The Black Prince

by sifshadowheart

Summary

Regulus Black took more than one secret to his grave, leaving behind only his brother to protect his most treasured possession. Faced with his brother's husband years later, Sirius faces a difficult dilemma how to tell a man he hates and distrusts with the secret his brother entrusted to him. But how can he tell Severus about a son his enemy knows nothing about?
**Prologue**

**The Black Prince**

*Author’s Note: Happy Birthday to Starlight_Massacre and Happy Belated Birthday to Kaida171. I hope you both enjoy my take on a creature a/u.*

**Disclaimer:** “Dovah” is a word for dragon from the Skyrim series while *Harry Potter* and its characters belongs to JK Rowling and this work is purely fanfiction without profit or ownership of the HP characters on the part of the writer.

Dovah – singular; Dovahim - plural

**Prologue**

*London, Early Spring 1979*

It was the night of the Potter wedding when Sirius Black cracked open bleary eyes as the pounding on the door of his little flat reverberated through his bedroom. Grabbing his wand he rolled out of bed and cast a quick *Tempus*. Three thirty-three a.m.

“Someone better be dead.” He muttered to himself before wincing. With the war kicking into high gear someone very well could be dead.

Scrubbing his palms over his sleepy-crusted eyes, he climbed warily to his feet as he felt his wards for information on who the bloody hells was waking him at this hour of the morning. At least he was alone for once, nothing worse than a one-nighter bitching and moaning in his ear over him having to deal with an emergency for the Order or for his work at the Aurors. Even some of the birds in the Order could get stroppy over it.

As if it was his fault he was the go-to clean up man. The one they called when there was a problem or an opponent the others couldn’t handle. Between him and James, there wasn’t a situation yet they couldn’t take care of, though his brother-in-arms was taking more of a back seat now that him and Lils were trying for an heir.

Bad fucking timing if you asked him to be up the duff, but with the danger some of the old lines were in the pressure to procreate was staggering.

He was just glad he’d recused himself from all that buggering nonsense when he got himself disowned.

Cracking open the door he stood there in disbelief, propping one shoulder against the jamb and rubbing a hand over his weary face. Yes, it was a Death Eater at the door but not the one he was expecting. If anything he thought it’d be this one’s husband who would come for him one day.

Though Blacks do tend to take care of their own family business within the family.

He’d just never thought it’d come to this or hurt so much, seeing the younger brother who used to think he hung the moon standing in the hall light and staring at him with so much loathing, his wand clenched in one hand.

Sirius loved Reg just as much as he always did, he always has. He didn’t think it’d be over something or rather *someone* like Severus Snape that he’d lose his brother. To their parents’
expectations and the Dork Lord, yes. To Snivellus, no.

But he had and no matter how much he fought it or tried to separate them, Reg stuck by the slimy Slytherin git.

And then…

No.

That didn’t bear thinking of.

It took years as it was for his and Jamie’s relationship to recover to the brotherly status they’d always enjoyed, he wasn’t going to go thinking of that particular tragedy on the very night Jamie’d married Lily.

No.

Although it looked like if Reg had his way, he would be thinking of it and so much more on this night.

“Reg?” He asked, voice rough with sleep. “What’re you doin’ ‘ere? Snivellus’s been lookin’ all over the ruddy island for you.”

“Don’t call him that.” Regulus Black-Snape hissed back at his older brother, barely hanging onto his Dovah instincts that were telling him to rip his brother apart for the slight considering what he and James had done to his mate. And worse, what they’d done to Regulus himself, accident or no.

Sirius just grunted as he held the door open wider in wordless invitation. Whatever brought Reg here, it wasn’t the Avada Kedavra otherwise he would’ve just cursed him for insulting his lover, husband, whatever. Moving into the kitchen he fussed about with the tea service, adding a bottle of firewhiskey to the tray before setting it down on his post-stamp sized dining table.

Regulus lowered himself carefully into a chair, feeling as if one wrong move would shatter him to pieces, and accepted a cuppa done up exactly the way he liked it.

Call Sirius what you will, and between himself and his mate they’d called him just about everything under the sun, but he loved him.

Love Sirius was excellent at, to a surprising degree considering how they’d both been raised, and Sirius not having the submissive Dovah instincts to guide him.

Acceptance…Sirius was still learning that one.

After a few minutes of sipping at their tea – spiked for Sirius – the older finally asked.

“What’s going on Reg?”

He shuddered out a breath as he lowered his teacup with a shaking hand, looking up at Sirius with tear damp eyes.

“I’m not going to make it through this war, Siri.” His voice cracked. “No.” He stopped his brother from butting in with denials. “I’m not. And not for the reason you might think.”

Sirius asked again. “What is going on Regulus?”

He ignored the question, soldiering on, trying to make his way clear to the actual purpose of his
visit. It’s the hardest thing he’d ever had to do, second to leaving his wonderful Sev and surviving after the loss of their possible children for over two years while Sev tried to find a cure. So hard. But it had to be done.

“I’m not going to make it.” He looked up at Sirius, eyes steely with determination. “I’m not. And I’m pregnant.” He continued, barreling through Sirius’s spluttering and widened eyes. “I’m pregnant and I’m terrified. I’ll lose the baby. Or I’ll die or be killed before it can be born. Something, somehow is going to keep me from living to see my child live. I know it in my bones.”

“Reg,” Sirius’s voice was hardly more than a whisper, tears gathering in his own eyes even as he reeled in shock. Snape, no matter what names Sirius had called him or how evil he was convinced the slimy snake was, truly had to be the best Potions Master in a generation if he figured out a cure to the…affliction Regulus had been cursed with. That fight would haunt Sirius Black’s dreams forever, and if he knew anything about James Potter, his as well. They’d never meant for it to go that far, for Jamie to lose his temper so thoroughly that he’d tried to curse Severus infertile…only to hit Regulus instead as the younger teen had tried to break up the fight in sixth year. “Don’t be like that. Your… husband has done what he swore he would and corrected mine and Jamie’s mistake.” Since he was the one to pick the original fight that led to the curse, he found it a guilt well-deserved. “We could go to Dumbledore, hide you away, keep you safe…”

Regulus just shook his head in denial.

“There are things that need to be done. Things that I have to do. I don’t trust another to carry it out, I have to do it. And if I’m right I won’t survive it, let alone my baby.”

Swallowing down anymore objections at the look in his brother’s eyes, Sirius took a slug of firewhiskey straight from the bottle, wiping his mouth with his sleeve. Gritting his teeth he stared hard at his little brother, finally having an inkling about what could possibly drive him here after swearing to never have anything to do with him ever again. Studying his brother with shrewd eyes he took in the haggard appearance, the careworn look around his eyes.

“You don’t have the power to cast the spell on your own…do you?” Sirius asked finally. He knows now what Regulus had planned. Knew why he was here.

Of all his options, of everyone of Black blood he could go to, only his hated brother had both the power and the secret keeping ability to carry out what Regulus had planned. Anyone else would either let it slip, flat out refuse, or simply didn’t have the juice.

But Sirius now…

He owed his brother. And Severus if it came down to that. Owed them a debt he’d never be able to repay. So did Jamie, so did Remy and even Peter though they’d likely never admit it.

A blood debt, left to fester for years.

One that Regulus Black was finally calling in, at least as far as what his brother owed him.

Regulus shook his head with a sigh. “I’ve done all the calculations. The spell will link to anyone of Black or Prince blood alive at the time of casting – at least who’re still magical and not one of our disowned squib relations. I’ve found a squib woman to be a governess and Sev’s grandparents Lord and Lady Prince have agreed to move into Castle Black and watch over him or her. All I need now is someone to carry the bulk of the secret and spell and lend me the power to cast the spell.”

Sirius rubbed his temples. The sheer scope of what his brother was asking…
“If you die like you say.” Sirius had to point out the major, major problem with Regulus using that spell. “How will it ever end? The secret keeper with this spell can’t pass on his duty to another, can’t alter the spell in any way. It will make an impenetrable trap. For life, especially if anything happens to me. And speaking of life,” he drawled the final word. “All of the Princes and the Blacks by blood will be linked. Dozens of witches and wizards all the way down to the fifth degree – or even further if the spell requires that much power to settle into place and keep it going for an undetermined length of time linked to your child. Including the likes of that mad bitch Bellatrix. When one of any of us dies…”

“I know.” Reg cut him off, slashing a hand through the air. “Believe me. I know. But there is a way to build in a safety net of sorts. It’ll take more power but…I can set up a way for the spell to collapse naturally, once it’s safe.”

“And the life-links?” Sirius asked quietly. It was after all, the reason why this spell, one that creates a magical incubator – of sorts – for an unborn child, became one of the Blacks’ closest and dearest secrets. There was one problem with the spell. If it wasn’t removed, the child would remained linked to those of their blood who, consenting or not, powered the spell.

And if the child remained linked they would undergo a power boost every single time someone linked to them died.

It had the potential to create a being of god-like power.

A spell that Voldemort would kill to possess.

If anyone other than the Blacks of the Blood knew of it.

Their closest held secret, one as dear as their own magics. After all, that’s what it would cost them to speak of it to someone not of their blood. Along with dozens of other secrets, some more commonly known than others. Like their rich wealth of Dovah blood, going back all the way to the first Lord Black.

“A risk I’m willing to take.” Regulus said shortly, rubbing an apologetic hand over his still-flat belly. His most beloved child. He’d give them life if it was the very last thing he ever did.

“Very well.” Sirius said with a solemn nod. “To Castle Black and the ritual room we go.”

“To Castle Black.” Regulus toasted him with his teacup as Sirius held up his whiskey in salute.
One

The Black Prince

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Dovah – singular

Dovahim – plural

Chapter the First

Order of the Phoenix Headquarters, 12 Grimmauld Place, London, Wizarding Great Britain

June 18, 1996

“Where are those blasted mutts!”

The furious shout came roaring through the Townhouse belonging to the minor branch of the Black Family, e.g. that of Walburga and her younger brother Cygnus Black. Walburga had inherited it from her own father when he died, and – very reluctantly and without an ounce of grace – left it to her disgraced eldest son upon her death in 1983, two years after her rapscallion of an offspring had gotten himself tossed without so much as a by-your-leave from the Lord’s Council into Azkaban. To say Sirius hated the very sight of the blasted place would not be an exaggeration, especially in its currently moldering condition, a state it had been in for as long as he could remember – though it used to at least be a tad bit cleaner.

“What the fuck is Snivellous doing here?” Said disgraced Black groaned to his partner (and mate though they tended to keep that under wraps) Remus Lupin. “We don’t have an Order meeting today. And it’s not like Albus is here.”

No, the erstwhile – and currently disgraced himself – Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry was in hiding at the home of Arthur and Molly Weasley, as with their children either out of the house (except for the Twins who had just made a rather spectacular exit from school) or still at school, they had more than enough room for a temporary albeit wanted by the Aurors…well, more like just the Minister for Magic Cornelius Fudge, houseguest.

“Apparently,” Remus said with a dash of dry sarcasm. “He’s looking for us.”

An observation helped on by Severus’s entrance to the Townhouse as well as the next words that Remus could describe in no other manner than as a bellow.

“Stop fucking each other for two damn seconds you worthless mutts and get down here!” Severus yelled, a bit frantically even to his own ears. “That Merlin-be-damned useless godson of yours in is trouble! Again!”

Now that, while not really a surprise, it was Harry after all, was more than enough to get the duo off their arses and pounding down the stairs to the kitchen where Severus had opened the Floo and was making hurried calls to the members of the Order, coordinating with Moody that all members would leave for the Ministry within the next five minutes and meet in the Atrium. He was certain that the boy’s hastily cobbled-together message meant that the Dark Lord had finally managed to take total
control of their link. Especially as he’d smelled the damned mutt up to his usual lechery with the cursed wolf.

“What is it, Severus?” Remus asked before an impatient and fidgety Sirius could bite off the spy’s potion-fume-greased head.

“Your godson is heading into a trap at the Department of Mysteries.” Severus reported grimly, to both the mutts and Albus and the Weasleys. “It took me longer than I’d like to admit to shake off the Ministry spies and get around their enchantments monitoring the castle. We have a matter of minutes before Potter is going to walk right into the Hall of Prophecy and the clutches of the Inner Circle.”

Shocked breaths were taken all around at that stomach-churning news.

“How do you know, Severus?” Albus asked cautiously. He knew that the spy would have warned them if he knew in advance.

“Potter told me a mangled message about the mutt.” Severus waved an indolent hand towards the disheveled form of Sirius Black. “He was absolutely convinced that Black is being held and tortured at the Ministry. By the time I got around the monitors on the school and checked with my compatriots, Death Eater contacts. “I was able to ascertain from them the situation before coming here to sound the alarm. We need to move, the other members of the Order are no doubt waiting on us already.”

“Yes, of course, you’re right Severus.” Albus said grimly, retreating back through the flames and allowing the Floo to be used to take the trio of wizards at the Townhouse to the Ministry.

“You warned us.” Sirius said, a bit dumbfounded.

“It may have escaped your attention mutt.” Severus sneered. “But for all that I loathe you and the un lamented Potter pater, I did give a Vow to both Lily and Albus to protect her son to the best of my ability. Of course I warned you, you idiotic crotch sniffing dunderhead.”

With that, Severus tossed another handful of powder into the Floo, Remus going through first as Sirius caught one of Severus’s arms before the dour man could follow.

“Wait, Snape.”

“What now, Black?” Severus snarled. “Don’t you want to go rescue your nincompoop of a godpup?”

“I have something to tell you when this is all over.” Sirius said with a thread of steely intensity in his voice. “A secret I’ve kept for my brother for over seventeen years.”

“After, then.” The dark wizard bit out, nearly enraged at the importune timing of the mutt to bring up Severus’s lost mate. “Once we’ve saved Potter’s messy – but empty – head.”

…

Veil Chamber, Department of Mysteries, Ministry of Magic, London, Wizarding Great Britain

Harry screamed and lunged as he watched his godfather Sirius Black take a vivid red hex to his chest, falling back towards the Veil.

Severus Snape, watching from the shadows from under a disillusionment spell, cursed under his breath as he cast a spell before the Veil could get its claws too deeply into the hide of Sirius Black.
“Corripio Mihi Sirius Black.” He all-but-spited the incantation to the strongest summoning spell he knew, feeling the strain as the Veil tried to hold onto the wizard who had already crossed its boundary but hadn’t completely passed the threshold.

“He’s gone, Harry.” Remus Lupin told the screaming Potter Heir tearfully as he prevented the boy from lunging after Remus’s mate. “He’s gone.”

Not necessarily, Severus said to myself as he gave a mental groan at the power it was taking to hold Sirius from the threshold, bringing him back out inch by excruciating inch as Harry gave another soul-rending scream and flew out of the wolf’s grasp, darting for the door in the wake of the cackling and laughing Bellatrix LeStrange.

Seeing that the battle was all but won with most of his compatriots from the Death Eaters either Stunned or bound in some way, Severus dropped his invisibility enchantment, funneling all his strength and ice-cold determination into his spell.

“Quickly, wolf!” Severus shouted as he felt a warning burn rush through his arm. Voldemort approached. “Summon the damned mutt, now!”

Shaken from his premature grief, Remus saw what had originally eluded him: Sirius wasn’t falling further backwards. No. Rather, it seemed that Snape had somehow tethered him to himself, and one of the last Blacks was slowly being towed back into the chamber.

But judging by the sweat on a dark brow and the strain on saturnine features, he wasn’t coming back fast enough.

“Yes, lads!” Moody shouted, having finished wrapping up the LeStrange brothers. “Quickly now! Corripio Mihi Sirius Black!”

That charm, as well as a slew of Accios, rang through the Death or Veil Chamber as the remaining Order members who weren’t busy rounding up the children or the Death Eaters cast, and with a great yank, pulled Sirius Black out of the Veil of Death and firmly into the land of the living.

Rushing to his side, Severus and Remus arrived almost in unison as the wolf set to work reversing the Stunner Bellatrix had nailed Sirius with along with a handful of other hexes.

“Ennervate.” Remus said, watching as olive-toned eyelids fluttered open over quicksilver eyes.

“Black.” Severus clamped one hand on Sirius’s jaw as Remus opened his mouth to protest before scowling and setting to work on fixing up his mate at one piercing glance from onyx eyes. “What did my husband entrust to you?”

“Your son.” Sirius coughed as one of Remus’s reversals cleared his lungs of the dank miasma that would have led to magical pneumonia. Never let it be said that Bellatrix was unimaginative. “Regulus entrusted me with your son: Asterion Severus Black Prince.”

Tucked away in Castle Black, hidden in the depths of Scotland on an estate that stretched under unplottable wards in the Highlands from the shores of Loch Ness and beyond, a seventeen-year-old young male with braided hair reaching down his back to the curve of his buttocks, snapped his head up with a shocked gust of air as he felt one of the main enchantments holding him prisoner in his
own home shatter and fall away, a victorious smirk crossing his well-shaped mouth.

“It’s about damn time, Uncle Siri.”

With a snap, Asterion Black-Prince closed the tome he’d been reading in his study and set it aside, changing his clothes with an absent wave of his hand as he closed his eyes and felt down the links that still connected him to those who had unknowingly – or knowingly in the case of Siri – lent their power to his survival as an unborn child, links that would remain until he had time to sever them properly lest he cause irreparable damage to their counterparts.

Searching, as he often did.

Searching for his father.

Finding him close to Siri as well as others of his blood, Asterion blew out a breath and found a weak point in the wards that they were under, wards that had recently been forced wide-open, causing a massive weakness in the entire warding structure.

He wasn’t sure where he was going, but he did know one thing.

Wherever it was, his only real family was on the other side.

Spinning gracefully on his heel, he took a steadying breath, and apparated, appearing somewhere hundreds of miles away from his home at Castle Black.

And into nothing less than a clusterfuck of epic proportions.

Taking it all in with a glance, he saw fallen combatants spread around what he recognized from both his mother’s and uncle’s descriptions as the atrium of the Ministry of Magic for Wizarding Great Britain, with two wizards – though one looked more like some malformed Lamia than any wizard he’d ever heard of before – dueling fiercely all around the room, almost without care for who might be hurt or caught in the crossfire of their duel.

From pictures in his history books and what he’d been told, Asterion recognized one of the combatants as Albus Dumbledore, the Headmaster of Hogwarts, which by process of elimination based on Siri’s descriptions of his parents’ former master, made his combatant none other than Voldemort himself.

Which meant…

Scanning the room, Asterion stepped to the edge of the shadows, spotting a couple others he thought he could name from Siri’s education.

Harry Potter, clutching his wand tightly and looking very much the worse for wear from whatever had passed that had drawn him to the Ministry.

Bellatrix LeStrange, crumpled on the rubble-strewn floor as she watched, panting with a combination of what looked like excitement and exertion as her Master did battle.

Others were obviously school children, most likely friends of Harry, or Order members since they appeared to be helping the teens rather than doing them harm.

But nowhere did Asterion see his father and uncle, though he thought he felt them several stories under his dragonhide boots.
Asterion focused on the duel, knowing that despite his own desires and wishes, he couldn’t leave Siri’s godson to fend for himself in the midst of a duel between two powerful opponents.

Raising his hands to chest-high together before him, he spread them open rapidly in a fast slashing wave, as if to clear the path before him, causing all the rubble in the atrium to clear from the duelists’ paths and crash high against the walls, powdering on contact at the same moment as Dumbledore trapped Voldemort in a sphere of water in an attempt to drown the Dark Lord and finish the duel before any more harm was done, keeping it constantly spinning and reforming until Voldemort apparated out of the sphere, a look of alarm showing on Dumbledore’s weathered face for a brief moment as the older wizard once more shoved Harry back with a wave of his hand and stood between teenager and Dark Lord.

With a roar, Voldemort sent a wave of darkness, solely made of his own twisted magic to Asterion’s eyes, pouring out at the two wizards: mentor and student as Dumbledore countered it with a shining white blast of a shield, buffered and reinforced with a sweep of Asterion’s hand, none of the trio having yet realized that there was another party to the fight beyond the observers who were busy trying to stay out of the way or get the wounded to the Floo and the hospital.

Asterion restrained the urge to laugh. After all, this was not the introduction to the wizarding world he’d had in mind. And even funnier was the blindness that seemed to take over the two “Lords” of Light and Dark when embattled against each other. Tunnel vision at its best or worst depending on how one looked at it.

Stymied by the shields, Voldemort gathered the dark energy into a swirling ball of light, throwing it at Dumbledore and sending him and Harry falling painfully onto their backs as the windows and chandelier in the Atrium shattered under the concussive blast of magic, Asterion himself rocking back on his heels as he was hit with the edge of the shockwave caused by the ball of magic hitting the shields.

Voldemort sent the glass falling around him into a whirlwind heading straight towards the fallen forms of Dumbledore and Harry with deadly precision, only to narrow his eyes in rage as the debris disappeared before it can reach them, blind to the figure on the edge of the shadows with glowing eyes and an outstretched hand, the doors to the Ministry lift opening as more members of the Order come pouring out, including an alive Sirius Black as the Floos lit again and Aurors and Ministry officials alike rushed into the room to the sight of a very-much-alive Voldemort.

Yelling in wordless rage, Voldemort spun and appeared to disappear in a cloud of black mist.

“That,” Minister Fudge stuttered, eyes wide and pajama clad. “That was You-Know-Who!”

“Yes, it was.” Head Auror Scrimgeuor said ominously. “But where is he now?”

“Now?” Auror Dawlish blinked owlishly. “He’s left, hasn’t he?”

“No.” Dumbledore answered as he rose onto his feet, blue eyes unusually stern and without a twinkle to be seen as his gaze searched the Atrium, finally lighting on the dark form standing on the edge of the shadows. It wasn’t Severus, he knew that much, though with the shadows concealing the wizard’s identity he couldn’t be certain just who it actually was. “He’s still here, I can sense his tainted magic.”

A high, hissing laugh came from the worse-for-wear teen laying at his side, sending eerie shivers down many a spine at that sound coming from the body of Harry Potter.

“You’ve lost, old man.” Came an echoing voice from Harry’s body, punctuated by groans and
gasps as the teen fought an invisible struggle.

Harry cried out as he was forced to witness his worst memories able to nearly taste Voldemort’s rank presence within him as he was possessed by the Dark Lord, the echoing remembrance of his mother’s final scream tearing through his mind and soul, the sight of Sirius falling into the Veil repeating over and over.

“So weak.” Voldemort hissed insidiously into his very mind as Sirius and the dark figure from the shadows rushed to his side, though locked in struggle as he was, Harry was blind to them. “So vulnerable. Look at me.”

“Harry.” Dumbledore whispered too low for the startled-still Aurors and officials to hear, those witches and wizards having gotten a second shock at the sight of Sirius Black in the company of Dumbledore and Potter – and seemingly on their side. “It isn’t how you are alike that makes you strong but how you are not.”

Asterion glanced at Sirius, wordlessly asking for permission for what he was about to attempt from the younger teen’s godfather, his uncle giving it with a nod without a second’s thought, his nephew immediately moving to sit and pull the twisting form firmly into his arms, Harry’s back to his chest, his hands moving to rest on the skin over Harry’s bleeding lightning bolt scar and his untainted heart, linking them with a flex of his will, however temporarily, and lending his young cousin his own augmented strength and power.

In this fight, at least, Harry wasn’t alone.

A fact reinforced as Sirius began to echo Dumbledore’s actions and speak lowly to his godpup, Remus joining him at the teen’s side as they tried to pull him out of whatever hideous vision Voldemort was using to solidify his possession.

Harry, trapped in his own mind, felt a rush of incoming warmth, like an embrace, and the voices of his godfathers played in his mind, his eyes filling with the vision of his friends as they rushed forward only to be held back by the Aurors, meeting the gaze of a somehow-alive Sirius, memories and love filling him: meeting Ron for the first time, seeing his parents in the Mirror, Remus teaching him to cast a patronous, Sirius hugging him in the townhouse drawing room, and more, so many more. Even the stranger who held him, somehow beat away the cold oiliness of the Dark Lord.

“You’re the weak one.” Harry gasped out in response to Voldemort’s repeated demand that he look at him. “You’ll never know love, or friendship.” Then he gave what seemed to be the last straw as he let power his own and yet somehow not, fill him and warm him like one of Mrs. Weasley’s hot stews. “And I feel sorry for you.”

The Atrium was filled with a scream of wordless rage as the dark mist flew from within Harry, reforming into the form of the Dark Lord beside Bellatrix LeStrange who was screaming in seeming pain of her own – though no one, except Sirius and Asterion knew why.

But it was already too late.

A link had been formed between Voldemort and Harry long ago on that All Hallows Eve night.

And if there was one thing Asterion knew better than anyone else alive, it was magical links.

“Keep hold of him Harry.” Asterion whispered as the Dark Lord twisted and screamed, the scream changing from rage to pain in shrieking harmony with his first lieutenant as Asterion pulled from one to help defeat the other. “Don’t let him go. He showed you the link now use it.”
“What are you…” Dumbledore started to interrupt only to be silenced with a glare and a spell from Sirius as the wanted wizard pulled them all back from the pair still seated on the ground, flashing eyes jumping continuously between the two teenagers and the two darkest beings of the day: the Dark Lord and his most trusted enforcer.

“Leave them.” Sirius barked out, casting a warning ward easily around the pair that would keep others from disrupting whatever it was his nephew was up to. “They can’t be disturbed.”

“That’s, that’s Sirius Black!” Fudge shouted, somehow ignoring the tableau playing out before him. “Arrest him!”

“Minister.” Kingsley Shacklebolt said with a put-upon sigh as he watched eagerly as the Head Auror quietly had Aurors sent down to round up the Death Eaters in the Ministry. Doing what he could since the battle at hand wasn’t one for them to handle. No. It somehow had come to rest on the too-thin shoulders of a pair of young boys. “With all do respect: shut up.”

“Find him, Harry.” Asterion whispered, eyes closed as he focused his power and that of Bellatrix, funneling it carefully into the temporary link between himself and his young cousin. “Find all of him.”

“I see them.” Harry whispered back, staring at something both far away and far too close. “He’s still…!” He started to cry out, finding a piece somewhere he wasn’t expecting…though he wasn’t as shocked as he probably should have been.

“I see it.” Asterion said calmly, giving him unconscious comfort as the older teen refused to panic. “It doesn’t matter. We’re going to break them all. All of the links. Every single bit of him. So he can never come back.”

“Far away first.” Asterion coached him, feeding him more and more power as Harry focused on both the power and the feeling of heat and comfort that had expelled Tom in the first place. “Then closer at hand. That’s it.” He praised Harry, all of their words both too low to be overheard and protected by his uncle’s ward, Voldemort and Bellatrix screaming all the while, though Bella’s were getting weaker while Voldemort’s were only getting increasingly pained and wounded.

Far away in Scotland, a tiara burst into flame then collapsed into dust, then a ring in an abandoned shack shattered, followed by a locket witnessed by only a crazed house-elf screamed and went quiet, then a cup deep beneath marble floors of a bank powdered without a sound as one by one, Harry burnt or broke or shattered the links between the objects and Voldemort.

Wizards and witches startled from their watching stances as Nagini began to roll about in her death-throws, her skin first smoking and then bursting into flame, giving a horrifying hissing shriek that was echoed by her master as Bella finally fell unconscious to the floor from her half-propped up position.

Asterion gave a vicious smirk as the blot on the family name gave up the last of her power, Asterion taking it all with a dreadful yank and feeding it through him and into Harry, leaving her nothing more than a muggle like those she disdained, the link between them breaking along with her power as she bled out from her wounds on the floor, no one willing to get close to her as Voldemort stood over her and began to smoke, his hissing screaming becoming ever more terrible with every heartbeat that passed.
“The last one is tricky, Harry.” Asterion coached him through, guiding him, all the while knowing that Harry himself was the only one who could actually make this insane, on-the-fly plan of his work. Harry had to want it and focus, this last piece of the puzzle that the two of them had come up with in a split second required hair-trigger timing…and a shit-ton of power. “You have to start on the last piece a split-second before you start on Voldemort. Otherwise this has all been for nothing.”

“I know.” Harry said with a voice broken from shouts and screams and cries from the moment he’d been struck with a false vision in his History of Magic test. “I can do it.”

“I know you can, Harry.” Asterion bolstered him, pulling with a light touch on the links connecting him to Sirius, and Severus, and who he thought was Sirius’s cousin Tonks. “Quickly now, ignore the gawkers and Voldemort and finish this.”

Crying out brokenly, Harry closed his eyes and sent pure power down the link to Tom and rushing through his own body, the stranger holding him firmly even as he convulsed and went limp, passing out from nearly exhausting his magical core as a last shard of black mist lifted, hidden by Asterion’s position over him, and disappeared as Voldemort’s false body shattered into ash and bone dust.

A shout went up from the audience, but Harry was deaf to it.

He was deaf to everything, falling deep into unconsciousness and held safe in a tired stranger’s arms.

Voldemort was no more.

…

Rushing back to his nephew’s side, Sirius didn’t quite know which of them to focus on, only to have his focus turn to Harry as Severus came and crouched at their side, seemingly instinctively knowing who the dark teenager was.

“How is he?” Sirius asked Asterion in a near-panic as he took in his nephew’s exhaustion and Harry’s shallowly breathing form, a question echoed by the Headmaster as he came to stand above them, keeping the now busy crowd at bay as the Order got to work collaborating with the Aurors over the events of the night and the officials spun themselves into a tizzy.

“Exhausted, a bit worn at the edges.” Asterion reported with an uneasy glance at all the people surrounding them even as they all kept their distance. “He needs seeing to by a healer.”

“Poppy can handle that.” Dumbledore told them, quickly fashioning a portkey to the infirmary from one of his robe ties that he tore off without hesitation.

“He can’t go alone.” Severus warned. “Not like this.”

“Siri can take him.” Asterion said without a moment’s thought, overriding whatever the Headmaster might have suggested.

“Yes, indeed.” Albus nodded, easily remembering Cornelius’s outburst. “Sirius, if you would…?” He handed over the portkey as the grim Animagus gathered his godson in his arms and accepted the piece of cloth, Albus activating it with the word: “Portus.” Needing no fancy password as it was being taken right away.

“Now see here!” Fudge burst out, rushing over to the small grouping of wizards who had played guard over the Potter brat as he did…whatever it was that he just did. “There must be an investigation…!”
“Indeed.” Asterion interrupted, in a tone very familiar to those who knew Severus Snape, including the man himself who was watching the young wizard as Asterion gracefully climbed to his feet without a sign of the exhaustion he must surely be feeling. “There should be. Voldemort is dead, for good this time. That I believe we can all agree upon?” He arched a brow at Dumbledore and his father, the latter of whom silently peeled back his sleeve and revealed the dark mark that had burned as the Dark Lord was defeated, now appearing no more than an old, whitish silver scar, utterly dormant and free of magic.

“Yes,” Dumbledore stroked one hand down his impressive beard as they were joined by others who were important to this coming…well, he wasn’t quite sure yet if it was to be a conversation or a confrontation, but from who he thought the young man might be, he was betting on the latter. Among the gathering – and watching – witches and wizards were officials such as Madam Bones, the head of the DMLE, an avidly-watching Head Auror, and department heads such as Arthur Weasley of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office, Pius Thickness of the Department for International Cooperation, and Griselda Marshbanks of the Department of Education. Enough witnesses and from a diverse enough pool, that Fudge didn’t have a snidget’s chance at a Quidditch match of burying the story of what happened at the Ministry this night, let alone these key moments in the aftermath of battle. “Yes, I do believe it is safe to say that Harry with support of our mysterious friend, have vanquished Voldemort for good.”

A shudder went up from many of the witnesses, Fudge himself giving off a squeak at the use of the taboo name.

“Excellent.” Asterion continued, watching the fat Minister like a serpent inspecting a juicy mouse. “Then what should come next is an accurate dissemination of the facts…after the Death Eaters in custody have been interrogated with Veritaserum, inspected for the Imperious curse, and then sent to the holding cells until they are given fair and full trials, as well as any other Voldemort supporters and followers not currently in holding.”

“The people will talk.” Dumbledore warned.

“Let them.” Asterion shrugged. “Give a simple statement that a battle between Death Eaters and Harry Potter with support from friends and family took place and an investigation is underway. Once the Ministry has all the supporters rounded up and awaiting trial, the full story can be released.”

Extremely uncomfortable with all the eyes currently upon him, but determined to carry through anyway, Asterion tucked his hands behind his back, twisting them anxiously where no one could see – except the vigilant eyes of his father who had come up behind him and now rested his hands on his son’s shoulders, hiding the telling twisting hands from view.

“Ex...cuse me!” Fudge burst out, face flushing an unpleasant shade of ever-deepening purple the longer this, this child spoke. “But just who do you think you are to be giving the Minister for Magic orders?!”

“Ahh, my apologies.” Asterion said with a sarcastically raised brow, unknowingly echoing the look on his father’s face. “Lord Asterion Severus Black Prince, Head of the Most Ancient and Noble Houses of Black and Prince. That is who I am.” He smirked, lifting his eyes from the little man and running his gaze over their audience, no sign of his discomfit showing for even a second. “And as for you being Minister for Magic…” He drawled. “Somehow, I don’t think that’s going to even last the night, once all these good people find out that you authorized your lovely undersecretary to torture the students of Hogwarts – many of them the children of themselves or their children, or their friends’ children…all in an attempt to shut up a fifteen-year-old savior who ended up being right all along…do you?”
Blanching, Fudge stared, gaping, at all the suddenly no-longer-neutral faces surrounding him.

“Is this true, Dumbledore?” Madam Amelia Bones hissed, face flushed and eyes narrowed on the fat, self-serving Minister. Her niece and ward Susan was in Harry’s class. But she hadn’t heard a peep from the castle in weeks – nor did anyone else she asked, a situation she’d been investigating discreetly under the nose of Fudge and his toadies.

“Yes, I’m afraid this is also true.” Dumbledore said mournfully. “Dolores has a writ from the Minister himself giving her full latitude to act as she wished while in the posts of Defense Professor or High Inquisitor.”

“Well.” Madam Bones said, icily furious, doing a mental head count. “Then by the powers vested in the Office of Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, I hereby place Mr. Cornelius Fudge under arrest until these allegations can be investigated and strip from him the office of Minister of Magic until such time as he is found either innocent of all crimes or the Wizengamot moves to either recall or reinstate him. Auror Shacklebolt.” She pinned down one of her best men – one that she is well aware that she shares with Albus’s order. “Take Mr. Fudge away.”

“We need to go, Albus.” Severus said quietly. “The entire Order needs to clear out.”

“They’re in the process of doing so, if they’re not employed by the Ministry.” Arthur Weasley said, his wife having already disappeared with their two older sons, Percy scuttling away under the wrathful gaze of his co-workers, knowing that it was only a matter of time before he was interrogated regarding Fudge and Umbridge. “And Amelia will be Minister Pro-Tem with Fudge under arrest. She’ll get things done.”

“She better.” Asterion said with a grimace. “I don’t want to have to kick up anymore of a fuss in a society I’ve just barely entered.”

Spotting a beetle with green markings fluttering away, Albus grimaced, knowing full-well that it might be rather too late for that.

…

Later that night found the trio of Dumbledore, Severus, and Asterion speaking quietly with intense looks on all their faces in the medical ward of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the rest of the occupants, including Asterion’s uncle Sirius and Harry Potter, all asleep thanks to Poppy Pomphrey’s free hand with the sleeping draughts.

Asterion had been fussed over, a singularly disconcerting experience for the sheltered teen, before taking a seat at the small table and cushioned chairs Dumbledore had conjured for the coming conversation now that they didn’t have an avidly watching and listening audience.

Dumbledore, of all people, began.

“There is a rumor.” Albus began carefully choosing his words. “Spoken of in whispers off and on over the years in certain circles,” he said with a peculiar emphasis. “Of a ritual known only to and hoarded closely by the Blacks. The very essence and heart of their magic rests on oaths taken never to reveal or share the ritual. Not even what it’s about. But still, when one delves into the history and way of things, pulls back enough layers of time and age, one finds things, hints and shadows of conjecture. Enough to wager a guess as to what this deepest and most precious of secrets is. It’s only a wonder that young Tom never discovered it himself with all the delving into things he did.”

He waved a hand, dismissing the tangent. Tom Riddle was only ever interested in the Dark and for being a purely Black ritual it took the Lightest of magics – that of willing sacrifice.
“What ritual, Albus?” Severus’s eyes were wide in his head. He’d only ever heard his old teacher speak like this when talking of horcruxes and his suspicion surrounding the Dark Lord’s immortality. But at the same time, Albus’s voice was layered with something approaching…awe…rather than the disgust the darkest of arts received from the defeater of Grindlewald.

Asterion simply watched him with mild surprise over the information Dumbledore had – and wanting to learn just how deep it goes.

“There is a story, ancient and well hidden, with only a sole reference to it in a single surviving tome. They reference is to a dangerous and costly ritual, one designed by a furious and grieving “Dragon-kin” father called Amadan Dubh in the ages before this island was mostly conquered by Rome. It spoke of a daughter being attacked and raped and thereby impregnated by her attacker. Rather than allow the man to live, Dubh slaughtered him in the village center as a message to all who would prey upon his family.”

Severus sucked in a breath. Stories of Dovahim and Drackens and Dreki and Chemeleo and all the other dragon-kin from before the Roman Empire breached Britain were rare indeed. Hells, any stories surviving from that time were rare. That was pre-Merlinic Britain, a time of great and wild magic when Druidism and wizardry were truly in their infancy.

“There would be no way for the child to survive.” Severus whispered as he shook off his shock. “Without the father’s magic to support the mother and pregnancy it wouldn’t survive unless she was from one of the rare female dominated species that don’t require power sharing to support their young. This Dubh condemned the child and likely his own daughter to death with his intemperate actions.”

“So it would seem,” Albus agreed before settling deeper into a chair to keep vigil over the ward before continuing his story. His bones weren’t as young as they once were. “However the girl, a submissive Dovah or Dracken we can safely assume from the overflow of their blood in House Black.” A safe assumption as Dubh is an old version of Black. “Wasn’t willing to simply let the child die and so kept funneling her own magic into maintaining it. Dubh not willing to let his daughter die, found an…alternative.”

“An alternative?” Severus arched a brow as he placed one hand on his son’s shoulder, beginning to see where this conversation might be going. “This most secret of Black rituals I would assume?”

“Quite so.” Dumbledore smiled sardonically with an answering nod from Asterion, an expression not often seen on his grandfatherly mien. “A ritual, powered by those of the blood of the child and cast by the mother with help if need be from her family members to boost her levels. It is tiring and taxing, before it became lost to modern history there are several accounts of the mother dying in the act of trying to use it.”

“What, exactly, does this supposed ritual do?”

“It creates the magical version of ‘false womb’ an incubator if you will, powered by those of the child’s bloodline and transfers the growing fetus from mother into the incubator where the child grows, supported and empowered by those linked through blood.”

Severus lost his breath as Asterion remained conspicuously silent.

He’d already broken the links between himself and his family members – though a lot gentler than Harry had the links tethering Voldemort to the earthly plane – the first moment alone he’d had…even though it had meant hiding in the infirmary bathroom under the guise of cleaning himself up. He’d done that as well, rather than give evidence of what he’d been up to, but that had taken no more than
a flex of his power.

A magical incubation chamber of some kind? Powered by what sounded like blood relatives? It was the stuff of fairytales and dreams. Especially to a dominant Dovah who’d lost his mate and any chance of children with him. Or so he’d thought until Sirius Black had uttered those fateful words.

“Impossible…” He breathed, staring wide-eyed at his son, a fact that had yet to fully sink in, no matter how deeply he knew it to be true.

“Like horcruxes can’t possibly exist?” Albus asked seemingly idly, watching as the man’s shock dissipated. “I assure you while such a thing would be risky and likely deadly, there is nothing else I can see that would fit the circumstances.”

“What can you tell us, Asterion?”

Both elder wizards took in the younger male with scanning eyes, cataloging all they saw to substantiate both Asterion’s and Sirius’s claims over his origins.

Black eyes were flecked with a silvery-grey in an undeniably aristocratic face filled with sharp planes and (thankfully) Regulus’s nose. Pale ivory skin had only the merest dusting of a light honey tan, while deepest ebony hair was pulled back in a braid that ended at the young man’s leather-clad hips. Attired in the finest – if rather rebelliously in leather trousers and a black silk t-shirt instead of robes – clothes money could buy, the self-proclaimed *Lord* Black-Prince wore dragon-hide riding boots, Lordship rings in platinum and black diamond – the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black – and white gold and sapphire – the Most Ancient and Noble House of Prince, resting comfortably on his fingers.

He was the very picture of a Scion of the nobility.

And he was most indubitably Severus’s and Regulus’s son.

With *Those Eyes* there could never be any doubt of the matter, even if you disregarded everything else about him that verily *screamed* of his heritage.

*This* was what a child of Severus Snape, formerly last of the Prince Line, and Regulus Black, beloved Son of House Black, would look like. There was simply no other conclusion that anyone anywhere who knew of their mateship or marriage would draw. It was purely inconceivable.

Severus gave a final glance around the ward, setting up a privacy spell for secrecy before allowing his Dovah features out on display as his facial features remained mostly human other than his eyes becoming a bit more slanted and scales flecked over his skin, wings spreading out from between his shoulders with claws on his hands and horns curling back from his temples as he got his first, good scenting of his child.

What he found there nearly had him apoplectic in shock, jaw drawing open in an unusual display of astonishment.

Seeing the look on his Father’s face, Asterion let out a chuckle and took a guess at what the problem was.

“Yes,” he said voice laughing. “I’m…”

“…a Dovah.” Severus breathed, interrupting his child. Well. His grown child. “An unmated submissive at that.”
The Potions Master moved at once to his child’s side, sniffing and inspecting the lithe body. Now that he knew what to look for he wasn’t quite so surprised that the man’s height, or lack thereof. He might be a tall man himself, standing well over six feet, but Regulus was barely taller than Potter at five-seven. Their child was only a few inches taller than that, tall for a submissive at five-nine or ten, but much shorter than he’d be if he was a dominant or a wizard.

Then Severus paled, mentally doing the math.

“My gods.” He breathed, stroking frantic hands down his son’s braid. “You’ve been unmated for…”

“…a year and eight months.” This time Asterion interrupted with a heart-felt wince. His bloody Dovah was pissed he’d yet to mate to ground his power and have children while his instincts were driving him absolutely barmy though it was still in the realm of annoyance and not true mania. “If it wasn’t for Uncle Siri teaching me Occlumency I’d be driven insane from my Dovah’s whining by now.”

“That fucking mutt.” Severus hissed ire returning in full force. “He fucking knew about your inheritance and still didn’t tell me or anyone else about you for another almost two fucking years?!”

Ignoring for the moment that locking away his Dovah wasn’t the best way to handle a creature inheritance, Sirius Black even with books and references and his wolf to help him was no Dovah mentor to help Asterion adjust.

“Perhaps,” Albus broke in. “We should listen to Asterion’s story before levying any judgement over the situation, Severus.”

Albus Dumbledore wasn’t quite sure what to make of the young Dovah – now that he knew what he was. He’d of course known about Severus and Regulus being Dovahim, as well as a score of other students passing through the school’s halls. Not least among them were a current pair of twin males in Ravenclaw and Slytherin – fifth year – respectively.

This secret, at least, was safe with the Headmaster, though he was a bit leery over the power he could feel leeching off of the young submissive.

Asterion Black-Prince needed mates, and soon, to ground all that power.

It was more than he’d sensed on a single person before, barring his own mentor Nicholas Flamel, but Nick had lived over six hundred years to gain that much power.

Asterion was only seventeen.

Closing his eyes Asterion took a deep breath and began.

“To begin with,” he said slowly, opening his eyes to drink in the sight of his father now that they were in ostensibly calm and safe surroundings. “You have to understand. I’ve been raised in almost total seclusion,” he clenched his hands into fists where they sat on his thighs, the only outward sign he’s given of his discomfort. “My ability to read social cues is a bit…off. So if I come across a bit...stiff it’s only because other than a few exceptions, I’ve been raised totally by my caretaker along with the Black house elves and the portraits.”

“I’m sure you’ll do fine, my boy.” Dumbledore said with forced joviality. Raised almost completely cut off from human contact…yes, that does explain quite a bit. “Try starting at the beginning and go from there.”
Rolling his eyes at the typical Dumbledore-ism, Severus simply gave his son – his son – an encouraging nod, his natural reserve not lending itself to a more effusive form of support.

Unclenching his hands, Asterion took another steadying breath and then did as suggested. No matter how many times he’d practiced this moment, adding and subtracting bits as time went on and circumstances changed, nothing could prepare him for this actual moment. Having it immediately after participating in a battle after a lifetime of seclusion certainly wasn’t helping him find a sense of equilibrium.

“What I can tell you about the actual ritual is very little.” He admitted. “The portraits ensured that once I was of age to understand the repercussions of the Oath our family requires in exchange for the knowledge of it that I underwent it. I’ll try and tell you what I can but…” He shrugged, there were some secrets too dear to risk. Even to ease his father’s mind.

“Understandable from what I know of the Blacks.” Severus said with a sneer, thinking solely of Sirius and not catching the quick frown that marred Asterion’s features before his perfect public mask was once more in place.

“What I can tell you is that there was an out-clause that had to take place before the secrecy clause that my Dad added to shroud my existence, tethering me to Castle Black, was broken. I could’ve broken it myself once I came into my inheritances but the consequences to myself and others,” he cut his eyes towards his father meaningfully, the others quickly catching on. “Would’ve been dire if not fatal.”

“Can you tell us the conditions of your freedom?” Dumbledore prodded gently with surgical precision. He knew his ways around Vows and Oaths, having both administered and taken his share in his hundred-fifty-plus years.

“As I was told: Sirius truly trusting that I would be safe and protected in the care of my father.” Asterion sighed. “Only then would he be able to tell my father or anyone else of my existence if they weren’t already aware. It wasn’t the best set of conditions with how Uncle Siri felt and still likely feels about you, Father. But my Dad was under quite a bit of stress and not thinking clearly at the time. Having to borrow the bulk of Uncle Siri’s power to complete the spell didn’t help matters either.”

“That mutt again.” Severus muttered with a glare at the sleeping Grim laying on top of Potter’s blanketed feet. “And how in Merlin’s saggy testicles was I to prove that to someone who hated me?!?” He demanded under his breath. “Merlin, Reg.”

“I don’t know, how did you?” Asterion asked rhetorically.

“I take it.” Dumbledore’s twinkle was in full-flower. “That you are quite close to our Lord Black.”

“Quite close.” Asterion said with a smirk that was eerily reminiscent of the sleeping Animagus. “He helped raise me until he was sent away, and then again once he escaped until, well, now I suppose. Though calling him Lord Black is somewhat, no, extremely incorrect as he has never actually held that title.”

Asterion threw the red-herring into the conversation pool hoping to get off the subject that while near to his heart was obviously painful for his father if the grimace on his face was anything to go by. Though that could just be his normal expression when talking about Siri. Asterion hadn’t experienced enough of Severus’s expressions to really know.

“I’m sorry?” Dumbledore was momentarily flabbergasted. Everyone knew Sirius inherited while
still in Azkaban. It was only the goblin’s stringent hands-off policies that kept the Ministry from taking the Black fortune following the death of the elder Blacks. Dumbledore gently explained as such to young Asterion only to watch fascinated as he turned into the epitome of a Lord right before his eyes in a replica of his performance earlier at the MoM.

“You’re wrong.” Asterion said formally, his voice proper and ice-cold in a manner that a Malfoy would envy. Whoever taught him comportment certainly did a thorough job, was all his audience could think. “Sirius Black was never in line for the main title, especially once I was born. He was nominally considered legally to be the Head of House until my majority or my creature inheritance and named an Heir to his personal holdings and fortune however. Great-Grandfather Arcturus never reinstated him to the line. It fell in to me immediately after their deaths and was held in trust if in secret until my majority and subsequent freedom from the tethering spell…so,” he glanced at the clock. “Last night.” As it had passed midnight by a good margin. “Sirius Black was never Lord of the House of Black.”

A moment of silence passed before being broken by a wicked chuckle.

“That’s the best news I’ve had all day, other than the obvious, of course.” Severus said before taking a little sip of his tea to hide his malicious grin. He could almost dance at the news that the mutt and in turn the mutt’s godson weren’t the inheritors of what was supposed to be his Regulus’s inheritance.

Shaking his head at his father’s foul temper, Asterion continued. Siri had warned him, his Dad’s portrait had warned him, even his great-grandparents had warned them before they died. His father could hold a grudge to the grave. And apparently beyond as James Potter had both been dead for some time and his father was still acting like a schoolboy towards the “Marauders.”

Though, with what his Dad’s portrait had told him, he supposed his father had plenty of cause.

“I was raised by Andrea Figg, a squib who’d taken to looking after Pureblood heirs and tutoring them in their younger years.”

“Arabella’s oldest sister.” Dumbledore broke in with what looked like understanding breaking across his face. “She was rather in demand at one time before she dropped off the map, as it were. Everyone supposed she’d taken an exclusive contract overseas.”

“They were right, after a fashion.” Asterion gave a quick flash of some indescribable emotion. “Dad hired her to look after me, just in case something happened with everyone else. A fail-safe if you will so I wasn’t left alone with only the house elves and the portraits for company.” Though that might’ve been better at times than being left alone with an elderly squib with no one to watch over her and supervise her care of him beyond the elves and portraits once Siri was gone and his great-grandparents died. Not that he’d ever even hint of such a thing in mixed company. Or ever. “A good idea as it turned out, though as a squib she couldn’t be used as one of the secret keepers or spell anchors. She’s just enough magic to anchor a Vow and little else.”

“Who were the keepers and anchors?” Severus desperately needed to know just who his mate trusted with the wellbeing of their child. It couldn’t have only been the mutt. Merlin knows what it must’ve cost Reg to go begging to his brother in an attempt, no matter how ill-thought-out, to save their child from the monsters Regulus was fighting alone in his mind.

Asterion winced. This was another revelation his father was not going to be happy about.

“Uncle Siri and my grandparents.”
“Your grandparents.” Severus stared at him in incomprehension before it dawned on him as evidenced by a whole new level of withering scowl. “You mean my grandparents. The Princes. That is why you call yourself Asterion Severus Black Prince. My grandfather reinstated you to the line after disowning my mother.”

“Yes.” Asterion said robotically. “Dad knew that of all your relations, everyone was most likely to overlook them. A reclusive pair of Purebloods of minimal power who rarely if ever left their estate after their only daughter ran off, causing a huge scandal. No one even remembered them except for the oldest Lines by the time I was conceived. Bad blood between them and Grandmother Eileen or not, Dad was determined.”

“Yes,” Severus conceded with a sigh. “When a Black is determined there is little they can’t accomplish.”

“To be fair.” Dumbledore pointed out. “It likely wasn’t a hard sell, as they say. Convincing staunchly proud Purebloods to look after and reinstate an heir with pure Black blood into their family Line…”

“Indeed.” Severus said drily. “It’s most Pureblood’s dream pairing, a match with the Blacks. If one overlooks the occasional strain of madness that is.”

Asterion had to laugh at that. “Black Madness indeed.” He snorted, completely losing his proud composure.

The others watched him like some strange potions experiment that was behaving in a manner other than expected, forgetting that for his strange upbringing and steel-plated composure, Asterion was only eighteen.

Sobering after several long minutes, Asterion flicked a tear from the corner of his eye as he settled down with a few more chuckles. “The Black Madness.” The last chuckle fell from his lips as his mouth tugged up into a wry grin. “I needed that.”

Shaking his head he explained.

“The Black Madness is a myth created to cover any instances of a Black attempting to reveal the secret that enabled mother to give me life even after his own death.” His voice turned utterly serious. “The more severe the attempted breach the worse the consequences. At best it’s a form of simple mania, easily explained away as a one-time event not likely to occur. At worst the offender’s magic would be the cost, their life following not long after.”

“So Bellatrix…” Severus trailed off with a curse.

Asterion nodded gravely. “Attempted to tell the secret. Which was probably just enough to explain Voldemort’s obsession with those of Black blood. Bellatrix didn’t go so far as to lose her magic, but definitely making enough of an attempt to be completely out of touch with reality, but whetted her Lord’s appetite for the great secret of our house. Uncle Siri is just off from Azkaban and in need of a Mind Healer, no Black Madness required.”

“Something I will be sure to arrange once he’s officially cleared.” Albus told him seriously. “An intriguing and insidious curse to inlay a Vow with.” Dumbledore mused to himself as he took a sip of his cooling tea. “It reaffirms that Vows have a type of rudimentary sentience to be able to adjudicate the severity of an attempted breach and retaliate accordingly.”

“That’s just what I was taught from the Black histories and the portraits.” Asterion cocked his head
to one side. “Whether all Vows are like that I really couldn’t speak to.”

Dumbledore waved off his musings with an age-spotted hand. Vows, while very much a present concern under the current topic, weren’t really the purpose of the day. The intriguing and possibly dangerous young Dovah before him was.

One with quite simply superb control from what he could tell so far. And as one of the more liberal wizards of his age and years, he has met his share of Dovahim.

Severus simply stewed in his own resentment for that moment. He was thankful, of course he was, that his grandparents unbent enough to take care of his child when he was unable and unknowing. But that did not lessen the sting of them not being there for him during his frankly awful childhood.

“Getting back on point.” Asterion said after emptying his teacup and waving off a refill. “I had a caretaker, elves, portraits, Uncle Siri for two years the first time, and Grandpere and Grandmere until I was six. Then Uncle Siri again from fourteen to seventeen. He has helped me become more adjusted, tried to teach me how to “loosen up” since I was raised very strictly in his absence. Great-Grandfather Arcturus knew of me but spent his final years convalescing on the Continent so I never met him in person.” Asterion shrugged trying to seem unphased by his public anxiety and the other issues created by his upbringing. “I’m still rather awkward. I wouldn’t have the slightest idea how to talk to someone my own age.”

Though he’d like to meet his cousin Draco as well as Harry properly. Uncle Siri didn’t know anything about Draco except that he was a Malfoy which to Uncle Siri was just about the worst thing someone could be, but he’d adored his godson. Asterion would like to meet the person who took his Uncle from him consistently. His one link to the outside world after so long in seclusion.

He wanted to what Harry was really like, outside of fighting a megalomaniac.

Part of him, probably inherited from his father, wanted so badly to hate Harry Potter for what he took from him. Knowingly or not. But the other part…likely from his Dad and from his Uncle, said that anyone Siri adored so utterly had to be worth it.

Only time would tell which side of him would win out.

Time he actually had now that he was freed from his tether to his secluded Castle home.

“Neither Reg or the mutt was close to the Late Lord Black from what your mother told me.” Severus scowled. “How did he come to know about you?”

“Well, since I was hidden in his House Seat, it was rather hard to hide from him.” Asterion drawled. “He knew the Castle was closed to him – him, Lord Black – which made him aware that something had happened. The house elves couldn’t tell him much but what they were able to pass along were any letters dealing with the greater Black estate. He figured it out, after all, no one ever accused Arcturus Black of being a stupid man, merely a self-absorbed Dark wizard.”

“What else can you tell us about the spell? Besides the little you have.” Dumbledore prodded, bringing them once more back on track.

“Not much.” Asterion admitted. “Dad didn’t expect me to be a Dovah, I don’t think. It certainly was a surprise to myself and Uncle Siri. Dad set it up, I just had to live with it. I can say that I experienced several artificial power augmentations throughout my life and am an expert at channeling power to others as we all saw at the MoM.”

“And your caretaker?”
“She died years ago, after Uncle Siri escaped from Azkaban.”

Finished with what he could tell him, he left them to figure the rest out on their own, studying the infirmary in all-too-clear fascination before being drawn from his seat over to where Fawkes was preening himself as a chick, watching over Harry and Sirius and had been the whole time.

Ignoring his movement, the others quickly held a silent conversation adding what he’d told them to Dumbledore’s tale and each drawing several conclusions.

Two things were clear to them both:

Asterion was who he said he was, his knowledge of Sirius and Arcturus Black and the Princes spoke to that.

Also, that Asterion was quite powerful and very, very controlled for a wizard or Dovah his age. Especially one ungrounded by mates. Quite rigidly controlled. Like the littlest thing could force him to snap and blow up the castle and everyone in it.

It was…unnatural to say the least.

While Severus was known for being the epitome of an icy, controlled Slytherin it was a learned behavior from years of abuse from his muggle father and being a half-blood in the pure-blood’s lair.

And Blacks weren’t exactly known to be anything close to cold.

Proud purebloods with the masks to go with it?

Yes.

Cold? Icy? Indifferent?

No, no, and definitely not.

Passionate to the point of instability was more the creed of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black.

Add in that Asterion was mentored for several years by Sirius of all Blacks and this…rigidity could be nothing less than a deeply ingrained behavior that the staunch Gryffindor couldn’t train out of him.

It made red flags go up, especially with the young Dovah’s very secluded upbringing. And while Dumbledore would never admit it to a mourning widower who just discovered a living child he’d never known…it made the aging Headmaster worry for the boy’s mental state. Asterion Black-Prince wasn’t normal by any stretch of the imagination.

“What are your plans now, my child?” Albus asked gently.

“Not your child.” Asterion corrected immediately, the man’s words hitting a sore point. For so long he’d not been anyone’s child. Not among the living at least. Not with an absent father he never knew that he’d be able to even meet or not before one of them died. “And I was planning on going to get Dad’s body, sitting vigil with Father over him, taking him to Castle Black for his funeral rights, dealing with some business with the goblins and the Ministry over my estates and titles, making sure they give the Death Eaters and supporters fair trials, then spending however long the Dovah mentors will allow me to get to know my father before they start pushing me to mate.”
He rattled off his current list, not a doubt in his mind that events would happen and in his order. Nothing else would do. He wouldn’t allow it.

Unmated Dovah submissives were rarely allowed to remain as such beyond seventeen years old or finishing NEWTs as they posed one of the highest risks of exposure to the secretive-to-the-point-of-paranoia Dovahim so long as their power remained ungrounded. Young submissives were encouraged to take a mate as soon as possible after their inheritance to ground them, with any additional mates then taken on the submissive’s one time-table based on the wishes of themselves and their Dovah half. It all revolved around grounding their power and keeping their species as under-the-radar as possible…though it was also because the longer a Dovah submissive went ungrounded, the more mates they generally required, and mateships resembling a large harem were hardly inconspicuous.

“That is…acceptable.” Severus said after a moment, barely holding onto his trademark reserve before the Headmaster and his son. His Son. “However, the mentor body will need to be informed of events Albus, to help arrange Asterion’s mate hunt and lifetime mentor if nothing else. Though we can’t tarry long. As it is your instincts are likely driving you mad if the pheromones you’ve been emitting are any indication.”

With being such a close-mouthed group, unless you quite literally ran into – or came within scenting range – of another Dovah who both suited you and was an unmated dominant, an unmated submissive who didn’t have links to other Dovahim needed the help of the mentors to arrange their hunts and invite unmated dominants. It was one of the main purposes of the mentors, and they were the only ones allowed to keep records of their kind. Well, outside of familial records like those kept by the Blacks. Being a mentor – a shoulder to cry on or a safe ear to complain into or a wise mind to pick – to their charges was their secondary task, and one that lasted all their lives as mentors.

There were hundreds of Dovah mentors all around the world, each with less than a dozen Dovahim assigned to them, and generally only one of those being unmated at a time.

Albus knew of three himself off the top of his head who might suit a powerful Dovah like Asterion, being by both nature and position in contact with the governing or ruling bodies of all the various creature species who called Great Britain home.

Severus, like the Dovah stationed at Hogwarts before him, was often Albus’s contact with the Dovahim mentor body. It was the duty of the Dovahim stationed at each and every magical school to watch out for – and report – any unknown or unexpected Dovahim inheritance. They didn’t just let their own fall through the cracks, not if they could help it.

They were secretive, not utter assholes.

“Quite.” Asterion said sardonically. It made no logical sense, the drives and wants and anger and rage and bloody needs he’s been dealing with for the last twenty or so months. But logical or primal, they won’t be beaten back, not completely, no matter how excellent his control. “I do insist on a very…edited…version of events being released. There are some things no one else needs to be privy to.”

“I believe we can trust the Headmaster to develop a suitable story for the Dovah Mentor Body and inform us of it before the Mentors or Ministry come calling for my head.” Severus’s sarcasm over the last was exquisite.

“Indeed,” Albus nodded, moving to his desk and taking out a blank parchment to begin crafting his tale. “I will send along an owl with the particulars and keep you both informed of the mentors’ decisions regarding our young Black Prince.” He twinkled up at them. “If I may…”
“Yes, Albus.” You could just hear the sigh in the Potion Master’s voice as he and his progeny moved towards the door before pausing.

“If I understand correctly,” here the elder man took care in his phrasing. “Asterion has never been around those his own age nor a large amount of people. Perhaps some time with your godson Draco might be in order, as well as with young Harry? Just to help Asterion acclimate a bit more to company before his mate hunt. You are after all, a very powerful young man from all evidence I’ve seen thus far.” The last was directed solely at the younger man however it carried a warning as well for his father.

Asterion had to forcibly restrain himself from blanching or clenching his hands together over the thought of *that*. *Mate hunting.* He shuddered unperceptively.

Seeing his father’s reluctance, he voiced his opinion. Even though technically he didn’t *need* his father’s permission or approval at his age…he still wanted it never having the opportunity for such before. His painted Dad’s pride or Uncle’s raucous encouragements simply weren’t the same thing. Not at all.

“It…would be a help to me.” He admitted, looking at the far wall with a faint hint of a blush, avoiding his father’s piercing gaze. “I *have* been sheltered and *am not* used to being around people, especially groups.”

Severus *did* sigh this time as he pinched the bridge of his nose between potion-stained fingers. “Very well.” He agreed gruffly. “I will owl Draco from Castle Black *after* we have done our best by your mother.”

His son nodded gravely before striding after his quickly-moving father.

He wasn’t sure what this emotion was that he was feeling but he thought it might be…*happiness*?

Perhaps.

Only time will tell.

…

“We’ll go and rest in my chambers, first.” Severus decided for them both, keeping his voice pitched low and soft. “Then go get your mother in the morning.”

The awkward air of tension in the Potion Master’s chambers was dense enough to be used as a blunt weapon.

Father and Son sat stiffly on opposite sides of the sitting room, each without the slightest idea of what to say to the other for the most part.

Especially in this situation, with the missing corpse of the one person that had he lived, would’ve united them in time, invisibly resting between them.

Then there would’ve been no caretakers, no power spikes, no Uncle Siri flying visits.

No heart-rending grief, no soul-sapping loneliness, no mind-clouding rage.

Rather, it would’ve been little hands learning to stir a cauldron, large rough hands straightening school robes at Madam Malkin’s, and glowing grey eyes watching them both with love and pride.
Severus hated Voldemort for stealing that from him, more than he ever hated James Potter for cursing his mate or Sirius Black for abandoning Regulus when he needed him most.

He could’ve had more children, and Regulus would’ve reconciled with his older brother if the events surrounding Asterion’s miraculous survival was any indicator, but he would never could never have another Regulus.

Just as Asterion would never have another mother or get back the time he lost with his father.

It was all just… gone.

Impossible to regain.

And what does one say in the face of that?

Neither knew.

Thus, they simply sat in silence until a voice broke the quiet.

“You…” Severus’s voice broke, forcing the man to take a sip of the ice cold tea sitting untouched on the table at this elbow. “You mentioned having the Rites at Castle Black.”

“Yes.” Asterion looked up from watching his hands. “The plaque was carved and set years ago. The pyre has been stacked and upkept. We merely awaited word of his body being found. It was all done and set long before I understood either’s purpose. Your grandparents saw to it under direction from the Black portraits in the Castle.”

“Good.” Tears choked the normally silken voice. “That’s good.”

Uneasy to an extreme, Asterion reached out a trembling hand and smoothed a hair that was out of place back behind an ear.

“He really was beautiful,” Asterion mused thinking about the portrait of his mother not quite used to applying definitions of beauty to people yet. Understandable as the only “people” he’d spent time around during his formative years were either elderly or portraits. “Wasn’t he?”

“Yes,” Severus agreed, tears spiking his eyes as he compared the two: his lost lover and his son. “He truly was. Thank Merlin you got your looks from him.” He chuckled harshly.

Asterion cocked his head to one side as he studied each of them, his late mother and his living father. “I don’t know.” He said after several long appraising minutes. “Great-grandfather used to say that I got quite a bit of my bones from you and then Dad smoothed them out. I think he was right.”

Severus scoffed. Great-grandfather indeed. How would a man that never met him have any idea of his appearance?

“He was beautiful.” Severus brought the subject back to the one at hand. “In many, many ways. And stubborn.” He smiled wistfully, remembering many of their rows. “And had a temper like an angry hornet. But he was mine.” He finished quietly, almost to himself. “And I was his.”

His son studied him once more before making perhaps the shrewdest observation he’d made since crashing through the wards.

“No was about it.” He said abruptly. “You still are his. And you always will be.”
His father’s gaze cut to him immediately at that, eyes narrowed and cautious. That was a very definitive statement from someone who at the marrow of the matter, barely knew him or the situation.

Asterion snorted derisively at the look.

“Oh, don’t give me that.” He said with all the scathing wit he’d inherited from the man and had honed by his years among the dead-and-painted in Castle Black and by the sole living Black he’d ever met. “You were devastated when I arrived, still are. You’re from all accounts a miserable, unpleasant git of a professor and have been for a decade. And yet at one point in your youth you convinced an extremely sought-after rare male submissive Dovah to dismiss all other contenders for his hand and give himself only to you. My uncle had many things to say about you, Severus Snape. Being disloyal was never mentioned, even in his most foul of tempers. You’ll be Regulus Black’s, mind body heart and soul, until the day you die. Of that,” he finished with a final, firm slash of his hand. “I have no doubt at all.”

Severus gave a quirk of his lips as his only concession to the point.

Perhaps his son had a better read on him that he’d thought.

…
The news was all over the school long before the owls bearing the *Daily Prophet* arrived.

Professor Flitwick had called student after student into his office in the late hours of the night to give them the news of their fathers being arrested – and in some cases both parents – as the captured Death Eaters were interrogated and held as had been demanded – if phrased as a suggestion – by the mysterious Lord Black-Prince.

Making this officially the worst June in Draco’s memory, he decided as he hid away from the gossip and derisive whispers over his father’s fall – and Dumbledore’s and Potter’s triumphant return to the school – in the Restricted Section of the library.

He knew it was only a matter of time until his pass was revoked, and given what had happened on his birthday two weeks before, it was time he desperately needed now that his trip home to his mother was rapidly approaching.

This June was terrible for reasons beyond his father’s arrest, reasons that began on his birthday when he woke up in his bed in his solo Prefect’s room in the Slytherin dorms, to the sight of having gained scales, claws, fangs, and *fucking wings*.

He’d had a creature inheritance, though what creature he still wasn’t sure, other than one of the idiomatically called dragon-kin species, all varieties of humanoid dragons.

However, some of those species were kill-on-sight in Britain, some were considered benign, and others were restricted Dark creatures, making figuring out which species Draco could now claim of vital importance.

Especially since he knew neither of his parents were creatures.

One thing he did know was that his inheritance came from his mother’s side, the Malfoys only having claim to Veela blood, as had often been rumored due to their strong genetic light blond hair and light eyes, which in Draco’s case were a silvery-blue with the infusion of Black characteristics from his mother, who herself took after her blonde-haired and blue-eyed mother Druella Rosier.

Finally locating the shelf containing the older – and more complete – creature compendiums, Draco pulled down the one bound in what looked like dragonhide with old English lettering spelling out “Dragon-Kyned” on the cover.

It was thick, with plentiful information on each species at the time of writing.

Quickly taking out a parchment and Dictoquill, Draco began searching for which species he might be, starting with the preface.

*Dragon-Kyned are many and diverse species,* the book began, Draco drinking up the words eagerly.

*They are not diseased or made, only born. Some are as different from one another as the forest from the desert, or as similar that the only differences lay in the smallest of details. However, all have some sort of wings and scales. That is where generalizations end and the details come into*
Draco scanned the list of major attributes, able to discard several immediately as he didn’t possess a tail like the Japanese Ryuu “demons” and several other similar species, and his creature “features” weren’t always on show like fae-wyverns and the others under that category. Which left him with the third section of dragon-kin.

Of the most efficient at hiding their natures – and some of the most dangerous and deadly of creatures – are the third category of Dragon-Kynde classification. These are those who can fade into other societies, magical or mundane, even those of other creatures. They are cunning, secretive, and dangerous by nature. They are the Chameleo, the Drackens, the Dreki, and the Dovahim.

He felt himself relax a bit, since as far as he was aware, only two of the four were kill-on-sight, thought the other two are restricted. It was bad. But not as bad as it could be.

Interestingly, both the Dreki and the Dovahim are thought to share similar ancestry, hailing from the far-northern climes such as Iceland, Greenland, and Scandinavia, while the Chameleo and Drackens are warm-climate creatures, preferring warm or at least temperate climates, while their northern cousins can live anywhere – though prefer areas with a mixture of seasons, and can withstand extremes of cold than can sicken their warmer cousins.

Little details such as climate preference are key to knowing which species one is dealing with, among them are issues of their dragon characteristics and human features.

Chameleo are the smallest of the four species, with submissives rarely being over five-feet in height and dominants not more than five and a half feet...

At that Draco gave a chuckle thinking of his growth spurt that had him easily topping six feet tall, and skipping down to the next entry. He definitely wasn’t a Chameleo. Not with his stature.

Next are the Dreki, whose most defining characteristic is their horns...


Drackens and Dovahim are at first glance the most similar. However, in terms of culture and biology they have some key differences. Both species have both dominant and submissive determinations regulating their mating practices, which aren’t revealed until their inheritance, both of which inherit at sixteen. However, while Drackens can only be scented at birth, to a discerning Dovah (usually an older Dovah with years of experience), another’s status as Dovah and their determination can be scented out within the year preceding their inheritance. Dovahim have a third determination, which isn’t revealed until mating. Among dominants who live in a group setting, e.g. a submissive requiring more than one mate, the Alpha dominant will emerge at which point he or she will grow horns as both a symbol of their status and as a warning to other Dovahim. Alpha horns grow during the first heat period following the gaining of Alpha status. Curiously, some dominants who do not live in a group setting have also been recorded to grow Alpha horns, though it is currently unknown what causes the phenomenon.

Another key difference between Dracken and Dovah, is their wings, as while submissives in both species have a smaller wingspan than dominants, their coloring is very different.

Drackens have a sharp divide in wing color that Dovah do not possess, with unmated submissives having strictly white wings with dominants having colorful wings until after mating where they will take on scales in the same color as their mate or mates wing scales.
Dovahim, on the other hand, have a smaller difference between submissive and dominant when it comes to their wing colors. Dominant Dovahim as a rule have dark or boldly colored wings with jewel-like scales, while submissives have light or pastel colored wings with lighter-jeweled scales.

In both species, submissives tend to have petite fangs in comparison to the larger dominant fangs, though they can be a match in claw length.

It is often said that while a dominant Dracken or Dovah is dangerous, a submissive is deadly, and their claws bear that out, submissives often containing secretions that can have a variety of effects on their claws.

There are strong differences between the social structures of the two species. While the Drackens have an insular species-centric outlook and are governed mainly by the Dracken Counsel of Elders, the Dovahim are highly secretive, shunning all social gatherings of their species outside of ritualized mate hunts, and blending into society wherever they find themselves. The only centralized group of Dovahim is the Mentor Body, based it is rumored in Sweden where they are without restrictions levied by stricter magical governments. The Dovahim mentors serve to do just that: mentor younger Dovahim. Dovahim are expected to follow the laws of whatever society they belong to, there is no judiciary group over them, with the exception of outbursts of violence and even death occurring during a mate hunt, which is excused according to their code. Drackens on the other hand, are known to be very clannish and social, rumored to have secret gatherings of their species wherever there is a large concentration of their kind, especially in countries where they are welcomed instead of considered dangerous animals such as South Africa and Australia.

Finding a mate is considered of the utmost importance to unmated members of both species. Indeed, it could be said that other than providing advice to younger Dovahim, the main purpose of a Dovah mentor is to facilitate their mate hunts. Dracken dominants are said to scent out and mate any submissive they are able to find.

Humming a little, and a bit confused by the two closely-related species as the book went on to describe dominants being taller and more muscular than submissives and so on, Draco looked around and let out his claws, pressing down on the nail bed the way he would milk a snake for venom, nodding his head once when nothing came out, and putting his claws away. Whatever he was, Dracken or Dovah, he was a dominant. He supposed the easy way to tell would be to locate one of either species and have them tell him…since he didn’t know what a Dracken or Dovah smelled like to categorize himself.

That would be a problem for another day, he decided, knowing that he could probably brew a potion at home that would solve the problem of which species he was.

Either way, he dictated the information in the book to his quill, checking the publication date then giving a laugh when he saw the lettering for 1587 on the inside cover, putting everything away and hurried back to his room, thankful that the castle was still mostly quiet.

At least now he had half an answer, even if it wasn’t the full one he’d been looking for.

As the time for their trip to take Regulus’s body to its rightful place approached, Albus rejoined the two men keeping watch over their lost family member, which had been retrieved on suggestion by Albus by Asterion’s house elves, Asterion knowing the location of his mother’s body from Regulus’s portrait, and taken care of with love and ritual by Regulus’s husband and son.
Asterion had given his elves a few other orders as well, mostly regarding Grimmauld Place, since if he knew his uncle, Sirius would insist on Harry living with him now that Voldemort was dead.

And since his father was coming back to Castle Black with Asterion, hosting Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and Harry Potter in the same location – no matter how massive – just seemed like a very bad idea.

After observing them for a second, taking in the weary and wary expressions both were sporting, the older wizard ruthlessly fought down the urge to meddle. If ever there was a pair of stubborn mules that were going to need meddling to find their way into a familial relationship, it would be these two. However, knowing Severus as well as he does and as long as he has and also realizing that his son was cut from the same cloth, he resisted his urges, knowing that any attempt to interfere no matter how well-meant would not be welcomed and would likely serve to drive them further apart rather than together.

“I have notified the Dovahim and requested Mentor Christianson, Tafari, or Roberts to help facilitate your gatherings, I’m acquainted with all of them and believe they should be helpful.” Albus spoke directly to young Asterion. Severus wouldn’t want his comfort, not now and likely not ever. Better to focus on the matters at hand. “Once they respond I’ll owl you the information on when and where you will meet with the mentor selected in order to set up your mate hunt if you choose a traditional Dovah mating or to provide introductions if you prefer a more modern courtship.”

They were much more…cautious for one, disdaining large gatherings except for the purpose of gaining a mate, finding the large social events their cousins participate in too large of a security risk, preferring to simply blend into the crowd in the human or wizarding world, to the point that in recent years many young Dovahim had been encouraged to eschew a mate hunt and simply be introduced to a series of unmated dominants vetted by either a mentor or their parents.

Albus was betting on independent Asterion going with a mate hunt, and needing more than one hunt to gain his needed mates.

New blood will always strengthen old lines, Severus was proof of that, but to do so in such a huge fashion was not the norm at all. Especially not as often as had occurred within less than a hundred years. Between Albus himself, the now deceased Tom, Severus, Harry and now Asterion, there had been more strongly-empowered wizards in recent memory than in many years before, perhaps not since the time of the founders.

The Lord Black Prince was a different kind of powerful than the rest of them however, one that desperately needed grounding from the dangerous and artificial infusion of magic he’s undergone since his incubation if Albus understood the situation correctly.

Asterion always would’ve been powerful. Taking the powerful if unstable Black lines and wedding it to the ancient Prince house with a new infusion of blood only one generation above him, Asterion was destined to be great. He wasn’t meant to house the augmented power he did. If it wasn’t for some of the power being leeched off into the Black estate where he lived and by his Dovah inheritance, Dumbledore honestly believed that the power would’ve torn him asunder before his second birthday.

“What did you tell them?” Severus asked, his voice low and gravelly from the long day and night of watching and sporadic conversation. The Mentor Body wasn’t a governance council like the Dracken Counsel, but more of an advisory group that watched over the Dovahim, playing mentor for the others of their species. It was also headquartered in Sweden, as the northern climes were perfectly amenable for Dovahim and they were welcomed openly.
“That your deceased mate birthed and bore young Asterion while in hiding.” Albus smoothed one hand down his beard. “And swore all who knew of his existence to secrecy. That Asterion wasn’t aware of the Dovah ways and had no idea of who or how to contact anyone with his only contact with the outside world being his formerly-fugitive uncle. With your discovery of Regulus’s body you discovered the pregnancy and your son in short order thereafter, hidden on the Black’s oldest and best warded estate.”

All of which was true…well true-ish.

“I’ve also informed them of Asterion’s status as an unmated submissive but that due to your new found relationship and the current political unrest you both request a delay of his meetings to get to know one another.” Which was entirely true. “The general consensus is that having waited so long to mate, another span of weeks shouldn’t hurt anything.” Except for increasing Asterion’s pheromone levels…but that was a worry to face in several weeks.

Quickly fashioning a one-way portkey, Albus handed it over to the younger man.

“It will take you safely through the wards, you simply need to infuse it with the coordinates for where you would like the two – three – of you to land.”

“Thank you.” Asterion said with a small nod. He hadn’t been entirely sure how they were going to bring his mother home. He knew the theory behind portkeys but had never made one himself.

“You’ve been very helpful.”

Albus nearly beamed he was so pleased at the small sign of civility from the normally closed-off young Dovah.

“Yes, Albus.” Severus nodded as well as Asterion finished with the portkey – a horseshoe of all things – and placed it on his mother’s still chest before resting his hand firmly on one side of the U-shaped iron. The Potions Master set his own hand carefully on the other half of the metal, mentally comparing the two body parts and finding them almost identical if it wasn’t for the stains and wear showing on his own. “Thank you.”

“It was no problem at all, my boys. Not at all.” With a firm nod, he bid them adieu before activating the portkey with a simple: “familiae domum” family home.

…

“Welcome to the ancestral Black estate.” Asterion said with simple gravity as his father landed beside him, somehow having transferred his Dad’s body into his arms as they came out on the other side of the portkey. He’d spelled it following the Headmaster’s instructions to let them down on the far back vista overlooking Loch Ness.

Clear on the opposite end of the estate from the Castle, this flat plateau of land was speckled with slabs of various stone markers, each with a different name and date though some had pairs of names. Some of the markers were so old that even being within the estate wards couldn’t prevent them from being worn down to the point they were illegible. Others were saturated with magic so that no measure of time would touch them, keeping them as sharp and glossy as they were the day they were erected.

The pyre stood before one of the latter examples of a marker, placed on the far end of the plateau with the land cleared in a circle spiraling out a good twenty feet in every direction.

At his son’s direction, Severus laid down Regulus on the precisely stacked wood, taking one last
moment to study his resting face before moving back to stand beside the product of their love and
others’ training.

Without a word or wand, Asterion set the pyre aflame, speaking almost to himself as he watched the
fire seem to dance around his Dad’s corpse on the cold January morning in the Highlands.

“This is a special place.” He said, keeping his eyes fixed on the Rite. “For only the best and most
loved of the Black family. It’s been generations since anyone was interred here and it may very well
be generations again until the next. He’ll be in good company here.”

“Who,” Severus’s voice broke, almost not wanting to know the answer. “Who chose this place for
him?”

It was the perfect place for his lover to rest in peace. The hills all around were lush with heather and
other wildflowers in the summer sun and the view of the famous Loch was breathtaking. To say
nothing of – according to their son – the hallowed company he would be among here.

Only the most beloved…

Yes, that was his Regulus indeed.

By more than himself it would seem.

“I did.” Silver-speckled black eyes clashed with pure black as the son looked at the father. “Once I
was old enough to understand what happened to him and to know of this place. I moved the pyre
Great-Grandfather built and Uncle Siri helped me apparate that heavy slab of stone then I recarved
the inscription.”

Severus nodded. While his Grandfather likely only laid the pyre out of a sense of duty, Sirius for all
his faults loved Reg to a fault. Loved him so much it nearly drove him mad when he appeared to
date and then become engaged by a boy he considered his enemy. The mutt would’ve helped
Asterion prepare this place.

“Recently then.” He observed.

“Two and a half years ago.” Asterion twisted his hands, uncomfortable with the inner sensations this
scene was producing in him. Not in public, not in public, not in public. He chanted to himself. It
was one of two mantras he’d had drilled into him by his caretaker. Not in public and A Black does
not… “On a visit following his escape.”

“You didn’t report him?” Severus eyed the lean figure of his son from the corner of his eye as the
magically-fueled flames began to die down. They’d made short work of the pyre as they were
designed to do, quickly returning ashes to ashes as the remains were absorbed by the ritually
prepared ground of the funeral site.

Asterion gave him a sardonic look, moving to cast the final spells over his Dad’s remains. It was up
to him to do this as both the Lord Black and therefor Master of these lands but also as the deceased’s
closest living relative. A child of age even trumps a mate or spouse.

Once finished with the final spells, he waited for his father to say a goodbye – not his last he was
certain, the former spy was more than capable of finding this place again – before answering.

“To whom would we have?” Asterion asked drily. “There was no way for us to communicate with
the outside world except through the house elves and the news we received was often out-of-date
and via house elf rumors. Besides that,” Asterion placed one slim hand on his father’s arm in order
to side-along him to the main Castle. “Why would I? He’s my Uncle and a Black. He’s welcome on these lands.”

For once, Severus had nothing further to say on the subject of Sirius Black as he was summarily apparated by who he was quickly coming to realize was nothing like what he thought a child of his would turn out to be.

…

Touching down outside of the gates of Castle Black – more out of a desire to walk for a moment after the tension-filled last twenty-four hours than any real need – Asterion quickly released his father’s arm and with a flick of his hand opened the towering black gates and began the quarter-mile jaunt up to the castle proper.

Built long before Hogwarts and upkept with a diligence that other old houses would envy, Castle Black towered high into the skyline, hidden from muggle and magical peoples alike beneath the ancient wards, with high towers separating each of the two wings from the main house that canted out from the body of the massive structure at a hundred-and-twenty degree angle. Faced entirely of black granite with the occasional flaw in the inky background, it was as if the builders took a chunk out of the night sky and made a king’s abode from it. Tall windows, some of stained glass worked to illustrate various constellations, broke up the monotony of stone and kept it from seeming to swallow the strong summer-morning sunlight.

It was unlike anything Severus had ever seen before, completely eclipsing the magnificence of Malfoy Manor and with an almost stern feeling to it that Hogwarts has never had.

Peering around him at the grounds once he could remove his gaze from the ancestral Black home, he saw an excellent mix of manicured greens, cultivated gardens both flower, kitchen, herbal, and magical, and towering trees of many kinds all protected by warded climate spells so strong he could almost see the magic of them. There were outbuildings off in the distance, some abutting fields likely for horses or pterrippi, and the glint of glass hothouses.

Everything an estate could need to be completely self-sustaining.

Which was good considering it’d had to be for the last eighteen years or so through Asterion’s incubation, birth, and life thus far. It was still unclear just how long the Castle had sat empty before Regulus commandeered it to house and hide their unborn child.

Under his father’s ever-watchful eyes, Asterion placed one hand on the elegantly carved ebony doors then chanted a short spell-couplet to unlock them. Opening one, he stood back waving him in and keying him to the wards to keep them from ejecting his father like so much rubbish.

“Welcome to Castle Black.” Closely repeating the welcome from earlier, and for good reason as the ancient wards could still be touchy, Asterion felt himself begin to waver after the trials of the previous night and the start to this day. Walking in after him and ignoring the goggling eyes that were taking in the entrance hall – a smooth honey-cream paneled room with a ceiling three-stories high – and its stark contrast to the exterior of the place, Asterion called for his head housekeeping elf.

Not the head elf or the head grounds elf or the head cooking elf or the head laundry elf, he thought wearily to himself of the many, many elves the estate required. But the head housekeeping elf.

“Abby.” He spoke softly, his summons answered at once with a soft “pop”.

“Lord Master Asterion.” The primly-uniformed female elf of indeterminate ears greeted the Black
Lord. “And guest. How can Abby be helping?”

“And prepare a room at once for my father.” He ordered but not harshly. Many of the elves were his friends before his caretaker caught wind of it and tried to put a sharp halt to it, not that either him or they actually listened to the woman when it came to anything but his education. “And bring him whatever he needs.”

The elf nodded before popping away.

“I’m tired.” He said bluntly to his sire. “I’m certain you are as well since neither of us really slept. Abby will send another elf here shortly to show you to your room or rooms. When you wake call for an elf and they will bring you to me.”

Without another word, Asterion did his own version of “popping” out. It did pay to be the Master of the estate after all. Being able to apparate within the wards was one of the smaller privileges he enjoyed while on the grounds.

Turning as he heard another pop, Severus followed the elf that appeared, swallowing any harsh words. It wouldn’t do to alienate his son or his son’s staff a bare day after meeting him. He rolled his eyes. Knowing both of their temperaments, there would be plenty of time for that.

…

After leaving his father – his father – in the entry hall, Asterion popped right into his private suite which made up the entire top floor of the main wing, and collapsed into his favorite overstuffed-upholstered chair in this private sitting room adjoining his bedroom.

The suite was composed of several over-sized rooms which together took up as much space as some people’s entire homes. There were half-a-dozen walk-in closets, two bathrooms – one slightly more opulent than the other – each with an attached dressing room, his-and-hers sitting rooms, a private study filled with the most rare and expensive of their notorious library, and of course the Master bedroom. It was a study in old-world opulence meeting creature comfort. Creature being the operative word, as many times over the centuries has the Head of the House of Black been a Dovah or other inherited creature, though Asterion made the first Head who was also a male submissive.

It was another highlight for the family grimoire among many other things Asterion would become infamous for in the family histories, not the least of which was his very existence.

Lifting his head from where it had fallen back against the plush headrest of the chair, he stared up at the portrait that had replaced the Black Coat-of-Arms that once hung above the fireplace in this room.

There, forever illuminated in pigment and oil, sat Regulus Black.

“He’s here.” He said at last, his voice exhausted as he met the painted gaze of his Dad. Who, for all that he was a painting, did his best to raise his son though he was never able to hold him nor kiss him goodnight. That never stopped him from singing him to sleep nor giving him advice or telling him a story, his brother joining him in his endeavors after escaping Azkaban. “My father’s come to Castle Black.”

Regulus he stared down at his son. Turning his full attention to his beloved boy, the portrait asked one of the more pertinent questions of the day, though not the one buzzing at his painted consciousness. “How are you doing?”

Asterion snorted.
“Siri finally told him.” Asterion sighed. “Right in the middle of a battle. In the last day-plus I’ve had to deal with your vigil and interment in addition to meeting my father for the first time and being ousted as a Dovah submissive to him and Headmaster Dumbledore, all after helping kill Voldemort and his horcruxes. I’m fan-fucking-tastic.”

“What’ve I said about you repressing?” His said disapprovingly over the verbal-vomit. In the case of Asterion it would do him more good to allow himself to feel and react emotionally in public instead of keeping up that stoic Pureblood mask that bitch drilled into him. One of these days he’s going to repress so much that a little venting or dueling isn’t going to do it anymore and his son is going to blow like Vesuvius. It’s only a matter of time. The only question is how many bystanders he’s going to take down with him.

With his power ‘holding it in’ is possibly the worst thing he could do.

And yet it was all he knew how to be and act, even in private.

It was only with him, a painting, and sometimes Sirius in his personal rooms that’re warded tighter than Gringotts that he ever lets go.

Asterion Severus Black Prince was a firebomb spell on a short fuse. All it would take was the smallest of sparks to set him off.

Which made Regulus Black more than a little leery over how his son wanted to conduct his mateship hunt.

“That’s it’s going to kill me one day.” Asterion said flippantly, then let his head fall back with a thunk. “Not much else choice, is there? Not with what’s gone on.”

“You always have a choice, dear one.” Regulus broke in before his son could devolve into one of his moods. It scared him sometimes how much like Sev their son was. “Even when it doesn’t seem like it.”

“I know, Dad.” He sighed, eyes falling closed for a moment before he sat back up. “I’ll move your painting into the family room in the morning or whenever I wake up.” He flushed, embarrassed. “I just want one more night before I have to share you.”

...

“…verus. Severus.”

The whispers woke him from a dream or perhaps a nightmare. He’d finally found out what happened to his beloved mate and then discovered the same mate’s betrayal – keeping their child from him. Keeping his Asterion hidden and nearly driving the boy mad in the process. It had to be a dream, a figment. His Regulus never would’ve done such a thing.

Not his Reg.

“Severus!”

At the shout in that voice, the dour potions master sprang forward, sitting up in a rush and staring wildly around the room as it all came back with his new surroundings.

It wasn’t a dream.

He did find his Reg.
His Reg did conceal his pregnancy and hide their son.

He had been betrayed by (before discovering Asterion) the one good thing in his otherwise miserable life.

His perfect mate.

Not so perfect after all, allowing his grief, desperation, and paranoia to drive him to extremes he didn’t think his unspoiled love was capable of.

It was a harsh blow to the shine Severus has carried in his heart and soul of his beloved, but at the same time, if Regulus hadn’t taken the steps he had, Severus might very well be truly alone now, with no son to give him purpose once more.

A son that would definitely need guidance.

Severus thought that he was introverted and awkward in company. He couldn’t even imagine the anxiety the Death Eater trials, Diagon Alley, or Asterion’s mate hunt were going to cause the sheltered boy. For once, he had to give the Headmaster credit. Spending time with Draco and the mutts and Potter, no matter how immature and irritating would be good practice for acclimating him to new experiences.

Hopefully he won’t have or develop any of the phobias surrounding people or crowds as it would make his duties as a Lord excruciating in the extreme.

And the list of things to do to help his son kept getting progressively longer the more he focused on the situation at hand and not the one from eighteen years in the past.

“Severus.” The voice was getting testy at his delay.

Wait.

He knew that voice.

Turning his head with an audible “Crack!” towards the far wall, the stoic man stared into the painted face of his lost love. A painted face that most definitely wasn’t occupying that particular landscape painting when the elf had shown him his rooms last evening. Climbing to his feet he moved swiftly to the scene, ignoring his state of undress, and lifted a shaking hand to place it palm-to-palm with the nearly life-sized portrait.

“Regulus.” He breathed, mist filling his eyes. “My Regulus.”

The painted man smiled softly. He’d been watching his lost lover for hours, ever since the elves took his frame down to the family room in the main family wing of the castle rather than being secluded in the Master’s Tower. No one and nothing went to-and-from that portion of the castle without permission barring the house elves. Not even the paintings.

Besides the “isolation” portrait gallery where the portraits that were in disgrace or unbearably unpleasant were kept, it was the only part of the castle where the paintings couldn’t come and go at will. When he was preparing the castle for his son, he’d had his and Siri’s paintings placed in Asterion’s rooms and the isolation gallery was searched and paintings moved according to the family’s now more neutral leanings. Bellatrix was one such portrait that was moved, swapped with Siri’s in the disgraced portion of the gallery, though at the time neither portrait was active, which if the elves were right, Bellatrix’s portrait now was.
As much as he’d yearned to go see his Sev the moment he was informed of his mate’s presence, he simply couldn’t leave until the elves relocated his main frame.

“Severus,” Regulus smiled down from his two-dimensional world, knowing that he was a mere echo of the submissive that this wonderful man had loved so ardently. “My Severus.”

Severus simply sighed, shaking his head as he blinked to clear his eyes. “No.” He admitted though it pained him. “Not yours. No matter how much I wish it was different, you’re not truly my Regulus.”

“No,” the portrait shrugged. “I’m not. Though I am a copy and know what he knew, feel as he felt, I’m not truly your mate, nor am I truly Asterion’s Dad and mother. But I’ve done the best I can to be both, though it would never be enough.”

“And yet,” Severus stared up into those painted grey-silver eyes. “Somehow seeing you, painting or not, is the greatest comfort I’ve had in eighteen years.”

Regulus smiled again, that same quicksilver grin he shared with his brother and son.

“A comfort and a memory is all we’re made to be.” He said with a nod before turning to the subject at hand. “But I woke you for a reason, Sev. And it has nothing to do with us catching up, we’ll have plenty of time for that when you and our son have retired each night.”

The quiet man scrubbed his potion-stained hands over his face. “You’ve been a comfort to him, helped raise him.”

“I have.”

“Tell me how to help him.” Severus stared up at the now-somber gaze of the painting. “Tell me how to know and help my son.”

…

Asterion sat in his “public” study in the main part of the castle. A massive complex, the main or center segment of the structure housed the more public rooms and common areas.

Below ground were an array of tunnels and subterranean rooms including cold storage for food stuffs, liquors, and potions ingredients; a potions lab, holding cells for prisoners, and the top sub-basement level which housed the house elves and the house elf kitchens the entire floor being warded to prevent anyone or anything but house elves from accessing it. It was a necessary precaution when dealing with a family known for creature blood, otherwise one temper tantrum would decimate the needed serving staff that kept the massive complex running and viable. From their floor the elves could send food, clean messes, and otherwise take care of their home and people without having to leave the safety of the wards if necessary.

The first level of the main building was devoted entirely to a massive receiving hall, several cloak rooms and half-baths for freshening up, and a ladies’ waiting parlor. One level up the ornate stairs took guests to the first truly public floor which contained an again, massive, ballroom the ceiling of which soared for two stories before ending in a stained glass dome; also on that floor was another selection of half-baths, a ladies’ retiring room, gentlemen’s smoking room, and a dining room suited for a buffet-style arrangement during a ball. The third and final of the “public” rooms were a mixture. It had a music room, billiards/cards room, another selection of half-baths, a formal parlor for receiving guests, a gallery containing a selection of both muggle and magical art, a semi-formal parlor and salon, two offices one of which Asterion was currently occupying for dealing with outside
business affairs, and a smaller formal dining room for dinner parties.

Of course “smaller” is subjective as in this case the table and room was capable of expanding to comfortably serve a hundred guests, though still smaller than the thousand or more the ballroom and large dining room one floor down could contain.

The fourth level was a transition level, where one would find still innocuous rooms and items if a guest happened to get lost but still part of the “family” area of the main castle proper.

Here was the home of the infamous Black Library as well as the Black Art and Antiquities collections. Though anything on the shady-side of legal was secreted away one floor up in the private collections of books, scrolls, art, and artefacts. The library took up the entirety of one side of the castle proper from the fourth floor up to the seventh and final floor with the subject matter getting more and more restricted and the security levels getting higher the further up one explored. In addition to these were a study, a fully-equipped bathroom, and a set of two classrooms used for educating the Black family for generations both before, during, and after Hogwarts.

Then came the “family” levels five, six, and seven. Beyond the library extension on each level was the walkway on the fifth level for access to the other wings of the castle, each of which was self-contained with kitchens, bathrooms, bedrooms, a smaller library and study, and rooms that could be converted for the pursuit of hobbies or business while the Master’s Tower was only accessible from the seventh floor via a magical walkway that only appeared for the Master of Castle Black or keyed in guests. Floor five of the main edifice was home to strictly the collections with walkways to the wings.

On floor six was where comfort and luxury was to be had with various living rooms, family rooms, conversation rooms, studies, and playrooms for various ages all bedecked with cushioned flooring, soft fabrics, and wonderful toys for child and adult.

The seventh floor was where all the studios were housed. Fencing, dancing, dueling, even a magically buffered shooting gallery. If there was a sport either magical or muggle, you could find a place on the seventh floor to indulge and train it. Except for those requiring brooms.

That was what the massive grounds were for.

Finally atop the last floor before the storage attics and roof was the observatory.

Day or night, summer or winter, one could study the stars on the seventh floor of Castle Black.

It *was* Castle Black after all. The stars almost seemed to be in their very blood.

Originally there was only the main building and then the Master’s Tower with the bedrooms on the sixth and seventh floors being converted to other uses after the twin wings that flanked the main section were built within the first century of construction. Though the Master’s Tower remains the home of the main Black family being only slightly smaller than the main building. The Master’s Suite was only the top three floors with a massive bed (Blacks are known for Dovahim), and the needed comforts for many people possibly living in a harem situation.

Depending on the Lord, the Master’s Suite could be broken up into individual rooms for various mates, or one large bedroom with doors leading to private closets, studies, and sitting rooms. The Master Bath can also be either one large room with a smallish-pool sized bathtub, three showers of varying size, half-a-dozen sinks and several enclosed toilets for privacy; or be broken down into one larger and three smaller bathrooms. There were also three nurseries set up for various aged small children from infancy to toddlerhood as no Dovah submissive would allow their children to be
further away than a door or two down until they were older.

One down from the top floor of the Suite were what could be used as mate or consort rooms but when rooming together became activity rooms for games or living rooms for private family time among the spouses or mates, or as bedrooms for small children between toddlerhood and school-aged who still needed to be close to their parents. It could also be converted into a Lady’s Suite in the case of a political or arranged marriage. The lowest floor of the Master Suite was the family gallery, the private offices and library.

Then came the family rooms of the Tower, with the next two lower floors split into suites that could be altered depending on the age, number, and maturity of the children.

The second lowest floor of the Tower was a fully equipped kitchen and dining area with another set of classrooms and a study-area while the first floor of the Tower contained the Heir suites, which were set aside (and as far as possible from the parental suite without having to leave the Tower, though some Heirs do end up rooming in one of the “public” or “guest” wings) for any Heirs that had either married but didn’t yet have several children or who were of age.

In the case of Heirs having large families of their own, often the Lord would give them one of the two wings or allow them to choose a separate property if they so desired.

All of which were thoughts that were crowding and filling Asterion’s mind as he stared at the letter delivered by one of Dumbledore’s owls.

It was a reply from the Mentors, telling him (Dumbledore and through forwarding now Asterion) that Mentors Tafari and Roberts had been assigned to help the newly discovered Dovah (Asterion) and letting him know that his meeting with them was set for Mentor Tafari’s home in six days, at one in the afternoon. His father could accompany him if so desired.

Seeing the letter brought to his mind that soon he wouldn’t be alone in this sprawling place of stone and wood any longer. Adjustments would need to be made. Perhaps the rooms reconfigured as had been done before.

Perhaps it was naïve of him or unrealistic but he hoped for a family, not just a mating of random strangers.

Hopefully it would work out that all the mates he selected would be okay with one another. Would even grow to enjoy and care for each other. His inner Dovah told him it was possible. If they chose well and wisely, it could happen.

But it wasn’t guaranteed.

He might very well have to break up his large, comfortable rooms that have been his for…forever.

Might have to force the castle to move walls and windows and doors when it’s been in one configuration and happy with that configuration for almost two decades.

Castle Black wasn’t just a building.

It was an ancient home of powerful and arcane magics, predating Hogwarts by more than three centuries. The Castle was as much alive and feeling as that great building was, though less…vague. With so many different people coming and going and many different Headmasters and Mistresses, Hogwarts while welcoming all, didn’t have a distinct identity.

Castle Black surely did.
And while not dangerous. No, not in anyway. It would protect the Blacks and especially the Lord and his family with a ferocity unseen before. It was after all in many ways the original Black.

As if knowing what was on his mind, the air around him warmed a few degrees, as if the Castle was giving him a hug and soothing his mind. Telling him not to worry so. It was something that he’d taken more than a few punishments for, his affinity with the castle. Or as Figg said, “his flights of unreasonable fancy unbecoming a young Lord and Heir.”

The Castle never liked Figg.

Thank Merlin neither of them had to deal with her anymore.

He and Uncle Siri saw to that.

So.

In less than a week he’d have to meet his first Dovah beyond his Father.

It should be interesting to see what they make of him.

...

Lunch, as between Severus’s conversation with Regulus’s painting and Asterion’s beginning replies to the owls that had flooded in with the breaking of the wards – most notably from Gringotts and the Ministry giving him appointments to claim his Lordships, vaults, seats, ect. – it was noon before either ventured from their rooms, was not nearly as painful as both feared.

Severus simply brought up a subject both were interested in: Regulus.

“Having his portrait here was…” Asterion trailed off, setting down his cutlery at the end of the meal. They’d already talked of Severus’s memories of the deceased Dovah, including many things that Regulus’s portrait didn’t know or had forgotten because they weren’t as striking to him or as memorable from his perspective as they were from his mate’s. Although they avoided the subject of the Dark Lord that both his parents had served at much too high a cost. “Everything.” He decided at last. “Once Grandpere and Grandmere died, all I had was his portrait. Figg was here but she was more for education than emotions. And the other portraits are all of older generations. Dad was the closest thing I had to a friend when Uncle Siri was in prison.”

Severus restrained himself from commenting on the mutt’s presence in his child’s life. At this point from what Regulus was able to tell him of Asterion’s growing years, he was grateful to that damned creature for being there for Asterion, when he could.

Better a mutt and a painting than nothing and no one.

“Regulus told me that some of the other portraits helped with your education and tutelage as well.” He commented, drifting away from the possibly-inflammatory topics of Figg and Black.

“Yes,” Asterion gave him that infectious Black grin. “The Blacks have had several persons of renown either born or married into the family and as this is the main estate, all of them have portraits here. Only members of certain lines who have chosen to live permanently outside of the main estate have portraits elsewhere, like Grandmother Walburga.”

“Phinneas wasn’t one of them was he?” Severus asked drily, referring to the former and loathed Headmaster Phinneas Nigellus Black. How that man became Headmaster of a school he’ll never know. He was definitely more political and bureaucratic than scholarly.
Asterion gave a little laugh with a shake of his head. He too had heard the stories of the erstwhile Headmaster and was glad he was one of the portraits contained in the isolation gallery up in the storage attics.

And that was exactly what he told his father.

“More along the lines of Asterion Black, my namesake, the master wardsmith.” Asterion explained. “He taught me how to funnel my power run-off into the estate wards until I can find my mates to ground me. And how to make and break wards as well. Then there was the triadic Dovahim Draconis Rigel Black, Alpha dominant, and his mate Lucia Seraphine Duchenne and his subordinate dominant mate Tertius Scamandar. They were a master Herbologist, a magiczoologist, and a holder of muggle forestry and agriculture education – Lucia was from the plantation period in the American Colonies. Together they taught me to use my magic to maintain and improve the estate lands and animals. There’s also potions masters, Aurors, Unspeakables, politicians, educators, warriors.” Asterion listed with a shrug. “You name it and the Blacks have probably had at least one in the family. And many of them were willing to share their knowledge with me in addition to the books and journals in the private family library.”

That sparked a thought in his father, who groaned in realization.

“You’ll have to take both your OWLs and NEWTs.” He pinched his nose between his fingers. “One more thing to add to the list.”

Asterion winced. “I was trying not to think about that.” Seeing the concern on his father’s face he hurried to reassure him. “Not that I think I’ll do poorly.” He gave a little chuckle at the thought. “I have had little else to do but study, take care of the estate, learn to be a Lord, dabble in a few hobbies, and prepare for when the spell broke. I’m more than prepared for the tests. I’m just not looking forward to hours on end taking tests. Especially since I’ll have to take both OWLs and NEWTs. It would make more sense just to have me take NEWTs and if I can pass them copy the grade over to the OWLs…”

Severus snorted at that. “It might make more sense.” He pointed out. “But this is the Ministry we’re talking about. They’re not about to start making sense at this late date. Let alone forgo a fee for administering a set of tests out-of-season since both tests have already been completely administered at Hogwarts by now.”

With a roll of his glittering eyes Asterion conceded the point.

“However.” Severus said with a smirk. “I’ll be more than happy to help you prepare for the various tests, though some are not my forte I can at least help drill you. That way our time together isn’t infringed on more than it will be already.”

“I can show you around the Castle after we’re finished.” Asterion offered, thinking of the labs in the basement levels. “You should approve of the Potions Lab and ingredient storages. And then there is the Black Libraries…”

“Quite.” Severus agreed with a pleased and greedy glimmer in his eyes. The Black Library was the stuff of legends. And Severus did love knowledge even if he didn’t approve of merely spewing facts like the Granger girl tended towards.

Asterion sighed, fishing out the letter forwarded from Dumbledore. “And on the subject of our time, we’ve received a response from the Mentors.”

Skimming the letter as they stood from the table, the food and dirty dishes vanishing with the efficacy
afforded to a legion of house elves, Severus hummed as Asterion led him to a magical lift hidden behind a panel.

“Efficiency.” The Lord explained. “Especially for elderly or infirm family members or guests. Certain floors require a magical key or item to access.” He pointed to various slots on the smooth honey-wood wall panel. Placing one hand above the panel he let his magical signature seep into the mechanism, making all the carved jewel or enamel buttons light up. There were many, covering each of the floors of the main building. Severus watched in fascination at the blending of muggle and magical. “Every wing, the main building, and the Master’s Tower each has a lift like this with various safety and security measures built in.”

Holding up the letter in his hand, the older Dovah commented: “This should be no problem. We can apparate to Diagon Alley and use the Floo at the Leaky Cauldron.” He studied his child for a moment as the lift began moving down. “It should be a good experience for you to be around a small amount of people for a short time. The pub shouldn’t be too busy and we do need to start familiarizing you with groups of people of various sizes if you’re to move about in both wizarding and Dovah society.”

Asterion sighed as they neared the bottom level of the complex, having decided to start the tour from the bottom and make their way slowly up to the observatory, skipping the Potions areas and leaving them for last lest the tour take days instead of the several hours it would likely encompass already.

“I know.” He ran one hand through his hair that on this occasion was merely brushed back off his shoulders as he wasn’t planning any trips outside the Castle, needing the day to recalibrate himself to his current situation and begin forging a relationship with his father. “Perhaps once we reach my public office you can quickly author a note to your godson, my cousin Draco, and invite him and his family over. How many people will that be?” He chewed his lip for a moment, waiting for an answer as they quickly made their way through the bottom layers of the building, him pointing out the various storages and pulling his father away from anything potions related before he could get side-tracked.

Severus quickly answered: “Three, depending on how soon Lucius wiggles his way out of his current charges.”

The younger Dovah gave a whistle as the other nodded with a sardonic look upon his face.

“You think it’ll be that easy for him?”

Severus chuckled as he stared incredulously at his child. “You have a lot to learn about government and society, son. At least how it works in the real world. I’ll be surprised if he even makes it all the way to a trial before some defense is brought forwards by his expensive solicitors that gets him at least released on bail if not charges dropped altogether.”

Asterion blushed, ducking his head.

“Well.” He defended himself. “I knew enough to insist on all the Death Eaters getting fair and full trials and Veritaserum for every prisoner suspected of Death Eater activity. Especially after what happened to Siri. I’m a bit anxious to see how my first real act as a Lord plays out.”

On another subject Severus had to admit he was curious as the tour continued, suspiciously bypassing two entire floors, only one of which his son gave an explanation for as being “house elf territory.”

“Will you show me?” He asked as they stepped back out of the lift and into the massive reception
room that Asterion had shown him into the day before. “Your Dovah attributes, I mean?”

His tone was very cautious. Already they’d made leaps and bounds more progress than he’d ever thought they’d make this soon, especially after the conversation he had early this morning with Regulus. The only thing he could attribute it to was Asterion having grown up with his grandparents and Reg telling him about Severus. Letting him know his father when he couldn’t actually know his father. The difference was night-and-day from the stoic and powerful young Lord who had appeared in the Ministry Atrium after feeling the secrecy tether binding him to Castle Black collapse.

Asterion searched his father’s gaze as he took a breath, pausing from pointing out doors that led to places like bathrooms and silver closets and resting areas from days of ladies with hoop skirts and corsets.

Closing his eyes he reached inside and centered himself a moment before exhaling and allowing his Dovah side to show to another person for only the second time since inheriting.

Silver scales glittered and gleamed on white-and-silver wings under the light from the stained glass windows and the ornate crystal chandelier. Like his height, his wings were also a little larger than some submissives’ spanning just under sixteen feet to Severus’s experienced eye. As soon as he saw his child’s claws, he immediately worried for any Dovah or any other creature that might come up against his son in a hostile mood.

Long and viciously curved, one swipe from Asterion’s claws would completely disembowel an opponent. And that was before you added a submissive’s natural secretions from their nail bed into the mix. He sincerely hoped that no dominant during his mate hunt was foolish enough to provoke Asterion as some have in the past, otherwise his son would be making mincemeat out of dominants right-and-left.

Taking them gently in one long-fingered hand, he looked up into unsure black and silver eyes. Inspecting them carefully, he pressed down on the nail bed of one claw with the back of his nail. Seeing little-to-no excretion he nodded.

“I wouldn’t worry.” He pronounced at last. “While you’ll have to take care, it’s no more than any submissive would when dealing with such things. You might even be in better shape. By not having much acid on your claws you won’t have to worry about it hindering your healing once you switch back into your human form and the sharpness of your claws will make for a very clean cut on any opponent.”

Asterion gave him a small nod to show his father he understood before retaking his normal appearance. His hair was one thing that never really changes since he kept his long anyway. It was one less thing to worry about at least.

“I could tell from your expression that you’re well aware of what your claws can do.” Severus mentioned after several minutes of quiet contemplation only broken by Asterion pointing out various things of interest as he was led through the second floor of the building and then up to the third which happened to be where they had dined as well as the location of his son’s office where they’d temporarily break to send off letters and have a cup of tea before continuing.

“Hunting.” Asterion answered with a shrug as he penned a note to the Headmaster agreeing with the mentoring arrangement and then two more to the Dovahim in question who would “guide” him through his mate hunt. All Dovahim enjoy the chase, whether for a mate or a meal. “There’s a large herd of deer that like to roam here as well as the occasional predator. Mainly wild cats.” Walking over to a window he grabbed a whistle that sat on the sill before piping out a short three-note tune. Seeing the interested look on his father’s face he explained.
“The Blacks haven’t always approved of having an owlery in the house proper. The mews with hawks and falcons for hawking also host our owls in their own special quarters. They’ve been dreadfully bored for the most part as I wasn’t receiving correspondence and was only able to send letters via the house elves to maintain the Black estates. Only Siri has given them any exercise, he was the only one with the privilege keyed into the wards still alive for a long time. The whistle is charmed to call however many owls are needed and which ones are to be used based on their exercise schedule.”

“That is rather impressive.” Severus had to admit. The idea did have merit. It would never work at the school with so many students constantly sending letters here there and everywhere but made quite a bit of sense for a large estate like the Black’s. Sealing his letter to Draco and another to Lucius in case the consummate Slytherin was already out of custody, if not the owl would leave it with Narcissa, he handed them off to the all-black eagle owl Asterion indicated while his son sent off a barred owl to Hogwarts and a Snowy – though not a pure white one like Hedwig – to the mentors.

“My owl is Barrabbus.” Asterion said with a little chuckle. “This sweet girl is Diana and this handsome boy is Lugh.” With a kissing noise and a few treats passed out he sent them all off.

“I sent an invitation to my oldest friends, Lord Malfoy and your cousin Lady Malfoy to join us for dinner Sunday provided Lucius has been released and if not for the Lady and Draco to come anyway. The mutts and Potter will have to wait until Harry’s through with the school year, I have no doubt Narcissa has already pulled my godson early from Hogwarts with her husband in custody, my friends will be a good practice run before the meeting with your mentors and later the Ministry.”

Asterion made an agreeing noise as he opened another missive from Gringotts, a response to his earlier agreement for a meeting.

“Add in visiting the Ministry on the Monday following the dinner with the Malfoys, and please, if you would, find out if there’s any Death Eater trials Lord Black-Prince should attend…like that of my cousin’s husband.” He said absently as they made up a schedule for all the many meetings to be completed before their reprieve from his mentors is up. “And an all-day meeting with Gringotts in two days hence.” He looked up and gave his father a wry smirk. “At least goblins will be easier for me to deal with than wizards and are less likely to hold it against me if I’m abrupt and to the point. But the estates have to be seen to before too much longer.”

Severus dutifully noted it down looking at what was turning into a full visiting schedule over the next weeks.

“After the first meet-and-greet with your mentors I would recommend at least one more meeting with them prior to the mate hunt. Speaking of which,” Severus arched a brow. “Have you thought about where you’d like to have it, if you’re having a traditional gathering? I would assume not here as a visit to Castle Black is considered a rare event, an honor even for an unrelated wizard or Dovah.”

Nodding Asterion stood, motioning his father to join him at the window overlooking Loch Ness and pointed out an elegant building sitting sedately on a bluff beside the loch.

“That is the Loch Ness Óstán Dubh.”

“The Loch Ness Hotel Black?” Severus asked translating the Gaelic.

Asterion smiled, “Uh-huh. It’s a strictly-wizarding hotel owned by the Blacks, or in this case me. It has over two hundred rooms, including a large conference center. It should work perfectly for the hunt.”
“And because it’s so close you won’t actually have to stay on site.” Severus said, comprehension dawning.

His son shrugged. “Neither will you for that matter.” He agreed drily. “One of the letters I sent out this morning was to the manager telling her to cancel all the reservations starting in three weeks for the foreseeable future for construction and ‘upgrades’ and to give the staff paid-time-off. I figure the Mentor Body will be able to supply workers to feed and otherwise maintain the property while it’s closed for the hunt. Then once the hunt is over I’ll actually have it renovated and then reopen, giving anyone who has a cancellation a free weekend stay.”

Severus’s eyebrows climbed ever higher as he heard his child’s plan. It was a good plan, excellent even when you considered Asterion’s special circumstances. But…

“That will be prohibitively expensive.”

The other rolled his eyes sarcastically as he handed his father the most recent statements from the goblins on the combined Black and Prince vaults, not even including the personal vault Siri had set up for him on his birth. It was more than anyone or any family could spend in a thousand lifetimes.

He summed it up nicely as Severus gaped at the totals.

“I’m the richest wizard in Britain. I think I can afford to rent out my own hotel for a while.”

…

The next two days went well all things considered. Asterion and Severus enjoyed meals together, with Asterion spending an hour before and after breakfast dealing with the continuing correspondence from his holdings, Gringotts, and the Ministry while Severus either explored the Castle and grounds or spent time with Regulus’s painting.

After Asterion’s business was concluded for the morning they ventured down into the potions labs where Severus drilled his son on his knowledge and skills. To say Severus was proud over his son’s ability which while not reaching his own level of genius would definitely guarantee him O’s on his OWLs and NEWTs, would be an understatement. Once Potions was finished they retreated to the seventh floor and it’s dueling and fencing rooms, Severus being a Master of the former and excellent at the latter.

Once again, Asterion’s education wasn’t lacking though some of his technique had suffered for lack of a partner following his Uncle’s having to split his time between Asterion, Harry, and the Order. A few hours of practice on the first day quickly shook the rust off and the two of them were pleased to have found a few common interests outside of their burgeoning familial relationship. While the reviewing for the tests would continue until it was time to take them, something now scheduled for the third and fourth weeks of their reprieve as Severus was pleased with Asterion’s likelihood of gaining all O’s, they were also able to spend time simply learning about each other and accustoming Asterion to making conversation both polite and more in depth.

Severus at one point quickly found himself outside his comfort zone when he realized that his son neither had a wand nor needed one. While his former Master and Dumbledore both used wandless magic, as did he himself, it was always for simple things and always with the wand near them if not on their person. The only one who he’d ever seen use magic even near to the same as his son was Potter.

And that was even hearsay, not something he’d witnessed for himself outside the scene in the Ministry Atrium which was – surprise surprise – all over the papers thanks to loose lips and Rita
The headline screamed across the Prophet’s front page. It was a fairly accurate account, but Severus was irritated nonetheless over the editorials calling into question his son’s parentage, paternity, and Severus’s ability to even be a father in the first place. Though even he had to admit that the picture Skeeter had gotten her claws on of Asterion supporting Harry, Potter’s green eyes open and fierce while Asterion’s were closed and he was clearly concentrating was quite evocative.

Asterion used wandless, wordless magic nearly constantly. It was rare enough to hear him speak an incantation, let alone make any kind of motion with his hands to direct his magic. He simply…did it. He wanted it and it happened.

To use a mixed phrase: it was like accidental magic, only on steroids.

A wonder indeed that he’d managed to harness and control his magic. It also explained quite a bit over Asterion’s extreme self-control while meeting with himself and the Headmaster for the first time in private and his behavior when confronting the former-Minister. Every day, all day, was an exercise in control for Asterion. There was no such thing in his world as letting loose or relaxing.

When Asterion “let loose” things exploded. Or shattered. Or disappeared.

He could only hope that once he was mated his magic wouldn’t be so volatile as they ground it and prevented it from wearing away as his shields.

Honestly, after dealing with his wild and powerful magic all his life, it was no wonder Asterion was able to exert an iron-clad control over his inner Dovah. While powerful, at least those instincts weren’t going to randomly make his favorite pillow disappear and reappear on the roof. Though they were responsible for the deerskin slippers his son liked to wear around the family rooms of the castle as well as the bear hide thrown in front of the fireplace in his public office.

They’d gone hunting as a bonding experience at Regulus’s prodding and his child was quite the accomplished killer, though it’d taken all his control not to bring down a deer and force his child to eat. His own Dovah wasn’t nearly as pleased over his son’s hunting abilities, wanting to protect him from the world, though it was just as proud when he took down a stag with two hits.

Today they were venturing forth into Diagon Alley and Gringotts Bank for Asterion to confirm his inheritance with the Goblin Nation.

The hope was that since it was a Friday and school was still in session that there would be a dearth of people wandering the streets, allowing Asterion to slowly become accustomed to being in public. At the end of the day if he wasn’t too overwhelmed they had plans for visiting Ollivander’s for his opinion on Asterion’s magic levels and then ice cream at Fortescue’s. And while Asterion was willing to forgo the former he was very excited about the latter.

Diagon Alley here they come.
Three

The Black Prince

Chapter the Third

Taking a stabilizing breath Asterion allowed his father to take his arm and apparate them both to the apparation point in muggle London just outside the Leaky Cauldron. Normally Severus would’ve landed at the point closest to Gringotts however he wanted Asterion to know where the quieter point just outside the alley was, in addition to how to access the alley from muggle London in case he ever needed to know for business or other pursuits. Gesturing his child forward, Severus scanned him with sharp eyes.

While the Potions Master was wearing his normal all-black, only in a men’s dress shirt and slacks with plain boots rather than his teaching attire, his son was kitted out as every inch the Young Lord At Play as the mutt, who had been cleared and given a ludicrous sum (in Severus’s opinion) restitution by the Wizengamot while they were in the process of interring Regulus and had a habit of dropping by for a few hours or even a night, had teased him during breakfast.

Long black hair was pulled back in a tail and folded over several times before being bound by a thick leather wrap, keeping his hip-length hair at a more manageable shoulder tail. Black dragon-hide trousers clung to his lean form with matching boots on his feet with glinting silver accents. As a nod towards the hot weather, this time his Acromantula silk shirt was thin and sleeveless in a royal blue with a thin black leather motorcycle jacket – a gift from the mutt – on top.

Fatherly pride at having such an attractive son warred with fatherly worry and concern. The dominant Dovahim would be in a frenzy at the first scent of him, let alone first sight. He growled lowly under his breath as a witch batted her eyes at his offspring as they made their way towards the back and the entrance to the alley, having waved at Tom the Barman as they passed his post with a short:

“My son, Asterion.”

Then proceeded to ignore the gaping maw of the gawping man, knowing that without a doubt this was a piece of gossip that would be flying through wizarding Britain by sundown, especially with the speculations in the Prophet over his child – and whether Severus was his father or not, or maybe it was Sirius, or perhaps James Potter’s bastard, or or…with pictures from the Ministry to back up each and every speculation.

Talking quietly, Severus explained the door to his son, telling him to try just tapping each brick with a finger instead of a nonexistent wand. With the magic flowing through his child it ought to work, and it did indeed. Resting a paternal hand on one lean shoulder Severus leaned in to speak not wanting his words to be overheard by an opportunistic gossip monger and have fresh drama slapped on the front page of the Prophet with all the troubles Albus is having keeping them in check these days and thus far no sign of Lucius being his normal self – though betting was running hot that it wouldn’t be long before the elegant – and slippery – Lord Malfoy was once again free…likely after paying one hell of a fine.

“Deep breath, Asterion. Calm and collected, just like we talked about with your Dad the last couple days. Most of the people here won’t even notice you, you’ll just be another face in the crowd. Now,” he waved one hand in a moment of whimsy. “Welcome to Diagon Alley.”
Stepping back he watched with rapt eyes as Asterion stepped into the magical commerce center for the first time.

Asterion knew he probably looked a sight with his mask down and pure enjoyment all over his face but he couldn’t help it. After all the times his Dad and Siri would tell him about Diagon Alley; about Ollivander’s and Fortescue’s, Flourish and Blott’s and the Magical Menagerie, he’s finally gotten to see it for himself. Although at the moment his eyes were caught by the rather large flock of owls winging their way into the sky.

Seeing the direction of his son’s gaze, Severus offered up this explanation:

“The Daily Prophet, and other publications, on their way across the country.”

“Ahh.” Asterion nodded. That made sense. He knew there were other magical publications, the estate had a subscription to quite a few that he’d used as sources of information about things like magical law and finances but the “shoddy rag,” according to Siri, wasn’t one of them. For all that it was ridiculous to some people, he preferred no news over crap news.

Besides, locked away as he was…it never really mattered.

Who won the Quidditch World Final didn’t matter when one didn’t know if they’d ever get to see a Quidditch match in person, let alone the World Final.

It was just one of many habits that he’d have to force himself out of now. For all the crap writing and speculative tripe, the Prophet did report things he needed to know like the latest magical-to-muggle exchange rate (for investments as he had both), what laws were being introduced in the Wizengamot (now that he could actually vote his seats), and where one might be able to find an excellent cup of coffee (he’d always wanted to try it but it wasn’t on the approved list his Dad gave the elves before he died and wasn’t one of the plants they grew in the many greenhouses), for example. Taking out a leather-bound note pad from his inside jacket pocket, he reminded himself to subscribe to the rag with the attached never-out quill.

Catching the surprised look from his father, Asterion arched a brow.

“I may be young.” He stated firmly. “But I have dozens of cauldrons on the fire. Better to jot things down when I’m thinking about it than forget and cause an international incident because I forgot to owl another Lord or a gift wasn’t sent.”

Severus smirked. “I didn’t say anything.”

Rolling his eyes, Asterion tucked the booklet back away. “You didn’t have to. Your expression said it all. Way to be a git, Father.”

Lightly cuffing him on the back of the head, Severus led the way towards the towering edifice of the bank, walking at a sedate pace that was neither impeding traffic for being too slow nor making Asterion rush and miss seeing something he was looking forward to spying. The younger man was looking around avidly while somehow still appearing cool and even bored now that he’d replaced his public persona.

There were just so many things.

Not so much the people, thank Merlin. The Alley was rather quiet after all it was a bit early for the hoards to be out-and-about on a sharp summer London morning, even if the wards concealing the Alley did tend to help regulate the temperature somewhat. But there were people bustling here and there as they readied their shops or did early morning errands.
He took a deep breath. He could do this. There was no noisy cacophony or mad crush of bodies. Just a few dozen people here and there. Nothing to worry over and no cause for concern.

Plus, his father was there and would help keep him safe and importantly, calm.

If he was calm, his magic wouldn’t leak out and accidentally hurt a bystander. It was the one fear that still preyed on his mind after all the others have already been mostly wiped away with finding his father. Yes, he would have a family, does have a loving father.

No matter his issues with his magic, he would never be alone.

Not now.

Not ever.

Everything else were just hurdles and would be dealt with in turn.

Reaching the bank he followed his father’s example and his own etiquette lessons with greeting and meeting with the goblins. At his request they handled the Prince accounts first, surprising both the goblins and Severus when he insisted the latter stay. Then he sprang a surprise on the older Dovah.

“I won’t say half.” He said finally after the goblin had asked him if he had any instructions following the signing of all the official documents and he’d given some directions for both selling the dead weight and diversifying the investments. The Princes had always simply stuck with Potions, Apothecaries, and Ingredient supply and it was time they branched out, Harry having given him an excellent idea for an investment in one of the owls they had started to exchange in the last few days. The younger wizard had reached out to Asterion to thank him for his help in the Atrium and it had naturally branched out from there. Asterion saw Siri’s hand in it, but figured it was innocent enough. “I know you won’t take it. But this all should be yours. I want you to have one of the properties and a million galleons.”

“No.” Severus replied immediately, turmoil churning inside him. What did his child think he was doing? He’d been disinherited for a reason and had never even made the slightest attempt at reconciling with his grandparents after discovering how they’d treated his mother. And he didn’t want their money, not even all these years later. “Absolutely not.”

“Yes.” Asterion gestured to the goblin. “And there’s nothing you can do about it. You can let the property rot and leave the galleons to collect dust but I’m still going to sign them over to you and you’re still going to have them. You’re a Prince. I won’t allow anything else.”

The dour man grumbled all the way out of the bank to go inspect his new property – a potions supply company in Knockturn Alley – while his progeny spent the rest of the afternoon pouring over the Black accounts. The Prince affairs were pretty much in order, his grandfather had made sure of that before he passed away, not wanting to leave a mess for his great-grandson to sort out. The Black affairs were not nearly as clearly cut-and-dried.

Whereas the Prince paperwork was mostly just signing things over officially and making sure there weren’t any loose ends – especially with the endowment Asterion bestowed on his father – the Black affairs would’ve taken weeks to slog through if only wizards were working on it.

Fortunately for Asterion, his accounts were all managed by goblins and what should’ve taken his entire respite from the Council only took one very long, very tiring day.

However at the end of it all the shady, underhanded, and just down-right illegal parts of his inheritance were done away with, the paperwork was all in order, and in the eyes of Gringotts he
was confirmed as Lord Black Prince.

Hand cramping from all the signing and paperwork, and with a splitting headache over some of the arguments he’d gotten into over cutting out the very profitable by highly immoral trading operation he’d found hidden in the books, Asterion met his father at Fortescue’s, the time it took at the bank cutting out the trip to the wand store, feeling rather pleased with himself for making it from the Bank to the ice cream parlour both alone and in a much busier time of day than earlier. And all without a single calming draught.

…

Severus smiled at the picture his son made striding through the Alley before Asterion took his place at his side.

His child was studiously ignoring the witches and occasional wizards that were taking a second look at him, the crowds having thickened with the late afternoon rush, and many were noticing what was to them a strange but handsome young lord striding through the Alley. Looks that turned from admiring or curious to incredulous when they saw him as the Potions Master’s side and connected the two’s resemblances. And then there were those who put the handsome stranger together with the other handsome stranger who had recently appeared on the front cover of the Prophet.

Ignoring the onlookers, Asterion nearly blinded him with that dashing Black grin, his false good cheer in the face of so many people as much a mask as his normal blank coolness. While he was obviously glad to see his Father, he was also very uncomfortable in the face of the crush of people who seemed to all be staring rather rudely in his opinion. The dunderheads. And if he so much as sees the hint of a camera flash he’ll hex the culprit.

Asterion was in no way ready for being hounded by the media.

Though that was as inevitable as the sunrise what with him claiming his lordships officially and taking his place in the political arena. Not out of any sense of duty to his line either from what Severus could tell but from an actual desire to improve the status of wizarding Britain as a whole and Dovahim in particular. It was a Black trait, the desire to meddle. Merlin knows Narcissa has it in spades.

And Potter with his Black grandmother doesn’t even bear mentioning.

“So,” Severus motioned to the glass cases with their displays of confections. “What will you have?”

Asterion’s eyes widened, taking in all the different options. Uncle Siri and his Dad had both told him of Fortescue’s and all the deliciousness to be found there but his exceeded his expectations. There were towering stacks of toppings and stainless steel containers filled with every flavor one could desire. Spotting the pistachio he made a face. And some that turned his stomach.

Humming under his breath he decided and they made their way to the counter to completely ruin their dinner.

…

Returning to Castle Black after a stressful day surrounded by strange people and stranger creatures and with a stomach full of frozen and sweetened treats, Asterion threw himself with casual elegance into his favorite chair in the family parlor where his Dad’s portrait hung and Siri was still lounging due to Harry being in the middle of the end-of-year packing rush. His Father had retreated to his room, having overdosed on people as well though in his case it was his patience that was worn down
and not his nerves. After greeting his son, Regulus had retreated to the landscape in Severus’s room to find out his opinion of Asterion’s bequest.

The painted submissive knew his child was planning on gifting his father part of the Prince inheritance but he didn’t know how he’d taken it. Especially when he lost the inevitable argument since there was really no way to keep Asterion from signing it all over. Even if he never touched it, it would still be his.

“Good, bad, or otherwise pup?” Sirius asked from his spot lounging in his favorite chair by the fire with a glass of butterbeer in his hand. His healer courtesy of the Wizengamot had put him on a strict low-alcohol diet until his mind healer cleared him. Siri’d been worried but cautiously optimistic over this first real exposure to the wizarding world versus Regulus’s pacing and worry. He couldn’t really blame him though, his little brother had never even held his son, having to parent via painting for all Asterion’s life. He tended to make the worst of things and worry more as a result.

Though Reg always was a worrier.

Asterion sighed, staring up at the ceiling as his leg swung over the arm of the chair.

“The bank wasn’t bad,” He said after a moment reviewing the day as he filed it using his Occlumency training. “Goblins are very gruff but they didn’t mess about at all or expect me to make small talk or polite conversation. So that was good.”

He closed his eyes with a wince.

“And getting there wasn’t a problem. But all the stares and the looks and the eyes on the way to the ice cream shop.” He shuddered. “I kept it together and I wanted to walk there on my own without having Father hold my hand, especially after dealing with the scene at the Ministry but…”

“It was nice knowing you only had to make it to Fortescue’s and then he’d scare everyone away?” Sirius asked understandingly. He hated that he wasn’t able to help him defeat this completely. He’d tried, teaching him what he could before he died but still… It wasn’t enough. Even with empathetic mates and his father’s help, it will be years if ever before Asterion will be acclimated to being around crowds of people without hiding completely behind his aristocrat’s mask.

“Exactly.” Asterion turned his head to meet sympathetic grey eyes. “I know he got his reputation by being really, really unpleasant, he’s even told me that he’s not a nice man. But that doesn’t change that I’m now benefitting from it since very few people seem to be brave enough to approach me when I’m around him. Pushing through the first few crowds before getting to his little bubble of peace was awful.”

“It will get better, pup.” Sirius said the oft-repeated phrase when it came to his issues stemming from his isolated upbringing. “People aren’t that difficult to be around most of the time. The hardest part will be learning who to gauge who you’re dealing with at a given time. Until then your polite “company” mask will work for most people.”

“I know, I know. So you’ve all told me.” Asterion stretched. “But that won’t help me with my mate hunt. I know I’ll have my father to help me and maybe I can get some pointers on managing attention from Harry or Draco but I still am anxious about making the wrong decisions. I’ll have to live with these dominants for the rest of my life.”

Or just for theirs if they don’t treat him well, he thought darkly. He knew that if he ended up with an abusive dominant it would be a race between him and his father to take the cretin out of the picture. Asterion had no illusions about his ability to tolerate such things, consequences be damned he’d gut
“Trust your instincts.” Sirius told him, ignoring the derisive look the teen gave him. “I know you’ve been ruthlessly controlling yourself since the incident but in this case you’ll want to trust yourself and your Dovah instincts. At least when it comes to the basics. Everything I’ve read, and you’ve read, says that your Dovah will automatically avoid a dominant that would be dangerous to you or your children.”

“That’s one thing less to worry about, I guess.” Asterion conceded with a sigh, climbing to his feet and cracking his neck. “About a million more to go.”

Sirius’s barking laughter followed him all the way down the hall to his office.

Entering the cherry-paneled room he sorted through the correspondence stacked on his desk by his secretary elf Tiggy. One of the younger elves, Tiggy had been taught to read and take dictation by his late great grandmother in anticipation of him needing help with his lordship duties and still being secluded on the estate. Sorting through he made notes on the master schedule that had reference sheets in his and his father’s rooms and private offices for his OWLs and NEWTs in the third and fourth weeks of his respite from beginning his mate hunt and the positive responses from the Malfoys, Lucius expected to be free no later than the end of the business week following a defense of being a Head of House with imminent danger to his family and line preservation.

In other words: Voldemort was crazy and held my wife and only heir as surety against my behavior.

It was shady as hell, and had to be “helped” along with a large fine and Veritaserum testimony giving evidence against other Death Eaters and pleading guilty – but not culpable – for his crimes under Voldemort.

Asterion was excited and anxious to meet them, the Malfoys have and had been such good friends of both his parents for so long and the Lady and Heir were blood members of his House.

And he was excited for school to let out and Siri to start bringing over his mate and godson, perhaps even Andromeda and her husband and daughter.

He’d like to meet some non-insane female Blacks, Bellatrix hadn’t exactly left him with the best of impressions.

Staring out the window, he leaned back in his chair, thoughts of family and mates and children and tests running through his busy mind.

…

As expected, when the portkey arrived in the foyer of Castle Black, it carried three blonds, not two, Lucius Malfoy a free man – much to the groaning and grumbling of the papers.

Though he was likely the only Death Eater who could use the defense he did, either to the Head of House/Line Preservation laws not applying to the others or simply not being bright (or sane) enough to use them.

There were cries of having the law that set him free abolished, cries that were swiftly silenced after pressure was brought to bear by the Lord’s Council on the Daily Prophet.

The done thing at that moment was to side with whatever people thought would make Harry Potter and Asterion Black-Prince happy…and they both were Heads of House with Harry set to become a Lord at seventeen, which Sirius would start his education in the moment his worn trunk set down off
the train along with visits to a mind healer after the trauma he’d been subjected to under Voldemort’s shadow for most of his life. Siri’s visits at the moment were very quick and flying, as the Animagus was quite busy running around London with his mate and preparing for his godson, making plans to get Harry a new wardrobe and educate him on being a Head of House and Lord. Though Asterion felt some justice in the world when Siri told him Remus had had him petition the Board of Education for Harry to retake his OWLs at the Ministry due to “unseemly and unconscionable disruptions throughout the testing days.” Harry had no clue and Asterion feeling a bit evil wasn’t about to enlighten him. His uncle had griped a little about the updates and overhaul Asterion had directed his elves to enact at Grimmauld Place, but was mollified by news that treacherous Kreacher had been “seeings to” by the Black Elves and a replacement had been moved from Castle Black to the townhouse.

They had barely made it through the first introductions with their dinner guests before Asterion’s awkwardness popped up and he blurted out what was on his mind:

“Draco, I didn’t know you were a dominant Dovah.” He said, eyes wide as the scent hit him – but with no attraction as Draco was too closely related for them to effect each other as potential mates.

“Indeed.” Lord Malfoy arched an icy brow at both young wizards. “Draco. Your mother did not inform me of your recent inheritance when I returned home. Something I can scarcely believe… unless she herself was unaware. However, at the moment the most pressing question would be: how do you know, Asterion?”

Formalities had already been exchanged, with Asterion both granting and being given the right to use first names due to his father’s close relationship with the Malfoys.

“Perhaps.” Severus interjected smoothly. “We should move this conversation to the lounge…over brandy.”

“Excellent suggestion, Severus.” Narcissa said with no little relief as her blue eyes darted between her husband, son, and her newly-discovered cousin. Well. Distant cousin, in the fourth degree or fourth cousins, making Asterion and Draco fourth cousins once removed to be exact. Still, in a family as pared down in the last twenty years as the House of Black, one didn’t quibble over technicalities when the Lord was willing to call you cousin and welcome you into the ancient family stronghold. “Shall we?”

Severus glided forward smoothly and took his friend’s hand, tucking it with gentlemanly panache into the curve of his arm, leading the way towards the lounge that had been previously set up for pre-dinner drinks.

Though thanks to his son’s quick observational skills, it was certain to be a much stronger round of drinks than arranged.

Honestly, Severus was feeling a bit abashed. As a dominant Dovah, he should have noticed the change in Draco’s scent, making him wonder just how many budding Dovahim he’d overlooked through the years simply because they – or their parents – either weren’t aware of their coming inheritance or chose not to inform the Headmaster of the fact. It was a sad truth, but in this his work as a Potions Master and Professor had left him with a sour taste in his mouth, knowing full-well that his ability to scent out the budding Dovahim had been affected by his vocation.

“First.” Lucius began once everyone was seated and had a crystal glass or tumbler in their hands, Draco getting a scant finger of brandy to the adult wizards and witch’s two-to-three while Asterion kept to his habit of keeping well away from hard spirits with a butterbeer in a glass. “Draco?”
Nothing else needed to be said, the name an implicit demand to spill his secrets.

“I woke up on my sixteenth birthday with fangs, claws, scales, and wings.” Draco explained softly, no sign of his cold, haughty Slytherin mask in sight in the close company. They were all family after all – or as good as in the case of Severus – and family came before anything else to a Malfoy. “I knew I’d inherited but not what species other than one of the dragon-kin. But things were so busy then.” He said a bit plaintively. “With OWL prep and Umbridge and her Squad she’d hand-selected me for. I couldn’t exactly tell the horrid beast no, any more than Dumbledore or the Heads could stop her from abusing the other students with that blasted quill of hers.”

“Language, my dear.” Narcissa warned him with an arch of one blonde brow, though her tone was too warm to be truly chiding.

“Sorry, mother.” Draco apologized with a lowering of his gaze for a split second before continuing. “When the…rumors…about Potter’s latest adventure began, I knew I would be leaving school sooner rather than later, so I used the Pass I have for the Restricted Section to look through one of the older – and from what I can tell from cross-referencing information against the Manor library – more accurate tomes in search of what I was, well, am.” He corrected himself. “I narrowed it down to between Drackens and Dovahim, but there’s no easy way to tell between the two from everything I read. The physical traits are nearly identical in most ways, all of it is mostly internal biology and social behaviors from my research.”

“Then, how, may I ask.” Lucius asked regally. “Did you know Asterion?”

“Scent.” He answered after exchanging a questioning look with his father, getting a nod in response. “Most dragon-kin species have advanced senses – we can scent each other. Draco has his own unique scent markers but the underlying base scent is the same as Father’s – dominant Dovah.”

“Then you’re…?” Draco half-asked with a slight furrow between his aristocratic brows.

“Not a dominant.” Severus said drily. “My son is a submissive Dovah, like his mother Regulus.”

“Oh.” Narcissa gasped, eyes opening wide with surprise. “That explains so much of your behavior during school.”

“That it does.” Lucius smirked a little, clearly remembering Narcissa’s complaints over her cousin’s “unseemly” displays with his fiancé Severus.

“I knew about the scents.” Draco said, turning to face his cousin with an eager look on his face, quickly rattling off the information he’d garnered from the old tome and his own research – all of which focused on comparing and contrasting the two cousin species of Drackens and Dovahim – mating, social, Counsel versus mentoring, horns, etc.

“You’ve done quite a bit of research.” Severus nodded approvingly. “But there’s much more to it than all that. We’re more than what makes us similar to Drackens – though they are the more infamous. We are different in ways both great and small. We have some excellent references here, I’m sure Asterion won’t mind if you borrow one – so long as you promise to return it in the same condition as it was given over.”

“Not at all.” Asterion nodded with a slight smile.

“That’s very generous of you, Asterion.” Narcissa all-but-beamed, so far delighted with her new Lord of her birth-and-blood House. “Of both of you.”

“Yes, thanks ever so much.” Draco smiled brightly.
“One question.” Lucius raised an elegant finger as he finished his brandy and set the sniffer aside. “Draco mentioned Drackens being able to mate with humans.”

“You’re thinking of the betrothal contract with the Parkinsons.” Narcissa realized. Oh dear. She hadn’t even thought of that thorny issue yet. Especially with Lord Parkinson certain to face time in Azkaban.

“You’ll want to cancel it, as soon as possible.” Asterion told them seriously. “That’s one of the major differences - biological not social – that Father mentioned. Dovahim can’t have children with anyone but another Dovah. They’re completely incompatible – and believe me, some have tried, even with Drackens since they’re nominally considered our closest genetic cousins. Once you inherit as a Dovah, it’s Dovah mate for you or nothing at all.”

“Gracious.” Narcissa blinked. “That’s certainly a difference from all the other creature inheritances one can have. But what of Draco, and the Malfoy name? How rare is it to find a mate for Dovah? Are the numbers as disparate as Dracken numbers are reputed to be?”

“Not at all.” Severus fielded this question. “There’s perhaps a few hundred unmated dominants at any given time, ranging anywhere from sixteen to over sixty years old. Most submissives take one or two dominants to mate, and the current numbers are less than half that of Drackens, six unmated dominants to every unmated submissive. Draco is handsome, wealthy, and charming when he puts his mind to it, as well as a host of other attributes. I’m sure he won’t have a problem finding a submissive. And keep in mind that just because some dominants never mate, that doesn’t mean that they don’t live happy lives. They can still marry and then adopt, or blood-adopt if carrying on a family bloodline is vital.”

Lucius frowned, something about that math not tallying for him.

“How can there be a few hundred unmated dominants with a ratio of six-to-one?”

“Because.” Regulus joined the conversation from where he’d been observing from a library scene on the wall. “That’s spread over the entire planet with mate hunts going on continually. Since dominants are expected to move to where their submissive wants to live – usually remaining close to the submissive’s family and support network – the mentors first try and match them with dominants within a certain radius before branching out. That doesn’t keep the doms from traveling around the world if word of a particularly desirable sub spreads, but usually you’re dealing with anywhere from a few dozen to a hundred or so doms competing within one area.”

“Our local mentor body only sends out notices to unmated dominants in Western Europe.” Severus said. “Which considering the concentration of magical communities still makes it one of the most competitive hunting grounds for a submissive mate. If we lived in southeast Asia for instance, there would be much less competition, at the moment only about twenty-five unmated doms in the entire region.”

“I see.” Draco sighed a bit wistfully. “Larger concentration, more submissives but also more competition from other doms.”

“Exactly.” Severus nodded, as Asterion rose after a glance at the mantle clock, leading them into dinner.

…

On Monday after a successful dinner with Lord and Lady Malfoy, barring the early faux pas with Draco over the other Dovah’s inheritance, Asterion was pacing restlessly in the entry hall waiting on
his father. He’d tossed the idea of going alone back and forth for days, from the moment he’d gotten
the owl from Dumbledore really, but finally decided that he was going to cling to his father for a little
longer. Over the past days, Severus had become somewhat like a security blanket, helping guide
him when he floundered during the dinner party with his long-time friends and scaring off the
curious masses in Diagon Alley.

He’d wondered what having Severus in his life would be like. Having a father and protector. While
he was sure this honeymoon phase they were in after finding each other wouldn’t last forever, he
was certainly enjoying it while it lasted.

After a long, long conversation with his father and his dad’s portrait about how making a good
impression on his mentors to get them on his side and what problems they’ve had in the last several
decades with the fears of discovery revolving around traditional mate hunts, urging more and more
submissives to go through the more “modern” process of having their parents or mentor introduce
them to various dominants and having them date like humans do. Having his mentors’ approval is
vital for weeding out the worst mate prospects, and for avoiding censure over choosing a traditional
mate hunt over only being introduced to vetted dominants. His uncle Siri had rather irreverently
compared the two methods to muggle car shopping, including taking a test drive, versus going to
Harrods and using a personal shopper for clothing. At the end of each he’d end up taking something
home – it just depended on what he was looking for.

Eventually, Asterion decided on a simple pair of black slacks and shirt with a silvery-gray robe on
top. For once he left his dragon-hide pants and the brighter and tighter shirts in his closet. Along
with everything else that was silk or leather or obviously muggle (courtesy of Sirius). All in an
attempt to win the good opinion and secure the maximum helpfulness of his mentors.

Severus simply arched a brow at his pacing and let him take his arm to apparate them out through the
wards and to London and the Leaky Cauldron. After an explanation that those who weren’t Blacks
by either blood or bonding couldn’t be added to the wards, Severus caved to letting his son side-
along him like a child though he still wasn’t happy about it. When the only other option was a mile-
plus trek to the edge of the wards, Severus finally accepted that while Asterion could make him a
port-key through the wards, apparating solo wasn’t going to happen.

Arriving at the Leaky Cauldron and again ignoring the stares, Severus quietly coached his child on
Floo travel and waited for him to disappear through the flames before tossing a few knuts into the jar
on the mantle and following.

…

Asterion felt like he was in a green-glowing muggle blender Siri told him about before stepping out
gracefully on the other side of the flames and into a comfortable sitting room with well-cushioned
couches and an Aubusson rug in rose-pinks and creams warming the bare wooden floors. His father
popped out right behind him and introduced him to the two large Dovahim watching him in a mix of
wonder and concern.

“Mentor Tafari,” Severus gestured to the ebony-skinned massive dominant Dovah. “And Mentor
Roberts, this is my submissive son, Lord Asterion Severus Black Prince.”

Mentor Roberts was another large man, though not as massive and muscular as the 6’6” Benjamin
Tafari. With brown hair that only had touches of grey at the temples and soft hazel eyes, the Dovah
Mentor was quite the contrast to his dark companion’s dark hair, skin, and eyes.

The mentors’ miens visibly softened when they looked at Asterion, their peaceful auras instinctively
putting the company-shy submissive at ease.
Each shook his hand gently and seemed pleased by his direct stare, conservative dress, and firm handshake.

“Asterion, may we call you Asterion?” Tafari’s voice was low and smooth, matching his large size well, waiting for Asterion’s nod before continuing. “We were very surprised to hear from the Headmaster that another male submissive was found.”

“Especially one of your age.” Roberts added as an aside. “Most Dovah children are known."

“But now we’ve had two appear from the Black lines in the last few months, one of them a male submissive! It was quite shocking for the Body, however we couldn’t be more pleased to meet you.” Tafari told him kindly.

Now this was something Asterion was prepared for.

“That’s because submissives run in the Black lines. Male submissives in particular.”

The three dominant males stared at him in confusion.

“Asterion, dear one.” Benjamin said hesitantly. “What do you mean?”

Asterion shrugged. When his father was catching him up on the current political climate and Dovah culture they hadn’t gone over this. He thought everyone knew that about the Blacks.

“Just what I said.” He explained patiently. “My family has kept meticulous records of every Dovah produced from our lines. We produce three submissives for every dominant and of those three usually two-thirds are males. If anything it’s surprising that one of the last three weren’t female. Either myself or my Dad could’ve been a female, or even Draco, though we’re not known for female dominants. There’s another three children my age or younger who haven’t reached sixteen from the Black Lines that could still inherit: Harry Potter, Neville Longbottom, and Ginny Weasley.”

Asterion frowned a brief moment. “Though since we’ve been cut off from society both wizarding and Dovah, the Black records and incomplete over the last seventeen years. Any of the other Weasley children or Nymphadora Tonks could be Dovahim and I wouldn’t know if from my records.”

This at least, Severus could answer. “Only Charles, the second Weasley son, is a Dovah. Currently I believe he’s an unmated dominant but he lives in Romania so you might not meet him. But if he scented you at the Atrium he might have decided to stick around.”

Mentor Tafari stared at the older Roberts. “Did you know any of that?”

“Nobody knows that about the submissive ratio in the Black Lines.” Severus said, watching his son with pride plain on his face. “Not even my mate knew.”

The young Dovah smiled shyly. “I had a lot of time to research it once Dad told me what he was. Then when I got my inheritance…”

“You learned all you could from the Black Library and archives.” Severus nodded understanding. “I would’ve done the same thing, isolated as you were.”

“Agreed.” Tafari nodded. Turning his attention to the matter at hand and leaving the fascinating subject for another day, he motioned for everyone to sit down. Once all were comfortably arranged and with a cuppa in hand, he continued, picking up a notepad and fountain pen from the table at his side.
“Now then.” He looked between father and son. “How would you like your hunt to be run?”

Severus took the lead, seeing Asterion was getting a little unnerved at the undivided attention he was being subjected to. The mentors weren’t exactly being subtle as they watched him and them carefully. He didn’t blame them in the slightest, it was their jobs to assure the submissive’s wellbeing and comfort through this transition period but it wasn’t the sort of thing that would put Asterion at ease in their presence.

Quickly he ran down the arrangements Asterion had made the previous week, including the name and Floo and apparition coordinates of the hotel, making it clear that while it was a strictly magical hotel it was also located in a heavily trafficked tourist area and Dovahim wandering outside of the property wards would need to be muggle-appropriate with either concealing spells or having their attributes put away.

The mentors both took notes as he spoke, nodding approvingly in places.

However, when they came to Asterion’s wish to exclude Draco from the hunt they hit a snag.

“Traditionally,” Roberts took the subject on, eyeing Severus warily. The Potions Master wasn’t without a reputation, even amongst other Dovahim. “All eligible Dovahim in the proscribed region are invited, while others from outside are free to attend if they wish. Draco Malfoy’s relation to you is distant enough that he should be considered as a mate.”

Severus rolled his eyes derisively with a snort.

Placing one hand soothingly on his father’s arm, Asterion took the subject head-on.

“I don’t care.” He said bluntly, putting his foot down for the first time with the mentors. He’d sat there and listened as his father than them debated back and forth over various things but on this he would have his way. “Tradition can go hang. I’ve been raised away from other people for the majority of my life. I’d never been around a stranger before last week. But I have been building bridges to those considered close to the main branch of the Black family. Which includes Draco and his mother, no matter the degree of relation involved. I consider him family.” He repeated firmly. “I can’t see him as a mate, so there’s no reason to waste anyone’s time by dragging him to Scotland only to send him packing right back home.”

He crossed his arms, he would be taken seriously on this matter and they could go suck a lemon. Which Mentor Roberts looked like he already was with that scowl on his face. Roberts went to open his mouth, likely with another rebuttal, when Tafari stopped him by holding up his hand.

“A compromise.” He offered, waiting to continue until the submissive had nodded. “You are suggesting some rather archaic practices – or those that are simply never before tested. We will agree to support your decisions so long as you allow us to use your mate hunt as a study of a traditional mate hunt and present our findings to the larger Mentor Body community.”

Asterion traded a glance with his father.

“That will be acceptable.” The Lord Black Prince said formally. “Mentor Benjamin Tafari will be welcome at Castle Black for the duration of each mate hunt until I have my full complement of mates and allowed to observe the decision-making process during the hunt. In exchange the mentor body will not attempt to control my mate hunt, mate selection, or the decision-making process.” He brought it back around to being able to exclude Draco without dragging him to the Highlands. “So mote it be.”
“So mote it be.” The mentors echoed, causing a light to flash sealing the agreement. Now whatever
ructions the other mentors made over their arrangement, nothing could be done to alter it.

Nothing at all.

It was good to be a Lord.

…

Several more days passed as Asterion continued to study for his wizarding tests and tend to his
matters of estate while Severus alternated between quizzing his son, researching in the potion labs,
and spending time either with Regulus’s painting or getting to know his child.

The two of them had their first real disagreement, though not a major altercation, when Severus
discovered that Asterion had stuck up a quill-pal friendship with his eternal-thorn-in-his-side Potter,
who had finally arrived at Grimmauld Place and was firmly under the protective aegis of Sirius Black
and Remus Lupin – and all for the good, as from what Severus had heard via Asterion the messy-
headed-menace was being forced to retake his OWLs (with some tutoring from the mutts and
Asterion) as well as see healers for both his too-small body and rather damaged mind. Since Severus
had spent a good portion of the early part of the year wandering through said mind, he felt that he
was a good judge of its definitely-not-all-right status.

Someone was at last taking the little fluff-head in hand, even if it was the mutts.

Lily, at least, would be happy over the turn of events.

Seeing the little menace when he came to visit with the rest of his family was one thing and solely for
the benefit of gaining his child familiarity with people.

The two of them actually being friends?

Perish the thought.

Although, it did give Severus one of his first real “I’m a father” moments when he realized his son
was exercising the age-old teenage rebellion of choosing his own friends no matter the objections of
this parents.

Not that Regulus had any objections. The painted echo of his late lover was deliriously happy over
the development. And the mutt had become unbearable.

“I simply do not understand what thoughts of merit that menace could have hiding under all that hair
that my own flesh-and-blood could find of worth. Let alone to the point of exchanging literal feet of
parchment over.” The dour Dovah complained once more, his arms crossed in what was nearing a
full-body scowl. “Potter has hardly proven to be a sterling conversationalist in the past.”

“Perhaps,” Asterion drawled from his spot reclining in his favorite chair in the family parlor, Regulus
watching the goings on from his frames like a spectator enjoying a particularly riveting tennis match.
“You simply never chose the right topic of conversation with Potter.”

Severus harrumphed, barely restraining himself from an all-out snort, wishing faintly that he had used
some of his Dovah contacts to connect Asterion with a more worthwhile friend, maybe even a
submissive female that wouldn’t cause Severus nearly the grief of the Potter spawn…no. That
would never have worked. Not for his son, no matter how many times Sev cursed the fickle star the
little brat was born under.
Asterion had been unsettled enough around the rather non-threatening Narcissa (as long as you weren’t on the wrong end of her wand or temper anyway) who was his cousin without bringing new and strange variables into the picture. He didn’t want to think about what set of circumstances would have led to Asterion’s visible discomfort with the fairer sex. Not if he wanted to control his notoriously volatile rage anyway.

“What do the two of you write about, anyway?” Severus asked finally rather than simply complaining. “Owls have been flying from here to Hogwarts and then Grimmauld Place morning and night. I cannot fathom what the two of you could possibly be discussing that couldn’t wait for Saturday.”

“Harry will be distracted by a new place and his godfathers Saturday.” Asterion said absently as he set aside the missive and focused on his father. “This way we can cover the things that require undivided attention without extraneous input from others.”

Like his father.

Or Siri or Siri’s mate who Asterion hadn’t yet sat down and had a conversation with despite meeting him at the Ministry and then again several times since.

None of the three older males would likely be very open to the idea of their child/pup/cub discussing what they might be interested in in a partner, especially Severus.

Yeah.

Probably not the best thing to talk about in front of possessive bastards of the spousal and parental regimes.

But there were other things they discussed as well, it wasn’t like they’d just jumped into the dominant problem right away.

“He wanted to know what Dad was like, what I knew about him and Uncle Siri.” Asterion waved a dismissive hand. “I asked about his childhood and growing up muggle, being a newcomer to the wizarding world and everything at eleven.” He smiled slightly. “He told me about the Marauders… new stories he must have gotten from Remus since I’ve heard all of Siri’s a hundred times.”

The Potions Master groaned when he heard that term.

Damned cretins were following him even after their ringleader’s death and Pettigrew’s betrayal. At least the wolf had the decency to bugger off for months at a time. Until his child and their relationship were more settled, he’d be dealing with the damned mutt for the foreseeable future. And now the next generation of Marauders as well, with Asterion being rather corrupted by his doting Uncle.

Though he took comfort in the cold logic Asterion tended to use in many situations. Granted it was a coping mechanism for an isolated and secluded person who had little interaction with the outside world but it did give him the ability to use his head and not go charging into situations like some… Gryffindor. Even if that first meeting was a rather deceptively impulsive – ultimately dangerous – decision.

In that case…most would’ve done the same, apparating to their closest relatives with the tether disappearing and Asterion alone knowing what that meant.

“Besides which,” here Asterion arched a sardonic brow. “He is my cousin, however distantly related and my uncle’s godson. Knowing my luck he’ll inherit on his birthday and end up another male
submissive, one of the few in England to come out of the last several generations.”

“That anyone knows about.” Severus interjected thinking about the sudden appearance of both his son and husband as male submissives. Before his mate, he’d rather thought they’d been bred out of the gene pool. Now it seemed as though it was simply waiting for the right gene pool.

“That anyone knows about.” Asterion conceded with a nod. Picking up the parchment he stood before excusing himself to send off his reply and finish the arrangements for the coming visit.

“Don’t forget to send the port-key.” Severus reminded his son as he turned back to the volume on ancient curses he’d been enjoying before the elf delivered Potter’s newest triste. Asterion had finally gotten in port-key practice under Severus’s stern eye and now was quite adept at making them.

At least to-and-from the main entry anyway.

Asterion as the Lord of the estate refused to give anyone free access to the house or grounds. By having everyone, yes including his own father, pop into the main entry and reception hall the house elves were instantly alerted and could completely close off the area if needed. Asterion himself had no need of any alert, being so closely tied into the wards as to know whenever someone was present inside them or attempted to breach them in addition to any actual comings-and-goings.

Severus easily acknowledged the huge step forward it was for his child to present him with a reusable port-key the day before. For a wary person, the unlimited access through the wards was a huge gesture of trust for Asterion and a major stepping stone in their relationship. Severus no longer felt like a temporary installment until his son stabilized and became accustomed to his new life but a welcomed family member who could come and go with the assurance of a warm welcome at any time.

It was a gesture only Lucius and Narcissa had made previously, not even the Headmaster had given him such latitude in his travels and home life.

“Yes, yes.” Asterion’s grumble easily carried down the hall and into the parlor. “I’ll remember to send the port-key.”

…

Asterion waited with his father in the entry hall, shoulders back and head held stiffly as he anxiously awaited the incoming wave of people and noise.

It was the first time strangers would be welcomed inside Castle Black in nearly two decades, his father notwithstanding as he was blood family of the ruling Lord. While the dinner with Lord and Lady Malfoy was lovely, this luncheon visit was a vital step for both the mate hunt as well as his rapidly nearing meetings and tests with various Ministry officials to take his tests as well as claim his Lordship seats.

According to his father, Lord Malfoy and his son Draco were excellent practice for the “higher class” politicians while Narcissa was considered the epitome of a Lady. Then there was cousin Harry and Uncle Siri who were both on the more extroverted side and would give him face-time with the more social people who would have to deal with while Remus was known to be rather quiet introverted… and a werewolf at that. If his father and Lord Malfoy had their way, he would be going from visit to visit meeting and speaking with all sorts of people before being exposed to the Ministry but that was neither expedient time-wise nor something he was willing to put himself through.

This was one case where he’d rather muddle through in places and just fall back on his icy public
persona than have to meet and meet and meet strangers and pretend to have casual conversations with them all for the sake of “practice.”

Honestly, if it wasn’t for the near relation of Narcissa and Draco and Harry’s very close relationship with his Uncle Siri, Asterion wouldn’t even be socializing with them let alone their various spouses, mates, and/or offspring.

At least Bellatrix was in the grave, no amount of pressure would convince him to have that bitch in his home were she still alive…and not an escaped convict.

He smirked to himself.

Of all the times he’s pulled on someone’s power without their consent prior to breaking the blood-links, only hers was the one he didn’t regret. All the rest he’d trade for having the people themselves alive and present in his life. Not her. She can keep her psychotic ass in Hell.

“Breathe, my son.” Severus clasped one lean shoulder in comfort before returning to a respectable distance from his child. It wouldn’t do for a double Lord to look weak in front of guests. Not that any of the coming trio would make something of it but it would be a bad habit to get into. “Breathe.”

Inhaling and exhaling in the deep rhythm taught to him when learning to control his powers and then later his inherited instincts, Asterion centered himself as the tingle in the wards alerted him to his incoming visitors. Though he nearly lost his composure then the smallest male figure stumbled and would’ve fallen flat on his face if not for his golden-eyed godfather hauling him up with one hand. Flustered and blushing, the brunet peered up at him from his deep green eyes hidden under black fringe and spectacularly ugly glasses.

“Graceful as ever, Potter.” Severus couldn’t help but sneer as the others all moved to greet father and son.

If the owl had come from anyone else but Severus, and been confirmed by his own eyes and his mate, Remus would’ve dismissed it as a joke, especially as he wasn’t one of Severus’s favorite people after he failed to defend Regulus from his mate Siri and his best-friend James. However, after discussing the situation thoroughly with Sirius and learning of Asterion from the Headmaster himself, they’d quickly fallen into a fascinated discussion of Severus having actually reproduced.

That the sour Dovah dominant had a mate who died young was somewhat of an open secret in Britain’s hidden creature society, though most forgot or didn’t know to begin with that the mate was a) male and b) Regulus Black. None of them could believe however that Sirius of all beings had helped hide the Black-Prince heir for over seventeen years. Sirius was known for many things, especially by his young godson, but his ability to keep a secret had long been considered negligible with the damage wrought by Azkaban.

Apparently not as they were staring in the face of the best kept secret in Wizarding Britain.

“Lord Asterion Severus Black Prince,” Severus stated formally before introducing the others in order of precedence. “Allow me to introduce Remus Lupin, you of course already know your Uncle Sirius Black and distant cousin Harry Potter.”

Remus stepped forward and they shook hands while Sirius gave him a large hug while Harry settled for a blushing wave when their names were called.

“Gentlemen,” Severus hid a grin seeing the startled look in his son’s eyes at Potter’s spontaneous bashfulness. “My son, the Lord Asterion Severus Black-Prince, Lord of the Most Ancient and
Noble House of Black and the Ancient and Noble House of Prince.”

“Thank you, Father.” Asterion said softly after nodding once more to the gathered group. “And thank you for coming. Please,” he motioned towards the stairs. “Follow me and call me Asterion.”

“Harry.” The green-eyed wizard said, quickly echoed by Remus, allowing for a lapse into informality despite the slight awkwardness between the three of them while Sirius and Severus watched with differing expressions of amusement as they muddled along.

…

“So…” Harry kicked off their conversation as the older adults left after lunch for Sirius and a put-upon Severus to take a tour of the public portions of the Castle, ostensibly to give the younger duo a chance to get to know one another in the flesh.

Interactions between Harry and his two godfathers, as well as between Severus and the older men, had all seemed both strange and interesting to Asterion, whose only previous experience in people-watching had been mostly one-on-one with the exceptions of the Malfoys who were trying to help train him for the Wizengamot and high society – so not the warmest of interactions – and dealing with the battle of the Ministry, the battle in the Atrium and the aftermath of the two distinct confrontations that had fallen back-to-back. None of which really prepared him for how…warm and affectionate Harry was with both Remus and Sirius, nor how caring and gentle Remus – a werewolf – was with his mate and honorary cub.

It really was all very fascinating but horribly confusing at the same time.

“I have to ask.” Harry said as Asterion lowered himself to the soft side chair facing him over a small selection of after-lunch biscuits and tea. “Why in the world didn’t Sirius’s dad live here instead of at Grimmauld Place?”

Honestly, who would want to live in that dreary wreck…well before Asterion had it fixed up, Harry had been overjoyed at the makeover when he arrived after school ended – and not just because he now had his own room decorated to his taste - rather than this awe-inspiring estate? It was no wonder Padfoot had hated Grimmauld as much as he used to if this was what he was missing out on when he was there instead of here…with his nephew.

“Two things.” Asterion answered with a shrug, careful not to jostle his teacup with the motion. “Convenience for one. Castle Black isn’t exactly the most easily accessed of properties,” he said drily thinking of what a pain it can be to alter the wards for visitors. “Nor is it attached to the Floo Network making travel inconvenient if you don’t have the power to make port-keys that can pass through the wards or are powerful enough to simply apparate through them. Which leads to the second reason. Comfort. Only the most powerful of the Black Lords tend to make their home here. Too much magic has permeated the very stones themselves for anyone weak of will or mind to want to live within these walls. And while Grandfather Black was Heir Black and was of a noble line…he wasn’t the most powerful wizard to ever live nor did he predecease Great-Grandfather Arcturus, who preferred to convalesce for the last twenty years of his life in a cottage in Spain, away from the drain of running the vast Black estate. Not to mention Grandfather Orion’s ideals. And then there was Grandmother Walburga…”

Harry nodded as the long explanation wound down. That did make sense, especially with how uncomfortable Grimmauld Place could make people. Or Hogwarts even. They simply had a sense about them that could discomfit or conversely welcome many a wizard or witch upon their grounds. And if the brief history Asterion had given him and Remus of the Blacks – with Siri shockingly chiming in - was correct then this location was older than either of those.
“Plus, Mother was a bloody bitch and didn’t want to live with Lord and Lady Black in the Castle when she married the Heir.” Sirius commented from his spot leaning against the doorway as he caught the tail-end of their conversation when they entered the room, his infamous shit-eating grin in wide display, Regulus shaking his head as he moved through the paintings to sit in his actual frame.

“What’s going on behind those eyes, Asti?” Regulus asked his son quietly while keeping one eye on his brother and Harry.

“I’m giving serious thought to cancelling my mate hunt – at least for a while.” Asterion answered, focusing on the painting to the exclusion of all less, a habit from a lifetime spent mostly alone except for a governess who really didn’t give a damn about him to begin with – a lack of care that had swiftly morphed into loathing once his great-grandparents and uncle were no longer around to keep her in check. He rushed to explain after seeing the frown forming on his dad’s face, not realizing that he’d also nabbed the attention of his uncle and cousin. “I’m still so awkward around new people – and anxious – plus I’ve never been around children in my life. What do I know about raising or having a family?” He asked, the aforementioned anxiety creeping into his voice as his pulse began to race and his ears ring.

Only to be stopped in his tracks by someone he’d forgotten was even in the room.

Harry pinned Asterion with his jewel-green gaze as he took Asterion’s head in his hands and turned him, forcing him to keep eye contact as he touched on a subject he rarely if ever broached without prompting.

“I never knew what a loving family was like. I knew what it wasn’t.” He laughed humorlessly. “Yeah, I definitely knew what it wasn’t. But I never had someone who loved me for me, no matter what. Who supported me and encouraged me and promised me forever.” He watched as Asterion shifted under his gaze. “You’ve never had that either, not really. Your Dad was dead, your Father completely inaccessible, and Siri was constantly splitting his time between the both of us. You’ve never had someone who was just yours. Mates and children will be that for you. They’ll fight to have you and then fight to keep you. Love you and protect you and make you happy whatever it takes from everything I’ve read and everything you and Siri have shared with me. Even Remus says it’s the same for werewolves.” His smile turned a little sad. “Almost makes me wish I’ll come into an inheritance at the end of the month…just to have that too.”

Asterion held himself together by the skin of his teeth as Harry poked and prodded at wounds that had never really had a chance to heal. Maybe getting close to Harry, despite his father’s grousing, wasn’t such a bad idea after all.

“Ignore my protective lunkheads – and your protective lunkheads. Parents, brothers, uncles, even godparents, if they’re worth their salt are never ready for their wards to grow up.” Harry commanded him with a laugh. “And ignore anything I or anyone else have to say about your prospective mates. I’m not you. You and I both know that we have vastly different personalities. What I wouldn’t want in a boyfriend might work really well for you. The only real caution I would have is if you need more than one mate make sure you pick ones that get along with each other.” Here Harry shook his head, thinking of some of the fights his godparents got into and they both at least loved each other. He didn’t want to even contemplate what it would be like if they didn’t.

“Be a unit.” The unmated submissive summed it up with a roll of his eyes before Harry could get lost on one of his winding doomsday thought-trains. “Not just a sub with individual mates.”

“Exactly.” Harry said with a grin before changing the subject to one less likely to instill panic – in either of them.
“Boyfriend, cub?” Remus asked as he caught the end of the conversation. “Something we need to talk about?”

“By the gods not here.” Severus groaned with a roll of his onyx eyes as he took his seat next to his mate’s painting. “I’ve already given the Talk to hundreds of horny teenagers, I’m not going to sit through you giving one to Potter. Besides, he may very well be right.” Severus added, sharing a quick and knowing look with his son.

After all, both of them could smell it on him.

“Right about what?” Sirius asked as he and Remy settled onto a settee next to Harry.

“Harry might come into an inheritance.” Regulus answered with a warning look at his mate and son. It wasn’t up to them to interfere. In fact that was one of the few laws the Dovahim abided by. They never mess around with each other’s inheritance or out another Dovah. That the Malfoys hadn’t known of the tradition and Asterion was so young as all that kept his son from a nasty dressing-down from his mentors. “He’s from the Black line descending from Cygnus Black the First, the same line that has now produced three Dovahim in Asterion’s generation, one in my generation, and several in the generations before that. He’s actually more likely to inherit than Draco was, being closer to Cygnus by one generation than he is, and Draco still inherited.”

Sirius had gotten more than one laugh out of the “perfect pureblooded” Lucius Malfoy with his Veela blood getting a Dovah for a son, and had shared the news with his mate and godson, knowing that they both were more than capable of keeping the secret for Draco the same as they were doing for Severus and Asterion.

After all, if one member of the Black blood gets outed, it’ll make the Ministry look harder at all of them.

It was in everyone’s best interest to keep quiet, unless they all wanted to have to register with the Ministry and be subject to fines over not registering before and heavy restrictions due to their “dangerous” creature status.

“Oh.” Harry breathed out, eyes wide and startled. “I never realized…”

“We’re third cousins, pup.” Sirius reminded him gently. “So are you and Reg. Don’t worry about it, yeah?”

“My mate, ineloquent as he is, is right.” Remus told him, love for the orphan boy shining out of his golden eyes, even if his voice was a bit rough from the coming moon. “If you inherit, you inherit. You’ll manage it, and you’ll have all of us to help you. We’re all a family now, Harry.”

“Family.” Harry mused, exchanging a look with Asterion.

“Family.” Asterion said back, much firmer in intonation. The wolf was right. They were all family now. That meant… “None of us are in this alone, Harry. Not anymore.”
Four

The Black Prince

Chapter the Fourth

Severus had never been so thankful for the full moon, and Remus Lupin’s having to schedule around it. It allowed his son a full day and two nights before having to face the Ministry on Monday morning following the somewhat emotional scene with the mutts and Potter. An event that required his shields up and mask on at full strength, something that took time to recover after the blow the young Lord had taken to his icy persona. But Asterion did bounce back, in large part due to the one-on-one that he had with Potter, the two discussing something better left to the imagination of himself and the mutts if their blushes and giggles were anything to judge by.

Teenagers.

Worse, teenagers where one was about to embark on a mate hunt, which accounted for the giggling, though thankfully it hadn’t been his son making most of the offensive noise.

Asterion swept into the parlor where he’d been waiting with a cup of tea in one hand and a potions journal in the other, his appearance making a brief frown show itself on his stoic face.

Apparently, Asterion had had enough of playing conservative as he’d done for the last several meetings and outings. His comfortable but staid cotton robes, slacks, and loafers had been once more relegated to the back of his closet and he was once more dressed in dragonhide trousers and boots – this time in a matte green and black motif – with a matching gleaming grey silk T-shirt that had a magical illustration of the Slytherin house crest picked out in black and green covering one shoulder and arm of the shirt. The rebelliously dressed teen had a long leather dueling robe tossed over his forearm. Gleaming black dragonhide, it would close just over his chest with a few buckles before reaching to the wrist. The bottom cut off at mid-thigh, allowing ample movement and agility in a fight.

Severus could usually tell where the Black blood was showing with his son, but never more than in his preferred clothing as impacted by most of his shopping over the last three years being facilitated by Sirius with input from Regulus.

Yes indeed.

His son was more than prepared to take on the Ministry. They’d spend so much time goggling at the teen or staring at his arse that he’ll be able to just walk in and have his way, making the signing of the proper documents so much easier. Thankfully, he won’t have to appear before the Wizengamot before the next session which doesn’t start until September for the spring, giving him enough time to take at least one mate to help ground him before having to get into a pissing match with some of the older and ultra-conservative members of the Ministry.

“Dressing for effect again, I see?” Severus commented drily as he climbed to his feet. Thanks to his port-key he would leave a few minutes before his son, allowing him time to apparate from Hogsmeade where the port-key touched down, to London. Asterion would meet him there and the two would take the visitor’s entrance in the muggle call-box.

“Naturally.” Asterion said with breezy savoir-faire. “One thing I have learned from Uncle Siri – that wasn’t about pranking or dueling or being an animagus – was how to get the effect I want.
Uncle Siri set out to get disowned and wanted to be underestimated as just a “rebel” pureblood that was merely a troublemaker. Nobody ever really thinks about him or remembers him for being the top auror the Ministry had before his imprisonment – or that he had the highest kill rate. They all just shrugged that aside because he was “just” the rebel Black. The same as they’re doing now that he’s a “martyr” of the prejudicial justice system in Wizarding Great Britain.”

It was in large part to Sirius being so viciously maligned and left to rot in Azkaban without a trial for so many years before his escape that Pro-Tem Minister Bones was being so insistence that Asterion’s wish for fair and full Death Eater trials was being followed through on instead of the “thrown them away” policy of Bagnold’s administration at the end of the Voldemort war.

The papers still weren’t sure what to call this second string of Death Eater terrorism, since other than at the graveyard – which was a duel – the Azkaban escape, and the two battles at the Ministry, the one year of Voldemort’s return was mostly quiet and behind-the-scenes of the public eye. It didn’t really qualify as a second war. Many were hailing it as a type of short cold war. Unfortunately for Harry and Asterion however, the frontrunner was the “Double Trouble” line coined by Rita Skeeter.

“And you want the Ministry to underestimate you, to think that the events of the Atrium were a fluke.” Severus pinched his nose with his forefinger and thumb as his son’s plan of attack became clear. “So that when you decide to use your votes and seats, your many votes and seats, to affect change they don’t want they’ll brush it off because you’re so young and obviously outrageous. A person who couldn’t possibly have a plan to completely change the status of Dark Creatures in Britain.”

“One bill at a time.” Asterion said with a vicious smile a shark would envy. “Little, seemingly unimportant gains that over time will amount to widespread legislation, as we’ve seen Dumbledore and Voldemort both do to great effect. And by the time they figure it out…”

“It’s always too late.” Sirius finished with a yawn as he popped his eyes open from where he’d been snoozing on their settee after a long couple nights up with Remus. His mate and cub were working on the schedule for retaking his OWLs which was looking would end up being at the same time as Asterion took his. Until it came time to review for defense, charms, astronomy and transfiguration, the Grim had made himself scarce from the townhouse while his mate drilled Harry on his other studies, including classes he didn’t originally sit exams for as they weren’t officially taught at Hogwarts though you could choose to be tutored in them at home or study them independently, as at least three students in recent memory had done: Bill and Percy Weasley as well as Barty Crouch Junior. Even Asterion was joining the party to help out Harry picking up the slack with Divination and Magical Law since of everyone in their burgeoning family, he knew the areas the best.

But then, since Asterion was set to take OWLs in fifteen subjects, that wasn’t exactly a surprise: Charms, Care, Defense, Astronomy, Divination, Herbology, Runes, Potions, Arithmancy, History of Magic, Magical Law, Finance, Dueling, and Healing.

The last had been a surprise to Sirius, Blacks weren’t known for their healing ability, but then… Asterion is half Prince he supposed.

Though with Severus as a father, Sirius was impressed that the git hadn’t pressed Asterion to take the Dark Arts exams.

They weren’t taught at Hogwarts, especially under Dumbledore, but not all of them were outlawed, making them perfectly legal to study with the exams revolving around a lot of theory and the practical focusing on the legal applications of Dark Arts.

Severus snorted softly at Sirius’s words, glancing back and forth between the two Blacks who
wound up being so very much alike at times.

“We’re lucky the Dark Lord didn’t have either of you working for him.” He decided after a long moment. “Or the Dark would’ve won the first time around.”

The former spy popped away to the sound of a trio of snickers from Asterion and the Brothers Black as Regulus joined in the laughter from his frame.

... 

The first glitch in what was already shaping up to be a long day occurred at the welcome desk.

“Wand please.” The security guard asked, his boredom plain for all to see. Severus had already passed through and was waiting arms folded behind his back with his hands in his sleeve for Asterion to join him.

Asterion looked at the guard flatly before stating:

“I don’t have one.”

At that the wizard looked up with a derisive look on his face, assuming it would be a creature of some kind that was banned from using wands.

What he found wasn’t what he expected.

“What do you mean you don’t have a wand?” He questioned the noble before him, rather stupidly, as he followed the Prophet and knew exactly who he was dealing with.

“I mean.” Asterion stated slowly as if talking to a toddler, though with a condescending tone he would’ve never used with any actual child. “That I don’t have a wand. I don’t use one.”

“But…” The welcome wizard fumbled, clearly out of his depth. “Everyone uses wands!”

Before Asterion could unleash what would’ve been a truly scathing tirade on the unfortunate imbecile, an Auror stepped forward and gently nudged the low-level guard aside. Asterion recognized him from some of Siri’s stories as being a member of “The Order.” He wondered if his presence was purely the happy accident it appeared to be or if someone had whispered in an ear in case of trouble.

Personally he rather thought it was the latter in the form of either the Headmaster (who would’ve heard of the anticipated meetings somewhere) or Lord Malfoy who’d been coaching Asterion on the fine-points of dealing with politicians and bureaucrats since their first dinner.

“Lord Black-Prince,” Kingsley Shacklebolt nodded cordially to the young Lord. “Glad to finally meet you officially. Your uncle is a very good friend of mine. Please, come through.”

The Auror waved him through the checkpoint and with a flick of his wand affixed the visitor’s badge to the robe Asterion had shrugged on before leaving home.

“Auror Shacklebolt.” Asterion nodded, offering his hand. “Pleased to meet you.”

“Kingsley.” Severus greeted with a nod.

Duty done, Kings, who was looking like a shoe-in for Head Auror if Madam Bones ends up elected Minister instead of returning to being Head of the DMLE once the Wizengamot opens for the Fall, turned and headed off into the bowels of the Ministry, likely returning to his normal duties before
getting pegged to this little side-trip.

Taking a breath Asterion followed his father into one of the notorious Ministry lifts, pressing the button for Level Seven: Wizarding Heritage Office, Wizengamot Clerks, Department of Records. While seemingly very different, all three offices dealt with births, deaths, and inheritances though the Clerks also dealt with running and fetching for the Wizengamot as well as keeping the minutes for the meetings and dealing with the required paperwork once it had been filled out and prepared by the various Lords and Seat Holders. Unfortunately for Asterion, he had business with all three parts of Level Seven: confirming his birth and right of inheritance with Wizarding Heritage, confirming his Lordship and Seat for the Wizengamot, and filing all these as well as signing paperwork that had been long overdue with Records.

Honestly, if he didn’t think Asterion would need the buffer at some point, Severus would’ve left him to manage this morass on his own as most of it would be nothing more than filling out reams of parchment in triplicate.

But as Asterion’s biological father his statement of parentage is needed along with the blood-based inheritance testing Asterion would have to undergo.

Not that many would dare to cause problems for someone of Asterion’s birth, station, and wealth but there was always that one dunderhead or stickler for tradition who wouldn’t like having to kowtow to a younger, fresher mind. Especially a mind whose voice on the Wizengamot and in Wizarding High Society would carry so much weight. The toadying would be atrocious if entertaining for him to watch.

One hundred galleons said that Asterion’s skin would be crawling from all the gushing over him by nightfall.

…

It was official. Asterion decided three hours later with a silent snarl as he stalked through the Ministry heading for the cafeteria with a snickering Severus following behind him. Witches were insane.

He had to allow that he was likely biased by being raised by a nasty piece of work who didn’t give him the best introduction to the female species.

Granted, his great-grandmother Prince had been a lovely woman, if a bit decrepit to really enjoy having an active baby, toddler, and small child constantly around before her death. But she was just one of the females he’s had to deal with, albeit an important one as before meeting Lady Malfoy she comprised half of his total opinion on the female race. Of the little interaction with others he’s had it’s mostly been with males and very pleasant for the most part.

Lady Malfoy had stuck him as being a very serene woman who was hard to rile. Though when riled he had no doubt about her ability to cause pain. She was a Black and one of his House after all. He knew very well what she was capable of which again, made him approach her with cautious respect.

But these…these…these bints at the Ministry with their noses that wrinkled when they looked at his clothes and his father like they smelled something foul and their obnoxiously unhelpful but cheery attitude and their never-ending paperwork…

Witches had to be insane as a species.

Had to be.
Otherwise the only explanation he had was that they were simply mean or cruel.

And call him insane but he would rather deal with someone who had an actual illness over one who gained enjoyment over being a bitch.

He was off like that.

Scowling as he took his place in a line behind his father, trusting him to know what was at least safe if not actually good to eat, he rubbed his aching left hand.

“Tortuous harpies.” He hissed under his breath as he studied the redness forming on one knuckle from having a quill pressed against it for hours. He was used to writing and quite a lot but his quills had all been spelled with a cushioning charm whereas the Ministry used quills that weren’t charmed and couldn’t be charmed to prevent tampering in any form. The suspicious prats.

Although he could definitely see someone like his father or Lord Malfoy exploiting something like that if it was possible. They wouldn’t be able to help themselves. Their personalities were just geared towards taking advantage if someone is dumb enough to give them the opportunity.

He eyed the slightly shaking shoulders of his father with disdain.

The jerks.

Looking over his shoulder his father gave him a mockingly sympathetic glance. “Come now, Asterion.” The potions master said silkily. “It cannot be that bad. After all, it was your idea to complete all your outstanding paperwork in one day.”

Asterion gave him a sneer for his troubles, then placed his order with the server witch, eyeing her with caution as she plated his “blue” steak medallions with baked potato and sautéed onions, asparagus, and mushrooms. He sniffed it discretely as he followed his dark protector over to a secluded table after gathering a cup of juice for each of them along with mugs of tea.

As they started to tuck into their meals, Severus with a large bookmaker’s sandwich and crisps, they were joined by a surprise or not-so-surprise guest.

“Severus,” Lord Malfoy greeted his friend warmly. “And young Lord Black-Prince, a pleasure to see you again.”

His voice was perfectly pitched to draw attention to their “close” relationship while seeming perfectly in tune with the consummate politician Lucius was at all times.

“Lucius,” Severus nodded softly, gesturing with one long-fingered hand towards a chair, implicitly offering for him to join them and set down his own plate. Asterion noted he’d chosen a similar meal to himself, though his meat appeared well-done. Most likely a ploy to draw unwelcome attention away from Asterion’s own unique choice.

“Lord Malfoy,” Asterion gave him a perfectly polite-but-friendly nod of his own. He’d liked Draco quite a bit if finding him a little immature, and had enjoyed Lady Malfoy’s company more than any other female previous or since. This family was one he would like to cultivate even if he didn’t already enjoy a close relationship because of his status as Head of the Lady’s birth House. “Grand to see you again, and in a more public setting.”

Lucius gave the younger man a discreet but pleased smile. Asterion was learning very quickly indeed. With one turn of a phrase he’d alluded to their close relationship, one furthered by his joining them of his own initiative. Lord Black-Prince would go far…if he didn’t choose the wrong
“Please, Asterion.” Lucius gave a “public” pleased smile. “Call me Lucius, as your father does.”


The three urbane wizards chatted casually on a wide variety of topics though steering clear of any that had the potential to be inflammatory such as the war all while they politely grazed their way through their plates, allowing them to see and be seen by a wide array of Ministry officials, workers, and visitors. Both Severus and Lucius would cast their voice low, too low to be overheard even with listening spells, knowing that Asterion’s superior senses would pick it up, pointing out a person of interest either good or bad or praising his control and performance. For his part, Asterion found himself dealing alright with the crowds of people. Much of this was due to Severus choosing a table that didn’t put them in the center of the hustle and bustle while allowing him to sit with his back protected by the wall.

Knowing that no one was behind him and he could see the others help with his anxiety over a new place and too many new people quite a bit.

“You’re doing very well, Asterion.” Lucius said while leaning over ostensibly to place his plate on the magical collector in the center of the table that whisked the dirty dishes away. “But you’re about to have your first real test.”

Asterion eyed the tall and muscular individual coming their way, taking a deep breath to calm himself that also allowed him to take in the stranger’s scent.

Eyes widening infinitesimally, he cocked his head curiously at his father for confirmation.

“Yes,” Severus whispered low. “He’s a Dovah. A mated dominant from a prominent family of Dovahim, you’ll likely meet some of his siblings and/or other relatives at your hunt.”

Lucius stood to greet him, Asterion following his example along with his father.

Severus nodded as Lucius went through the ritual greeting-dance politicians engaged in. Especially politicians whose family was always in the middle of one scandal after another over their often unconventional spouses. The Llewelyn family had more than one same-sex couple among this one’s – Felix – siblings, as well as two triads, one of them involving Felix himself. However, as the wizarding world was ever-concerned with birth rates, and Felix had ten children, no one ever dared to take him to task for his triad, even the most prudish of tsing biddies.

Being in a relationship with multiple partners – even marry them – was perfectly legal in Wizarding Great Britain, but there were always those who viewed such relationship askance.

“Good to see you out and about Master Snape.” Felix Llewelyn said warmly, looking down at the others from his six-five frame and holding out a hand the size of Asterion’s plate. “It’s been too long.”

“Yes, you’re looking…robust as always Mr. Llewelyn.” Severus said with a slight nod. The Llewelyns were prominent in both the pureblood and Dovah circles and of them Felix was arguably the most powerful. He was the sort of man who commanded enough respect that even the disagreeable Severus Snape played nice…or at least played down his usual disdain.

“Thank you.” Felix gave a little smirk before zeroing in on the reason he came over. It certainly wasn’t to speak with Malfoy. He was still furious over the blond getting off all-but scot free. And
Severus while a brave and honorable man wasn’t someone he’d speak to in the usual course of a
day. The others seeing his objective and being a pair of rather perverse prats when the mood strikes
them, made him ask.

“And who is this?”

Smirking together over forcing the indomitable Felix Llewelyn to unbend enough in public to ask for
an introduction, Severus stepped up next to Lucius to introduce his son.

“Felix Llewelyn, this is my son Lord Asterion Severus Black-Prince. Asterion this is businessman
Felix Llewelyn.”

Smiling politely after a covert signal from his father, Asterion offered his hand. Felix was safe as far
as dominants went, despite being huge, as he was not only mated but with children as well. Plus…
his father could be a bit of a prick but so far he hadn’t steered him wrong nor sensed anything off
with Felix.

“Hello,” Asterion said. “Pleasure to meet you.”

Felix’s smile was in turns blinding at the sweet young Dovah and tense when he caught the anxious
undertones in Lord Black Prince’s voice. Mentally growling at whoever gave this sweet one cause
for anxiety, he gently took the offered hand and gave him a soft kiss on the back. Asterion stiffened
at the new sensation and gracefully took his hand back.

“Likewise,” Felix smiled again, already making plans to go over to his parents’ house and call a
family meeting. His unmated siblings needed to be on their game once the newest batch of mate
hunt notices go out. He’d make sure they prioritized this sweet one’s hunt over that of some of the
others that would soon enter their hunting season.

“It was good to see you Felix.” Severus interrupted before either party was offended. “However we
are needed back down in Records before our meeting with Asterion’s new solicitor.”

Taking the quaffle-sized hint Felix excused himself followed quickly by Lucius, the latter of which
let Severus know he’d made arrangements to be present when Asterion was officially vested in his
seats on the Wizengamot and Hogwarts’ Board of Governors. Usually a closed-doors event with a
random selection of Lords present, Lucius had pulled rank to ensure that his best-friend’s son had a
friendly face in the chambers. It was one function where Severus simply could not be there to
support his child, especially following his resignation from teaching, therefore Lucius would stand in
his stand.

Grumbling about filling out more paperwork but excited to meet the solicitor who from here on out
would deal with the majority of the minutiæ in the future allowing Asterion to doing what he’d been
trained from birth to do: be Lord Black-Prince.

To the “normal” wizard or witch, just being a Lord wasn’t a job or a vocation. It was simply an
accident of birth that others were born into, usually accompanied by wealth or “family money.”

To the negligent Lords, those who took their accident of birth for granted and rested on the
achievements of their ancestors, being a Lord was a license for laziness and excess. Everything was
their entitlement and they didn’t care about anyone but themselves.

Then there were the other Lords.

The Lords from many houses who were raised and trained in the ancient policy of noblisse oblige
who took their station and used it to effect change in their world.
Those Lords were the ones who were considered “unemployed” or “free-loafers” by the uninformed masses. They worked every day for the betterment of their world, for no pay and often no acknowledgement. It was a life of service and commitment and it was what Asterion had studied for and devoted his education towards.

Lucius Malfoy for all that he’d bowed in service to the Dark Lord, was another such Lord raised from birth to service in the Wizengamot and politics; he’d taken the young Lord under his wing in a sense as this was an area Severus had zero experience.

It had taken a lot for his old friend to approach him once he learned his son’s ambitions to come to his friend and ask him to mentor his newfound child. Lucius appreciated the effort it had taken and the blow to the man’s pride. Severus prided himself on being a well-rounded wizard but no amount of education could replace the lessons instilled in the old line heirs from birth. Asterion needed another old line heir for a mentor until he became more confident around people.

Asterion continue to grumble under his breath as they made their way back down into the bowels of the Ministry to fill out the dreaded paperwork. Uncle Siri had been right.

There was a big difference between writing for pleasure or research and filling out these infernal parchments!

…

Asterion once again threw himself into his favorite armchair after stripping off his outer robe in his private rooms.

It had been the day that never ended.

Hours had been devoted to nothing more than filling out parchment after parchment. Then it was time to undergo the blood-inheritance testing with the Heritage officials. His father, raised by a disowned daughter, had been surprised to find out some of the lines they were related to both as Princes and through his grandmother who had been Cassandra Argineau before marrying Septimus Prince.

The Argineaus were one of the truly old Houses, harking back to Ancient Greece and even Atlantis before it sank in a magical catastrophe. They were known not as the most powerful of houses but instead for the accuracy of their Diviners, who when properly trained tended to advise kings and heads of state. It was said that the legendary Princess Cassandra of Troy, the Seer who foresaw the fall of her city but was met with disbelief, hailed from the Argineau lines. Which explained a lot that had been confusing Severus over why his son was tutoring Potter in Divination of all worthless subjects – because to Asterion it wasn’t worthless, as he’d told him loudly and ad nauseam when Severus had mentioned it.

What wasn’t well known was that Argineaus were also known for having a higher ratio of Dovah children versus other lines, Severus being an excellent example. Having a Dovah dominant pop up after a line – in this case the British Argineau line – was considered “dead” as far as Dovah inheritance was concerned for centuries was extremely rare. Not as rare as having four Dovahim in two generations with only one from a Dovah parent like the Blacks, but still rare.

Severus was shocked to say the least, not having known that his grandmother was an Argineau.

Nor, really, knowing much of anything about his mother’s family.

Clearly, they were going to have to have a conversation about the Princes and the Argineaus.
Asterion had tried to broach it once with his father when he signed over a portion of the Prince assets but he’d quickly been shot down. His father still held a grudge over Grandmother Eileen being disowned.

It was understandable.

It was also idiotic considering both they and she have been dead for over a decade.

But now wasn’t the time to tackle his stubborn sire.

Asterion was sitting for fifteen OWLs, Harry with him, over the course of the week and needed to brush up on what would be expected on the tests.

Fortunately, they’d be the only ones testing so they would be graded same-day, allowing him to take his NEWTs next week.

He sighed before climbing to his feet and walking over to a decanter sitting on the small bar in his sitting room. He didn’t often indulge but at the moment he felt the need for a small brandy to unwind from the Ministry before hitting the books...again.

...“Divination.” Harry said with a groan, staring around the office in the “family” portion of Castle Black, though at least half of his groaning had more to do with how overstuffed his brain felt from having information beaten into his head all-day every-day with only short breaks. Asterion had even joined in, giving him reading assignments on the Tarot, reading Runes, and Divining using special throwing sticks or tiles called “bones.”

At least it wasn’t dream interpretation or crystal gazing, it had to be said.

“Divination.” Asterion repeated, though with much less trepidation and much more serious intensity. They were alone, Severus hiding in his brewing room while Remus haunted the libraries and Sirius escorted him around the ones he couldn’t enter alone without a Black with him.

“Why are we doing this again?” Harry asked, his voice a near whine as he plopped down on one of the chairs positioned on opposite sides of a small hexagon table in rich mahogany that was draped with a raw silk cloth. “My last practical I had to stare at a crystal ball until I made up enough gibberish to please the proctor. Can’t I just do that again?”

“If you want a Poor at best, certainly.” Asterion told him with an arch of a brow as he settled into position across from Harry. “The test proctor isn’t an idiot. They would’ve known that you were making it up and didn’t give half a farthing for Divination – grading you accordingly.”

“But Divination is a soft subject.” Harry said with much less petulance and more confusion. “An easy O.”

“At Hogwarts with a sherry-soaked witch as your teacher, it might very well be, I’ll grant you.” Asterion allowed with a half-smirk. “But in real life? Not even close. Did you know a NEWT in Divination is required to work with the Department of Mysteries?”

“Well...no...”

“How about with the Spirits Division? Did you know they require a Divination NEWT? Also the obvious: being a Diviner.” Asterion turned graceful now that he’d made his point. “All of three of those require Divination NEWTs off the top of my head, and there’s dozens more.”
“Why don’t they tell us that in second year?” Harry asked, rather disgruntled over once again being blindsided by information about the world he was living in that he never knew. And since everyone always assumed that he knew, they never told him.

“I think part of the problem.” Asterion answered carefully. “Is that with half-bloods the assumption is that their magical parent will tell them things that you just learn growing up in the wizarding world, or at least they know enough to ask the right questions. But since you were raised muggle, you don’t even know what you don’t know to ask the questions you need answers to. Do you even have any idea what you want to do after school?”

Harry sighed, slumping a bit into the softness of his chair, shaking his head then explaining:

“I said Auror during my meeting with my Head of House, but that was mainly since Umbitch was watching from the corner…and it was one of the only jobs I knew about at the time other than generic working for the Ministry or teaching.”

“Plus you wanted to rile her up.” Asterion quirked a smile as Harry laughed agreeing: “And I wanted to rile her right off.”

“Alright.” Asterion waved a hand. “I’ll tell Remus to hook you up with a wizarding careers book, the townhouse should have on that’s self-updating, most family homes above a certain income level do, others using the ones at the Hogwarts or Ministry archives. For now, let’s just focus on getting you passing OWLs across the board so you can take the NEWTs you need for what career you decide on after some study, ok?”

“Yeah.” Harry gave the older teen a soft smile. “That sounds brilliant.”

“Well, I’ve been linked to you, so I know you’re smart enough to manage it.” Asterion told him seriously. “You just need to apply yourself a bit…and actually care about school now that you’re not going to cork it. So, Divination.”

Asterion rose and motioned for Harry to join him, showing him the various “stations” that were set up with items that could be used in place or moved over to the table in the center of the round room.

“One of the reason the OWLs Divination course is supposed to cover so many subjects is because while not everyone is a Seer, most everyone usually manages to connect with one form or another.”

“Really?” Harry asked surprised. “I thought you were either born with the talent or not. That’s certainly what McGonagall says.”

“That’s what most purely analytical people say.” Asterion responded drily. “My father with them. But the fact of the matter is, Divination wouldn’t be such a popular form of magic if it didn’t have value. The mistake people like my father and your Professor both make is expecting too much. Divination isn’t a showy magic like Transfiguration or Defense or Charms. It’s a subtle one like Potions or Herbology. Many witches and wizards favor use Divination in their daily lives – and that’s fine. The sticking point is to be aware of how much you’re relying on it and not allowing yourself to be ruled by it or become obsessed, such as I’ve gathered your Seer Professor is. She has a valid – if inconsistent – gift, but that’s not enough for her so she overreaches herself with other forms of Divination and has made herself – and her field with her – look foolish.”

“Really?” Harry echoed himself. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen the Weasleys stare into a crystal ball or anything.”

Asterion snorted. “There’s a lot more to Divination than crystal gazing. Here,” he waved his hand
around the room. “We have several options both common and uncommon. Crystal gazing you’re familiar with…” He gestured towards shelves filled with crystals, though in many shapes, sizes, and colors, not just the clear orbs Harry was familiar with. “But that’s for more serious practitioners or someone with a gift for it.”

“Wish someone would tell that to Trelawney…” Harry muttered under his breath as he glared a bit at the shelves, Asterion ignoring him and continuing with his tour of the tools.

“Then we have I-Ching, Numerology, xylomancy, Runic Divination, astrology, and one of the most common forms used by both magics and muggles.” Asterion stopped in front of a table with many stacks of card decks. “Tarot.” He gestured for Harry to stand in front of the table. “Which is what we’re going to focus on for your OWL.”

“But I had to do crystal gazing…”

“Only because you didn’t ask to use something else.” Asterion told him with a chuckle. “They set the OWL table with a crystal ball, but if you’d have looked around the room, there would’ve been other tools for you to use – if you asked. It’s how the examiners separate people who are wasting their time from those who take the field seriously.”

“How do you know all this?” Harry asked suspiciously.

“I had years to read and research for the day the spell failed.” Asterion reminded him. “And my Dad, who was one of the students who asked to use a different tool and scored an O on both his OWL and NEWT. Here,” he took Harry’s dominant hand and held it a couple inches above the Tarot decks. “Close your eyes and try and feel with your magic, do some of the decks feel better than the others? Warmer, more soothing, anything?”

Frowning lightly, Harry did as instructed, thinking back to the Atrium when with Asterion’s power pumping through him he swore he could see the magic all around him, not just feel it. After a minute or two, he lowered his hand and rested it on a deck that felt better than the others as Asterion had said, quickly moving his hand away from several that had felt cold or sharp towards the warmth the other gave out. Opening his eyes back up, he picked up the deck, one that looked older than several of the others, but not as old as the one he thought was the cold one.

“Mmm.” Asterion hummed, seeing which deck Harry had chosen. “Consider that lesson one: new tools that you purchase in a shop will be blank, they won’t have retained energy from previous readings or owners. If you buy used tools, at a specialty shop or an antiques dealer or what have you, you’ll need to cleanse them before you use them.”

“Why haven’t you done that with all these?” Harry asked, waving towards the table as Asterion led him back to the center table, setting down the deck in the middle before sitting.

“They’re family tools, going back generations.” Asterion explained. “None of them are harmful or cursed, but using tools that have stored energy from generations of use – if you can trust from whom they’ve taken said energy – can give a more accurate or powerful reading.”

“Ok, family energy – good, stranger energy – bad.” Harry said reflexively. “I’m following you so far.”

“Not necessarily family energy.” Asterion clarified as he picked up the Tarot deck and started shuffling it thoughtfully. “More complementary. At the Atrium…” He hesitated a moment then seeing that Harry didn’t have a negative reaction at his bringing it up continued. “At the Atrium, were you able to distinguish between my power and your own as you found Voldemort’s tethers?”

“That’s a good analogy.” Asterion told him approvingly. “Discipline is one of the main differences between our two magics. You haven’t cultivated discipline the way I have, I could tell when we were linked that there’s a start of it, but one you haven’t really focused your efforts on continuing. You should work on it, maybe ask Remus for some advice, it’ll stand you in good stead as you move onto more difficult magics in your NEWT studies or if you ever wanted to train in a discipline…such as the Animagus transformation?” He smiled knowingly at the younger teen as Harry blushed at his words then continued. “The key to Divination, at least in the more concrete facets of it like Tarot or throwing bones, is two things: mindfulness and energy transfer.”

Harry mouthed the words a bit, blinking. He thought he understood energy transfer without further explanation after what Asterion had told him about selecting tools. But he waited to ask any questions until the older teen was finished with his lecture.

“Energy transfer, while harder initially for most beginners, is actually simpler to manage and understand than mindfulness once you’ve gotten the hang of it.” Asterion set the deck down tidily in front of himself then cut it thrice before restacking it with the middle cut on the top and the first on the bottom then shuffled it a final time. “While I was handling the cards, I was also charging them with a bit of my magic, tuning them to me if you would.” He explained. “When you’re doing a reading for yourself or someone else, you’ll do the same. It lets the cards know, if you will, whose power they’re calling on. Magical beings bleed magic as naturally as breathing, giving off magic to the world around us even as we take it in with every breath we take or thing we eat or drink in a never-ending cycle of give and take. Doing a reading for another person, you’ll shuffle the cards first then hand them to the other person, instructing them to shuffle and cut the cards as many times as the pattern you’ll read requires. For the OWL, you’ll likely be asked to do a simple three-card read: past, present, future; and then interpret the cards for either yourself or the examiner.”

“Where does mindfulness come in?”

“I’m getting there.” Asterion told him with a teasing look. “Be a little patient, Harry. If you can spend months learning the Patronus charm you can give me your attention for the bit of time it takes to get you an O reading. Besides, I was covering that next anyway.”

Harry groaned a little to himself, rolling his eyes.

Yeah, Asterion was definitely a Black, Siri told him almost the exact same thing when they were discussing one of the transfiguration core principles.

“Mindfulness for Tarot or runic divination. Whoever the reading is for, instruct them, or remember to do it yourself, to focus on what question they have or what the object of the reading is. Focus and concentrate on that to the exclusion of all else while they handle the cards with purpose and care.” Asterion told him then gave a soft laugh at that look from Harry that almost screamed Really, that’s it? “Like I said, it all sounds easy enough, but blocking out everything and focusing on one thing and one thing only can be much easier said than done. It’s easier when you’re doing a reading for yourself as the tools won’t have extraneous information coming from whoever charged them for the reading.”

“Ok, then shouldn’t I have shuffled the cards or something to charge them?” Harry asked. “If I’m giving the reading and you’re the subject. For that matter, you shouldn’t have been talking to me either…”
“Ah,” Asterion held up a finger. “But you *did* charge the cards, you felt a complementary magic in them, so it wouldn’t have taken much, and held and carried them with purpose. That’ll be enough, especially with tools this old and magical. As for my mindfulness,” Asterion shrugged. “I started learning Divination from the cradle with my Great-Grandmother Cassandra. At this point for a simple three-card reading I don’t have to focus that much to reach the correct mind-frame.”

“Ok then…” Harry shifted restlessly. “What’s next?”

“Next,” Asterion handed over the deck. “The cards have been charged, shuffled and cut. Now you’ll reveal the cards: past to the left, present in the center, and future to the right, keep that in your mind: past, present, future, and that it’s for me. That’s your part of the mindfulness while doing a reading for someone else. You’ve studied the Tarot meanings?” Asterion asked as Harry followed his instructions, his brows raising as he watched the cards being reveal. Harry wasn’t half bad at dealing the cards with a past/present/future spread for Asterion of a reversed Devil, six of swords, and two of cups. The only thing that could foul him up on the exam would be his interpretation.

“Yes.” Harry answered absently as he set the deck aside with and studied the cards. “Both with Trelawney and a refresher from that book you told me to find in the townhouse library.”

“Then what do you make of those three cards as they relate to me?” Asterion asked. “Now keep in mind, if they have you read for the examiner, you won’t have much if any background information to draw on. You’ll have to put the three together as best you can with minimal information.”

Harry nodded then spoke, at first tentative then gaining more confidence as he continued. Like Asterion said. It wasn’t as if he was doing this reading blind. It was like training-wheels for Divination almost.

“Well, Devil reversed, that’s…breaking free, power reclaimed, so that’s your past.” He decided. “You were bound for a long time, now you’re free and are free to take your power in hand which fits with the six of swords: regretful but necessary transition, rites of passage. Your presently in the middle of becoming a free man, and all the heartache and joy that comes with it.”

“Where does joy come in?” Asterion prompted him.

“The third card, your future.” Harry tapped it with a small smile and looked up at Asterion with shining green eyes. “Two of Cups: unified love, partnership, attraction, and relationships. You’re going to meet someone – or several someones – to be your mate or mates.”

“It’s mates.” Asterion told him with a smile, nodding his head over towards where the runic divination tools were in explanation. “Even if I didn’t know from my power levels, I practice Divination and mates is the answer the bones gave me.”

“Why is it called throwing or tossing bones, anyway?” Harry asked as he picked up the reading and shuffled them back into the deck, trying to be mindful as Asterion had instructed him.

“Because that’s what the best runic divination tools are made of.” Asterion explained patiently. “Bone. Read the text I assigned on runic divination and they’ll tell you why, I don’t think either of us really has the patience for another lecture on Divination today…and by the way…well done on that reading, especially for someone who has spent the last couple years writing off Divination as rubbish.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah.” Harry rolled his eyes as he set the deck down and cut it. “I’m allowed to change my mind aren’t I?”
“I’d be a piss-poor tutor if I didn’t manage that much at least.” Asterion told him seriously. “Just make sure you don’t use Divination as a crutch. It’s a tool like anything else, but what it isn’t is infallible. People who let it rule their minds are just asking for trouble. After all, as we’ve already discussed, not all energy is benign…any more than people and their magic are.”

Asterion hit his bed face-down with a heartfelt groan at the end of the week. Fifteen OWLs. Fifteen. It had been a marathon of testing. Not only had he taken more tests than normal, though he hadn’t broken the record, but he’d also done it in six days instead of the standard ten.

But the looks on the faces of his father, Dad, and Uncle Siri were brilliant when he told them he scored straight O’s.

It was a mixed bag, he’ll admit.

His Dad as always beamed with pride. But his Dad was biased to say the least. He would’ve been proud with any results let alone fourteen straight O’s.

Uncle Siri had beamed and then mock-frowned, saying that he knew he should’ve spent more time teaching him to be a prankster and how to have fun since Asterion had clearly spent too much time buried in the library.

Which had his father scowling at the menace and Regulus jumping to tell Severus to smack him upside the head for him.

Severus for his part was half-proud and half-shocked, though he supposed that Asterion was three years older than most students with three extra years of intensive education even if he was dealing with isolation and his new Dovah inheritance.

Asterion sighed, flipping over onto his back and stared up at the ornate carving on the ceiling, visible thanks to the lack of a canopy cresting over the top. He liked having curtains to block out the sun but having the top on the massive four-poster made him feel penned in. He’d had the fabrics in the room redone a few months before, during a particularly hard time dealing with his isolation, changing out the traditional fabrics with night sky motifs in dark colors for light silver and an airy pale green.

It brightened the dark cherry wood of the furniture, especially when paired with the Aubusson in the same colors brightening his mood at the same time.

As the start of the mate hunt crept ever nearer, his mind kept churning with all the different changes that could and undoubtedly would come along with finding and selecting his mates. Each mate would mean melding new tastes and likes and opinions with that of him and his home while also having to work around a new set of dislikes and can’t-haves. It was another set of coming changes in a time that had already been overflowing with shocks and adjustments and yes, changes.

Here he was a formerly parentless, house-bound, unmated Dovah who could only study and train and prepare for a life that seemed to never start. Fast forward three weeks and his father was ensconced in the best guest suite in Castle Black, he was traveling to the Ministry and Gringotts and Diagon Alley to take his place in Wizarding Society, making friends with his cousins and preparing for his mate hunt. A mere few weeks was all that was between him and the stressful circus that would shape the rest of his life.

Time that was slated to be filled to the brim with dinners and meetings and his NEWTs testing.
Well.

He laughed to himself.

At least he wouldn’t have much time to stress out about the hunt.

If there was one thing he’d found out about the changes going on in his life, most of them left him with little to no time to sit down and think about everything that would send him into a tizzy if he spent too much time obsessing over them.

When you’re a secluded Dovah with more power than any one Wizard should ever have, obsessing was just about the worst way to spend his time.

Sitting up he took a deep breath before folding himself into the lotus position and started his deep breathing exercises. Thinking about obsessing was the first step towards actually obsessing. Occlumency was one of his best defenses against some of his more destructive habits. Sorting and organizing his thoughts and memories helped lessen his instances of anxiety in public as well as helping him not focus too much on the maybes and might-haves and might-happens.

Closing his eyes he cleared his mind and sank into his trance.

Yes.

This was just what he needed to sort through everything that had happened.

Including how he was going to handle an event that was a cross between feeding time at the zoo and speed dating.

He shivered a moment, his trace temporarily shattered as he got the image of himself as a baby gazelle surrounded by a mass of hungry lions and hyenas.

From what his Dad had told him…the thought wasn’t far off…

…

Harry stared at him with equal parts disgust and admiration from his spot cuddling with and preening his owl on the rug beside the study fire at the townhouse.

“I can’t believe you not only scored fifteen straight O’s on your OWLs but then had the utter nerve to take twelve NEWTs and got O’s on all of them.” Harry stared at his newest friend with accusation. “You know how much whining I’m going to have to deal with from my friends now over this crap?!”

Sirius snickered from where he was studying the three pages of test results, Asterion’s OWLs and NEWTs and Harry’s OWLs. Since his pup had retaken them, they’d scored them same-day, the same as they’d done for Asterion, and then sent the letter off to Sirius as his guardian once he’d finished. The first results hadn’t even been fully scored before they’d gotten the retake notice, so the Board of Education had binned his Hogwarts exams and the retake would be what was sent to Minnie.

Ordinary Wizarding Level Exams

Wizarding Great Britain Board of Education

Passing Grades:
O – Outstanding

E – Exceeds Expectations

A – Acceptable

Non-Passing/Failing Grades:

P – Poor

D – Dreadful

T – Troll

*Note: To be eligible to take the N.E.W.T. or sit for a Mastery, the testee must pass a subject with A – Acceptable or above. Required grades to advance in study is established by each school. In order to retain the right to a wand, a witch or wizard must pass no less than three (3) O.W.L. exams with at least an A – Acceptable or better. 

___________________________
Student/Testee Name: Harry James Potter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Astronomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Care of Magical Creatures</td>
<td>O***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charms</td>
<td>O</td>
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<td>Defense Against the Dark Arts</td>
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<td>Divination</td>
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<td>Herbology</td>
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<td>Transfiguration</td>
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Final Results: 8 O’s, 2 E’s, 2 A’s = 12 Passing OWL Results
Remus had given Harry a battery of pre-tests to see if he should take the same fifteen tests as Asterion and in the end they had decided to leave off Runes and Arithmancy since he hadn’t been able to catch up on the material. That didn’t mean he was off the hook, no, Remus had made vague threats of summer studies. Since apparently one of those things Harry didn’t know enough to ask about was that he could retake the OWL and NEWT exams at the Ministry as many times as he was willing to pay for them. He was excited now to receive his letter on August First so he could see what classes he qualified for, he’d never known that if you scored well enough on your OWL exams that you could qualify to take a NEWT on subjects like Warding and Healing.

The more he learned, the more he realized he really needed to sit down with a muggleborn introduction packet and his godfathers and get some information about the world he’s saved…twice publicly and twice privately.

“Still can’t believe that I scored an O in Divination.” Harry said with a chuckle. He’d done as Asterion had coached him and gone for a tarot deck, netting an approving and interested nod from Professor Tofty then gave a three-card read for himself, drawing the Fool reversed, the Tower, and the King of Cups which he interpreted as: being naïve and reckless, taking too many risks in his past, leading to a time of upheaval and sudden change in his present, and ultimately emotional balance and control if he took the revelations of his past and present and used them to fashion his future. The examiner had been impressed, to say the least, by the night-and-day practical Harry had done.

Still, Care had been a lot more fun since it had been on Crups, Harry enjoying the magical canines enough that he’d been half-tempted to ask for one for his birthday before changing his mind.

Hedwig was more than enough companion for him.

“Divination,” Severus drawled as he swept into the room. He’d finally tired of Asterion harping on him for ignoring people other than the Malfoys and the Potions Masters he corresponded with. Although with the Dovahim mentors coming soon he could see Asterion’s point. He wouldn’t want his son left alone twenty-four seven with a Dovah, no matter how long he’s been mated or how honorable he is until his child is safely mated himself. So he suffered through the hospitality of Potter at Grimmauld Place and had a requisite cup of tea that would keep his child happy and out of his hair. “Is a wooly subject and utterly useless unless one happens to be a Seer or Oracle. Divining is a mixture of myth, magic, science, and insight. Even someone without a genuine gift for Divining can still use it for personal enrichment and decision making.”

Remus made an agreeing noise as he looked up from the language text he’d borrowed from the Black Library. He’d adorably pouted for several moments when he found he couldn’t remove it from the estate but was mollified by Sirius promising they could visit often so Remus could come and study it.

“Those with the bloodline gift tend to be the most accurate though.” The werewolf added in his soft, low voice. “But a true gift for Divining is rarer than true Seers. There’s only one Master Diviner I’ve ever heard of alive today and he’s attached to the Egyptian Magical Emperor-Pharaoh.”

“Why do they call it all Divination then?”

“Because people are morons who took the title for a respectable profession and tried to give Seeing the same cache in public view.” Sirius answered with his usual blunt irreverence. “Which backfired thanks to foolish twits like Trelawney.”
“Huh,” Harry said oh-so-eloquently. “Learn something new every day.” Turning his attention to the once-more seated Asterion, he posed a new question. “How accurate are you?”

“Harry!”

“Potter!”

The older wizards called out, shocked. You just didn’t ask someone things like that. It simply wasn’t done. It was like asking a Lady to show you her knickers in the middle of a Wizengamot meeting.

Asterion waved them off with a roll of his eyes. That was the kind of faux pas he was likely to make himself. Only in his case it would be because he didn’t care about other’s social mores instead of simple ignorance like Harry.

“What?” Harry demanded as he straightened a feather that was crooked, gaining himself a soft hoot and ear nibble from his first friend. “I’ve seen his results and he scored straight O’s in Divination and Arithmancy and Ancient Runes and Astronomy. And he just told me all of those are part of Divining. It’s easy to see from that that he at least has some sort of skill with it or he wouldn’t have bothered with Divination, let alone done such a good job of tutoring me in the subject.”

The other teen laughed, stretching out a bit on the chaise.

“I’m…adequate.” He admitted. “Not a Master by any means. But,” he stressed. “A big part of that is experience in reading the bones. Experience I just don’t have yet when it comes to reading for others. For myself,” he shrugged. “I’m very good but like any actual Diviner I have a limit on how much I can ask of my gift in a set period. I have to be careful or I could burn it out and it wouldn’t come back. Ever.”

“I…” Severus sighed. “Had no idea.”

Remus gave a low rumbling laugh as he traded a surprisingly commiserating glance with the Potions Master.

“When it comes to kids,” he said thinking of important things that he would simply forget to talk to his own father about when he was that age. “Most parents often have no idea about what’s going on with them. I’d just be thankful Asterion seems to want you around.”

The dour man nodded in acknowledgement of that truth before turning back to his Potions Quarterly. If they held to standard, it would be at least a half hour before he’d be able to get back down to the basement and his experiments. Might as well not waste it in idle chatter.

…

“You’re a Diviner, that’s why you were helping Potter with his Divination studies?” Severus asked his son quietly later that night as they shared a brandy before retiring after returning from Grimmauld Place. Severus was a bit surprised at how well Asterion was sharing the mutt’s attention. He supposed Asterion was just being mindful that Harry was now and would always be parentless, making him the more needful of their shared Siri.

The part of him that worried over his child’s forced reclusive behavior was thrilled that he was making friends. But the much larger part that still resented and hated James Potter for the years he’d spent childless was grimacing inside over it being Harry Potter that Asterion’s been drawn to. Not that he hasn’t formed a much more tentative relationship with his cousin Draco as well. No, they’ve begun exchanging owls as well, having short visits at each other’s homes, and have taken to
educating each other on their joint family, Draco surprisingly encouraging Asterion to reach out to their other cousin Nymphadora or their more distant relatives like Longbottom, showing a shocking level of understanding and empathy for a normally selfish teen.

That was still only two people who Asterion could call “friend” and both of them claimed kinship with the young Lord.

As a man who’d never sought out friends or friendship he couldn’t exactly talk. Though his case was personal preference for having a very small pool of friends, not the result of forced isolation. Asterion still wavered and was uncomfortable when around others. It was breaking Regulus’s heart, watching from his painting as his cherished and hard-won child floundered now that he’s been released from his imprisonment in his family estate.

And if there was one thing Severus couldn’t stand, it was watching Regulus be anything but happy.

If that meant tolerating the infernal puppy that was Harry James Potter, let alone the mangy mutts he dragged around with him, Severus would do it.

Only for Regulus and Asterion.

Asterion laughed a little laugh. “Really? With all the artificial power boosts I’ve had? If there was a smidgen of a gift in my bloodline I’ve picked it up. Thankfully the Blacks were only known for their creature inheritances and not for Seers or anything else. The Potions gift from the Princes and Divining from the Argineaus were more than enough, thanks.”

Severus had to concede the point. While Asterion was the first to say that he didn’t have his father’s genius in Potions – and that was true – it was more do to a lack of driving interest than ability. Asterion could surpass his father in his chosen field…if he wanted to.

Fortunately for Severus’s reputation as “the best of the best” Asterion’s interests were much less academic and much more politically driven. Whether he’d always wanted to affect change in Wizarding Britain for Dark Creatures or if that was a development that came with his inheritance only Asterion could say. However it was clear that he’d been groomed for public office from the cradle, much like his new mentor Lucius had been.

And unlike Lucius’s son who loved Potions, in a twist of fate it was the Potions Master’s son who would take the political world by storm.

“Diviners tend to focus more on personal divination than large-scale unless they’re Masters of the craft.” Severus said casually. “Perhaps that would be why you knew you needed to change around Castle Black and make it welcoming of guests?”

The dour man took a slow sip of his warmed brandy, enjoying the bouquet as his son thought that over, deciding how much he should share about this particular gift.

“I knew,” he said slowly. “That I would have some kind of inheritance. I didn’t know which, the Blacks have more than Dovah blood, but the bones were certain on that point. From there they also spoke of freedom from constraints, mating, and children.”

Asterion looked up with fierce eyes. “Divining is no exact science. I learned those things when I first threw the bones. Then nothing on that subject for years. And nothing of you. Somethings are destined and others are the result of personal choices. When those two things align they can then be Divined. I wasn’t told of you or our first meeting because that took a series of cascading events that were impossible to predict in advance. Voldemort was truly an agent of chaos at times. But…” He
smiled with mock-sincerity. “If you want to know if the Chudley Cannons are going to win the World Cup in the next century...I’m your man.”

Severus choked, barely keeping his superb mouthful of liquor from spewing all over the front of his robes. *Chudley Cannons indeed.*

From there they continued discussing less sensitive topics before retiring, each feeling like they had spent an enjoyable evening with their companion.

…

Asterion was up bright and early the next morning his face showing no sign of the long night he’d spent first with his father in genial conversation and reviewing Lucius’s notes from his experiences with the public and press, then trying to decide for himself what he was looking for in a first mate.

He’d hedged a little with his father the night before. He’s learned more than he’d told of what was coming, at least as far as his mates were concerned. He knew how many he needed of which there was more than one possible outcome depending on who he chose and in what order.

Some dominants would ground his excess power better and more efficiently than others. That doesn’t mean that the best mates for controlling his wayward magic would be the best mates for him though. It was a delicate balance he needed to strike, choosing who was best for him as a person while at the same time choosing powerful mates so that he can limit the number he needs.

If he chooses poorly when it comes to power he could end up with a genuine harem, the bones predicting as many as thirteen mates in that scenario. And it wasn’t merely power either but in what order he chose. If he chose his most powerful mates *last* then he would end up with more mates than seemed viable for a happy family.

*But* if he chose merely based on power, he could end up with a bunch of domineering prats. Granted it would be less mates to have to please and worry about and handle on a day-to-day basis but they also might have more infighting or not treat him as well. In the scenario where he chose simply the most powerful mates available he would need no more than three.

Most scenarios pointed to a number in between, ranging from five to seven mates depending on how he chose and in what order.

Of course all of that was merely academic.

Asterion has still yet to meet a single unmated dominant. There was just no way to gauge who, when, and how powerful his mates would be. That wouldn’t stop him however from tossing his bones after each selection to see the new minimum and maximum mates he would need.

He’d also used his gift to discover how long his heat cycle would be in advance so he could properly plan in the future things that he just can’t miss because he was busy being shagged six ways to Sunday. He also checked how long his heat would last since for a submissive Dovah, there were several factors that would determine the length of their heat, some of which could and would change over time, such as his power levels, fertility, health, and age. Even his primary gender played into it, since as a male he was more likely to get pregnant than a female since it was a purely magical pregnancy with much less reliance on biology. But like all submissive Dovahim, his heat cycle wouldn’t start or send him into heat until he had his full complement of mates required to ground his power.

Asterion shivered not solely out of fear or excitement but some mixture of the two at the thought of
going into heat and being shagged blind for anywhere from a few hours to a week or more.

Intimacy was something he and his father had broached briefly in an extremely uncomfortable conversation wherein Severus was happy to learn that Asterion had already been taught the birds-and-bees by his Dad and Uncle when he turned thirteen before being directed to some informational tomes in the library.

That was one rite of passage that Severus was glad to have missed.

It was uncomfortable enough having to explain some of those things to his students in third year, it would’ve been ten times worse doing so with his own precious son.

For the moment, it was finally the third week of July and Asterion was about to take his first real solo outing since popping into Hogwarts to meet and possibly retrieve his father. It was two days before his mate hunt would commence, the invitations were set to go out the following morning and he would greet the dominants on the day after which was Monday. He had one last sit-down with his mentors at Mentor Tafari’s home where he would be giving the massive Dovah a port-key that would bring him safely through the Castle Black wards.

It was his first real test of how well his socialization regimen had gone and he was honestly looking forward to stretching himself. Tea with his mentors and Ben’s lovely mate, who he’d been introduced to at their first mentor/mentee meet-and-greet, was hardly as harrowing as the Ministry gauntlets he’d ran were.

Dressed in some plain but very comfortable muggle blue jeans Harry had insisted he buy on one of their recent outings around London and one of his own silk T-shirts this time in his favored black with small strands of silver running through it with a soft cotton robe in dark grey on top, Asterion activated the port-key, touching down elegantly in Mentor Tafari’s now familiar entry room just outside his living room.

His main mentor, who would be his to call upon all through his lifetime, had entrusted the port-key to Asterion after his first visit, understanding that if Asterion was going to give him one through his much more sensitive wards that Ben should return the courtesy instead of forcing him to pop to the Leaky and Floo through every time.

Mentor Tafari and his lovely mate Zima were waiting on him with Mentor Roberts and the backup Mentor Christianson. Mentor Christianson had been introduced to Asterion briefly at their last chat, he was going to be there as a backup Mentor/security if Tafari or Roberts felt the meeting was getting out of hand. According to his father and Dad, the sight of those three particular Mentors together would keep all but the most outrageous dominants in line, which Draco had agreed to in part, being one of Roberts’s mentees. Mentors, generally speaking, are more for Dovahim who weren’t raised by other Dovahim, or who had been removed from their Dovah parents for some reason. There were exceptions where a young Dovah might request a mentor even being very familiar with their culture and traditions, but for the most part whether you were submissive or dominant and raised by non-Dovahim, you would have an assigned Mentor, with some of the Body specializing in either mentoring submissives or dominants, with a few like Roberts who mentored both.

This particular trifecta of mentors were the ones often times placed in charge of mate hunts that were handled by the Body instead of a Dovah’s parents.

Partly because most Dovah didn’t want to take on Tafari who taught self-defense and martial arts for a living outside of being a Dovah Mentor…also partly because Mentor Christianson was known for being able to strip the hide off a dominant at ten paces for being inappropriate while Roberts tended towards riding herd on the submissives themselves.
Asterion, with his straight-forward and rational way of thinking was well-liked by all three men for not being a spoiled snot...which also meant he had been subjected to one of their tirades about the decreasing quality of matched mates with the increasing emphasis by the older and more conservative Dovahim worried about exposure and pushing for matches that sounded more like an arranged marriage than a proper mate hunt.

All of three of Asterion’s mentors were of the opinion that the mentors themselves needed to start encouraging traditional but quiet and low-key mate hunts rather than endless parades of “dates” and match-making that severely suppressed the hunting instinct that was supposed to guide both submissives and dominants towards the most promising mates.

“Asterion, sweetheart.” Zima cooed as she gave him a quick hug, having quickly cottoned-on to the fact that he was uncomfortable around females for the most part. He had warmed to her with time and multiple meetings but physical affection was still hard for him to accept from her, no matter how well-meant. “You’re looking wonderful as always.”

She beamed at him as his mentors all greeted him in turn before pressing a cup of tea, his preferred green with honey and milk, and a small plate of her fabulous snickerdoodles into his hand. She’d won him with her snickerdoodles and he had no problem admitting it...to himself. Once Zima had bustled off into her kitchen, smiling brightly as ever over his unashamed eyeing of the cookies, his mentors, both permanent and temporary, asked him how he was feeling.

Asterion slowly chewed the wonderful bite of cinnamon and deliciousness in his mouth before taking a sip of tea and answering.

“Anxious.” He said finally, setting down the cup. “And mixed up.”

“How so?” Ben or Benjamin leaned forward, a small worried frown briefly on his face as he exchanged looks with his fellow chaperones. Of all the submissives he’d watched over, this one was his favorite. Christianson was still enamored of Asterion’s late father Regulus as were most of the older Dovahim who met the adorable teen, but Asterion had a...fragileness to him that called to Ben’s protective side.

This young man had lived through almost total seclusion and fighting with his inner Dovah for over a year before he was released from the spell that held him captive in his own home. Then rather than go crazy and drunk on his newfound freedom and power, he’d acted with admirable poise and control. First seeking out his father and being reunited with Severus before informing the mentor body of his existence. He’d claimed his titles and estates, then rather than throw his weight around too much or rest on his inheritance he’d sat both his OWLs and NEWTs with exemplary results.

Asterion Black was an extraordinary young man and submissive.

He deserved nothing but the finest mates the Dovahim had to offer and Benjamin was determined to see that he got them.

Even if it meant taking a step back and letting through a couple of the more...hard to take dominants.

If it was left to him they’d all be knocked on their arses the first day before they had a chance to get up to any shenanigans with his charge.

“I’ve not spent much around large groups of people.” Asterion began his habitual hand-twisting, a sure sign of burgeoning discomfort. “Let alone had anyone consistently in my personal space. None of you have ever even been to my home!” He worried his lower lip with his teeth as his eyes trained resolutely on his cup. “And soon I’m going to have to let a dominant then dominants into my home and my space. I...” He sighed. “I don’t know how I’m going to handle that. Or if I’m even
capable of handling it at all.”

His mentors all exchanged relieved glances. It wasn’t the snotty expectation and belief that they
won’t find a dominant handsome, or strong, or powerful enough. No, this was a totally
understandable misgiving about the coming changes in his life. They could handle this.

“Asterion sweetheart.” Ben said soothingly. “That is all perfectly normal. Change is always hard,
no matter whether it’s for the better or the worse. You’re focusing too much on the aftermath of this
thing, something that tends to work itself out all on its own without extra worrying and anxiety. All
you need to think about is what you want in your future mate or mates. That’s all. Let the rest of
us,” he gestured between the three mentors. “Worry about all the rest.”

The teen looked up in surprise at that. No one had said that to him before. Given him a specific task
and goal to think about to the exclusion of everything else. What surprised him is it was exactly
what he’d needed.

His breathing and Occlumency exercises could only do so much when he started to freak out about
the big, big changes coming to Castle Black. Having one concrete thing to do and think about
helped quite a bit to focus his mind elsewhere and alleviate his anxiety.

“On that subject,” Roberts reached over for one of the ever-present notepads the mentors had at
hand. “Is there anything you’ve decided about your possible mates?”

Tafari and Christianson grabbed their own notepads, turning to watch Asterion with care and
attentiveness. They would need to gauge how serious a requirement or dislike each item listed was
in order to try and introduce him to the best possible matches. While their official title was
chaperone, most also dabbled a bit in matchmaking as they knew best many of the dominants if only
by reputation and word-of-mouth.

Asterion took a breath. He’d talked a few things over with his father, dad, and uncle, also with
Harry in their chats and owls, though in code in case their messages were intercepted by some
enterprising newshoomer or gossip-monger. There were a few things he’d decided he simply
couldn’t deal with after listening to both of his parents describe some of the dominants they’d met or
had dealings with. Especially Severus, as while he was mostly divorced from Dovah society he still
kept an open ear for news and trouble.

“I don’t want anyone who has a spouse or significant other at home already.” He said decisively.
“I’m not going to ruin someone else’s life just to make myself happy.”

All three mentors hummed with happiness over that dictate. There weren’t many dominants who
turned to human or other creatures for lovers when they remained unmated but it did happen, usually
by the time they turned sixty. In theory. Many also adopting children with them as well, but would
still – rather shamefully in the minds of the mentors – still attempt to gain a Dovah mate.

“Very good.” Tafari praised, watching indulgently as Asterion preened for a brief moment under the
compliment, his Dovah pleased at the praise. It was a distinctly un-Asterion thing to do, which made
it all the more special when he let go enough to allow his Dovah to shine through. “Anything else?”

“I don’t want anyone who’s overly violent and likes to fight all the time.” Asterion said after another
moment of thought. “I can’t handle being around that kind of chaos all the time and my father would
probably kill him.”

Christianson couldn’t hold back a snort at that. Severus Snape would most certainly take the head of
anyone who messed with his child, mate or not. And would likely skin someone who wouldn’t
leave him in peace in his potions lab.

On the tail-end of that thought Asterion had another.

“And they have to be ok with my father and uncle being around, and whatever friends I make beyond Harry and Draco.” Asterion decided. “Father hasn’t decided if he’s going to stay with me permanently or not but for the moment he’s there and my mates will just have to deal with it whatever he decides.”

“None of these should be too much of a problem.” Tafari admitted as he looked at the rather small list. “Though thankfully you haven’t required Severus to actually like your potential mates.”

“No,” Asterion snorted into his teacup. “I’m new to this father-son thing I’m not delusional.”

…
Asterion stood before the mirror in his private suite at Hotel Dubh that he was using as a staging point for the hunt, a place to retreat to when he wanted to relax but still wanted to be close at hand if he was just taking a break, anxiously smoothing down the front of his robes.

While his father and his mentors had all suggested he wear something simple and concealing, such as the conservative robes he wore when first meeting his mentors, he’d decided to go a different way. Though after hearing horror stories of being fondled down the back of jeans or skirts like what happened to some Dracken submissives at their mate meetings they’re subjected to, he’d also nixed wearing the comfortable denims he’d been eyeing as well. In the end he’d gone with splitting the difference between his normal “Young Lord at Play” clothes and something more sedate.

He was wearing a set of robes over his leather trousers, and they were the soft deerskin type that draped rather than the dragonhide that clung also having a higher waistband that tied off tightly to make slipping a hand down the back of them a logistical nightmare. Then he’d put on a long-sleeved dress shirt in plain green without embellishment, leaving it untucked to partially conceal his bottom. On top of both of those he wore his dueling robes that hit him in mid-thigh but buckled tightly across his chest which he left open to reveal the shirt underneath.

Altogether he looked casual and comfortable but his modesty was well-preserved and the pervier dominants would be hard pressed to discretely cop a feel, though that won’t derail the bolder offenders.

He’d also gone with his dragonhide boots that had steel shafts on either side of his ankle for support as well as in the sole and toes, if anyone tried anything they’ll end up with bruised shins or mashed feet.

A shadow appeared in the mirror as his father walked up beside him, a looming spectre to scare off the more weak-willed dominants in his all-black severe Potions Master’s robes, and clasped his shoulders from behind in a comforting embrace. His Father gave him a quick squeeze before dropping his hands and turning his son to face him. Ink-black eyes studied him carefully from head-to-toe before nodding.

The weeks together had flown by, with the two of them quickly falling into a comfortable routine. He was pleased to have gotten the time with his son, even if it was constantly infringed upon by Asterion’s duties (and the mutts and their godson) and trying to get him ready for today. Even with everything that had gone on, they’d gotten close.

Not as close as they would’ve been if Asterion had grown up with him as a father, but they’d managed to create something like a friendship and sense of family out of their situation which was more than Severus had hoped for in the beginning when all they had to bond them together was Asterion’s need for family and their dual love of Regulus.

“I’m proud of you, Asterion.” Severus said, forcing his way past his natural reserve to make certain his son wasn’t going into this with any more insecurities than necessary. “So very, very proud.”
hand cup his cheek and force him to look into those endlessly black eyes.

“I am.” Severus said again. “You knew what was right and what you should do to stay true to your ideals and you did it. Disregarding your personal comfort or discomfort as it turned out to be. You flew into a fight – and fought amazingly well - then approached a man you’d never met, a potentially dangerous widower Dovah and moved him right into your home only on the word of a dead man that he could be trusted. That took enormous courage, especially for someone who’d never even met a stranger before. Then you followed everyone’s advice and allowed people you barely knew to help acclimate you to the outside world, welcoming Potter of all people into your home. Now you’re standing here about to go out there and start finding the first of your mates.” Severus blinked a moment clearing out the mist that had appeared in his gaze. Must have caught a dust mote in his eye, he certainly wasn’t crying for Merlin’s sake.

He shook his head before wrapping his son up in a warm, paternal embrace, nearly lifting the smaller Dovah right off of his feet.

“I couldn’t be prouder of you in this moment if you were Merlin himself.” He whispered fiercely before setting him back on his feet and stepping away. Fussing a moment Severus straightened Asterion’s robes once more before questioning: “Ready?”

Asterion gave a bright smile to best the sun for its brilliance.

“What’s ready.”

And with that, Asterion lifted his chin and strode out to meet up with the Mentors before being introduced to the assembled dominants.

…

Mentor Tafari was whispering in his ear as he handed young Asterion a bound sheaf of parchment.

“This is a list of all the dominants present.” He explained as his fellow mentors worked to quiet the unmated Dovahim down enough for Asterion to be introduced. “It’s self-updating,” Tafari held up another sheaf. “When a new dominant arrives and checks in, we’ll add him to this list and your list will self-update, the new name glowing green until you tap it to let it know you saw the entry. You can also ask it to sort itself by age, wing span or color, nationality, however you want based on the information listed.”

Asterion nodded following the explanation easily as his eyes scanned the list, taking in as much information as possible and trying to look for any themes. As his mentor had said, not every dominant had made it, according to the list there were one hundred and twelve present and Mentor Roberts had told him to expect anywhere from one-fifty to one-seventy-five at this first hunt with a possibility for more depending on how long it lasted so he could possibly have another forty to sixty entries to crosscheck later on in the hunt. The information provided was just the basics, mainly to help him keep the various dominants straight in his mind as there were quite a few names that were common.

He saw at least five James, seven Johns or Johnathons, and more than a few Adams. Jacob, Isaac, and Collin seemed popular as well. He rolled his eyes discreetly as he saw some of the names repeated over and over. Say what you will about naming traditions, at least in his family you didn’t have to worry about being one of the crowd. He might be the tenth Asterion Black but he was also the only Asterion of his generation, no getting mixed up with someone else because some famous witch decided to name her kid Apple and others followed along like Lemmings.
The list provided Name, Age, Gender, (here he grimaced over the thought of a female being intimate with him. If he followed his instincts he would send all the female doms away but after having a talk with Ben about how many dominants got a much-needed boost after merely being considered during a hunt, he’d decided to let them stay instead of crushing their hopes. It was the right thing to do even if it made him uncomfortable.) Wing span and wing and scale color were also included along with other identifiers like scarring, eye color, and hair color.

Deciding to make it easy on himself he sorted it by gender first, sending the females to the bottom of the list. No one but him would ever see it so it wasn’t like they would get their feelings hurt by it. Then he sorted them by age with the oldest at the top and youngest at the bottom. With the listed sorted new entries would insert themselves according to his preferences which was why the new entries would light up green until he read them.

Pleased with that first step, he listened as Mentor Christianson stepped up and read off his disqualifiers and watched carefully as around a dozen dominants got up and left, their names disappearing from his list. Most of them were towards the top so were most likely older dominants who’d married humans or other creatures like faeries or veela. Though there were a couple of younger men and a woman who all left as well, likely having fallen in love with someone outside of Dovah culture.

These first couple of steps taken, Asterion stepped up onto the dais in the largest hunt room Hotel Dubh had to offer waiting a moment for the exclamations to die back down.

Apparently, he thought dryly as he watched the dominants all start chattering amongst each other, they weren’t expecting a male. With that thought he sent a little glare at his mentors who all gave him little smirks. Bastards. They’d left out his status as a male submissive on purpose to ruffle the doms’ feathers.

Rolling his eyes he waited patiently for the initial fervor to calm down. He certainly wasn’t about to try and talk over a hundred dominants. That would just be an exercise in futility.

…

Brann Llewelyn couldn’t believe his eyes as he let out an uncontrollable gasp. His brothers and sister all echoing his surprise as they caught sight of the new submissive as well.

“A male.” Fintan breathed, eyes wide with surprise and pupils already blown with lust.

“It’s unheard of!” Another dominant said loudly, those who heard him murmuring in agreement as similar exclamations came from all corners of the hotel’s conference room.

“Quiet!” Leta snapped as his brothers started to vulgarly discuss the beautiful creature. “I want to hear who he is!”

“What does that matter?” Albert asked with an eye roll. “He could be the son of You-Know-Who and I’d still pursue him.”

Fintan and Brann nodded, though in Brann’s case it was rather unwilling. Male submissives were simply too rare to not pursue. Especially for dominants like himself who preferred males almost exclusively.

“Because.” She hissed. “If you’d paid any attention at all when we were at Dad’s house and Felix came over you’d know that he’d recently met an unmated male submissive. One who is the son of Severus Snape and Regulus Black making him…”
Brann caught on first.  

“Harry Potter’s cousin though a bit distant.” Brann commented as he drew the family tree in his mind. “Third cousins once removed or something.”

Leta nodded sharply as her canny eyes watched while the little one waited patiently. He was tall for a submissive but not overly so with wings that were pure shining silver with white scales stretching out behind him in a stunning display. Like his height, his wingspan was also impressive for a submissive.

She exchanged a look with her sanest brother…well sanest at the moment anyway.

“He’s not as tiny as most submissives.” Brann commented, having inspected him for himself. “Almost on the cusp of being a dominant I’d say. Might be a problem for some doms.”

“Not for us though.” Leta said lowly as the noise finally began to settle.

Brann gave a low chuckle from his five-eleven height, the shortest of the present Llweleyns, including his sister who was an inch taller than him at six-foot even.

“Most definitely not a problem for us.”

…

As the noise started dying down, Asterion cast a wandless, wordless sonorous so that he wouldn’t have to shout to be heard at the back of the room. Yes, Dovahim have excellent hearing but that didn’t mean it wouldn’t be a trial trying to hear him with so many people crammed into one room, and more arriving by the minute as he studied the parchment that had glowed green several times as he waited for them to settle.

“Hello,” he greeted them with the smooth voice he’d inherited from his father. His was a few degrees higher in pitch but still had the silky quality that had been mesmerizing and terrorizing students for years. “I am Lord Asterion Severus Black Prince and I will be looking for several dominants. Some of you,” his gaze quickly found several faces that started avoiding his gaze at his next words. “Know of my cousin Harry. However, let me say this.” He cautioned them. He didn’t want a mate who only wanted him because of his relationship with Harry or because they thought he’d be wealthy or help their aspirations. “Harry and I are very, very different people. So, if you think that pursuing me will benefit you in anyway by having a relation to him, you couldn’t be more wrong. Thank you and I look forward to the hunt…and being hunted in turn.”

He removed the spell and stepped back, watching as several dominants shifted uncomfortably at his little speech. It wasn’t one that he’d wanted to give but it was one that had been impressed upon him as being important. Harry Potter was a famous – or infamous – household name in Wizarding Great Britain. More than one social-climbing dom would likely be tempted by the relation if they weren’t by his own double-lord status. He didn’t want to be wanted for such shiny trappings.

Asterion had far too much pride for that.

“Asterion sweetheart,” Tafari came over to his side as he was watching the dominants start talking and in some cases hissing and growling at each other. “How would you like to proceed?” They had discussed several of the older ways of sifting through the invited dominants but Asterion had wanted to wait until he got a feel for the crowd before he made a decision on which method he would use first.

The young submissive finally tore his eyes from the figure that they kept returning to over and over.
It seemed his inner Dovah already had his sights set on someone. Only time would tell if they could agree.

“Split them into random groups.” He decided. “No more than ten and a good mix of ages and personalities. You would know who is friendly and who should be kept apart. We’ll do some activities this first day, see if I can weed out any of the more temperamental, mean, or spiteful personalities before starting to focus in on the others.”

“Time frame?” Roberts asked as Christianson and Tafari huddled over the list to do as he asked.

“Half an hour.” Asterion decided. “We’ll do half the groups before lunch and half after. Then I’ll take some time before dinner to review and maybe make some initial cuts.”

“Very good.” Roberts nodded, following Asterion and Severus as they made their way through the hotel. “Have you already decided on an activity?”

Asterion gave a slightly-evil smirk over one shoulder as he led them out towards the impressive gardens – and the famous enchanted maze they contained.

…

Once the first group reached the maze he took a moment to greet them and graciously accept each gift and find each on his list and mark down the gifts before explaining.

Gift-giving played into two specific Dovah instincts: proving themselves as providers and their vanity as they competed to give the best, most expensive, rarest, or most liked gift.

Thankfully, Castle Black was massive, so anything he didn’t particularly like could be hidden away in a dark corner of one of the empty things…or something, considering some of the truly gaudy and ugly things he received because the dominants were focused on the expensive of the item instead of its aesthetic value…or they just had really bad taste.

“This,” he waved to the large hedges behind him. “Is the enchanted maze of Hotel Dubh. I’m not forcing you to enter or undergo the trials within. However,” he said with a little smile. “Since I’ll be waiting in the center, those who do go through will be able to get some one-on-one time with me…depending on how long it takes them to make it.” In other words, it was the dominant Dovahim’s turn to hunt him, all while he was hunting them in turn – though by reviewing their responses and reactions and not through the physical action of traversing the maze. “Once inside you’ll be presented with questions, your answers will determine what path you take through the maze. Be warned.” Here his gaze went ice-cold. “You can lie. You’re not being fed a truth serum. However if you chose to deceive the maze the answer will be recorded like every other answer given…only it will show up in bright red.”

“Everyone understand the task?” Severus asked silkily. When it had been brought up that most dominants would do anything including kill to gain a powerful male submissive as their own, he’d brought up the maze his son and late husband had told him about. It would ask anything from mundane questions to those that were deeply private and personal.

After everyone nodded, some more eagerly than others which was noted by the sharp black and black-silver eyes that missed nothing, Asterion wished them luck then gave them a final instruction.

“You will enter one at a time and then answer the first question. Each person has thirty minutes so use your time well. If you ever come to a question that you refuse to answer for whatever reason, simply say ‘finished’ and you’ll be led back out of the maze.”
Smiling, Asterion apparated to the center of the maze and took his position by the book that would record everyone’s answers, joined by his father and Mentor Roberts who had been chosen to assist him for this first set of maze runners. After lunch the Mentor would switch out with Tafari for a break. Roberts leaned close to the submissive, whispering too low for his father to hear.

“You’ve seen someone you like.” Roberts teased lightly, having caught the direction of Asterion’s gaze earlier.

“Perhaps.” Asterion answered non-committally. “Only time will tell.”

The Mentor chuckled and went back to watching through the enchanted crystals as the first group of Dovahim took on the maze – and its questions.

Questions that had been reprogrammed by Asterion himself.

This was one submissive that didn’t miss a trick and was taking no prisoners in his search for the right set of dominants. Though the dominants didn’t know it now, this one activity would weigh heavily on their future chances of mating with one Asterion Severus Black Prince.

…

Gunnar smiled as he approached the next crossroads, this one with four possible answers. He’d made good time so far, knowing himself rather well and being able to quickly answer the questions. He was primarily gay and Asterion was gorgeous so he was hoping for at least a shot at winning a place in this forming mateship.

That smile that grew to a grin when the question appeared out of smoke and light like the others.

*What do you consider to be your sexual orientation? Asexual, bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual, pansexual, or other?*

With a laugh he answered “Homosexual” and took the far right turn…a turn that brought him much closer to the center of the maze.

…

“Oh Merlin.” Brann Llewelyn stared at the question in disbelief. Why in the world would someone want to know about *this*? Then again, from what he understood from his non-creature friends, it was a standard question in relationships…just usually (hopefully) one much later in coming.

The question before him?

*How many sexual partners have you had in your life: None, less than ten, between ten and fifty, or over fifty?*

With a blush, something he hadn’t thought possible at his age, he gave his answer then followed the opening corridor. It led west, not bringing him closer to the center but not leading him further away either.

*At least I didn’t completely blow it…* He thought to himself. While he wasn’t the slut Fintan could be, he wasn’t an angel either and his sexual history proved it. Though if answering between ten and fifty got him a neutral response, he couldn’t help but wonder what would’ve gotten him a positive one…

He’d have to compare notes with his brothers and sister, since between them they had all the answers
covered but “None.”

Llewelyns just weren’t built to be angels…

…

Now he was certain of it. The dominant growled to himself. The little sub was seriously fucking with them. He huffed as he stormed out of the maze following his refusal to answer that fucking question.

That was the only reason he could see for wanting to know about a dom’s personal kinks.

Honestly…somethings should stay private.

And after the caution about lying, he’d rather not answer than admit he liked crossdressing.

He was a dominant for Merlin’s sake!

…

The gentle dominant blinked as he walked through the towering hedge and out into a blossoming oasis.

He’d actually made it all the way through, and in what had seemed like pretty good time.

Asterion was sitting down on a cushion with his back against the trunk of a magnolia tree, looking like a scene from a medieval romantic saga, watching him with interest and a soft smile on his face as he looked down at what had to be the book that recorded their answers. Seeing that, he was glad that he actually answered that last – and for him the most difficult to be truthful – question rather than quit the maze. Yes, it was true that he had been known to be…well…picky, which was his reasoning to himself over his still unmated state.

But that didn’t mean he wasn’t willing and even eager to fall in love and be loved in turn by someone else.

Maybe even someone like Asterion.

“Jamie.” Asterion smiled as he held out one lithe hand to the scarred Dovah. “I was hoping you would make it through…”

…

Fintan Llewelyn groaned under his breath as his answer led him further away from the center. Quite a bit further.

Of all the times to have to tell the truth… He grumbled to himself.

Stupid honesty testing maze. At this rate he’d never get to spend time with the cute submissive.

…

How important is family to you? The question read. Are other dominants just a nuisance or could they be equal partners in your mateship? Would you treat their children the same as your own? Could you grow to care about Asterion’s other dominants or would they simply be someone you had to share your mate with?
Elias Graves stared up at the smoky letters, having to really dig down and think about that question.

It wasn’t something he’d ever had to consider before. Submissives who needed more than one mate were pretty rare and those needing more than two were almost unheard of…outside of Asterion. Could he accept the other dominants? Gladly and not as a mere requirement of mating Asterion? Would he be able to love all the children of the mateship and not just his own? Was he capable of having “softer” feelings for his fellow dominants…maybe even as more than friends?

These were all new questions for someone who was rather open about living life on the darker side of grey as a wizard and was known to be a bit possessive of what was his.

He hunkered down into himself, glad he’d answered the other questions so quickly and easily. This was going to take a while.

…

“Of course my submissive could work outside the home.” Jason Sauvage, a HitWizard for the French Ministry scoffed at the question. “If they so desired of course.”

He rolled his eyes thinking of the dominants that wanted barefoot-and-pregnant submissives. This wasn’t the seventeen hundreds anymore, if working or having a vocation outside the home was important to a submissive then they should have one. Otherwise they wouldn’t be truly happy or healthy.

Although he couldn’t help but be concerned over some of the things that were being asked. At least one of the questions had sent up red flags in his mind that he had to forcibly ignore.

No analyzing the submissives. He repeated his mantra, sometimes having issues leaving his work at work. No analyzing the submissives.

…

Fintan threw his hands in the air as he failed to answer yet another question properly. At this rate he was going to get booted from the maze for going over the time limit, let alone being able to reach the center.

Stupid, stupid honesty test.

Really…so he’s slept with a few…hundred people.

It wasn’t that big of a deal…right?

…

Which is more important, work or family?

Sebastian groaned at the question that would prove to be his undoing. He knew that submissives didn’t like how much time he spent at his job or how important being a lawyer and law wizard was to him. This question would likely get him bounced from the hunt by dinner…

“My work is the most important thing in my life.” He answered reluctantly. “I don’t know if a mate and children would be able to change that or not and I’ve never met anyone who was willing to risk it to find out.”

…
Charlie was almost bursting with happiness as he made it past the final question and into the center of the maze.  

He knew he wasn’t the fastest person in his group or in the others…but he still had made decent time and Asterion only had two dominants sitting with him besides his father and chaperone.

That was pretty good in his book.

“Charlie,” Asterion smiled up at him with those sparkling black-and-silver eyes.  “I’m so glad you made it.  Grab a cushion, we were just talking about where Gunnar and Elias went to school…”

…

Asterion barely restrained himself from throwing his body into an armchair and slinging a leg over one arm like he would do in his private rooms at Castle Black.  He groaned, resting his head against the back of the seat as his father offered him a cup of soothing peppermint tea with just a drop of Calming Draught.  It was worse than any of the testing days at the Ministry.  He’d thought that was running a gauntlet but it had nothing on having to deal with having dominant Dovahim in his face for hours on end.

Especially at lunch, where the ones who’d failed in the maze for one reason or another were in pissy moods and trying to pick fights with the ones who made it.

Thankfully him mentors had made it clear that fighting was not something he appreciated and they had no problem tossing out dominants who tried to make problems, a plan which Severus was especially fond of.

“Seriously?”  Asterion finally lifted his head after a moment.  “Some of those answers were just…”

He couldn’t even find words to describe some of the answers the dominants gave.  The maze had done a good job of making the really undesirable dominants run out of time but all that seemed to do was egg some of them on.  Others who left rather than answer were being all sulky and pouty.

“It’s like dealing with preschoolers with some of those Dovahim.”  Asterion at last came up with a description that he was pleased with.

His mentors couldn’t help but laugh, even as they agreed.

Asterion cracked up laughing himself as he remembered one of the funnier moments.  After a minute he wound down, wiping a mirthful tear from his eye.

“You know who was really really entertaining?”  He asked rhetorically.  “Fintan Llewelyn.  The poor guy just seemed to answer every question wrong but he kept up a good attitude no matter what.  Although…”  Here he grimaced thinking about one particular answer.  “I can’t believe he’s slept with so many people.”

Tafari snorted with laughter at that.  “I can.  I can definitely believe it.  Fintan was a bit of a slag when we were younger, only tapering off a bit in more recent years.  And he’s an equal-opportunity slag as well, fancies males and females.”

Fintan Llewelyn was one of the older children from that family, and the oldest unmated Dominant, having gone to school a couple years below Benjamin Tafari at Hogwarts.

Asterion’s temporary mentor Charles Roberts, who was attending to assist Asterion and his two mentor friends while Draco was helping keep the other dominants under control, having been
assigned to the young dominant once Severus had informed the three mentors of his godson’s status, agreed with Benjamin’s summation of Fintan’s younger years. “The Llewelyns are all very attractive and some have taken more advantage of that than others. But yes,” he had to agree ruefully. “Fintan was a slag.”

The back-up mentor Ian Christianson, who didn’t currently have an unmated Dovah mentee – either submissive or dominant - looked on in mild disapproval over that topic of conversation, not finding it appropriate for a submissive’s ears…even though the submissive was the one to bring it up. Making a decision, he grabbed the master copy of the dominant listing before changing the subject.

“What have you made any sure decisions, Asterion?” He asked mildly. “Or would you like more time before you send anyone away.”

Sending dominants away served several purposes during a hunt. First, it allowed Dovahim who were completely incompatible with a submissive to attend other submissive hunts, many of which take place during the summer or school breaks given the age of Dovah inheritance. Second, with unsuited dominants gone, the submissive was able to focus more time on sorting through the remaining dominants while he hunted for the perfect one. And last, with less dominants quartered together and pursuing the same submissive, sending some home lessened the likelihood of in-fighting or deaths as their hunting instincts ramped up in close proximity to a receptive submissive.

Some discouraged the practice, feeling it was unfair of the submissive to dismiss some dominants out of hand, while others encouraged it thinking that it would give the dominants opportunities to join other hunts since attending more than one at that same time was highly discouraged and had been known to spark feuds between submissive mateships in the past.

“No,” Asterion said after a moment thinking about some of the answers with a wince. “I think I’ve made some decisions about who needs to leave. Let me just grab the answers and we can go through it.”

From there they spent a couple productive hours going through the maze answers and Asterion deciding who needed to stay and go. After they were finished he looked at the pared-down list in amazement. Shaking his head he gave his dozing father an appreciative look. Severus had vowed to stay out of his decision making as much as possible but firmly believed in using the maze. A belief that Asterion had allowed to sway him and now he couldn’t be happier that he did.

What was once a list of over a hundred dominants was now pared down to just under fifty, with any late arrivals having to take the maze alone and then Asterion would review their results the following day.

Half.

Thanks to his father a good half of the dominants left were being sent home as unsuitable for Asterion.

What he found interesting was that many of the females who finished were actually leaving while Fintan and a few others who couldn’t complete it were staying.

Two answers in particular were responsible for tripping the most people up. The one asking about sexual preferences and the one about the possibility of accepting other dominants and their children.

Two.

Two questions took down dozens of dominants.
Asterion had never been happier for listening to his father’s advice.

His uncle Siri’s had been less than helpful, mostly along the lines of picking out the “hottest” Dovah he could find.

Now if they could only keep the dominants from rioting…

Well…that was why they’d asked for extra security in the forms of Sirius, Remus, and Draco, especially on this first day, all of them knowing exactly what spells to use to “assist” an angry Dovah to calm down and leave peacefully. The trio would leave after the main exodus of dominants, though Remus in particular was rather fascinated by the whole process – as was Draco, though he’d been warned that Asterion’s way of doing things was considered old-fashioned and traditional. Still, the newly inherited Dovah dominant was having fun getting to know some of the others in his age bracket beside his friends the Zabini brothers who were present and accounted for, though one had been placed on the list to go home.

Julian preferred females to males, making him a less than ideal choice for someone hoping for an all-male mateship.

Still, at least Draco was getting his feet wet with meeting other Dovahim, especially in a situation where he wasn’t seen as competition to the other dominants with his being welcomed early on as Asterion’s cousin.

…

The Llewelyns gathered together in their normal huddle, comparing notes on the maze activity, only to be drawn out of their isolation at the return of Asterion and his companions.

They’d all been in separate groups, and Asterion’s mentors had been careful to keep those who had already gone through the maze segregated from those who haven’t so while Asterion had been debating his cuts, they had been catching up.

Brann had been surprised to find that it was Leta with her answer of less than ten lovers who had gotten the closest turn at that question. He’d thought that Carson would’ve gotten it only to find out he’d answered the same as Brann, but wasn’t surprised that Fintan and his slaggy self had been taken the furthest away from center with his body count.

Fintan had also been tripped up on the kink question as had been Leta surprisingly though for different reasons, Fintan taking too long to answer and running out of time and Leta apparently giving an unfavorable response.

Which was very interesting to her brothers and nephews, as Leta was known for being rather prudish and, well, vanilla.

And wouldn’t their Dad blow a blood vessel at that little gem of information, that his daughter was too kink-free to be a desirable mate for the match of the century?

“Thank you everyone for being good sports and participating in our little version of twenty questions.” Mentor Tafari spoke in his deep smooth voice. “And your participation ended up being most enlightening.” He said dryly, eyeing a few dominants with outright disdain.

“As you exited the maze,” Mentor Roberts took up the speech from there when it looked like his cohort was diverting. “You were each stamped on your wand-hand with a special potion brewed by Asterion’s father Potions Master Severus Snape. Asterion will now cast a spell that will make the mark from the stamp change color.”
Severus stepped forward in all his forbidding glory, scowl set firmly in place.

“The color the potion takes will indicate your status in my son’s affections.” His voice rippled out over the hushed gathering. “White is neutral. Whites should consider themselves no further along nor further behind then they were this morning. Whites gave answers that while not distressing were neither pleasing. Red is dismissed. If your mark turns red you should consider yourself thanked for your time and energy, however you are not a match for my son and should leave at once. Those who think to stay anyway should know that all marks will be checked and those trying to conceal or remove it will be forcibly ejected.”

At this the “enforcers” with Remus’s eyes showing light gold with a werewolf’s shine stepped forward as one in a display of might, newly inherited Draco showing off his growing body with his broadening shoulders and thickening arms and chest in a sleeveless shirt he’d originally scowled at when handed it by his cousin’s uncle…who was also his cousin, then had found himself liking it once he realized how formidable it made him appear with his muscles on display.

“And then there’s blue.” Asterion said with a soft smile. “Not many of you are blues at the moment, though that might change. Blues have made a favorable impression and should continue to press on…because whatever you’re doing is currently working.”

A soft, excited chatter broke out among the dominants, all hoping for a blue mark.

“Be advised.” Severus said. “These marks cannot be removed until you leave the hotel grounds. If you need to leave for work or other obligations let one of the Mentors know and it will be reapplied upon your return. Your marks will be an indicator of how your courtship is going at any given time. If it happens to turn red at the course of the day, you should stay. It is only after the evening meal where marks will be checked and reds will be asked to leave. This is a precaution as everyone is capable of making a blunder and Asterion has no desire to overlook someone because they couldn’t control their tongue for a brief moment.”

A few of the more intemperate Dovahim let out a relieved breath at that news. Asterion was the first ever submissive to manage his hunts this way – the traditional way - in recent years. Many were actually impressed at how rational and efficient he was being. It wasn’t what they’d come to expect from teenaged submissives.

The method was different, but it used to be that there was always some way of checking a ranking or having a firm idea about where in the submissive’s hunt list you were. Now with more and more parents pushing for mateships that were almost totally arranged by either them or their child’s mentor, there was little way to know if the submissive reciprocated or was being guided a bit too firmly by their elders. Or just holding out on choosing because they couldn’t control their tongue for a brief moment.

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There was a collective holding of breath as Asterion closed his eyes for a moment and appeared to silently mouth a few words, though no one was close enough to hear what the incantation was.

The quiet hush was followed by a swift outpouring of rage as more than half of the assembled dominants watched as their marks turned red. None of the remaining white or blues had any doubts left about the quality of mate they were pursuing. Asterion certainly wasn’t a tease nor was he messing around or being led around by his father and his mentors. He was simply hunting for what and who he wanted. Exactly as it should be.

…”

Leta Llewelyn winced when her mark turned red before glancing at her brothers’ hands. She wasn’t
exactly surprised when she saw the result. While she’d made it through the maze she’d noticed that many of the questions used male verbiage or were worded more for males, making Asterion’s preferences easy to see. Then he’d been a bit uncomfortable when she or any of the other female dominants were around.

Though she did notice that there were some female doms who were staying, though none appeared to be happy so she guessed that none were blues.

At least Asterion was kind-hearted enough to give them a chance, even if it wasn’t necessarily what he would prefer sexually.

“I…” She turned to her brothers as she heard one of them start to babble. Taking a quick look at their hands she could see why. Like herself her brother Carson was a red, as was their nephew Ianto, however Carson’s twin Albert and shockingly Fintan were both whites.

It was Brann babbling and Leta couldn’t blame him.

“I’m a blue.” Forty-year-old Brann looked up in shock. He never even considered that he would make it onto the “good, keeping going” list. Neutral with Fintan…and wasn’t that a surprise…maybe. But not blue. He didn’t think realistically that any of him or his siblings would be blue, rather that maybe Ianto (for all that he preferred females) or his other present-and-unmated nephew Owain would be. “Blue. He likes me.”

Fintan threw an arm around his younger brother’s shoulder, happy for him. He’d scored a white and was still there, but even he recognized that of all their family’s unmated Dovahim Brann was pining for a mate and children the most. This little submissive might be just what Brann has been waiting for.

“Of course he liked you.” Fintan said mock-snobbishly. “You’re a Llewelyn.”

The others chuckled, even the three who’d gotten reds and been sent home.

“Say hi to Dad for me will you, yeah?” Albert hugged his twin as the trio of reds prepared to leave along with quite a few of the baby doms and females, a rare sight. Usually it would be all the older doms dismissed on the first day, not the younger.

“Course.” Carson gave him a false smile. He wasn’t that unhappy to be dismissed. His preferences lay with the female form for all that he could appreciate a cutie like this one, but he was sad to miss out on getting to know Asterion better. He seemed like a really nice kid. Still, one of his brothers might end up with him and Carson could get to know him then as a brother-in-law or even a nephew. “See you guys later.”

All over the conference room other goodbyes were taking place, some congenial while others had to be forcibly removed as Asterion’s family and two extra mentors patrolled the room and escorted baulking reds from the premises while Tafari stayed with his mentee keeping watch over the implacable submissive stayed safe at his side.

While all this was going on Asterion was watching everything with an intense looking in his eyes, observing how various whites and blues reacted to both their status and the status of others. The Mentors had been surprised at this use of potion and spell developed over the past month by father and son. He’d based it off of a Dovah courtship hunting spell from an old journal of a Black ancestress. He’d taken the idea to his father and the genius of Severus Snape took it from there.

His mentors had already contacted the Body about purchasing the rights to use the now-patented
combination at all traditional submissive hunts. It would serve a dual purpose, allowing the submissive to make widespread cuts without having to stand up and call out every single name and also allowed the dominants to know where they stood without having to kill themselves guessing. As it worked off of the caster’s thoughts and feelings, it would prevent a lot of the prevaricating and dallying some submissives were prone to.

All three of the mentors firmly believed that after Asterion’s example of a private, well-run traditional hunt that they might have a shot at bringing them back instead of the sometimes disastrous arrangements that have been popular for the last fifty or so years.

Some of the reactions made Asterion smile to himself, like Brann’s open joy, while others irritated him when some of the whites got pissy over not being blues. He shared a grimace with his father and those marks bled a little pink. Not quite red but enough of a change for those doms to know they were on thin ice.

A couple of blues were also being bragging prats, shoving their marks in the faces of reds and whites. Now that just plain pissed him off, making him instantly change those marks from blue to white. What the doms didn’t know was that he’d added a charm to his dominants list that would show the changes in the marks between the various colors in a spectrum scale.

At the moment most of the scales under their names were a solid color either white or blue. But some of them had changed looking bisected as blues became whites and some whites bled into pink. Depending on how long it takes him to make his selections, some of the spectrums would look like a tie-dyed strip based on how they acted both with him and the other doms.

He really was Siri’s nephew because sometimes he truly enjoyed pulling nefarious shit like that. As his father the spy could tell you, it wasn’t what you knew that would kill you, it was what you didn’t know.

And in this case, not knowing he was keeping track of the marks would end up sending more than one dom home.

…

The following morning after a night spent in deep discussion with his father and his Dad’s portrait as well as Mentor Tafari, Asterion popped back into his rooms with plan in hand.

Yesterday the maze had done its job of weeding out the undesirable mates and it was continuing to do so as stragglers showed up throughout the night and morning bringing the current total number of dominants up to sixty-one after he’d reviewed their answers and either marked them with their color or sent them home. Now it was his turn to sit down and get to know them a little better individually. After talking with his father and dad about the violence that had broken out at their hunt when the dominants were bored and waiting for their chance to woo Regulus, Asterion had worked up a plan of having activities going on for the rest of the doms while one was talking to him in private, then on other days depending on how long the hunts took they would do smaller group activities that would let him see how the different doms worked together.

His hope was giving them something to do when they weren’t with him as well as making it clear that outpourings of violence were not acceptable, that the death and maiming toll would be greatly reduced. It was an experiment that his mentors were watching very eagerly to see how this combination of a traditional hunt with new ideas would work in the selection process. Or if they were even viable in the first place in the current political and social climate in the wizarding world.

Standing up following breakfast at seven o’clock sharp, Asterion waited for the dominants to settle
down and listen to what he had to say. With a small smile he began once the last few talkers had
tapered off into silence. He couldn’t really blame them, even he had been surprised at one of the
early-morning arrivals who ended up making it through the maze and scoring a blue mark.

“Good morning everyone,” Asterion waited a moment for the influx of greetings to die down then
continued. “Today I’ll be sitting down with each and every one of you in a one-on-one setting. Due
to the number of meetings that will take, you’ll be limited to no more than ten minutes each.” A few
of the dominants grumbled at that but quickly shut up when they saw the pointed looks aimed their
way by the Mentors and Severus.

Asterion sat down as Severus stood to deliver the rest of the information. His father had felt that this
particular challenge would have a better result if it came from another dominant and not the
submissive they were hoping to win over. Otherwise they might go overboard with their instincts
running amok.

With a flick of his wand, two pieces of parchment appeared before each dominant’s place setting
with two very different lists attached.

“In order to help avoid infighting among the dominants,” Severus sneered. “My son has prepared
two lists. Each contains a type of ‘hunt’ if you will albeit for very different things. These lists will
be good for the rest of Asterion’s hunts both for his first mate and all others thereafter. While one list
contains prey for a dom to show his physical-hunting prowess, the other has rare or valuable items he
would like to acquire for various reasons.”

Gift-giving and showing hunting prowess were deeply ingrained instincts for a dominant Dovah. It
was their hope that with an actual task and direction in front of them that the doms will listen to
what’s being asked of them and refrain from bloodletting to try and pare down the competition.
Which with Asterion’s pheromones only getting stronger each day he remained unmated was a very
large concern for both him and his mentors.

“There are three ways you can choose to spend your downtime.” Mentor Tafari continued where
Severus left off. “At the top of every hour we will announce the dominants that will be seen during
that time frame. While you’re waiting to be called you can enjoy the hotel and its grounds, go
hunting, or seek out the items on Asterion’s ‘treasure-hunt list’.”

“Fighting without cause will mean an immediate reduction in your mark status.” Christianson
frowned at the doms as some started shifting restlessly. “While permanent injury, disfigurement, or
death could mean expulsion depending on the situation.”

“I am a Lord.” Asterion said quietly when some doms looked like they were going to throw of fit
over the no-fighting injunction which was a detour from traditional hunts where fights among the
dominants was one way to show off for a mate. “A double Lord when it comes down to it. I hold
seats on the Wizengamot and the Hogwarts Board. I will constantly be in the public eye. I simply
cannot afford a mate who makes a spectacle of themselves.”

“Good luck with this lot.” His father muttered under his breath. Severus hadn’t been impressed with
some of the reactions to Asterion’s fighting decree. “You’re going to need it.”

Asterion just rolled his eyes and stood, walking towards the temperature-controlled garden where he
would spend the morning and afternoon walking and talking with the various dominants.

No faith. His father had no faith in the doms at all.

Not that Asterion could blame him. They were going to steal away his newly-recovered son after
all. At least he hadn’t started threatening to poison them…yet.

The lack of poisoning threats didn’t even make it through the first interview. Severus had been less-than-impressed when the very first dominant, a businessman from Prague, autocratically demanded that his mate should stay at home with their children. Although Asterion egging him on by rolling his eyes at the proclamation probably didn’t help and when the dom got all puffed up and offended Severus started in with the poisoning threats as the white mark on the dom’s hand slowly bled into a light red.

Which promptly turned dark when the dom refused to leave and had to be escorted out of the gardens by Remus, Harry perfectly happy to have his friends over while his godfathers helped his newest friend – and cousin.

Asterion wryly looked at Mentor Christianson who was calling the dominants when it was their turn and said “Next.”

Mentor Tafari choked back a laugh, truly enjoying his job watching over Asterion and seeing the byplay between father and son. If they didn’t watch it they were going to give some poor dominant a heart attack. Charles had drawn the short straw and was busy recording and cataloging the kills from the prey hunt, the various dominants would be presenting the trophies and treasures they’d found or other gifts during their time with Asterion who would also be given a list at dinner each day of who had caught what. Ben had to admit at being impressed by the thoroughness of Asterion’s lists, there was something for everyone if they took the time to read and follow it. Everything from books and gems on the treasure list to various prey animals or pelts Asterion fancied.

If it didn’t keep the giant prats busy nothing would.

Asterion had also imposed a one-a-day limit, and an alternating day rule for the lists where if they hunted one day they should either take a break or look for one of the gifts the next, so that no herds of animals would be decimated nor bank vaults emptied in the quest for his hand.

The submissive sat up from his slouched position as the next dominant walked in. To prevent his own leanings from skewing the system, he’d let his mentors take charge of the order leaving him with the element of surprise over who would walk into his bower next. This dominant was one of the ones who’d scored blue the previous day and hadn’t done anything since that would’ve downgraded him.

Elias Graves was a large six-foot-four inches tall and had gorgeous dark burgundy red hair paired with bright blue eyes. His wings were out and on display, showing off his twenty-four-and-a-half-foot long span with their deep burgundy coloring flecked with patterns in bright ruby. He was in a word gorgeous. But from his answers and what the others knew of him, he was also fierce, loyal, and deeply protective of his friends as well as a bit dark and possessive.

Elias might not be what he was looking for in his first mate…but he was certainly hitting all the right notes on first acquaintance.

He’d managed to spend a little time alone with him the previous day and had liked him very much. It just remained to be seen whether Elias could keep up that good impression he’d made or whether it would wither with familiarity.

“Hello Asterion.” Elias came over and bowed low over one lithe hand, holding it gently for just a beat too long for propriety.
“Hello Elias.” He smiled with a slight blush. It wouldn’t be the most egregious advantage a dom would take during the day but it was a simple one that made him heat up just a tad. “How was your night?”

The dom gave him a quick flash of a smile. “Fine,” he said in his smooth tenor. “But it would’ve been better spent with you.”

That made Severus growl, Ben pretend not to laugh, and Asterion flush bright red at his cheek.

Before either of the older Dovahim could sanction him, he was honestly scared of what Potions Master Snape would come up with, Elias whipped his gift out from behind his back and offered it to the blushing beauty sitting on a bench beneath the cherry tree that was flowering well out-of-season due to the climate charms on the gardens.

Asterion got a greedy gleam in his eye as he took in the shape of the package and recalled that Elias owned a bookstore as well as having other business interests. He’d gotten more than a healthy dose of the Black love of all things literary, as their library could attest. Blacks loved knowledge and hoarded it like a dragon hoarding gold.

Two of the items on the treasure list were rare books and scrolls.

Yes, he was likely to end up with copies of things he already had but he could also get something new. And the libraries in the other estates could always use new volumes so it wouldn’t be a loss to gain another copy of something. Honestly, books and scrolls were probably the least expensive thing on that list.

“Amm.” Asterion hummed as he carefully removed the plain cotton wrapping surrounding the leather-bound volume. The bindings and cover were all done in a deep green dragonhide, tough and able to stand against the test of time but very rare. It was used mostly only in custom family grimoires or a patronage gift to a benefactor. It wouldn’t be practical to bind an entire run of books with it.

Turning it over in his hands, he grinned when he opened the front cover and saw the title and author on the cover page in an archaic script. It read:

*Dark Arts and Personal Defense, by Salazar Slytherin and Godric Gryffindor*

Looking up into those stunning blue eyes he whispered. “I can’t accept this.”

Elias grinned, that was exactly the reaction he wanted. He’d like to see some of the other doms top it. It would be interesting if any of them managed it as the tome was literally priceless.

“Yes you can.” He said, pushing the offered book back into Asterion’s hands. “It’s only a copy. My family has the original under lock and key the Family Gringotts vault. It’s a tradition that every child gets a copy for a courting gift. And I think a Black will appreciate it more than anyone else I could possibly give it to.”

Asterion gave him a wry grin at that.

“You’ve certainly got him pegged.” Severus commented with his exquisite dryness, taking the tome from his son’s limp hands before it could fall. Not that Asterion would ever let such a thing happen but it was better to be safe than sorry. Only Severus was shocked anew when he saw what had prompted his child into trying to return a gift of a book. *Holy Salazar…*

“Thank you, Elias.” Asterion said beaming up at the dom whose mark turned the brightest blue
imaginable. “I’ll treasure it always.”

“I know.” The quiet, intense man said with surety, then turned the conversation back towards one of both of their favorite topics: literature. Muggle literature in this case.

A few minutes later saw them having a lively debate.

“How can you say that?” Asterion demanded heatedly, his cheeks flushed and eyes snapping with ire. “Romantic my arse! Heathcliffe and Catherine are horrible people. No wonder they wound up together, it wouldn’t do to inflict them on anyone else!”

“And Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy are so much better?” Elias arched a brow. “The only reason Lizzie pulls her head out is because Darcy bribes Wickham into marrying her slaggy sister. Not exactly the most auspicious beginning to a relationship.”

Before Asterion could retort, Mentor Tafari interjected. “Times up I’m afraid.” He called, keeping the rampant amusement out of his voice through sheer force of will. Entertaining. Asterion was pure walking entertainment during these hunts.

Sighing Elias rose to his feet, not about to get on the Mentor’s bad side when things were going so well. He’d wondered if his devotion to his businesses would hold him back from having a mate and children of his own but if he was reading Asterion right, that worry might be gone. Even if he wasn’t picked first, he still was in with a chance at being one of the following mates.

It wasn’t what any dominant would really want unless they preferred men and had been picked by a female submissive, but most doms would also give their left nut to be mated to someone like Asterion.

Dealing with other dominants was a small price to pay in the face of a perfect catch.

…

Three other dominants followed Elias, each gifting Asterion with an animal hide from their hunt or a small trinket though nothing off of his ‘treasure’ list. While none were horrible none were memorable either, simply talking about their work or awards or interests. All of which were things Asterion wanted to know but not when it precluded talking about anything else.

“I’m about ready for a break.” Asterion said with a sigh. They were almost through their first hour and other than Elias he was less than impressed. “I need a cup of tea, stat, before I pass out from sheer boredom.”

Severus looked up from where he was currently devouring the Slytherin-Gryffindor compendium, giving his son an arch look.

“We could always cut things short and you can pick Elias.” He offered teasingly.

Asterion rolled his eyes. Yes, he liked Elias. However he wanted to give everyone a fair shot. That was the whole point of doing things this way. He got to meet and talk to every dominant and then made cuts each night until he was down to a more workable number that would carry through and continue to shrink as his hunt went on instead of leading on the dominants and hogging their attention for himself and keeping them from pursuing other, more receptive, submissives.

He wanted to be down to half the current number before settling in with his first mate. It would make the next hunts much, much easier if his first mate didn’t feel the need to put a bunch of pushy arseholes in their place. Which would make an actual mateship more likely instead of him having a
bunch of different husbands who never wanted to be around each other.

“I have a plan.” He stated mulishly. “And I’m going to stick to it. No matter how self-absorbed some of these idiots are.”

“Suit yourself.” Severus said sotto-voice as the next dominant was shown in.

Sebastian was one that was still slightly iffy. If it hadn’t been for Severus having a good opinion of him, he probably would’ve been sent home yesterday. Though his pleased reaction over being kept when he was aware a few of his answers raised red flags was gratifying.

“I will.” Asterion all but sang back as Sebastian came forward.

He had the confidence of a successful, handsome man with his dark blond hair and blue eyes. His form was lean and fit though strictly the result of good genes and not from devotion to any one type of fitness regimen or healthy lifestyle. With his dark blue wings with coppery-colored scales on display, he made a handsome sight.

But his priorities were worlds away from what Asterion would want in a mate with his utter focus on his work at the law firm he owned in France.

Knowing that Asterion had given him a chance not many submissives were willing to take, Sebastian had gone all out on his courting gift and selected one of the rarer items on the treasure hunt. He wasn’t the kind of person who enjoyed much of the outdoors or sport and only hunted to appease his instincts. Not wanting to present a less-than-stellar prey animal compared to some of the rougher Dovahim, he went with the things he did have to offer.

Connections.

As one of the top magical lawyers in the France as well as specializing in international law, Sebastian Argineau had cultivated relationships all over the magical world.

Including some that specialized in procuring rare magical items and potions ingredients. Such as basilisk parts from the single basilisk raising operation in the world located in Sri Lanka. He’d carefully studied the list of items Asterion was interested in a several stood out…if you knew what you were looking for and having overheard one of the Mentors talking to Professor Snape about Asterion’s NEWTs, plus with his own family’s talents, Sebastian was able to make the connection. Basilisk bone was used in fashioning runes or “bones” for Diviners. As were uncut, raw gemstones like fire opals while raw silk was used in the polishing process and phoenix tears in a cleansing potion used on older family sets that are passed down in lines that had the gift.

Asterion was a Diviner, or was close to one, and was gathering the rough elements used in fashioning the tools of that brand of magic.

He enjoyed the muffled gasp Asterion made when he unwrapped the several fine pieces of basilisk bone, each perfect for forming several runes from their lengths, pleased that he’d been able to acquire them and then apparate back to Scotland before his hunt.

The appreciative and pleased look on the little Lord’s face was more than thanks for the time and effort and called in favor it’d taken to acquire them and most doms he knew would agree.

“Thank you, very much.” Asterion said after inspecting the bones for flaws before setting them aside. They’d work very well for making a new set of runes geared towards divining major events and were one of the items he didn’t actually expect to receive and so were a very pleasant surprise.
Patting the seat beside him, Asterion offered his hand once more and was happy when Sebastian held it decorously in his rather than trying to take advantage of the sign of favor from the submissive.

“There are a few things we need to talk about,” Asterion said softly, his gentle gaze catching the wince that crossed Sebastian’s face. Oh yes, the lawyer was well aware of what was coming.

“I know.” Sebastian sighed, shrugging. “What do you want to know?” He rested their joined hands on his leg close to his knee rather than on Asterion’s jean clad thigh the way he truly wanted to.

“Your work.” Asterion prompted at once. “You are aware that spending eighty hours a week either at your office or working at home is unacceptable to any submissive.”

“Yes.”

“Then why do you do it?” Asterion was honestly confused by this dominants behavior. “Everything I know about dominants says that you should’ve ameliorated your habits by now if you really wanted a mate. If you’re truly seeking a submissive, why don’t you work more reasonable hours?”

“It started just after law school.” Sebastian explained with a sigh. “I got a position as a Junior Attorney at a prestigious firm in Boston. The hours were grueling and at that time I didn’t have much choice in the matter if I wanted to advance. That cost me several submissives. Then once I’d finished my Mastery in Magical Law, I decided to start my own firm. That was when the seventy hour weeks started.”

“And cost you more submissives as you didn’t have the time to attend hunts.” Asterion said with understanding dawning in his voice. “How long ago was that? When you started your own firm?”

“Five very long and busy years.” Sebastian said with a sigh. “Before I realized it I’d been attending hunts off-and-on for a decade and after so many rejections there didn’t seem to be a point anymore because at least when I went home at night I still had my work.”

Asterion decided to lay it out there for him, rather than dishing out hints and tidbits. Other submissives might hint and prod to get promises of what they wanted but that wasn’t his way. He dealt with matters in his personal life in a rather blunt fashion. He spent more than enough time dissembling in his public life, there was no reason to do it in his private life as well.

“Forty hours.” He stated point-blank. “Fifty max. That’s the most I would accept from any of my dominants unless they work at a job where the times of high hours were contrasted with weeks off. If you can’t agree to cut your hours down to those parameters, then I don’t really see the point in continuing no matter how much I might like you otherwise, our family connection, or how attractive I think you are.”

Sebastian sighed as he caught the look from the chaperone. He was running low on time and something told him Asterion wanted an answer here and now not next Tuesday or next month.

“It would take work.” He admitted after thinking the logistics over. “My firm could support a few more staff members, perhaps another lawyer, paralegal, and a researcher. That should cut my hours to what you want from a mate. But it would take time to do and if I was working a big case I might not be able to stick to that.”

Asterion turned this over in his mind. It seemed fair on the surface. The catch would be whether Sebastian was actually capable of sticking to it or if his workaholic nature would take over after the first flush of matehood was gone.
“Thank you for answering honestly.” Asterion went with the best non-committal answer he could. “I do appreciate it and I loved your gift.”

The blond dominant walked from the room with the faintest bit of hope as he stared down at his mark. It was still white but it had just the tiniest bit of blue in it. He still had a shot.

He’d had worse reactions from submissives, that was for sure.

…

“If you want to take a quick break.” Mentor Christianson said looking down at his ever-present clipboard of names. “I would suggest doing it now, especially after having that out with Argineau.”

“Why?” Asterion said around a yawning stretch. “Who’s up next?”

“Llewelyn.” Was all the answer he got.

“Which one?” The submissive prodded him as he walked stiffly towards the hotel and a loo. Too much tea. He would need to cut back or he’d never make it all the way through these hunts in one day.

“All of them.”

Asterion couldn’t help the little giggle that escaped at his father’s harsh groan and head thunking onto the table over having to deal with the remaining Llewelyns one after another. Catching a look between Mentors Tafari and Christianson he quickly turned to conceal a smirk. The Mentors were conspiring against his father after all the grief he’d given them during the last month.

That was the funniest thing he’d seen in a long time.

The only thing funnier would be watching his father try and control himself in the face of the Llewelyn madness that at least one of the brothers would unleash during his one-on-one.

Asterion’s money was personally on Fintan.

If nothing else, the lovely shade of red his father tended to turn when dealing with the dominant’s antics was always entertaining.
Asterion choked back a snort at the scene before him.

He’d been right.

His mentors were conspiring against his father Severus.

Though doing it by way of the Llewelyn males was a stroke of pure genius. Apparently not satisfied by forcing Severus to sit through their one-on-ones back-to-back with his son, they’d also arranged for them to be seated closest to Asterion during the mid-day meal. So Severus had been subjected to over an hour of the Llewelyns’ own personal brands of zaniness and bragging and trying-to-outdo each other spread out over the course of the day.

Truly, Ben and Ian were diabolical.

Uncle Siri would get the biggest laugh out of this when Asterion got home and gave his nightly report as would Harry when he was told.

The Llewelyns had each chosen to go prey hunting with Brann and Albert presented him with a hide, bear and deer respectively, while Fintan showed the canniness he was known for in the business world by going after one of Asterion’s favorites: wild boar. In addition Fintan had also given him a thin silk ribbon for tying his hair back, having noticed that he’d worn one the previous day when he’d clubbed it back rather than leaving it down like today, while their remaining nephew had hunted a stag.

Tied back hair just didn’t go with his casual T-shirt and jeans. It was too proper for his outfit, at least the complicated clubs, tails, and braids Asterion preferred. Spells really were a wonderful thing.

While Fintan had shown off his canniness in addition to his normal boisterous personality and Albert had been as fun-loving as Asterion remembered, he’d also really enjoyed Brann’s more calm and laid-back personality.

Just as tough and intimidating as his other brothers, Brann stood out with his silver-blond hair playing off his light green eyes. Despite having rougher features, edging him more towards a masculine attractiveness rather than the straight-up handsome some of his brothers enjoyed Brann was still very, very attractive.

Not that it made much difference to Asterion, who found him lust-worthy either way with his well-maintained physique. That was one thing the older Llewelyns had over some of the other dominants that were even a decade or two younger than them, including their own nephew. Not one of them had let themselves go, all keeping in excellent shape in hopes of finally finding a submissive of their own.

Following the Llewelyns came another parade of forgettable faces and names, none really standing out before the midday meal and hour break came. Just another set of self-absorbed dominants that were too busy trying to impress him to actually carry on a conversation. Though he did enjoy some of the gifts, having received a couple single opals from a handful of dominants and enough hides to make several rugs, throws, and leggings for the cold Highland winter weather that would creep over
his home sooner than later.

A job he would set some of the house elves to as soon as he got home.

For now he just had to make it through lunch and then the second set of meetings, the list for which was almost twice that of the morning set.

Joy.

Oh look, his father was starting to turn purple in outrage.

He gave a little chuckle as he caught the joke that Albert had told to turn him that interesting shade of eggplant.

At least having those three around made time pass a little faster with their antics.

…

The meetings after lunch got off to a good start with Gunnar Eklund, a Senior Dragon Tamer from Iceland. Gunnar had given him a bison hide from a massive American Bison bull and then went on to enjoy a short conversation about working with dragons, something that interested Asterion in an academic sense. He’d never want to become a dragon tamer, though he would like to visit a reserve one day.

Gunnar had been transparently pleased at that and offered him a personal tour of the one he worked at, regardless of whether he was selected as a mate or not.

An offer which edged him firmly into the blue after being a sort of watery-blue-white.

After Gunnar was another half-dozen generic dominants, except for one from Japan. Haru Duchenne was an art student living in France while finishing his painting apprenticeship and was half Japanese and half French. He was also at the younger end of Asterion’s remaining possibilities at only twenty-one years of age. “Haru” was a nickname referring to the shade of wings and scales which in shades of dark yellow, orange, and red resembled dark summer sunshine.

Hakon Jonsson presented him with a kingly gift of several opals. An older dominant at fifty, he had two failed marriages to human women under his belt due to his inability to father children with them, Dovahim being infertile except with their own species. While not the best indicator of possible happiness, relationships that shouldn’t have been started if wanting children was such a strong desire for his ex-wives, it wasn’t impossible to understand either. Though bisexual, he obviously had a preference for women which was concerning.

Immediately after Hakon came his younger friend Jason. Jason was a renowned HitWizard and specialized in analyzing serial crimes. He also gave Asterion a gift of opals, being friends with Hakon who knew a dealer and was willing to help out a friend despite their being in competition. A fact that improved Asterion’s opinion of both doms.

Jason was very patient and understanding, at odds with his high-adrenaline job and massive muscular build, though sometimes Asterion got the feeling he was being analyzed.

Another set of random and often forgettable doms came after Jason, with a Native American shaman slash Master Herbologist easily standing heads and shoulders above the rest. Stepping outside the box, Raven had presented him with an eagle feather that he’d painted himself with a motif of a murder of ravens in flight. It was truly a work of art and Asterion immediately called for an elf to take it and display it in his private rooms.
Asterion had finally passed the halfway point and had about another three and a half hours of interviews to go when he decided to switch locations. With dusk rapidly approaching he moved inside and took up residence on a comfy chair next to a lit fireplace. Refreshed from the change of scenery, he was ready for the last long set of meetings.

Charlie was another Dragon Tamer who loved all kinds of creatures, but especially dragons. He was also the older brother of Harry’s friend Ron Weasley. However, according to a grudgingly-agreeable Severus, he tended towards being quiet and reserved preferring creatures great and small to people…as if either Severus or Asterion could judge anyone else for being introverted or even downright asocial.

Charlie scored a blue after their talk, a standing that didn’t look in any sort of jeopardy.

Though even tough-nut Severus was impressed when Charlie unfurled the large bundle of skin he’d been carrying in his arms.

The tough and adventurous dominant had gone halfway around the world to hunt down, skin, and bring back the carcass and fur of one of the biggest land predators on the planet: The Kodiak Bear. The largest brown bear by far, Kodiaks are one of the two largest bear species along with the Polar. Asterion quickly flipped through what he knew about the animal then looked up at a fidgeting Charlie.

“You poached a Kodiak for me?” He asked humorously. July was several months outside of the regulated hunting season and Kodiaks were a heavily regulated species when it came to game hunting. Not exactly what he was expecting from a Dovah with a soft spot for creatures.

“Ah…” Charlie rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. “Dovahim don’t tend to worry about things like muggle hunting policies so…I guess?”

Asterion chuckled before curling up in the massive fur, assuring the stammering dominant that it was alright as long as he didn’t do it again. Most wizards didn’t care about things like the muggle endangered species act or hunting regulations but Asterion did, hence why he’d stipulated no endangered species on the hunting list.

They fell into an easy conversation about some of the places Charlie had visited for hiking or with his work as a Dragon Tamer.

As Charlie said his goodbyes, another dominant was shown in. One who chuckled lowly at seeing Asterion all cuddled up in the massive bear skin that looked like it was trying to swallow him.

Gracefully accepting Jamie’s gift of a phoenix feather, another item from his treasure list, and enjoying the soft kiss on the back of his hand as well as the American’s gentle hold, Asterion settled in to get the answers he wanted. The Mentors knew that this might take more than one round of interviews for Asterion to make a decision regarding Jamie and so had left him more towards the end, not wanting him to be distracted during his other meetings.

…

Asterion finished his last meeting with the mysterious late comer and shock to all, one Viktor Krum, and flopped back onto the floor with a groan.

No one had had even the slightest hint that the Quidditch star was a dominant Dovah.

Apparently according to Viktor, he traveled so much that most invitations to a submissive’s hunt never even reach him and those that do he managed to ignore as he wasn’t ready at the time to have a
mate. Now twenty-one and well-settled into his career with the Vrasta Vultures and the Bulgarian National Quidditch team, he’d finally decided to start attending hunts when he could fit them around his game and practice schedule. Mentor Tafari’s invitation had come mere days after Viktor had taken down the wards that had shielded his home from invitations and put away the pendant that protected him the rest of the time from receiving them no matter where he was, assisting him in resisting the temptation to go since he never knew when or where they were going on.

Normally Viktor’s home in Sofia would be out of the normal range for Asterion’s hunt, however Ben has been good friends for years with Viktor’s mentor and was aware that the Quidditch star was both a Dovah and finally interested in meeting submissive to see if one would suit him, though as a matter of being wary of a submissive choosing him merely off of fame, he intended to accept only invitations filtered through his mentor, like Tafari’s for Asterion’s hunt.

Not being a major fan of the Wizarding sport, since he’d lived so long in seclusion though Siri had tried his best to instill a love of Quidditch in his nephew, Asterion was far more impressed with the adult male lion skin Viktor had presented him with than his name.

Asterion did like Quidditch and wasn’t opposed to flying or tossing a quaffle with Siri or playing catch the Snitch with Harry (though he always lost in their couple of games they’d played), he just wasn’t obsessed with it like many young wizards – and witches and older people of the same – could be.

Wealthy in his own right apart from the old-moneyed pureblood family he came from, Viktor could’ve easily purchased anything on Asterion’s treasure list. Instead he’d chosen the harder route – for him – and gone hunting instead, showcasing his ability as a hunter and possible provider for Asterion and his possible children. And Asterion had been suitably impressed with the gambit from the Quidditch star some thought of as slow due to his habit of always thinking before he spoke especially in English instead of his native tongue.

It was a high note to end the otherwise rollercoaster of a day.

“Well?” Severus prompted as he closed the book he’d spent the day buried in when he wasn’t insulting or harassing the various dominants vying for his son’s hand. “Any decisions made?”

The Mentors all gathered around, Roberts handing over the sheet that contained the record of all the kills and trophies brought in. A good thing as several had gone with the non-trophy hunt animals, such as Fintan Llewelyn. They’d picked up on him not adding such an animal unless he really enjoyed eating it since there wouldn’t be any other proof of their prowess.

Viktor had gone the opposite direction, taking down a trophy-only animal.

Asterion certainly wasn’t going to eat a lion for Merlin’s sake. It’d be all tough and stringy. No thank you.

Looking over his list of names he got out his red ink and struck through about ten in quick succession, six of them from the few remaining female dominants. “That’s it for now.” He said with a slight nod. “I’ll go over then list more carefully after dinner. We’ll just have to announce that there’ll be another round of cuts tonight after I’ve gone over the day with more care.”

“Sounds like a good plan, dear one.” Ian said as he moved to extricate Asterion from the Kodiak and lion skins, (that the doms had thoughtfully used magic to tan, dress and clean before giving them over), he was wrapped up in to the amusement of the others present.

The submissive barely held back a whine. He didn’t want to leave his snuggly cocoon! The elves
better put these two furs in his bedroom or there would be Hecate to pay…

Grumbling under his breath he stalked out to the dinner table, calming himself as he went since the dominants would already be wound up enough over the latest cuts and then facing a second set in one night without him adding to it.

He slapped a smile on his face that quickly turned genuine when he saw that Elias and Gunnar were seated closest to him of all the dominants. Then looking around the table a little farther he couldn’t hold in a snicker. Mentor Charles Roberts, who had taken care of the seating chart before handing over the kill list, had placed the Llewelyns right next to his father Severus.

*Diabolical.* He laughed to himself. They really were diabolical.

…

Uncle Siri smirked over at Asterion from his seat. The Brothers Black along with Severus and Asterion had had their nightly conference over the results of the day with father, uncle, and son enjoying a hot toddy before Severus took his leave quickly followed by Regulus. After giving the two ample time to be out of hearing range the teasing had begun.

“You llliiike him.” Siri rolled the word teasingly, making his nephew blush bright red. “You really *really* like him.”

Asterion hissed half-heartedly at the rakish figure then rolled his eyes.

“Which *him*?” He asked cynically. Even after the second round of cuts there was just over forty Dovahim left to choose from and the cuts were only getting harder the better he got to know them.

Granted some were easy like the dom who didn’t think submissives should be allowed to work or the one who would make them ask for permission to do everything.

Others…

Others he had no idea how he was going to choose between, especially with the belief among many of the doms that secondary mates were after thoughts and only taken grudgingly to beget children.

How could he let *any* of them, let alone *most* believe that they’re second best just because one suited the position of first mate better than others. It wasn’t a reflection on them as much as it was on him. He needed a certain kind of dominant to help him with his anxiety and social issues stemming from his upbringing. It was just that simple.

No matter how much one dom made him smile or another made his stomach get all fluttery, what he needed *most* at this point in his life was a stabilizing force who could be a bedrock of support for him to lean on.

Especially when the time came for him to be invested in the Hogwarts Board and the Wizengamot and he started having to actually attend those meetings.

Having a support system was crucial for him. And while he firmly believed that any of the doms he liked most could be that for him, he also knew some would be better at it than others, particularly in the day to day.

He quickly explained as such to Siri then tossed back the rest of his concoction before climbing to his feet.
“Say what you want, pup.” Sirius said with a knowing look on his face. “But you already know which dom you’re going to pick. You’ve known almost from the beginning. Your Dovah wants him and you want him. You’re going to pick him. You’re just being stubborn about sticking to your game plan.”

“Well,” Asterion said sardonically, casting a look at his Uncle’s smug face before turning to head to his room. “I wonder where I learned that stubbornness from.”

“Oi!” Siri called out at his nephew’s back. ”I resemble that remark!”

…

The next morning saw a newly anxious Asterion up, dressed, and pacing in his private garden at Castle Black.

He wasn’t quite sure about what he had planned for today.

Having a range of small activities around an hour each had seemed like a good idea…at the time. Now thinking over what a couple of the activities were…he foresaw quite a few doms sporting bruises by the end of the day.

For himself he’d had to think ahead to everything he would be doing today.

Which meant he was dressed almost identically to how he was when he met his father for the first time. Dragonhide trousers, silk T-shirt, dragonhide boots, and his hair pulled back in an intricate braid down his back. The only difference was the leather duster he had on which would be removed and reworn several times through the day as he moved from indoors to outdoors, needing the protection that the coat provided more than he needed to dress with the summer sun in mind. He could just use cooling charms if he got too warm, and he was a damn Dovah so that would take some doing.

Asterion couldn’t deny that he was looking forward to seeing which dominants signed up for what activities. There were seven in total but some were capped at four doms while others were capped at ten with participant numbers ranging along that scale. For instance horseback riding was limited to four while as many as nine could take part in fencing.

Another cause of his current anxious state was that for the first time he would be allowing some of the suitors to come onto the Black Estate.

Two of the activities would take place on the Estate grounds:

Fishing and boating on one of his favorite lakes that he had stocked with salmon and rainbow trout every year and horseback riding to a sacred grove and back.

Thankfully they were also the two smallest activities.

He didn’t think he was in a place yet where he could handle a dozen or more near strangers running around his home territory.

Again today while the some were busy with him the others would be free to explore the hotel or go hunting treasures or prey.

He pouted a moment. He hoped someone would bring back a brace of turkeys today. No one had gone after the lone fowl on his hunting list and it was a little saddening. He loved turkey.
But he did have roasted luau pig to look forward to thanks to Fintan and a couple other doms so it wasn’t a complete loss.

Asterion chuckled when his stomach growled with hunger. First before luau pig he needed to sit down and have breakfast.

Which meant his father and Mentor Tafari needed to bloody hurry up!

…

Fishing had only gone so-so. They’d port-keyed through the wards surrounding the Castle grounds and up to the Highland lake that Asterion kept stocked year-round. Surprisingly the doms had put aside their rivalry to get the boat launched…and from there things started to go downhill.

Albert Llewelyn was one of this group…and the only dominant over forty out of the bunch. Apparently a quartet of the “baby” doms, meaning anyone under eighteen, had been unable to rein-in their impatience and had simply signed up for the very first activity. Two of them got seasick from the rocking of the boat forcing Asterion to make one-way single-use port-keys back to the hotel.

Vomit was not how he’d wanted to start his day.

After that things went a little smoother as the two remaining younger doms began competing to see who could catch the most or biggest fish keeping them well-occupied while Albert showed off his own version of Llewelyn cunning by claiming the rod and chair beside Asterion and engaging him in conversation and entertaining him with his repertoire of jokes while reeling in a decent-sized king salmon.

It wasn’t the biggest catch of the day, Asterion had managed that himself with a grand-daddy salmon almost as big as he was much to the younger doms’ disgruntlement.

By the end of the trip Albert had landed himself a blue mark while the other four were steadily edging into pinky-red with the two who left in pink and the two who stayed, red.

Following fishing was an indoor activity, a good thing since Asterion had could use a break from the hot July sun. After hearing from several of the dominants about them taking art classes or lessons he’d set up studio time in a sunny atrium of the hotel, capping this gathering at eight dominants.

Two of his solid blue dominants were in this group: Elias with his rich red hair and Raven Three-Feathers who had his black wings with dark blue scales out and on show.

Half-a-dozen others had signed up after hearing about Asterion’s reaction to Raven’s artistic and unique gift, each seeking to gain a sign of favor for their own work. Thankfully everyone who’d signed up for the ‘art class’ all had actual ability and Asterion wasn’t forced to pretend enthusiasm for someone who could be out-done by a preschooler’s fingerpainting. As someone who’d been trained himself, art was one of the areas of his life where he was very critical and finicky about what he would have in his private quarters and any room that he spent any amount of time in.

Which was one of the reasons the hotel would be getting a face-lift after the meetings were finished. He couldn’t stand some of the so-called art the high-class hotel had on offer for the guests’ appreciation. Asterion would not have a place famous for its connection to the House of Black have anything less than perfect art for the space.

Asterion and the others all worked in peaceful harmony for about twenty minutes before he cajoled them into each taking a turn up on the model’s stage in the center of the room which had had a selection of different still-life subjects to choose from if the Dovahim had so desired.
Making it into a game, he offered a prize for whoever could produce the funniest and most accurate caricatures of their fellow dominants, capping the modeling time at five minutes each. When one dom went to shed his pants, he hurriedly added a no-nudity clause much to Raven’s entertainment at his beet-red cheeks, the dom cooing over his innocence. Elias had a look in his fierce blue eyes that showed exactly how he felt about Asterion’s innocence…and how much he’d like to relieve him of it. It was the first sign he’d gotten of a physical manifestation of Elias’s passionate, fiery nature and he was happy for it.

He’d hoped that the same dominant that had no problem debating him into the ground over classic muggle literature didn’t constrain that same passion to only books.

It would’ve been a massive disappointment.

Studying the collections of drawing from the dominants, Asterion bestowed a kiss on the cheek of the winner – a twenty-four-year-old dominant with dark golden yellow wings and brown scales from Germany – and used the sheets of drawing parchment to conceal what he’d been doing with his own time…sketching portraits of Elias and Raven with appearances from the Llewelyns and others.

Asterion wasn’t the best portrait artist, it wasn’t where his focus was, but he could still produce a good product.

Besides, his Dad, Harry, and Siri had requested pictures of the top suitors and this would work just as well.

After a quick break where Asterion shrugged back into his jacket it was out onto the hotel grounds for the next group this time archery. While he wasn’t surprised when Brann Llewelyn signed up, the dom had mentioned that he’d been in a club in school, he was intrigued that the half-French half-Japanese artist-in-training Haru had chosen archery over strutting his stuff in the art class. A mystery that was quickly unraveled when while waiting his turn the frankly beautiful man had lured him into a conversation and away from watching another dom take his turn at the butts.

Haru hadn’t wanted to be pigeon-holed as an artist but wanted to show off more than one skill. Archery was the best option for him to do so since he like Brann had competed in archery in his teens though in his case it was the Japanese-style and not the English longbow that he’d used. It was an interesting peek into the outspoken dominant.

Brann won the archery contest, with Haru coming in second and a laughing Asterion in third. The blond Llewelyn swooped up the lithe submissive and claimed a smacking kiss as his prize. Taking that as his cue, Haru tugged him from Brann’s arms and dipped him, dropping a gentle peck onto his forehead.

Blushing once more at the affection, Asterion took it all with good grace. Despite the frowning faces of Severus and Mentor Roberts, an unrepentant Brann and Haru escorted him away. With good timing as it turned out as a tense trio who’d been bickering all through the event broke out into a savage fight with fang and claw.

First blood of the day had been drawn, this time by Brann’s nephew Owain who ended up being sent home along with the other offenders.

Back inside, Asterion was ignorant for the moment of the infighting. It was time for the largest group of the day and the last one before lunch. Nine total dominants had signed up for dancing, each hoping for one-on-one time with Asterion where they could but their hands on his slim body without getting a punch in the head for it from Mentor Tafari. It came as no surprise that Fintan was one of the first ones to sign up for the opportunity to take “innocent” advantage of the event.
Jamie on the other hand, was a mild shock.

Soft-spoken with underlying verve, he would have thought the outdoor activities would be more his speed.

Sebastian, on the other hand, wasn’t a surprise though it only took one turn around the ballroom floor for Asterion to realize just why the law wizard had chosen to dance.

On the floor, Sebastian was simply divine. Swooping in and stealing him for the first dance, a Viennese Waltz, Sebastian led him perfectly and exquisitely while also leading him in a caring conversation about how his day had gone so far and how he was feeling. While some of the others were almost pouting while waiting their turns, Fintan and another dominant named Isaac Anderson, an African American who was one of the bigger doms, though not as large as the Llewelyns, decided to show off their moves…together.

Moving fluidly across the floor though with an athletic feel instead of Sebastian’s grace, they made quite the pair. Pleased by their grasp of what Asterion wanted to have happen, at the end of Sebastian’s waltz he whispered in his ear and had him trade partners with Fintan for the Foxtrot – which was a riot with Fintan’s flair for the dramatic – before having them trade again with Asterion partnering Isaac for the Lindy Hop. Finally catching on, the other doms paired off and Asterion spent an enjoyable hour not dodging as many wandering hands as he’d expected.

He finished the set the same way he started it but in reverse dancing the samba with Isaac, a tango with Fintan, and finishing with another waltz with Sebastian.

Only one dom had played octo-hands and been given a red while his first three partners each scored a blue with Sebastian’s only slightly darker than the other two.

For once Severus wasn’t displeased by the outcome of an event, having feared he’d need to kill himself a Llewelyn by the time lunch rolled around. Plus he’d gotten to bodily throw out the wanker that palmed his son’s bum…and may have broken an arm in the process…

After a delicious lunch of luau pig which he thanked the remaining boar hunters for providing including Fintan, he led Charlie and three others out to the stables. Quickly mounting up, he headed straight for the estate wards where he stopped and waited.

Holding out a hand he explained. “I need to take you through the wards. If the two closest to me could grab an arm and then the ones next to them their arms I can escort you through.”

By the end of the day which finished out with card games in the parlor – where Jason took everyone but Hakon to the cleaners – and a thrilling fencing spar against Viktor, Asterion was exhausted. Sitting at dinner he watched as the various dominants shifted anxiously, not knowing whether he had any additional cuts to make that day. Several dominants had already left after their performances during the groups, including the one who groped him and had his arm broken by his father.

That didn’t mean that there wouldn’t be more as the previous day had shown.

Four dominants had left, making the current field an even forty. Asterion had not been shy about his desire to cut that number down to thirty or less before choosing his first mate. It wasn’t out of any desire to draw things out – the opposite.

Asterion firmly believed – and had zero problem sharing – that giving dominants false hope was cruel. While his inner Dovah played a hefty role in selecting his mates, his rational mind and
yearning heart did as well. Most Dovahim never know how many mates they need, assuming the number to be between one or two, the only sure sign they were finished was the start of their heat cycle since unlike other dragon-kin, Dovahim only start going into heat (in other words, they can only fall pregnant) once they have their full complement of mates. Asterion had a leg up, however, with his ability to Divine the number of mates he needed – which gave him some guidelines – and he could check the number after each mate he bonded.

Still, most submissives allow their instincts to do most of the choosing for them, for fear of not getting a “prime” mate that would give them the best children.

Now Asterion didn’t quite feed into that philosophy but he couldn’t discount it either. Too much of what he was feeling was being driven by his never-shutting-up Dovah rather than his cool and collected mind. And then there was the part of himself that was waiting for him to have a panic attack under the unrelenting pressure and attention.

Teenagers should not have to make life-altering decisions while hopped up on Dovah pheromones. It just wasn’t a good idea as far as he was concerned.

That most submissives did this at sixteen or seventeen at the latest was madness to him.

Pure, barmy madness.

At last making a decision that he’d been putting off, Asterion gestured for Mentor Tafari and whispered furiously in his ear. Nodding to show he understood, he walked over to the reclusive Krum and escorted him to Asterion’s private rooms in the hotel. Normally he wouldn’t do this but as Asterion wasn’t actually staying there he was as concerned with the breech of etiquette.

Looking up from the list he was notating, Asterion gave Viktor a beaming smile making the worried look in the Bulgarian’s eyes melt away.

He wasn’t being sent away. Viktor let out the breath he was holding. He’d been worried ever since he lost to Asterion at swordplay. His Dovah was screaming at him for losing to a submissive none the less. Never mind that everyone else had lost to him before he lost to Asterion.

The others had been worried as well, it was easy to see.

What submissive would want a dominant that they could beat in a fight?

But Asterion hadn’t sent any of them away except for one giant asshole who’d thrown a fit over Asterion knowing how to fence. Going off on a rant about how it wasn’t “proper” for a submissive to behave that way and spar with a dominant. He’d quickly been shown the door, Asterion having made his opinion about his opinion crystal clear.

“Viktor,” Asterion said warmly, offering his hand. “I’m sorry to do this but there is something I need from you…”

…

Hakon Jonsson stared down in dismay as his mark bled red along with several others around him. It had happened again. Just like it always did. Only this time he couldn’t even blame it on his age, not with the Llewelyns still around and two of the three over a decade his senior.

He’d been rejected…again.
His Dovah curled up into a wounded ball inside of him.

For his part he couldn’t quite understand it. Everything had gone so *well*. Even after having to admit to his failed marriages, Asterion still kept him around. What had gone wrong?

“Jonsson.” Mentor Christianson called his name to get his attention as he stood glumly to leave. “Asterion would like to see you before you leave.”

A murmur rippled through the crowd. That’d never happened before, Asterion wanting to see one of the dominants he’d rejected. Their communal curiosity was roused by the anomaly.

Hakon walked to the side room where Asterion was waiting patiently, flanked by two Mentors while Severus was standing behind his son, habitual scowl firmly in place.

“Hakon.” Asterion gestured for him to sit across from him. “I’m glad you agreed to see me.”

“Of…of course.” The rejected Dovah said with a little cough. “It isn’t a problem at all.”

“I’m glad.” Asterion reiterated. “Because I wanted to explain to you why I decided to send you home. If you can stand to listen?”

The dominant gave a shallow nod as he fist his hands where they rested on his thighs. He knew Asterion wasn’t a cruel submissive, so he couldn’t figure out why he was doing this.

“It’s not your age.” Asterion said firmly. “Or how you acted or even that you’ve been married twice to human women. It isn’t any of those things and honestly you didn’t even do anything wrong.”

Hakon frowned deeply at that. If he didn’t do anything wrong then what was the problem? Why was he being sent away?

Asterion sighed, deciding to be blunt.

“You didn’t do anything right either.” He said. “There isn’t any attraction between us and if you’re honest with yourself you can admit that. You’ve said that you’re bisexual but honestly? You’re mostly drawn to females and with an all-male harem that just isn’t going to work.”

Face drawn, Hakon accepted what Asterion had to say, knowing he had a valid point no matter how much it hurt. As a fifty-year old Dovah he knew what his preferences were and he loved women too much to really want to do without them for the rest of his life. He’d been hoping that Asterion might also select a female dom…but that apparently wasn’t to be with only Seren as the lone female left after this last round of cuts.

“I have something for you.” Asterion said his voice brightening as he held out a jewelry box. “A very rare item, perhaps the only one of its kind in Britain.”

Flipping open the lid, the dominant stared down at the dragon-shaped pendant. The necklace *reeked* of magic and dominant Dovahim. He’d never seen the like of it before.

“What does it do?”

“Blocks invitations to submissive hunts and muffles your instincts to mate and sire children.” Asterion said gently. “You may not be for me but that doesn’t mean you don’t deserve happiness. You’ve fallen in love twice with human women. With this pendant you can finally live out your life without being at the mercy of your Dovah’s whims. You’ve fallen in love twice.”
Asterion gave him a soft, understanding smile as tears gathered in his eyes.

“Third time’s a charm.” The dom said, voice raspy from emotion, hope blooming anew on his face.

…”

“That was very kind of you.” Regulus praised his son that night as he retold the events of the day for his usual audience.

He shrugged. “After Viktor told me about the pendant all I could think about was Hakon and how unhappy he was. I mean, two failed marriages? Lots of doms want to mate and have children but he just wanted a family. Any family. He tugged at my empathy in a way none of the others did. Now he’s gone and can make a life for himself and I can get on with selecting my mates.”

“And there’s the Slytherin coming out to stomp on his inner Hufflepuff.” Siri laughed, over to support his nephew and heckle Severus once again, this time bringing Harry and Remus with him, the latter of whom was currently tucked away in the library.

Severus just looked on proudly, ignoring the slur on his House.

…”

Staring down at what he’d sketched out for the day, the fourth day of his meeting, Asterion did something he rarely did.

Crumpled up the parchment and tossed it in the bin for his house elves to clean and recycle.

He was tired.

The last three days had been a marathon of interviews and questions and activities all designed to help in select the best dominant and clear out the dominant field to make additional hunts easier to handle.

Well.

He’d done that.

Along with Hakon there had been over a dozen others who he’d sent home last night, especially with some of the fighting that went on, paring the group down to around thirty dominants.

Thirty was a manageable number for his next hunt.

Now he just needed to spend some more time one-on-one with three of his favored suitors and hopefully make his final decision for his first mate.

Hopefully.

It wasn’t what he’d planned, he’d wanted to do another round of meet-and-greets followed by a pair of big group sessions but…

He was tired and more importantly ready to choose a mate.

Any late comers would just have to take the maze test and meet him at his next hunt. He was done with this one.

And wouldn’t Siri be proud of him for chucking his plan and going with his instincts?
The dominants had all gathered in the main conference room once more, many breaking off into small groups. Most couldn’t believe how quickly Asterion was weeding out his mate prospects, never before had a submissive had such a clear-cut plan of how they were selecting dominants.

It was refreshing and confusing all at the same time.

There was something in the air this morning, a sense of anticipation that hadn’t been hovering on the previous days.

Something was going to change after today, they could feel it.

Asterion had skipped out on breakfast with the group, Mentor Roberts cluing them in on him being in conference with the other Mentors and his Father.

Something had happened to change the game plan.

And not a single dominant there wasn’t excited to find out the results of the change.

Asterion flipped through the parchments that had the information for every dominant Dovah present, searching for some sign that would help him choose between three very different men.

“I can’t do this.” Asterion groaned tossing the folder onto the table. “Not like this.”

His mentors and Severus looked up from examining the initial results that they’d gathered from this first stage of Asterion’s mating process as he hunted through the dominants for his most perfect mates, trying to compare the number of dominants injured or killed, complaints to their own mentors, etc. against other mate meetings so that his mentors could present their preliminary finding for how the various experiments have gone thus far to the greater Mentor Body.

For example the use of the mark that let the dominants gauge how well their courting was being received and how accurate a tool the enchanted maze really was in the long term as well as Asterion giving them a task to complete if they chose rather than just waiting around for him to give them his attention.

Thus far the results were quite promising. Whether the other mentors would be willing to make even one of them mandatory for other mate hunts, or even bring back more traditional hunts was the question. Though the newest idea of Asterion’s, to send the dominants all home and owl them when it was time for him to choose his next mate would definitely cut down on dominant deaths.

“What do you need?” Mentor Tafari asked at once. Having gotten to know Asterion very well through their chats and during this hunt that he was comfortable with the assumption that this submissive would have an idea on how to choose between his short list for his first mate. Usually his Dovah would let him know but because Asterion needed so many mates it wasn’t giving him clear feedback and hadn’t been the whole time.

“If I might offer up a suggestion?” Severus asked, turning to face his son who gave him the go ahead with a wave of his hand. “Perhaps a date or three might be in order.”

“A…date?” Asterion cocked his head to one side considering the idea. “Like with flowers and dinner and what have you? Like what most mentors suggest their submissive charges do with pre-selected candidates?”
“Not necessarily those particular items,” Severus gave his son a look. “Do as you did yesterday, come up with some simple activities to do with each of the doms you’re having trouble choosing between. At the end of the day you should be able to make a decision.”

“Hmmm.” Asterion turned that rather foreign idea around in his head. From the time he was small he knew that he would be the one courted as his great-grandparents were sure that he would be a bearer when he came of age. Then when he turned out to be a submissive Dovah his mind went from courting to mating. “Actually planning little one-on-ones sounds like fun.”

“Mmm.” Severus turned back to the raw data he was examining. “Remember Asterion,” he cautioned. “It takes more than one person to make a relationship work. You can’t expect your dominants to carry the load all the time. You’ll have to do your share as well.”

Humming under his breath, Asterion grabbed an empty sheet of parchment. It was already half-past eight. If he was going to give each dominants a good amount of time with him, he’d need to get these dates planned and now.

…

Mentor Tafari stood up before the assembled dominants and cleared his throat, easily gaining everyone’s attention.

“Lady and gentlemen,” He said formally. “Asterion has made a decision. He has narrowed the field for his first dominant down to three possibilities.” He waited for the roar to die down before continuing. “If your name is not called it is respectfully requested that you return home until his next hunt. Remember Asterion will need several mates, just because you were not one of the top three for his first mate doesn’t mean he isn’t still considering you. Owls will be sent out a week in advance of the next hunt, allowing all of you ample time to travel and return to the hotel.”

A low humming of conversation broke out at that announcement. They weren’t expected to drop everything at the last minute? Or simply leave their lives behind until some foggy day that may be months for now?

Hearts were softened all around the room as Asterion proved once and for all that he had compassion and consideration for all of them not just his favorites.

“You may if you choose,” Tafari continued. “Send owls to Asterion care of Hotel Dubh which will be vetted by his father before being forwarded to him at the Black Estate. Upon returning to the Hotel, your stamps will be reapplied and your current standing will reflect any changes in status that occurs during the break. Also,” here he lowered his voice just a tad. “If you choose not to return, Asterion wishes you well in your future endeavors but would appreciate it if you sent an owl to that end so he doesn’t hold back the hunt waiting for someone who has no intention of returning.”

A few dominants growled at the inference that they would be rude and uncaring enough to do such a thing while others, like Seren who was the last female standing, looked thoughtful.

It was another first, a submissive giving them a no-hard-feelings “out”.

“The following dominants have been selected to accompany Asterion on a date to assist his decision making: Brann Llewelyn, Fintan Llewelyn, and Elias Graves.”

There was an uproar from the younger dominants when they realized that one of the “grandpa” dominants, Fintan, was in the top three. Some of the others were a little downhearted but brightened when they remembered the Mentor’s words. Asterion would need several mates. They still had a
chance.

“Brann.” Mentor Tafari called out, waving for the blond Llewelyn to join him. “You’re up first.”

... Brann followed Benjamin’s instructions arriving at the glassed-in conservatory still very much in shock. He’d never made it this far before. Being one of three options? Never, never, never. The only part that sucked about the situation was that he was in a head-to-head competition with his older brother.

Llewelyns competed for submissives all the time, it was part of the downside of having such a large family full of dominant Dovahim. Rarely however were they in true contention for a single submissive, the others often stepping out when one was really drawn to a submissive or a submissive genuinely seemed to favor one over another.

Here was a different situation all together.

Asterion wasn’t giving them the option of stepping back.

He was quite obviously drawn to all three of them though apparently moreso to Brann and Fintan than Albert.

It was all his decision at this point.

The only shitty part about being in true competition with his brothers was that one of them was going to get hurt.

It was a foregone conclusion.

The only question was which brother it would be.

... Albert stepped through the floo into the warm kitchen of his father Cadfael’s house to a very warm welcome. Many of his brothers and sisters were there, along with several nieces and nephews.

“If I didn’t know any better I’d say you knew I was coming.” He said with a smirk.

“Where’s Uncles Fintan and Brann, Uncle Al?” George asked, looking around as if they were hiding in the woodwork.

“That’s the funny part.” Albert said with a laugh, genuinely happy for his brothers even though it was starting to look like he was out of the running. “Asterion kept both of them. Brann and Fintan are both top contenders for Asterion’s mate.”

A hush fell over the room before breaking out in celebration, Cadfael twirling his wife and mate Arden around. One of his boys was going to get a mate. He could feel it in his bones.

... Asterion coaxed Brann down onto the rug laid out over the tile of the conservatory, the dominant eyeing the array of flowers laid out skeptically.

“What’s all this, beautiful?” He asked in his low gruff voice that didn’t quite match up with his light hair and eyes.
The submissive gave him a knowing little smirk, hinting that whatever he was up to wasn’t going to be easy on the other man.

“We’re going to make flower wreaths.” Asterion announced waving one hand out over the many types of foliage before him. “To wear. As crowns.”

The rough-and-tumble dominant groaned under his breath. Nope. This time Asterion wasn’t even pretending to make the activities easy on the doms. He was testing them, throwing them into the activities most contrary to their normal preferences. Or at least, that was what Asterion was doing to him.

This was not going to be fun.

At least not for Brann.

An hour later Brann had to reconsider. While his hands weren’t the most dexterous outside of winning duels on the professional circuit, that had the benefit of getting Asterion to sit close and help him, using his lithe hands and lean fingers to wind flowers in and around the basic wreath Brann had managed to weave from the rosemary he’d found among the other options. With Asterion helping him, what he thought would turn out like something a toddler would make actually looked like a masculine wreath that could be worn during any of the springtime festivals or revels.

And listening to Asterion giggle when his big hands would fumble wasn’t a hardship.

Not in the least.

…

Fintan’s date happened right at midday, Asterion taking him to one of the smaller more “intimate” dining rooms for a private lunch.

Well as private as you can get anyway with a chaperone in the form of a protective father watching your every move.

Fintan was an engaging and entertaining conversationalist, who’d managed to tone down the perviness for Asterion’s sake. Conversation flowed smoothly with hardly a hitch, Fintan’s big-brother side coming out as he mentioned a few interesting or funny tidbits from each Brann’s and Albert’s younger years. It was one of the things Asterion really liked about Fintan.

He really loved his family.

Brann did as well, but he was one of the younger siblings missing out on some of the super-protective moments that Fintan had enjoyed or not remembering as many things that his siblings did because he wasn’t old enough to.

It was over desert and a small glass of wine that Fintan confided in Asterion about his worries for his fellow unmated dominant siblings and nephews.

“It breaks my heart.” Fintan said softly. “Having to step aside so that my nephews have a better chance. A lot of submissives won’t look at a dominant my age, especially with more and more letting their mentors and parents “pre-select” the best choices for their charges – and the age gap is only getting bigger. It’s happening all over though no one knows quite why. There have always been a few dominants from every generation who didn’t get picked for one reason or another, and they usually end up being happy with another species and adopt kids. But right now there’s more older unmated dominants than usual.”
Asterion nodded. He’d been made aware of the growing number of unmated older dominants that the Dovah world in the current age was facing. He had a few theories for why that might be but nothing he’s had the time to research.

Yet.

“Submissives run in the Black family.” Asterion said after he gave Fintan a few moments to recover. “It’s three-to-one submissive to dominants Dovahim born. The last couple generations had withered a bit with some of the choices they made for spouses and children. But now we have two Dovahim of the members of this generation with one of them submissive with myself and cousin Draco, and three more who are close enough to watch who might inherit. Perhaps submissives are on the rise again.”

“I hope so.” Fintan said, his heart in his voice. “I hope they are. Because if this trend continues then the numbers may continue to decline with more and more dominants losing the chance to mate.”

“If I may?” Asterion asked. “Why haven’t you settled down with a spouse yet?”

Fintan gave a crooked grin. “Too stubborn.” He laughed at himself. “I know I come off as a perv and a slag, but really, I just want what any other Dovah wants: a family. But you’re right.” He sighed, shaking his head. “I may have to go that route sooner or later. You’re one of the first submissives to show interest in a dominant my age in longer than I can remember.”

Asterion smiled softly in understanding before offering Fintan a bite of his cake and changing the subject to happier ones.

…

Elias followed Asterion happily as the smaller Dovah tugged him off towards the stables. It turned out that the horses the submissive had used for the outing the previous day were from the Black stables and Asterion wanted him to meet them. Most horses were skittish around Dovah but the Irish Draughts that the Blacks bred were from lines that had been selected for their calm temperaments and raised around Dovahim from birth before being sent over from their farm in Ireland to Castle Black in Scotland.

Asterion adored his horses and wanted to share them with Elias who he’d only ever seen inside doing more cerebral activities and not outside being more rough-and-tumble.

The Dovah in him wanted to see Elias get dirty before he made his decision.

Tugging impatiently at the bigger dom, Asterion towed him into the stables, not minding the horse scents in the least.

Pointing out his favorites, he watched with wide eyes as Elias gave him a knowing – and naughty – grin before easily swinging up onto the back of the stallion who the dominant had quickly made friends with, easily cantering around the stable yard before coming back to a clapping and smiling Asterion’s side and jumping just as nimbly back down.

Asterion’s original impression had been right. There was much more to Elias than met the eye.

“Excited much, sweet one?” Elias teased the object of his affections as he released the stallion back into the paddock that they’d easily jumped the fence of – showing off, both of them, but Asterion hadn’t seemed to mind it if his flushed cheeks and happy grin were any indication. It was amazing to see such a bright grin on Asterion’s face, he usually was so serious all the time. Unless one of the Llewelyns was near him and teasing him into delicious little giggles.
“Yep!” Asterion was all but bouncing. “Love me, love my horses. And you were fantastic!”

“All for you, sweet one.” Elias murmured as he caught Asterion before he could trip over a rake. Unable to restrain himself he buried his wind-chilled nose into the curve of his bundle’s neck, making him shriek at the sudden cold.

“Elias!” He cried out. “Stop that!”

Elias laughed lowly as he shifted. “As you wish.” And with that pressed a warm kiss to the spot that his nose had recently so abused, relishing in the rush of scent and smothered gasp that Asterion couldn’t conceal along with a slight moan.

“I don’t think we need to draw this out any further.” Mentor Tafari said from behind them, making them turn and face him sheepishly, Asterion still cuddled up in Elias’s arms. “You’ve obviously chosen, Asterion sweetheart.”

“Indeed.” Severus said as he watched his son blush and snuggle deeper into his dominant’s arms as Elias brushed a reddened cheek with a soft kiss. “I suppose you could do worse for a first mate.”

Asterion peeked out from the shadows of Elias’s arms to tease his father.

“You just want to get your hands on the original of the book he gave me.”


Laughter echoed all through the stable, waking the horses who stuck their heads out to see what all the fuss was about.

…

Before taking off with Elias for Castle Black, Asterion returned with him hand-in-hand to speak personally with the remaining two Llewelyn suitors.

His father had already departed, as had all but Ben and themselves, while a legion of house elves were preparing to descend on Hotel Black and repair any damage done by the meeting to the building and grounds as well as begin some of the renovations.

By the time he was finished with his hunt, Hotel Dubh would be a shining gem of a getaway.

Spotting them walking towards the talking brothers, Fintan gave a little sigh before nudging Brann with his elbow. It was patently obvious that Asterion had chosen Elias for his first mate. Before Asterion could break into whatever prepared speech he had, Brann gave them both a look and spoke.

“Are you happy with your choice of first mate, Asterion?” He asked pointedly as he rose to his feet along with his brother.

“Yes,” Asterion looked up at Elias with soft eyes. “Yes I am.”

“Then that’s all that matters.” Fintan said as they both turned towards the floo room.

“Don’t worry about us.” Brann said with a roguish wink. “We’ll be eagerly awaiting your owl.”

Blowing them a cheeky kiss Fintan waved, and both Llewelyns disappeared into the green flames.

“Ok.” Elias said with a laugh. “I see what you see in them now.”
Seven

The Black Prince

Author’s Note: I tend to use the same references over and over when it comes to the House of Black. On my Facebook page, you’ll find the family tree that Harry/Asterion used to determine the degree of cousinship between the various branches off-shooting from the “root” ancestor of Phineas Nigellus Black.

Chapter The Seventh

Wrapped up tight in Elias’s strong arms, Asterion apparated them to just outside the fanciful iron gates. With a flex of his magic, he sent them opening wide, welcoming the new mate of their Lord. Smiling he threw out arm in dramatic flair saying:

“Welcome to Castle Black!”

Elias could barely believe his eyes when he saw the ancient edifice his little love called home. It was a far cry from the flat – however nice – in Dublin he called home. The two buildings were so far apart that one might as well be on Jupiter. Turning his head he caught Asterion twisting his hands, a sure sign of his rising anxiety and gave him a smile and a gentle kiss on the corner of his mouth.

“It’s amazing, sweetheart.” He said honestly. “Show it to me?”

It was exactly the right thing to say as Asterion beamed up at him, tugging him up the drive without letting go of him for a second. Asterion’s Dovah was pleased with their new mate and his appreciation of their home but it wouldn’t be secure until after he’d been bonded to him with a heat. His vanity instincts had been aroused at Elias’s words, he couldn’t wait to show him the rest of Castle Black – especially the Library.

They quickly toured through the “public” areas, Asterion showing Elias where his public office was where he spent part of his day answering correspondence and signing paperwork for the estate. He pointed out the several other empty rooms on that floor that could be turned into an office or workroom for Elias, something the dominant appreciated very much. Elias showed his appreciation by pinning him softly against the wall and stealing a deep, tongue twining kiss.

“I’ve been waiting to do that for two floors now.” He quipped as his little mate started up at him with dazed black-and-silver eyes.

“Hnn.” Was all Asterion could manage. Fintan had stolen a kiss the day before but nothing as deep and well...hot as that. If that was what intimacy was like then Asterion could definitely handle more of that.

Elias chuckled at his dazzled mate, tugging him up a floor and asking him questions about the various rooms until he returned to himself. Once they reached the fourth floor, Asterion got a wicked look in his eye.

“I know something you’d love to see.” He said slyly as he passed the corridors that branched off into the two wings or to the portal that led to the Master’s Tower. Darting up the stairs he waited, almost whistling, for Elias to catch up. Leaning against a huge pair of double doors when his mate caught him he gave a wicked grin then pushed them open.

“Wha...?” Elias, lover of books of all sorts, stepped into a dream. “The Black Library.” He all but
breathed. “I thought they were exaggerating.”

“No,” Asterion said looking around with a smile. “The Library covers several floors of this section of the castle with self-contained stairwells to the upper floors. This is only part of the collection,” he said with a shrug.

“Part?” Elias looked back from where he was examining the spine of an ancient leather bound book in a glass case.

“Hmm.” Asterion nodded as he waved in an abstract gesture. “There’s books in rooms all over the castle, like in the family parlor or my Father’s office and rooms. Then there’s the ones in the Archives or in the Private Collections or in the Master’s Library. The ‘Black Library’ is only part of the collection. Oh,” he exclaimed having forgotten. “There’s some in the vaults at Gringotts as well.”

“Oh my Merlin.” Elias stared around him in wonder. “That’s more books than anyone could read in a lifetime.”

“Pretty much.” Asterion agreed with a shrug. “I gave it an honest effort but even with all the time on my hands I had when I was in seclusion here I couldn’t make it even halfway through the collection. Though I have read all the books in the Master’s Library.”

“Where’s that?” Elias asked eagerly.

Asterion gave him a sly grin as he held out his hand. Perfect. “Let me show you.”

Show him he did, apparating them both straight into the Master’s Tower and into his private study. Asterion escorted him right to his private library before leaving him with the promise he’d be right back. Pulling back a panel in his study, Asterion accessed the ward stone for the Master’s Tower quickly enchanting one of the rings he’d removed from the Black and Prince vaults to allow Elias in and out of the wards, though it would only give him access to the Tower via the portal on the fifth floor.

Rejoining his mate, Asterion pulled him gently away from the scroll he’d been examining with a perplexed look on his face.

“Castle Black,” he started his explanation softly. “Has the most complex warding structure in the wizarding world. It’s believed that is one of the reasons we tend to have more Dovahim and more male submissives than any other line. Because when they’re born here they feel secure here, that their magic and heritage enjoin best here. In order for you to be able to apparate in and out of the wards freely and to access the Tower, you’ll need to wear this.”

Asterion held out the box containing the ring. Of all the jewels he’d selected from the vaults and had on stand-by for when he chose a mate, only this one seemed right for his Elias. A simple band of polished white gold and set with rubies and aquamarines, it matched his hair and eyes perfectly.

“It’s enchanted to never break or fall off or otherwise leave your finger once you put it on. It’ll only carry you through the wards however,” Asterion cautioned. “So you won’t be able to side-along anyone who isn’t, well, me or someone else with access like my father or our eventual children. It also gives you access to the other Black and Prince homes and estates.”

“It’s beautiful, Asterion.” Elias said honestly as he took the ring from its bed. “But I’m the one who’s supposed to lavish you with presents.”

Laughing lightly, Asterion took the ring and slid it onto the middle finger of Elias’s right hand.
“You’ll just have to make it up to me.” He teased.

Desire sparking in Elias’s eyes, he scooped up his little mate and carried him off into the bedroom he’d seen when Asterion was giving him a tour of the Tower.

“Well.” He said as he dropped Asterion lightly onto the plush, massive bed. “Let me get right on that…”

Hours later a well-snogged but still-virginal Asterion popped himself and his new mate from the Tower and into the small family dining room he’d been using with his father prior to starting his meetings.

Elias had been exquisitely gentle with him, teaching him how to kiss and touch in a loving way. He understood that while Asterion wasn’t ignorant, he certainly wasn’t practiced either, nor used to physical affection. Though he soaked up Elias’s affection like a sponge.

The fierce redhead knew that he would have to take intimacy at Asterion’s pace. Which happened to be dick-achingly slow. Not that it mattered in the end. They were mates and Asterion would become used to sex, intimacy, and affectionate and loving touch. It would just take time, which they had.

It wasn’t as if there was a clock ticking on a biological timer forcing them to mate and bond within a certain timeframe. No. It was entirely at the pace that suited Asterion – as it should be.

After all, he wouldn’t go into heat until he had his full complement of mates, lessening the pressure to just “do it” so they didn’t run out of time before a biological imperative set in.

Holding hands, they walked over to the table with Elias pulling out Asterion’s chair just as his father Severus entered the room.

Catching the lovey-dovey byplay the dour Potions Master let out a hefty groan.

“Merlin save me from new mates.” He said with an eye roll. “If you two are going to show up flushed and freshly snogged to every meal I might have to take myself off to Malfoy Manor to escape the syrup.”

“I make no promises.” Asterion said full of cheek. “But I’ve grown addicted to Elias’s kisses.”

“Circe’s tits.” Severus cursed as he blanched. “Thank you Asterion, I didn’t need to know that about my innocent son.”

Snickering, Asterion called for dinner to be served. Elias’s eyes widened a bit when the food appeared on the table, much like happened at the great hall at Hogwarts. Asterion had explained the system the Blacks used to protect their elves and allow them to live in proximity to Dovahim but it hadn’t quite clicked until he saw the food appear.

Much like how he didn’t think about what was implied when Asterion called his home Castle Black until he actually saw it. There were just somethings you had to experience to understand, and life at Castle Black was shaping up to be one of them.

As long as that life included Asterion, he was more than happy to be along for the ride.

“Speaking of parents,” Elias commented once plates were all filled and Severus and Asterion had
stopped bantering. “You’ll need to meet Jericho, sweetheart, he’s all I have that’s close to family left.”

Jericho being Elias’s best friend Jericho King who’d taken him in when his parents died, leaving him an orphaned young teen. Jericho had originally been a sort of surrogate father – being well older than Elias as a damphir of indeterminate age – before morphing into a friend over time. It had been Jericho who had salvaged the mess of an estate left by the late Graves, and overseen the bookstore until Elias was old enough to do it themselves. It was only after Elias had come of age that they’d gone into business together, opening the first of their endeavors as a nightclub in Dublin a few years before.

Both mates heroically ignored the gagging coming from their dinner companion. Asterion’s father would either have to get used to such things or hike himself off to Malfoy Manor or hide in the basement labs. Both were viable options for avoiding the lovefest that came with new mateships.

“Harry’s birthday is next week.” Asterion said, thinking over his schedule out-loud. “And then I have my investiture for the Hogwarts Board of Directors the week following that. Why don’t we go visit for you birthday on August 20th?” He asked finally. “That’ll give us a month to settle in before having to do the whole meet-and-greet thing.” Here he grimaced. “Morgana knows I’ve done enough of that lately.”

“Alright, little love.” Elias smiled. “I’ll send out the owls tonight if you don’t mind, I don’t have work until Monday or I’d just go tell Jericho in person. But he’d skin me if I left it for the entire weekend.”

“Rightly so.” Severus nodded. “Speaking of which…” He arched a brow at his son. “A little birdy told me that someone forgot something rather important in their rush to show off the castle.”

Asterion thought for a moment before the light dawned.

“OH!,” He thought from a moment before wincing. “Oh.”

“Just so,” Severus nodded. “I suggest rectifying that lapse as soon as dinner is over if you want to have any peace over the next several weeks. He can hold a grudge like no one else.”

“Cauldron, kettle.” Asterion whispered under his breath before giving Elias a bright smile. “It’s nothing to worry about.” He assured the confused/concerned dominant. “Just a little bit of a thing I overlooked in my excitement to show you the Library.”

“Might want to cover up that love-bite, son.” Severus said nonchalantly. “If you’re expecting that excuse to hold water.”

Severus laughed out loud at the light growl his son gave him for the remark.

…

Elias gently cradled Asterion’s hand with his own as his mate led him down the hall to the family parlor he’d briefly pointed out earlier in the day. All either of them wanted to do was escape back to their rooms and spend the next two days cuddled up in their giant bed with its silk comforter and furs. Severus had successfully derailed their plans if only temporarily by reminding Asterion of his duty.

“Most people either never met or simply forgot about my other parent.” Asterion explained quietly as they walked down the hall. “I’ve been touted as the first male submissive in over a century.
Well…” He gestured toward the frame on the wall. “That’s not even close to the truth.”

They moved closer, coming to sit on the couch positioned facing the painting and its smiling occupant.

“Elias Graves, meet my mother Regulus Black. Dad, this is my first mate Elias Graves..”

Elias stood back up, bowing towards the frame that held the youthful painted figure of Regulus Black, dating to just before he’d been pregnant with Asterion. “Sir,” Elias said smoothly. “It’s an honor.”

And it was. Regulus Black, while not as flashy as his older brother, was now known to have worked against the Dark Lord from within, a position that eventually cost him his life.

Nowhere was it even breathed that Regulus had been a Dovah. Let alone a submissive, even if Severus was known as a widower.

Nobody had ever taken the time and connected the dots.

Not until Asterion appeared.

“Call me Dad, or Regulus.” Reg smiled happily at his son, showing off that beaming Black grin. “He looks wonderful Asterion, just as you said.”

…

That night saw the two of them lying intertwined in the massive Black Ancestral Bed. After a few moments of blushing on the part of Asterion, they’d eventually stripped down and climbed under the covers. They didn’t advance in the physical part of their relationship, Elias knowing that too much too fast would come back to bite him when Asterion became even shyer.

But that didn’t stop him from stealing as many goodnight kisses as possible from his frankly gorgeous mate.

Asterion was all silky, pale skin and lean muscle, not an extra ounce of fat to be seen anywhere on him. He had the lithe form of an athlete, a gymnast or swimmer, rather than say a footballer. His long black hair cascaded in waves down to his shapely bum and his long legs and arms ended in elegant hands and delicate feet.

Elias thanked whatever deity that was listening when Asterion shyly stripped off and he saw him in all his glory. While not to the size of a dominant, Asterion did have a package that was nothing to sneer at and like the rest of him was perfectly formed. If it wasn’t for the rare scar that he’d collected since his inheritance, all explained as either from fencing or dueling practice, Asterion Severus Black Prince would be flawless.

Rubbing one large hand up and down his mate’s spine in a gesture meant to sooth, Elias hummed softly under his breath.

Despite his being overjoyed with his mate, he was neither stupid nor blind.

All was not right with Asterion nor with Castle Black. There were secrets here, some undoubtedly as dark as their trademark ebony hair. And whatever those secrets hid had left their mark on Asterion.

He was cautious and on edge at all times when around others. He’d only rarely laughed or relaxed
in any way during his mate meetings. Severus watched him like a hawk, even if it was out of concern rather than some nefarious purpose.

Yes, there was trouble here.

One thing Elias was certain of.

Whatever trouble may come knocking at the Castle doors, he was ready and willing to answer it. Asterion was everything he’d ever wanted in a submissive and all the things he’d never even thought to ask for. Nothing was going to take him from Elias. Not while he still drew breath.

No matter the cost, Asterion was his.

…

The next several days passed as Elias and Asterion started settling in together.

They spent the morning and night hours curled up in bed in the Master Suite, learning everything they could about each other and taking baby-steps towards true matehood.

Asterion was still shy about being bare with Elias but he was slowly starting to overcome that hang-up as his dominant devoted hours of his time to just learning his body. His touches were never meant to arouse, although often they did anyway, but to gentle Asterion to loving and affectionate touch. It also had the side-benefit of letting him know each and every ticklish zone.

Elias had well indoctrinated Asterion to the virtue of a good, deep snog, making tongue-twining kisses and soft touches one of his sub’s most looked-forward to parts of his day.

Severus had scoffed the second time he came upon them snogging and caressing in a corridor, though as it was Asterion’s castle there wasn’t much he could do except be his usual snarky self and disappear for hours on end in either his – and yes by now they were thoroughly his – potion labs or the library. Those two locations being the only ones where neither Dovah was inclined to start a heated snogging session.

Come Monday Asterion and Elias had tentatively figured out a routine.

Thanks to the ring Asterion had gifted him with, Elias was able to apparate to and from his bookstore where he kept his main office for his business and those he partnered in like his nightclub, freeing up time that used to be spent either walking or flooing over depending on the weather. It being the first business day after his mating and already having had the ‘where we’ll live’ discussion with his sub, as had pretty much every dominant Asterion had seriously considered, Elias needed to start the process of packing and closing up his flat…after filling in his in-the-know friends – mostly creatures themselves like Jericho – on his new mate/fiancé.

While Elias was off working and running errands, Asterion tucked into the correspondence and paperwork that seemed to multiply exponentially every time he stepped away from his desk.

There were letters to send off, some of them to the various Councilors, mated dominants, and enforcers who had helped with his last meeting. Other missives were to Harry and Lucius, as well as responses to Gringotts and the Ministry along with any paperwork that needed to go out. Being Lord Black Prince was a position of never-ending minutiae, even with a solicitor to handle the bulk of it.

When Elias came looking after popping back to the Castle after his very productive day, his friends could hardly wait to meet Asterion they were so excited for him, though Jericho being Jericho was
cautious about the matter, it was to find his sub in the same position as when he left: sitting ramrod straight in the desk chair of his public office, making steady progress through a pile of papers that seemed unending.

“Have you even moved in the last,” Elias glanced at the clock on the far wall. “Nine hours?”

“Hmm.” Asterion hummed thinking. “Father hauled me to the family parlor for lunch. And I know I used the loo somewhere in there…” The submissive trailed off, brows briefly furrowing before he shrugged sheepishly.

“Up,” Elias demanded, walking over to the desk and taking the quill out of his hand and placing it back in its rest, careful not to smudge the document his mate was working on. “It’s time for dinner. The rest of this can wait until tomorrow.”

Spinning in his chair, Asterion grabbed Elias around the waist in a quick hug happy as ever to see his dom. Elias returned the embrace with a chuckle before shifting his hold and swinging his sub up and over his shoulder in a fireman’s carry.

Asterion shrieked at the sudden change of position, drawing Severus’s immediate attention from his potions journal that he was reading at the table while he waited for his son and new son-in-law to appear. Letting out a little chuckle he had to admit that this undignified spectacle was better than the sappiness that had reigned supreme during previous meals. Tossing the journal aside, he observed.

“You’ve certainly figured out one of the quicker ways to pull him away from his duties as Lord Black Prince.” Severus said with his typical dryness. “However it’s not the best option if you’re hoping for marital harmony. He’ll make you pay for this for days.”

Elias just laughed, thinking to himself that he had persuasive measures on his side that Severus as Asterion’s father would never be able to utilize.

“Never underestimate the values of a good snog.” He offered only partly joking. “Its powers have worked through the ages for alleviating many an offense.”

Irritated by their banter, Asterion hissed at them as he stared pouting into his lobster bisque. Bastard dominants. They’re all bastards. Even the Father-bastard was still a bastard.

Elias had spent an enjoyable evening cajoling his mate into a better mood with kisses and felt that Asterion was ready to take the next step.

As they settled down in their bed, Elias slid between his sub’s thighs, moving to cover him with his body as he pressed him down into the mattress in a deep, blood pumping kiss. Keeping his hands soft but still firm, Elias caressed his mate heating the blood that was rushing to the surface of his gold-dusted alabaster skin. Peppering kisses down Asterion’s jaw, Elias reached one of his favorite places on his mate’s body purely because of the reaction Asterion gave.

Nipping lightly as he clasped Asterion by the hips and ground down, brushing their erections together, Elias sealed his mouth against the curve of his mate’s silky neck, sucking hard as Asterion let out a long, uncontrollable moan. Pleased and excited by the positive reaction, Elias’s hands spasmed a moment then he thrust firmer, his own erection beginning to weep as he started licking, nipping, and sucking at Asterion’s neck in earnest.

Lost in the sensations caused by Elias’s active mouth and stroking cock, Asterion could do little more than moan, burying his hands in his mate’s long red hair and wrapping his legs around Elias’s
grinding hips. Arching up when the alignment of Elias’s stroking cock hit the sweet spot on the underside of his shaft, Asterion gasped as he sweated and panted and moaned. Taking his cue from his little love, Elias repeated the motion, again and again as his mated drowned in pleasure under his body.

Moments later, the virginal Asterion let out a keening cry as he shuddered and came, his release splattering his chest. Moaning himself at the intoxicating sight, Elias gave a final thrust before joining his mate in his pleasure. Strength gone after the much-anticipated climax, Elias dropped on to his side, careful not to land on the much slighter-built Asterion once his mated legs slid away and released their grip on his hips.

With a wave of a wand, Elias banished the milky proof of their pleasure then stroked one hand down Asterion’s sweat-beaded face. His mate was luminous in the aftermath of his orgasm, the first one he’d ever shared with a lover. Leaning down, the dominant gave his mate a soft kiss before laying back against the pillows and leaving him to sleep.

It had been a long, fulfilling day for both of them and now it was time to rest.

Eyes fluttering closed, Asterion hummed softly before wishing Elias a goodnight.

…

Days passed quickly once Asterion and Elias settled into their routine, the only changes coming when they retired to their rooms for the night, Asterion’s dominant seemingly focused on introducing him to every form of pleasure under the sun, save the actual consummation of their mateship.

His current favorite was learning how to give head, having quite enjoyed both ends of that lesson: giving and receiving.

The things that man could do with his mouth…

If their nights were spent in the sole pursuit of pleasure, their days were filled with the endless tasks that came with joining two lives.

Before a week had gone by Elias had his flat closed up and the key turned in, his things finding homes both in the room close to Asterion’s office that had been converted to an office/study in the more public part of the house as well as in the private study with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves he’d claimed for his own in the Tower. A few things had made their way into their bedroom and joint bathroom with his clothes now taking up space in one of the massive walk-in closets. Elias hadn’t been enthused when he was informed that a trip to France’s magical clothing district was in order as well as a trip to Harrod’s.

Another one of those things that hadn’t crossed his mind when pursuing a Lord: the wardrobe that came along with his new “station.”

His friends were busily planning a party for his birthday weekend as Asterion had claimed the actual day as for them alone. His sneaky mate was up to something but whatever it was he was planning, any evidence was well and truly hidden. Just as he’d hidden his plans for Harry’s birthday from the other teen, a day which was nearly upon them.

Elias could hardly wait for Asterion to be ready for the next step, one that might be helped along by the alcohol Asti’s uncle Sirius was likely to slip into the punch.

Don’t get him wrong, he was enjoying besmirching his little love and teaching him everything he knew about physical pleasure short of intercourse…but he was more than ready to finish defiling his
sexy little sweetheart.

Asterion had whispered in his ear during their post-climatic haze that he thought Lammas or August 1sounded like a good day to have his first time. That he thought he’d be ready by then. Elias had taken to playing with his tight little hole when he had his lips wrapped around his slender cock, sucking him deep and long.

Something told him that the hurried thrusts and hair-pulling caused by him fingering his mate might have something to do with him being ready to “go all the way.”

Whatever the cause, he was ecstatic that he’d be Asti’s first lover. He would be first for a lot of things, mate, snog, frotting, blow job, but lover was a whole different level. Being someone’s first lover – a submissive’s first lover – was a heavy responsibility.

A ham-handed dominant could leave a submissive scared and fearful of intimacy while someone who was too tentative wouldn’t be able to satisfy their feral Dovah instincts.

It was a balancing act a dominant had to manage when they were chosen as a first mate and lover.

Elias didn’t doubt his ability to perform to his usual high standards, this wasn’t his first lover by any stretch of the imagination. But there was still that bit of performance pressure in the back of his mind, egging him on every time he touched, kissed, stroked, or nipped his Asti. His Dovah reminding him that Asterion would have multiple mates eventually and he needed to prove his worth as a lover if he didn’t want to be shunted aside for another.

…

Asterion accompanied by Elias and Severus, the former of which Harry had yet to meet, apparated straight through the wards of Grimmauld Place and into the designated apparation point in the Lord’s office on the fifth floor.

Despite being an unentailed property, Grimmauld Place was a Black property, allowing Asterion and anyone he brought with him through the impressive warding structure which with the death of Voldemort no longer included the Fidelius. Honestly, Asterion wasn’t sure why the Headmaster had bothered with the charm at all. Any Black properties – including the least of them which Grimmauld was not – were warded far beyond the simple magic of the Fidelius.

There wasn’t a need for it – so Asterion had torn it down, along with any other alterations to the warding scheme his grandfather Orion had put up around the original wards…the paranoid old bastard.

Asterion rather thought that it came down to the same issue with both Dumbledore and Orion Black – control.

With the original wards, Walburga was given prominence as the heiress of the townhouse, while under the extensive Orion-era wards Sirius or any other Black had preference over the Headmaster and his ilk.

Whatever the reasoning, Asterion was simply pleased that the Headmaster hadn’t been allowed to tinker any further with the warding beyond slapping up a Fidelius.

Granted, the wards of Castle Black were far beyond that of Grimmauld Place, but Asterion refused to underestimate the old coot. And for a Lord with Asterion’s political agenda, having the former Chief of the Wizengamot know anything about Black wards was an unacceptable level of risk.
Thankfully, even damaged by being fresh out of Azkaban Sirius knew better than to cede control or inspection of the townhouse wards to Dumbledore.

Presents in hand, for the day was 31st July, the trio wandered down the stairs, both Asterion and Severus moving with confidence fueled from sheer familiarity with the space around them as Elias brought up the rear, Severus taking point and soothing the younger dom’s protective instincts, especially as the scent of an unmated dominant Dovah had already started leaking through the house.

Asterion gave a thoughtful sniff, Severus commenting after giving his son a moment to make sense of what the older Dovah had already sussed out.

“The Weasleys must have already arrived – likely with the dawn if I know anything about Molly.”

Ah.

That solved the question that had been pinging at Elias’s instincts.

He vaguely remembered the scarred dominant with hair in a flaming red.

Charles?

Or something like that, anyway.

“He’s the older brother of Harry’s best-friend.” Asterion explained, pitching his voice too low for a non-creature to pick up in case of eavesdroppers…like the infamous Twins.

“He’s getting an unsanctioned visit with you.” Elias said, voice equally soft. “My Dovah doesn’t like it…”

Especially since they weren’t yet fully mated.

Asterion snorted at that noting caustically: “As if parents don’t arrange unsanctioned meetings for their little darlings all the time. At least this one is an honest case of same-place same-time not barely-concealed matchmaking.”

“True enough.” Elias gave a dark chuckle, thinking of some of the “surprise” meetings his fellow dominants had been subjected to over the years.

Never Elias though, oh no.

Not with his…reputation and friendship with a creature even a Dovah would find dangerous in Jericho and his breathren.

Elias was an anomaly in the Dovah world – one who willingly sought the company of creatures even darker than himself. It didn’t make him any less loving and sweet to those he cared about. But it didn’t make him a favorable match in many pairs of judging parental eyes.

That Severus Prince was known for being a bit darker than most was likely the only reason the elder Dovah had let someone like Elias anywhere near his unmated son – traditional mate hunt or no.

“Asti!” Sirius Black barked out a laughing greeting as he barreled around the corner from the massive family room Asterion had torn apart three rooms to create on the ground floor during the refurbishment of the townhouse: the drawing room, study, and minor dining room leaving only the formal dining room and the entry unmolested though thoroughly redone, the same as the dingy kitchen and the rest of the house that had gotten facelifts…including adding additional bathrooms to
the six floors…unless it was a day when the townhouse felt like being whimsical and added a second basement.

Asterion’s uncle swooped down on the lean submissive Dovah, picking him up in arms that had regained their pre-Azkaban strength and twirling him around as his father sneered and Elias watched with interest but no aggressive, giving proof to Asterion’s instincts which had told him the intense Dovah would be best able to control his own instincts. Asterion couldn’t afford a primary mate who flew off the handle or refused to allow him to be in the presence of other males. He was a Lord, not just a submissive, and such considerations came hand-in-hand with his status.

The submissive Dovah thought that Elias’s control and lack of aggression towards other males – particularly dark males who were often more dangerous than their lighter counterparts – came from his friendship with Jericho.

If Elias’s hadn’t learned to control his instincts around the damphir, he would’ve lashed out at the powerful creature one too many times and either died in the process or lost his friendship entirely.

He was a bit…odd, and darker than most.

But he was Asterion’s and that was all that mattered to him.

“Asti’s mate.” Sirius turned narrowed eyes on Elias, not quite willing to let go of his overprotectiveness as far as his nephew was concerned. At least not yet. He’d spent too many years of his life worried equally but in different ways over both Asterion and Harry for him to be pleased that one of them was moving so rapidly into manhood…er….Dovah-hood, he supposed. At least Harry was only sixteen today and would need old Padfoot around for a few more years. He felt a tad bit wistful every time he looked at his godson or nephew.

To a man who’d lost more than a decade to false imprisonment, it really did seem like only yesterday Lilyflower was putting Harry in his arms for his godfather to hold, or that Asterion was finally able to be “born” from his magical incubator…thing.

Severus easily read the melancholy on the mutt and the two shared a rare – but genuine – moment of sympathy over young ones growing up entirely too fast.

“C’mon Pads.” Remus wandered in at a much sedater pace than his mate, tugging the silver-eyed wizard away from Asterion as the werewolf slung an arm around Sirius’s waist, Elias echoing the movement with his own mate. The amber-eyed man arched a brow at the – for a Dovah or any of the dragon-kin – extremely low-key reaction to being around a “diseased” creature, let alone how they purportedly reacted to having their mates or young around one such as him.

Remus squeezed his arm around his mate’s waist as a wordless prompt as they led the trio towards the gift table to let down their burden, Asterion and Remus filling the gaps in the conversation.

“Fine.” Sirius grumbled too low to be heard by any of the magical humans but more than loud enough for the magical creatures to catch. “He’s not that bad…for a nephew stealing prat.”

“And you’re not that bad either.” Elias responded with amused calm. “For an overprotective arse of an uncle.”

The two shared bright grins as Severus groaned.

Great.

Just what he’d always wanted. He muttered as he slapped the gift from himself on the table and,
well, billowed away towards the mini-bar he knew was hidden behind one of the bookshelves in the far too-bright-and-lively room. His son’s mate and that damned mutt to get along.

Asterion laughed and made his way over to the birthday boy, leaving the werewolf and the Animagus to bicker over the correct way to organize the gift table – with Sirius leaning towards hiding Severus’s present in some deep dark hole and Remus scolding him – Elias’s grip changing to holding hands once he’d taken a thorough survey of the room and not finding any threats gave the minimal one the unmated Dovah presented.

Harry was seated near the unlit fireplace, chatting with bright eyes and an animated mien with several other young magicals his age – or nearly.

Many Asterion had yet to meet, though they shared a connection via blood such as the Weasleys other than Charlie, the Dovah, who were related to him through distant cousinship.

In fact, of the living Blacks, almost to a one they were closer in kin to Harry than they were to Asterion, due to having an extra generation or two between Asterion and the root connection they all shared, the only real except to that being Sirius himself as the only other living Black from the main line.

Harry popped up and threw his arms around Asterion – much to the surprise of some of the others.

But before they could question the seemingly close relationship between the two – at least closer than anyone would’ve suspected given they’d only met a few months before – a few precisely-on-time arrivals caused a near riot with Harry’s friend – and Asterion’s third cousin once removed – Ron leading the charge.

“Malfoy!” The hot-headed ginger shouted, jumping to his feet and brandishing his wand. “What in Merlin’s saggy balls are you doing here?!”

“Ronald!” Came the recriminations from more than one corner – over his word choice if not the sentiment.

“What!” The teen – who’d had his own magical inheritance already and shot up to at least six foot tall if Asterion was any judge, though his muscles had yet to fill out the new frame – asked indignantly as the person – or rather people, in question simply watched with that cool urbane cockiness that drove him barmy. “He’s, they’re, all slimy Slytherins who should be in Azkaban, not strolling happy as you please into Harry’s house!”

“Actually, Ronald.” Sirius corrected dryly, stepping in when it seemed as if Molly was – once again – going to fail to rein in her youngest son from making a faux pas of monumental proportions. “Grimmauld Place is still my house. A Black house. And almost everyone here – including yourself – are Blacks either by birth or marriage.”

“What?” This time the question was purely reflexive dumbfoundedness as the irate redhead collapsed back into his chair beside Hermione.

“If you hadn’t jumped the traces.” Asterion told him icily. “We would have explained that Harry and Draco – and the elder Malfoys as well – have reached a sort of truce.” He arched an ebony brow as he stared down – unimpressed – at the younger wizard. “Since – as Uncle Sirius said – most of us are family here…including Harry and Draco.”

“Really?” Hermione jumped in, gazing around her wide-eyed at the many older witches and wizards – and even Neville – who were all nodding in agreement or shrugging, most of them aware of the
relation. “Harry?”

“It’s true, Mione.” He told her quietly, shifting a little. “I didn’t know it myself before…well, just before.” He wasn’t about to go into the Atrium and the aftermath. The mind healer was helping, but it was much too soon for him to speak of it openly. “But yeah.” Then he started pointing to various people in the room and rattling off his relation to them, as had been drilled into him by both Sirius and Asterion. He’d made a bigger social gaffe than he’d known by refusing to take Malfoy’s hand after all.

And when you got the git alone without an audience…or Ron…to perform for, he wasn’t quite as much of a git…even if he could still be a pompous prat to almost outdo Percy.

“Weasley kids,” he pointed vaguely at Ron, Ginny, and the Twins who were arrayed near him and then at Charlie and Bill who were watching with entertained looked on their faces near where Severus was still pillaging the spirits. “Third cousins. Siri,” he nodded and smiled at his godfather. “Also third cousin.” Clasping a hand on Neville’s shoulder, the quiet boy sitting next to him. “Nev, third once removed.” A wave of his hand encompassed the group still hovering near the door, which had grown by another three while Ron was showing his ass. “Mrs. Tonks and Lady Malfoy, second cousins, Dora and Draco, second one removed. And Mr. Weasley, also second once removed.” He shrugged. “Mrs. Weasley has a distant relation to the Blacks, but it’s from a completely different branch so it’d be like…twelfth cousins or something.”

“Correct.” Narcissa said with a regal nod of her perfectly coiffed head, moving into the room and extending her hand first to her cousin Sirius – as the host – then Asterion as the Lord of her birth house, and finally to Harry, the rest of the new arrivals following the same pattern, her sister first at her heals then their two children, then their husbands as this was a nominally “family” event. “Felicitations on your coming inheritance.” Lady Malfoy smirked just a bit, blue eyes showing an entertained gleam for the barest of moments as she greeted Harry. “Cousin.”

After that blow up, things progressed a bit smoother, Lucius mainly sticking close by either Asterion and Elias or Severus depending on the overall mood of the party, while Narcissa and Andromeda exchanged their first congenial words in more than a decade.

Asterion had made no bones about his ideas of appropriate “family” behavior to the various more immediate relations who interacted with one another. A message that hadn’t seemed to have trickled down to Ron…or the boy hadn’t realized the severity of the issue. Facts were facts: when it came to power, Asterion had it in spades, enough that it made him a sort of liege lord for the many offshoots of the Black family.

And over his dead body would they continue to wage blood feuds on one another, even if he had to bring them into check kicking and screaming.

Draco joined the group near the cold fireplace – if a bit hesitantly – but Harry being the forgiving fluff-head that he was, and not wanting to piss of Asterion, helped draw him into the conversation which Neville had helpfully shifted over to NEWT class selections and speculation on how everyone did – as they’d be informed in the morning.

Elias shook his head and gave Asterion a soft kiss, then took himself off to talk to the small group that contained the unmated Dovah dom – other than Draco who Elias knew from the hunt was considered family to his Asti, closer than Charlie and not competition – along with a female metamorphmagus who’d introduced herself as just Tonks after a killing glare leveled at her mother, and the oldest Weasley son.

“It’s not fair that you already know how you did, Harry.” Hermione huffed for the tenth time since
arriving earlier in the morning and finally able to vent her spleen over the matter of his retest. “You’ve had weeks to plan for NEWTs classes!”

“Since I only know after retesting in all my subjects plus more.” Harry rolled his eyes, sharing an exasperated look with the other teens their age, Asterion quietly laughing at him. “And they sent the results to Siri, not me, I rather think it bloody well is fair.”

“How did you do, Scar…Harry?” Draco corrected himself hastily after a minor glare from Asterion. He did not want to piss of the submissive Dovah, especially with Asterion’s mate, one of his unmated prospects, and his ruddy father Severus all in the damn room. “Well, I’d think, after having most of June and all July to go about it.”

“June, I’ll give you.” Harry shifted with a groan. He just couldn’t seem to get comfortable today. Something was up with his…well…everything. Sirius had reassured him it was normal, especially for young wizards more than young witches who got more drastic physical changes with their inheritances, but it didn’t bloody well feel normal. “But July’s been mostly working on getting Runes and Arithmancy up to snuff.” He shrugged. “I still don’t know how I did on that test, just took it yesterday before the cut-off for the next school year. Other than that, I passed everything I tested for at the Ministry, so I can take whatever I need to next year…hopefully.” He added the last with a wince. “If I didn’t do well enough on Runes then I can forget about taking warding.”

“What are you all thinking about doing for careers?” Asterion asked, as the lone pair of twins made something explode on the other end of the room, Mrs. Weasley screeching at them as Siri and Remus laughed.

The younger teens all exchanged glances then Neville took the inititive to start.

“I want to go into Herbology.” The quiet boy said with a soft smile. “No more potions for me, even if your…father,” and wasn’t that a mind-trip? Daddy Snape? The very idea as Snape as a dad made Neville want to break out in hives. Still, Asterion seemed to manage him well enough. “Isn’t teaching anymore.”

Asterion hummed under his breath, then turned his gaze on the dazed-looking blonde witch he remembered from the Ministry, who was sitting on Neville’s right.

“I’ll be a Magizoologist.” Luna replied, smiling at the pretty aura the Dovah had. The hints of darkness really highlighted the rest of the other colors. Just lovely. “Of course. I’ll probably take over the Quibbler one day…”

“Quidditch player.” Ginny said confidently, cutting off her dozy friend, her eyes batting a bit at both Harry and the handsome Lord in front of her – much to their not-so-hidden amusement.

A boy who’d been introduced as Dean – and Ginny’s boyfriend despite her transparent attempts at flirtation – was next to her and went next with: “Artist.” Then the Irishman next to him piped in with: “Own a pub.”

Ron was next, waffling between Auror and Quidditch player – at least being realistic enough unlike his sister to have a back-up, even if it wasn’t nearly as simple an idea as the boy thought it was to become an Auror.

Draco was one of the last to go, with a simple: “Potions Master.”

But it was Harry who seemed most uncomfortable, his O.W.L. results having opened up possibilities as well as the studying he’d been forced into regarding wizarding careers at Asterion’s behest.
“I’m thinking Healer or teacher.” He came out with it after a long moment of having everyone’s expectant gazes on him.

“Thought that was the way you were leaning.” Asterion smiled, then leaned in. “Father may have gotten you a gift to help you along with that…”

…

And did he.

Severus’s gift – when the packages were all torn open – being an annotated version of Harry’s sixth-year Potions text…when the list came the next day, *Advanced Potion-Making* by Libatius Borage. The stern man had also given him the text he’d need for Healing classes…and those weren’t the only annotated books he received, enlightening him to the conspiring that had gone on behind his back. Severus had come through with an annotated *Healing at Home with Herbs* by Phyllida Spore, while Remus – being the author – had given him *Confronting the Faceless: Defensive Magics* by R.J. Lupin as well as *A Curse, A Hex, and A Jinx: Decoding the Dark Arts*, which was more for personal enjoyment being on the darker shade of grey and not a text for school. Neville had gotten him their sixth year herbology text as well as some new dragonhide gloves for working with the dangerous plants, and Asterion had gone with a voucher – or five – to both Diagon and Regal Alleys for school supplies and clothes – as well as a promise to take him shopping.

All in all, it was a grand birthday, familial requirements and tensions aside.

Right up until the clock struck midnight…and all hell broke loose.

…

It was just gone midnight, when a glowing silvery wolf roused the mated pair of Asterion and Elias from their slumber.

“Asti! Pup!” Sirius Black’s panicked voice came from the wolf, which if Elias had to make a wager was the were-form of his mate. “Harry’s sprouted wings and scales! Need you here yesterday! Please!”

“Well.” Elias rolled onto his side to face his groggy-but-amused mate.

It wasn’t as if this was the *first* time Sirius Black as had to deal with a creature inheritance, including Asterion’s own.

But when it came to the well-being of those he loved, the man did *not* have a calm setting…though the jury was still out as far as Elias was concerned over whether his mate’s uncle had a calm setting *at all* not just in times like these.

“I love being right.” Asterion smirked over at his mate as he hurried out of bed, Elias snuggling back down into the covers. “I knew he was going to inherit.”

“Submissive or dominant?” Elias asked. He’d been paying much more attention to the other doms earlier, not the burgeoning creature in their midst. And with the similar scents several different dragon-kin species had, and the sheer number of people in the townhouse for Harry’s birthday, it wasn’t like he’d gotten a good scenting of the boy anyway.

“Submissive or I’ll eat my boots.” Asterion said with a soft snort as another Patronus entered their chambers and found him in his closet where a few freshening charms and a quick change of clothes had been the order of the day. This glowing messenger was a small dragon, a copy of Regulus
dragon form or Asterion would be shocked.

“We’re needed at Grimmauld Place.” Severus’s smooth voice came from the messenger. “The wolf’s message sounded of a submissive, Elias will have to remain here.”

Which was why the dom hadn’t made any move to clean up and dress. Whether dominant or submissive, as an unmated dom it wasn’t wise to introduce him to the situation. Whereas Asterion as a submissive and Severus as a widowed dom were different and unlikely to cause an adverse reaction in the most-probably-panicking teenager.

“You heard the Dovah.” Elias said with a half-smile as his mate came over and gave him a soft kiss goodbye. “Try not to be too long, yeah?” His half-smiled took a distinctly naughty cast. “We’ve plans for the morning.”

“I’ll do my best.” Asterion promised. “I’ve been prepping him – subtly – for an inheritance, even if I was forbidden to tell him of what sort. It shouldn’t take too long to calm him down and get him to sleep. Merlin knows, a creature inheritance of any kind is ruddy exhausting.”

With a wave and one last kiss, Asterion made his way to the entrance of the Lord’s Tower where his father was already waiting and pacing, his potions master’s bag hanging from one clenched fist…just in case they and the others were wrong and Harry was in need of medical attention from complications. It hadn’t sounded that way to him – just a general level of Sirius-panic – but his father wasn’t one to take chances. That had always been the purview of his mate…to his detriment in the end.

Wrapping one hand around his father’s bicep, Asterion immediately apparated them from the Lord’s Tower entrance to the apparation point they’d used less than a day before in the upper reaches of Grimmauld Place, greeted upon their arrival by the sight of a golden-eyed and growling Remus Lupin, Severus stepped forward at once to be a block between the agitated werewolf and his son.

“It’s fine, father.” Asterion rested one hand on Severus’s shoulder and stepped around him, Remus having spun to face them as soon as Severus moved, Asterion’s apparation being silent even to advanced senses…when he chose to make it so. “He won’t hurt me. He’s just worried for Harry.”

Turning his gaze to the other man, Asterion wordlessly asked for an update.

“He’s in the shower.” Remus told them as they rushed with the grace of creatures not quite human beneath their skin through the house to Harry’s heir suite. “Won’t let me or Sirius near him. He woke me with his shouts of surprise then barricaded himself in the bathroom in his panic. Siri has tried to talk him down but…”

“Suddenly growing claws and fangs and scales and wings isn’t the sort of thing one just calms down from.” Asterion noted drily, thinking of his own inheritance, Severus nodding once in short-tempered agreement. “Even if it’s somewhat expected the way it was for me.”

“You’re not surprised.” Were the first words out of a drawn-faced Sirius Black as his nephew and the dreaded bat entered Harry’s bedroom, where the Animagus had already banished the blooded sheets and bedcovers, even a rug that had caught some of the gore that came with the first emergence of Dovah traits, down to the laundry room for the house elves to take care of before remaking the room up. To a casual observer, one would never know a thing was wrong…beyond Harry’s absence. “You knew this was coming.”

“We knew something was coming.” Asterion corrected him, rolling his shoulders as Severus set down his bag on an end table and stood at ease, letting his son handle the mutts. “There was no guarantee even with the scent Harry was casting that he would inherit. Some don’t, for whatever
reason. No one knows why. And with all he’s been through…”

“There was a chance he wouldn’t.” Sirius scrubbed rough, tattooed hands over his scruffily stubbled face. “I hear you. No putting the cart before the horse, yeah?”

“Not just that.” Severus’s silken voice broke in. “With the Dovah laws regarding secrecy, we’re forbidden from enlightening others without proof of them being one of our own. Even speaking of an inheritance without the Dovah in question broaching the subject can be a severe breach of protocol.”

“He’s in there?” Asterion pointed to the door, leaving the subject for his father to cover more thoroughly with his uncle and Remus. With Sirius spending so much time in seclusion, there had never been a point to enlightening him fully to all the ins-and-outs of being Dovah and all it entailed within their secretive society.

“Yes.” Remus said, a bit bemused. “Excellent job with warding, likely accidental magic. Neither of us can get through it to comfort or reassure him.”

“Hmm.” Was all Asterion replied to that, already lifting his hands and moving to stand a bare inch from the carved wooden door. Closing his eyes, he focused on the link that had once joined the two of them together, getting a taste for lack of a better word, of Harry’s power. Remus was right, it was an impressive display of magic. But every piece of magic had a weak point. This one was that it blocked out everything but Harry. Normally not a problem, rather a strength, exactly what you’d want for wards and very similar to those in use by the Black properties.

But normal didn’t quite come into play when you had someone like Asterion running around.

Wrapping himself in the taste of Harry’s magic, Asterion reached out and pressed down on the door handle. The wards resisted a moment, Asterion’s copy wasn’t quite perfect. But in the end with his power, it was just good enough, allowing Asterion to open the door and slip through before the door slammed shut behind him.

Asterion spelled away his shirt, releasing his wings and other Dovah features as he knelt down ignoring the water pouring down onto his skin, and wrapped himself arms and wings around the shivering Harry, who couldn’t seem to warm up despite turning the water up as hot as it would go – but it failed to burn him.

The older Dovah studied Harry quickly, taking in the petite fangs, average length straight claws, and the dainty and cute features. He hadn’t grown much at all, still about five-foot-five, and his wings were a lovely pale green speckled with white scales. A Submissive Dovah, the second male submissive of their generation.

Asterion cursed mentally, even though from Harry’s height, features, and scent prior to his inheritance it had been expected.

Expected or not, it wouldn’t make it any easier for Harry to navigate, especially being raise so long in the mundane world by bigoted cretins, where things like having a flame for one’s own sex had likely been as harshly disparaged as “freakish and abnormal” as Harry himself had been.

Thankfully, Harry would have both his new family – including Asterion and his mates – and his Dovah instincts to help him through.

“W-w-wings.” Harry got out through chattering teeth, slowly beginning to warm as Asterion held and rocked him, his emerald eyes – freed of his glasses but seeing perfectly nonetheless – starting to
focus on the silver wings that had wrapped around him, and the arms that weren’t his own but speckled with scales nonetheless – and in some different colors than Harry’s own. “And scales, and claws.” He whimpered a bit, looking up into a face that was all at one vaguely foreign with the strange reptilian additions of scales but so familiar at the same time. “What am I, what are you, Asti?”

And why didn’t Asterion ever say anything about any of this? Why didn’t anyone? Harry even in his shock wasn’t foolish enough to think that Asterion had kept his…otherness a secret from Sirius, let alone Snape. Why would they just let him wake up in pain to blood and mucus and other things with perfect vision and a body that didn’t feel like it was his anymore?

Not to mention the damned voice in his fucking head.

Harry had thought he’d been done with that shit after he and Asti had burned Voldemort down to dust and ashes.

No such luck for the Boy-Who-Lived, he thought bitterly.

No he had to be some kind of freak among freaks.

“You’re not a freak.” Asterion told him sternly, making Harry wince. He hadn’t meant to say that out loud. “Neither am I, or Severus, or any of the other Dovahim. We, you, are magical creatures who upon our sixteenth birthdays had our creature sides unlocked along with our adult magic.”

“Dovahim.” Harry repeated, the voice in his head seeming to purr at the very word. “I’m a Dovahim?”

“A Dovah.” Asterion corrected, shifting his hold on Harry as he shut off the water with a flick of one finger and had them both dried off with another. “Is the singular, Dovahim the plural.”

“Okay…” Harry drawled, starting to come out from his, well, hysterics as he knew Snape would likely put it. “What does that mean?”

“Dragon-kin.” Asterion shrugged, resting his chin on Harry’s shoulder and rubbing his hands soothingly along the younger Dovah’s arms, being careful of his wicked curved claws. “Basically, it comes down to that. We’re one of a dozen or so species of dragon-kin who are part dragon and part magical human. Ours is one of the most secretive species. As a result we’re seen by witches and wizards as more myth and legend than reality.” Asterion smirked down into slowly-clearing green eyes. “Which is how we like it.”

“Dragon.” Harry blew out a breath, letting himself go limp in Asterion’s arms. “I think you’re going to have to start at the beginning, Asti. And use small words…”

Asterion woke up from a deep sleep on Lammas morning with an empty bed and a twitching nose. A soft kiss was pressed to each corner of his mouth as he eyes slowly slid open. His wonderful mate was sitting on the edge of the bed holding a cup of tea in one hand and a single long-stemmed orange rose with a kiss of deep red at the tips of the petals. Propping himself up against the headboard, Asterion reached for the rose first, brushing it lightly against his cheek.

“Passion with a touch of unconscious beauty.” He murmured naming the rose meaning around an exhausted yawn. Harry’s inheritance had taken a toll on his sleep schedule, given the time of night he’d been born. With a soft smile, he accepted the cup from Elias’s hands, allowing him to fit a breakfast tray he hadn’t noticed onto his lap. There was an empty slim vase in a deep red blown
Slipping the rose into the vase, he was surprised to see it there. He recognized it. He should, after all he made it.

“Trying to spoil me, my mate?” Asti’s tone was pleasantly teasing as he eyed the variety of dishes before him. Naked eggs benedict (lacking the muffin), delicately spiced wild boar sausage, and a blue-rare venison steak shared space with a few treats that were normally nighttime indulgences.

“It’s Lammas, the harvest festival.” Elias said, leaning down to steal a real kiss. “You can have all the spoiling you can stomach on Lammas.”

Wrapping one hand around the back of Elias’s head, Asterion tugged him down for a deeper, more satisfying kiss.

“Thank you, Elias.” He said, gentle gaze locked onto his mate’s sparkling blue eyes. “This is wonderful.”

“You’re wonderful.” His mate instantly rebutted. “Nothing but the best for my mate and the mother of my future children.”

Beaming a smile up at him, Asterion offered him a forkful of venison watching carefully as his mate accepted the tidbit. Alternating between sweet and savory, they shared the meal between them, whiling away the morning with kisses stolen that tasted of chocolate.

When they finally made their way downstairs to the dining room for lunch, they were greeted with an empty room and a note:

*Twitterpated New Mates:*

> As usual on this infernal post-Potter celebratory holiday, I have hidden myself away in the labs with a bottle of firewhiskey where I shall remain until the last irritating grandstanding speeches on the air have vanished with the night, barring a visit to check on our erstwhile newly-inherited submissive.

> Asterion don’t worry, the elves will keep me from starving and no amount of alcohol will induce me into blowing up my labs.

> Severus Snape

> P.S. Your midday meal will be served in the orangery, please make your way there and stop staring into each other’s eyes like twitterpated bunnies!

The twitterpated bunnies in question both burst into laughter at the comical note. The best part was that Severus wasn’t even *trying* to be funny. His overflowing vitriol over Harry’s birthday and the lavish praise heaped on the teen he only tolerated the day before did that all on its own. And that was *before* the teen’s Dovah inheritance had upset the applecart at Grimmauld Place late in the night.

Elias arched a dark red brow. “Orangery?”

He’d explored much of the castle and grounds there was just so much land to cover that he hadn’t finished with the main building and wings yet after seeing the entire Tower. Let alone getting to the attached outbuildings and the actual outbuildings like the several greenhouses that grew and supplied the estate’s fruits, vegetables, and potions ingredients.

Smiling Asterion set down the letter letting out another laugh when it burst into flames upon him no
longer touching it. Taking Elias’s hand in his own he twined their fingers together before leading him out of the room and down to the first floor then through a veritable maze of corridors. Stopping before a beveled-glass door, Asti gave him one of his infectious grins before pushing it open with his free hand and stepping inside the estate orangery.

‘Orangery’ was somewhat of a misnomer. Basically an attached hothouse that specialized in citrus and tropical fruit trees, it was like a self-contained orchard inside a steel-and-glass greenhouse. In the case of the Castle Black orangery, the steel was replaced with silver-veined black granite frameworks in intricate designs with crystal-clear glass panes inset into the designs to provide the natural light and heat that was supplemented by spells woven into the granite framework and the slate masonry underfoot. Alternating rows of fruit trees: orange, lemon, lime, grapefruit, banana, and pomegranate among others created a lattice work of branches, boughs, and leaves overhead.

Their lunch was laid out on a small glass-topped round dining table in the very center of the mini-orchard underneath dozens of strands of twinkling fairy lights and gauzy paper lanterns. The table was set with the best gold plate chargers, pure white china, silverware, and crystal goblets and glasses. Each place setting had been laid down on top of a bed of sunflower petals in a mixture of orange and deep red while a centerpiece of intertwined wheat stalks and daisies filled another of Asterion’s vases this one an elegant column resembling a calla lily in a cream and bright yellow.

Where were they finding these? He thought to himself in exasperation. All of his glasswork was supposed to be tucked away in the storage room beside his workshop in the basement levels or at the studios and shops that sold it via Siri’s contacts, not popping up all over the place.

Removing the silver domes covering their food, Elias arched a brow before seating his little love. “Your father has excellent taste.” He commented with a barely concealed laugh. “Or knows his son well.”

It was Asterion’s favorite dish, butterfish that was wrapped in porkbelly with seasonings and then steamed on a bed of tea leaves. Not quite the traditional Hawaiian preparation, but his favorite none the less.

“Severus Snape,” Asterion said around a short groan as the flavors burst across his tongue. “Has a very deep very well hidden soft heart. Especially for those he cares about. He can’t really help his snarky tongue or acidic nature so he does things like this.” He waved a hand to encompass the blatantly sumptuous feast for both eyes and tongue. “This is his way of making up for all the barbed comments over our mating and behavior.”

“Hmm.” Elias’s eyes traced over Asti’s face glowing under the shade of the trees, illuminated by the sparkling lights. “He’s certainly setting the bar high. I’m going to have to up my game for your dinner tonight.”

Asterion blushed at that. He was already being spoiled enough and told his mate so.

“Nonsense.” Elias said firmly. “I’m not going to hear a word of it. You deserve to be spoiled. Both as a wonderful mate and person and the future mother of my children.”

And that was the end of that.

…”

Later that night Asterion was pacing restlessly in his bedroom, hands twisting at the tie of the liquid-moonlight silver robe that Elias had given him. It was all that was concealing his nude body from the night air.
Lunch had gone swimmingly with the two of them keeping up a happy and flirtatious banter over the light repast Severus had ordered for them. Their butterfish had been accompanied by a delicate saffron rice and a light serving of fruit that had been marinated in brandy and honey then flambéed. It was perfection and Asterion had sent a note towards the basement saying as much.

Following lunch the lovers had put on their summer jackets and riding boots, braved the Scotland summer heat to take a ride through the trails that Asterion’s army of house elves kept clear. The hush of the summer day added to the intimacy of the outing and added to the flush on Asterion and Elias’s faces. Returning and stamping off dust and dirt, the two had made immediately for the hot spring in the Tower Conservatory to deal with their sweaty bodies.

Kissing passionately with the steam rising all around them, Asterion would’ve gladly handed over his innocence with both hands to the man rubbing his hands all over his body whose wicked mouth was keeping him in a constant state of arousal.

Elias however had a different plan and kept his little love on the cusp of release for an hour or more before lifting him bodily from the head-lightening heat of the steamy water and carried him still beautifully bare up to their private dining room in the Master’s Suite.

If Severus’s luncheon had harkened to a summer day, Elias’s dinner shouted of lavish decadence and desire.

The furniture had all been removed save for a low-lying table and plush silk pillows and thick fur rugs piled all over the floor. Candles had been lit on the mantle and in the windows, casting a golden glow over the room as an intimate fire glowed in the grate. Setting his mate down on a champagne-silk pillow, Elias unconscious of his own nudity, settled down beside him and knocked away a hand that had started to reach for one of the delicacies on the low table.

Tsking, Elias picked up the cubed melon wrapped in prosciutto that his lover had been reaching for a lifted it to sulky lush red lips.

Keeping eye contact with his dom, Asterion wrapped his sinful lips and tongue around the mouthful, taking it sensually from his hand.

Following his plan through sheer willpower, Elias fed Asterion every little morsel by hand only taking small breaks to give over sips of sparkling champagne in its crystal flute. Feeding himself between bites, the two of them made a healthy dent in the trays of antipasti, sliced and cubed fruit, caprese salad, and strawberries stuffed with sweetened mascarpone cheese or dipped in chocolate.

Taking Asterion’s laying back against the pillow he was leaning on as a signal for no-more, Elias reached over and grabbed the packages laying on the end of the table out of Asterion’s reach, both a way of celebrating their mateship.

The younger Dovah sat up, carefully peeling away the shiny paper from the larger box. Opening the hinged lid, he took out a robe of liquid moonlight, quickly slipping it over his shoulders. He’d enjoyed the sensuality of being hand-fed nude but at the moment would prefer a covering of some sort.

Setting aside the silk lined box, Asterion dived into the second much smaller box. Opening it wide he gave a startled gasp as he saw what it contained. Nestled on a bed of raw silk sat a platinum chain made of polished links each the size of a galleon. Removing the finely-wrought belt from its resting place he held it up against his body.

It was just the right size to rest elegantly around his hips over his formal robes.
Taking the belt from his lover’s hands, Elias turned it so that Asterion was staring at the clasp. Etched into the slightly bigger clasp was a rendering of the Prince and Black coat of arms side-by-side with an inset of each family’s stone: black diamond and deep blue sapphire. Turning it a fraction, Elias directed his gaze to the link one spot to the left of the clasp.

Underneath an aquamarine that perfectly matched his first mate’s eyes was another etching, this time saying **Elias**.

Understanding dawned in black-and-silver eyes as he took the belt from his lover and set it gently back in the box.

“You’ve been open about needed many mates.” Elias explained as he lifted his hand to stroke one pearly cheek. “Enough that wearing a ring for each might become ungainly. This was you can carry all of us with you, no matter what.”

Tears brightened dark eyes for a moment before Asterion took the caressing hand in his own holding it tightly for a long moment.

Sweeping his little love into a kiss he sent him off to their bathroom to freshen up and take a moment before he would join him in their bedroom, where Asti was even now pacing.

Having called for the elves to clean up the dinner mess and performed his own ablutions courtesy of a few quick spells, Elias propped a shoulder on the doorjamb as he watched his nervous mate. Moving over when his back was to him, he wrapped him up in his arms whispering in his ear before dotting kisses down the length of Asterion’s elegant neck.

“Nothing to be nervous about, my little love.” Elias breathed, causing shivers to race across Asterion’s body. “It’s just you and me here. Nothing to worry about, darling.”

Large hands caressed lithe muscles barely concealed by silk before finding the tie and peeling the robe from his mate’s body, letting it drop to the ground as he spun him in his arms. Lifting him up, Elias plummeted his mate into hazy desire with a kiss that seemed to never end as Asterion wrapped his long legs around Elias’s hips. Gripping onto a pair of perfect buttocks, Asterion’s dom walked them over towards the bed, never stumbling despite not looking up from the kiss for even a moment.

Holding Asterion tight, Elias lifted a knee onto the bed lowering Asterion’s back onto the cool silk sheets without missing a beat. Breaking the kiss with a gasp, Asterion arched his back at the dueling sensations of hot hard dominant at his front and cool soft bed at his back. Kissing his way around Asterion’s jaw to his neck, Elias settled in to worship the sensitive curve, turning his mate’s shocked gasp into moans of pleasure as his little love bucked up against him.

Whispering a spell for cleaning and lubrication, Elias circled Asterion’s hot tight hole with a slicked finger before pressing firmly inside at his mate’s needy whine. Lost in the sensations, Asterion could only shiver and moan as he thrust himself down onto the invading appendage, loving the new intrusion.

Swiftly adding a second digit, Elias stole Asterion’s mouth in another desperate kiss as he ground his weeping arousal against his mate’s own throbbing manhood as he started scissoring his fingers, working to loosen the virginal passage.

Satisfied that he wouldn’t hurt his little love Elias removed his fingers, using the slicked hand to wrap around Asterion’s cock and give it a teasing pump to distract him as he lined up his pulsing hard on and slotted home in a smooth, slow thrust.
Keening at the burning, if pleasurable sensation, Asterion arched his back bucking his hips against
the steely hands that were suddenly holding him down to prevent him from accidentally injuring
himself at the sublime invasion. Gritting his teeth as the burning gave way leaving only the pleasure
behind, Asterion swore, cursing his mate to *do something*.

Smirking at the demand, Elias started rocking his hips in a punishing pace, bringing Asterion quickly
to the edge of his endurance. Seeing that his little love was about to lose it, the dom swiped one
thumb in a teasing circle around the weeping head of the smaller cock.

“Come for me, little love.” Elias demanded huskily, holding onto his own climax by rapidly fraying
threads of control. “Come. *Now.*”

Obeying the command from his mate, Asterion bucked once, twice, three times before shouting
Elias’s name in an ecstatic shriek, his release rocketing from him and covering both his mate’s
cressing hand and his own abs.

Finally able to let himself go as Asterion started to wilt underneath him, Elias gave a final thrust and
groan, burying his face in his mate’s hair as he pulsed deep inside his lover’s channel, coating
Asterion’s passage with his release and sealing their mateship with a flash of golden light as their
cores bound them together.

Exhausted and utterly spent, Asterion gave a negligent wave of his hand cleaning them both of the
evidence of their activities and guttering the lights as Elias tucked them both under the covers,
wrapping his little love safely in his arms.

…

“Are you certain about this?” Harry asked his older cousin/mentor skeptically. Harry had been
introduced to his *actual* Mentor a few days after his inheritance, Asterion taking care of sending off a
note to one of the Mentors who had been helping the older Dovah. Ian Christianson was a bit of a
dichotomy, gruff and suspicious of Draco even though Harry saw the dominant as a family member
– now at least – and not a viable mate prospect, but conspicuously gentle and caring towards Harry
himself. Harry was just happy that everyone – even Sirius and Remus who *weren’t* Dovahim – were
taking his new…*status* in stride.

Though Sirius had thrown a rather comical fit over Harry’s eventual mating.

The Animagus had been inconsolable over “losing his pup to a grabby-handed perverted half-
dragon!” up until Harry himself had reassured the wizard that he had zero intention of jumping
straight into a mate-hunt bare months after finally freeing himself from the pressure of saving the
world…*again*.

Asterion had been more help than anyone could know – save another submissive – on that front.

He’d gone months and months without being around another of their…*kind*, let alone mating. He
knew better than anyone how to deal with Harry’s inner Dovah bitching over wanting mates and
children. And the pressure – no matter how well-meaning – from Harry’s mentor to start his mate
hunts.

Harry wanted to just *be Harry* for a while – likely through the rest of school – before having to deal
with a mate, or *mates* – and that had been a shock, along with children.

He just wasn’t *ready* and Asterion had been his biggest supporter of Harry making that decision, for
reasons that were much more involved than Sirius and Remus’s not wanting him to grow up so fast.
“Yes.” Asterion said patiently as they strode into Gringotts, Asterion’s mate Elias at their heels. It had taken Harry a bit of time to get used to the large dominant, but once the mating between the two had been sealed, for some reason Harry found himself much more comfortable around the quiet man. Harry rather thought it had to do with his emerging submissive Dovah being uncomfortable around a dominant that had been chosen but not sealed to someone he considered family. According to the books Asterion had piled on him, submissive Dovahim had stolen mates before under such circumstances…and it never ended well. “You need your school things, and new robes, etc. We’ve let the uproar die down…now we need to claim our combat-rights over Voldemort’s estate before his remaining minions figure out a way to claim it.”

“They could do that?” Harry asked. Honestly, the whole idea of combat-spoils and gaining inheritances that way had come as a shock. When he’d told Asterion of the basilisk, the older teen had nearly frog-marched him then and there to Gringotts to lay down his claim. Apparently if he’d left it unclaimed for another year then the school – or the Headmaster – would have been able to claim it, similar to the Death Eaters laying claims to Voldemort’s estate if he and Asterion didn’t claim it.

Harry may not want what he saw as blood-money…but he didn’t want it to go to any of them either.

It had been Elias who had suggested that if Harry didn’t want the money – or properties or whatever the dead madman’s estate entailed – that he use it to fund a charity…such as a magical orphanage, considering what Harry had confided to Sirius and the others regarding Tom Riddle and his awful background.

The two of them really were frighteningly alike – but at the same time so very dissimilar.

If Harry had his way, there wouldn’t be another little Tom Riddle or Harry Potter or even Severus Snape left in the hands of magic-hating muggles to grow mad or dangerous or bitter.

To that end, they also had another chore to see to while they were out and about – turning Harry’s two, and hadn’t that been a lovely surprise to learn of the day after his birthday when the owls arrived from Gringotts regarding his inheritance, Wizengamot seats over to Asterion to hold for him via Proxy.

Harry didn’t know if he’d ever be interested in politics.

But he certainly knew – or had an inkling at least – over what his cousin was up to with Lucius Malfoy’s help.

Two more votes Asterion didn’t have to try and scrape and wrangle away from Dumbledore’s political bloc that remained in place even after the Headmaster was ousted from the political chambers would be a boon to a few projects both submissive felt strongly about – namely creature rights and protecting magical children.

Setting his jaw, Harry marched up to the nearest goblin.

“I am here to levy my claim via victory-right over the estate of the late Tom Marvolo Riddle, including the trophy of the basilisk that remains in the Chamber of Secrets beneath Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.”

...
As August skipped on by, Asterion was slowly beginning to feel a tug that his Dovah told him was the draw to take another mate. A draw that wasn’t yet full-blown, giving him more time to settle into mateship with Elias before sending off for another hunt. A boon, considering the full social calendar Lord Black Prince and his new husband – their sealed mateship being recorded as a marriage in the Ministry records – were now subject to.

The end of the month also brought what would be the first public outing since their mateship and also the first where Asterion would truly be representing the Houses of Black and Prince; his investiture into the Hogwarts Board of Directors. Asterion held four seats on the Board altogether: two from both distinct (though one was now defunct except for himself) branches of the Blacks, the Prince seat, and the Argineau seat he’d inherited from his paternal great-grandmother.

Argineau was a rare if ancient name and with Cassandra’s passing he and his father were the last two blood family of the English Argineau branch with the dominant Asterion had met at his meetings being from the French branch of the family and a distant relative hardly related except for the shared name.

When asked if the Argineau patriarch wished for their seats to return to the main branch of the family in Greece, he’d declined in favor of Cassandra’s living heirs. As long as there remained a legitimate male of Argineau blood in England the seats and votes would remain there. Though if Asterion somehow died without a legitimate heir, the seats would pass back to Greece as Severus was disinherited.

It pissed Asterion off to an unholy degree that there was nothing he could do about his father’s status. He could reinstate him to the lines, return his inheritance, etc. But as far as magic was concerned because Septimus and Cassandra were dead, no one could truly undo what they’d done.

Same with Sirius.

No matter how many loopholes Asterion found, Sirius was never able to be Lord Black except by proxy for his nephew or acting as the proxy for Harry’s Potter holdings because the disininheritance was binding.

A later Lord can return their names, but they couldn’t overturn the other effects of the disininheritance.

Asterion had done what he could to right those wrongs. It wasn’t enough and never would be, but he could rest in that his honor and duty to his father was appeased.

As Elias was a pureblood so no particular standing though was from “pure” bloodlines, gossip had trickled out through various sources over his attachment to the Lord Black-Prince. Lucius was furious when he found out that one of the ministry workers had been gossiping over the match and Elias “marrying up.” He’d engaged in a stealthy behind-the-scenes rumor campaign with the help of Asterion’s father and solicitor to put a halt to the hints that perhaps Elias had sought to improve his circumstances by marrying “up” a vicious lie that couldn’t be further from the truth.

The only blemish on their otherwise sunny mateship, Asterion had prepped Elias endlessly with help from the portraits, Severus, and Lord and Lady Malfoy for their first public appearance as a couple.

He’d learned well from the back issues of the Prophet he’d ordered which had raked Harry over the coals during the last year questioning everything from his sanity to his honesty and everything in between. No one was going to even whisper such things about the new Lord Black Prince and his mates or he would unleash holy hell onto them. Finding the Daily Prophet to be the worst offender,
especially when it came to causing Harry problems, he’d quickly owled off an order to his Gringott’s account manager, telling him to buy up as much stock in the rag as possible, if not buying it out completely.

If he couldn’t control the reporters themselves, and he knew better than to ever think he could, he would choke out their avenues of spreading their venom.

A campaign which so far had worked, Asterion now finding himself with major interest in most of the magical publishing houses with the exception of the sole-proprietorship Quibbler and that damned Daily Prophet.

His investiture into his seats on the Board would be a closed-door event, but one that would make a firm first statement to the Lords that ran magical Britain, whether for good, ill, or otherwise.

The Board members were all of the oldest lines in Britain or were duly appointed representatives thereof.

While the common witch and wizard drew most of their opinions through word-of-mouth or from the paper, the ruling elite tended to fall in with the members of the Board. The impression he made there would determine how hard he would have to fight in the Wizengamot or ICW. Contrary to popular belief that careers were made at the annual Ministry Ball, this was where the truly powerful sat in judgement.

Blowing out a breath, Asterion stared at the dual images in the mirror.

He’d ordered new robes from France for Elias, much to the dom’s dismay though he understood the purpose behind them. While he was in no way impoverished or in need of galleons, few were the wizards who could compete with the Lord Black Prince for wealth. His pride as a dominant took a hit at that realization but was quickly soothed when it became apparent that Asterion needed him for other things that were much more important than the balance of his Gringotts vault.

His little love’s currently rising level of anxiety was a perfect example.

Asterion was a total wreck when it came to exposing himself to public scrutiny.

None of the dominants ever would’ve believed it, but during his meetings Asterion was in a constant state of nerves and was near-panic at any given moment. Nearly to the point of xenophobia, rarely did Asterion go anywhere outside the estate wards alone. In fact, other than quick meetings with Lucius or the Councilors, Elias couldn’t think of a single time where Asterion left the Castle alone.

“You look perfect.” Elias said warmly, wrapping one arm around his mate’s lithe shoulders in a comforting squeeze. “Exactly how a young, powerful Lord should.”

They both did.

The Lord Black Prince was out in full-flower today with an undershirt of fine linen over top brushed Egyptian cotton slacks, Queen acromantula silk black over-robies with delicate embroidery of the Black and Prince crests on the shoulders, breast, and back of the robe, and Elias’s mateship gift of the platinum belt holding it all together. Italian dragonhide shoes covered his feet and the Lordship rings were on his hands with his hair clubbed back in a manner befitting a Lord.

Coming out in public for the first time as the Black-Prince’s first husband, Elias was also dressed richly in a brushed velvet over-robe in a gunmetal grey also made from Acromantula silk that beautifully set-off Elias’s dark red hair and blue eyes.
Lush on their own, he’d refrained from ordering any embroidery on the velvet. Designed to be worn openly, in the fashion of the ‘younger’ lords, Elias had a white linen shirt that matched Asterion’s own with the Black and Prince crests stitched onto the collar discretely. Black Egyptian cotton slacks and dragonhide shoes finished the outfit that was a perfect complement to Asterion’s pure black with silver and blue accents. Because of the open style of the robes, Elias’s Black-Prince pendant could be seen clearly, the only jewelry he wore besides the ward-ring on his right hand, both gifts from his mate.

Striding elegantly into the retiring room in the Ministry where the couple was waiting alone, Lucius studied them both for any flaws. Pleased when his critical eye found nothing wanting with the picture they portrayed, he interrupted their absorption.

“Ready?” He asked quietly, understanding full well the nerves and planning that had gone into this single performance.

He’d done much the same when it was him and Narcissa who were going to be judged in the court of the Board.

Blowing out a deep breath, Asterion nodded firmly, straightening his shoulders and gracefully accepting his mate’s offered arm.

“As I’ll ever be.” He said with a wry smirk before following the Malfoy Lord out of the room and into the lion’s den.
Elias stroked one hand down the smooth length of Asterion’s back, marveling in the pearly sheen that permeated his little love’s skin.

It was one of his favorite things, watching the light play off of his beautiful mate as they rested cuddled up in their bed either after a long day or heated session of lovemaking. The ceiling was enchanted to turn clear, letting in the sky day or night with a spoken Word. The first time Asterion had used it his first week here he about had a heart attack, looking up through the roof of the Tower and seeing the magical telescopes from the observatory seemingly floating over their heads.

Asterion loved the night sky, something both he and his father claimed was a Black trait, and now that Elias was used to the spell their bedroom had a clear ceiling more often than not.

Tracing the patterns of where he’d memorized Asterion’s scales would be in his Dovah form, Elias leaned over a pressed a kiss to the scar from a rapier his mate had gotten from his Uncle shortly after his inheritance from a heated fencing duel.

Neither Black was known for their restraint when it came to a fight, though Asterion wasn’t likely to go looking for one the way his uncle was.

Asterion made an adorable little mewing noise and cracked open one silvery-black eye as he woke from a rare mid-morning nap. While Elias could easily coax his mate away from his researching, paperwork, and correspondence with his solicitor – though what exactly he was planning he still hadn’t revealed yet – getting him to stay after the fast and furious or slow and sensual bouts of loving was much more difficult. His little love simply wasn’t the sort of person to stay idle, claiming that he’d been waiting all his life for it to actually start and now that it had he didn’t want to waste a moment.

Elias simply saw it as a challenge after the first couple times where no amount of coaxing him to cuddle would keep him in their bed when the sun still shined. His Dovah had pouted at first before being roused at Asterion’s stubbornness. Now he pulled out all the stops to exhaust his lover so that he would stay and cuddle, sometimes like today even nap.

“Whazzit?” Asterion muttered almost unintelligibly as his eyes blinked owlishly with an adorable scowl on his aristocratic face.

The other Dovah hated to wake him but they were due at the club Elias owned with Jericho and Asti would skin him alive if he let him oversleep.

“You need to get ready, love.” Elias said, kissing his mate’s adorable pouting mouth quickly before picking him up and climbing from the bed.

His little love grumbled into his chest as he carried him into one of the orgy-sized showers in the master bath.

They’d both carried off their parts with exemplary aplomb during Asterion’s investiture, hurtling the first real test of their new mateship with easy. While most new mates were worried about things like meeting parents, his lover was juggling political statements and journalistic piranhas with business
decisions and researching laws. Elias had readily proven himself up to the challenge of being a support-system for his submissive mate, easily taking on the task of sharing the burdens of Asterion’s station as they’d come.

Now it was Asterion’s turn to prove himself in a much more traditional way.

Meeting Elias’s family…or what amounted to it these days: his former-guardian/current-best-friend Jericho as well as a few of their other friends at their club Requiem.

As a submissive Dovah with a borderline social-anxiety disorder, it was much scarier a challenge than dealing with the stuck-up nobles he shared the business of running magical Britain with. There was a certain code and standard of behavior that his public affairs required which called for cool, calm, collected behavior. An easy thing for a traditionally-raised noble Lord to manage.

There was no such rulebook for dealing with his mate’s friends and/or family…and this was only the first round of who knows how many.

Asterion wasn’t looking forward to it to say the least, especially as one of Elias’s less-temperate friends had already made waves by speaking out-of-turn and her comments starting what could’ve very well been a media-firestorm surrounding his relationship.

Lucius had been less-than-pleased and had made that very clear to both the offender in question as well as Asterion and his mate.

It made for a tense couple of mentoring meetings to say the least.

So Asterion felt like he was already walking into this with a black mark against him, no matter how hard Elias tried to make him understand that his friends weren’t – likely – going to hold what Lucius had to say to Magdalen against him.

Finally dressed and ready to go, Elias wrapped his little love in his arms and apparated them away from Castel Black and into his office at Requiem.

Asterion could feel the thundering bass from the dancefloor below them as he looked around the sleek, modern area. Elias’s office had a massive wall of glass that overlooked the dancefloor from two stories up, and while the other three walls were stark white, the marble floor and furniture were all inky black. Walking over to the windows, which if he read the magic right were warded to be one-way glass, he stared out at the mass of bodies that were either dancing or laughing and flirting around tables barely two-feet in diameter or at one of the rare booths or alcoves that offered a bit more privacy on the balcony that was half the size of the club and made up the second floor. Like Elias’s office, nearly the entire club was done in inky black but with only a few hints of white or jewel tones to lighten the effect of endless shadows.

It was the exact sort of place that Elias was at home, and Asterion had never felt more alien in his life.

Catching the change in his little love’s scent, Elias came and wrapped his arms around him, leaning down to plant a heated kiss on his neck, whispering: “They’re just people. Whether muggle, creature, or magical. At heart, every single one of them is in search of something. The job of Jericho and myself is to try and provide one more place for them to look. That’s all.” Leaning back, Elias barely glanced over the writhing mass below them before linking their fingers together and towing Asterion out of his office and down the soft-grey painted short hallway to the other main office on this floor, Jericho’s office.
Inside, Asterion found a new mass – if one much less in number – than the one of people down below.

Though at first glance many of them were magical, a closer looked revealed more creatures than witches or wizards – and even a child or two with a hovering nanny to take them away once they’d met Elias’s mate.

On the far-side of the room, kitty-corner to the mass of windows that echoed Elias’s own office, was another desk, this one in purpleheart wood rather than Elias’s ebony, and leaning against it was none other than the infamous Jericho King.

Jericho King was known for taking in “strays” among the magical world. Orphans, outcasts, even squibs who ended up in the Irish foster system or out on the streets usually found their way to him. More often than not, those “strays” ended up being magical creatures who couldn’t act human enough to pass in the muggle system after one tragedy or another.

Massive, with hands the size of dinner plates, and dark from head-to-toe with his dark ebony skin, endless black irises, and short-buzzed black hair, he nearly blended in seamlessly with the shadows in the inky dragonhide trousers and silk shirt that covered his muscular dhampir body.

For his part, Jericho had only needed to take one look at Elias’s beaming face when his former ward and current best-friend had returned from his hunt to know that he’d adore Asterion for that alone, even if he turned out to be the most unmannerly, puss-ridden Dovah in existence. That the Lord Black-Prince was clearly gorgeous by any standard, and polite to a fault made it a case of being able to like him as well as love him for lifting the unrelenting air of melancholy that had followed Elias around for the last few years. And seeing the fire in Asterion’s eyes and some of the looks he was getting from the rest of their little mish-mashed family, Jericho couldn’t wait for the fireworks.

He didn’t have to wait long.

Shaking hands with Jericho, and only a little nervous so long as he only focused on Jericho as Elias introduced them, Asterion gave him the wine Elias had helped him select from his cellars. “Chateau d’Arginaeu Eighteen Fifty-Seven!” Jericho exclaimed reading the label in pleasure. “This is entirely too rich a gift.”

“Not too rich when you’re a Black.” One of the females Asterion had picked out from Elias’s descriptions as married to one of his friends said snidely under her breath.

Elias hissed at the implied insult to his mate, making her blanch.

What was meant as pure cattiness for Magdalen’s own amusement suddenly wasn’t so clever when the one person she didn’t want to hear it picked it up from across the room. Knowing Elias and spotting the harsh glare, she gulped. Nothing good ever came from being on the receiving end of that look.

Ignoring the byplay as if he was deaf, dumb, and blind; Asterion focused on Jericho letting his mate sort out his other friends and their counterparts…for the moment.

“They were nonsense.” Asterion said pressing the bottle back towards Ishmael when the man tried to hand it back to him. “It didn’t cost me a knut, just moldering away in the cellars from when my great-grandmother Cassandra came to live at the Black estate when I was young. You’d be doing me a favor by enjoying it before it turned.”

Knowing he was being managed but willing to go along because it truly was an exceptional vintage,
Jericho chuckled and acquiesced with good grace then turned to introduce the rest of the group as Elias seemed to be engaging in some kind of stare-off with one of them, leaving it up to Jericho to keep things running while handling the domestics himself…as usual.

Feeling a tug on his trousers, Asterion looked down giving the little one, a boy of about four and the child of one of Elias’s friends, who would be whisked off to the nanny when the adults went down to the club-proper, his undivided attention.

“You’re pwetty.” The child lisped charmingly, making several of the avidly watching adults smother laughter. None of them could deny it was the truth however, what with the teen’s aristocratic features well-displayed by the braid his long hair was pulled back in. “Will you mwarry me when I gwow up?”

Smothered laughter turned into full-blown hilarity at the innocent question, made even funnier at the panicked look Asterion tossed at an unhelpfully-chuckling Elias. Left on his own to field the inquiry, Asterion squatted down to look at the little one face-to-face.

“I would.” He said with a bright smile for the charming creature. “But I’m afraid I’m already taken by your Uncle Elias. It’d break his heart if I married someone else. Even a charmer like you, and we wouldn’t want that would we?”

Blue eyes went wide at the information seemingly offered in confidence, the little boy’s hands clutched carefully in Asterion’s.

“No,” the boy said mournfully. “Uncle Elias is the best!”

Heartache was quickly forgotten when the “pretty man” offered him a cookie from a plate he’d seen on the counter top and the boy, who Asterion found out was named Henry and was the product of Ester and James, went off to enjoy the treat.

Standing back up from his crouch, Asterion quickly had arms wrapped around him as his mate who had deserted him in his hour of need kissed his neck softly. Elbowing Elias sharply, Asterion ignored the irritated hiss from his mate and the large hand that quickly wrapped his braid in his fist in warning.

Magdalen snickered at the undignified display, inciting Asterion’s temper from mere irritation to full-blown Black ire.

Immune in his temper to the sharp shock of pain at the base of his head when he pulled away, before anyone could react Asterion was away from Elias and an inch from Magdalen’s face, his claws out and tapping in wordless threat against the wall next to her head, the woman trapped temporarily by his arms on either side of her, Asterion having no fear of showing his Dovah side in a room packed with creatures and part-creatures and their assorted mates. Everyone here had a secret to keep from the public. Which gave them all a bit of freedom to be their inner selves…and explained how such a diverse group came to be friends in the first place.

“Magdalen!” Several of the adults gasped as the nanny rushed the children from the room.

“Asterion,” Elias cautioned his mate, his voice low. “Step away from her.”

Brushing them all off, his magic reacted unconsciously to his desires and erected a shield around them keeping both his mate and the others from disturbing him.

Though from the power he felt from the older male, Jericho might have a short at taking it down…if he wanted to, which at the moment didn’t seem likely as the massive male leaned against his desk in
“Let me explain something to you.” Asterion said, as his viciously curved claws tap-tap-tapped away on the wall. “Something that I honestly didn’t expect to have to explain to a grown witch. But that’s life. You’re upset because Lucius scolded you. Boo-hoo.” The tone was all the snarky-silkiness he’d inherited from the infamous Professor Snape. “I am Lord Asterion Severus Black Prince. A double Lord of two Noble Houses. I cannot afford indiscretions such as your negligence almost caused. More than that your friend, who you’re apparently jealous of sharing his attention,” he tsked when she made a disgruntled noise. “Ah-ah.” He said. “I can smell it all over you. Continuing on.”

Elias, having given up on getting through Asterion’s shield as a bad cause really tuned in to what his mate was saying at that. He knew there had to be something more behind Asterion snapping than a couple of petty remarks. With his general levels of shyness and unease around others, Asterion losing his shit in public – family and/or friends or not – didn’t make sense without a damned good reason.

“You friend, who has been there for your mate and your children now has a new focus.” Asterion gave her a knowing smirk. “And you can’t have that now can you? Not when he’s always been there, week after week, filling in when you wanted to have dinner with your husband out or to go catting off wherever at the drop of a hat. Just floo Elias,” Asterion said with mocking precision. “He’ll always be there ready and willing to pick up the slack. It’s disgusting the way you abuse his loyal nature like that.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about!” Magdalen burst out furiously, her ire overtaking her good sense when being cornered by a predator, which mated to a werewolf, she should have learned better than to dare years ago. “You’re just the little whore who decided Elias would make a good house husband for your slutty harem!”

Asterion chuckled lightly, viciously delighted that she’d shown her colors. From the moment he started to dig deeper into Elias’s relationship with his pseudo-family during the mate meeting something had niggled at him that he’d only figured out after Lucius investigated Magdalen while they worked to put out the fires caused by her mouth. He just wasn’t sure how he was going to bring his concerns to Elias’s attention with the mateship still being new.

One of the reasons Siri had always been so found of the full-frontal attack was that depending on the person, they usually weren’t able to hold their tempers. And people admitted all kinds of things with their minds clogged with fury.

Elias and the others listening gasped at her words, especially her husband Devon. None of them could believe that the loving woman they all knew would say such things, especially to Elias’s submissive mate.

“Darling,” Asterion drawled with exquisite iciness. “I’m Lord Black Prince as well as a rare male submissive Dovah,” he reiterated just for her. “I can have anyone I want. If I wanted a house husband, I would’ve chosen one instead of Elias who loves his makeshift family and his work with his businesses too much for me to ever ask him to leave either for good. And if I wanted someone just to bolster my image I would’ve gone with one of the Heirs who already knew the nobility game. Your friend – who if I have the story straight was actually your husband’s friend first – is a Dovah. I’m his mate and the mother of his future children. I’ll always come first now. So grow up and deal with it or I’ll deal with you.”

With a final tap of his claws Asterion pushed away from the cringing woman, taking down the barrier in the process and accepting Elias’s mad look with calm dignity. He knew he’d be paying for
that later. Elias had yet to seriously punish him but what he just did had pushed him and he knew it.

It didn’t matter, he’d take it.

She and the rest had all needed that little wake-up call. Humans, even ones who were born from Dovahim or had Dovah children or siblings, often forgot the basics of dealing with them. And number one was that once they took a mate, the mate came before everyone else.

Game over, the end.

While he’d never begrudge Elias spending time helping with his friends and their children, Magdalen had taken serious advantage of his mate. An abuse Elias would likely have never stopped if left on his own. Asterion wasn’t about to let it stand so he’d taken care of it.

Sauntering away, Asterion joined the others as they made plans to go downstairs and get to know him better with drinks in hand and many, many dances on the floor.

He wasn’t looking forward to being pressed in on all sides…but if it would make that stupid bint look even more foolish, then he’d willingly subject himself to pulsing music that made him think of sex and having his mate pressed up against his back or into his side.

It was a hard job…but one that Asterion was more than willing to…handle.

…

Asterion ached there was no other word for it.

Elias’s method of punishing his unruly submissive was gathering his hair in one fist and pulling sharply on it until his head was forced back in an uncomfortable and unnatural angle, exposing his neck in a classic sign of submission. A pose he’d been forced to keep until the muscles in the back of his neck were screaming in displeasure. He wasn’t injured or bruised but he was definitely not going to have an easy day of it until the muscles loosened back up.

He hadn’t been punished because of his display, not at all.

He’d been punished for not simply trusting Elias with the information he’d found about his friend’s mate. For fearing his fiercely loyal mate would choose her over his submissive, a thought that was anathema to Elias’s very nature. If Elias had been a spanker Asterion’s bottom would’ve been blistered by the time he was done, so hot was his temper.

Elias had made it very very clear exactly where his loyalty was and that any further manipulations involving his pseudo-family would not be tolerated. From that point on if he had a concern he was to bring it to his dominant mate, as he should have from the beginning.

After Asterion’s display and Magdalen’s subsequent tantrum while he was tucked away in a quiet corner of the club recovering from his display, things had taken a turn for the better even with Magdalen being kept under a silencing charm for the rest of the day.

Jericho had taught him the charm as it was the dhampir’s own invention. It went with the adage “If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all.” In Magdalen’s case it had meant total silence as apparently she couldn’t keep a civil tongue in her head around Asterion.

He was okay with that though he knew it hurt his mate.

Another reason on the list he was making for why he should take his claws to her.
Although her daughter was simply adorable.

He hoped that he had daughters, though he knew they were harder to get with an all male harem.

At least it wasn’t impossible like an all female couple having boys.

Just harder to accomplish and they’ll be rather outnumbered by their brothers, a situation he was perfectly okay with if it meant his little princesses would be safe.

Only time would tell, he’d just have to wait and see.

...

The evening following the less-than-stellar first meeting between Asterion and Elias’s friends, the two mates popped back to Jericho’s home Dublin for the pre-birthday dinner they were putting on for a select group of Elias’s friends. It was the evening of August 19th and was unseasonably pleasant outside rather than sweltering so Jericho had set up picnic tables in the back yard with torchlights bordering the area for extra light.

Determined to make a good showing despite the literal pain-in-his-neck, Asterion flitted easily between groups, easily charming his mate’s extended family and friends much to the shock of those present the day before.

“It’s like night and day.” Devon observed to his close friend and packmate as they stood shoulder-to-shoulder sipping butterbeers and watching Asterion’s performance. And a performance it was. “You’d never know…” He trailed off knowing better than to talk about certain things in mixed company.

Elias chuckled. “It’s an act.” He explained, frowning after a moment’s thought. “He always does this around new people and groups. It’s his charming-young-lord persona. I just wish he didn’t feel the need to do it around my friends and family.”

Curious Deven asked, “How many personas does he have?”

His little, er, younger friend sighed. More than he wanted to think about, he settled for: “A couple, depending on the situation.”

“Formal functions?” Devon asked with an arched brow. He’d taken what Asterion had said to heart. When it came to status there were few his equal and none his better.

He still couldn’t believe his mate Magdalen was acting like such a twit. It made him worry about what would’ve happened if a less-assertive submissive had chosen Elias. Would she somehow have tried to sabotage it?

Well, he guessed they’d never know.

“Those,” Elias agreed easily with a nod. “And then there’s Board meetings and closed-door meetings with other Lords, and and and…” He trailed off. “I knew, or guess I assumed, that Lords worked. I just never had any idea just how much work it actually was.”

“I don’t think anyone does.” Another of their friends, Thomas, an unmated dominant Dracken commented perceptively. “Not unless you’re close to one. They all make it look so effortless that you forget what goes into running an estate let alone a country.”

“I’m getting a crash course and I still don’t know it all.” Elias sighed. “Asterion’s been raised to this
from birth. And every once in a while I have to ask myself why he picked me when I have zero experience moving with his set…”

“Why he didn’t pick one of those Heirs he mentioned yesterday?” Kayla, Ian’s wife asked shrewdly as she joined them. She’d known Elias for years, since before she’d started dating Ian and knew how his mind worked and how sensitives he could be under that fierce redheaded temper.

“Yeah.” Elias shrugged then gave Asterion a bright smile when the submissive caught his eye, likely sensing something wasn’t quite right. “It just doesn’t make sense sometimes is all. Like when Lucius had to explain how important mine and Asterion’s behavior and everything was during the investiture onto the Board. One wrong move and I could’ve set him back years. Someone else wouldn’t need those kinds of things explained to him.”

“Someone else wouldn’t be You.” Kayla said firmly. “You’re who he picked. Out of over a hundred choices he went with you. If he thought you couldn’t handle it, believe me, he wouldn’t have picked you. So suck it up and enjoy your gorgeous, noble mate.”

Satisfied at having the last word, Kayla took off to rescue Asterion from Desiree’s tipsy claws. Some witches just could not hold their firewhiskey.

“I love that woman.” Ian all but sighed watching his wife walk away.

Elias just rolled his eyes and followed the witch over to his mate, worried temporarily assuaged in the wake of Kayla’s firm good sense.

…

After candles had been blown out, cake eaten (and icing smeared all around with the littlest children), and paper wrapping tore apart with considerable enthusiasm, the two mates returned to Castle Black Asterion immediately ordering a house elf to go collect the pile of gifts at Jericho’s home.

His mate had been showered with a plethora of books, assorted sweets, and several bottles of his favorite brand of butterbeer, having never really acquired a taste for alcohol. That didn’t stop him from having a stout or a glass of champagne every now and again but it often wasn’t his first choice unless the occasion called for it. He’d learned early that Dovah instincts and inhibition-loosening alcohols were a bad mix.

Humming under his breath, Elias pinned an all-too-willing Asterion down onto their plush bed.

“Hmm,” he grinned lecherously as he took in the leather trousers that never failed to drive him mad and the silk t-shirt showing off his mate’s impressive musculature. “Is this my present? My every desire all wrapped up so pretty in silk and leather?”

Asterion chuckled breathily as his mate simultaneously palmed an ass cheek and his hardening length through the leather.

“Technically.” The submissive pointed out around a groan as one of Elias’s wandering hands disappeared down the back of his pants and started circling his hole teasingly as his dom nipped as his silk-covered nipples. “Your birthday isn’t until tomorrow. So no, you’ll get your present then. And it certainly isn’t me.”

“But,” Elias gave a mock-whine as he lifted his head and pouted. “I was looking forward to unwrapping you.”

He bucked his hips, grinding his arousal down against his mate and nipping once more at the silk-
concealed pecs, driving two fingers up into his already-prepped mate in the process.

“What’s this?” Elias arched a brow. “Has someone been playing without me, hmm?” He asked as he scissored his fingers roughly.

“Just…ah,” Asterion forced himself down harder, enjoying the burn of the penetration. “A little. Wasn’t sure if you’d be up for it tonight with the party and wanted to be ready…just…in…case.” He panted as his mate found his prostate and curled his fingers stroking it in time to his words. Mewing he bucked again at a particularly well-placed jab, coming in his pants at the sensation.

Grinning wickedly, Elias removed his fingers from where they’d been playing with his mate’s passage, roughly stripping the tormenting trousers and shirt from Asterion’s body before removing his own clothes. Asterion laid there, still dazed from the unexpected orgasm, only to scream out his mate’s name when he was suddenly flipped over and Elias slamming home inside him with a brutal thrust making him scream into the pillows.

“That was very naughty Asterion.” Elias said conversationally, as if he wasn’t fiercely pounding away inside his mate. “Playing with yourself.” He jabbed viciously at his mate’s prostate with his cock, forcing his way through the delicate tissues with every move. “Running around in leather trousers with no underwear.”

Asterion hissed as his reinflating erection was grabbed and stroked in time to Elias’s pounding pace. When he’d set out to tease his mate he hadn’t thought *this* was what the reaction would be, Elias’s possessive instincts had roared to the surface when he discovered that his mate had been running around all night commando.


With each word he pulled on his mate’s hair, not enough to injure but to get his point across.

“Will you?” Elias demanded, lifting Asterion’s head from the mattress to stare into those pleasure dazed eyes, stilling until his mate answered.

“N-no.” Asterion stuttered out breathlessly. He’d already come twice from the rough fucking and knew another was right around the corner if Elias would just *move.*

“No what?” Elias pulled back with tantalizing slowness, keeping barely the weeping head of his cock inside the grasping ring of muscle.

“No, I won’t go out of the house without wearing underwear again.” He gasped out. “Elias, *please.*”

“Good, mate.” His dom cooed. “I have such a perfect mate.”

With that, Elias slammed his entire cock into the pulsating channel and came hard, soothing the abraded tissues with his hot liquid.

“Oh, yeesss.” Asterion hissed arching as he came for the third time, his cock juice spluttering onto the sheet beneath him.

Spent, the submissive collapsed into his own ejaculate, his dom following him down not ready to separate from him yet.
A few minutes later, his cock gave a twitch. Pulling out, Elias watched with hot eyes as his fertile fluids spilled from his mate’s well-fucked channel. “Merlin that’s sexy,” he moaned as his arousal once again reached full-mast as his mate looked back over his shoulder with his dark bedroom eyes, the blown pupils and black iris swallowing the normal flecks of silver. Together with the come-flecked thighs and winking hole, Asti was the picture of hedonism.

Flipping his little love over, Elias told him to open, filling his pouty mouth with his come-slicked cock as he slid into sixty-nine position. As his now skilled mate set to work with his mouth and wicked little tongue dancing up and down his pole, Elias stroked his mate’s pleasing seven-inch erection with his hot tongue, licking up every speck of come from his previous orgasms that covered his cock, balls, thighs, and abs. Humming under his breath as he enjoyed his mate’s unique flavor he swallowed the twitching red pleasure rod whole, swallowing around his delicious throat-full.

The mates set to work with lips, tongues, and mouths, each working to bring the other off first.

Asterion won.

Cleaning up with a spell, Elias sank back into the cushion, his mate once more wrapped in his arms.

“Are you sure you’re not my birthday present?” He asked teasingly. “Because that certainly seemed like the perfect way to celebrate turning twenty-eight to me.”

“Go to sleep.” Asterion ordered around a yawn. “You’ll get your present in the morning.”

“Yes, love.” Elias snuggled into the covers, nuzzling his mate’s ear. “Whatever you say.”

Grunting in disbelief, Asterion simply ignored that blatant falsehood and let himself drift off.

…

The morning of Elias’s birthday dawned bright and clear. Asterion woke up before him for once and shifted restlessly. A move that turned out to be a mistake as delicate tissues abused from their rough treatment the night before screamed in protest.

Asterion let out a weak, pained whimper at the pain that sparked across his anus and lower back making Elias bolt straight up in bed, Dovah attributes coming to the fore.

“What is it?” He stared around in panic, his instincts not sensing any danger.

“Hurt.” Asterion whimpered out. “We forgot to use the cream last night before we fell asleep.”

“Oh, love.” Elias winced at the thoughtless oversight, Dovah traits receding. “I’m sorry.”

Leaning over he fumbled about in the drawer of one of the nightstands next to the bed, crowing as he held up the jar of salve with one hand.

“Lay still.” He instructed, peeling back the covers so he had access to the abraded area. Catching sight of the raw red area he gave another wince. Thinking over their rough session the night before he cursed under his breath. Falling asleep before seeing to Asterion’s aftercare was unacceptable, no matter how exhausted they both were. Silently he vowed not to let it happen again.

His submissive mate let out a sigh as the gentle stroking fingers covered in healing salve worked their magic.

“How’s that?” Elias asked, screwing the lid back on the jar and returning it to the drawer then giving
his mate a cuddle. “Better?”

“Mhmm.” Asti agreed with a nod after moving cautiously. “I think I’ll need a mild pain relief potion though.”

Standing at last Asterion remembered why he woke up early in the first place and bolted for the bathroom as a sharp pain lanced across his bladder. Sighing as he relieved the painful pressure, he propped himself up against the wall with one hand as the other helped himself aim. Elias stroked one hand down his braid as he bypassed him heading for one of the showers.

After retrieving and downing a pain reliever, Asterion joined him though not for their usual shower time activities as he was much too sore for that and would be for most of the day.

“Happy Birthday, Elias.” Asterion said as they joined Severus at the dining table, a pair of colorful packages resting beside his mate’s plate.

“Yes, yes. Happy Birthday.” Severus groused over his morning cup of plain black coffee. Eyeing the contents of his son’s face and body language speculatively, he commented.

“Seven weeks.”

“Excuse me?” Asterion said after swallowing a bite of musk melon.

“Your settling period for this mating.” Severus elaborated. “It’s seven weeks. Your skin is producing excess oils and making the location of large scale clusters in your Dovah form shiny to lubricate the scales under your human skin as your body temperature rises. And your shoulders are twitching, likely because you have a slight itch around the site of your wings in your Dovah form, both signals that you’re halfway through your settling period. Today is the 20th of August. You should be ready to start hunting a new mate mid-September.”

Silently, Asterion rolled back his sleeve and looked at the spot where in his Dovah form he had a pretty pattern of interlinking scales, resisting the urge to scratch his back against the chair only for Elias to slip one hand up his shirt and do it for him. His father was right, his skin was looking abnormally shiny, even for someone who took good care of himself. And neither him or his mate had even noticed, preoccupied as they’d been this morning.

He’d crested his settling period, which was a long one for any Dovah mating…likely due to his issues stemming from his secluded upbringing and having a busy summer to get through at the same time.

Asterion shot his father a look Severus instantly understood. Rather than talk about his next mate hunt in front of a mate that he hadn’t yet completely settled with, Asterion wanted Severus to alert the mentors of when they should send out the owls to the prospective suitors. Doing the math in his head Severus gave a slight nod and arched a brow then discretely flashed nine fingers followed by two then two again.

His next hunt was set, the date being September 22nd.

…

Following breakfast, where Elias received an experimental restoration potion from Severus that could be used on delicate parchments that wouldn’t take restorative spellwork (which Asterion snickered was his father’s way of both welcoming Elias by trusting him with one of his creations and using him as a Guinea pig) and a scroll to test it on from the portraits of Regulus, Asterion escorted his mate to
the lift using his magic to access one of the levels Elias had asked about in a days following his original tour.

He knew that in a Castle as large and as old as Castle Black and home to the Black family who were notoriously secretive that there were entire sections of the castle new spouses and guests weren’t allowed. When he brought up the closed off floors in the basement even Severus had commented that there were at least two that he knew of that he was still blocked from along with some of the Archives and Collection rooms. Elias really wasn’t that concerned when after only a month into his mating and not yet bonded that there were entire floors of the Castle he couldn’t explore.

Giving him a small smile, well aware that his mate’s curious nature had been driving him crazy about what was on this particular floor, the only one neither he nor Severus had received an explanation regarding just why it was blocked off. Watching Asterion press the button with the inlay of a flame, Elias couldn’t help his rising sense of excitement. His little love had told him he wouldn’t get his present until today and now they were heading for one of Castle Black’s secrets.

Asterion’s continued silence was wonderfully tantalizing, bringing all sorts of naughtiness to mind.

“Don’t tell me the Blacks have a sex dungeon tucked away in the basement?” He couldn’t help but ask half-hopefully.

His mate laughed uproariously, likely knowing some secret of which he wasn’t aware. As the doors opened, Asterion calmed then said:

“There’s several actually.” He answered with a perfectly straight face. “At least three that I know of. One of which is connected to the Master’s Suite and another to Siri’s old rooms.”

Aroused Elias gave a small grimace. “I really didn’t need to know that about your Uncle.”

“Believe me.” Asterion said with an eye roll. “Neither did I.”

“Master’s Suite, you said.” Perking up, Elias eyed his beautiful mate as he led him off down a brightly lit corridor, focusing his now-ravenous gaze on his succulent ass.

“Maybe for Christmas.” Asterion shot him down handily. “Or our first anniversary.”

A little put out over the date being so far out but pleased that it wasn’t a stout ‘no’ which Asterion was perfectly capable of giving him, Elias agreed hurriedly before his mate could change his mind. They hadn’t yet expanded into some of the more exotic or kinky parts of sex yet, mostly sticking to whatever felt right at the time rather than consciously trying to expand Asterion’s horizons. There was plenty of time to do so, especially as they worked to integrate more mates into their relationship and getting more experimental out of sheer necessity.

Giving him a shy smile, Asterion stopped before a pair of doors each one set in the middle of the corridor on opposite sides of the hall.

Glancing down the hall both left and right Elias noticed that there wasn’t another entryway to see spotted save for the one to the lift and an archway at the opposite end from the lift that led to the stairs that ran the entire length of the castle.

Making a decision Asterion turned towards the door on the left hand side and placed his right hand, palm-side down on the solid steel door and sent a pulse of his energy spiking through the magically enhanced metal. Stepping back beside his mate, he watched the awe spread across Elias’s face as spiraling lines began to glow across the metal. As the design, a set of swirling stylized flames, spread out from the center where Asterion had placed his hand and met the edges of the door the sound of a
lock snapping open filled the corridor and the door slid into the wall leaving the entryway clear. At a gesture from his mate, Elias stepped into the well-protected room.

Stopping just inside the door, it took him a long moment to realize where he stood. He’d heard of them of course but had never been in one before. It was a glass-artist’s and sculptor/potter’s studio.

There was a large kiln and a trio of furnaces, a pottery wheel, a glazing area, tubs and bins and tins of silica and clay and various additives and chemicals. Large chunks of asbestos cloths, pipettes and blow pipes, blowtorches for lampwork, and tables and easels for drawing up design plans. Shears and dippers and more tools and supplies than he knew the names for, all arrayed with precision around the room.

As his mate stared around the room, Asterion began to explain.

“I was angry.” He started slowly as Elias walked around, riffling through his designs and stopping to handle a pair of shears here and a blow pipe there. “So very, very angry over basically being held prisoner in my own home. I don’t think I talked to my Dad’s portrait at all between fourteen and sixteen when I hit my inheritance, not that you’d know it now.”

Elias glanced back in surprise at that revelation. Asterion was right, without being told he would’ve had no idea that they’d ever been anything but the perfect mother and son.

“Siri escaped from Azkaban when I was thirteen and I thought that I would be able to leave. That between the two of us we could figure out a way to lift my Dad’s spell. But we couldn’t without telling my father and Uncle Siri didn’t trust him at that time. So I was stuck here with a bitter squib and a sometimes-absentee Uncle who never quite recovered from the damage that hellhole did to him.”

“What happened?” Elias asked quietly, knowing there had to be more than just his seclusion to stop him from talking to his Dad for two years.

“Andrea did.” Asterion sighed. “She’d always been…stern and exacting. But when Siri showed up…well…” He scrubbed his hands over his face. “She was only bound to silence about me not him. She tried to send a letter to the Aurors about where Sirius Black could be found by threatening and abusing the house elves.”

His dom winced knowing that whatever was going to come next would be bad. And it was.

“My magic exploded.” Asterion gritted his teeth, barely able to manage the disclosure. “I have too much of it, always have. It’s why I need so many mates to ground it. A side-effect of my Dad’s spellwork. The wards held and as I hadn’t reached my inheritance or majority yet there wasn’t any damage to the Castle itself but there was little left of the room but rubble and dust. And Andrea who had been tossed around like a rag doll by my rage and uncontrolled outburst.”

“How bad?”

“Broke her spine.” Asterion hunched his shoulders. “I was thirteen and my magic was dangerous. She was tucked away, unable to walk or stand or anything mobile without assistance. The house elves took over her care and she lived out her days in comfort if not peace or with her family. It was my fault.” He said quietly, with that firm sense of duty Elias recognized as a core part of his mate. “So I made sure she was taken care of.”

“It wasn’t your fault.” Elias corrected him sharply, striding to his side and taking his mate in his arms. “Not entirely. Your Dad was the one that cast the spell that trapped you here and affected
your magic. Your Uncle was the one who decided to go off half-cocked and chase down a traitor alone. And Andrea was the one who decided to betray the trust your family had placed in her and try to turn him in. None of those were in your control and they all contributed to Andrea’s situation. Besides which,” Elias watched him with knowing eyes. “Something tells me that wasn’t the first time she did something to hurt you.”

“I know.” Asterion met fierce blue eyes with an unreadable gaze, not willing to go there about his childhood after his great-grandparents died. At least not yet. “But that doesn’t stop me from feeling responsible. Despite all those things, it was still my temper and magic that lashed out and almost killed her.”

“And the glass work and pottery and…”

“I needed an outlet.” He gave a wry smile. “Uncle Siri charmed the dummies up in the sparring rooms so I had a physical and magical outlet through dueling and fencing against an opponent but I needed more than that. Neither Blacks nor Princes are known for sharing so Siri conferred with some of the portraits and decided to channel my anger another way. I’d already shown an artistic bent with making runes and divination tools – and was good enough at it that Siri used his contacts through the Order to sell them all around the magical districts in Britain.” He gestured towards a worktable with his in-progress orders for one of the shops in Majestic Alley, which catered to the wealthy and the nobility from around Britain, located off Diagon Alley…if you knew where to find the entrance. He also sold his work in Diagon and Knockturn, and had recently branched out to Dublin and Paris with help from his solicitor. “I had been fascinated by the tomes on glass working so Siri went to Venice and learned all he could before coming back with books and books and taught me what he could.”

Asterion gestured towards the door on the other side of the corridor.

“That’s where my work’s all stored. Most of it is too raw or emotional for me to want it displayed in the castle but the elves will sneak in there every so often and take out a vase or bowl or whatever and use it until I have them put it back, or Siri will go through with me and we’ll decide what to sell.” He shrugged. “I’ve made a nice sum as an artisan, gold that’s mine and not from my family.”

“The flower vase.” Elias said with appreciation sparking in his eyes. “From the Lammas breakfast. You made that?”

“Hmm.” Asterion nodded, leaning his head against his mate’s chest.

“Will you show me?” Elias asked.

Eyes shining, Asterion looked up with a bright smile before taking his hand and led him over to the opposite door and the treasure trove of glass it concealed.

…

Days passed quickly thereafter with little to disturb their new understanding of each other. Soon the moment of Asterion’s investiture onto the Wizengamot was nigh and Asterion’s skin was nothing short of luminous. He had a bit of time left before having to disappear from the public eye for his next hunt. Settling periods varied in length depending on the circumstances, much like their heats did. Which was good, because the last thing he needed was for some bureaucrat with a grudge to put together his absences in a patter than screamed “Dovah.”

Dovahim weren’t illegal dark creatures…but they weren’t accepted by the Ministry either in Britain, considered very dangerous and deadly.
Not diseased like werewolves and vampires are considered, but still subject to a lot of very restrictive laws that make being outed as a Dovah less than ideal.

Thankfully following his investiture they didn’t have any non-negotiable commitments outside of the next mate hunts until the Winter holiday and the annual Ministry Ball in January.

With Elias once again dressed as befit his bonded-mate and Asterion in a slightly-flashier version of the formal robes he wore of his Hogwarts’ investiture, his taking of his seats in the Wizengamot went off without a hitch. Not even some of the sour-faced crones and the fawning brigade of fluttering ninnies surrounding Minister Bones – though she looked rather fed-up with the latter - could take the shine from the event. The addition of Asterion to his House seats meant that now together with the Malfoy, Potter, and Longbottom seats – three Houses that generally didn’t vote the same or associate save for Longbottom and Potter – who each had alliances with the Blacks and Princes respectively they held almost a third of the voting power in the magical ruling body through alliances alone.

With Malfoy came Crabbe, Goyle, Parkinson, Greengrass, Zabini, and LeStrange votes with Lucius holding the proxy for the latter, especially with the Lord and his Heir back in Azkaban and the Lady dead at the Atrium battle. Together with Malfoy’s vote that made a group of seven that voted together as a unit.

The Longbottoms had two votes due to a now defunct line that had married in and was allied with the Bones, Lovegood, and Diggorys for five votes.

And through Harry, the Potters had their own vote as well as that of the Peverell family for another two votes.

Together with the votes controlled by Asterion they held an alliance of eighteen out of thirty, three more than the half needed for a simple majority. The balance of power had thoroughly shifted. Along with Dumbledore if he and his alliance chose to vote with them they had twenty-two votes, just over having a quorum.

Former-Minister Fudge and his ilk were nervous and with very good reason.

Alliances didn’t always vote together all of the time as different families had understandably different concerns.

But when it came to major issues, such as for example putting a Former-Minister on trial for allowing his Undersecretary to torture children, they always voted as one.

Change was in the air and it had many of the Ministry bureaucrats scared shitless as many had thought that nothing could ally the Dark factions represented by Malfoy alliance and the Light led by Albus Dumbledore with Augusta Longbottom bringing in the Light-leaning neutrals.

But with Asterion being Lord Black as well as Lord Prince, the earth seemed to spin on its axis tossing the lines drawn between the various parties right out the window.

Elias stood by puffed with pride as his gorgeous mate solemnly swore on his magic to help lead the people of magical Britain to the best of his ability. A spark of magic lit the air, sealing his oath, as Asterion took the seat that had magically appeared in the chamber directly to the left of the Chief Warlock as the holder of four seats, each House noble from before the founding of the Wizengamot much to the dismay of Former-Minister Fudge whose favorite lackey had been displaced by the move. Lights flashed as pictures were taken of the historic moment, many of which featured Elias at his lover’s side.
September brought rainstorms mixed with sunshine to Castle Black in the Highlands, though you wouldn’t know it by the heat building in the Master’s Suite.

Severus had taken himself off to Malfoy Manor to visit with Lucius and Narcissa now that Draco was back at school, while Sirius and Remus were off on some sort of ramble through their old haunts until the full-moon later that month, none of them wanting to see any sign or sight of Asterion and Elias’s postponed “honeymoon” period that had been too-often disturbed during August by their obligations.

Arousal hit him in the shower where he was attempting to cool off from the late-summer heat he was experiencing as his body soaked up the heat like a snake basking in the sun, making it impossible for him to accomplish anything at all.

All at once he went from uncomfortably hot to burning alive, keening out a cry as the water which before had felt so good now was shockingly cold.

Stumbling from the enclosure, he was met by his dominant who somehow managed to get him spread out on the bed while he was reeling from the touch that at the same time amplified the burning and yet was exactly what he needed as his instincts took over and left him a panting mess on the silk sheets.

Opening sandpapery eyes, Asterion groaned as he came back to himself.

His body ached all over, in some cases in places he didn’t know could ache. Wincing as a sharp pain in his bladder alerted him to why he woke, he carefully climbed to his feet not wanting to embarrass himself by losing his water nor exacerbate his tender and abraded tissues. Their joinings hadn’t been anything even close to gentle, their Dovahim constantly urging them on to more, yes, and harder.

All but waddling he finally made it to the bathroom and gave a sigh as he took care of his immediate problem then started the shower, they didn’t lose themselves completely in sex and mating the way some of the dragon-kin species could, but they would still go longer than normal between taking care of themselves and their bodily needs. Finished with his ablutions and wondering just how bad his aches and pains would be if Elias hadn’t already seen to his raw bum and the bite marks covering his neck, chest, and back, Asterion tossed on the silk robe Elias gave him at the start of their mateship not able to stand anything heavier on skin that felt like he’d had a muscle-deep sunburn.

Stumbling from tired muscles that hadn’t been used correctly for most of the last few days as they enjoyed their stay-cation, he made his way over to the private dining area of the Master Suite his stomach rumbling in fierce complaint. Mewing softly at the sight of his dom, he hungrily fell upon the gutted and skinned carcass making a bloody mess on the tiled floor. The meat was tender and sweet from the animal’s diet of berries and grasses as he took the offered slice from a half-dressed Elias who had the remains of his own meal bloodying his chin and neck, and the sign of his being the current top-dominant of their mateship showing in the impressive horns curling up elegantly from his temples in his Dovah form.

Top dominants or “Alpha” dominants were distinguished by the horns in their Dovah forms as a warning to other doms. Should a top dom be unseated by a subordinate dom, they would shed their horns painlessly during the next heat with their mate and the formerly subordinate dom would grow their own. As it always took place during a heat except for immediately following bonding a new
member to their mateship and the subsequent dominance fights, the shedding and growing of “Alpha” horns, it was possible for a dom to lose and then regain his top status without ever having to go through the process.

Sharp fangs and viciously curved claws made swift work of the tender underbelly, Asterion feasting until his stomach was swollen and distended and unable to continue. Sighing, he daintily cleaned his claws before retracting them and then crawled over towards his mate, licking him clean from his kill. Flexing his jaw he sheathed his fangs and settled in using his mate’s muscled chest as a pillow.

He grumbled softly as his pillow shifted, his mate lifting him into his arms from the floor but was appeased when he was settled down laying atop his mate on what smelled like the bear-skin rug in front of the fire in their room.

“Feeling better?” Elias asked as he peered down into drowsy, satisfied eyes.

Asterion hummed in agreement, feeling warm and having his stomach filled though he still ached.

“Sore.” He said after a moment, resting his head back on its muscled pillow.

“Mmm.” His dom murmured beginning to rock him gently. “Get some more sleep, you’ll be in perfect shape again in the morning.”

“’kay.” His little love agreed, already nearly asleep as the soothing motion and warmth of the fire on a cool autumn night seeped into him, leaving him limp.

Elias pressed a kiss into the top of his head as he stared into the fire, humming a lullaby under his breath. This would be the only time he’d get to enjoy this, soon they’d have another dom to try and fit into the peaceful but busy life they’d carved for themselves and eventually children would follow. Their idyllic honeymoon was almost over and Elias was determined to enjoy every moment they had left, even if it meant watching Asterion sleep away the day.

There were worse ways to pass the hours.
Nine

Chapter Summary

The second mate.

The Black Prince

Chapter The Ninth

Fintan, Brann, and Albert Llewelyn all gathered at their father Cadfael’s home, each bringing their owls from Councilor Tafari to compare them. It was September 16\textsuperscript{th} and they’d received notice that Asterion’s second meeting was to start on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} when they were given notice the day before.

Cadfael watched the three of them attempt to communicate silently over the rim of his tea cup before rolling his eyes and setting the cup on its saucer with a click.

“What’s he like, is he a sweet one?” He asked with fake-idleness.

He wanted to see him from the perspective of a potential mate, to see if one boy was really worth the angst his sons were forcing on themselves.

The trio exchanged a knowing glance.

“Perfectly imperfect.” Fintan said point-blank.

“Gorgeous.” Albert all but sighed.

“Everything.” Brann said at last after a long moment. “Everything one of us could ever want in a mate and more.”

“Hmm.” Cadfael tossed that around in his head for a moment. “And there’s been no real indication that he likes one dominant more than another aside from his current mate?”

“Well…” Al trailed off uncertainly. “He did send me back before Fin and Brann but I’ve been writing him weekly as have a lot of the others, some of them more than weekly…”

“He always writes back unless someone says something or sends a gift that’s inappropriate.” Fin added with a slight pout, he’d gotten the silent treatment for two weeks before he wrote again and apologized for upsetting Asterion.

Cadfael chuckled at that, remembering that rather memorable occurrence.

“Most everyone I’ve spoken with plans on returning.” Brann said, having stayed in contact with quite a few of the other dominants. They all knew that Asterion would need more than one additional dom and that doms that could show a willingness to get along were more likely to impress him at this point. “Except for a few like Seren who didn’t feel Asterion was all that interested in them compared to others or some of the snottier doms who think he’s too much work with his methods of sorting through his suitors.”
“And the three of you?” Cadfael finally got to ask the question he wanted an answer to. “Where do you three stand?”

A beat or two passed as they thought about how to answer their father.

“Normally all but one of us would’ve bowed out by now.” Fin said with a sigh. “But Asterion hasn’t really given us that option.”

“I think I could stay back.” Albert said with a shrug. “But he has been answering my letters and seemed more receptive. It’s just hard to gauge at the moment which of us he likes the best.”

“Especially since we’re all so different.” Fin jerked a shoulder. “Despite what some say about us as Llewelyns, Asterion has recognized that we’re not the same and he doesn’t treat us like different colored copies of each other. That’s one of the things that’s so intoxicating about being near him.”

“And then there’s his ass.” Brann said in a rare moment of crudity, instantly lightening the mood.

“Well, dear.” Arden bustled over with a tray of tarts in her hands. “I suppose now you have your answer.”


With a sigh Asterion welcomed Councilor Tafari back into his home. His father Severus had arrived earlier in the evening, more out of wanting to return to his labs than because he was worried about the outcome of Asterion’s second hunt. While Elias wasn’t the biggest dom around, he was by no means lacking in any way and had proven himself to be intensely protective over his mate.

Secure in his mateship, Elias nevertheless held hands with his little love as they spoke with the Councilor, Asterion giving Benjamin a heads-up on what he’d roughly planned for the next several days.

During the meeting the Councilor gave him an updated list which showed who among the dominants had chosen not to return. Elias was surprised, not having thought that anyone would refuse to return for another chance with his gorgeous mate while Asterion took the information with his quickly becoming famous calm. It was about what he’d expected based on the events of the prior meeting though one or two he thought might return hadn’t and vice-versa.

It was nice to know that the dominants were able to surprise him, otherwise there wouldn’t be much point to even having any more interviews or dates or challenges for his hunts as Asterion might as well pick one from a list instead of spend time with them if they all acted exactly as expected.

For one thing he’d been uncertain about the Llewelyns despite them leaving on a high and with assurances of returning.

He thought that perhaps they might either make a decision for him amongst themselves with only one returning or decide not to return at all in fears he might play them against each other.

The latter of which was an understandable fear as according to Elias – who at twenty-eight had been going to meetings for twelve years – as it had been attempted before with the result of all the Llewelyns leaving the meeting. Every once in a while some cruel or stupid submissive would get it into her head to try it again only to meet the same result. Llewelyns were rare in their tendency to stand with each other rather than fight one another for a submissive.
It was one of the things that made them attractive as a group to Asterion.

Following the established routine from the first hunt except with the inclusion of Elias, they all gathered in the entry hall before breakfast and port-keyed over to the hotel. Arriving, Elias removed his shirt and unleashed his Dovah traits while Asterion smiled and gently stroked the arch of one jewel-toned wing. Clothed only in jeans and boots, Elias was ready to meet the others with his mate at his side.

Dressed to match Elias only with a shirt in a rich burgundy to play off his dom’s wings and black jeans and boots, Asterion offered his mate his hand as they walked into the conference room where the returning dominants had gathered along with a few baby doms who had come into their inheritances since July.

His hunt almost had a dual purpose now that Harry had inherited as a submissive as well. Harry would start his own mate hunt – already talking about wanting to use the same method as Asterion, down to the meeting place and maze – two Julys from now, since he wanted to finish his schooling before mating. Thankfully, Harry was able to hear from an ever-closer friend and cousin about different doms and what to expect out of a meeting. It wouldn’t just be throwing a lamb into a wolf-pack, not for his baby cousin. Asterion is keeping one eye open for dominants that he thought might suit Harry, though he wouldn’t say anything until the arrival list was made at Harry’s introduction gathering at his hunt.

He wouldn’t want to talk up a dom only to find out that they’d already mated or had turned into a prat in the two years between Asterion’s first meeting and Harry’s own.

Though, he couldn’t say that he was happy over Harry returning to school now that they knew there were three unmated baby doms in the school – and all of them in his year.

Draco would mind his manners – or face Asterion – and would hopefully keep his two friends the Zabini twins who were in Slytherin (Blaise) and Ravenclaw (Julian) respectively, under control.

Or Asterion would gut the baby dom who was inappropriate with his cousin, as simple as that, even if his relation to Draco is far closer than that of Harry, close enough that Draco wasn’t an option for Asterion’s mate and hadn’t been effected at all by his call but would be effected by Harry’s…though the two of them making a go of it was unlikely in the extreme given their former embattled relationship.

Sitting, Asterion nodded genially to Councilors Christianson and Roberts who were present in the room already before giving Benjamin the go-ahead to start the meeting as Elias filled his mate’s plate with only the finest foods before them and handed him a cup of tea doctored up just the way he liked it.

Asterion gave Elias a gentle smile and a kiss on one pale cheek before turning his attention to Councilor Tafari as Elias started in on his own breakfast.

“For those of you young doms who have only recently come into your inheritance, welcome.” Benjamin said in his deep voice. “And to all the others welcome back. Young ones, you will be spending the day with Councilor Roberts going through an exercise all the other dominants have already completed: the enchanted maze. This will help Asterion and his first mate Elias select which of you are possible mates. For the rest of you, today will be a casual day.”

A murmur broke out through the room. They hadn’t had a ‘casual’ day in the previous meeting.

“Which means,” Tafari continued to explain. “That Asterion and his mate will be available in the
gardens for you each to talk to either one on one as it were or with several of you at a time though in
groups less than five if you please. This is your chance to get reacquainted with Asterion and Elias or
to meet Elias for the first time while the young dominants are completing the maze. As a reminder
no dominant will be left alone with Asterion who will either be with his mate, father, or a Councilor
at all times. You also may not touch, kiss, or otherwise approach Asterion in a physical manner
without permission from him and his Alpha dominate. Enjoy your meal.”

Chatter broke out among the dominants as some of the older doms filled in the baby doms on what
the maze entailed and those closest to Asterion and Elias, this time a couple of doms with white
marks from the previous meeting, engaged them in conversation.

…

Lest Asterion and Elias be swarmed despite the warnings, Councilor Tafari took up a watch-post at
the doors to the gardens, making a list of who wanted to talk to the mates and scheduling them so
that every group or person got their turn.

Councilor Christianson and Severus sat in cushioned chairs in the shade with a view of the grassy
spot beneath an oak tree that saw Asterion reclining in Elias’s arms on a patchwork quilt provided
from a basket filled with nibbles and drinks for the pair to enjoy while they entertained the other
dominants.

With Councilor Tafari manning the door, Asterion wasn’t much surprised to see the first group let
through contained the three Llewelyns though he was surprised that they had the HitWizard with his
twenty-three-and-a-half foot chocolate-brown wings with their gorgeous emerald scales with them.

While Asterion was aware that Jason was friends with the now-absent Hakon, he had no earthly idea
he knew the Llewelyns, let alone well enough for them to let him join them during their visit.

It was just another indicator that the Dovah world was much more insular than he’d thought,
connections within connections.

Dovahim – or any creature really - weren’t as incestuous as the British wizarding purebloods could
be but they were just as interconnected.

How else could you explain a French HitWizard who lived in Provence being friends with the
wholly-Welsh and English Llewelyns?

“Fin, Brann, Al, Jason!” Asterion called out happily. “Come and sit! We have cookies!”

Elias and the other doms all laughed at the teasing reference to a common muggle phrase. Leave
Fintan to run with it.

“Does that mean we’re joining the Dark Side?”

Asterion just stuck his tongue out childishly, knowing none of them would judge him for his
temporary bout of immaturity.

They all chatted easily, giving Elias time to warm up to the older Dovahim, even Jason at thirty-five
was seven years his senior while the Llewelyns were more than that. He knew why his little love
was so heavily interested in the older unmated Dovahim, a lot of it having to do with them being
more patient and calm than those who’d only come into their inheritance a year or two earlier. Older
Dovahim however came with their own set of problems.

Such as the ones who were old-fashioned and wouldn’t want Asterion to be active in politics instead
trying to keep him home and pregnant and rearing children.

Or those who were so desperate for a mate that they’d become borderline abusive.

He knew Asterion had put in a lot of time already trying to weed out both of those types of older doms during the last meeting but that didn’t mean that one had slipped through the sorting process. He was honestly a little wary of the Llewelyns who were far and away the oldest Dovahim left, with the largest number of doms falling into the thirty-to-forty range. Though he could definitely see why Asterion was attracted to the Llewelyns, they were all very masculine very shaggable males.

Having both topped and bottomed before in the bedroom he was honest enough with himself to admit that he wouldn’t mind a go with any one of the Llewelyns, though sometimes their attitudes can be off-putting.

At least they weren’t as stuck up as that dick Antoine from the first meetings. That dom hadn’t even made it through the first day with Asterion let alone into the second meeting.

Elias was chatting lightly with Jason about the highly anticipated study done by several top mind healers and law enforcement agents – to which Jason had contributed – about the connection between mental illness and the advent of Dark Lords which was due to be released in bookstores the following month when his attention was drawn back to where Asterion had moved over to play a game of hot hands with the Llewelyns.

It was Asterion’s turn and he kept pulling his hands back from Fintan, accusing him of cheating much to his brothers’ amusement. Mockingly-indignant over the harpoon to his character, Fintan had claimed reparations, quickly wrapping the much-smaller submissive in his arms and finding all of his ticklish spots with the accuracy of muggle heat-seeking missiles.

Bellowing with laughter and flailing comically Asterion called for help.

“Elias!” He giggled uncontrollably. “Save me, Elias!”

Laughing at the display Elias smacked the other dominant on the back of the head and pulled Asterion from Fintan’s arms and into his lap, the other dom knowing better than to try and stop him from reclaiming his mate.

“And what did you do that was deserving of tickle-torture, hmm?” Elias asked with an arch of his brow though knowing full-well the cause. “Perhaps I should claim a boon for saving the damsel.”

Blowing a raspberry at his dom over the “damsel” remark Asterion wrapped one hand around the back of Elias’s neck and pulled him down into a tongue-filled kiss that had the other dominants staring with partial-arousal and part-jealousy.

“Damn.” Fin whispered, having to adjust himself at the sight of the redheaded Elias and black-haired Asterion snogging right in front of him.

“Agreed.” Jason said, eyes wide as he swallowed harshly.

“I think that’s the hottest thing I’ve ever seen.” Al said with certainty.

Brann didn’t say anything at all, focused completely at what was going on before him with lust-blown green eyes.

Before the mated pair could forget that they were in public, Severus let out a shrill whistle. He really didn’t need to be watching his son do that.
With impeccable timing, Councilor Tafari called for the groups to switch, the Llewelyns and Jason quickly bidding farewell to the mated pair and each rushing off to his private room to take care of the problem they had left them with.

…

The next few visitors came one-on-one though Haru the half-French artist and Isaac the African-American law student who danced well came at the same time.

None of them really interested Elias much, though he could tell Asterion was at least moderately entertained by Haru who according to his mate had nearly beaten Viktor Krum in the finalist match during the fencing exhibition. And that he was drop-dead gorgeous with his half-French and half-Japanese heritage certainly seemed to help matters, though Asterion was determined not to simply pick the prettiest doms. They both wanted substance in their mateship, something they both agreed on.

And Haru could be a little flighty.

Elias got to meet the two dominants that Asterion had confessed to being “attracted to, to an unholy degree” just before they broke for lunch.

Sebastian who had some of the prettiest dark blue wings with copper scales Elias had ever seen had paired up with almost his polar-opposite personality wise.

Charlie, an outdoorsman who was obsessed with dragons.

Sebastian, a workaholic whose idea of cooking was making a sandwich that he usually ate while working.

And Charlie who at six-foot-six had arguably one of the best bodies – and one of the tallest - of all the remaining dominants and whom Asterion got hot and bothered over.

Asterion was the first one to admit as they walked back to the dining room after the visit that Sebastian was the handsomer of the two.

But Charlie’s temperament almost screamed bad-boy that Asterion’s inner vixen was positively drooling over.

The four of them spent a happy half-hour discussing books, always a winning subject with Elias.

“It’s one of the ways I relax.” Sebastian admitted in his English accented with more than a hint of French from his native tongue. “I spend so much time working that curling up in bed with a mystery helps take my mind off the depositions I need to take or the brief that is due the next day.”

“I’m more of a Jack London bloke.” Charlies said with a shrug with only a faint hint of his years at the Bulgarian dragon reserve peeking through. “White Fang is still my favorite story. Even though I’m well and grown.”

“That’s for sure.” Asterion whispered under his breath as he eyed the physique Charlie was once more showing off by being topless with his wings on display. Nearly sandwiched between his topless mate and muscle-packed Charlie with his blue and black wings with crimson scales, the submissive was struggling to hide his insistent hard on as well as keep his hands to himself.

He’d never been more relieved to see Councilor Tafari’s face than when he came to shoo Charlie and Sebastian away, falling back onto the grass with a groan as soon as they were out of sight.
“Yep.” Elias said, still staring after the absent duo. “I completely understand now. They really are just that hot.”

“Unng.” Was all his mate could manage, rolling over onto his stomach and burying his head in his arms.

Severus and Councilor Christianson walked over to them to collect them for the meal a few minutes later, Sev letting out an amused chuckle at his son’s position.

“Let me guess.” Councilor Christianson said with a laugh of his own. “Charlie?”

“Yup.” Elias said popping his lips on the ‘p’ as he hauled his blushing mate to his feet and dusting him off. “And Sebastian too.”

…

During lunch several of the dominants had jockeyed for position closeted to Asterion, trying to get extra time with him and his first mate since they all had realized that Asterion was listening to Elias having noticed him whispering comments or things he knew about each unmated dom in his sub’s ears.

Surprisingly, quiet Raven with his smaller twenty-foot black wings with dark blue scales managed to grab the spot just to Elias’s left, striking up a conversation with the redhead and Severus about the differences between Native American shamanic rituals and the druidic rites of Europe, the latter of which Asterion was surprised Elias was familiar with.

One of the just-sixteen baby doms who’d made it through the maze had ended up on Asterion’s right, talking about his family and what he wanted to do after school, apparently aspiring to go into the French Auror Corps.

After lunch Asterion and Elias curled up for a cozy hour alone in their private rooms before moving into the library and enlarging a settee to comfortably fit them both with Asterion laying down and resting his head on Elias’s thigh as his dom played with his long hair.

Councilors Tafari and Christianson had switched with Ben sitting in an arm chair flanking the settee but not too close.

First in the door was Gunnar, who Asterion had asked Charlie about as they both worked on dragon reserves. An inquiry which had Charlie blushing as it came out that the two of them had been lovers once upon a time for a short while between submissive meetings. A confession that had Elias and Asterion exchanging naughty grins and Severus yelling at them for being vulgar over his former student.

Gunnar was one of two children of his parents and the only Dovah, his genes like Elias’s coming from both sets of grandparents though he’d had uncles and cousins who’d inherited as well.

With cornsilk-blonde hair and icy blue-green eyes to go with his Nordic facial features and six-foot-three slenderly muscled build, Gunnar looked like a modern day Viking come to pillage the local nunnery, complete with a wicked glint in his eye.

“You seem to be taking the British political world by storm, little one.” Gunnar commented with a knowing look in his eyes.

“That he is.” Elias said giving his mate a soft hug and kissing his head. “He had quite the savvy mind for politics.”
“Having Lucius Malfoy as a mentor helps as well.” Asterion said drily.

“Ah Lucius.” Gunnar said with a sigh. “Few have Lord Malfoy’s way of twisting things around while making it all seem like your idea in the first place.”

“Believe me.” Asterion said with a light laugh. “Of that I have become aware.”

“Of course,” Lifting the lithe hand Gunnar had claimed gallantly, he pressed a kiss onto the back. “I forget you’re his cousin by marriage. Silly of me. Though your Elias has done well himself.” The senior dragon tamer who had to work closely with the Icelandic version of the Wizengamot to preserve the volcano fields the dragons ruled gave the other dom a nod. “He’s supported you wonderfully by all accounts.”

“Thank you.” Elias smiled, pleased with Gunnar’s review of their public outings. “It’s been interesting. I never thought I’d end up mated to a double Lord, that’s for certain.”

Gunnar laughed, squeezing Asterion’s hand in a gentle tease. “I don’t think anyone grows up thinking they’ll mate a double Lord, as your Asterion is one of a kind.”

Blushing at the praise, Asterion peeked up at them through his lashes, happy that the somewhat mischievous dragon tamer and his fierce Elias were getting on so well.

Thus far other than a few dominants Elias has had to put in their places, the meeting has gone relatively smooth.

Now if only it would continue that way.

Asterion was pleased when after dinner that night only three dominants had been ejected other than those who were eliminated through the maze.

Two had gotten into a bloody fight in the atrium over both wanting to visit Asterion during the same time but not together and the third had been physically ejected from the library by Elias when he made an extremely crude and suggestive comment about Asterion to his mate.

As they’d sat down to dinner Councilor Roberts had bustled over and whispered lowly in Asterion’s ear, delivering a message of some kind. Shooting Elias a look Asterion nodded once before leaning over and conveying the message to his dom…along with a nip to his earlobe.

“We have one more dom to see after dinner is over, then we can go home for the night.”

Arching a brow at the change in plans Elias simply nodded before continuing his conversation with Sebastian over current wizarding mystery fiction while his little love dug into his bloody venison steak and kept careful watch as the dominants all ate, not even pretending to listen to the dom blathering on at his side, his mind far away at the coming meeting.

Hurrying alongside his mate into one of the studies in the hotel, Elias saw exactly why Asterion had agreed to the change in plans. It was one of the doms who had been conspicuous in his absence as he’d not sent a refusal. Leaning up one arm on the mantel and staring into the flames with his twenty-six foot grey wings with stormy-blue scales on display was Viktor Krum.

“Viktor.” Asterion said with a smile as he held out a hand to the Quidditch star. “I was afraid you were too busy with the Quidditch season to come, I heard Vrasta is doing excellent as always this year.”

“Ya.” Viktor said in his thick Bulgarian accent. “We are doing good this year. Makes it hard to get
away for meetings, but I will do my best to be here...if a little late.”

“If you let me know when you can make it.” Asterion said with a smile as the courtly professional athlete bowed low over his hand, tucking it through his arm after a look at Elias and towing Asterion gently to the settee. “I will try to be here as well as Elias.”

“Dank you.” Viktor gave him one of the shy but genuine smiles he saved for those he cared about. “Means a lot to me that you are willing to work with my schedule.”

Cuddled up together two days into the mate hunt, Asterion nuzzled his nose against Elias’s neck as his dom stroked one hand down his hair. Resting over an exuberant bout of lovemaking with Asterion laid out across Elias’s body, his dom asked the pertinent question.

“Have you decided?”

Together they had dismissed another half-dozen suitors, bringing the total to the high twenties once more. If nothing else limiting the amount of dominants in close contact with a submissive was working to decrease the death toll though there was still at least one fight a day. Fights which ended with at least one dominant being sent home.

“Hmm.” Asterion jerked one shoulder. “Maybe. I know I like some more than others. You?”

Elias hummed under his breath.

“Same.” He said after several long moments with a sigh. “Ideas?”

“I know at least...mmm...two that I want for sure. It’s just figuring out the rest and the order to take them is that I’m really struggling with.” He admitted, chewing his lip softly. “It’s hard since we don’t know exactly how many mates I’ll need.”

“Well...” Elias blew out a breath before tipping his mate’s face up to look him in the eye. “I would suggest starting with just this one and then going from there. Don’t count your dragons before they hatch.”

“You mean our children?” Asterion corrected with a sly look.

His mate just laughed and tumbled him onto his back on the bed, sliding back inside him with a groan. That was enough discussion for one night.

The next morning started with a bang as Asterion made an announcement that had the dominants up in arms.

“Everyone with a white mark can go home.” He said, Elias at his back supporting him with a hand on his shoulder holding one of Asterion’s securely. “After spending time with each and every one of you both in multiple one-on-one meetings and group events, I’ve narrowed my list of possible mates. Everyone with a mark either white or red should please go home with my thanks for coming.”

All the newly rejected dominants which amounted to all but thirteen not counting Viktor who was once more in training with the Vrasta Vultures, were in an uproar. Asterion had once more cut their numbers by more than half.
Standing there resolute and unchanging, Asterion waited while the furious dominants were escorted out, more than one starting a fight with the mated enforcers before being thrown sometimes harshly from the warded building.

Wincing at upsetting so many potentially wonderful dominants, Asterion huddled into his mate. Elias stroked one hand down the back of his inky-waterfall of hair wordlessly soothing him. The unmated dominants looked around what was quickly turning into a cavernous room. Without the hundred-plus dominants they’d started with, they felt almost dwarfed by the towering ceilings.

“I think.” Councilor Tafari said staring at the truncated field of suitors. “That we should be able to handle things from here, Asterion sweetheart, if you’d like to release the mated dominants and enforcers back home except for the perimeter security force.”

Trading a glance, Elias nodded in agreement with his mate’s soft “ok.”

Once all the extra personnel had cleared out Asterion, Elias, and the others all sat down to a nice breakfast in one of the smaller dining rooms. Though ‘smaller’ was a matter of perspective as the table still had to fit between eighteen and twenty-one Dovahim depending on who made it to what meal. Some of the dominants were continuing with going off and hunting, providing both Asterion and the other Dovahim with fresh meat from their kills and giving the hides to the submissive as courting gifts.

If this trend kept up he’d be able to carpet his Tower in furs…not that he was complaining.

Stone was cold on bare feet in the winter, no matter how many heating charms were laced into the masonry.

They were just finishing breakfast when a latecomer bringing the smell of singed flesh and brimstone staggered into the room.

“Sorry I’m late.” He said with a weary sigh. “Emergency at the reserve.”

“Charlie!” Asterion shouted as he spotted the injured dragon tamer leaning against the doorjamb, hair still going from a quick shower and smelling of burn paste along with the actual burns. Running over to the dominant, Asterion searched frantically for the burn as the other dominants cursed under their breaths. Lifting up Charlie’s t-shirt high on his ribs, Asterion gave a squawk as he spotted the viciously red area that covered half his ribcage.

Taking his shirt from the little one’s hands, Charlie smoothed it back down concealing the injury from his fellow dominants, any of whom would gladly take advantage of his wound in a fight.

“I’m fine Asti.” Charlie said as he gave him a kiss to the forehead. “Nothing to worry about. Dovahim don’t burn the same way humans do, it’ll be gone in a day.”

“You’re hurt.” Asterion said in his adorably stubborn way with his big black-silver eyes glinting up at him in worry.

Unable to control himself in the face of that look Charlie hooked one large hand around the back of Asterion’s neck and pulled him up into a deep kiss. Winding his arm around the blonde dominant, Asterion sank into him with a little mewl of happiness. The watching dominants all hissed in displeasure while Elias, Severus, and the Councilors looked on knowingly, Asterion’s first mate not displeased with the match.

Asterion couldn’t care less.
He was busy claiming his second mate for all to see.

At the Counsel headquarters Head Councilor Amaury Roxburgh stared in disbelief at the Councilors assigned as submissive Chaperones to Lord Asterion Severus Black-Prince.

“He’s done what?” He asked quietly. “I don’t…understand.”

Councilor Torantine snorted, his nostrils flaring.

“The little brat has sent away all but a handful of dominants.” He said disdainfully. “Over half on the first day of his introduction. We’ve had complaints pouring in from them for months over this Asterion being unreasonable.”

“That isn’t what happened.” Benjamin Tafari held onto his patience with by a hairsbreadth. “As you well know as one of your sons was among those dismissed. I do hope we’re not having a repeat of mateship tampering on our hands…are we?” He asked with an arched brow.

While he didn’t think Torantine was that particular breed of foul, he was tiptoeing close to showing favoritism to his dominant son.

“Of course not.” Roxburgh held up on hand. “No one wants to see such a thing happen again. Now someone who was there,” he eyed the trio of Chaperones. “Explain this to me again.”

“Asterion was very well prepared for his meeting.” Councilor Christianson reported, tone icily distant. “He’d selected a hotel he owned and cleared its bookings for the next year in order to accommodate his meetings. Hotel Dubh is famous for its enchanted maze which has been used for centuries for lovers to get to know one another better. The maze was set up to report any dishonesty and programmed to ask a set of questions vetted to provide Asterion with information he needed to make an informed choice of mates. After all of the dominants went through the maze, though only some reached Asterion’s position waiting in the center, he reviewed the answers and made decisions on who to keep to get to know better and who was simply incompatible.”

“I see.” Councilor Roxburgh stroked one finger down his jaw in a thinking motion. “And how well would the three of you rate the success of this system.”

The Councilor held up an imperious hand when it seemed as if some of the other Councilors would object. Mainly those with relatives who’d failed the maze test.

Exchanging a look they nodded having discussed this in depth as they watched the various dominants interact with Asterion.

“Based on the mates he’s already chosen and the dozen or so suitors remaining after two meetings where he’s been systematically sorting through them and dismissing those who aren’t what he wants or needs…” Ben sighed. “Excellent. It did an excellent job of culling the field which in turn as kept the number of deaths and injuries to an all-time low.”

“Interesting.” Roxburgh rocked back in his chair. “Very interesting. I find myself fascinated by this Lord Black Prince. I do hope he’s planning on attending one of the Yule balls. I’m most anxious to meet him.”

Asterion spent the first night with his new mate snuggled in between Elias and Charlie all of them
naked at the day they were born, with Asterion eyeing Charlie’s heavily muscled body and thicker cock appreciatively.

They’d given a wowed Charlie a tour of the Castle, which led to a discussion of what to do with Charlie’s cottage – and job – in Bulgaria. In the end they’d decided for Gunnar selling the cottage and transferring reserves. With some of Charlie’s things sharing space in what was now Elias and Charlie’s closet and Charlie declining an office of his own in favor of a drawer or two and a spot at a side table in Asterion’s private office in the Tower. In the morning Charlie would start the process to transfer to either the dragon reserve in the Brecon Beacons or the Hebrides.

Not wanting to make the same mistake twice, Asterion took his new mate to meet his dad and uncle before snuggling up with him in the Tower.

Siri had given him a lecherous grin and a thumbs up for “landing himself a hot one” which had Regulus telling Severus to smack him on the back of the head for the hundredth time that week.

While Elias and Charlie were working on arranging their closet to each dom’s satisfaction, Asterion was waffling over rings.

One the one hand was the rose-gold band with the single blue sapphire that came nearest to matching Charlie’s hair and eyes while on the other was an onyx arm band with a silver inlay that looked like dragons at play. Finally making up his mind, Asterion pocketed the box and went in search of his mates. Lifting their heads from where they were hovering over a set of measurements Elias had taken of Charlie at their mate’s request – the dragon tamer being even less enthused over the upgraded wardrobe than Elias was – both doms smiled at his obvious happiness.

His Dovah, angry over taking a mate who couldn’t give them children after waiting so long, had settled somewhat with the addition of Charlie which would hopefully keeping the pissy creature from lashing out anymore.

Asterion really, really didn’t like Elias’s method of punishment since besides the first time it’s never been sexual in any way.

Annoying really because having Elias pull his hair had made him gagging for it when combined with a hefty cock pile-driving him into the mattress.

Although…

He eyed Charlie’s long, built body lasciviously. Maybe his new mate like to pull hair while having sex instead of for punishment. He hoped so, the thought making his already tumescent cock rise to full-mast.

Gesturing for his mates to join him in front of the fire he waited for them before settling himself in Charlie’s lap. Snuggling in, he reached into his pocket and removed the jewelry box.

“T’im sure you noticed.” Asterion spoke softly, Elias rubbing his hands up and down his back as his mate straddled their new addition. “Elias wears a ring. More than a piece of jewelry, it gives him access through the wards on every Black and Prince estate as well as the ability to apparate in and out of the Tower. It only works for one person however,” he cautioned strongly. “The results for side-alonging anyone or trying to bring them otherwise through the wards would be less-than-pleasant.”

Opening the box, he undid the clasp of the arm band as he showed it to an appreciative Charlie who moved his arm obligingly so Asterion could lock it in place with a spell.
“It won’t come off.” Asterion looked up into emotion-clouded eyes. “Ever. Only I could remove it and that’ll never happen.”

“Thank you, Asti, pchelen med.” Charlie said giving Asterion a soft kiss that ended with a teasing nip to his plush lower lip. “I’ll treasure it, as I do you.”

Asterion cocked his head as Charlie handed him off to the now-standing Elias for their mate to carry to their bed as their new mate rose to his feet.

“What does pchelen med mean?” He asked stumbling a little on the pronunciation.

Charlie gave a wicked grin, staring into night-sky eyes. “Honey. It’s Bulgarian for honey. I couldn’t live there for so long and not pick up on some of the more important phrases.”

“Pchelen med.” Asterion rolled the foreign word around on his tongue as he stripped to his skin under the appreciative stares of his mates. “I like it.” He decided with a grin and a nod. “I like being your honey…and there’s a sentence I thought I’d never say.” Asterion rolled his eyes a bit at the sappiness that was sure to drive his father right up the wall…if mating a Weasley hasn’t done that already.

Charlie tumbled him onto the bed, kissing him sensually as they waited on the watching Elias to join them.

Sliding in behind his tempting mate, Elias sucked on the curve of Asterion’s neck as Charlie kept his wicked mouth otherwise occupied. The doms locked eyes, both of their gazes blown with lust for the lithe form tucked between them then seemed to come to a consensus and slowing their advances to a gradual stop to Asterion’s disgruntlement.

Whining low in his throat, their wicked mate wordlessly demanded to know why they stopped before they really got started.

“It’s too soon.” Elias said with a soft brush of his lips over Asterion’s closed eyelids. “You’re not ready for the both of us at once. Not yet.”

“We don’t have to rush, Asti.” Charlie pressed his aroused body into Asterion’s dragging his weeping erection over Asterion’s own. “We have plenty of time for me to learn all the sweet spots on your delectable little body. But for now…sleep.”

…
Ten

Chapter Summary

This is the last chapter update for this story for awhile as I work on finishing up Lokison, On Whom the Pale Moon Gleams, and Angels, Hunters, and Wizards Oh My! Check my Facebook for the 2017 update schedule and updates on if there’s any changes.

The Black Prince

Chapter The Tenth

Charlie smiled indulgently as Asterion nuzzled the shiny white patch that was all that was left of his third-degree burn that had shocked Asterion into acting on his mating instincts and selecting him as his second mate.

The normally collected submissive was nuzzling and sniffing all around the formerly burned area, searching and scenting out any sign of remaining damage. It was rare to find him acting so obviously on instinct, his position in society and his power levels requiring the utmost of control and calm in his life. Being a Dovah submissive had little to do with either calm or self-control, most running on primitive instincts every second of every day especially when it came to their children.

Several days had passed since Charlie’s arrival at Castle Black and all three of the mates were still being wary and stepping carefully around each other.

With being wounded, Charlie had no interest in fighting a dominance battle with Elias for the Alpha position, however temporary it might be with additional mates being anticipated, nor did Elias’s pride allow him to start a fight where he would have an unfair advantage over the other dominant.

Feeling a push on his shoulders Charlie smirked and went willingly onto his back, his submissive straddling him as he traced the various shiny patches of skin that marked healing burn wounds that weren’t serious enough to scar. Grasping his hips with his rough working-man’s hands, he held him in place as Asterion gave him a startled look out of his black-and-silver eyes. Jabbing up with his hips, the dom ground himself against his little *pchelen med*, reveling in the heated blush that took over his face when the sub realized exactly what position he’d maneuvered himself into in his innocent inspection of Charlie’s sun-kissed, freckle-marred, and fire-burned skin.

This was the first time they’d been left alone as Elias had taken several days’ vacation from his businesses as he wasn’t sure how long it would take Asterion to select a mate and then move him into Castle Black.

But now Elias was busy elsewhere and Charlie was more than ready to take advantage of the dominant’s absence, tired of the other mate always calling a halt when their bedroom activities were starting to get good.

Charlie understood not wanting to rush Asterion. But there was a difference between being protective and being a right cock-blocking bastard. A difference Elias seemed to *not* understand.
“Pchelen med, my little love.” Charlie said huskily as Asterion rose over him, brushing their chests together and stroking up against his painful arousal.

Asterion groaned lightly, nipping lightly at Charlie’s slim, well-formed lips. His mate’s faint accent got to him every time but when he slipped into the Bulgarian he’d picked up at the dragon preserve all of his blood immediately headed south.

“How brave are you feeling today, little love?” Charlie whispered temptingly, tunneling his hands into Asterion’s hair making the submissive purr. Flexing his hips, Charlie flipped them hovering over the arousal flushed brunet.

“How brave.” Asterion answered breathily, winding his arms around the dragon-tamer’s firm shoulders. Charlie nipped lightly at his jaw before stealing a tongue-twining kiss in approval. “Very brave.” He gasped as his dominant began trailing kisses down his neck and chest, undoing the buttons on Asterion’s thin cotton shirt as he went before stopping at his navel and lavishing it with attention.

Hands dug into fire-brand hair, tugging restlessly as Asterion fell into sensations that were the same but at the same time very different from the ones he was used to feeling with Elias. Part of his brain, not completely fogged over from his dom’s attentions, paid close mind to the differences as Charlie sensually ran his hands through his hair and caressed his sensitive neck and his sides just above his jutting hip bones. Even when Elias was making slow, thorough love to him his touches were filled to the brim with vibrant energy. And when they weren’t going slow…

Elias was as passionate and fierce about making love with Asterion as he was about loving and protecting him. His vibrant energy and care overflowed into every aspect of his life, including his private moments with his submissive mate.

Charlie was as different as night to day.

The dragon-handler, an in-your-face tough, playful, and determined male, was a devout sensualist, lavishing Asterion with soft touches and slow kisses.

Nipping him lightly in warning, Charlie drew his full attention back to him as he lowered his hands to the laces of his leather pants. Moving with dexterous fingers, his dragon-tamer smirked as he found himself naked and spread out like a pagan offering on the silk sheets with his dom aroused and throbbing coming down over top of him.

“My brave little darling.” Charlie’s voice was a heated growl. “My perfect little mate.” He took Asterion’s legs by his ankles, wrapping his sub’s strong legs around his shoulders. Parting his downy cheeks with his rough hands, Charlie nuzzled Asterion’s slender cock gently as his sub gave a breathy moan, once more digging his elegant hands into Charlie’s shoulder-length hair, grabbing roughly.

Blowing softly, enjoying the gasp coming from parted kissed-reddened lips, Charlie lightly flicked out his flexible tongue, teasing his mate’s hole. Mewling at the new sensation, Asterion pulled Charlie firmly into him, legs spasming where they rested on sweat-slicked shoulders. Acquiescing to Asterion’s unspoken desire, Charlie set to work, thoroughly licking and caressing his mate’s hole before stiffening the velvety organ and piercing the firm band of muscle.

Reveling in his mate’s pants, sighs, and wanting mews, Charlie thrust his organ in and out of the sensitive channel, mimicking the next step of their mateship now that they were alone and ready to take it.

Asterion, made into a puddle of dazed, boneless need by Charlie’s oral attentions to his pleasure
centers, whimpered in distress when the dominant moved, straightening from his crouch and
kneeling over his pleasure-stunned body.

“Hush, little love.” Charlie soothed him as he moved into position, his yearning body dripping in
anticipation of sliding home into the silken channel he’d just been attending to, the musky taste and
scent intoxicating him. “I’ll take care of you, pchelen med.”

Surging forward before his darling could make another pleading, dick-tightening noise and shred his
control completely, Charlie claimed his mate, branding him as his. Growling, human mind almost
entirely subjugated under the Dovah’s drives, Asterion’s dragon-tamer plummeted into his heated
tunnel over and over, pushing insistently on his prostate. Hearing a moan and feeling the tell-tale
tightening of his mate’s incipient climax, Charlie leaned down and bit his mate, tearing through skin
and leaving a permanent mark of his claim.

Spilling his hot liquid into the heated tissues of his mate, Charlie lowered a hand and tugged once on
Asterion’s weeping cock, bringing him off in the same moment and completing their bond as much
as it could be before their mating heat.

…

A crash coming from inside the dueling studio had Asterion wincing and looking over at his father.

After coming home from working and visiting with his business partner Jericho, Elias had utterly lost
his redheaded temper at the sight of his submissive cuddled up with Charlie and the scent of sex
heavy in the Suite’s air.

They’d been sniping ever since, Asterion having – knowingly or unknowingly – picked two mates
with equally fierce natures, finally exploding and nearly knocking Asterion into a glass display
cabinet in the family parlor where he had gone to try and escape the arguing. Severus had been
summoned by a frantic Regulus when he saw Asterion stagger over and sit heavily on the settee,
stunned from the accidental knock he’d taken. Furious and ice-cold, the older widowed dominant
had instantly separated the embarrassed dominants and ordered them to either go outside or head
upstairs to the padded dueling studios.

Growling and hissing all the way with an irritated Severus and worried Asterion following them.
Asterion had tried to follow them into the room only to be stopped by a fist in the back of his shirt
tugging him backwards. His father had given him one of his famous looks and said drily:

“Unless you want to have to pick another mate,” Severus arched a brow. “Stay out here. They’ll
kill each other if you try and interfere.”

“Why?” Asterion asked, honestly baffled.

“They’re sorting out their dominance.” His father explained with a patience he’d rarely shown any
child but his own. “Try and stop them and it’ll only make things worse.”

So there they were, standing in the hallway. Severus was leaning against the wall, his potions case
on the hall table next to his hip; while Asterion paced back and forth before the door.

Sometimes when there were only two dominant mates, dominance battles never occurred simply
because of the Dovahim in question.

Others times it only took a fight or two. Then in yet others it took weeks for them to be satisfied with
the hierarchy. Very, very rarely did dominants fail to resolve the hierarchy however when that was
the case one of the dominants would eventually kill the other.
Severus desperately hoped that the last option wouldn’t occur, especially as Asterion still needed several more mates.

More than anything he didn’t want his son to ever have to live the same hell he did for most of his life, mourning for a lost mate.

“Don’t worry, Asterion.” Severus attempted to soothe his son as he watched the teen’s nerves slowly shredding right before his eyes. An anxiety or panic attack was the last thing his son needed when he’d been doing so well. “They just need to sort things out. Dominant Dovahim do so through violent displays of strength and prowess. It’s nothing to worry about most of the time.”

“Most of the time.” His son echoed, hands twisting together as he paced, eyes continually flicking between staring at nothing and the closed door behind which his mates are beating the tar out of each other. “Most. You didn’t see how angry Elias was when he found us.”

“Why was he angry that you’d slept with your other dominant and sealed your bond?” Severus had to ask baffled. That wasn’t a normal response unless you were dealing with the first-pregnancy protectiveness. “He’s twenty-eight years old…he had to know that you were going to sleep with Charlie eventually.”

Severus wasn’t enthused with the topic of his only child’s sex life but he needed to know to best help his son clear the current hurdle in his path.

“He’s been keeping both of them from having sex with me.” Asterion said waving a hand distractedly. “He didn’t want either himself or Charlie to rush me into anything and thought both of them together would be too much for me.”

“Which he was and is right about.” Severus noted insightfully, getting an embarrassed look from his son for his trouble.

“Which he was right about.” Asterion sighed, running his hand through his still-unbound hair. “That doesn’t mean I didn’t want to be intimate with Charlie. He’s my mate, I wouldn’t have picked him if I didn’t want him to touch me…and not with Elias playing guard dog.”

Asterion loved how protective Elias was. It was one of the reasons he chose him for his first mate. He was protective and fierce. Loyal and loving and affectionate. All the best attributes a mate, especially a first mate could have with a dark but somehow still gentle undertone that was pure Elias.

He never expected that protectiveness to explode and potentially damage the harmony of their forming mateship.

Perhaps he would have if he’d been around people growing up and better understood human nature. But he didn’t grow up that way, he grew up isolated with little to do with actual human interaction.

Not the best way for anyone to be raised, let alone a male submissive Dovah.

A resounding crash! Came from inside the room.

Exchanging a quick glance, Asterion and Severus rushed towards the door, the dominant barely beating his son to flinging it open with a sharp crack.

Against one wall laid the remnants of one of Asterion’s training dummies which were all spelled by his Uncle Sirius when the oldest living Black male had lived at the Castle with Asterion instead of at Grimmauld Place with his mate Remus. Crouched on the ground in the midst of the rubble from the dummy and powered plaster from where one large body had hit the wall with enough force to
overcome the cushioning spells were Elias and Charlie with the intense businessman’s teeth clenched around the dragon tamer’s windpipe, Elias growling low and the threat clear. If Charlie didn’t submit his fellow dominant would rip out his throat, any possible distress Asterion might feel at losing his newest mate far from Elias’s mind.

Conceding, Charlie went boneless submitting to Elias as the top dominant. Growling again in one last warning, Elias let go of his now-subordinate mate then climbed to his feet and walked over to his sub, claiming his mouth in a searing kiss. Today Elias’s passion and slightly broader frame had triumphed over Charlie’s long arms and cut, wiry strength.

Asterion instantly and instinctively went limp in submission to his top dominant, kissing him back with vigor despite still being angry over the fight, especially as Charlie was still lying injured on the floor and Elias himself had limped badly while stalking over to where Asterion and Severus had come to a halt just inside the door.

Pulling away gently, not wanting to incite Elias into erupting again, Asterion tugged him over to one of the padded benches lining the wall flanking the door. Pushing him down, Elias going along with his mate who he could tell coming out of his instinctual haze was not pleased to say the least.

Taking in the damage to both himself and Charlie who was being seen to by Severus as well as the room where Asterion had spent so much time with his Uncle, Elias concealed a wince.

Their bed was going to be extremely chilly tonight if Asterion doesn’t forgive them and quickly.

Casting a diagnostic, Asterion made a harrumphing sound under his breath at the results. Charlie certainly didn’t pull any punches.

“Congratulations.” He said with his father’s iconic snark. “You’ve managed to tear several tendons in your right knee, shatter your radius, dislocate your shoulder, and collect several bruises and lacerations.” Striding over to his father’s side, he colluded with Severus for a moment over both dominants’ conditions before taking a couple of potion bottles and returning to Elias’s side. “Here,” he thrust the bottles at Elias who shot them back without argument.

Binding the arm in place until they could set it properly once Charlie had been treated, Asterion gave a pouting Elias a peck on the cheek and a sigh before going to assist his father with his more severely injured mate.

“How is he?” Asterion asked, his voice pitched low with worry. His second mate was used to injury with his work as well as the childhood injuries from being one of a large group of siblings. That he wasn’t moving or making much noise after the fight shook his submissive to his bones.

“He’ll survive.” Severus said tersely, black eyes narrowed as his wand moved in precise, sweeping movements over the Englishman’s six-three body. “The fight was more vicious than I expected, though because of that you’ll likely not see a repeat from the two of them. Rows are inevitable but not another major altercation. Their Dovahim simply won’t allow it due to the severity of Charlie’s injuries.”

“Good.” Asterion choked out as he waved a hand and began spelling potions directly into his mate’s stomach, not willing to take a chance that Charlie would have issues swallowing from the livid bruising left on his throat by Elias’s fangs and teeth. “Having to deal with this every time I mate will be bad enough without current mates fighting each other again and again over who gets to top when I go on heat.”

Severus nearly gagged at the reminder of what would happen when Asterion had his full complement of mates in order to get pregnant. Once in a while he would hear or worse see the proof
that the mutt had a major impact on his son and every time it turned his stomach. Asterion’s occasional lapses into vulgarity being a definite sign of Sirius’s influence.

Charlie stirred, opening his distinctive bright blue eyes and squinted up at his mate’s sire, who was enjoying an irreverent thought over his son having a definite type thus far in his mates: fierce redheads with blue eyes.

“Anyone get the identification number of the hippogriff that flattened me?” He asked gruffly, his natural humor shining through.

Asterion rolled his eyes and handed Charlie a restorative potion for his throat, the only one he wasn’t able to just spell into him as it needed to traverse the neck passage to repair any internal damage from having a pissed-off dominant threatening to rip out his throat.

“I’ll be fine.” Charlie assured his darling in his pain-roughened voice. “Elias didn’t break anything permanently.”

“Not through lack of trying,” Severus observed under his breath, still reeling from the amount of damage the other fighter had managed to unleash on a dominant that wrangled dragons for a living and had an older and four younger brothers...plus his harpy of sister. It just went to show that when it came to their submissives no dominant should be discounted.

…

That night Elias slid into bed behind Asterion, the submissive turning his back to the top dominant when he came into the room, curling up closer to Charlie. He couldn’t snuggle with his dragon tamer out of fear of exacerbating his injuries but he came as close as possible without actually touching him. That it took him further from Elias was only a plus.

Elias stroked one hand down Asterion’s back, kissing him lightly on the temple before whispering in his ear.

“Going to stay mad at me?” He asked.

Asterion huffed under his breath before turning to glare suspiciously at his top dominant.

“Going to nearly put Charlie into a coma again?” Asterion asked sarcastically.

Dominance fights were one of the points where his logical mind head-butted into his Dovah instincts and could potentially cause a disaster. His instincts knew that his mates needed to fight and sort out their hierarchy for the future happiness of their mateship, and Charlie hadn’t seemed resentful or hateful towards Elias in the little time he’d been awake that day after all the potions Asterion pumped into his system. However his logic stated adamantely that fighting between grown wizards was a worthless exercise in barbarity.

It wasn’t the first time he struggled between the two though it was the first time he’s had to fight with himself seriously since he chose Elias weeks ago.

Elias sighed, wrapping his arms around his little love.

“Not likely, no.” He admitted. “But not impossible either. Fights between Dovahim, even mates, can be deadly. I can’t promise that I’ll never seriously injure Charlie or any other mate again because I can’t see the future.” Elias squeezed Asterion, giving him a comforting hug as they laid still in their bed. “But I can promise I’ll try to never widow you, whether you’ve already bonded the chosen mate to you or not.”
“Ok,” Asterion whispered, turning his head and giving his mate a little kiss. “I can live with that. But try to keep your redheaded temper under control.”

“I’ll try.” Elias chuckled nipping at the shell of his mate’s ear. “Sleep.” He ordered. “It’s been a long and trying day, you need to sleep if you’re going to meet with Lord Malfoy tomorrow.”

Asterion gave a little groan.

“Thanks for reminding me.”

“Anytime love.” He laughed, lightly shaking the bed in the process. “Anytime.”

…

Asterion and Lucius hunched – elegantly in the case of the ever-lordly Lucius – over a large table that was strewn with reams and scrolls and tomes of parchment. Before them was a concise listing of laws broken down into three categories with short summaries of their key points and purposes. The purpose of the list was as simple as it would ultimately be profound:

All were on Asterion’s chopping block.

One-thousand three hundred and seventy-seven laws passed by the Wizengamot that had in turn spawned over six thousand by-laws and close to six-digits of policies.

Each and every law, by-law, and policy dealt with the same three core issues:

Creatures, beings, and spirits; child welfare; and lastly muggle/magical separation.

While they all were issues Asterion had intended to reform before his inheritance in one way or another, coming into his inheritance as a submissive Dovah had pushed him to look deeper at the law. Realizing that he wasn’t just the product of a mateship by so-called “Dark” “Restricted” Creatures but one himself had put a sense of urgency and immediacy to an ephemeral idea. Asterion had been raised to be the Lord Black Prince and in turn return his Houses to their former glory.

He wasn’t satisfied with that, not anymore.

And while he never thought he would actually run for Minister, it no longer was an out-of-the-question proposition, depending on how much opposition he will face for his three reforms.

The idea was simplicity itself, and in that way would appeal to much of the general populace of Wizarding Britain, replace those one thousand three hundred and seventy-seven laws and their trailing amounts of by-laws and policies and replace them with a far simpler Code.

Honestly, he didn’t anticipate much problem with the first Code the: Wizarding Children’s Welfare Act or WCWA at all. Not with his cousin’s abuse being an open-secret at this point with the approaching muggle-trial and the general temperature of politics in the post-Voldemort era. Both Wizarding Wars had left large amounts of Wizarding orphans, many of whom fell through the cracks following the First War. It was Asterion’s intention that that never happened again. The potential of creating another Tom Riddle was just as likely as another Harry Potter if not more so.

The WCWA also represented the fewest amount of sweeping changes, with less than twenty laws being affected, a far cry from the two hundred seventy-nine that are involved in the most complex of the three Codes the: Equality and Safety of Sentient Beings Act or ESSBA.

It chafed at him to leave the most important to him personally for second but he knew it would also
face the most challenges and by leaving it for the Summer Session next year it gave him time to cement his political bloc and create alliances. Also giving the reappearance of Voldemort and his merry band of idiots more time to fade in many minds that would resist giving any freedoms towards creatures who in some cases fought on the “losing” side. A funny distinction to Asterion who thought after his reading and how wars had impacted him that there was no such thing as a “winning” side in war, even a cold war that played out mostly out of the public consciousness. After the dust settled, everyone loses in a war.

Somewhere between the controversial ESSBA and the easily-enacted WCWA stood the adjustments to the Secrecy or separation laws. Half of the work will already be done by passing the WCWA but much of retooling the Secrecy Act would be hindered without ESSBA. For example, many shop owners refuse to employ what they consider half-breeds or Dark Creatures which forces them into the muggle world – putting the Magical world at possible risk of exposure. But if those same people could find employment and humane treatment in the Magical world there was no reason for them to leave it in the first place.

Retooling the Secrecy Act would be the finishing touch on Asterion’s three acts and would solidify the still-shifting Wizarding Britain into a much more cohesive whole that didn’t ostracize a large portion of their population both human-creature hybrids and muggleborns.

Though to many purebreds the first was still preferable to the latter even though many hybrids like other dragon-kin species that were cousins to the Dovahim were still under a death sentence if discovered.

“It’s ambitious to say the least.” Lucius said with a sigh, after he’d finished listening to Asterion’s explanation and reading his detailed notes and plans.

His protégé had finally let Lucius into his confidence over just what he was planning to do as the Lord Black Prince. Asterion was savvy and poised enough that unless he was planning something he had no real need for a mentor. Let alone one of Lucius’s caliber.

Asterion Severus Black-Prince had been raised from the cradle to be a Lord including all the training he’d need to navigate the Wizengamot and Wizarding Society.

Politics however required a different kind of training and navigation when it was being played with on such a large scale.

That was where Lucius came in.

No one knew how to maneuver the political waters of Wizarding Britain better than Lucius Malfoy. His detractors had many things they could use to poke holes into his public persona, his political acumen was not one of them.

“Well.” Asterion said with a good-humored jab at himself. “I am a Black.”

“Yes,” Lucius said with a piercing look. “You are that.”

One could almost say there wasn’t any Prince or Snape to be found in him. Almost. He’d felt the sharp edge of Asterion’s disdain at times – both directed directly at him and not – and was very familiar with the biting combination of snark and piercing sarcasm that could only come from Severus.

“This will revolutionize Wizarding Britain.” Lucius sank back into the armchair behind him. “If it gets passed. Which as things stand is unthinkable.”
“I know.” Asterion admitted, looking over the piles of parchment that added up to over five years of work and research. Pretty much since just after Sirius came back into his life with stories of his cousin Harry – and his living situation. “But…”

“But?” The Malfoy Lord prompted with an imperiously arched brow.

“Broken into three separate Acts each introduced in consecutive Summer Sessions…”

“Where the harder-nosed WM’s” Wizengamot Members, not including Lords who hold entailed seats. “Are vacationing outside of Britain.” Lucius smirked, having used that same weakness to his advantage several times.

Only a quorum of Lords is required to hold a session and vote on and pass laws. The elected or appointed WM’s which included the Heads of various MoM departments and the Minster and their advisers were all later additions to what used to be known as the Lords’ Meet or Lords’ Council and were not required to be present. Though if present they did hold a vote.

Some like Professor Dumbledore always attended, which used to be the only thorn in Lucius’s side. Now however it would work to their – or rather Asterion’s – advantage as the WM’s who are never absent are also the ones who are most likely to go along with his proposed changes.

“And those who are most likely to either agree with my ideas or are easily swayed will still be present.” Asterion finished the thought. “Agreed. It helps that with this coming Session being my first time present they won’t be expecting me to have anything to present, especially with my age.”

Lucius made an agreeing noise in his throat as his brows furrowed lightly in thought. Asterion had already made a good choice in mates as a submissive thus far. But there was still room for improvement.

“Speaking of your age.” Lucius wavered for a moment at the sharp look his protégé pinned him with, effectively drawing his attention firmly away from the table’s contents. “It is a…reason for concern.”

“How so?” Asterion’s tone was deceptively mild. He thought he had an inkling where Lucius was going with this line of conversation and if his suspicion proved true he was going to be hacked off. His father had already had conversation after conversation over Lucius’s behavior and attitude towards his own son possibly having mates older than him if he is selected by a submissive Dovah who needed more than one mate.

He better not be trying to poke his aristocratic nose into Asterion’s own mateship or there would be hell to pay.

“I do not pretend to understand the Dovah instinct to mate.” Lucius said with a sigh, rubbing one thumb along the silver head of his cane. “In fact I have a hard time coming to grips with the entire culture. However, your choices of mate could have an impact in on your goals with these Acts.”

“Be careful, Lord Malfoy.” Asterion’s voice turned into an icy-replica of his father’s at his most displeased with a student. “The area you are treading can be quite hazardous.”

Lucius nodded to acknowledge the warning before pressing on regardless. His son hadn’t been interested in his opinion when it came to his inheritance, or anything really now that Draco has seen the near-ruin Lucius choice as a young man to join the Death Eaters had almost led them too. He could only hope Asterion was savvy enough to take his advice in the manner it was meant.

“You have chosen wisely in your Elias.” Lucius conceded with a wry smile. “I wasn’t sure how a
Dublin businessman would acquit himself in high society but he has performed well, all things considered. He would make an excellent Consort – “He held up an imperious hand. “I know Dovahim do not need to wed to cement your mateships but if you want to be a successful political force you must consider wedding at least one of your mates. The public tends to want stability from their reigning leaders, marriage and family gives that to them like nothing else.”

“I will…consider it.” He forced out between his clenched jaws. His inner Dovah was taking Lucius’s studied neglect of Charlie as an insult to his second mate. One that he was having a hell of a time refraining from answering with fangs and claws. “Anything else?”

Seeing the barely-concealed anger brewing behind eyes that have turned almost utterly black, Lucius wisely bit back his advice on the proper age range for his remaining mates.

Something told him Asterion would take that about as well as Sirius had taken Lucius’s participation in the Ministry battle…and Lucius really didn’t need a broken nose or jaw from a Dovah-powered fist.

It didn’t go with his bone structure.

“In that case.” Seeing that there was no further commentary being supplied by his so-very-human companion, Asterion bid him good day. “I will see you at the next Wizengamot Meeting.”

…

Asterion shifted, his mates’ heads turning instantly towards him as his wordless anxiety coursed through their bonds the moment the ramshackle home came into view.

Meet the Family hadn’t gone all that well last time, at least at first.

He wasn’t looking forward to a repeat, no matter that he’d met Charlie’s family at Harry’s birthday or that they’d seemed perfectly pleasant people…for the most part.

There would be a new one here to start with, Percival one of the middle brothers who’d been absent from the party.

And Molly Weasley sort of made him…ache.

He loved his mother Regulus, loved that he cared enough about Asti to do whatever was necessary to ensure his survival, that he’d be safe and cared for at Castle Black, even making certain that there was a portrait of himself at the Castle for Asterion to turn to for his comfort and wisdom.

But he’d never known what it felt like to be wrapped up in a maternal embrace until he’d met Molly Weasley, the matriarch instantly wrapping him up in her arms that smelled like baking bread and sweets when they were introduced, the woman drawn to Asterion – much as she was to Harry – the poor orphaned lambs that they were – her words, not his.

She made him miss things he didn’t even know there were to miss…and a part of him no matter how quickly stamped down, had deeply resented her for it, for making his mother come up short in comparison just by dint of not being physically present in his life.

That she was now his mother-in-law only missing a formal ceremony…well.

He wasn’t quite sure how to handle that any better than he did her husband’s boggling – and mind-blowing – condescension towards muggles.
Oh, he knew Mr. Weasley or anyone else saw it that way, saw his obsession with gadgets as being condescending, but the fact remained that like a great many other purebloods, Arthur Weasley for all his “love” of muggles never deigned to learn their language and terminology for the things he was so fascinated with, reminding Asterion very much of an indulgent parent admiring the strange inventions of a not-particularly-bright child.

Which when combined with his lingering social-anxiety issues, albeit those had been alleviated to a degree by the consistent support of both his family and his mates, made for an uneasy Asterion going into Meet-the-Family Round 2.

“You’ll be okay, little love.” Charlie came over, taking one elegant hand in his callused and scarred mitt and caressing it gently as Elias wrapped his arms around their mate from behind encasing him in his silent-but-unbending support. “They don’t bite, and they’re only magical humans, not a creature in the bunch.” He snickered a little, then added: “Well, at least with Ron at school anyway…I’m pretty sure that boy is half-giant with the way he eats. If he were here you might have had to worry for your fingers, especially if they got in the way of whatever dish baby-brother was reaching for at any given time…”

…

“…and furthermore,” One of the Dovah Mentors continued to pontificate to the gathered group of Mentors and Asterion’s family to discuss the success or failure – thus far – of Asterion’s mate hunts. “Mr. Prince’s culling of dominants in such great numbers…”

Charlie couldn’t take it anymore.

They’d sat there and listened as Mentor after Mentor stood and talked and waffled about how his mate had chosen to conduct his hunts. They’d talked about the maze, the venue, the sending away of dominants to await the next hunt, everything it seemed. And at least one Mentor appeared to have a problem with each and every point.

He didn’t need to be a legilimense to figure out what was going on and if the rising color in his fellow dominant’s face was any clue, Elias had cottoned on as well.

They were attempting a witch-hunt over how much leeway submissives had during their hunts…and they were using Asterion as a lightning-rod for it.

Not one of the baby-faced spoiled brats who made a game out of cutting down dominants and being as cruel as possible. No. They were using Asterion.

Asterion who had little by way of family to protest the treatment unlike the majority of those baby-faced bitches with their slutty clothes and spoiled attitudes.

The Mentor Body – at least some of them – wanted a firmer hand with submissives.

And they were going about it all wrong.

Apparently he wasn’t the only one who’d have enough if Asterion’s sudden interruption was any indicator.

“Excuse me.” Asterion said softly, with a deceptively-sweet undertone that made the hair on the back of his mates’ and father’s necks stand on end. “I’m new to” he waved one hand expansively. “All this. What exactly is the point?”

His Mentors – both permanent and temporary – Tafari, Roberts, and Christianson quickly lowered
their heads or hid their mouths behind a raised hand to conceal their amusement. They’d allowed the
more “traditional” Mentors to drone on and on, knowing that either Asterion or Severus would step
in eventually. They’d warned the others that trying to use Asterion as an example of a submissive
being allowed too much leeway during meetings was a mistake.

Especially with the results of said meetings being so being the norm.

But their counterparts were stubborn and didn’t listen…as usual.

“The point.” A Mentor with a thick Spanish accent sneered down at Asterion. “Little boy is that
more dominants have lodged complaints over your behavior than any submissive previously.”

Charlie and Elias let out nearly-identical scoffs, clearly remembering some of the worse examples of
submissives in the previous years.

“You can’t just send away over half of the dominants at once, lad.” Another barked. “It simply isn’t
done.”

Asterion gave a shark-toothed smile. That was exactly the objection he’d been waiting for one of
them to voice.

“Really?” He drawled, sounding quite a bit like his father, to Severus’s clear amusement. “Do the
names Janine Richards, Sylvia Brown, or Lydia d’Orlain ring a bell to anyone?”

A few of the Mentors glanced at each other in confusion while Christianson just laughed, clearly
remembering that last fiasco.

With a soft “pop” and a flick of Asterion’s wrist a thick folder appeared in his hands. His father had
warned him before his first hunt that such a confrontation might occur. Asterion had applied his
same dedicated research ability to mate hunts – of all kinds – as he had to the laws he wanted to
reform. With help from his mates, various dominants, his parents, and his own Mentors he’d
compiled a list of the hands-down worst examples of mate hunts anyone could think of.

“Janine Richards.” Asterion’s voice remained soft though now there was a fine thread of steel
running through it. “Held her hunt just after her sixteenth birthday. One the first day sent away all
of the dominants over twenty. All that remained were less than a dozen dominants, including two
females that she dismissed immediately.”

As a few of the Mentors began to get red-faced and splutter, Asterion continued on despite the noise.

“Sylvia Brown. Held her hunt at her family home. Insisted that every dominant undergo a “pain”
test to prove their worth. Over ninety-percent of the dominants present left immediately, most
lodging complaints over her behavior.” Asterion flipped another page in seeming boredom. “Lydia
d’Orlain. Allowed her parents to “introduce her” to a “respectable” dominant outside of a hunt.
Suspected of having been abused before being freed from her bond, has yet to take another mate or
agree to a hunt.”

As a few of the Mentors began to get red-faced and splutter, Asterion continued on despite the noise.

“Bianca Granestine.” Now every dominant present including his father flinched, clearly
remembering the landmark meeting that ended up changing Dovahim society. “Demanded that the
dominants present spend a night with her, most coming out disfigured or scarred, over fifty
dominants injured before the Mentor in charge put a stop to it and referred her to a mind healer for
evaluation…she’s currently locked away in the Janus Thickey Ward with no hope of recovery.”

Asterion arched a brow as he tossed the folder into the middle of the large meeting table.

“I think you have bigger problems to worry about than my hurting a few feelings.”

“That’s beside the point.” Mentor Rivera tried to bluster as the Head Mentor Roxburgh flipped
through the compiled reports, having had it passed over to his place at the end of the table.

“That’s exactly the point.” Elias said with a roll of his eyes.

Charlie nodded. “Submissives are getting out of control with the lack of open hunts requiring
accountability and discretion, or their parents are, either way it’s something most everyone here can
agree with. However, our mate isn’t part of the problem.”

Before things could spiral out of control, Roxburgh looked up and over at his friend and asked a
rather pertinent question.

“Benjamin.” Mentor Tafari looked over at Roxburgh at the sound of his name. “How many injuries
and deaths have resulted from young Asterion’s two hunts thus far?”

The mates all smiled Severus settling for a smirk. They were all well aware of that particular statistic.

“Thirteen injuries.” Mentor Tafari answered after looking up the figure on his ever-present notepad.
“No deaths.”

A hush fell over the Body. They’d heard from the Black-Prince mentors that the teen’s unusual
methods had had an interesting side-effect but they hadn’t really believed it. Not until the numbers
were shoved in their faces. Short of “arranged” hunts proctored by parents, there rarely was so low a
toll on the dominants as they competed for a submissive.

“In that case.” Roxburgh said ponderously after a long moment. “I would say it was time to retool
our mate hunts once more to integrate some of young Asterion’s choices. At a later date. Asterion,”
He nodded towards the family. “I hope you enjoy what’s left of your night, you should expect my
owl, I would like to learn more about your selection process.”

Standing, Asterion and his family all bowed, merely nodding in Asterion’s case due to his station,
and took their leave of the Mentor Body.

…

The scandal of the year at Hogwarts started before the term ever really began.

In fact, the seeds of it were sown months before, the very first time Asterion reached out to both
Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy as the Head of House Black, seeds that were tended and treated with
care all through the summer during tutoring meetings, lunches, and family dinners, culminating in
many ways with the back-to-school shopping trip that included all four of the Black Family
descendants still attending Hogwarts.

Ron Weasley was likely the most reluctant of the group, followed by his sister who had thrown the
fit to end all fits when she was told that Harry was not interested in dating, courting, or otherwise
being involved in a romantic relationship until he was finished with school. That this was due to a
creature inheritance was implied but not outright stated, as wizarding society in many ways had a
“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy regarding one’s creature status. So long as they weren’t pillaging the
local muggles, the Ministry was generally content to leave them be. But make waves and they’ll come down on a magical creature like the wrath of Merlin himself.

Asterion, letter by letter, nudge by nudge, had drawn the Blacks together – even though not a one of them in school carried the name, engendering in all of them a shared sense of family and heritage that had long been missing in the outer-branches of the Black Family.

He was the Lord Black-Prince, and already proving himself a much better one than most in recent memory.

So when a gossipy Pansy Parkinson went in search of her beloved “Drakey” only to find him ensconced in a compartment filled to brimming with all kinds of half-bloods and blood-traitors including Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, Ginny Weasley, Neville Longbottom, and that awful disgrace of a squib’s daughter to the mighty house of Slytherin Mafalda Prewitt…well.

Her screech could be heard all the way at the school and the train had barely left London.

Other friends to the eclectic group took it much better, swallowing the “Asterion” excuse with little trouble, especially those who were wise enough to remember that it had been Asterion Black-Prince who had stood with Harry Potter and helped him defeat Voldemort at the Battle of the Atrium, even if they ignored all the other avenues of power the Black-Prince Lord had at his fingertips.

He wasn’t one to trifle with, especially if one was still a student.

Hermione had been fascinated by all the interweaving lines of kinship that connected the varied group, while the Zabini brothers would overlook just about anything to be allowed in the presence of a submissive outside of a normal hunt.

Which had led to Draco’s – as the unofficial co-leader of the little group of relations along with Harry – making the decree that Harry wasn’t to be left alone with either boy, due to the same excuse given to Ginny: he wasn’t interested in a courtship at this time, since it wasn’t as if any of the young Dovahim were about to go spouting off about him wanting to wait to mate and have young until after school.

The four of them weren’t the only Dovahim in the school either, bringing the second wave of gossip about regarding Asterion Black-Prince’s far-reaching hand.

Due to his father resigning his post, Hogwarts had found itself in need of a potion’s instructor, a post often filled if possible by a magical creature so that newly inherited students had a safe place and a safe teacher to go to about their often unique needs.

Under pressure from their newest member, the Board had also created a new position, that of a guidance counselor who was there to help the students deal with the mental and emotional toll having a torturer for a teacher the year prior had taken.

The two positions ended up being filled – though unknowing to the majority of the school population – by a mated female pair of Dovahim who were past the age of having children themselves, with their own young having either married or mated or otherwise flown their nest. Madam Gina became their new Potion’s Mistress, with the now-senior Professor Sinistra took over as Head of Slyterin, with Gina’s submissive mate Yvette coming on-staff as guidance counselor. While not the only married and/or mated staff members, they were the only ones who’s spouse was also employed by the school, leading to a great deal of speculation on the part of the school populace.

And so time went on.
The four Blacks from Sixth Year all banded together for Care of Magical Creatures, mainly due to Draco being unwilling to allow Harry to attend any class without at least one of them present…to keep Blaise and Julian in check if nothing else.

Draco trusted his friends…but he didn’t trust any unmated dominant Dovah around who he had quickly shifted from the “enemy/nemesis” column in his mind into the “younger cousin/protected” column upon both Asterion’s (and his mother’s) insistence and his own instincts coming into play.

He didn’t like Harry well enough to be interested in mating him…besides the other Dovah really having the wrong bits for him, but he would keep him safe while he was under his care.

Or else Asterion would have his ass, and that was only if he beat his mother Narcissa to it first…

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