond. I want it to be perfect but Harry is not allowing me to do so. It's too soon Mother; I'm just not ready to complete that aspect of our bond yet but Harry's growing increasingly frustrated with me."
"Because he senses that you are ready," Narcissa noted, giving him a piercing look. "Draco, Harry cannot read your mind, but he can certainly read your emotions, and he knows that you are deliberately denying him. I'm not surprised that he's upset with that being the case. I'm not trying to pry into your relationship son, but I know that you have wanted him for the past few years. I do recall your complaints and grumblings after all," she added with a small smile. "There were times that you wished he was older or yourself younger, and it would not surprise me if Harry now understands what he was too young to comprehend then. It must not be pleasant for him, now that he is ready, for you to keep him waiting this way."

Draco unconsciously chuckled at her words, his mind drawing him back over the years. She was right; he had started wanting Harry physically shortly after he had started puberty and had been restraining himself ever since. The irony of the situation was not lost on him. For at least three years now he had been careful to respect the boundaries put into place by his mate. He never pressured him; if Harry wanted a kiss, or wanted to mess around for a bit, he honoured his desire, putting forth as much passion as his mate desired. His own wants though had been carefully tempered so that he did not take advantage of him. He allowed himself only a brief taste of his mate when in reality, all that he wanted to do was lose himself completely in him. And now, when Harry finally believed himself ready, when he felt absolutely no fear or hesitation on his path whenever they explored each other's bodies, he refused the silent plea, that call of longing that echoed from deep within his mate.

It was torture, a self-imposed one now that Harry was ready for him, and yet, Draco could not bear to lift from himself those imposed barriers. The reasons were numerous. For one thing, his mate was not yet sixteen, and yes, given the fact that he himself had matured faster than normal, it was not too surprising that his mate would follow suit, Draco truly had planned to wait until Harry was seventeen, until they were married, to fully consume their bond. However there was a secondary reason. Draco knew that, despite the occasional setback, his mate was mentally and emotionally matured and prepared for mating fully with him. What he was not certain of though, was what exactly had triggered this swift movement into maturity.

Undoubtedly the politics he had involved himself in was a factor in the matter. It was frustrating for his mate, and more than once, Draco had spent an afternoon or evenings, rocking in a conjured chair with Harry on his lap, listening to him pour out his troubles. How could he not be certain that this increasing desire to mate was not simply born out of Harry's unconscious need for a greater distraction from the pressures of his current endeavours? While he knew his mate loved him, and would truly bond with him, Draco did not want, at any level, for his actions to be triggered out of the desire for catharsis. And so, he preferred to continue to abstain, to content himself with rocking his body against his mate's clothed flesh until they gained a pale but still gratifying released that took the edge off, but never truly removed, the deeply rooted and burning passion that now ignited whenever they became passionate with each other.

"Draco?" Narcissa said gently, her slightly worried voice letting him know that he had been lost in his own thoughts for too long.

"He believes himself ready Mother, but how am I to be completely certain that he is. Gabriel told me about this; he could have simply convinced himself that he is ready. I don't want to press on and complete the bond Mother under these circumstances. Nor do I want to marry him simply to fulfil my own desire for sex."

"Your marriage to him and your bonding will never be based solely on sex," she said seriously. "It's a part of it yes, but not the most important part of it. Your relationship is built upon love and trust Draco; don't try to cheapen it."

"I'm not Mother," he assured her. "But it still worries me."
"Actually, she said ruefully, "I think you're more concerned with your plans going awry. Shush, let me finish. It disturbs you that Harry is ready for you ahead of schedule and so you're trying to reign him in, to get him to conform to your expectations."

"Mother..."

"Hush," she bid. "I'm not chastising you; it's just in your nature. You like your life ordered and stable and you always strive to achieve it. Unfortunately for you, your mate loves and indulges in chaos and disorder. Really Draco, when have any of your plans, especially those that concern Harry, gone according to plan?"

"Never," he admitted. "Something always happens to through those plans out the window."

"And yet you always try," she finished with a laugh. "Darling, I won't interfere with your relationship, for truly it is no one's business but your own, but I will ask you if you're prepared to live like this for the next year or so until you believe Harry should be ready. Because, my darling, you know your mate, and Harry will attempt to have his way, even if that means tying you down."

"Mother!" he gasped, blushing at the image.

"Don't you 'Mother' me young man," she bid. "If you refuse to explain yourself to him, expect that result. Harry will not be satisfied until he learns the truth, and if you will not tell him willingly, he will find a way to extract it from you. I can only hope that you are prepared to live with the results. Even now he's probably wondering why you are rejecting him."

"But I'm not..."

"To him you are," she stated firmly. "And if he has not already, he will soon start thinking along those terms. As is, I suspect it is his preoccupation with the laws that is distracting him from focussing solely on you currently. However my dear, you know as well I do, that the limitations against him are being swiftly resolved. I don't know if he plans on taking an active role with the institution past its founding, but what I am certain is that soon enough you will have a mate on your hands, focussed solely on you, who will demand answers. For all that he is a spit-fire, Harry is still a veela submissive. What do you think will happen if he decides that you are rejecting him hmm? I believe you went through something similar."

"I did," he said, his heart clenching slightly as he recalled the days when Viktor Krum had been an unwanted intrusion into their lives.

"Harry must be feeling the first stirrings of those feelings my darling, and we both know that he, no matter how much have tried to teach him, will not resort to discussion to explain himself, especially among us where he is free to act as he please. He may be proffering brilliant arguments against the politicians, but when it comes to us – and especially you – he is still not above emotional manipulations to gain his way. Is it worth it my son? Does having your ideal plan for Harry take so much precedence that you're willing to put that above your happiness with him? I think that is something you need to decide for yourself."

"You've given me a lot to think about," he noted after a long moment. "I really was not considering any of those things. I was just annoyed that Harry was choosing to react this way rather than respecting my desires."

"He does respect them Draco," she chuckled, "but only to a point. I'm not dispelling your concerns as being irrelevant darling. Indeed, a part of me, for all my supportiveness, cringes at the thought of my little baby – both of my boys, being ready to take this ultimate step with each other, but it's not
my place to argue against it. You are young, but perhaps this is your destiny."

"But destiny takes many routes."

"But that does not mean you should rush to avoid the one that seems to be laying itself out before you. Take your time Draco, you have it. Think about it, perhaps even talk with Harry about it. Find a situation that resolves both of your dilemmas. Communication is key for any relationship to work my darling, remember that."

"I will mother," he responded with a nod. "Will you excuse me? I had planned to go after Harry and apologise. What I said was cruel...but I think I need to think more about this first."

"You can make amends later," she agreed. "Shall I have his favourite dinner prepared?"

"Would you mind if we excused ourselves?"

"You are both almost adults now Draco," she smiled, "Lucius and I understand that sometimes you will need privacy. We won't grudge you that."

"Thank you mother," he said sincerely, "for everything. I don't know what I would do without you."

"You are very welcomed darling," she beamed. "Now go away. Mother wants to finish her magazine."

Draco laughed at the flippant dismissal, but heeded her, deciding to take a trek through the grounds. He had a lot of things to think about.

* *

Draco turned his head slightly when he heard the crunch of footsteps coming down the path to where he sat. The footsteps were too heavy to be Harry; his summation proved right. It was his father who was now approaching him, hands in his pockets with a slightly amused expression on his face.

"In the dog house are we?" he asked with a chuckle, sitting down beside him on the stone bench.

"I suppose so," Draco agreed ruefully, leaning his head against the man's shoulder and smiling when his hair was roughly tussled. "Did Mother send you?"

"She told me about what happened," he confirmed. "I decided to come speak to you. You've been out here for the entire afternoon, and from the manor, you looked decidedly woe-begotten."

"Has so much time past?" he asked reflectively. "I've been thinking."

"Too much thinking is not good. Harry returned about an hour ago by the way."

"His mood?"

"Uncertain," he said honestly. "He's locked himself away in the study with some more documents, although I strongly suspect that he's simply trying to keep himself busy."

"To avoid thinking," Draco guessed. "Cub rarely chooses to dwell on these things."

"Whereas you sit out here like a budding philosopher."

"Don't tease me," he bid. "I'm no closer to a solution than when I first came out here. I know I've hurt him and I know what Mother has said, but I still don't know what to do about it. What I am
certain of though is that I am doing him disfavour. I want my plan, but it's hurting Harry. But, I still can't bring myself to let it go. I want everything to be perfect Father. Perhaps I should have been honest with him from the start, but I doubt he'll agree with me."

"He'd argue that everything is perfect already," Lucius correctly deduced.

"I know," he laughed.

"Plans are made to be changed you know son. Perhaps you should just make yourself more open to these changes?"

"I wanted to wait until he was seventeen," he grumbled. "But the more I think of that, the further away it seems and I don't think I can bear it, far less for Harry. Maybe we shouldn't wait."

"Maybe you should be talking to Harry about this?"

"I may have to...and at least explain to him why I don't want to go further than we have as yet. I still want this to be perfect Father, but something tells me that we'll be married before the year is out."

"And the bond consummated before that?"

"I don't know," he said honestly. "I wanted it done simultaneously."

"It doesn't have to be."

"Perhaps," he nodded. "But I think I'm getting ahead of myself in all honesty. How can I be thinking of marriage when I can't even guarantee that Harry will talk to me again."

"Oh he will, but loudly."

"Father!" Draco laughed. "A peace offering may be required."

"A plate of treacle tarts should do the trick."

"A tray full is more likely," he chuckled, "although the elves should be preparing some anyway."

"That and some grovelling will certainly guarantee you at least an audience with him."

"Speaking from experience Father?" Draco teased.

"No sass from you!" he retorted, slapping his shoulder playfully.

"Fine," he conceded, "I'll leave that to Mother."

"Good. Sass from one is bad enough, I will not accept rebellion from you as well."

"Okay Father," he agreed. "Now before I go in, help me think of something to say."

"I was stupid. I'm sorry. Anything else can follow."

"The sad thing is," Draco noted with a wry smile, "that might actually work."
Draco absently fingered the rings in his robe's pocket as he stared out onto the grounds of Harry's manor. Or what used to be his manor, he corrected. After all, it was no longer a home, but now a facility to house under age wizards and witches in need of care and protection. By right he knew that he should be at his mate's side; even now, Harry was probably still escorting the reporters around, giving them a detailed tour of the place that had been officially opened that morning. It was a very important day for his mate. Today's events heralded the end of Harry's endeavours over the past few months. Finally, after all his efforts, success had been found, and the home was now open.

Even now, if memory served him right, Sirius was hunting down that child who had been the catalyst to all of this; determined that he would be the first one to be established here. By the end of the week, Harry expected the number of children moving into the place to reach fifteen; thanks to his collaborative efforts with the Ministry, a number of children residing in Knockturn Alley had already been identified. All of them had been discreetly spoken to, and all but one had expressed a willingness to escape their current life. The last one was nearing seventeen and thus could not be forced. Harry had already asked that an eye be kept on him, and that any help he desired should be afforded to him.

Draco was very proud of his mate for all his efforts, and while, earlier in the day, he had stood by his side, smiling proudly at him while he made the required speeches and cut all of the ribbons to the manor, he had now secreted himself away into this isolated area, too lost in his own thoughts to be good company. His fingers clenched around the rings even as he lambasted himself for the apprehension he felt. Why was he being so silly, he wondered. After all, Harry would never refuse him. Many times over the years, Harry or he had absentmindedly spoken of their future and a time when they would be married. And yet, now that the moment was nearly at hand, Draco felt silly emotions complicate what was otherwise a very simple thing.

One month had passed since his last spat with Harry, and, luckily for him, due to the distraction with preparing for this very day, Harry and he had had little time for personal interactions. It gave him ample time to arrange this though, and, turning behind him, he did a quick scan to ensure that everything indeed was in place. Silently thanking his mother for her assistance, he looked out onto the grounds once again. Everything was going to change today he knew, one way or another. He and Harry were about to enter into another phase of their relationship, the precursor to the one that would carry them through the rest of their lives. Yes he was nervous about what he was going to do whenever Harry chose to join him, but there was also joy there, and happiness at the prospect of what was to come.

Eventually he transfigured himself a reclining chair, and, sitting in it, he hummed contentedly as the sun warmed his face. It had been a long night, he thought, for both himself and his mate. Harry had been too anxious to sleep, and he had been too engrossed in trying to calm him enough to rest to get much sleep himself. A quick check of the time showed that there was at least two hours before Harry finished carrying out the tour, after which they would have a few moments to themselves before they retired to the celebratory tea party that had been planned. It was inescapable, something that Harry bemoaned. Draco laughed at that thought; no matter how much time had passed, Harry still hated these official gatherings, however, luckily enough, he had been able to downgrade it from an entire meal to a mere hour of his time. The real celebration, he noted, waited for them when they arrived home. Everyone would be there, from their family to their friends, ready to have an enjoyable evening and night commemorating their engagement. Now it was only to wait for his mate to join him, so that the real event could begin.
Draco was not certain if laughter or tears were in order. After all his anticipation and meticulous planning, he had fallen asleep. To compound that, upon awakening, he had found Harry snuggled into his chest, using him as a mattress. Still caught up in drowsiness, Draco had drifted off again, essentially eliminating any time for him to propose to his mate. By the time they roused themselves, there was only enough time left for them to straighten their robes, and they had not had a private moment since. And now they were once again in the yard, Draco a distance away from the crowd as he watched Harry make his final farewells before they were left alone again.

At this point, Draco was uncertain of how to proceed. Should he stall for a few moments and propose to him now? It was the only time available unless he wanted to be embarrassed when they flooed home. After all, their family and perhaps even friends would be waiting to celebrate with them. So, he had better get a move on with it, unless he planned on doing the proposal before them. And, while he did love his family, there were some things that should be done in private, this being one of them.

"Dominant?" Harry asked, drawing him away from his thoughts.

Draco blinked in surprise, stunned to find that, while he had been musing, the remainder of the people had left and Harry was now standing before him, a slightly concerned expression on his face.

"You startled me," he breathed, even as he stroked his cheek.

"I did call to you. Is everything all right with you? You've been awfully quiet today, and you've been preoccupied for the entire week. I'm sorry that I did not take the time to ask before, but, is there something wrong? Something that we should talk about?"

Draco shook his head lightly, even as he acknowledged that that preoccupation was undoubtedly the nervousness he had been feeling regarding his plans. Perhaps that was why his family had been shooting him amused looks for the entire week?

"Dominant?" Harry pressed.

"I've had a lot on my mind, that's all. But I am fine."

"Oh? Like what?"

Harry's question, Draco quickly decided, was the perfect opener to his proposal. It was not what he envisioned, and, in seconds, his carefully crafted speech had been discarded, but that was all right. Perhaps the words coming from his heart would be more meaningful anyway.

"I've been thinking about us."

"Then those thoughts must have been delightful," he teased.

"They were," Draco agreed. "I can't help but think that we've been through so much together Harry. We've come a long way you know."

"I know," Harry confirmed, leaning forward to snuggle into his chest. Draco smiled at the gesture, and raising his arms, wrapped them around him. He bent his head so that he could inhale the sweet smell of Harry's hair, before turning to press his cheek against the brunet locks. He continued speaking then, his voice soft. He knew though, that Harry was hearing clearly every word that he said.
"I remember the day you came into my life," he said eventually. "You were so small, so bruised, and yet so perfect to me. I took one look at you and I knew that you were the one that I would spend my life loving."

"I felt the same way too. I thought you were an angel at first; you were standing there over me and your hair seemed to glow. You were so kind to me as well, from the very start. I told myself that night that I never wanted to leave your side."

"And you never did. We've had our spats—"

"Numerous spats," Harry amended impishly.

Draco laughed at that, before continuing. "There were times that I wanted to put you over my knee and keep you there until you turned thirty."

"And there were times when I wanted to bop you good for being an overbearing git," he shot back.

"And yet nothing kept us apart," he concluded. "Look where we are right now Harry. You're here with me, safe in my arms, like it's been from the very start. This is what it's always come down to. No matter what was going on, no matter our age, at the end of the day I knew that you were there for me and that I could pull you to me like this and hold you close. Everything suddenly seemed better—still does—when you are here, in my arms."

"I understand that," he said, pulling back so that he could look into his eyes. "You've always been there for me from the start, whether it was to fight by my side or to protect me—even if it was from myself. You've been a constant at my side, and I doubt that I can ever express how grateful I am for that. Without you dominant, I would not be who I am today."

"And I can say the same. I will always be there for you Harry; whenever you need me, whatever you need, I will do my best to provide for you."

"And I will do the same dominant."

"I know you will," he said, claiming his lips briefly. "There is something I wanted to ask you."

"There is?"

"Yes," Draco returned. Gently he disengaged from Harry before taking a few steps backwards. Briefly he wondered why he was about to go through this the muggle way, but, he remembered watching one of those telly shows, and had found the whole idea of it rather endearing. At the very least, it was bound to bring a laugh from Harry.

"Dominant?" Harry asked, confused as to why, at this heartfelt moment, his mate would back away from him. It seemed opportune for a snog, or at least a good long cuddle before they returned home. And, why was he kneeling?

Draco saw the myriad of emotions flash across Harry's face as he reached into the robes, and removed the ring. At that moment he felt his heart clench from all the love he felt for the fifteen year old standing before him with a dawning look of revelation on his face as he bent down on one knee.

"Draco," Harry began, in a voice that suddenly seemed a bit choked.

"Hush," he bid, surprised to find that his own voice was husky. "I think I've said everything I could have before, so I suppose all I can do now is ask you. Harry James Potter, my mate, my partner, my heart and my soul, would you do me the honour of being my husband?"
As he watched, his mate made a hitching sound, raising a hand to his mouth. After a moment, he nodded. "Yes," he managed, dropping down before him and, ignoring his outstretched hand, threw his arms around his neck instead. "Yes Draco," he said, his heated breath caressing the blonde's skin, "I will marry you. How could I not? I love you so very much."

Draco closed his eyes in relief even as he returned the awkward embrace. "I love you too Harry, thank you."

The brunet pulled back eventually, finally taking stock of the rings in his hand. Laughing happily, he extended his hand to him, shooting him a loving look. "Aren't you going to put it on?" Draco found himself laughing as well as he grasped his hand, and, after kissing the finger that would be bare for the last time, he slipped it on. He then held out the partner ring to his mate who, repeating his action, kissed the finger before placing the ring on it.

"With this ring I promise to bind myself to thee for all eternity," Harry whispered, the traditional words coming easily to his lips.

"Until the day when our union be fixed I shall wear this ring," Draco returned before kissing him.

Harry tumbled them over so that they were sprawled on the ground. Manoeuvring himself, he ended up with Draco's arm around him, while he laid his head on his chest. He raised his hand, allowing the ring to glitter in the sun. Draco mimicked him for a few seconds before placing his hand over his mate's, bringing it down for a kiss.

"I didn't think today could get any better," Harry murmured, twisting to look into his eyes.

"I'm honoured," the veela whispered before kissing the appendage once again. "And thank you for making this one unforgettable day Harry."

"And to you, I say the same."

Well?" Harry inquired, turning to look at Dobby.

The elf wringed his hands together in delight as he took stock of him. "You look perfect Young Master Harry," he said sincerely, his eyes suspiciously bright.

"Dobby," Harry stated incredulously, "are you crying?"

"I am trying not to. Dobby not succeeding though."

"What's wrong?" he asked worriedly, moving away from the mirror to crouch before him. "Dobby?"

"Oh Dobby no know what be wrong with him," he gasped, reverting to his native speech pattern. "Dobby is so happy. Young Master Harry be getting married today. Dobby is happy."

"Oh Dobby," Harry gasped, feeling a welt of emotion go through him as he looked at his long-time servant and friend. He reached out, clasping the elf on his shoulder. "How can I thank you for all that you've done for me so far?" he said rhetorically.

"It is Dobby's job..."

"No Dobby," he interjected. "Were I just your job, you would not have done half the things you've done for me over the years."
"Master Harry..."

"You're wonderful Dobby, and I'm glad you're here with me on this on all days. You do have your outfit made though?"

"It is hardly appropriate –" 

"Today is my day.' Harry interjected once again, "and if I want my house elf at my ceremony, I will. I'm certain Draco asked Trix to attend as well."

"She be looking very pretty," he confirmed.

"Oh? Another wedding in the future perhaps?" Harry proceeded to laugh at the blustering sound his elf made before he straightened and returned to the mirror, perusing his appearance.

In respect to both sides of his familial history, the brunet was dressed in a combination of wizarding and muggle clothing. He wore a white three-piece suit, carefully tailored to allow the wedding robes of the same colour to be draped comfortably over it. Harry found himself smiling at his overall appearance, before sitting to allow Dobby to finish fuss over his hair. At Narcissa's insistence, he had allowed his hair to be magically lengthened to his shoulders, which would, at least for the day, tame the unruliness that had overtaken his locks after he had decided on an impromptu haircut some weeks before while in Diagon Alley. Looking at himself, he decided that he would keep it after all; while he had smiled proudly at the numerous remarks about how remarkably similar he looked like his biological father with the hairstyle, he rather preferred being defined by his own worth, rather than who he resembled.

Carefully, Dobby pulled back and secured several strands to keep the mass of it out of his face. Harry hesitated a moment when he asked if his scar was to be hidden as usual. He took a long look at himself in the mirror, noting that there had never been a time in his life when he had left his forehead bare. That scar, no matter how faded it was now, had always been a symbol, one that he had wanted to hide in order to force people into looking beyond it, and instead focus on him. But was that truly necessary anymore he wondered, for had he not succeeded in that. He was still the boy-who-lived (and perhaps would always be), but more and more, people were starting to associate him as being just Harry Potter, an incredible person yes, but one who was using the privileges life had afforded him to create a better world for them all, one person at a time.

"No," he said finally, "pull it all back Dobby. I don't have to hide it anymore."

"As you wish Young Master."

Harry smiled at his reflection, slightly unnerved, but determined not to renege on his decision.

A knock sounded at the door, and, granting entrance, Sirius and Remus entered.

"Uncles," he breathed, turning away from the mirror to smile at them.

"Hello Pup," Sirius beamed as he reached him, taking his hands into his own while Remus leaned against the dressing table smiling encouragingly at him. "How's my favourite godson feeling?"

"Your only godson is feeling very happy," Harry replied, merriment in his tone.

"You're much better than we were then," Remus noted. "But, you've had Draco with you forever; this transition is natural for the two of you."

"It is," he confirmed, a small smile playing on his lips as he dwelt on his mate who was, like him,
"Is everyone here?"

"Hermione and Ronald have just arrived. We wanted to make sure you were okay before we let them bombard you."

"Why are they so late?"

"Hermione has decided to rehash some muggle traditions," Remus explained. "Something about something old, something blue and something new; she's gotten two sets though as not to offend."

"Oh?"

"It's traditionally given to brides for good luck; she didn't want to insinuate anything."

"Is everyone else here?" he asked, once he stopped laughing.

"Yes," Sirius stated, "although they've been some issue with reporters trying to access the manor through the floos. Don't worry they won't get in."

"Why can't they leave us alone?" Harry grumbled. "My wedding is something private; why on earth do they want to exploit that?"

"Ignore them Harry," Remus bid. "The important thing is that they are not here, so you just focus on what is important."

"Marrying Draco."

"Exactly."

"If you're certain that you're fine, we'll get Ron and Hermione to come up here."

"I'm fine Uncles; please, do bring them up. Ron's grumblings is bound to amuse me further."

"Ron just can't get over the fact that the youngest out of you all is the first to get married."

"Yeah well, don't let the twins up! I won't fall for anymore of their tricks."

"Like convincing you that men could get pregnant?" Sirius laughed, earning himself a glare from his godson.

"It isn't funny Uncle," Harry fumed. "With my luck I was right to panic. I imagined myself waddling around with twins, or worse, triplets!"

"It didn't help that no one would tell you the truth for days," Remus chuckled despite himself. "We'll leave you now. The ceremony starts in an hour and I suspect, other than your friends, there are a few other people who want to say a few things to you."

"Okay."

Harry smiled shakily when he felt Ron's hand settle on the small of his back. On his other side, Hermione briefly laid her head on his shoulder. "Are you ready," she asked, looking at him.

Harry took a deep breath before nodding. "I have no reason to be nervous," he said, although the shakiness in his voice belied his words.
"You have every right to be mate," Ron countered. "You're getting married Harry!"

"I know," he laughed, before swallowing as he heard music start from behind the doors they were standing outside off.

"One minute," Hermione murmured, before looking at him. "Draco's waiting for you, just remember that."

"Stay with me," he bid unnecessarily.

"We'll be with you the entire way," she promised.

"Hermione knows the vows in case you forget," Ron added teasingly.

"Just wait until it is your turn Ron," Harry threatened, despite the fact that with his current state, the words were far from unnerving. "I swear I will not be in the least supportive."

"I rather not marry a bumbling idiot Harry," Hermione said mildly. "Try to leave him with his wits okay?"

"Some of them," he conceded. "But only half."

"Why you..." Ron began, ready to launch a mock-attack on him. Hermione immediately moved to warn him off while Harry laughed uproaringly. There was never a dull moment with them around; and to believe at one time he had been worried about their friendship. And here they were, on either side of him, ready to escort him toward his future husband.

Unfortunately, at that very moment, the door opened, and, given the number of hired photographers milling about, their candid moment was caught and would become the source of much humour. Harry found himself laughing anew at Hermione's chagrined face. Already things were going against plans, but, for Harry, it mattered not. So what if Draco arrived at the front before him? It's not like he could get married without him. Nevertheless, with her usual diligence, Hermione quickly righted herself, and with a small glare, the two of them fell into place. Their unreadiness had been witnessed by many though, and as they finally entered the room, they were subject to many amused looks. At the front of the room he saw Severus shaking his head ruefully while, besides him, his husbands struggled to control themselves. If anyone expected this to be a serious event, they were very much mistaken.

Harry silently thanked his friends for the laugh that did wonders to calm his nerves. Waiting briefly to fall into queue with the music, Harry started walking, trying not to turn to his left. On the other aisle, he knew his mate and future husband was also walking, his own friends framing him. Ron blocked him from vision though, and so, Harry was forced to look forward. He would only get a sight of his mate when they faced each other before the officiator who also happened to be their Grandfather. The man's twinkling gaze met his as they finally reached the end of the long aisle and he found himself winking at him. They stopped at the start of the first row, and, after squeezing a shoulder and hand encouragingly, his friends took two steps backwards. The rest of the trip to the raised area would be made on his own.

Reminding himself not to turn to his mate before time, Harry took the last remaining steps, passing his family until he was standing before Albus. He felt Draco's presence settle beside him, and, glancing discretely to the side, he caught a glimpse of his robes, white as well. Although it went against tradition, Harry found himself reaching out with his hand, and he stifled a chuckle when Draco's hand met his halfway. He was surprised though at the faint, yet obvious tremor in it. Started, and now entirely abandoning propriety, he turned to look at him, shocked when he saw the emotion
on his mate's face.

Draco was far from a stoic character; nevertheless, he had his public persona that he always strove to maintain. Every sign of it was gone currently though. His mate's emotions were laid plain for all who cared to see it and Harry felt his own feelings rise resultantly. Albus' words gently guided his attention back to the front, but, even as the ceremony begun, he refused to release his mate's hand, instead interlacing his fingers with his in support.

The next few minutes were forever engraved into Harry's mind. Albus, in deference to his relationship with them, departed from the traditional words and instead, made a speech unique to them. Then, finished, he waved his hands at their family while Harry and Draco, still without looking at each other, backed away before claiming the seats Blaise and Ron brought forward for them. Harry rhythmically squeezed his mate's hand while the second part of the ceremony began. Lucius and Severus, representing Draco, took and brought forward a silver chalice, while, representing Harry, Narcissa and Sirius did the same. Harry felt himself choking back a happy cry a few seconds later when Lily and James materialised alongside the four, placing their hands on the goblets as well as the contents of it was poured into a larger golden one.

A squeeze from Draco signalled that he too was seeing them, as did the remainder of their family. He would have to ask later though, to determine if anyone else was privy to the sight. His biological parents had not made an appearance for months, to the extent where Harry had wondered if he would have to wait until his death to see them again. But now, he understood. The pair had been giving him — them — a chance to live their lives without their interference. After all, they could not grow dependent on having knowledge of the future to guide them through their lives. Somehow Harry knew that this would be the last time that he would see his parents on this plain — the look they gave him when their eyes met confirmed this. Harry felt a brief moment of sadness before it was suppressed by a wave of gratitude for them joining him today on this most special day. Lily nodded at him, mouthing her love to him before vanishing once the goblets were replaced, James doing the same. He nodded at them, too overcome to speak, and he was forced to bend his head and blink rapidly to regain control of his emotions.

"This cup," Albus intoned, lifting the golden chalice, "represents the merger of two different entities into one glorious being. So too is the case for these two households. The Malfoys and the Potters from this day forward will be irrevocably bound; united in the marriage of these two members."

It was their cue to rise, and they did, moving to him once again. They had no choice now but to separate their hands as the man held the chalice to Draco. Harry had a moment's apprehension as the blonde accepted it, for he himself knew how shaky his mate's grip was. The anti-spillage charm that he was certain on it prevented a mess though, and while it wobbled, Draco was able to maintain a firm grip on it.

"Who gives this young man forward to create the unifications of the household?"

"I, Lucius Abraxas, patriarch of the Malfoy family, do give my son Draconis Lucius forward for this union."

"And who gives this young man forward to complete the unification?"

"I, Sirius Orion, patriarch of the Black family, do give my godson Harrison James forward to complete this union."

"It is a blessed day indeed," Albus said, losing that officiating tone for a moment, "when two families officially seal a union that has been in place for over a decade now and someone decides to rename their godson."
"Grandpa," Harry gasped, before chuckling ruefully at the truth of his words.

"Well Lucius didn't have to add in that extra syllable," Sirius huffed.

Behind them chuckles came forth from the audience, something that Harry was most grateful for as the tension he felt from Draco dissipated considerably.

Albus cleared his throat before falling back into character. "Draco, offer your intended the symbol of your unification."

Harry felt his breath hitch. Finally, he could observe his mate for the first time that day and see fully the truth in his face. He turned, mindful of his robes, and waited for Draco to do the same. What he saw took his breath away. Draco's silver eyes sparkled with tears – happy tears, he saw, but tears nonetheless. The amount of love and affection in his eyes pierced him to his very core, and he felt his own eyes burn slightly. How long they stood like that, simply staring at each other, as they silently conveyed their feelings he would never know. It felt like an eternity though before Draco started extending the cup toward him. Without him realising it, Harry's hands reached out to steady his mate's own, willingly accommodating this rare loss of control and composure. He closed his eyes briefly as he took a long draw from the chalice, relishing the sweet taste before gently moving it away. He had to remind himself to wait for the old man's words before he pushed the chalice toward his mate's face.

"Harry," Albus urged, "offer your intended a taste of your unification."

Harry nodded his head slightly before he complied. Unlike him, Draco's eyes remained open and affixed on him as he drank deeply from it. Harry moved swiftly to stroke Draco's cheek before he withdrew and was heartened when Draco managed to wink at him, offering a silent apology for his state. Harry shook his head slightly to dismiss it, for he too was feeling the same. Neither paid attention when Albus took the cup from their hands, nor did they bother to face forward once again. Instead, they reached out and clasped each other's hands and waited. Understanding, Albus continued the ceremony.

"With you as witnesses, the couple has sanctioned the unification of their union, and are now, forever united as one. Before I seal the union, I invite the couple to present tokens of their bond to each other."

Reluctantly they separated. As the dominant in their relationship, Draco moved first, taking the ring from Blaise before looking at him. He swallowed several times, undoubtedly in an attempt to clear his voice before he attempted to speak. His tone was the most emotional Harry had ever heard and the brunet found himself swallowing as well before meeting his gaze.

"H-Harry," Draco paused, breathed, and then continued on in a more steady tone. "Harry, you already know what is in my heart and mind. You mean the world to me, you have made me into the man I am today. I ask of you, that with this ring, you accept me forever as a part of your being. Where you go I will go, whenever you falter, I will be there to assist. We are two beings, but we possess one soul. Will you accept this ring, and with it me and all the love that I have to offer?"

"I-I do," Harry managed, fighting against a wave of emotion that threatened to overtake him. He raised his left hand to Draco, noting now that it was he who was trembling. With slight effort, Draco got the ring onto his finger, where it joined the first. Much like the day they were engaged, the veela raised the hand to brush it with his lips.

When he released him, Harry turned to Ron, accepting his own ring. His vision blurring, Harry raised his eyes to Draco, tears finally slipping free as he saw one trickle down Draco's face.
"D-Draco, I...this is why people shouldn't have to speak at their own weddings!" he finally gasped, drawing laughter from all who were gathered.

Draco chuckled as well, a watery sound, before reaching out to cup his face, offering him support.

"This is why I love you," Harry managed. "No matter what the situation, whenever I need help, you're here to offer it to me. It's been that way from the start. I've said this before and I know I'll say it again, but I doubt that I would reach very far without you Draco. You are my other half, that rational, level-headed person that ensures that I don't go overboard with anything. I have already accepted you, but will you now take this from me? With this ring I pledge myself to you; you will never be alone for I will always be with you, body, mind, heart and soul. Draco, will you be mine?"

"For all of eternity," he confirmed, holding out his hand to him.

After placing the ring and kissing it, Harry reached up to wipe away the tears from his mate's cheek, sighing when he returned the favour. Smiling at each other, they turned toward Albus once again.

The man's eyes seemed to be twinkling for an entirely different reason, however, when he spoke, his tone was sound, even as he waved his wand above their heads.

"Draco and Harry have stood before you and have declared their love and support for each other on their life journey. Where two individuals once stood, now exist one solidified unit that no one shall tear asunder. With the power invested in me, I seal the bond between them, forever bound they will be. Gentlemen, congratulations, you are wed."

Although it was a muggle tradition, neither could resist grasping each other before kissing tenderly.

"Hello husband," Harry whispered when they parted.

"Hello to you too," Draco returned before kissing him briefly. Breaking away from each other, they turned, and allowed themselves to be surrounded by those they cared about the most who wanted to offer them their congratulations.

Opening his eyes, Harry blinked sleepily up at the unfamiliar ceiling. Where was he? The question faded though when he realised that the pillow he was resting upon was moving slightly but steadily. His memory returned when his eyes met his slumbering husband's face and, humming contentedly, he bent to press a small kiss against his bare chest before resting his head down once again. Idly he raised his hand to stare at the rings on his finger, a silly smile playing on his lips. They had portkeyed here the night before after the celebrations had ended. If he recalled correctly, they were in one of the Black properties, a Cottage on a hillside although he could not remember which country they were in. That wasn't too important, he decided after a moment, and contented himself for long moments simply admiring his rings.

Eventually he decided to rise and, careful not to disturb his mate, he slipped from the bed. Forgoing a robe for now, he padded across the wooden floors to the window. Slowly he parted the curtains enough to look out, although he ensured that the glare was not affecting his slumbering mate.

Looking outside, he took in the beautiful scenery. Across from him, he saw the sea, and smiled as he saw the sunlight glittering on the water, creating a kaleidoscope of colours. He was looking forward to journeying down there with Draco later on; the water was beautiful and he would enjoy taking a dip in it with him. Moving from the window, he wandered quietly through their temporary home, eventually entering the bathroom. It was a good way to pass the time until Draco woke up, he decided.
Running a bath, he eased out the remainder of his clothing before sinking down into the warm water. He sighed in contentment as the water lapped at his shoulders before he allowed his eyes to drift close. The day had been perfect he decided, even if their night had not gone according to tradition. They had not yet consummated their marriage, and with it their bond, but Harry found that he was not too concerned about it. They had spent copious amounts of time exploring the Cottage, and after that, they had finally unravelled the gift they had been presented it. They had both gaped in surprise at the thick album that had been revealed, one that started from the day Harry had arrived at Malfoy Manor and ended with their marriage ceremony. The rest of their waking hours had been spent curled together pouring through the pictures. It was a wonderful gift and they had reminisced over the photographs even while questioning at times how their family had managed to take out the pictures for certainly they had been alone for a lot of those times.

"What a beautiful sight," a gruff voice stated from the doorway.

Lazily Harry opened his eyes, looking to where his husband stood. He smiled happily at him.

"Finally awake then?" he asked, his hands skimming the water.

"Have you been up long?" he inquired as he walked across to where he was, sitting on the edge of the tub.

"Long enough," he shrugged.

"I had hoped to wake up with my husband in my arms."

"Well you found him in the tub instead," he retorted before reaching out to pull him down. "Why don't you get in with me?"

"Oh?"

"We are married now," he grinned, pressing a kiss to the corner of his mouth. "It is wholly acceptable to take a bath with one's spouse."

"You're an expert on the married life then?" Draco teased, although he did rise, hooking his hands into his pants' waist.

"On this I am," he returned coyly. "Come on in, I promise I won't peek."

Draco laughed huskily at that, but in less than a minute he was seated across from his mate, tilting his head back to wet his hair.

"I was thinking that we could go to the beach this afternoon," Harry said eventually. "I want to swim."

"It's been years since we've done that," the veela mused, before reaching for a washcloth. "We'll turn into prunes if we remain in here much longer," he pointed out.

"What's wrong with that?" he asked glibly, before mimicking him. "Wash my back?" he requested a few minutes later.

Draco arched an eyebrow at him. "You've been doing it yourself for years," he pointed out, even as he moved across to accept the washcloth.

"And now it shall be your job," came the haughty reply before Harry turned his back to him. "Hurry up now, I'm hungry. Do a good enough job and I may return the favour."
The veela snorted at that, but obliged. Wetting Harry's back, he gently moved the cloth in small circles across his skin, smiling softly when the brunette made small, contented sounds. Gradually the veela's mood changed. The gentle amusement he had felt at his mate's pseudo-order were now changing into something else, as he could not help but notice how smooth and soft his skin was. Eventually he allowed his bare hand to replace the cloth, and then the other joined in, gently exploring the expanse of his mate's skin. Harry twisted his head enough to give him a smouldering look and the veela felt himself become embolden. Harry was feeling the same thing that he was – arousal.

Draco bent and, still meeting his mate's gaze, licked a drop of water from his shoulder. He smirked at the light shiver the action induced before repeating it. He continued for a bit, working his way across from one shoulder to the other. By the time he reached up to lightly nip on Harry's earlobe, small goosebumps had erupted all over his mate's skin. He shifted slightly, exerting gentle force on Harry until he leaned forward more, folding his arms on the edge of the claw-foot tub before resting his head on them.

"Good boy," Draco whispered before nipping him again.

Harry's only response was a light moan as Draco moved aside his wet hair to kiss the back of his neck before working his way down. The gentle touches and kisses maddened Harry and more than once he squirmed, wanting to turn around, only to be stopped by a firm hand before the veela resumed his caresses.

"Draco," Harry gasped when the man's arms snaked around him to rub lightly along his chest, stopping on his nipples where he rolled them.

"Hmm?" he said heatedly, his lips once again on his ear.

Harry was unable to continue, too distracted by those skilful fingers. Gently Draco drew him backwards, so that his back was braced against the bathtub once again, Harry's body held firmly to him. A heated flush graced Harry's face when he felt the proof of Draco's arousal nestle itself against him, even as his mate's hands moved down, tracing a light pattern on his stomach.

"Draco," he moaned, flinging his head back against his shoulder when the blond's hand descended beneath the water, gently taking hold of him.

He squawked into an open-mouth kiss when his hand moved slowly along his length. It was the first time Draco had handled him thus, but, far from nervous, Harry spread himself a bit wider to get more of the wonderful feeling.

"Is this what you've been wanting mate?" Draco's heated voice asked.

"Yes," Harry managed, arching his back slightly. "Wanted this...wanted you...dominant!"

The veela smirked at the admittance before slowly stopping the intimate caress despite the frustrated grunt it brought from Harry. "Don't worry," he whispered, taking a kiss from him again, "this time, there will be no stopping."

Harry's breath hitched at the words, but he remained pliant as the veela shifted them around before rising from the tub. Harry swallowed as he took in his husband's nude form, and he felt his desire increase threefold, as he felt the urge to explore the length and breadth of the man's frame. Draco pinned him with a look, one that silently asked him to remain where he was. Swallowing, he fell back against the tub, watching through hooded eyes as the veela walked about the room, first drying himself before fetching a next towel. Wrapping the dry one around his waist, he held out a third one
to Harry in invitation.

Harry stood still for a moment, blushing slightly at the look of pure desire that his mate gave him as he took in his naked frame before he stepped out of the tub, and into his open arms.

"Feeling shy are we?" Draco chuckled when he buried his face into his shoulder, refusing to look up. "Such swift mood changes you have. I've always enjoyed that."

"Don't tease me," Harry pouted as he looked up. "It's just that...well..."

"I understand," Draco interrupted, saving him from a bumbling explanation. "It's natural for you to feel this way. Allow me to take the lead my husband, my mate. Trust me, all will be fine."

"Yes dominant."

"Good mate."

Harry closed his eyes once again as the veela gently dried him before dealing with his hair. He quickly grew impatient though, and despite himself, Harry laughed when he resorted to a warming charm to remove the last bit of moisture from his hair.

"Much better," he grumbled, before leading him out of the bedroom.

Instead of the bed as Harry expected, he was seated before the dressing table, while his mate took up a hairbrush.

"Draco?"

"In good time Harry," he told him, biting the shell of his ear. "For now, allow me to take care of you."

"Okay."

Rather than cooling his ardour as he had half expected, Harry found himself growing increasingly sensitised. Long after his hair had been untangled, Draco continued, replacing the implement with his fingers as he gently raked his hand through his hair, scraping and massaging his scalp in a most enjoyable way. With a hum, Harry's head fell back to rest on his chest, while he shot him a contented look. "Dominant..."

"Yes?"

"Love you."

"I know," he responded, "I love you too. Are you still hungry?"

"For you..."

"I meant for food."

"Right now I want you," he said honestly, reaching up to stroke his jaw. "Please dominant? Enough games, I'm ready."

Draco caught one of his hands, and sucked on a finger, even as he eyed him searchingly for any signs of hesitation. When he was certain that Harry truly bore no fear of what was to come, he nodded slightly, spinning him in the chair. Before Harry could orient himself properly, the veela kissed him, a dominating kiss that overwhelmed the brunet. Finally Draco allowed himself to follow
his desires, long suppressed. Without anything further to worry about from Harry, he was free to lose himself to his feelings. Finally they would mate. Harry seemed to sense his thoughts for his arms wrapped around his neck even as his legs parted to pull him closer. They parted only when they required air, and even as they took shuddering breaths, Draco's fingers worked to rid Harry and then himself of the towels.

Dropping them carelessly, he backtracked, pulling Harry gently along with him until the back of his legs hit the bed. Then, with a harder tug, he tumbled Harry on to it, his eyes darkening further with pleasure as he took in his splayed state. The time for foreplay was over, he knew. An urgency had risen within him, and even now Harry was extending his arms to him, inviting him to merge with him. It was an invitation that could not be ignored. With a growl, Draco dropped down over Harry, hissing in pleasure when Harry's fingers dug lightly into the flesh of his back. His hands roamed his body once again even as his mouth worked to taste every bit of Harry's creamy skin that he could reach. Eventually he settled himself into position, and, kissing him once again, he finally fulfilled their bond, completing the process of their mating.

He swallowed Harry's groan, his hands stroking him calmingly even as his spirits flew at the feel of his mate wrapped around him. He gave in completely at that moment, and throwing his head back he groaned in pure delight even as he felt himself transform, his wings erupting from his back before spreading out over him. "My angel," Harry murmured, reaching out to stroke a wing even as Draco shifted experimentally. The shift earned a gasp from Harry, but seeing that his arousal remained constant, the veela took it as a sign to continue. Their groans and cries echoed throughout the room as they participated in that exquisite dance, both of them working in tandem to achieve that pinnacle of pleasure that would overshadow all of their previous activities. Feeling himself nearing it, Harry dug his fingers even deeper into Draco's shoulders, drawing a grunt from him even as he bent to nip at his now rosy and swollen lips. Harry chased after his lips, seeking the affection even as he felt that coil of heat in his stomach uncoil, tipping him over the edge, Draco following him a few seconds later.

Although Draco was heavy, Harry did not have the strength to complain when his body collapsed on top of his. Instead, he closed his eyes, trying to calm his breathing even as some aftershocks of pleasure ran through him. Eventually Draco pulled back, eyeing him speculatively. The question was easily discernible in his eyes and, smiling softly, Harry quickly pecked his lips before pushing lightly against him, until he moved off him. Harry followed him, placing his head on his chest, right above his heart that was still beating erratically. There was no need for words between them. Indeed, he could only purr contentedly when Draco's wings covered him, a natural blanket, before he allowed his eyes to drift shut as he felt along their bond. He now had full access to his mate and all that he was feeling. It was different, for, what they had had before had seemed perfect. But what he felt now...it was as if all of his mate's feelings were in Technicolor and for long moments he was unable to discern his own feelings from Draco's. Not that it mattered, he decided, as he stroked his chest absent-mindedly; they were essentially experiencing the same thing.

Peace.

Contentment.

Happiness.

Love.

Harry moved so that he could look into Draco's face, feeling even more contented at the pure relaxation and pleasure playing across his features. Here, in this bed, their world had narrowed down to just the two of them, and Harry was enjoying the state. Draco was his sole concern, and he found
that he liked that fact very much. All of their responsibilities awaited them in England but for now, the wizarding world would have to wait. There was time enough for all of that, however, for the moment, the only thing Harry was concerned about was losing himself in his mate's embrace as they continued to explore the possibilities that had opened with their married state. Everything else would simply have to wait.

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