Disclaimer – All characters and settings are the property of JK Rowling and her various publishers/agents. I'm just playing around for the fun of it.

Rated R for language, violence, sexual situations, and because I can….

This is the sequel to Harry Potter and the Sword of Gryffindor (as my beta so kindly reminded me to inform you!). If you haven't read that story yet, well, get moving. This one is going to make little to no sense unless you do!

Chapter 1 –

Harry Potter had always hated summer, until this year. The final summer before he turned legally of age in the wizarding world was perhaps the best summer he'd ever had. Of course that was probably due in part to where he currently was.

The white sands of the secluded French beach were magnificent, but not as magnificent as the sight rising out of the Atlantic waters. Slick, wet, blond hair, a handsome face with smiling grey eyes that seemed to take in everything around them, a lean, hard body, its usual paleness tinged with pink from the sun, and covered only by the slimmest of green Speedos available - this was the sight his eyes were feasting on, and it had him stretching the fabric of his own red Speedos. He couldn't resist the urge to climb to his feet and lock his lips onto those of his blond god.

"Mmpph…I should wear these more often." Draco Malfoy said as Harry wrapped himself around the blond man.

"If you did that, we'd never get anything done." Harry told him, pulling back a little and smiling at his fiancé.

"So you are enjoying this trip after all?" Draco smirked as he led Harry back to their towels.

"Naturally, Malfoy." Harry said, flicking his head so that his hair got out of his eyes. He hadn't worn glasses since the Battle of Hearly Manor, somehow his vision had corrected itself that night and he'd been glad of their absence ever since. He smiled as Draco set his wet (and lovely) tush on the towel and stretched out with a sigh as the sun's warmth began to soak into him. Harry sat down on the towel next to him, not really caring if any of the people around them saw the bulge in his Speedos.

"Isn't this much better than sweating in some damn meeting chamber at the Ministry or dealing with your red-headed friend's latest exploits in the world of Quidditch or Granger's endless lectures about all the books you have in the library at the manor?"

"Draco, you were right." Harry gave in with a sigh. "I needed to relax or I'd have been hexing everyone within sight."

"That's the advantage of being who we are, Harry." Draco said from his position, smirking at the sky. "We're Potter and Malfoy, two of the most powerful, rich, and gorgeous men in the wizarding world. Thousands of children dream about being like us, wizards and witches three times our age quiver in anticipation of our next words, and every member of the media dream of getting an exclusive interview with us. When we say we're tired and are going to take a break, no one dares to deny us what we want."

"You know." Harry said after a moment, "There's some part of me that says I should be arguing

with what you said but for the life of me I just can't understand why."

"See." Draco said with a chuckle. "I still say we demand to have that dratted hat re-sort you for your last year."

"Now, now, love." Harry smirked back. "However else are we going to keep the Gryffindors out of our hair if I don't know what they are up to?"

"My dear spy." Draco said, and Harry lost all control, finally letting out the laughter he'd been holding inside.

"Oh dear." Harry said after a few minutes, wiping the tears of laughter out of his eyes. "If Ron or Hermione had heard that they'd have been throwing me into St. Mungo's claiming I'd been possessed."

"I've always said that both your friends have sticks up their asses all the time." Draco said seriously, only setting Harry off on another round of laughter. A shadow fell over them and they both looked up to see an older wizard and witch, both wearing old fashioned one-piece bathing suits looking down at them. They had surprised looks on their faces.

"Pardon me." The wizard said in a thick French accent as they looked up at them. Draco had risen onto his elbows while Harry was sitting up. "I couldn't help but recognize you, young Mister Malfoy and thought I would welcome you back to France. It has been quite some time since we last met."

"Yes, it has." Draco said, standing up and holding out his hand in greeting. The old wizard took it and politely shook it. "Mr. Gallenfry I believe?"

"Precisely!" The old wizard seemed delighted. Harry stood as well and shook the man's hand. "You must be Mr. Potter! We've heard of your engagement. Our congratulations! I'm Pierre Gallenfry and this is my wife Margot Gallenfry."

"Pleased to meet you, sir, ma'am." Harry said, politely taking the woman's hand and kissing it. Draco did the same, greeting her as well.

"It's been several years since you last visited with your parents. How are they doing?" Margot Gallenfry asked politely.

"They are well, but have chosen to stay in England for the summer." Draco said smoothly. He'd explained to Harry that sometimes the polite fiction of having chosen to stay in England was a better explanation than that the Ministry would not allow them to leave quite yet.

"Ah, yes, of course." Pierre said, politely accepting the fiction. "How long will you be staying in our wonderful part of the world?"

"Sadly we must leave tomorrow." Draco said. "Harry here has family visiting and we must really be there to greet them. We just needed a few days away from all of the hustle and bustle."

"Understandable." Pierre said. "Both of you have assumed quite impressive duties for being so young. Your parents must be proud."

"They are." Draco said firmly. "I do seem to recall you had a daughter. How is she doing?"

"Deidre?" Margot said softly, a frown appearing on her face. "Naturally you wouldn't have heard. She's decided to wait until she reached twenty before showing her rebellious nature. She's

gone and shacked up with some muggle like a common-born witch. I expect she'll wake up soon enough and return to her family. We'll let the muggle keep the child she's carrying of course and arrange a decent wedding for her. It's quite embarrassing really."

"Deidre?" Harry asked, stifling a groan. Sometimes things were just destined to rebound on him. "You wouldn't happen to know the name of the boy she's seeing would you?"

"Doosely or something like that." Margot said in an offhanded manner. "They live in this god-awful place in Surrey. I really can't understand young people these days, no offense meant."

"None taken." Harry said, looking over to Draco. Draco's smile and slight nod told him to go ahead.

"Actually, it's quite a coincidence to meet you here." Harry said. "My Aunt, she's my mother's sister, is preparing to visit our home tomorrow with her son and his future wife. It's quite the family scandal you see. My mother's side has squib blood in them. My mother was the first witch in the family in generations from what I understand and my Aunt was quite horrified at the idea of having wizards and witches in the family. Silly muggle superstitions really. Well when Aunt Petunia's son, Dudley, managed to get a young witch pregnant and bring her home it caused quite a row. My poor Aunt is finally having to come to terms that her family is part of the magical world, so she's bringing Dudley and his girlfriend Deidre to visit."

"Did you say Deidre?" Pierre whispered in surprise while his wife covered her open mouth with an elegant hand. He looked closely at them and realized they had the same elegant, aristocratic lines to their faces that Draco had, but with dark black hair. Quite a handsome couple, really.

"Yes, I did." Harry said with a soft smile. "Dudley's last name is *Dursley*, by the way, not Doosely."

"Oh my." Margot said, her hand moving to grasp her chin and a smile forming. "Pierre dear, doesn't this change everything? I mean this Doodely boy, he's got squib blood, and he's the cousin of Harry Potter no less!"

"Well, he still isn't as acceptable a match as a pureblood wizard." Pierre said with a slight frown. "Still, family connections to the Potter family really can't be all that bad of a thing, especially since her older brother has married a pureblood. Why, we might just consider it as getting some fresh blood in the family!"

"Of course!" Margot said with a pleased grin and slight giggle. She looked back at the two boys and smiled even more. "You two absolutely must join us for dinner tonight. We're staying at the Mar-San-Leandre. Dinner at seven o'clock?"

"We're honored." Draco said, inclining his head slightly with a low bow. The older couple moved off, chatting happily about their daughter and Harry just shook his head.

"I'll never understand you purebloods." Harry moaned, and this time it was Draco who fell over from laughing too hard.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

As Harry and Draco climbed out of the magical limo that had brought them home, and the driver followed them up the entrance with their bags, Harry realized he was very glad to be home. The Gallenfry family was quite…aristocratic…and dinner had been nearly an interminable affair with

Harry spending as much time trying to answer Margot's questions about the Dursely family without making them out to be total ogres. It was quite difficult, really, but thanks to the past year with Draco it was now possible for him to lie without giving himself away.

"Harry! Draco!" Hermione screeched as they entered, rushing over to give both of them hugs. She was starting to show a little, and she had taken to hiding her growing stomach with larger witch's robes. Ron followed her, shaking both of their hands with a warm smile. His animosity towards Draco had all but disappeared over the first few weeks of summer, something Harry was infinitely glad about.

"Kreacher, get their bags and take them to their rooms." Ron ordered as the old house elf walked into the room. The ancient creature scurried to obey. For some reason he'd taken to Ron's ordering him around and seemed very happy with the red-headed wizard's abrupt orders.

"So how was France?" Hermione asked as they moved into the sitting room. Both Harry and Draco were wearing muggle clothing, cargo shorts and t-shirts, that showed off their sun-tinged skin quite well. "You both look so much more relaxed."

"It was great." Harry said with a smile, sitting down on the couch with Draco sitting next to him. Ron and Hermione sat in separate armchairs. It was so hard to guess their relationship. Sometimes they acted like they were dating again and other times they were just good friends.

"Very relaxing." Draco added with his own smirk.

"Well, poor Jeremy is going crazy." Hermione said.

"As is Pansy." Ron said with a snort. "Your little jaunt off to the French countryside has upset their preciously balanced schedules and they've been working like devils to fix things."

"Where are they?" Harry asked warily, leaning forward and looking around as if he expected them to appear with loads of paperwork.

"At the Ministry and Gringott's." Hermione answered. "Pansy is meeting with Mr. Weasley to finalize the account transfers that will be taking place later this week. Now that you're turning seventeen, Harry, everything has to be finally transferred to your name. She said she's going to have to get you secluded for two hours straight to do nothing but sign papers. Jeremy is meeting with Minister Milieu to schedule some meetings the Ministry wants you both at. Fudge was spotted last week in Scotland and that's set off an uproar. They want you two to meet with some aurors about that and then there's the International Wizards Conference. They want to initiate both of you into that organization. Then there's the Hogwarts Board of Governors meeting the day after Harry's birthday. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley want you guys to attend since they'll be doing the final interviews of the top three candidates."

"Enough." Harry said firmly. "Why don't we wait for the two of them to get us all depressed with this stuff. How did you two enjoy the last few days?"

"Oh, we didn't do much." Ron said. "I've been busy with the Cannon's practices. We've got some new strategies that I thought up. The Coach thinks they might work and we've been working hard on them."

"I've been reading in the library." Hermione said quickly, but a frown appeared on her face. "Harry, I have to ask you. Do you think the blacks left any Dark Arts stuff in there? I get so uncomfortable every time I go in there. I actually feel like I don't belong and there's something

in there that doesn't want me to stay. I just go in, get the book I need and then go somewhere else to read it. I've never felt that way in a library before."

"I'm not sure, Hermione." Harry said quickly. He knew what it was, but he'd never guessed the marker stone for a blood oath would have this affect. "Maybe Draco and I will have time this summer to look into it and see what we can find."

"I'll ask my father." Draco said. "He probably will be able to figure out what could cause such an effect."

"Oh, good." Hermione said firmly. "Then I won't worry about it anymore. So, Harry, you ready for your Aunt's visit?"

As if her words had summoned them, Kreacher suddenly appeared in the room announcing that the expected guests had arrived outside. Harry sighed gently before standing up. He'd really wanted to change before his relatives had arrived, but they were early. Draco gave a disgusted look at his own clothes before disappearing upstairs. Harry wished he could join him. Instead he followed Kreacher to the entryway, where he could see his Aunt, Cousin, and future cousin-in-law standing nervously just inside of the doorway. Aunt Petunia gave a frightful glance at the diminutive house elf, Dudley shied away from it, and Deidre just smiled at the creature.

Deidre looked much like her mother, with thin, aristocratic features, long jet-black hair, and piercing blue eyes. Harry smiled at the guests as he moved forward to greet them with Ron and Hermione close behind them. Dudley seemed to recognize Ron and shrank back against Deidre even more.

He'd lost enough weight and no longer looked like a whale, but he was still big. His hair was a little longer now as well. Aunt Petunia looked just the same, but she was standing there, looking at what she could see of the house with an appraising glance.

"Aunt Petunia!" Harry said with as much cheer as he could. "It's good to see you!"

"Harry dear." Petunia said with a genuine smile. She let Harry take her into a gentle hug before he turned to face his cousin.

"Dudley, you're looking good!" Harry said. He'd vowed he'd be polite and friendly until Dudley stepped wrong.

"Harry." Dudley said, shaking his hand limply. He looked terrified.

"And you must be Deidre." Harry said, turning to the young witch who, like Hermione was showing her pregnant state. She was a few months further along.

"You're….you're Harry Potter." Deidre said excitedly. For a moment Harry thought he was going to faint.

"Yes, and you're Deidre Gallenfry." Harry said with a smile. "Welcome to the family. Would you care to join us in the sitting room? I will have some tea brought. Kreacher, get their bags upstairs to their room and have Leemie bring some tea and crumpets to the sitting room."

"Yes, sir, Master Potter, sir." Kreacher said, snapping his fingers for the bags and then disappearing with a pop.

"What…what is that thing?" Dudley stuttered.

“One of our house elves.” Harry said with a smile. “Oh, how rude of me. I forgot to introduce my friends. Everyone, these two people are my best friends Hermione Granger and Ronald Weasley. I believe you’ve met Ron before, Aunt Petunia, but Hermione here is probably the smartest witch in school. Her parents are muggle dentists.”

“Oh, a pleasure to meet you.” Aunt Petunia said, grinning genuinely at Hermione. Dudley just nodded his head to Ron, who was looking at him closely, as if waiting for him to make a mistake.

Harry took control of the situation once more and led them into the sitting room. Aunt Petunia seemed quite astounded at the luxurious appointments of the manor, and Harry was very glad she hadn’t seen it when he arrived here for the first time. She’d have died from disgust at all the filth that had filled the place. Another house elf appeared with tea and got busy serving their guests as Hermione answered Aunt Petunia’s questions about her parents. Dudley was staring in awe at a moving portrait of Mundugus Black, a great-uncle of Sirius’. Deidre was staring at him with wide eyes. When there was movement at the entryway to the sitting room, her eyes got even wider when she recognized Draco Malfoy, now wearing an elegant lounging robe of emerald green and black velvet.

“Draco Malfoy?” Deidre whispered in a horrified voice.

“Deidre Gallenfry!” Draco said charmingly and crossing the room to embrace her. “It is a pleasure to see you again. I take it you are the witch who has managed to capture the heart of Harry’s cousin?”

“Ye…Yes.” Deidre stammered as Draco crossed the room to sit next to Harry.

“Well, congratulations and welcome to the family I guess I should say.” Draco replied with a smile.

“Oh, yes, you two are getting married aren’t you?” Deidre said, still shocked.

“What?” Dudley said in surprise, nearly spilling his tea. “Two blokes can’t get married!”

“Dudley!” Aunt Petunia said far more sharply than Harry had ever remembered her speaking to her Dudley-kins. “What did I tell you about manners?”

“Sorry, mum.” Dudley mumbled into his tea. “But, I mean, can *you* get married?”

“In the wizarding world, yes we can.” Harry explained patiently.

“Oh, um, congratulations I suppose.” Dudley mumbled, still looking down at his tea.

“Thanks, Dudley.” Harry said with a smile. It helped that Dudley had a miserable expression on his face. “Congratulations to you also. Deidre is a nice young lady.”

“Thanks.” Dudley mumbled as he took a sip of tea. He was looking sideways at the crumpets the house elf had brought. His fingers twitched twice, then he sighed. “Might it be possible to get an orange?”

“Of course.’ Harry said with a smile, snapping his fingers. A house elf appeared and he told it to bring an orange for Master Dursley. Dudley took the orange a few moments later and thanked the house elf politely before beginning to peal it.

That was when Jeremy and Pansy appeared. Dudley nearly dropped the orange as Pansy walked in with four feet of stacked parchments floating behind her and Jeremy walked in with about

twenty scrolls floating behind him. Both of them had celebrated their seventeenth birthday in the last week or two and were now able to use magic outside of school.

“Harry! Draco!” Pansy exclaimed with a smile, ignoring all the other people in the room. “It’s about time you two got back from France! Harry, you absolutely must get all these accounts signed before your birthday! There’s nearly three hundred million galleons that have to accounted for and transferred to your control!”

“Not to mention your proxy papers for the Hogwarts Board of Governors chair.” Jeremy added. “There’s also the Ministry committees that you’re sitting on that require your signature and then the establishment of your office in Diagon Alley and the property transfers that must be completed as well as the induction paperwork for the International Wizard’s Conference.”

“Pansy! Jeremy!” Draco barked impatiently. “We have guests, all that will have to wait until morning.”

“Oh, sorry.” Pansy said with a blush, then she noticed Deidre sitting there with wide eyes. Truth be told, all three guests had wide eyes while Ron and Hermione were sniggering into their tea cups. “Deidre? What a surprise! Are you the young witch that has captured the heart of Harry’s cousin?”

“Pansy?” Deidre asked with wide eyes before jumping up to hug the blond Slytherin girl. “Oh Merlin! It’s so good to see you again!”

“Hermione, come on!” Pansy said as she hooked an arm around Deidre. “Let’s go have some girl talk. It looks like we get to have two baby showers instead of just one!”

The three girls left the room, leaving Harry staring at them. Aunt Petunia looked like she wanted to follow them, but instead asked Harry about the paperwork that was still floating in the middle of the room.

“Oh, just my inheritances now that I’m coming of age.” Harry said with a negligent waive of his hand. He summoned Kreacher and told the house elf to take everything into the downstairs office. Jeremy sat in the chair vacated by Hermione. Dudley asked about their trip to France, a look of jealousy evident in his eyes, and Harry took great delight in talking about the luxurious hotel they’d stayed at for a few days.

Yep, revenge was sweet, especially when it didn’t involve dark magic or anything else like that. Seeing Dudley’s face light up in jealousy at the things Harry now enjoyed, that he Dudley had no real chance of enjoying on his own was all the revenge Harry ever needed for overcoming the torment his cousin had inflicted on him. He even vowed to make sure to share some of the wealth with Dudley and his unborn child. Knowing that it came from Harry, the boy he had tormented for so many years, would drive Dudley nuts. Harry wasn’t surprised when Draco leaned over and whispered into his ear.

“Revenge, Malfoy style.”

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Happy 17th Bir**thday**

Ha**r**ry Potte**r**

Even though Harry couldn’t see the banner with his back to it, he knew it was there as he stood

greeting the guests. Lucius and Narcissa had pulled out all the stops for this event, the birthday signaling his arrival into the world as an adult. The entrance to Malfoy Manor was brightly lit. Everyone was wearing splendid dress robes, and Harry's hand *hu*rt.

Shaking hands with three hundred-some people can do that.

Lucius stood at the head of the greeting line, smiling and resplendent in silver dress robes with black trim. The Malfoy crest was emblazoned over his left breast and gleamed in the bright candlelight from chandeliers overhead. Next to him, Narcissa stood tall and graceful in her elegant silver and gold dress robes, the very essence of feminine beauty. Harry stood next to her, in his own dress robes. This time a deep crimson with gold piping, the Potter crest above his left breast. Draco stood beside him in robes similar to his father's but with green trim instead of black. The final guests had arrived and were passing through the doorway after handing Harry small presents wrapped with shining gold paper. It joined the other three-hundred-odd gifts on the table behind him.

For the first time in his life he actually groaned at the thought of opening presents.

Never mind. Pansy and Jeremy could do it, except for those that had come from people he actually knew and considered friends. As the last guests entered the grand ballroom, Lucius motioned for Harry and Draco to lead the way. He was smiling at the sigh of exasperation that escaped Harry's lips.

The man was taking great delight at Harry's reaction to all the grandeur and ceremony.

The wizarding band Weir*d Siste*rs had struck a pompous march as Harry entered the room with Draco's arm in his right arm. Behind them Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy positively gleamed as every eye in the ballroom turned towards them. Harry tried not to blush, and succeeded for the most part as people began to applaud.

All he wanted was a nice, quiet birthday party with the Weasleys. But nooo. Molly had been so busy planning this event with her new pal Narcissa that there was no hope of him escaping. At least the band moved on to one of their hit songs as soon as the doors closed behind him. Harry moved to the head table as his guests began to move to their assigned seats at the other tables.

Lucius had insisted that for the night, Harry would take the head chair at the table, a seat normally occupied by Lucius himself. The Aurors stationed inside the room, just like those outside, were all hidden so well that Harry could barely spot them. The Ministry had not liked the idea of this party, but no one had dared object after Lucius had offered to pay all the overtime salaries for the Aurors who were guarding the festivities.

With Draco at his side Harry took his seat, followed shortly by everyone else at the hall. With a clap of his hands, reminiscent of Dumbledore at every year's Welcoming Feast, food appeared on every plate. As Harry dug nervously into his food, he stole glances at those sitting at the great table with him.

Besides the Malfoy's, the entire Weasley family (except the still imprisoned Percy) was there. Molly was sitting next to Narcissa and both were beaming with pride at the gloriously decorated ballroom. Hermione sat with her muggle parents, who did nothing but stare in awe at the room, and look nervously at the food that had appeared on their plates. Aunt Petunia was sitting with Dudley and Deidre near the end of the table. Deidre was looking very comfortable, but the other

two obviously felt out of place. Professors Snape, McGonagall, Sprout, Trelawney, and Lupin were also seated at the main table. To Harry's horror, he'd learned that Lupin and Snape had begun dating and they were now sitting close together, heads often leaning in towards each other as they whispered something.

Lupin was even wearing new clothes, but Snape's hair was still greasy.

Blaise, Crabbe, Goyle, Pansy, Millicent, and several other Slytherins were at a table, as were Seamus, Padma, Lavender, and several other Gryffindors. The rest of the hall was filled with Ministry officials, the head goblins from Gringott's (at their own table), and just about every pureblood family not in hiding. There were even guests from overseas and from France as well. Hagrid was sitting next to Olympia, and Harry had learned last week that his old friend was planning on moving to France where she ran her school rather than be separated from her for anther year.

Altogether, this party would be a perfect opportunity for Voldemort to strike. But Harry wasn't worried about that. He'd used his skills, and the link with Voldemort, to check on the Dark Lord last night. Voldemort was still trying to get the fragment from the Sword of Gryffindor out of his chest. So far three healers had tried and failed. Currently he was in Russia trying some strange cure there.

Harry almost chuckled at the thought of how much had changed. No longer was Voldemort using the link to deceive Harry. Instead he was doing everything he could, and often failing, to keep Harry out. Every time Harry got through his defenses, a team of Aurors would follow Harry to the spot, only to find him gone.

It was quite entertaining actually.

"So, Harry," Lucius said, and the room quieted a bit at his voice. "I hear that you got your N.E.W.T. results the other day."

"Yes," Harry said, quite aware that most of the people were listening intently. "It was only a partial examination so that I can concentrate on other areas. Still, both Draco and I managed to get an 'O' on every one we were allowed to take."

"Which were they again?" Lucius asked, quite well aware of the subjects.

"Potions, Defense against the Dark Arts, Charms, and Transfigurations." Harry said with a slight smile. "I'll still have to take History of Magic, Care for Magical Creatures, and a few others at the end of the next school year."

"Still, quite impressive." Lucius said, leaning back in his seat with a pleased grin. "I must say I'm proud of both of you."

"Thank you, sir." Harry said with his own smile.

"Harry, dear." Narcissa said, leaning forward a bit. "Have you two finally decided on a date for the wedding?"

"January 1st, mother." Draco said with a smile of his own.

"Oh, excellent!" Narcissa said, immediately turning back to Molly. They were soon talking animatedly about exactly where the best place for the wedding would be. Ron, who was sitting closer to Draco, began a lively conversation about Quidditch that lasted for the rest of the meal.

Even Lucius joined the conversation offering his own opinions about various things.

After dinner, a huge cake was wheeled in by human caterers. It was nearly seven feet long and four feet thick. The silver dragon Harry had made for Draco rested on one end, roaring and belching fire as it entered the hall. The golden lion Draco had gifted to Harry sat on the other end, letting out its own roar in counterpoint to the dragon. They soon joined their masters as Harry and Draco approached the cake. In the wizard tradition, Harry used his wand to blow out the seventeen golden torches that were burning merrily. The cake itself was decorated as a Quidditch pitch, with a simulacrum of Harry grabbing a golden snitch in the exact middle. The applause was deafening as the torches went out and the caterers moved to cut the cake for the guests.

After the cake was done, and people had stood and begun to mingle, the tables disappeared at a clap from Lucius Malfoy. They were replaced by chairs and refreshment tables along the walls of the great ballroom, and people sighed in appreciation of the magic. Aunt Petunia held on to Dudley to keep from fainting. Then the *Wei*rd Siste*r*s began a lively tune and it was time for Harry and Draco to dance.

The stares of the assembled people no longer bothered Harry like they once had. All he had eyes for was the platinum-blond haired young man with whom he crossed the floor in an elegant, stately dance. At that moment, he decided that the party was okay after all.

Any party would be, really, as long as Draco was there with him.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

“I must say that it feels wonderful to be out of Malfoy Manor.” Lucius Malfoy said in an easy drawl as he relaxed in an armchair. Narcissa sat with him, sipping tea and beaming brightly at Harry and Draco, who were reclining on ‘their’ couch in the sitting room of Black Manor.

“Wotcher, Harry,” Tonks warned from her own seat. “He’s going to be making you sweet talk Minister Milieu into letting him move in here next!”

“I doubt that, ‘Dora.” Narcissa said with a chuckle. “He’d be arguing with Harry and Draco within a day and this place is not quite big enough to keep them far enough apart when they have their tempers riled up.”

“Narcissa!” Lucius said in mock horror at her revealing family secrets while everyone else chuckled.

“Lucius, dear, Tonks is family.” Narcissa reminded him and he just nodded.

“So, Harry, when is our shopping trip set?” Lucius asked with a gleam in his eyes.

“In about two hours.” Harry reminded him for the fourth time. “The Grangers should be arriving soon. Hermione’s in the garden and she’ll be inside to change soon.”

“She still hasn’t told them, has she?” Narcissa asked with a worried frown.

“No.” Draco said with a frown of his own. “I think she’s trying to get through the summer without them seeing her stomach. She’s fooled herself into believing they’ll be much more accepting if they see a baby instead of a big stomach.”

“How’s she gonna keep them fooled for the next week?” Tonks asked. “She wears muggle

clothes and it's obvious."

"I think she's going to tell them she can't go home." Harry told them sadly. "I even agreed to say we needed her here, although she hasn't even really told them about Voldemort and everything. She's been telling them it's a special school project. Her school letter came here so they wouldn't see it signed by the new Deputy Headmaster."

"Maybe we should talk to her, dear." Narcissa said to her husband. "Give her an idea of how parents might react. I mean, I can understand that her situation is similar to if Draco had gotten some muggle girl pregnant. We'd have been angry, but we wouldn't have disowned him or anything else that drastic."

"Unless he insisted on marrying her." Lucius said with a nod, and Harry stifled a groan. Draco was just looking at him with mirth in his eyes. He knew these type of conversations made Harry uncomfortable.

Kreacher showed up at that moment to announce the Grangers had arrived. They had been here before, once, over the summer so Harry told the house elf to show them to the sitting room. That was when a noise drew his attention to the other door, that led to the kitchen. Hermione came through that entrance, the knees of her jeans dirty from kneeling in the garden, and her gloves in one hand. Her t-shirt hid little of her pregnant state and had some dirt on it from the garden.

"Harry, how soon until my parents…" She started to ask, but her eyes went wide as her parents appeared in the other doorway. They smiled at her, while she stared at them in horror, one hand going to her protruding stomach. A sense of dread filled Harry as he saw surprise appear on Mrs. Granger's face, and a look of shock appear on Mr. Granger's face. Hermione gave a squeak and disappeared.

"Draco, would you please show the Grangers into the living room?" Harry said as he stood to follow her. "I'll bring Hermione down in a bit. If you will all excuse me?"

Harry didn't wait for their nods before racing after Hermione. Sure enough she'd locked herself in her bedroom. Harry called out to her several times but she was ignoring him. The basic unlocking spell didn't work as Harry pulled out his wand, so he went through the more complex spells. On the third try it worked.

"Leave me alone, Harry!" Hermione bawled from where she lay on her bed, head buried in a pillow.

"No, Hermione." Harry said softly, moving to sit next to her and put a hand comfortingly on her back. "We can get through this."

"You don't understand!" Hermione wailed. "They'll never understand about this! They'll try to make me stay home!"

"Hermione, you'll be seventeen in six weeks." Harry reminded her. "You'll be a legal adult then."

"Not in the muggle world!" Hermione retorted. "They'll be able to make me stay at home if they take me out of Hogwarts and Hogwarts can't keep me there if I never show up!"

"We'll just have to convince them otherwise." Harry told her. "Besides, once you turn seventeen you'll be able to do magic. You can whisk yourself away from there and enroll yourself back into

Hogwarts."

"But…" Hermione began, but Harry didn't let her.

"You already know enough that missing a few weeks will just mean that you have to study a little harder. You will do fine if that happens. But I don't think it will come to that. Your parents love you, we all know it. We will go down there and talk with them, and we'll share the whole truth with them. They'll see how important you are to the work we are doing, and they'll let you go to Hogwarts. Lucius and Narcissa have already offered to help. They'll stand there and tell them you are needed so they hear it from adults."

"Harry?" She asked softly, raising her tear stained face to look at him. "Have I ever told you that you are way to optimistic?"

"Get cleaned up and dressed in your robes, Hermione." Harry told her with a smile. "You're a witch and you belong at Hogwarts. Let your parents see that first and foremost."

"You win." Hermione said with a wan smile. "Now get out you bloody poof."

"You've been hanging around Ron too long." Harry shot back as he left the room. He took a moment to compose himself before heading downstairs. He entered a very frigid living room. Draco sat on a couch next to his parents, who were being glared at by a very irate Mr. and Mrs. Granger who were seated on another couch near them. Their glares switched to him as he moved to sit down on the unoccupied couch. Hermione would want to sit next to him.

"Harry, what is going on here?" Mr. Granger said angrily.

"Hermione will be down in a bit." Harry told them. "She's been out in the garden working most of the morning. It relaxes her. She's getting cleaned up and she'll be down in a moment."

"She's pregnant." Mr. Granger stated.

"That's for her to tell you about." Harry responded firmly.

"Weasley?" Mrs. Granger asked suspiciously.

"That's for her to explain." Harry told them. "Before you ask, he's at work today and won't be back until tomorrow."

"What CAN you tell us?" Mr. Granger asked.

"Has Hermione ever told you how she saved my life during our first year at Hogwarts?" Harry asked them. The surprised look on their faces showed that she never had, so he began to tell the story of the Philosopher's Stone. It turned out that Lucius and Narcissa hadn't heard the entire story either. It also required the story of Harry's connection to Voldemort and a brief explanation of the history of the dark wizard. The Grangers faces were pretty stony by the time Harry finished, their feelings well hidden.

"So this Voldemort would want to harm Hermione?" Mrs. Granger asked.

"Yes." Lucius told them. "But he'd have to get through a lot of defenses to get to her."

"Well, there was that time she got petrified." Draco admitted, earning a very dirty look from Harry. That necessitated the telling about the Chamber of Secrets. Their reaction to that story made Harry immediately launch into the tale of their third year. Unfortunately, it seemed both remembered the muggle news story about Sirius Black and were quite upset to learn that they

were sitting in his home. Harry tried to distract them by telling them about the Tri-Wizard tournament and how much Hermione's help had meant to him, but then that led to the tale of Voldemort's return at the Riddle graveyard and Cedric Diggory's death. They reacted very poorly to that, especially when Lucius told them the story from *his* perspective at the side of Voldemort. They almost left then, but Tonks had stumbled (literally) into the room from where she'd been listening and started to tell about Harry's fifth year.

That was when Hermione showed up.

"We're leaving, now." Mr. Granger said, standing up.

"Sit down, dad." Hermione answered, moving to sit next to Harry. Tonks sat on the other side of her on the couch and the Granger's glared before sitting back down.

"So, what happened this last year of school?" Mrs. Granger asked in a small voice.

"I fell in love, twice." Hermione said softly, and then launched into the tale of their sixth year from her perspective. Harry, Draco, and Lucius all filled in the blanks whenever she faltered. They reacted with very different expressions at different parts of the story, and Mrs. Granger broke into tears when Draco spoke softly of how Neville Longbottom saved his life. They had progressed to the train ride home when they were interrupted.

"The news said there was a terrorist attack at Kings Cross. Was that this Voldemort person again?"

"Yes." Hermione said. "Dumbledore died."

"Your Headmaster is dead?" Mr. Granger shouted. "That's enough, we're leaving now and you're going nowhere near that school ever again!"

"No, dad." Hermione said firmly, staring at her parents. "I'm sorry, but you don't really understand. There is a war on and I'm needed where I am! I am not going to run and hide. I've faced things that you can't even imagine and I've made valuable contributions to those who are fighting against evil! I'm carrying Neville's child and this child belongs in the world of wizards and witches, not in the muggle world!"

"She will actually be in more danger at your home than anywhere else." Lucius Malfoy added softly.

"Why is that?" Mr. Granger said sharply.

"Because of who she is." Lucius replied. "She's muggle-born, but has more power and more intelligence than most pureblood wizards and witches alive today. Along with the Weasleys, the name of Granger is prominent as a target of her opponents. Your muggle home, devoid of wards and protections, is the easiest place in the world for them to attack her once they find out she is not back at Hogwarts or under the direct protection of Harry Potter. They know she carries the child of Neville Longbottom and there are many who would rather see that line end than be sullied by muggle blood. Add in that the Longbottoms have long been thorns in the side of the Dark Lord and you add more of a reason for her to be a target. Unless you take your entire family into hiding, there is no safer place than Hogwarts."

"And even if you take her into hiding, there are ways to find her." Harry told them. "My parents were protected in hiding by the most powerful wizard of their time and they were still found and

killed."

"What about the child?" Mrs. Granger asked. "How can she attend school with a child?"

"Once her child is born, a governess has been hired." Harry answered for Hermione. "The child and governess shall stay in a flat I own in Hogsmeade. That is a village very near Hogwarts. Hermione will be able to visit every weekend and finish her last year of school."

"I don't like this." Mr. Granger said firmly. "But I can't see a way to stop you folks from taking my daughter away."

"They are not taking me away." Hermione said firmly. "I love you both but I knew you wouldn't react well to this."

"Why have you kept all this from us?" Mrs. Granger asked with tears in her eyes.

"Because you would pull me out of school!" Hermione said. "You never really liked hearing about magic because you knew you couldn't participate in it. I know you tried to be friendly with the Weasleys, but you always were moody every time you had contact with them! You wouldn't understand that not going to Hogwarts and being the best witch I can be would be giving into Voldemort's prejudices."

"I can understand that." Mr. Granger said softly. "That's probably the part I understand the best. Fine, you want to go, you go, but we *will* be a part of our grandchild's life."

"Oh, daddy." Hermione sighed, rushing over to hug her father. Harry led everyone else out of the room while the three of them hugged. They sat in the sitting room, talking softly for an hour until the three Grangers reappeared.

"Who is ready for shopping?" Hermione asked with a smile.

"Like you even need to ask, Granger?" Draco said with a smirk, earning him a dirty look from the girl.

The car was summoned and the group made their way outside. The two Aurors stationed outside the manor jumped into the front seat as the rest of them piled into the back. The trip to Diagon Alley was made mostly in silence, with people staring at each other rather uncomfortably. The trip through the Leaky Cauldron though, was quick, even with old Tom speechless at the sight of Lucius Malfoy and his wife walking through the tavern. As they moved through the streets of the wizard district, they were surrounded by murmurs and a wide space. Still it was a fun afternoon.

Hermione left with her parents to spend the last week at their home. She left willingly after both had given their word they would not stop her from returning, and Harry had promised to send Hedwig the night before just in case they changed their mind. Lucius and Narcissa were required to return to Malfoy Manor the next morning, and for the first time all summer Harry and Draco were alone in Black Manor. Pansy and Jeremy (who had started a most unexpected romance the week before) had taken off for a two-day vacation at the Leaky Cauldron. They used the time wisely, startling poor Kreacher when the house elf caught them making love on the staircase.

They had both had to stop laughing before they could continue what had been interrupted.

The rest of the week was taken up with the constant presence of Remus Lupin and Severus Snape. At least the pair only took up one bedroom now. They were helping Draco and Harry prepare lesson plans for the classes they'd be charged with. Although Draco was officially only

‘assisting’ Severus with potions classes for first year students, Severus had planned only to be present on the first day, leaving everything else to Draco.

Draco was extremely nervous.

For their last night of summer Black Manor was an extremely packed house. Every incoming Slytherin seventh year had shown up, as had every Gryffindor seventh year. Hermione’s parents had dropped her off with grudging nods for Harry. Ron had shown up, and Ginny was the sole sixth year in the house. The impromptu party that night was loud, boisterous and lasted so long that as Harry and Draco finally crawled into it bed, the sky was lightening with pre-dawn and Harry was very, very glad that the train would not leave Kings Cross until eleven.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

End of Chapter 1 -

An extra special treat for readers! I’ll be uploading the first two chapters of this story tonight! I would like to thank everyone who has reviewed HP & The Sword of Gryffindor. I was quite impressed with the number, and quality of the reviews. I hope this sequel lives up to the original!

This story has a lot of political intrigue, fights, dreams, love, hate, betrayal, and the kitchen sink as soon as I rip it out of the wall.

Now, instead of trying to type out responses to all the reviews, I’m going to give a few basic answers to some of the comments as well as the most common questions:

1. The Sword of Gryffindor is gone, destroyed. No one alive has the knowledge to re-forge it, so it will not be seen again.

2. Ron…well just wait and see. Those that hate him won’t be happy, and neither will those that love him. As for Hermione, all I can say is that she is fated to marry a Weasley, someday.

3. The Muggle Government will play a MAJOR role in this story.

4. There will be more Petunia and Dudley, but probably not enough to satisfy those that want to see more of them.

5. I really am insane.

6. I now have two complete sets of characters, many with the same names, but different ages and behaviors, combating for time in my head. It’s starting to send me batty.

7. I really, really hope y’all enjoy this!

Chapter Two –

It took two cars to get the entire group to Kings Cross Station in time. Poor Ron had waited until morning to finish packing his school trunk and as a result, almost made them all late. The large group of Gryffindor and Slytherin students was loud and boisterous until they passed through the barrier of platform 9 and ¾. Their happiness faded at the sight of the large marble monument that stood near the Hogwarts Express engine.

It was a memorial to Albus Dumbledore, and the events of just two months ago welled into the students’ memories. The platform was crowded with Aurors, MLE agents, and nervous parents waiting for the train to leave. In fact, the group of students from Black Manor was the last to

arrive. They group quickly turned their luggage over to the porters and boarded the train.

Hermione, the new Head Girl, headed off with Ron to the prefect's meeting. They were followed by Lavender, Seamus, Pansy, and Blais. Crabbe, Goyle, Draco, and the rest of the Slytherins went off to find their house mates. Ginny and Harry found a compartment full of sixth year Gryffindors, but it could only hold one more person. Harry told Ginny to join her year mates as he continued on through the train. Every compartment he checked was full, but everyone greeted him warmly when they saw him. Finally he found a compartment with two open seats and four small, very innocent looking first years, their robes devoid of house badges. He smiled gently at them as they looked up at him in worry and sat down next to a petite brunette girl.

"Hi!" Harry told them cheerfully. "Hope you don't mind but I got here late and all the compartments seem to be full."

"Hi." One of the two boys said bravely. "I'm Darren Creevy. This bloke next to me is Mikhail Karnov, his family moved from Russia a few years ago but he speaks pretty good English. The girl over there is Mirna Doodle, and the girl next to you is Alicia Silversmith."

"Nice to meet you all." Harry said in the same cheerful tone he'd used earlier. "Are you excited about attending Hogwarts?"

"Yes, sir!" Mirna said with a giggle. "Momma wasn't too sure about sending me with everything that happened last year but dad insisted it was safer than me not learning anything!"

"What happened last year?" Alicia asked innocently.

"How could you know not?" Mikhail asked with wide eyes.

"My parents are muggles." The girl replied. "We didn't even know magic existed until I got my letter!"

"I know how that is." Harry said with a chuckle, running his hand through his hair. He realized what he was doing too late because Darren saw his scar.

"OH MY GOD!" Darren shouted at the top of his lungs, pointing at Harry's forehead. "YOU'RE HARRY POTTER!"

"And you're Colin Creevy's youngest brother." Harry retorted as Mikhail and Mirna gasped aloud and Alicia looked confused.

"Are you someone famous?" Alicia asked shyly.

"Famous?" Mikhail exclaimed. "Every wizard in the world knows about Harry Potter! He's beaten You-Know-Who so many times the git is hiding out in fear instead of killing muggles and scaring everyone!"

"Who's You-Know-Who?" Alicia asked, even more confused.

"A very, very bad wizard you won't have to worry about, with any luck." Harry told her with a smile. "Now, calm down. I'm just another student. When I first went to Hogwarts I didn't know much more than Alicia here. I was raised by muggles too."

"I know all about that!" Darren said excitedly, reminding Harry of his oldest brother. "That's why I'm going to be in Gryffindor just like Colin and you!"

"The sorting hat decides that, most of the time." Harry said with a slight smile. The look on

Alicia's face led him to give her a brief explanation of the four houses and how the sorting hat decided which fit the student best.

"Yeah, but you better hope you don't get Slytherin." Mirna said firmly. "My Da always said that no good wizard ever came out of that house!"

"Better be careful, Mirna." Darren said in a low voice. "Harry's fiancé Draco Malfoy is a Slytherin."

"Oh." Mirna said with wide eyes. "I forgot about that."

"What kind of name is Draco for a girl?" Alicia asked.

"Draco is a guy." Darren said with a roll of his eyes.

"You're a poofter?" Alicia said in a horrified voice, moving away from Harry.

"OH MERLIN!" Mirna said pushing the girl away from her and back towards Harry. "You better lose that muggle idea that boys with boys is a bad thing real fast or you're never going to make it at Hogwarts."

"Okay." Alicia said in a very small voice. Harry decided to take some sympathy on her despite her comment.

"The wizarding world is very different than what you're used to." Harry told her gently. "As time goes by you will get use to the differences. The best thing you can do is ask questions when something that doesn't seem right shows up. That way you won't offend people so easily."

"Tha…Thank you." Alicia stuttered and Harry smiled down at her. Mikhail had pulled out a piece of parchment that was obviously his Hogwarts letter and was looking at it closely.

"I wonder who made us buy three different books for Defense Against the Dark Arts." Mikhail wondered aloud and Harry grinned.

"Don't complain." Harry said with a smile. "In my second year we had this idiot who made us buy all seven of his own books."

"That's funny." Mirna said as all four chuckled.

"My brother told me that the DADA position is cursed." Darren said proudly, and Harry wondered how soon it would take for his year mates to grow tired of hearing 'My brother told me…'

"Why's that?" Alicia asked, her curiosity coming back to the forefront.

"He said they always have a new professor each year." Darren explained and Harry smiled. "Last year they actually had a half-werewolf return. He taught in my brother's second year. He also said Harry Potter taught some first-year classes."

"I thought you said you were a student?" Mikhail looked at him suspiciously.

"I am." Harry told him. "Last year was a special year and I filled in for Professor Lupin. He's an old friend of my family's. He was good friends with my dad when they went to school together."

"So he's safe?" Mirna asked nervously.

"He won't bite." Harry assured her with a smile. That was when Draco opened the compartment

door.

“There you are!” He said in an exasperated tone. “We’ve been waiting in our compartment for you and you never showed up!”

“Well, excuse me!” Harry smirked back as the first years stared wide-eyed at the blond Slytherin. “I thought the lot of you forgot about me!”

“So you go slumming with first years?” Draco smirked.

“Be careful, Malfoy.” Harry said with a sly smile. “If you’re not careful you’ll scare more students away from Slytherin.”

“Oh sure, blame me because you insisted on Gryffindork.” Draco said, changing his smirk into a sneer. “Get your golden boy butt moving, Potter, we’ve got some snogging to get done before we reach Hogwarts.”

“Okay, you win.” Harry said with a smile. He stood up, waved farewell to the four first years who were staring at them with their mouths hanging wide open, and followed Draco forward.

“You know those four will be telling the story about the first time they met Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy for the rest of their lives, don’t you?” Draco asked with a smirk.

“Yep.” Harry said with a nod and smirk of his own. He noticed Justin Finch-Fletchey coming out of the bathroom and listening to their conversation “We have to let the common people have some excitement in their lives. Those four will go their grave content with having met our esteemed personages.”

The look on Justin’s face was priceless. Harry looked back and saw him rushing into a compartment with a harried expression on his face. There would be so many rumors around this year that the students should have plenty of gossip to keep them going. Draco soon led him to an oversized compartment filled with seventh and sixth year Slytherins. Over the summer, all of the sixth years in the compartment (who were all but two of the students in the year), had come to Black Manor to join the Blood Oath.

It was time for business.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Harry entered the great hall surrounded by his friends and house mates. Unlike years past, the Slytherin and Gryffindor houses were getting along quite well as the hall filled with returning students. With a nod to the table full of Professors, Harry sat down at the Gryffindor table and waited for the hall to fill up. It was filled with quiet chatter and he realized that all the students felt the absence of Albus Dumbledore. Still, Harry was getting used to missing more people each year, and he didn’t let it get him down as he listened to Ron grumble about waiting on the blasted first years before his golden plate would fill with food. Minerva McGonagall stood at last and waved her hand, opening the doors to admit the first year students, led by Professor Snape, his black robe billowing behind him.

Harry almost laughed out loud at the expressions on the first years’ faces as they followed the intimidating Potions Professor, and now Deputy Headmaster, into the great hall. Still, their gaze was soon transfixed to the magical ceiling showing a bright sunny day, and then by the tattered, worn Sorting Hat sitting on its stool. As they stopped in front of it, it burst into a new song, for a

new year.

*Anothe*r year*,* and more students to t*r*y me on!

*Anothe*r year*,* and a new Headmaster!

*We have g*rieved fo*r* Albus, but now it is time for mo*r*e!

Come little ones, on your heads try me on!

*To you*r places shall I send you,

*Whe*re the g*r*eat founders might wish you to be!

*Unde*r Ravenclaw's wings shall shelter *all those*

*Who value knowledge and lear*ning above all.

*O*r shall you be guar*ded by the badger* Hufflepuff,

*Whe*re confidence and loyalty cover*s all who come?*

*O*r shall you go to slipper*y Slythe*rin,

Master of Plots and Cunning?

*Then the*re a*r*e those who are b*r*ave, who know courage in eve*r*y fiber,

*They shall lea*rn to *r*oar *as G*ryffindo*r*'s lion

*Come little ones and t*ry me on, you*r* future you shall lea*r*n!

*As su*rely as the p*rophesies* thr*ee of T*relawney!

"Trelawney's had another prophesy?" Hermione whispered to Harry with a shocked voice. He just shrugged, glad his surprise didn't show any longer. Ron was quiet, with an odd look on his face, but Harry figured it was probably from an empty stomach. At the head table, the Professors looked confused for a moment, but Severus Snape ended that by calling the first name on the list.

This year the sorting took longer than usual since there were more first years, and a few older students who had not been sent by their parents the previous year. He paid attention when the four children he'd met on the train were called. He smiled and cheered when Darren and Alicia were sorted into Gryffindor, and also cheered with the Slytherins when Mikhail and Mirna were sorted into Slytherin. The girl seemed shocked, but her warm acceptance at the table, and the sight of Harry cheering for her, seemed to help her relax greatly. The sorting was finally over, and Minerva McGonagall, Headmistress of Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry stood to make her speech.

"I am very pleased to see so many returning, and new students this year." She said into the quiet room. "There will be enough time for speeches later, for now, it is time to eat!"

As she clapped her hands at the last word, the plates before the students filled with an abundance of food. Harry dug in almost as greedily as Ron since he'd missed the food cart on the train. Colin spent most of the meal patting his youngest brother on the back, and Darren beamed proudly at Harry and his brother. Several times during the meal, Harry managed to meet the eyes of the platinum-blond at the Slytherin table. He was happy at being back, but there was definitely something missing, something besides the presence of Albus Dumbledore. He realized what it

was as he dug into a piece of chocolate pie that wasn't quite as good as the one Kreacher made.

Hogwarts was no longer home, like Black Manor was.

Before he could feel depressed at that thought, Minerva McGonagall once more stood proudly at the head table. She looked through her half-moon glasses as the hall grew silent and she smiled at the faces looking up at her. When she began to speak again, Harry realized that a new era of Hogwarts was truly beginning.

"Now that we have all filled ourselves on fine food, I have a few things I must share with you." She said with a smile. "First, for all first-years, and for some of our more daring returning students, please be aware that the Forbidden Forest remains absolutely off limits to all students. Mr. Filch has asked me to remind you of all the rules that must be obeyed while at school, including no use of magic in the hallways. I suggest that those not familiar with the rules visit the list he has posted outside of his office. Some of our returning students might wish to remind themselves of this list as well."

She gave Harry a very direct look at this and several of the Gryffindors around him laughed before she continued.

"Now, for some changes to our teaching staff. I regret that I will no longer have time to teach Transfigurations due to my new duties as Headmistress. Therefore we are pleased to announce a new teacher, Nymphadora Tonks!"

Everyone clapped and Harry was surprised that he hadn't noticed the former Auror, and that she hadn't told him all summer. Then he realized that her hair was brown and she looked almost normal, which was why he hadn't noticed her before. At least, she looked normal until she tried to stand and knocked over her chair, generating a round of laughter before she righted it and sat back down, blushing furiously. McGonagall raised her hand for silence before continuing.

"Professor Snape has accepted the position of Deputy Headmaster. As such, he will have to cut back his rigorous class schedule and will be assisted in teaching his first year courses by seventh year student Draco Malfoy!"

The Slytherins went absolutely insane at this announcement. Even the Gryffindors joined in with good-natured applause as Draco stood and nodded at the crowd. Again, the room calmed down when McGonagall raised her hand.

"Professor Lupin has returned for a third year as Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor. As we had last year, we will continue intensive training for our upper level students, so once more seventh year student Harry Potter will assume the role of instructor for our first and second year DADA classes!"

This time the applause and cheers were downright deafening from all four tables. Harry barely kept himself from blushing as he stood and waved at the room around him. He sat back down with Hermione and Ron clapping him on the back.

"Now, I will inform our first year, and remind our second year students, that when Mr. Potter and Mr. Malfoy are instructing your courses, they have all the rights and privileges of full Professors. They will be able to give and dock house points as well as assign detentions. You will give them both due respect.

"House Quidditch teams shall hold tryouts in two weeks. All third year and above students are

invited to show up and try out for their House teams. DA courses will continue to be held twice a night and all students fourth year and above are encouraged to attend once per week. Professors Firenze and Trelawney will be joining Professor Sinistra in offering a stargazing and divination group each Friday night. Those students third year and above who are interested may sign up on a list posted outside Professor Firenze's office.

"Let me close by reminding you that Hogwarts continues to function in grave times. Our enemy has suffered a grave defeat, but we have also suffered losses. You can remain assured that we will continue to provide for your safety. Learn, study, but above all, enjoy your year!"

"First years Gryffindors follow me!" Seamus Finnegan called out as he stood from the table. Lavender Brown joined him in leading the Gryffindor younglings out of the hall. Hermione and Ron excused themselves to go check on their own rooms, and it was a few minutes before Draco showed up at his side.

"Hah!" Draco said with a smirk. "Looks like we still got two of those kids you were talking to on the train, Potter."

"You must be losing your touch." Harry sighed, earning him a playful slap from Draco. That was when Tonks joined them.

"Wotcher, Harry!" She cried, enveloping him in a hug.

"You sneak!" Harry scolded her with a smile on his face. "You didn't tell me!"

"Wanted to surprise my little baby." Tonks said, raising her hand to pinch his cheeks, but Harry stopped her in time.

"Leave the boy alone, clumsy." Snape's sonorous voice sounded from behind him and Tonks glared at him for a moment, before smiling.

"Are you still Head of Slytherin?" Draco asked the greasy-haired Professor.

"Naturally." Snape replied. "McGonagall served as Head of Gryffindor while Deputy Headmistress, so I will remain as Head of Slytherin."

"Who is Head of Gryffindor?" Harry asked.

"I am, of course!" Lupin's voice sounded from behind Harry. He spun around and embraced the werewolf Professor in a hug.

"McGonagall's going to have fits when you start recruiting Marauders." Harry smirked.

"There will be no such thing." Snape said in a stern voice. "The Headmistress has made it very clear to our dear wolf-boy that any hint of a new group of Marauders will have negative effects for him."

"How much money you got, Moony?" Draco asked with a smirk.

"Why do you want to know, Malfoy?" Lupin asked with a frown.

"Oh, just wondering what it's worth to you for me to keep Colin Freward in line." Draco said with an evil chuckle. "He was telling me at dinner about all the new products he picked up over the summer from Weasley's Wizard Wheezes."

"Really?" Lupin said, rubbing his hands together and his eyes gleaming until Snape's glare

caught his attention. “Oh, I mean, we’ll have to have a stern word with the boy.”

“Sure.” Draco said as they all laughed.

“Draco, it’s best if you two head off to bed.” Snape said after they’d calmed down. “You have your first class early in the morning.”

“You too, Harry.” Lupin added.

“Wotcher, Harry.” Tonks said. “It’s already getting late and knowing you two you’ll be exercising half the night away.”

“I did *not* need to hear that.” Snape groaned.

“Like you two won’t be doing the same.” Draco said, then scampered off as Snape growled and lunged at him.

“Sweet Merlin!” Harry yelled back at the group of older Professors as he followed Draco out of the hall. “He growled! Lupin must be rubbing off on him!”

They barely made it to their quarters before Snape could catch them. Harry prayed Snape wouldn’t come inside, and the quiet voice of Remus Lupin was probably the only thing that prevented that from happening.

Tonks was correct; it was a few hours before they finally got to sleep since they hadn’t used their bed in these quarters for two months. It had to be re-broken in.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

“Why are you so tired, Harry?” Hermione asked at breakfast. Harry had almost dozed off, and a drop of porridge was still on his nose. With a soft growl, he wiped it off and drank some more tea. He looked up and growled again at the sight of an energetic, happy Draco chatting with Pansy and Blaise. Harry brightened a little bit when Draco winced as he moved.

Good, he deserves a sore bottom for being so bloody cheerful after so little sleep.

“Just been real busy getting ready for the first day of classes.” Harry told her.

“Oh, yes.” Hermione said with a nod of her head. “You have your Defense against the Dark Arts class first thing in the morning.

“Yes.” Harry agreed. “First yeah Gryffindor and Slytherin.”

“You remember our first year class?” Ron said with a smile.

“What, Mr. Stutter-with-Voldemort-in-the-back-of-my-head?” Harry said with a smirk.

“Yup.” Ron muttered before stuffing his face with more sausages and crumpets.

“How could I forget.” Harry said with a smile.

“So what are you starting off with?” Hermione asked, and Harry looked to make sure no first years were close enough to hear.

“Well, I’m going to start them off easy this year with pixies.” Harry said.

“Harry!” Hermione screeched under he breath. “You remember when…”

“Yes, but I’m not bringing in live ones.” Harry said, calming her down. “I’m just going to go

over the basics of the creatures and then give them an essay."

"An essay on the first day?" Ron mumbled in shock. "You are *mean* Harry."

"Well, it was either that or ambush them all as they came in the door." Harry said with a shrug and evil grin. His two friends laughed at that thought. Of course Harry had noticed Darren Creevy eating up every word while trying not to laugh. He'd have to apologize for fooling Hermione and Ron later, but it was worth the price.

As breakfast was completed, Harry walked with Draco briefly. His Gryffindor friends had seventh year potions first class (except Ron who had Astronomy) and Draco had Arithmancy. Draco wished him good luck before they separated and Harry arrived at his class early.

The desks were arranged in rows on either side of two walls while there was an open space in the middle. His desk sat the far end of the third wall, facing the entrance and he went over there, sitting down and opening his lesson planner and grade book as the class filled up with very nervous first year students. He counted them as they arrived, and as the bell gonged indicating it was time to start he smiled realizing two students would be late. He rose from his desk and moved to stand in the center of the two sets of students. Gryffindors were sitting on one side, and Slytherins on the other, as was typical in mixed-house classes.

"Welcome to Defense Against the Dark Arts." Harry began, smiling at each side of the room. "I am Harry Potter, your teacher for the first year level."

That was when two students appeared at the door, out of breath. His wand was out in a flash and they were both bound with red glowing ropes, looks of shock on their faces. There was a gasp around the class at this, and stood there for a long moment while everyone turned to stare at him.

"Tardiness is not acceptable." Harry said, still smiling as he moved to loom over the two bound, and frightened first year students. "Mirna, Alicia, please explain why you were late."

"We got caught on the staircase when it moved and we couldn't figure out to get here." Mirna said in a rush. Harry moved his wand and ended the incantation, releasing the two girls.

"Very well, take your seats." Harry said, then grinned as he faced the class. "Five points from Slytherin and Gryffindor each. Next time it will be ten and a detention."

Groans filled the classroom and both girls blushed even worse. It was never good to be the students who first lost house points at the beginning of the year. Still, it was fun being the one to take the house points, even those from his own house.

"Now, let's get roll call out of the way." Harry said, moving back to his desk and picking up his grade book. "Before I call your names, let me explain that for this term you will be working in pairs. I will alternate your pairing at the beginning of each term so you will work with new partners. However, you and your partner will only receive one grade for each assignment. Each essay I assign will be worked on by both of you. If I find one person in the pairing doing all the essay work, I will require you to work on them in my presence to make sure you are working as a team. Any questions?"

"What if our partner refuses to help?" A Slytherin boy asked.

"Then you tell me and we'll work something out." Harry said. "If you don't tell me and I find out, and I will believe me in that, then you and your partner will receive failing marks for all

work turned in up to that point and will write your essays in front of me. I'm very busy this year and the idea of having to babysit two first years who can't figure out how to do their work on their own will put me in a very bad mood when I grade that essay. Is that clear?"

Everyone nodded their heads.

"Good, now for roll call. I suggest that when I call each name you stand up and move to sit beside your partner. They'll also be your partner when we are working on spells. Mikhail Karnov, Darren Creevy."

"But he's a Slytherin!" Darren Creevy cried out.

"Ten points from Gryffindor and detention with Mr. Filch tonight at 7:00 p.m.." Harry answered mildly. "If I hear one more comment like it will be double the points and two detentions. You will learn how to work with people in other Houses while in my classroom or you **will** fail this course. The first lesson in this year's Defending Against the Dark Arts is teamwork."

"Yes, sir." Darren said with his head down.

"Mikhail, will you go join Darren please?" Harry asked, and the Russian Slytherin smiled as he crossed the room, ignoring the dirty looks from the Gryffindors around him. It didn't matter, they'd all be mixed up soon enough. Harry continued calling out the pairings, all mixed perfectly between the two houses except for the last two names, both Gryffindors who rounded out the class.

Oh well, nothing's ever perfect.

"Now, who can tell me why this class is important?" Harry asked, and the room filled with hands in the air. He called on a young Gryffindor boy first.

"Because You-Know-Who is back." The boy announced with a smile.

"Wrong." Harry said, and all hands but one went down. He pointed to the Slytherin girl with her hand up. "Mirna"

"Because you never know when someone is going to use the dark arts on you or when you might meet a dark creature?" She said, her voice hesitating slightly.

"One point to Slytherin for an excellent answer." Harry said with a smile. "Mirna hit the answer right on the head. Voldemort is back, yes, and because of that we've had many attacks by people using the dark arts. Still, what everyone seems to forget is that there are *always* wizards and witches who are enamored with the dark arts, and dark creatures will always exist. Now, who can name some dark creatures?"

"Vampires." One Gryffindor boy said after Harry pointed to him, and he gave one point to Gryffindor.

"Dementors" Another Gryffindor girl said when called on, also receiving one point.

"Werewolves." A Slytherin announced, and was surprised when he didn't receive a point.

"Are all werewolves evil?" Harry asked.

"Of course." The boy replied.

"Isn't Professor Lupin a werewolf?" Harry inquired.

“Well, yes.” The boy said after a moment. “But he’s different.”

“Why is he different?” Harry asked.

“I don’t know.” The boy said after a moment of silence, hanging his head.”

“One point to Slytherin.” Harry said with a smile, “For knowing when to admit that you don’t know something. Now, let’s open your textbooks to page six and learn exactly what makes creatures innately Dark and what the exceptions might be.”

The class proceeded on from there, with Harry trying to explain to eleven year old kids that the world is not always black and white. It was frustrating, but he felt like he was making some progress. Before the class ended, he asked a few questions to see how much they had understood.

“So, Darren,” Harry asked, picking on the Gryffindor first. “Tell me this: If you saw Professor Lupin walking towards you in the hallway would it be okay to hex him?”

“No.” Darren said firmly.

“What if it was a full moon, he’d forgotten to take his potion, and he was in werewolf form? Could you hex him then?”

“Yes?” Darren half-asked in a weak voice.

“Five points to Gryffindor.” Harry said with a gentle smile.

“Mirna.” Harry said, turning to the Slytherin girl who was partnered with a Gryffindor girl. “If you were in the hills and saw a giant walking along his merry way would it be okay for you to hex him?”

“No.” Mirna said. “Not unless he was charging right for me.”

“Five points to Slytherin.” Harry said with a smile. That final point total brought both houses to an even gain of ten points for the class. Whew, it was tough not letting one house or the other get too many points in a class.

“Now, before you go, read pages fifteen through forty of your Standard Identification of Dark Creatures textbook and be prepared to discuss how to identify trolls, their abilities, their weaknesses, and how to tell if they are a threat to you. That last part is not in the textbook, but I suggest you meet with your partners to discuss it and come up with some good answered before your next class. Any questions?”

“Class dismissed.” Harry said as the bell rang. He spent the time in-between classes marking down which students had participated in the discussion and which had not. Those that had been quiet would be the first ones he called on next class.

The Hufflepuff/Ravenclaw passed much the same as the first class, although there was very little rivalry between the two houses. The Ravenclaw students seemed to grasp the point he was trying to make very quickly, and even the Hufflepuffs did better than their Gryffindor/Slytherin counterparts.

Lunch was busy. He ate with Draco in their private room, along with the Defenders. There were several new members to replace graduated students. McGonagall had been adamant that the group continue as long as Voldemort lived, and Harry had agreed with her. Besides, it was a very good reason for Draco and him to continue sharing private rooms.

After lunch was his Care of Magical Creatures class. He missed Hagrid tremendously, but Professor Grubby-Plank was doing an excellent job. It was different for Harry, having been a teacher in the morning but now once again being a student, but he adjusted.

He had a free period after that, and grabbed his invisibility cloak from Ron so he could watch Draco's first potions class. It was another Slytherin/Gryffindor combined class and the students were all nervous. Neither Snape nor Draco were in the room until after the bell rang, when both flowed through the door to Snape's office, robes billowing behind them.

"Put away your wands." Snape ordered in his dramatic first-year intimidation voice, Draco stood behind him, his eyes boring into the students fiercely as Snape continued. "There will be no silly wand waving in this classroom. Here you will learn the mysteries of potions, you will learn how to brew fame, boil glory, and even put a stopper on death. I am a Potions Master, and the school has finally learned what a waste of my time the lot of you are. I will not have to suffer through your explosions, your melted cauldrons, and your idiotic essays. Instead, Draco Malfoy here will take your hand and try to beat some sense into your heads on how to learn the magnificence that is Potions. Pray that I am not summoned to deal with you until your second year."

Snape turned at that and exited the classroom, his robes and cloak billowing behind him. In the silence that followed, Draco stood rooted in his spot. None of the first years moved as the silence grew uncomfortable. Draco just stood there for a long time, letting it continue until the first student, a Gryffindor moved.

"One point from Gryffindor for moving without permission." Draco snapped in an imitation of the departed Snape. "Now, who can tell me kind of potion would use Phoenix Tears? Ms. Doodle?"

"Healing Potion?" The girl said.

"Perfect!" Draco said, smiling slightly. Then he added "One point to Slytherin."

Harry let out a small snort, then wished he hadn't. Well maybe no one had heard.

"Can anyone tell me one ingredient of a potion that would help you detect invisible objects?" Draco asked with a smirk and Harry knew he'd been caught. Draco continued after a moment of silence. "Of course you can't. That's a seventh year potion. Now, pay attention to the board. This is our first potion of the year. It is a extremely simple, so unless you want to be the class klutz for the rest of your life at this school, I suggest you don't mess it up. Of course, Mr. Potter started out such a klutz that he ruined this his first year and it wasn't until I started tutoring him that he learned how to fix a real potion. My point is that I will *not* be tutoring any of you, so you had best get this right."

'Oh God.' Harry thought to himself. 'He's going to be making fun of me all year!'

Harry chose that moment to let himself out of the room. Draco'd already heard him, so he wasn't surprised at the door opening by itself, but several students looked at the door. A wrong move since Draco jumped on them immediately demanding to know why they had stopped copying the potion.

Dinner was funny for Harry as he listened to the Gryffindor first-years griping about their potions class. Hermione was having a hard time keeping from laughing, and Ron was shaking his head while muttering about smarmy gits ruining potions classes.

After dinner, Harry started the first two DA sessions of the year. He'd prepared a schedule of instructors for the course over the summer, but he'd be taking two per week himself. It went quite well until a fifth year Hufflepuff deflected a bat bogey hex and it hit a sixth year Slytherin who was working with another partner. He got that argument calmed down quickly and was very glad when the second session was over. He was very tired.

He still had two hours of homework to do, and he wondered how bad it would get when he started assigning homework that he had to correct as well as do his own. Draco had spent the time cross-checking the ingredient interactions of some new potion Severus was developing, and it wasn't until midnight that both boys crawled into bed, falling asleep immediately.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N – Yes, I know Creevey already has one younger brother, Dennis, who was sorted into Gryffindor. Guess what, there's no mention of other siblings (or lack thereof) so I can make my own Creevey brother up!

Chapter 3 –

As Harry entered the Headmaster's office, he was struck by how different it looked. Gone was the cluttered mess that seemed to personify Albus Dumbledore as well as the bowl of lemon drops. Parchments were neatly stacked on the desk, various items were neatly placed on shelves, and a new painting hung on the wall above the desk. It was the painting that drew Harry's attention immediately.

"Why, hello my boy!" the Wizard Portrait of Albus Dumbledore said in a jovial tone. "Quite good to see you! I hope you have not managed to earn the ire of the new Headmistress so early in the term?"

"No, Albus." Harry said weakly, a soft smile beginning to form on his face. "I haven't managed to upset her…yet."

"Let's hope it stays that way." Minerva McGonagall said sternly, the smile on her face as she entered giving lie to the sternness of her voice. "Have a biscuit."

"Yes, ma'am." Harry said as the portrait behind him chuckled. She motioned him to a seat, which he took as she sat behind the desk.

"How are your classes shaping up?" She asked him in a far nicer tone.

"Excellent so far." Harry told her. It was now three weeks into the term and things were going very well.

"As we expected." She told him. "You must really consider a career as a teacher. I managed to eavesdrop on a group of your first years in the library the other day. I must say I was quite pleased to see a table full of Gryffindor and Slytherin students all studying together and the essays they were working on sounded quite exciting for first year students."

"I've been trying to get them to understand the theory of things before we move into the practical work." Harry told her. "Remus and I talked about it over the summer and we agreed that understanding the 'how' and the 'why' before blasting away with wands would probably help them more than just picking up a wand and pointing at something."

"A very good concept." Minerva said with a smile. "Also one very fitting for your subject. Like I

said, you make a fine, natural teacher."

"Thank you." Harry said, trying not to blush.

"Yes, very well. Now on to why I called you here." She said after a moment. "Young Jeremy contacted me with a request for a pass for you and Draco early next week. He said the Minister of Magic has requested a meeting with the two of you. I know that Albus pretty much allowed you two to leave whenever you wanted, but I feel that is inappropriate so long as you are students. What is this meeting to be about?"

"Ministry business, Headmistress." Harry replied shortly. "No disrespect intended but it is not related to Hogwarts business."

"Is it related to Order business?" She asked, her raised eyebrow reminding him that Fawkes had chosen *he*r as the new head of the Order of the Phoenix.

"Somewhat." Harry admitted, shifting in his seat slightly. "It's dealing with some former Death Eaters."

"In what way?" She pressed him.

"The Aurors and MLE want to practice techniques in combat with Death Eaters. While Aurors and MLE agents know Death Eater tactics, they aren't as familiar with them as actual Death Eaters. Some of the former Death Eaters that voluntarily quit Voldemort's service are uniquely qualified to work with Aurors and MLE on developing new techniques that will be used against Voldemort's followers."

"Why hasn't this been brought to the Order's attention?" She demanded sharply, a look of anger on her face.

"I just learned about it yesterday." Harry lied. "I wasn't sure if the Order was aware since I haven't been allowed to attend meetings this summer."

"You are still too young." She told him firmly. She still held the belief that he was too young for regular meetings of the Order and now that she was in charge, she had removed some of the privileges Dumbledore had given, or at least those that she could remove without it becoming front page news.

"I am very much aware of your beliefs in that regard." Harry reminded her.

"Yes, so anyway, why is the Minister meeting with the two of you?" She demanded.

"He wants our opinion on who can be trusted among the former Death Eaters." Harry told her.

"I'm sorry but I can't see how your involvement will help in the matter. You will regretfully decline the meeting." She told him with a look of sympathy.

"Do you really want to do this, Minerva?" Harry said, pleased at her look of surprise with his use of her first name. He hadn't used it ever since returning to school. "I am a legal adult now, not a minor. I can sign myself on and off school grounds within reason, so long as classes or other obligations are not missed. For convenience sake, this meeting was being scheduled so I'd only miss dinner and DA meetings that I am *not* scheduled to instruct. Sure, there's a lot you can do in retaliation for me defying your wishes, but that will lead us both down a very uncomfortable road. We also both know that I can take all my N.E.W.T exams right now and earn full marks on

them. The only reason I'm here is to preserve the image of Hogwarts as a seven year school and because I want more than an 'A' in those subjects. I will not sulk about your opposition to my Ministry duties, I will not run off in a snit and I will not react out of anger. Lest you forget, we are on the same side here. We can do this so that we both maintain our dignity and respect, or it can be done the hard way. The fact of the matter is that I have never had the opportunity for a normal childhood ever since Voldemort attacked my parent's house. We both might wish things had gone differently, or that I might have had a normal childhood, but you know as well as I do that it has not been the case for me. The egg has hatched, Headmistress McGonagall, and as much as either of us might wish differently, I cannot go back into that egg."

"I see." She said after a few moments of silence. "Your response is not quite what I expected from you, but it is what I would expect from a mature adult. Very well, Harry. Please do me the courtesy of having your assistants inform me when you will be off campus, but my permission will not be needed unless it interferes with your regular classes."

"Thank you." Harry said, leaning back in his chair and relaxing a little. "They are under very strict instructions that short of an attack by Voldemort on the Ministry or Hogwarts my classes are sacrosanct."

"That will be all." She said dismissing him. He got up to leave with a polite nod of his head towards her, but her voice stopped him as he reached the door. "Oh, Harry, the next regular meeting of the Order is one week from Saturday. Please be in my office at 2:00 p.m. so that you can travel there with me."

"I'll be here." Harry said with a smile before leaving. His smile lasted all the way down to his next class.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Ron Weasley was frustrated. Actually, frustrated was not a way to describe how he was feeling at that particular moment. Hermione was the cause of a lot of the frustration, but she wasn't all of it. A lot came from Harry as well.

The Gryffindor Trio no longer existed in any real sense.

Hermione spent a lot of time alone, or studying with different Ravenclaw students. Harry spent most of his time with Draco (of course) or with others from his little "Defenders" groups, or gone to some meeting at the Ministry. The end result was that Ron had few people to talk to or spend time with.

Ever since the attack on Hearly Manor and the revelations about his relationship and seduction by Cho Chang, most of his fellow Gryffindors seemed to not trust him like they once did. Sure, he was Quidditch Captain and Head Boy, and he had a lot of duties with those positions, but his free time was still lonely. Hermione kept patting her growing belly and wouldn't even hear his offers of marriage anymore. She no longer showed up in his room, even though she now had the room next to his, and she never sought him out for comfort when she'd start crying.

That's why he found himself alone in the Hog's Head one Saturday. The Three Broomsticks was filled with students and he didn't feel wanted there, so he had gone to the less savory bar he remembered from fifth year. He was nursing his butterbeer, wondering if a mead might be better when a familiar face swam into view.

“Blimey, Oliver Wood!” Ron said in surprise at the new arrival.

“Ron Weasley!” Oliver exclaimed, crossing the room to shake Ron’s hand. He readily accepted Ron’s offer to join him and soon had a mead of his own.

“I saw you in the Cannons this year.” Oliver said after taking a swig of his drink. “Think they might hire you after you graduate?”

“Maybe.” Ron said with a grin. “They seemed to do well with some of my ideas.”

“Aye that.” Oliver said with a laugh. “They gave us a run for our money in the last match. I swear they must have talked to someone who knew my habits very well at goalkeeping.”

“They might have.” Ron admitted with a sheepish smile. “So what are you doing down here?”

“Oh, I was just visiting Madame Hooch.” Oliver answered. “She’s my mother’s cousin and really taught me some flying in my first year. I visit her every now and then.”

“I didn’t know that.” Ron admitted.

“So whatcher doin’ here instead of the Broomsticks?” Oliver asked him.

“Didn’t feel like being there.” Ron answered noncommittally.

“Where’s Harry? I didn’t see him there either.”

“He’s probably at the Ministry, or snogging Draco.” Ron muttered, deciding he really did need something stronger. The mead, when it came a moment later, was better.

“Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy.” Oliver sighed into his own drink. “Who would have thought little ole Harry could sink so low?”

“Don’t say that.” Ron said sharply. “You might make me laugh.”

“Tell me Ron,” Oliver said with a small smile. “Is it really true that they have no decency whatsoever and will shag in any place?”

“Oliver, you don’t know the half of it.” Ron said with a grimace, launching into the tale of all the times Hermione and he had caught them over the summer, and before. When he finished Oliver asked him another question.

“So, is it true that he’s surrounded himself with a bunch of those Junior Death Eaters?”

“They aren’t Junior Death Eaters anymore.” Ron said firmly, and then something occurred to him. “Although now I’d say they all acted like the Potter and Malfoy Personal Servants every time I saw them this summer.”

“Oi!” Oliver exclaimed. “You don’t think they are like forming another group like the Death Eaters are ya?”

“I don’t know,” Ron admitted, looking down into now empty fourth mead. “I heard something right after Dumbledore’s funeral that I just don’t quite get, but it makes me wonder.”

“Wonder what?” Oliver asked.

“If Draco might be seducing Harry to the Dark Arts.” Ron admitted, immediately regretting he’d said something like that to someone he hadn’t seen in years. But this was Oliver Wood! He could trust another Gryffindor, even if Hermione had refused to believe him when he told her about the

Prophecy he'd overheard.

"Why do you think that?" Oliver whispered, leaning closer to Ron so they wouldn't be overheard.

"Well, you see, I overhead Trelawney giving another *r*eal prophecy after Dumbledore's funeral. Only Harry and Draco were with her and I know they haven't told anyone since it's about Harry." Ron explained in a whisper.

"What was the Prophecy?" Oliver asked, still whispering.

"It was: *'Bewar*e the danger of Darkness being *r*eplaced with Darkness, stumble not lest the wor*ld be plunged for*ever *into evil!"*" Ron told him. "Look, don't tell this to anyone."

"Don't worry Ron." Oliver said, with wide eyes. "But what are we going to do? I mean if Harry were to go Dark, that would be bad for everyone!"

"I don't know." Ron admitted, pleased that Oliver had said 'we'. "But…oh crap, it's getting late. I have to get back. Listen, can I owl you?"

"Sure." Oliver said, then he told Ron where he could owl him. Ron left, stumbling a little from the mead, but by the time he was back at Hogwarts he was sobered up. He also felt better.

At least now he had someone he knew he could talk to about Harry.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

*F*ree

Harry Potter was feeling free as he soared above Hogwarts on his broom. Kingsley had sent an owl saying he was unavoidably delayed and cancelled their training session this morning, so Harry had a free hour. He'd been looking out the window of the great hall when he saw Madam Hooch fly by, a string of first years clumsily following behind.

That was all it took for him to race to his room and grab his broom. He was in the sky moments later and he wondered once again why he'd bothered quitting Quidditch. He missed it, but more than that he missed the feeling of freedom he got every time he kicked off from the ground. Up here he didn't have to worry about appearances, didn't have to be everybody's hero, or any of that. He could just be himself.

Down below he could see a group of third years returning from Care of Magical Creatures, and the first years that had been following Madame Hooch were putting their school brooms away. With a wicked gleam in his eyes, he took off in a dive for the little group. One of the girls screamed as she saw him streaking for them, grabbing the entire group's attention. At the last possible moment, he wrenched his broom upwards, the bristles of the broom almost touching the cowering head of one of the students. He embellished his climb by spinning, even as he turned back into another looping dive that ended as he landed next to the awestruck group of students.

"I don't recommend any of you trying those moves." Madame Hooch said in a disapproving tone, glaring at Harry. He gave her a sheepish grin, then a bow, and took off back to the castle at an easy jog.

It had been two weeks since his meeting with Professor McGonagall, and he was very happy with her change in attitude. There were no more attempts to shield him from things because he

was ‘too young’. There was also more respect from her when he voiced his opinions at the last Order of Phoenix meeting. The hunt for Voldemort wasn’t going well right now. He’d disappeared somewhere in Russia and was strong enough now to keep Harry from entering his mind like he had over the summer.

There was no Russian Ministry of Magic, per se. Instead it was a branch of the regular muggle government and run by muggles. They seemed convinced they could take on Voldemort without any help, and absolutely refused any help. Any news of activities in their region was impossible to obtain. A scolding silver dragon met him at the entrance and refused to be shooed away as he jogged to his private room. He’d been flying a little longer than he planned, and was now running late. Draco had a habit of sending the damn toy to fetch him every time he was late.

It was almost getting annoying.

As the portrait to their rooms opened, the dragon flew inside and settled on Draco’s desk. Harry absentmindedly patted the golden lion that was sitting on his own desk and made his way into the bedroom where a fuming Draco was waiting, already dressed in formal, non-school robes.

“You’re late, again!” Draco muttered.

“Sorry.” Harry said, putting his broom away and pulling off his own clothes.

“This is an important meeting and we’re going to be late!”

“I said I’m sorry!” Harry snapped in a moment of ire. He finished undressing and hurried into the bathroom for a quick shower. When he got out, he found a set of dress robes waiting for him. He pulled them on angrily and was finishing putting his shoes on when Draco came back into the bedroom.

“Your hair is still a mess.” Draco said in an annoyed tone.

“Then fix it!” Harry snapped back. Draco always got this way whenever Harry caused them to be late, but when it was Draco’s fault for them to be late he said it was ‘expected for a Malfoy to arrive in his own time’. Harry had yet to determine when it was ‘expected’ to be late and he largely expected that there was no pattern, just Draco’s ego.

“I will.” Draco snapped in response, and stormed into the bathroom, returning with a brush in one hand and gel in the other.

“Oh no you don’t.” Harry warned him with a glare. “No more gel! It takes days to get rid of the greasy feeling that stuff leaves behind!”

“But it is the only thing that works!” Draco nearly wailed.

“Give me that brush.” Harry said, snatching it from Draco’s hand and quickly swiping it though his hair a few times before standing up and leading the way out of the room. Draco let out an exasperated snort before following him. Their carriage was waiting for them at the entrance. The ride to Hogsmeade was made in stony silence.

“It’s still a mess.” Draco said as they arrived and left the carriage. Harry just glared before disapparating.

The Ministry building was as hectic as it always was, but people stepped aside as Harry stormed inside with Draco close behind him. They both had looks on their faces that made people wonder

what horrible thing had happened to cause them to be so angry. Harry almost wished someone would ask so he could tell them.

Harry's hair had made them angry.

Okay, it wasn't true, but it felt like nothing had been going right between them for the past week. Last night, Harry had even thought of sleeping in the second bedroom just to get away from Draco's seething ire. He tried to think what might have caused Draco to get angry but couldn't imagine what it had been. As the lift took them to the level of today's meeting, Harry's mind wandered over the week's activities to find when exactly Draco had started acting this way.

Oh CRAP. It had started last week when they'd met Oliver Wood after returning from a meeting at the Ministry. They'd stayed at the Three Broomsticks for a few drinks to unwind and Oliver had been there. Harry had talked to him for two hours before Draco practically dragged him out of the pub and back to Hogwarts. Ever since then Draco had been acting pissed off.

"Oliver Wood isn't even half the man you are." Harry whispered as they stepped out of the lift and headed down the hallway. Draco was now walking right next to him instead of slightly behind him as he had been all week.

"Just remember that next time you see him instead of ignoring me and my yawns for two hours." Draco murmured angrily, but then he wrapped his arm around Harry's and a quick glance showed that the blond was relaxing.

"I love you." Harry whispered as they reached the door to the conference room and opened it.

"Just keep repeating that mantra, Potter." Draco said with a smirk as they entered through the doorway and took their seats. That was when Harry noticed that there were several people there whom he hadn't expected. The Minister of Magic, Orrin Milieu, nodded at them as they sat in their seats near the head of the table and continued with what he'd been saying before they entered.

"…many years since the Prime Minister of Her Majesty's Government has graced us by attending this Ministry's meetings. So, without further ado, let me turn the floor over to him."

"Thank you, Minister." The dark haired muggle said with a slight smile. Harry examined him closely. He'd seen the man on the telly when he won his recent election to the post, but in person he looked more…vibrant. Middle aged, trim, with dark hair, he looked like the epitome of a British leader.

"I must say that I have been most impressed with what I've seen here so far." The Prime Minister said, glancing sideways at Harry and Draco, a slight frown forming on his face before continuing. "I know that in the past, relations between the rest of Her Majesty's government and this branch have been rather sparse, but in these changing times I cannot see that continuing much further. The attacks last year, and the recent spat of less-violent crimes in recent months has forced us to reevaluate the relations between the non-magical and magical communities."

A loud murmur broke out in the room at that statement, and Harry felt Draco's hand touch his right arm, the light tapping of two fingers sending a message. He lifted his right hand slightly to indicate agreement as the Prime Minister continued.

"Your good Minister here was informed this morning of the steps that will be made to assist us in

this evaluation, and we decided to inform you personally this afternoon."

"What steps?" Arthur Weasley said in a weak voice.

"We have appointed evaluators to inspect each area of this Ministry's operations. The ladies and gentlemen behind me will be assigned to your Departments that correspond to their areas of expertise. They will observe your operations over the next month and send make final reports on changes they believe appropriate. The Cabinet shall consider these changes and inform the Ministry of Magic of what we require."

Draco indicated to the Minister of Magic that he wished to speak and was recognized immediately.

"Mr. Prime Minister." Draco spoke coolly. "While we recognize that Her Majesty's government does have some legal authority, doesn't the London Treaty of 1982 give the Ministry of Magic final say in how it is run? We do not operate off of your taxes, but rather on taxes from the Magical Community."

"Her Majesty's government is reevaluating the terms of that Treaty, young man." The Prime Minister said with a friendly smile. "I believe that you would be Draco Malfoy? I can understand that young man like you, with little experience beyond the classroom, might not understand, but sometimes Treaties must be reevaluated when they no longer work for both parties. Events over the last few years have force us to conclude that the Treaty is no longer fair to Her Majesty's government. Our citizens have been killed, and those responsible for it still roam free."

"Lest you forget," Harry broke in, barely keeping his anger in check at all, "Some of our citizens were killed by you a few months ago and none of those responsible have been held accountable either. In fact, one of those killed was one of our greatest heroes ever."

"A lamentable accident." The Prime Minister said sadly. "One that we hope to prevent reoccurring by this review and reorganization."

"It can be prevented simply by keeping muggle troops out of magical combat zones." Maggie Lawton said heatedly.

"It is my understanding that children were being attacked in that incident." The Prime Minister replied.

"Those children were holding their own with little assistance." Harry said heatedly. "Until your troops showed up and started cutting down everything that moved!"

"I don't see how you can be expected to understand the complexities of a battlefield!" A muggle seated on the far side of the room snapped. He was wearing what Harry recognized as a military uniform.

"Only because I've been on magical battlegrounds since I was one year old!" Harry snapped back. "I was there that day, sir. I helped train most of those students, and have been drilled by many of the adults fighting on that station platform. If your troops hadn't intervened, the wizard responsible for most of these attacks would be dead right now!"

"Minister," The Prime Minister said sternly to Orrin Milieu. "Since when do children hold seats on a Ministry Council?"

"Mr. Potter and Mr. Malfoy are of legal age, Prime Minister." Orrin Milieu said firmly. "Under

wizarding law, the age of seventeen is legal age and includes the right to sit and participate in government activities."

"Ah," The Prime Minister said with a nod of his head. "Another discrepancy in our laws that will have to be dealt with. I shall make myself more clear. This evaluation, and reorganization, of the Ministry of Magic is not up for negotiation. Action must be taken to prevent catastrophes from reoccurring, and your cooperation is required, not requested. Please excuse me, Minister, but where is the Headmaster of Hogwarts?"

"Headmaster Dumbledore was killed by muggle bullets two months ago." Harry said coldly. "Headmistress McGonagall is too busy making sure that the school runs properly to attend these meetings. Draco and I report anything of consequence to her."

"Ah, yes." The Prime Minister said with a frown. "Well, then, let me introduce you to Richard Miles. Richard will be evaluating the educational system at Hogwarts. Please escort him back to your school and introduce him to your Headmistress. He'll require quarters there for the next thirty days."

The man the Prime Minister mentioned stood. He was in his early thirties and had a shock of pale red hair, much different than that of the Weasley family. His face held no expression at all as he moved from his position towards where Harry and Draco sat. Harry was about to protest that he would do no such thing when a look from Orrin Milieu made him change his mind. As he stood, he managed to make eye contact with four or five Department Heads he'd be contacting over the next few days. With a nod to the red-headed muggle, Harry stood and left the room, Draco following so that the muggle was between them.

"Is that all your luggage?" Harry heard Draco ask the man as they went down the corridor.

"No." The man said softly. "The rest of my luggage is in the vehicles outside of the…guest entrance."

"Very well." Harry said shortly. "We'll stop there and get it before heading back to Hogwarts."

"Is it very far?" the man asked. "No one could tell me exactly where it is located."

"Several hours train ride, usually." Harry answered. His stomach grumbled, upset at having missed lunch and from the acids his worrying was pumping into it.

"Oh, so we'll be there by nightfall?" The man asked as they stopped at the lift.

"Far sooner." Harry answered. "We'll even have time to stop in Hogsmeade for lunch."

"Hogsmeade?"

"Village outside of Hogwarts." Harry explained shortly as the doors to the lift opened. As they filed in, he realized that he was being very rude to someone who might need to think of Harry as a friend.

"This place really is amazing." The muggle said as the lift stopped to let on two witches and a dozen flying memos. They got off at the next stop and Harry turned to look the muggle over.

He was short, no more than 5'7", but had a decent build. His pale reddish hair and hazel eyes were set on a pleasantly square face. Harry smiled at the man and held out his hand.

"Harry Potter." He said simply.

“Richard Miles.” The man said, letting out a little sigh and smiling softly. Draco took the hint and introduced himself as well just as the lift stopped at the main level. The man started talking as if a barrier had been broken as soon as they left the lift. This time he walked next to Harry, with Draco on the far side. Everyone made a path for them as they walked through.

“You’ll have to excuse me if I seem a little freaked by all of this.” The man said in a rapid ramble. “I just really learned about magic being real and everything a week ago. They gave me a huge file and I really haven’t had time to sort through everything yet. Is it common for people as young as you to be in such important positions? What exactly are your positions with the Ministry?”

“No, it’s not normal for wizards as young as us to be filling such positions.” Harry said with a smile. “But then neither of us are exactly normal wizards. Our official titles are now ‘Special Advisor to the Minister of Magic’. What it means is we fill a variety of roles while also attending our final year at Hogwarts.”

“So you’re still students?” He asked, his eyes widening in surprise.

“Partially.” Draco said smoothly. “We’re also instructors, and I’d really like to get back in time for my afternoon class that begins in two hours.”

“But I thought you said it was a long trip?”

“By train.” Harry explained. “We’re not going by train.”

“Oh, how long will it take?” Richard asked.

“Er…I’d say ten minutes to get your baggage, then we go to Hogsmeade. A quick lunch at the Three Broomsticks, Madame Rosmerta usually serves a most excellent shepherd’s pie this day of the week, and then a little less than an hour’s walk to the castle itself. Plenty of time to get Draco back for his class.”

“But how long is the trip to Hogsmeade?” Richard asked, still confused as they entered the telephone booth that would take them back to the surface.

“A second?” Harry asked, looking at Draco.

“Knowing you, Potter, maybe two.” Draco said with a laugh. The man literally whimpered when the booth took off for the surface, and only opened his eyes when Harry announced their arrival.

There were a fleet of cars waiting, and Richard spoke to the assembled drivers and security guards who soon returned with four very large suitcases. Draco sighed, gathering them around him before disappearing with the a *c*rack. The muggle drivers and guards jumped, as did Richard. Harry just grabbed his hand and prepared himself for the jump.

“What?” Richard finished the word he’d started in muggle London and looked around him with surprise at the village of Hogsmeade, and Draco standing with his luggage nearby. When they appeared, Draco took off into the nearby post building to send an owl requesting a carriage. That would be easier than trudging all the way back to the castle with luggage.

“You can teleport?” Richard said in an excited voice.

“It’s called apparating and disapparating.” Harry explained, taking out his wand and using a levitation charm to lift the luggage. Richard’s eyes nearly fell out of his head as the luggage

followed them down the street.

“Knowing magic exists and seeing it in action are two totally separate things, aren’t they?” Harry said with a smirk.

“Ye…yes they are.” Richard stuttered out. They entered the Three Broomsticks and Harry ordered three meals and three butterbeers. Draco showed up just as the food arrived to say McGonagall was sending a carriage for their trip back, and that Harry was to take their ‘guest’ to see her immediately.

The food was good, and Richard talked nonstop about their surroundings and kept asking questions on how exactly they had ‘teleported’. Draco was actually smirking at the muggle’s reaction, and Harry had to admit that the man was reacting far differently than he had expected. Still, what he represented posed a danger greater than Voldemort and Harry was not going to forget that.

“Is that real gold?” Richard asked as they paid for the meal with a galleon. Draco explained how wizard money worked as they made their way to the waiting carriage, baggage floating behind. Harry levitated it to the top of the carriage and turned, noticing the man staring at the front of the carriage.

“What are those?” The muggle hissed.

“Threstrals.” Harry answered, and gave the man another appraising look. “They are magical creatures, very intelligent, and they eat raw meat for food. Usually they can’t be seen unless you’ve seen someone die. Then they are visible.”

“Oh.” Richard said, giving the beasts a wary look as he climbed into the carriage after Draco. “I fought in the war, I guess that’s why I can see them.”

“What war was that?” Draco asked as the carriage took off for the castle.

“The Gulf War.” Richard answered.

“Never heard of it.” Draco replied. Then Richard started asking questions about magical creatures. He was shocked that vampires, werewolves, unicorns, centaurs, fairies, pixies and a whole host of other legends were real. Harry wondered how the man would react to meeting Remus Lupin, a real live werewolf. Harry barely withheld the chuckle at that thought. The muggle gasped when he first caught sight of the castle, and as they were getting out of the carriage he squinted at the Quidditch pitch, where Madame Hooch had some second years flying laps.

“Are those kids flying?” Richard asked in wonder, then added “On br*ooms?*”

“Yes.” Harry answered him with a smile. “Although they aren’t quite as good as Draco or I.”

“You fly on a broom?” Richard asked with wide eyes.

“Of course.” Harry shrugged as he led the man into the great entrance.

“What is it like?” Richard asked another question. Draco had already taken off at a fast pace with a bare ‘good-bye’, heading to the dungeons. He had ten minutes before class started.

“Well, I have a Firebolt and I’m sure it can hold two.” Harry said, surprising himself. “Maybe I’ll be able to take you on a short jaunt while you’re here.”

“I’d love that.” Richard said, grinning widely. The man stared as they passed through several passageways before reaching the gargoyle. Harry spoke the password and the man leaped back as the staircase appeared. Nevertheless, he followed Harry upstairs. When they arrived the Headmistress had not yet shown up, so he pointed Richard to a chair, but the muggle was staring at the portraits…all of whom were staring back.

“I daresay that man is a muggle!” The portrait of Phineas declared in a disgusted tone. “Not even you, Albus, ever let a muggle like him in here!”

“Oh hush, Phineas.” Albus’ portrait said sternly. “I’m sure Mr. Potter here has a good reason, don’t you Harry.”

“Yes, and you’ll all hear it when Headmistress McGonagall does.” Harry told them.

“The pictures are talking!” Richard exclaimed at last, his voice little above a squeak.

“Of course we do!” Phineas chided. “We’re wizard portraits, not muggle imitations!”

“Enough, Phineas.” Harry said irritably.

“Why, I never!” The portrait muttered. “Such CHEEK from a student.”

“But he’s quite right.” Minerva McGonagall said, walking in from another entrance. Richard jumped at her voice. “All of you be quiet, please, for the nonce. Mr. Potter, you may explain.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Harry said, finally getting the muggle man to sit in the chair. He sat next to him as the Headmistress sat behind her desk, looking down her long nose at the man.

“This is Richard Miles, from the muggle government.” Harry began his explanation, but Richard cut him off.

“Pleased to meet you, Headmistress.” The muggle said quickly, then slowed as Harry remained quiet with a raised eyebrow. “I work with the Department of Education in Her Majesty’s service. I’ve been sent here by the Prime Minister to perform an evaluation on your education system for children and make recommendations to the Cabinet based on my opinions.”

“Ah, a Muggle High Inquisitor.” McGonagall muttered, causing Harry to let out a laugh before he got it under control. Richard looked confused for a moment, then realized he’d probably been insulted and sat back with a wary expression. “Mr. Potter, I trust this has been approved by the Ministry?”

“They didn’t have much choice, ma’am.” Harry said.

“I see.” She said softly. “How long will you staying, Mr. Miles?”

“30 days, ma’am.” He replied warily.

“I see.” She repeated with a sigh. “Mr. Potter, how are you doing in your classes that you are attending?”

“Just fine, ma’am.” Harry answered, stifling the groan as he knew where this was leading.

“Do you think missing a few days here and there will hurt you much?” She asked him sweetly.

“No ma’am.” Harry replied, refusing to let his shoulders slouch.

“Is that extra room in your quarters still available?”

“Yes ma’am.” He replied, not controlling his voice enough as a little of his dislike for the position she was putting him in showed.

“Then you wouldn’t mind escorting Mr. Miles while he is here would you?” She asked sweetly. “We’ll arrange for you to visit third, fourth, fifth, and sixth year classes in the subjects you aren’t enrolled in or teaching. That should give him plenty of time to examine our curriculum, not only by subjects but by year level as well. Of course if he wishes to speak to any specific faculty as well, that will be arranged. Why don’t you also have him join you at all the house tables during different meals, that should give him another good idea of how Hogwarts works. Also, make sure to keep him clear of Peeves. That ghost positively hates muggles.”

“It will be a pleasure ma’am.” Harry said, catching the glint in her eyes when she mentioned Peeves. “I’ll also keep a sharp eye out for Peeves.”

“Very good, then.” She said, rising to her feet. Harry also rose to his feet, followed a moment later by Richard, who looked a little set-back. “If you need to speak to me again, let Mr. Potter know. I can’t imagine leaving you in any safer hands than his.”

“Thank you.” Richard managed to get out before she left the room. Harry motioned for him to follow Harry out of the office. The first stop was to take the man to the quarters they’d be sharing. He introduced Richard to the portrait, gave him the password and then led him inside. The muggle seemed impressed by the room, and then Harry summoned Dobby. The man jumped when the house elf appeared, still wearing a dozen hats, scarves, and even more socks.

“What can Dobby do for Harry Potter, sir!” the elf asked cheerfully.

“This is Richard Miles, from the muggle government.” Harry said and Dobby looked the man up and down before nodding.

“Actually the Department of Education.” Richard clarified.

“I wouldn’t bother with that.” Harry said, trying to sound polite. “Only muggle-born wizards and witches would have any idea what it meant, and saying that would probably make the non-muggle-born think you were being condescending.”

“Oh.” Richard said, his eyes wide at Harry’s bluntness.

“We’re roommates for the next thirty days.” Harry explained. “That means I should at least be civil with you and civility requires that I try to help you do your job without you pissing people off, something your mere presence is likely to do in a few cases.”

“Why is that? Richard asked.

“Dobby, please get Mr. Miles’ baggage from the carriage and put it in the second room.” Harry asked the elf, who immediately disappeared, before answering the question. He pointed the muggle to one of the armchairs, sitting in the other before continuing. Of course Winky appeared at that moment with a tea service, so there was another delay that allowed Harry to gather his thoughts before answering.

“When was the last witch burned alive in England?” Harry asked finally.

“I have no idea.” Richard admitted, as he sipped some tea, his eyes slightly wide.

“February, 1712.” Harry answered. “When was the last time a wizards home was looted by

neighbors who discovered his true nature?"

"I don't know that either." Richard admitted again.

"Last month." Harry told him. "Wizards and witches know how muggles react to us, and we ride a precarious balance between the two worlds. We know what prejudice is, we know what hatred is, and we know how little our lives are worth if the muggle world every really learns of us as more than fairy tales. Your presence here, your mission by your government is potentially a threat to our very lives and many in this school will see you as an enemy to hex, wipe the mind of, or kill, to protect themselves. Attacking you won't seem abnormal, they will think of it as nothing but self-defense."

"You're kidding!" Richard exclaimed, looking around worriedly and setting his tea on the table.

"Not one bit." Harry told him. "That evil wizard you've heard about, his stated goal is to kill all the muggles he can and exert wizard dominance over the known world. The man your troops killed at Kings Cross last year, he was the man who opposed the evil wizard and supported friendly relations to muggles. When your soldiers killed him, they killed their greatest advocate in the wizarding world."

"And now the muggle government is looking like it wants to take over your wizarding world, probably something this evil wizard used to recruit followers." Richard said, barely above a whisper.

"At least your Prime Minister didn't send an idiot." Harry admitted, surprised at the rapid understanding the man showed.

"That's not really what the Prime Minister is doing." Richard said quickly. "He's just trying to get a better understanding of your world and trying to prevent evil wizards like this character you're talking about from killing our people."

"Er…I hope that what you are saying is true." Harry said, taking a sip of his own tea. "If it is, I think things might work out. If it isn't, you'll have done nothing but given the wizarding world over to Voldemort and his followers."

"You seem certain of that." Richard said, picking his tea back up.

"I am as certain of that as I am that you are sitting across from me." Harry told him.

"How can you be so sure?"

"In your reading material did you ever read about the 'Boy-Who-Lived'?" Harry asked.

"I saw a reference to that, but didn't really understand it." Richard admitted.

"I'm the Boy-Who-Lived." Harry said simply. "I'm the only person, muggle or wizard, who survived the killing curse cast by that man, and it's my destiny to kill him or be killed by him."

"Oh." Richard said simply, a look of skepticism on his face.

That was when Harry decided it was going to be a very long month.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N – Hope you enjoyed and sorry for the delay!

Chapter 4 –

By the time Harry had given Richard a brief overview of the first sixteen years of his personal life - mostly focused on the history of Voldemort's rise to power, the Potter family opposition to him, and the bare details of his encounters with the wizard, the muggle's eyes had glazed over and it was dinner time. Draco returned, and Harry excused them to get changed, advising Richard that his things should be in his room by now. Without thinking, Harry followed Draco into their room to prepare for dinner, sharing a quick and quiet update with his blond lover about the rest of the afternoon. In turn, Draco told him about the irate comments of a Professor Snape who had thought he'd have to teach a first year class and who only got more upset when Draco showed up in time to take the class. They changed into their regular school uniform and robes before returning to the common room, having used the door on their room for the first time ever.

"You share the same room?" Richard asked from where he stood in the common room. He'd changed into a rather nice gray suit that looked much fresher than the darker suit that he had been wearing. He had a look of shock on his face.

"We're engaged to be married, so of course we share a room." Draco said, surprised by the question.

"But…" Richard stuttered.

"It's more common in the wizarding world for two men or two women to get married, and it is legal." Harry informed the muggle, as he was much more familiar with their prejudices. Suddenly McGonagall putting the man in their rooms made a little more sense. She was most definitely not happy having a 'Muggle High Inquisitor' on her grounds.

"Sorry, it's just that I'm surprised." Richard said, his face blushing a wonderful shade of scarlet. "My boyfriend is going to be so jealous when I tell him."

"Naturally." Draco said, covering up for Harry who was stunned. A gay muggle in the government? My how Uncle Vernon would have a fit. Oh well, it's not like he'd be talking to his Uncle anytime soon.

"Let's go for some dinner." Harry said. "The great hall should be almost full by now." The three made their way to the hall, getting many looks from passing students. When they arrived, a look from McGonagall stopped them in the entryway. She stood, and the room descended into silence, with stares split between the Headmistress and the muggle being escorted by Harry and Draco.

"Everyone." McGonagall said into the silent hall. "We will be having a guest with us for the next month. The Muggle Government has sent a representative to study how we educate our young as compared to their own institutions. Mr. Richard Miles will be visiting many of your classes and speaking with many of you. I expect and require each and every one of you to treat him with the utmost respect and courtesy. Mr. Potter will be escorting him while he is here. Please show him the courtesy and hospitality of Hogwarts. Thank you, and let the feast begin!"

Harry figured she was showing off for the muggle, because he jumped when the empty tables were suddenly filled with food. Draco clapped Harry on the shoulder before heading to his own table. Harry escorted a bemused Richard, who had noticed the ceiling and was staring in awe at it, to the Gryffindor table where a place was made for them between Ron and Hermione.

"Richard, the young lady on your left is my best friend Hermione Granger." Harry said, forcing the muggle to look down from the ceiling and shake hands with Hermione who was looking at

him with her usual inquisitiveness. Richard's eyes widened as he recognized that she was pregnant under her robes. "To my right here is my other best friend, Ronald Weasley."

"Pleased to meet you both." Richard said a little faintly. Ron was busy tearing into a chicken leg and barely grunted his greeting. Following Harry's example, the muggle soon had his plate full of food. Harry introduced Padma, Lavendar, Seamus, Colin, Darren, and the other Gryffindors who were sitting close to them. Richard was surprised at those who readily announced they were muggle-born and started pelting questions to him about what he did for the Education Ministry. He seemed very surprised to find wizards and witches who understood anything about the non-magical world.

"I must say I never expected to find so many people who understood the non-magical world." Richard admitted aloud (he'd already been warned by Harry to never, ever, say 'real world').

"Just don't be asking me any questions about it Ron admitted after swallowing a mouthful of taters. "I can barely use the *fellytone.*"

"Telephone." Harry laughed, remembering the one phone call to his muggle relatives' house in Surrey.

"Whatever." Ron said, his attention once more returning to the table as dessert appeared. Richard selected a banana custard.

"My parents are dentists." Hermione said with a grin. "They were quite shocked when I got my letter from Hogwarts."

"I can imagine." Richard said, slightly patronizing, looking at her stomach again.

"After dinner, we'll visit one of the DA training sessions." Harry said quickly, seeing a dangerous gleam in Hermione's eyes.

"DA?" Richard asked.

"Defense Arts." Harry expounded. "We started it two years ago as 'Dumbledore's Army when we had a particularly atrocious DADA teacher. Now it's an extra-curricular activity to help students practice their defense against dark wizards."

"Oh." Richard said.

"Yes, it should give you an idea of what wizard combative spells are like" Harry said with a smirk. "I imagine that it would be a bit easier to understand than watching a Transfiguration class where students turn feathers into mice."

"You can do that?" Richard asked, astonished.

"Easy." Hermione said, her eyes twinkling dangerously. "It's a little harder to turn a man into a frog, but any decent seventh year student can do that. Have I mentioned that I'm tops in most of my classes and that I love Transfigurations?"

"Uh, no." Richard said, grasping the meaning of her statement quite clearly. Harry decided at that moment that dinner was over and it was time to introduce Richard to the grand staircases.

Apparently Hogwarts didn't like having a muggle there either, because every single staircase moved, causing Harry to take a very circuitous route to the room of requirement. The usually short journey actually took them closer to an hour and Richard was looking positively green

when they finally arrived. He really didn't seem to like staircases that shifted on him.

Harry just smiled and enjoyed the ride.

Professor Lupin was leading this session as they walked in, and the forty students attending that night stopped to stare. Lupin's shout to continue got them going again. Harry introduced the two men and then let his eyes wander around the room, taking in how the various students were doing. That was why he noticed the two students stop dueling each other and turn towards the visitor. Harry's wand was out right as they cast their curses.

"*P*rotego" Harry cried out, blocking both curses and sending them back against their casters. Both of them cried out as boils covered them. Richard jumped, but Lupin turned and immediately took twenty points from Slytherin for each of the two students, then gave them a week of detention with Filch, and finished by kicking them out of DA for two weeks. Richard just raised an eyebrow at Harry.

"You're pretty fast with that wand." Richard said softly.

"When you have a mad, evil, and powerful wizard who's tried to kill you several times, starting when you were one year old, you learn some things pretty well." Harry said with a smile as he put his wand back into his robes.

"I would guess so." Richard agreed. Lupin stomped back over.

"Sorry about that, Harry, Mr. Miles." Lupin said, still steaming mad.

"No harm done." Richard said with a smile. "I begin to see why I was put in his care."

"You won't find a wizard or witch who can beat Harry in this school right now." Remus boasted with a proud smile at Harry. "There's a few Aurors who can still best him, but in a year or two even they will have a tough time of it."

"Enough, Remus." Harry said in a whisper, fighting the blush he felt creeping up on him.

"Now, Harry, is that any way to talk to family?" Remus said with a wide grin.

"Family?" Richard asked.

"Closest thing to it, really." Harry said.

"I was best friends with his parents and his godfather." Remus said sadly.

"Oh." Richard replied, remembering that Harry said all of them were dead now. He looked at Harry again, and Harry could sense the man was reappraising him yet again.

"If you don't mind, I need to head back to the room." Harry said to the muggle. "I have some essays to finish grading before class tomorrow, and another to finish writing for my Care for Magical Creatures class."

"No problem." Richard said with a nod of his head. "I really should get unpacked as well."

With a farewell to Remus Lupin, they left to head back to the ground floor apartment. Naturally it took them almost forty-five minutes to get there since Hogwarts still wasn't cooperating. Harry just hoped they'd be nicer in the morning when he had to get to his classrooms.

Draco was in the room already, muttering over essays from his first year potions classes. It was quickly becoming Harry's favorite past time to listen to Draco's muttered comments. They made

great caustic statements on some of the poorer essays in his own classes. The muggle disappeared into his room and started unpacking. Draco handed Harry a lengthy parchment that was filled with a schedule for the muggle. It looked like Harry would be missing about half of his afternoon classes, but none of the classes he actually taught. When Richard came out and asked where the bathroom was, Harry showed him, sighing as he realized they'd have to share. Then he laughed when Richard asked where the plug was for his electric razor.

The poor man went pale when Harry promised to get him a magic self-shaver since there was no electricity in Hogwarts.

Draco just laughed.

Later that night, after Harry and Draco had shut their door and put a very powerful silencing charm on their room, they had a very long, and very extensive conversation about what this would all mean for their plans. It looked like something they didn't think they'd have to head off for years yet had landed on their doorstep, and if they didn't act quickly Voldemort wouldn't have to return to recruit half the wizarding world to his cause.

Oh, the temptation to just kill the damn muggle!

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

The Room of Requirement

Once it had given Dumbledore a glittering row of chamber pots. In Harry's fifth year it had given him a place to train students in a secret group, casting their defiance against Dolores Umbridge, and now, it gave him and the sixteen Slytherins waiting for him, an undetectable portkey to the library of Black Manor.

As soon as the hook behind his navel had disappeared, Harry's wand was out. A flick flung the furniture against the far walls. Another flick gently raised the bust of Sirius Black and the tall wooden box it stood on, and rested them against the far wall as well. Where it had stood was a tall, narrow, stone plinth, milky white with rivulets of blood red floating as if on a sea of milk. Moving together, Harry and Draco placed their bare hands on the top of the plinth and they called while the students that had traveled with them formed themselves in a loose circle around them. Soon, ten more people joined them, having used their own special, unregistered portkeys to arrive. Once everyone was there, Harry raised his wand and called up the wards and protections that he and Draco had put in place over the summer, with the help of Severus Snape.

"Everyone is aware of the move by the muggle government on the Ministry of Magic?" Harry asked sternly, everyone nodded at his question.

"What has the reaction been?" Draco asked.

"Bad." Michael Corners, who now worked in the Ministry reported. "Even those who never considered supporting Voldemort are whispering that he might have been right."

"We have to counter that." Harry said after seeing several of the others who worked at the Ministry nod in agreement.

"How?" Millicent Bulstrode asked.

That was when the weight of what he had done fully impacted on Harry Potter's consciousness. He was their leader now, and it was to him and Draco that they looked to for answers.

Fortunately, they had talked long and hard about this.

“First of all, we make sure that these “fact-finders” or whatever they are calling themselves understand one thing.” Harry said flatly. “They must understand that if they try to take over our world, we will make them rue the day they were born. Nott, Bulstrode, you both did excellent with those curses in the DA meeting. Richard’s been keeping so close to me that he almost didn’t let Snape drag him to the staffroom to meet with the professors. I had to tell him that I trusted Snape implicitly to get him to go.”

That got a brief chuckle from everyone there.

“Those of you at the ministry, use the contacts you’ve garnered to get word to the various muggle people. Don’t do it directly. They must understand though, that to make changes without the input of the wizarding world will lead to revolt.”

“Is that it?” Theodore Nott asked carefully.

“No.” Draco said firmly. “Those of us whose parents were, or are, in the ranks of Death Eaters know of their reactions to this. Get the word out through them that if worse comes to be, there will be someone else to follow in making the muggles have a hard enough time taking over that they will give up.”

“But they are thinking that the Dark Lord…” Pansy said in a scared tone.

“Voldemort is all but dead.” Harry snapped, turning to face her directly. “The Sword of Gryffindor leeched much of his power and he needs what he has left to keep him alive. He can’t even cast the *c*ruciatus for more than a minute without going so weak that he keels over. He’s hiding in Russia and is not likely to come out of there anytime within the next year. I’m the one who did that to him, and I’m the one who will finish him off next time we meet. He has nothing to offer anyone!”

“What about the muggle weapons?” Blaise asked in a quiet voice.

“You were all at the platform that day.” Harry reminded them. “You remember the shield that Voldemort had? It deflected the bullets.”

Everyone nodded, most had seen it directly, and the rest had heard of it from their fellows.

“I figured out how to duplicate it.” Harry said simply. “Quite simple, really. The trick was to make it so that it only deflected physical objects moving at high speed. Draco and I will begin to teach it to everyone as time avails itself. Muggle bullets will not endanger us in the days to come.”

“Shouldn’t we…eliminate…some of these muggle government people? You know, intimidate them?” Michael asked, and Harry sighed, placing his hand once more on the Oath Stone. As he whispered a word over it, it began to glow softly.

“Hear me and obey.” Harry said, invoking the Power of Command for the first time among his bound followers. “No one shall, through action or inaction, harm or allow to come to harm, any of the muggle representatives during their stay at the Ministry or Hogwarts, or anywhere in the magical or non-magical worlds during the month that they are among us.”

“We obey.” Came the response, in unison.

“You’ve never used that before…” Pansy whispered in shock as the spell ended.

“This is too important to leave to chance or to risk passions overriding good sense.” Harry told them sternly, in no way, shape, or form apologizing. They had known that they were giving this power to him when they swore the Oath. “If any of the muggles die, it will make our job much harder. I do not want bloodshed, and if we can do this without shedding blood, we will.”

“If we can’t?” Crabbe asked softly, his eyes glistening in the pale light given off by the stone plinth.

“Then blood will be shed.” Harry replied simply, his voice soft as silk.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

The Room of Requirement was empty, except for Draco and Harry. They stood close together, looking at nothing for a long time after the last Slytherin had left. Harry ended the moment with a soft sigh.

“I had best go see if Richard is done with the staff yet.”

“Yes, and I had better finish revising my Arithmancy homework.” Draco sighed. They left together, moving in silence, each lost in his own thoughts, until Harry separated to head towards the staffroom.

He’d been in the long and well-appointed room a handful of times over the last year. As he entered, he was surprised to see no one there but Severus and Richard. Richard was writing some notes on paper with a ballpoint pen while Severus glared at him. When the greasy-haired Professor noticed Harry arrive he exploded out of his chair.

“It’s about time you returned!” Severus nearly yelled. “I sent that bloody third year looking for you forty minutes ago!”

“Draco and I had business.” Harry explained, and Severus nodded. “Richard, you ready to head back?”

“Sure, just let me finish this sentence.” The muggle replied. “I’m not used to writing this much. I just wish the computer worked here.”

“Can you bloody well believe he suggested we have these compooters installed?” Snape growled. “Like we’d want infernal muggle machines in a school of *magic*! What use would they be?”

“The Internet has a wide variety of information available and is fast becoming a wonderful educational tool!” Richard said, in a way that told Harry he’d repeated it several times that night.

“But what will it have on magic that we can’t already find in our books?” Severus said, also as if repeating an argument already aired once.

“Retrieving information from books is slow.” Richard explained. “Imagine sitting in front of a computer and instantly pulling up the information you need!”

The mental image that statement brought to Harry’s mind made him snort, then try to keep from laughing. Severus Snape in his black robes, bent over a pristine white keyboard, pecking at a keyboard as he looked up the recipe for a potion was hilarious. It was also totally unrealistic.

“Magic and electricity don’t mix too well.” Harry said as Richard stood up. “As you found out

when you turned on your laptop while Draco was casting a basic firestarting spell on the fireplace."

"I still don't know how I'm going to explain that." Richard admitted with a small laugh as Harry led him out of the staff room. "I can see the look on my superior's face right now. He doesn't even know about magic, just knows that I'm working on some special project for the Cabinet. He'll read 'the magnetic field generated by the operation of a muggle device in direct proximity to a fire-starting spell had the effect of attracting the spell off course and incinerating said device.' He reads that and I'm off to the looney bin!"

"Just tell him the dragon had gas." Harry told him, causing the man to laugh again.

"Like he'd treat me any different for that statement!" Harry alternated in his feelings for this guy. He was friendly at times, and Harry almost liked him, but the purpose he was here for was something Harry could not let happen. Fortunately, the man looked to Harry as a confidante within Hogwarts, although he didn't like Draco at all.

"So, Richard, how'd it go with the Professors?" Harry asked.

"Well, you heard a bit of it from the at Snape character." Richard replied glumly.

"Come now, I'm sure at least Professor was interested." Harry said with a small chuckle.

"Not really." Richard said glumly. "I swear I've never met a more hidebound set of teachers in my life! They didn't even like the idea of testing to make sure students have adequate reading, writing, mathematical, and historical knowledge!"

"Well, let's see." Harry said as they approached the apartment. He continued as they entered, thankful that Draco must have taken his homework to the Slytherin common room. "We prove our reading and writing abilities when we take the O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. exams in the fifth and seventh years respectively. History of Magic is a required course and we are all required to take the tests in that field, and a really poor grade can hurt students who apply for certain jobs. Everyone has to understand basic math, it's part of potions, charms, and even transfiguration to a point. There's really no need to test it separately except for Arithmancy and that's really a divination tool."

"You don't get it either!" Richard nearly wailed. "History of Magic is all well and good, but what about real history? Math isn't just something that you can scoff at and claim it's covered in other courses, you have to learn it well to understand the principles and you don't have anything like calculus or statistics here! Why none of the students would ever be accepted into a University if they chose to apply!"

"Why would they choose to apply to a Muggle university?" Harry asked calmly. "Why should we care about Muggle History except abstractly? I mean, we do have Muggle Studies if students want it, and I suppose having another elective like Muggle History wouldn't hurt, but what does that have to do with living in the world of magic?"

"Don't you see it yet?" Richard asked softly. "The magical world can't stay forever hidden and unconnected from the real world!"

"Why not?" Harry asked calmly.

"Because the government can't allow you to traipse around, constantly fiddling with our citizens

and not answering to the real government!" Richard fumed, then looked a little shocked that he'd spoken so bluntly.

"Richard, you're part of a new government, fresh to power and just finding out about our magical world." Harry said calmly. "Don't you think you might be overreacting a bit?"

"What do you mean?" Richard asked, obviously surprised at Harry's calmness.

"We are a persecuted population throughout history." Harry continued calmly. "Most of the time when muggles find out we exist, they react with fear, and fear leads to violence. That's why we stay hidden, and why memories are obliviated when muggles do find out. The wizards and witches of today's world are far different than those of the past. No one is going to lie down while they are persecuted and manhandled by muggles. They'll fight back. When that happens, there will be a lot of death and horror. As you've seen, muggle devices don't really work that well around magic and what devices we might find useful, we are often able to duplicate with magic. When we go into the muggle world, we try to adapt and stay hidden for the most part. As long as the two worlds stay separate, we can live next to each other in peace."

"But, it doesn't have to be that way!" Richard responded.

"Yes, it does." Harry insisted, still calm. "How will many muggles react if they find out there's people that can really do magic? Be honest and use your own reactions to answer. Remember what you felt when we were watching the Transfiguration and Flying classes?"

"Jealous." Richard answered after thinking for a few minutes, his voice tinged with regret.

"Exactly, and what will that jealousy lead to?" Harry continued.

"Anger, fear, violence." Richard admitted.

"Correct." Harry said, letting out a deep sigh.

"Tell me, Harry, how does a teenager like you understand stuff like that here?" Richard asked politely. "It's not like they teach a course in logic and reasoning."

"They do." Harry said with a grin. "It's taught by a very, very boring ghost and is known as History of Magic. Most of us doze off in that class at least once a week. There's only so many stories of goblin rebellions, giant raids, and weekly witch burnings that one can take."

"Funny." Richard said with a chuckle. "Well, I have some more reports to write up, if you'll excuse me?"

Harry nodded, and Richard returned to his bedroom, shutting the door behind him. Harry stared at the fire for a while before moving to his own desk and working on an essay assigned by Professor Grubby-Plank since he'd missed her last two classes. Fortunately it was an easy one for him to complete thanks to notes provided by Hermione.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

It was Richard's last day at Hogwarts, and Harry was going to give him a very big treat. They'd walked out of the castle and were now standing a few feet from one of the walls, Harry's Firebolt lying on the ground next to Richard. The muggle was standing there, his hand held out over the broom and yelling "UP!" at it. The broom didn't even quiver.

"Okay, that's enough." Harry said with a gentle smile. "As you can see, it won't even respond to

someone who does not possess magic."

Harry held his hand out and the broom leaped into his grasp.

"Whereas after many years of flying a wizard or witch doesn't even need to use the voice command." Harry continued.

"I'm getting jealous again." Richard grumbled.

"A natural reaction." Harry said with a smile as he mounted the broom. He motioned for Richard to climb on behind him. "Now remember, the broom is going to feel you as dead weight, not respond like it would to a magical rider. Hold on tight to me and match any movements I make or we'll fall off. I'll start with a lap of the school at low altitude, then if you're doing well, we'll go higher.

The first lap of the school was done at about a meter in height. For the first few turns, Richard tensed and wobbled the broom, but by the last quarter of the lap, he'd settled down and was moving with Harry. That's why Harry took them higher and higher, until they finally soared at the height of Gryffindor tower. By this point, Richard was laughing and shouting out in excitement. That was when Harry noticed Madame Hooch's class.

They were working on acceleration and deceleration through turns, a slightly more advanced lesson than the last time he'd seen them. It seemed as if one of the students was having some trouble, and Madame Hooch was bending over her own broom to help the student when her broom shuddered in a sudden burst of wind. The student went toppling over, and Madame Hooch followed her.

Harry reacted without thinking about his passenger and took off at maximum acceleration. The class had been pretty high up, and as they started to fall, the young student separated from Madame Hooch. Behind him Richard was screaming something, clasping tightly to Harry, but was keeping perfect balance. As Harry dove and approached the falling pair, he realized with a twist of his gut that he'd only be able to grab one of them. Without even thinking about it, he changed course in his dive and grabbed the young student just before she hit the ground.

The sudden impact of the student unbalanced Richard, which also unbalanced Harry, but he somehow kept them all on the broom as he slowed down and lowered their altitude until Richard could jump off. Harry handed the girl to him and turned the broom around to where Madame Hooch was lying on the ground.

"ON THE GROUND NOW!" Harry ordered the class who were still in the air, most of them crying. They heard his order and descended as he reached the fallen flying Professor and realized that she'd landed on her back. He dismounted and immediately went to her side, lifting her slightly. Of all the luck, she'd landed on a rock.

Her back might be broken. Swearing gently, he placed her in a full body-bind so she couldn't move and increase her injuries. Another spell levitated her behind him as he took off for the infirmary.

"Class, go to the great hall and wait there for a professor or your prefects." Harry told the bunch of blubbering eleven year olds in front of him. They nodded and started heading off as Richard and the young girl who had fallen jogged up. Harry recognized her from the classes he taught. "Richard, Ms. Abernathy, follow me."

The trip to the infirmary was made quickly, and Madame Hooch began to revive just as they reached Madame Pomfrey's domain. Madame Hooch seemed senseless, and as soon as Harry told Madame Pomfrey what had happened, she went white in the face and told Harry to place her on a bed. He did, also releasing his body bind only to see Pomfrey place one of her own in its place. Meanwhile, Harry turned to the first year Hufflepuff and began to question her about what exactly had happened.

He found it hard to believe that a sudden gust of wind would have so injured the experienced Flying Professor, but stranger things had happened. Headmistress McGonagall appeared at that moment, demanding to know what was going on, so Harry informed her. She strode off immediately, returning a moment later to tell Harry she had sent Professor Sprout to take charge of the students in the great hall. Then she gave Gryffindor 20 points for Harry's quick thinking.

It was the first time that year he'd earned his House points.

Madame Pomfrey came over a few minutes later and her face told Harry that the news wouldn't be too good. She looked from Richard to the Headmistress and sighed when the Headmistress shrugged before nodding. Richard's face made it plain that he wasn't going to leave.

"Her spine has been broken." Pomfrey said at last. "It looks like two vertebrae have been smashed and will require careful healing if they are going to work properly. For a witch of her age, this can take three to four months."

"You can heal a broken spinal cord?" Richard asked in awe.

"Of course." Pomfrey actually sniffed. "We can cure most ailments with the right potion or the right spell. It's just that the damage is so severe that it will require really detailed work, work that a specialist at St. Mungo's is more qualified for than I am."

"Arrange transferring her there, Poppy." McGonagall said comfortingly. "We'll figure something out about her classes."

Harry took that opportunity to lead Richard out of the infirmary. The muggle immediately set about demanding to know everything about wizarding medicine. Considering how many times he'd been in the infirmary, Harry had quite a store of knowledge. He laughed at Richard's shocked expression on bone regrowth, and Harry's detailed explanation of teeth regrowth (he'd had a few knocked out during Quidditch).

It was almost lunch time, and Richard went into his room to finish packing. Then Harry led him to the great hall for his final meal. Harry was constantly looking at Draco who had worn a surly expression on his face for the last month, but was now smiling a little more. That morning an owl had arrived from the Ministry instructing Harry to apparate the muggle to the Ministry building where he'd be taken back to the surface and a car that would be waiting for him.

Richard's farewells were pretty short, since the entire school (except Filch) was happy to see his back. During the entire carriage ride to Hogsmeade the man kept thanking Harry for all his help and Harry responded politely. It was on the carriage ride back, after having dropped the muggle off at the Ministry, that Harry wondered just what was to come and if maybe killing the man would have been better after all.

During the next two days, Draco seemed positively intent to erase all traces of the muggle who had shared their rooms. His chosen method? Sex, anywhere and everywhere the muggle had

been. The sink in the bathroom, the bathtub, both couches, both desks, both armchairs, the table in front of the fireplace, the fireplace ledge, the second bedroom, practically everywhere. Harry spent the entire time walking around with a wistful smile on his face, thoroughly mussed hair, and was constantly rubbing his butt. He didn't even notice the sniggers of his fellow students as they passed him in the hall. All he knew was that he was wondering when Draco would pounce on him again and was trying to figure out how to duplicate getting this much of a sex drive out of his blond-haired god. It really was exciting.

He'd tried moving to the Gryffindor table that night for dinner, but Crabbe and Goyle had stood at the entrance and dragged him to sit next to Draco (Draco had tried to move him onto his lap, but a stern glance and a cough from the Headmistress made him change his mind.). That night Harry didn't get to touch his plate, or his food. Draco insisted on cutting his food for him and feeding him each bite, slapping Harry's hand the one time Harry tried to return the favor.

Harry gave in and enjoyed being pampered.

He was enjoying the pampering so much that he didn't notice the sniggering of the Slytherins around them, or their whispered comments about how Draco had him wrapped around his little finger. Nor did he really pay attention to anything going on in the hall until he realized that Professor McGonagall was standing, giving some speech and had just said "Oliver Wood." The hall was cheering loudly, except for the Slytherins around Harry and Draco.

"What was that about Oliver Wood?" Harry mumbled.

"He's coming to teach while Madame Hooch is laid up." Draco said in a half-snarl. Harry knew that jealous look.

"Love, I'm hungry." Harry whined in a little voice. Draco snapped his head around to look at him, saw Harry smiling at him gently and lost the jealous look.

"You're eating her*e* as long as Wood is at this school." Draco snarled, causing the entire table to laugh since he was actually loud enough for the entire hall to hear.

"Oh my." Blaise Zabini said with a startled expression. "Potter, did you date Wood while he was here?"

"No." Harry said shortly.

"And he's never going to." Draco snarled back with such a vicious look that Blaise actually paled a little.

"That's right." Harry said, nodding and finally getting a smile from Draco. "I belong to Malfoy."

"It's good to know that you have finally learned your place in life, Potter." Draco said with a genuine smile.

"Yes, leading the way with you at my side." Harry said with a smirk, jumping as Draco jammed a spoonful of quiche into his mouth.

"Chew, Potter." Draco snarled. "With your mouth closed for Merlin's sake! What do you think you are? A Weasley?"

The Slytherin table erupted in laughter as Harry obnoxiously chewed the food with his mouth open and facing Draco, who just sighed.

Yep, another wonderful day at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N – Once more, my thanks to all those who review! It really does make a difference for me! I've started classes again…which is why the updates are coming a little slower. I've actually got a backlog of chapters from my beta, Stampedelover, that I have to go over before posting. I really hope all of you continue to enjoy this story!

Yikes! So many reviews I stayed up until 3:00 a.m. to get this out. Enjoy!

Chapter 5 –

"Are either of you named Harry Potter?" Headmistress McGonagall's voice was sharp, and Harry winced from where he was listening to her lecture. He stood at the entrance of the Headmistress' office, and he could see the backs of two students facing her desk. They were shaking where they stood.

"No ma'am." They murmured in unison, and Harry vaguely recognized them as seventh year Ravenclaws.

"Then what gives you the idea that the school must sanction your union and give you private quarters?" McGonagall asked, her eyebrow raised at them.

"Well, you gave him and Draco quarters." Said the male, whose name Harry could not remember for the life of him.

"Mr. Potter is the head of the Defenders, and Mr. Malfoy is his second." McGonagall said, her voice dripping ice. "*That* is why they share quarters holding *two* bedrooms. Even if that weren't the case, I'd be willing to consider the matter when you've faced Voldemort four or five times…oh stop flinching! If you've done a tenth of what Harry Potter has done, then you might earn such a privilege. Since I would not grant Mr. Potter such a privilege based solely on his reputation and desire to live with his fiancé, you have no grounds to stand on. I suggest you do not push me any further. If you do, I do believe we will begin using certain resources to make sure every student is in their own beds after curfew."

"Yes, ma'am." They said, again in unison.

"You may go." She told them curtly, then a little louder. "And you may come in now Mr. Potter."

Both students blushed a bright red as they turned and saw him there. He just gave them cool, appraising looks as they shuffled out. He took the seat the Headmistress waved him to and gave her a gentle smile.

"I hope that sort of thing doesn't happen too often." He told her.

"I've memorized the speech by now." She replied with a grimace. "Still, hormonal children trying to wheedle perks they don't deserve isn't why I asked you here."

"So, what can I do for you, ma'am?" Harry asked politely, trying to forget all of the work piling up on his desk in his quarters. Maybe Draco would handle some of those essays he had to grade?

"Well, as you are quite aware, it has been almost three weeks since our muggle visitor left." McGonagall began, and Harry suppressed a groan.

"Yes." Harry replied, His thoughts running to the Samhain/Halloween Feast tomorrow night.

Had that new robe he'd ordered last week arrive yet?

"Well, the Minister of Magic has just informed me by fire that your presence is being requested at the muggle government offices tomorrow. They aren't sure how long the meetings are to last, but you should be prepared for an overnight stay."

"What?" Harry exclaimed, all thoughts returning to the present. "But it's Samhain!"

"I know, Mister Potter." McGonagall said with a sigh. "I also stressed that you've missed far too many classes for my comfort this year, but the Minister made it very clear that this is not an optional meeting. You will be at the Ministry of Magic lobby by seven in the morning. You should be in muggle attire and will be taken from there to the Muggle government building. Based on what Minister Milieu did *not* say, I am under the impression that your interview there will have lasting repercussions on our world."

"Draco..." Harry began, but she cut him off.

"Has not been invited." She said sternly. "They want to talk to the Boy-Who-Lived, not the son of a former Death Eater."

"Oh." Harry said, sitting back in his chair. "Very well, I suppose there'll be a carriage waiting for me?"

"No, you will portkey from my office. I will be waiting at precisely five minutes to seven."

"Very well, ma'am." Harry said, standing at the obvious dismissal. He tried not to slump as he returned to his quarters, but he was already cringing at Draco's reaction. Sure enough, once he returned, the blond Slytherin turned from his desk where he was correcting potions work to ask what the old cat wanted.

"I have to leave tomorrow for the muggle ministry." Harry told him.

"NO!" Draco thundered. "Tomorrow's Samhain. We were going to…"

"I know." Harry interrupted him sadly. "I'm sorry but the Minister of Magic made it very clear that this wasn't optional, and it was very important.

"How long?" Draco asked, his anger disappearing from his face, if not his heart.

"At least a day."

"Let's get you packed, then I'm going to make sure you come running back here when you're done." Draco said with a sly grin. Harry couldn't help but return that grin.

The next morning, Harry had to take a few small sips of a bruise-away potion to remove some of the marks Draco had left. Precisely on time, he showed up in the Headmistress' office, wearing a black Armani suit and holding a garment bag with two more suits in it and a small bag with toiletries. McGongall nodded approvingly before handing him the portkey, and he soon found himself at the Ministry, where a very anxious Orrin Milieu was waiting for him.

"Harry my boy!" The man said with a smile when Harry appeared.

"Minister Milieu, good to see you." Harry greeted the man.

"Yes, yes, well, their driver is waiting by the telephone booth upstairs. Come right this way."

"What exactly is this about?" Harry asked as the man led him through a relatively quiet lobby.

Harry noticed that they'd finally fixed those damn statues.

"The Prime Minister wouldn't say outright, but I think the bloke you escorted to Hogwarts said some things in his report that didn't jive with what they got from the other people, and they're going to try to disprove or prove whatever it was he reported."

"Interesting." Harry said.

"You do have your wand with you?" Orrin Milieu asked with a worried glance as Harry entered the booth.

"Never leave home without it." Harry said, patting his side where the wand was hidden.

"Good luck, Harry." Milieu said with a smile as the booth moved Harry to the surface.

A government vehicle waited for him there, with two men in dark suits standing by it. One approached, asking if he was Harry Potter, and then took Harry's bags and put them in the boot before opening the door for Harry. Once Harry was inside, the men climbed into the front seat and the car took off into London.

Harry's stomach was fluttering, and his palms were sweaty, but he forced himself to calm down as they approached a building that looked vaguely familiar. The car turned down a side street, went through some type of security checkpoint, and finally stopped at what was obviously a back entrance to some type of home. The driver got out, opened the door for him, and as Harry got out, he saw a familiar face coming out of the building's door.

"Harry!" Richard Miles said in a friendly manner, crossing the distance between them to shake Harry's hand warmly. "Glad you could make it."

"Not like I had much choice." Harry said with a wry smile. "Glad to be back in the muggle world?"

"Yes!" Richard said, a little more strongly than Harry had expected. Harry followed Richard's lead as he led him into the building. "I realized when I got back that you were very much right about the jealousy factor. It wasn't until I was back in the office trying to write out the report on that bloody laptop that I realized how glad I was to be back home."

"Told you." Harry said with a smile as they entered what appeared to be the hallway of a very upper-class home. "I felt the same way my first five years when I was forced to spend the summer hols with my muggle relatives. I'd take one look at Hogwarts castle and relax because I was home."

"Yes, I didn't understand what you were saying, but it really hit me when I got back." Richard said, repeating himself as he led Harry into what looked like a small sitting room. He invited Harry to sit in one of the armchairs, but remained standing near the fireplace the two armchairs were facing. "Do you know where you are now?"

"I have no clue." Harry admitted with a smile.

"Does #10 Downing Street ring a bell?" Richard asked with a sly smile. Harry just raised an eyebrow.

"I'm glad I'm wearing Armani." Harry answered instead of the obvious.

"A wise choice." A new voice said, a voice that tugged at Harry's memory until he remembered

the last time he heard it. Of course the way Richard was standing a little straighter gave him a clue. Harry stood and turned to face the source of the voice.

“Mr. Prime Minister.” Harry said with a smile, taking two steps and extending his hand as gracefully as Draco himself would have done. “It’s an honor to meet you again.”

“From all I’ve read, I’d have to argue that the honor might be mine.” The Prime Minister said with a slight smile. “Please have a seat. We should have some tea here soon. Mr. Miles, thank you for greeting our guest, you may return to your work now.”

“Yes, sir.” Richard said, nodding slightly before he left. Harry sat down, just a hair of a second after the Prime Minister sat. Harry noticed that there were four men in suits arranged around the room and took careful notice of their placement. Nothing was said as a maid came in with tea service for two and poured a cup for each of them. Harry directed her to pour cream and two sugars in his.

“I must say that reading your file and seeing you here dressed like that, it is quite hard to imagine that you are only sixteen.” The Prime Minister said as the maid left. “We can speak openly in this room, although only the guards are aware of your…nature.”

“I’ve never really had a chance to be just a child, sir.” Harry replied with a nod of his head. “That choice was taken away from me when I was a toddler.”

“Don’t you see that as a failing of the magical world?” The Prime Minister asked. “So many lives torn apart, so many children forced to grow up far to soon…it really makes me wonder some times.”

“It’s no different than the muggle world in many ways.” Harry replied. “Look at what your government has dealt with in Bosnia and Kosovo. I dare say it would be worse if I had been born and raised there.”

“Still, Britain is not a place like that.” The Prime Minister shifted a little in his seat. Harry made a note to remember to thank Hermione for the list of muggle world events to use in a discussion like this. It had only been a hunch that made him ask her for the information, but it was paying big time.

“Isn’t it, sir?” Harry asked him politely, taking a sip of tea before continuing. “When was the last time the Irish Republic Army set off a bomb either here or in North Ireland?”

“Mr. Miles was right about you, it seems, despite your age.” The Prime Minister said instead of answering. “You seem well-versed in, what do you call them? ‘Muggle’ affairs?”

“Correct term, sir.” Harry said with a smile. “Not all wizards and witches were born and raised only in the wizarding world. Some are muggle-born and keep tabs on the world from which they came. I was taken from the wizarding world after my parents were killed and placed with muggle relatives, so I have a better understanding than many wizards such as my best friend Ronald Weasley.”

“Not quite what I expected when we began our review of the Ministry of Magic.” The Prime Minister acknowledged, “Yet it does give me hope for the ideas we have generated from that review.”

“Which is why I’m here.” Harry stated, not a question in any way shape or form.

“Yes.” The Prime Minister said simply, pausing to take a couple sips of tea before continuing. “Several of our reports contained warnings that your people would not accept many changes without some…resistance. Mr. Miles’ report contained the most detailed, and strongest warnings based on conversations with you. I have spoken several times with your Minister of Magic, but he does not seem to have the understanding of the non-magical world that you possess. His answers just did not give us a clear enough picture.”

“A picture you hope to have me help paint more clearly?” Harry asked him.

“Precisely.” The Prime Minister said. “I’ve arranged several meetings with key members of my government. They will be asking many questions and I hope that you can shed some light on some confusing issues for us.”

“Such as?” Harry asked.

“My security detail were quite concerned with a reported plot from this Voldemort character to take over the government of one of the European countries. Your Law Enforcement people seemed to think it was quite possible and my detail would like more information about that.”

“Why didn’t they just ask for a demonstration?” Harry asked.

“A demonstration?”

“It would be simple.” Harry answered. “Just put a protection spell on you, and on the people participating and we could do it right here.”

“Would you be qualified do perform such a demonstration?” The Prime Minister asked, and Harry noticed one of the guards edging closer into view.

“If you so desired, yes sir.” Harry replied, then went on to explain. “I’d need to place a spell that repels bullets on everyone participating, but that is quite easy to do.”

“Repels bullets?” This came from the guard that had edged closer. Harry looked up and noticed he was an older man in his fifties.

“Yes.” Harry replied with a smile. “It’s actually quite an easy spell to cast.”

“Eric?” The Prime Minister asked.

“I’m not sure, Prime Minister.” The guard replied.

“I’d also cast a version of the spell so that no sound or bullets would leave the room.” Harry added, somehow wanting to prove just how vulnerable these people were. It just might work to make them really think twice about their plans.

It might also backfire, but he had an idea of how to handle their reactions.

“Are you sure there would be no danger to the Prime Minister?” Eric, the guard asked.

“None. If you wish, I can cast the spells on the room, and on you and I. Then the Prime Minister can leave the room, you can verify the safety, and then I can give the demonstration.” Harry told him.

“That would be…acceptable.” Eric said after a moment of thought. “I wanted to see a demonstration but I wasn’t part of the team that visited your Ministry.”

“Very well, then.” The Prime Minister said, standing. Harry stood quickly as well. The remaining

guards also left the room at that point, leaving just Harry and the Detail Captain.

“First, I’ll cast the protections spells on us.” Harry said, taking his wand out of his hiding place. The older man started to reach inside his jacket, but relaxed as Harry touched the wand to his own chest. “*Velo* P*rotectum*”

His skin tingled for a moment as the spell set. “Now for you, sir. You’ll feel a slight tingling as the spell sets on your skin. Once it’s set, you’ll feel normal.”

“Go ahead.”

“*Velo* P*rotectus*” Harry said again, as he touched the man’s chest with his wand. There was a slight silver glow about the man that lasted for three seconds before disappearing. Harry smiled as the man shivered then looked at Harry with wide eyes.

“You know, I didn’t really believe in magic.” He said in a slightly breathy voice.

“Common reaction.” Harry replied with a smile. “Now, I’m going to cast two charms on this room. The first is a silencing charm. Silencio*!* There, that’s set. The second is a sticking charm. It’s a little different than the protection charm in that instead of blocking the bullet, or any other object, that object will stick to the walls. *Impervius* stickilis! I’m actually proud of the bullet protection charm and the sticking charm. I made them both in the past few months based on existing spells.”

“Interesting.” The muggle said. “So, if I were to scream right now no one could hear me?”

“Using your voice, no.” Harry said, and winced when the man yelled at the top of his lungs. When no one came inside, he whispered into a button on his lapel, then listened to the speaker set in one of his ears before nodding.

“Well, that was accurate.” He said with a nod of appreciation. “Now what.”

“Take out your gun and shoot me.” Harry said with a smile, moving a few feet back from the man.

“Son, are you sure about this?” He asked cautiously.

“Absolutely.” Yhe man slowly pulled his weapon out. He did something to it, then pointed at Harry’s leg.

“Last chance.” The muggle said.

“Go ahead.” Harry said calmly, and the man fired. Harry jumped a little. The gun was extremely loud in the small room and it almost deafened him. The bullet had bounced off his leg and was now sticking in the ceiling above them. The muggle looked at Harry’s leg, then at the ceiling in utter disbelief.

“Try it again.” Harry said with a grin, then quickly raised his wand to his ears and cast a protection charm. The man fired twice this time, at Harry’s chest, and both times the bullets bounced off. One of them bounced back and hit Eric, then bounced off him and stuck on a far wall. The other stuck on the curtains covering one of the windows. Harry released the charm on his ears as the muggle wiggled a finger in the ear that did not have any protection.

“Amazing” He said, a little loudly, then whispered something into his lapel. “They didn’t even hear the gunshots and they’re leaning against the door trying to listen!”

“Now, if you want a demonstration in front of the Prime Minister?” Harry asked him. He just nodded. Harry made a hole in the sticking charm so that the door could be opened. He saw the Prime Minister and four more guards enter. One of the guards disappeared after Eric spoke to him, and returned a moment later with ear protection for everyone. Harry refused the offered contraption, that looked like stereo headsets, and cast the protection charms on everyone in the room. When he was done, he looked around the room in satisfaction.

“Now, if you don’t mind.” Harry said with a smile. “I’ll leave the room. Prime Minister, sit or stand wherever you want. Positioning of everyone doesn’t matter. I’ll come in like an attacker. The only difference will be that the spells I use won’t kill or cause any type of injury that I can’t heal myself without outside help. Is that acceptable?”

The Minister and Guard Captain both nodded. Harry left the room, resetting the charms to cover the door as he left. He stood in the hallway where three more guards were located and asked them where the loo was. One of them followed him there and as soon as he was inside, he emptied his bladder, rezipped his pants, took his jacket off, picked his wand back up, and disapparrated.

He apparrated into the exact middle of the room to see Eric and all four guards standing with their weapons drawn. They began firing immediately, but he responded just as quickly.

“Expelliarmus!” One guard’s gun went flying and he flew against the wall, sticking to it.

“Stupefy!” Another guard collapsed unconscious.

“Expelliarmus!” Another guard stuck against the wall, his gun crashing and sticking to the curtains far away from him. Then a weight hit him as Eric tackled him. He cast another stunning spell as he was falling which took the fourth guard out before Harry hit the floor. Even with the breath knocked out of him, he managed to twist in the man’s grip and hit him with the disarming spell. The net effect of which was that the older guard was now stuck to the ceiling. Harry stood up, pointed his wand at the Prime Minister who was sitting in his chair watching with wide eyes and smiled. “With the killing curse, you would be dead now, sir. With the *Impe*rius curse, you would be under my mind control, and with the *Cruciatus* curse you would feel pain like your very bones were melting.”

“Impressive.” The Prime Minister said, taking his hearing protection off. Harry took the charm off of his ears as well.

“What if I told you that the spells I used to disarm and incapacitate your guards could be performed just as effectively by my first year students?” Harry asked him.

“Seriously?”

“Yes, Mr. Prime Minister. The spell allowing me to appear out of thin air is a little more complex, as are the protection spells I used, but most adult wizards could manage them, and I’m only one person.”

While the Prime Minister stared at him, Harry released the charms around the room, and lowered the older Guard Captain from the ceiling. The younger guards immediately started picking up the bullets, counting them all. Amazingly, none of the furniture had been damaged, even though Harry hadn’t put spells on them. Lucky that. When all the spells were taken off, Harry found him face to face with the older guard captain.

“I will have to have your weapon, sir.” He told Harry.

“Sorry, not going to happen.” Harry told him. “I’ve got enemies out there who could care less about your Prime Minister, but will move hell and earth to see me dead. I’ve just shown you what one wizard can do to your protections. Do you expect me to entrust my safety in your hands?”

“What makes you say they have no interest in the Prime Minister but would go after you?” The older muggle asked.

“That’s an easy question.” Harry said, smiling slightly. “In England, the muggle government does not have any real impact on the wizarding world. Except in very specific circumstances, the governments never really impact each other. While this leaves the muggle government void of magical protections, it also makes it a useless target until the Ministry of Magic is either destroyed or controlled by them. If they attack the muggle government, or seek to gain control of it, the Ministry of Magic will be able to stop them before they do any lasting damage. No, you and your Prime Minister are safe precisely because the two worlds are so separated.”

“That’s why you told Mr. Miles that any intervention by the non-magical world in the magical world would be disastrous.” The Prime Minister said thoughtfully.

“Precisely.” Harry said.

“Thank you, Mr. Potter.” The Prime Minister said. “Eric, let him keep his wand. I seriously doubt that he will use it for harm as he hasn’t done so already.”

“Thank you sir.” Harry said with a nod of his head.

“Now, if you don’t mind, I believe there are some people in another room that would like to meet you.” The Prime Minister said, holding his arm out towards one of the doors. Harry smiled and followed him out, stopping by the lavatory he’d used to pick up his coat. Somehow he had the impression it was going to be a very long day.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

What followed in the next day and a half was pure hell, pure torture, boring, aggravating, and a whole host of other adjectives that Harry was far to tired to think of at the moment. As the muggle car made its way through mid-day London traffic, Harry allowed his worn out mind to rest, doing his best to ignore the snippets of memory that popped up. He’d only had a few hours of sleep the entire time he was there, and the repeated use of magic had made him very, very tired. Right then, he wasn’t sure if he could apparate if his life depended on it, but he believed that it had all been worth every bit of effort, sweat, and frustration.

That first meeting after his “demonstration” had probably been the most volatile. It was with several military experts who had watched his little show on a closed circuit camera. Somehow, the device had operated, probably because the spells he’d used weren’t extremely powerful. It had fuzzed out a little when he cast the charms on the walls, but the picture had still been clear enough for the men watching to see him disable five of the best security guards Britain had to offer.

They’d wanted to know how they could use wizards and witches as part of combat units overseas and what opposition such an idea might face from the wizarding community.

They didn't like his answer about wizards and witches living all over the world, and any army that fielded such a force would likely find itself soon facing similar forces in other armies. He likened it to nuclear weapons (another thing to thank Hermione for) and how their very existence in arsenals across the world prevented their use short of apocalypse. At least they accepted his assurance that they could always find volunteers if *some other country* used wizards and witches first.

Silently, Harry prayed that would never happen again. It had happened in 1944 with a desperate Germany losing the war and throwing everything they could find at the encroaching troops. Wizards and witches had responded to the call that time, but that was the last time magical communities had fought in muggle wars. Harsh lessons were learned, lessons still not forgotten.

The medical people who came next were much harder to deal with, especially as he thought of Madame Hooch now recovering in St. Mungo's from an injury that would have forever paralyzed a muggle. Fortunately they understood the term 'scarcity of resources' (Harry reminded himself to thank Blaise Zabini for that one), and had largely decided to feel him out about the idea of sharing resources in extreme cases. Since that largely happened on an unofficial basis right now (according to Pansy Parkinson), that was something he encouraged.

Then there were the Law enforcement people who just couldn't understand why Magical Law Enforcement had to handle all magical offense. Although they'd had the most contact over the years (especially with wizards like Arthur Weasley), they seemed the most incapable of understanding how their prisons could not hold magical people and how their criminal court system couldn't really judge the cases. Harry had resorted to using magic with them more than any of the other groups he had met, and he'd cast a lot of spells in the eight hours they'd harangued him.

He did everything from casting a basic glamour to change his appearance just enough so that they didn't recognize him when he came back from a trip to the loo, to changing his shoe into a brick and throwing it through a window, followed by summoning the brick back through the broken window and changing it back into his shoe. They'd angrily shouted at him about breaking the window until he repaired it and asked them to prove he'd broken the thing in the first place.

Then he'd turned the bloke who refused to shut up into a frog and cast a silencing charm on him when he still croaked.

He waited until he'd finished explaining how magical law enforcement could figure out how he'd done these things while they could never figure out how to prove he'd done anything wrong, especially if all the witnesses were toads. He'd turned the offending bloke back into human form at that point, but left the silencing charm on since the man was still trying to shout, his face far beyond purple.

The man calmed down a half-hour later and Harry took the charm off. The man didn't say a word after that.

Then had come a late night conversation with the Prime Minister and his wife about what it was like to live in the magical world versus the muggle world. The man seemed absolutely incensed when Harry told him about the cupboard under the stairs and how much better things had gotten when he was allowed to just wander the streets without any attention at all during the summer before his first year(b/n the dementors didn't come that summer). The Prime Minister couldn't

understand though, why citizens of the magical world could care less about ‘voting rights’ for muggle representatives. He seemed intent on the concept that since they lived in the same land, within borders on some map, that they belonged as part of the muggle world. Harry thought his wife might have been beginning to grasp the concept, but the man just couldn’t seem to get what Harry was talking about. That was when he suggested the man take a trip down to Kings Cross Station and go through the barrier to platform 9 ¾ . For Harry that was always a significant step, as if he was sloughing off his old self and putting on his real identity.

The education people were probably the worst, and were why he was so tired today. They couldn’t understand that the magical world had no use for muggle education beyond basics. Magical schools taught much the same subjects for children under age 11, or for richer families, private tutors would be used to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic. Like Richard, they were shocked by disinterest in muggle history, and found Richard’s reports of Muggle studies totally confusing. Nothing he said seemed to persuade them, and he finally realized that was in part because they didn’t want to look at ideas other than the ones they had already formulated. Two of the women seemed ready to descend on Hogwarts and force students to sit in a range of classes from muggle history to cooking!

Harry had shocked her by going into the kitchen, ordering the kitchen staff out (which they obeyed) and using a few spells he’d learned from Molly Weasley. The sight of bacon and eggs cooking themselves, followed by the pans cleaning themselves, made one of the women swoon so that Harry thought she’d faint.

“Why should I bother learning to cook the way you do?” Harry asked her afterwards, conveniently ignoring all the muggle meals he’d prepared for the Dursley family. That was the only point they conceded the whole morning.

After lunch, a quick phone call to Minister Milieu had arranged for the barrier at Platform 9 ¾ to be opened. He’d apparated the Prime Minister and his wife (separately) to an office (over the objections of the security detail and after a few phone calls made sure the office was empty), and then escorted them through the barrier. When they returned to the Prime Minister’s residence, he thought he’d seen a glimmer of understanding in the man’s eyes.

Only time would tell.

The car finally reached the Ministry of Magic’s guest entrance, and he soon found himself in Minister Milieu’s office giving him a brief overview of his time with the Prime Minister. He learned that several Ministry officials had been called into various muggle offices over the next few days and he let out a weary sigh. This was not just going to go away.

Could Voldemort have been right? Harry pushed that thought away with a grimace of distaste.

“Being around the muggles that bad, eh, Harry?” Milieu said at Harry’s expression.

“Some of them are so thickheaded.” Harry said, then realized a pattern he’d seen. It hit him like a lightning bolt. “Minister, how many of the people we had working with their reviewers are muggle-born or have actually lived in the muggle world?”

“Off the top of my head,” Milieu said thoughtfully, “You probably were the only one who fits that classification. Even Arthur Weasley really hasn’t lived as a muggle.”

“I think that’s part of our problem.” Harry said, his brain protesting at being worked when it was

so tired. “I was reading some of their reports, or they’d quote it to me and it sounded like what you might get when someone who’s Spanish speaks to someone who’s Portuguese. The languages are similar, they can understand the words, even communicate, but when they try to explain something that one has understood all his life and the other has never seen before, they don’t really understand what they are saying to each other.”

“Where’d you get that idea from?” Milieu asked, his eyes going wide.

“Well I remember a Spanish kid and a Portuguese kid from grammar school. They were speaking in their languages since they understood each other better than trying to speak English, but they didn’t understand a lot of the stuff we were studying in school. Then I remember Ron Weasley trying to explain stuff to Fleur deLacour during the Tri-Wizard tournament and that didn’t work too well either, and I also remembered Mr. Weasley going all crazy over the stupidest muggle stuff, except he’d never seen it before and it wasn’t stupid to him.”

“My boy, that sounds like you’ve hit on part of the problem, but what’s the solution?” Milieu asked.

“Put muggle born wizards and witches to act as ‘translators’ when Ministry officials meet with muggle officials?” Harry opined.

“That’s something we’ll have to think about.” Milieu said, tapping his chin with one finger while Harry yawned.

“Goodness, young man!” Milieu said in a shocked voice. “You must be tired. Think you can get back to Hogwarts okay?”

“I’ll use the portkey.” Harry said with a wan smile. The Minister shooed him out of the office then, and Harry made his way to the lobby where he could utilize the portkey. Moments later he was startling McGonagall who was just entering her office. She took one look at Harry and told him to get to bed, even though it was only mid-day.

Harry was asleep by the time his head hit the pillow.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Harry curled up into the warmth of Draco lying next to him and let out a content sigh. He’d been exhausted on his return from the muggle government meetings and really didn’t want to get up yet, although his stomach was growling. Draco’s warmth was relaxing, even through the clothes he was wearing.

Clothes

Draco

Draco would never wear his robes in bed.

Harry opened his eyes and turned slightly to find himself staring into a set of hazel eyes. Before he could react to the sight of Oliver Wood in his bed, hugging him while he’d been sleeping there was a gasp from the entrance to the bedroom, followed by the sound of running feet. There was a bang as something hit the portrait door, and the loud complaint of the portrait at being mistreated. Harry looked again at Oliver Wood’s face, now showing a bit of surprise.

“GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY BED!” Harry shouted. When Oliver didn’t move fast enough

he added a shove that pushed the young man onto the floor "GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE!"

Oliver's retreating back was the only thing that helped Harry get control of his temper. With a sigh, he got out of bed and quickly crossed over to the wardrobe, picking out the first set of clothes he could find, pulling a school robe on before rushing out of the room. He was feeling a little more awake now and had to think. There was no doubt in his mind that it had been Draco coming into their rooms and who had run at the sight of an all-but nude Harry in bed with a fully clothed Oliver Wood.

This was so not how he wanted his evening to go.

It was evening too, he figured by the mass of students heading into the Great Hall. A few saw him and waived at him with smiles, but he ignored him as he tried to think where Draco might have gone. Of course, the Slytherin common room!

Draco wasn't there.

The Great Hall!

No Draco.

Their rooms!

Still not there.

Another check of the great hall earned him several curious glances, and he noticed that Ron wasn't at the Gryffindor table. Maybe he was with Ron? But why would Draco be talking to Ron? Despite the events of the last year, they weren't really friends. They tolerated each other, but actual friendship? No.

Still, Harry headed to the Head Boy's room. He knew the password to the portrait that guarded the common room shared by Head Boy and Head Girl, so entered immediately. Ron's door was shut, so he went over to it, preparing to knock when he could faintly hear voices. He cast a hearing augmentation charm and he could clearly make out the voices speaking in the room. It *was* Draco and Ron.

"But I don't understand how he could let that Wood hold him in our bed." Draco was sobbing.

"Well, Oliver *is* an old friend." Ron replied. "Maybe he always had a crush on him?"

"But what about us?" Draco was nearly wailing, and there the sound as if Ron was clucking over him.

"I'm sure Harry will come back to his senses." Ron was saying now. Harry put a hand on the door handle getting ready to storm into the room. What Ron was saying made no sense.

"I swear if I saw either of them right now I'd hex them into next week!" Draco snarled, and Harry let his hand drop to his side.

"Harry's just got a big heart, Draco." Ron said consolingly. "He has a hard time turning his back on people that need him, and Oliver Wood is his friend."

"But how could he *cheat*…" Draco started to say, but was interrupted as Harry's anger leaped inside him and he threw the door open with so much force that it banged as it hit the wall and only an outstretched hand stopped it from hitting Harry as he stepped into the room. Draco was sitting on the edge of Ron's bed, with Ron's arm around him and there were tears falling down

his face.

“I have never, and never will cheat on you Draconis Malfoy.” Harry said angrily. “The very fact that you can’t seem to get that through you head is infuriating, but you had better believe it is true. You see this?”

Harry lifted his arm so that his silver bracelet was very visible. Draco just stared at it blankly. Ron was looking at him with a very worried expression.

“It didn’t even get warm, much less burn like it did when that bitch tried to seduce me.” Harry snarled fiercely. Draco’s lack of faith in him had him furious beyond belief. “I thought it was you that was snuggling up to me. I was asleep and had just woken up when you came in. If you’d stayed a moment longer you would have gotten to see me push Oliver off of *our* bed where *he did not belong*. I don’t know what kind of game he was playing but it will not work.”

“Oh yeah?” Draco snarled, anger filling his face as Harry spoke. “Why did my bracelet grow cold like it did when you were captured? I know what that means and it means that your faithfulness is lapsing! I know what I saw! You staring into the that Wood’s eyes and you were *smiling*! You might want me to believe something else but I know what I saw and what I felt from my bracelet! Just leave me alone, Harry *bloody* Potter!”

With that, Draco stood and pushed Harry aside as he stormed out of the room. Harry stood in the doorway, totally stunned, before turning on a very nervous looking Ron.

“What kind of game are you playing?” Harry asked his red-head friend fiercely.

“What are you talking about, Harry?” Ron asked with a confused voice on his face. “I saw Draco storming out of your rooms and he looked angry. I asked him if he wanted to talk and brought him back to my rooms and was trying to calm him down until you came storming in here!”

“Calm him down?” Harry asked, his voice cold as his guts knotted. “Do you call telling him how Oliver and I are old friends, that I have such a big heart I’ll sleep with anyone who crawls in my bed calming Draco down? If I didn’t know you better I’d think you were trying to break us up!”

“That’s crazy!” Ron nearly shouted. “You know I support you two together! Why would I want to break you two up?”

“I don’t know, Ronald Weasley.” Harry told him in that cold voice. “But I swear that if I find out you were, you will wish you had never been born!”

“Don’t you threaten me!” Ron nearly roared, his wand appearing in his hand. Harry just stared at him for a moment before turning and walking out of the room. He made his way down to the great hall and found Draco sitting at the Slytherin table, looking extremely angry. He took one step in that direction and stopped at the furious gaze of those silver eyes. Instead he went and sat down next to Hermione who looked like she was just finishing her meal.

“Harry, what’s wrong with Draco?” Hermione asked as soon as he sat down.

“Long story.” Harry told her.

“Want to come up to my room and talk about it?” She offered.

“No.” Harry told her honestly.

“How about the library?” She persisted.

“Okay.” Harry said, realizing he really wasn’t hungry. They got up and left the room. Harry noticed Oliver at the staff table, staring at him but refused to meet the man’s gaze. The library was mostly empty and he broke into tears as he told her what had happened. She let him cry on her shoulder, but before they could really talk about it, McGonagall appeared and asked Harry to come to her office.

By the time he got done talking to the Headmistress about the past few days, it was well past nine. He returned to his apartment, hoping Draco would be there and willing to talk, but was shocked to see the second bedroom’s door shut. The only response he got when he knocked was a sharp “GO AWAY!”

For the second night in a year, and the first where they ever had a choice, Harry Potter went to bed without Draco Malfoy next to him.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N – Okay, we know a little now about what Oliver Wood and Ron are up to, but as to *why*, well that will be forthcoming.

Now, before people start talking about Draco’s reaction to this development, here are the reasons going through his head:

1. Malfoys are VERY VERY possessive and get extremely angry/jealous when something they view as theirs is being taken or infringed upon. Look at Lucius in Chamber of Secrets and you’ll see that. Also look at Draco’s reactions to anything that is his being damaged or threatened in all the books and you see why he might react with anger.

2. Ron is the first person that Draco saw, and has been Harry’s best friend for years. If anyone would know about Harry and Oliver’s past, it would be Ron, and the Weasley might just be able to provide Draco with the knowledge that Harry *wouldn’t* cheat on him.

3. Draco is very upset right now and not thinking very clearly.

4. Harry is exhausted and even though he had a nap for a few hours, he still isn’t thinking clearly or he might have noticed one big difference from when he went to sleep and when he woke up.

Chapter 6 –

The days that followed Harry’s return to Hogwarts were pure hell for him and for many other people as well. Harry had woken to find Draco gone from the rooms and not in the great hall. Oliver had approached him immediately and asked him for a private word. They’d left and gone to an empty classroom where Oliver had apologized. He admitted to having a long-standing crush on Harry and had just let things get out of hand when he found Harry asleep on the bed. Harry had forgiven him but asked Oliver to tell Draco the truth since the blond git wasn’t speaking to him.

Somehow Harry had forgotten to ask how Oliver had gotten into their room.

As they were coming out of the empty classroom, they had run right into Ron and Draco. Ron was saying something about “just talk to Harry” when the blond saw them exiting. He had gone pale and fled before anyone could say a word, and even Ron had looked surprised at them.

By lunchtime it was all over school that Draco had caught Harry snogging Oliver in an empty classroom. Harry made it a point to keep his engagement bracelet clearly visible, but gave up

when he overheard to seventh year Ravenclaws discussing how Harry might have charmed it to not fall off. After dinner, he learned that Draco had moved out of their rooms altogether. He immediately set off for the Slytherin common room, but was met by a cold greater than that of the North Pole.

He could have forced the issue by using the Blood Oath, but he just didn't feel right doing that.

His first and second year students over the next few days grew to dread his class. He took so many points off for the littlest things that they were shaking in fear whenever they entered the classroom, and although he felt a little guilty at that, it also made him feel slightly better. Harry finally understood Severus Snape's teaching style. Fortunately he had no meetings at the Ministry that week, so he was able to spend time talking with Hermione about the problem.

Ron wasn't talking to him, and half the time he found his best friend in Draco's company. For some reason, Ron had taken Draco's side and was refusing to even talk with Harry. It didn't help that every time he saw Draco and Ron, Oliver Wood just happened to be nearby, once again apologizing to Harry.

The one time Oliver had tried to talk to Draco, the Slytherin had cursed him with jelly legs and walked off.

This carried on for a whole week before a pair of very angry Malfoy owls streamed into the hall at breakfast. Harry had taken to sitting with his back to the Slytherin table so he wouldn't have to look at Draco's angry glare, but he recognized the two owls immediately and from where the second went, he knew that Draco was receiving a letter too. That was when Harry realized their wedding was only a few weeks away and here he and Draco were all but broken up.

The angry owl dropped it's letter in Harry's lap and he took it glumly, running his fingers over the Malfoy family crest. Hermione said something encouraging, and he screwed up his courage to open it. The letter opened and it took him a moment to focus on the elegant script to read it. Surprisingly, there was no hidden message in the family code, just the elegant words Lucius Malfoy had written.

*Dea*r Ha*r*ry,

*As you might expect, wor*d has reached us of the tr*ouble cu*rrently existing between you and my son. While I am su*r*pr*ised you have not wr*itten to me about these troubles, I do under*stand that you might be r*eticent to bring such issues to me based on the fact that we have only recently come to good ter*ms with each other*, I am shocked that you have been avoiding Professo*r* Snape's efforts to discuss these issues with you. While I might expect such behavior f*r*om my son, I did expect better f*r*om you.

*D*raco has w*r*itten to his mother that he wishes to have the engagement annulled. Accor*ding to the ancient r*itual, there must be valid *r*eason for such an annulment and so long as your b*r*acelet remains on you*r* wr*ist, the*re is no such *r*eason. Seve*r*us has informed me of the nasty r*umo*rs that you have found a way to overcome the fidelity of the br*acelet, but I have confer*red with knowledgeable sour*ces and they state such an act would be impossible. Any spell that might do such a thing would invalidate the spell of the b*racelet, causing it to r*emove itself fr*om you immediately.

I have requested, and *r*eceived, permission f*r*om the Ministry of Magic to visit Hogwar*ts this*

*weekend. Nar*cissa and will be in attendance, as will the both of you. This issue will be resolved Satu*r*day, as it is far too close to your *wedding date to allow anything tr*ivial to interfe*r*e. While I am hopeful that we will arrive only to find the matter *has been* resolved, I will str*ess that you should do nothing to furthe*r aggravate the situation.

*I also must info*rm you that news of these…tr*oubles has been leaked to the media. We we*re contacted late last night for *comment and expect the stor*ies to appear tomo*r*row. While we Malfoys do prefe*r* our *p*rivate matte*r*s to remain p*r*ivate, we must expect that events will on occasion be made public. You must allow your assistant to deal with matter*s as deemed best. He has p*roven himself to be a ver*y capable young man in these affair*s.

*Until Satu*rday,

Lucius Malfoy

“He wants to break off the wedding!” Harry managed to blubber as he collapsed into tears. Hermione wrapped her arms around him immediately, and he was vaguely aware of Jeremy joining her and getting him to stand. Together, they led him out of the great hall where people were staring in shock at him, and back to his rooms. They sat him down on the couch and tried comforting him, but for some reason they just set him on edge and he ordered them out. He sat there for how long, he didn’t know, but his eyes were closed as he tears fell down his face and felt like the entire world was falling on him. Then he felt a soft pair of lips on his and opened his eyes, daring against hope itself.

Oliver Wood.

A gasp from the doorway got his attention and there stood Ron and Draco. Draco had made the gasp, and before Harry could react, he turned and ran. Ron had a strange expression on his face, as if he was smug, and he turned and ran after Draco. Harry turned back to face Oliver, who was still only inches from him.

“You don’t need him, Harry.” Oliver whispered. “I am so much better for you than…”

Whatever Oliver Wood was about to say, he never got a chance as Harry drew his wand and cast a spell that threw Oliver against the fireplace. There was a large crack as Oliver hit his head on the fireplace, and a smear of blood on the stones as he slid to the floor. Harry cast an *ener*vate that brought Oliver around. Before the man could move, Harry began kicking him violently.

“YOU SON OF A BITCH” Harry roared, changing the aim of his kicks so he struck this vile thing that called itself a man in the crotch. “YOU DID THAT ON PURPOSE!”

“HARRY!” Hermione’s voice was horrified, and he didn’t have time to react before her stunning spell hit him.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Harry woke on the same couch he’d been sitting on, but his room was full of people. Professors Snape, Flitwick, and Grubby-Plank were standing around him, and Headmistress McGonagall was putting her wand away from having wakened him. He noticed Crabbe, Goyle, and two others of the Defenders standing near the entrance to his rooms. Every single person had a very grave expression on their face.

“Harry Potter.” Minerva McGonagall said in an extremely stern voice. “You were found by the

Head Girl brutally assaulting a member of our staff. You will explain your actions. You are facing expulsion and criminal charges for your assault on Professor Oliver Wood."

Harry winced at the name, and remembered the angry joy he felt kicking the man. He hung his head, realizing there really was no excuse for his angry reaction. He could feel his cheeks heating in shame as the silence became very ominous. The bracelet on his wrist was even chilly.

"You *will* speak." McGonagall warned him sharply.

"He kissed me." Harry whispered, and he could hear Severus groaning from where he stood next to the couch.

"A kiss." McGonagall whispered. "Since when does a kiss warrant such force?"

"Since he's trying to break me and Draco up!" Harry snarled angrily.

"You are doing a fine job of that without his help." Severus snapped at him, jolting Harry.

"Bring Mr. Potter to the Infirmary." McGonagall said, looking at the Defenders. "Professor Snape, you will find Mr. Malfoy and bring him to the Infirmary as well. I know Mr. and Mrs. Malfoy were planning to work on resolving this issue on Saturday but due to these events I fear that we cannot wait. The Ministry will need to be informed soon and I fear that once they are any actions we might take will be moot."

With that she left, followed by the Professors. Harry stood and the Defenders followed him out of the room as he headed to the Infirmary. Crabbe and Goyle were looking extremely angry while the two Ravenclaw girls were looking confused. Harry ignored them as he thought about the events of the past few weeks, and he realized exactly how true his statement of Oliver's intent was. He also realized that he had to have had some help from a certain Weasley.

That only got his anger boiling harder, and he realized he'd need to calm down here. He was a legal adult and his assault on Oliver Wood could very well end up in criminal prosecution, something no one needed now. Calming his anger was not easy, and as he entered the Infirmary that keeping it under control was going to be very hard. McGonagall was talking to Madame Pomfrey, who shot a very dirty look at Harry before nodding to the Headmistress. Oliver was sitting in a bed and winced when he saw Harry.

"Mr. Wood has a concussion." McGonagall said sternly. "He also has several broken ribs that will have to be taken care of. However, Madame Pomfrey has agreed that he can talk for a little while now. We will begin as soon as Mr. Malfoy arrives."

As if on cue, a very angry looking Draco walked in, Ron at his side, and a very angry looking Severus Snape behind them. Draco went to stand a few feet from Harry and at an angle where they could not see each other without turning their heads. He was staring off at a Portrait on the far wall as if no one else was in the room. Ron kept shooting dirty glances at Harry. Harry noticed that Draco was tugging at the golden bracelet on his wrist, and wincing a bit as if it was hurting him. Before he could think about that, McGonagall spoke again.

"Now that we are all assembled here," She said, her voice still stern, "we will figure out exactly what has been going on here and what has led Mr. Potter to severely beat a Professor of this school."

Harry was still looking at Draco with longing, so he saw the look of surprise the blond shot him.

A swelling of hope filled Harry at that moment, and he looked back at Professor McGonagall with confidence.

“I believe that the basics of the matter is that Oliver Wood, with the assistance of Ronald Weasley, has for reasons currently unknown been attempting to end the relationship between Draco and I.” Harry said, his head held proud and his voice firm.

Ron reacted as Harry expected.

“What a crock!” Ron snarled, surging forward as if he was going to hit Harry. Snape caught him by the arm and dragged him back to stand next to Draco. “You’re the one who’s been shagging Wood and cheating on Draco!”

“I have never shagged Wood, nor have I willingly had any intimate contact him with including kissing or hugging.” Harry said truthfully, pointedly raising his arm with the bracelet and fingering it.

“That doesn’t prove anything!” Ron snarled. “You’ve used some charm to get around that!”

“Enough Mr. Weasley.” McGonagall said. “Mr. Wood, would you please confirm that Harry has not behaved as he is accused by Mr. Weasley?”

“Well, we haven’t shagged.” Oliver said after a moment, wincing with pain. “As for snogging, well we might have a time or two. He said that Malfoy was getting to be too much for him with that family of his and all.”

“Professor Snape?” Harry asked, and the greasy haired Potions Professor gave him a hesitant nod. “Do you have any Veritaserum in stock?”

“I do.” The Potions Professor said with a grim smile. “But you are aware that no one can be forced to take it without agreeing to before hand.”

“I do not intend to force anyone to take it.” Harry said with a smile. “I am asking so that I can take it.”

“It won’t work.” Ron said with a funny expression on his face. “You told me yourself that you can ignore it just like you can throw off the Imper*ius* curse!”

“Ron, why are you lying?” Harry asked in a hurt voice.

“Mr. Weasley,” Snape said in a very curt voice. “I assure you that despite what you might read in the gossip column of some rag calling itself a newspaper, the truth serum cannot be overcome as easily as a curse. While it can be countered by various spells and potions, a person does not have the innate ability to resist it!”

“Then he’s probably already taken the antidote!” Ron snorted.

“Then I will administer a testing spell before giving him the truth serum.” Snape said with a sly smile as he withdrew a vial from his robe. “I anticipated this request before finding Mr. Malfoy in the Head Boy’s room and interrupted a rather…embarrassing moment. Madame Pomfrey, a glass of water if you please?”

The medi-witch brought the requested water, and everyone watched as he poured several drops of the truth serum into the water. Before giving it to Harry, he cast a spell on his wand, announced that Harry had no spells or potions in or on him that would interfere with the truth

serum, and that it was an extremely heavy dose. Harry drank the water down and immediately realized that heavy dose was an understatement. Harry would have no chance in hell of fighting this off.

“How do we even know that is real truth serum?” Ron snorted.

“Mr. Weasley.” Snape said in a very sweet voice. “If you doubt my word I will be happy to have Madame Pomfrey get a second glass of water and you can verify that this is indeed what I said it was.”

“Uh….no, thanks.” Ron said, backing up a step.

“Make him.” Harry said at that moment. “I would love to hear why the hell he’s been doing this!”

“Mr. Potter.” McGonagall said a little more softly than she had spoken before. “You will focus on the questions I am about to ask you.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Harry said, his head spinning from the potion slightly.

“Why did you assault Professor Wood?”

“I was very angry.” Harry said, the word leaping to his mouth before he even had time to think about them. The potion was very strong indeed. “At dinner I got a letter from Father…”

“Father?” McGonagall asked.

“Lucius Malfoy.” Harry said at once. “I’ve been thinking of him as a surrogate Father ever since we escaped Voldemort earlier in the year. He’s nothing at all like what I expected and I’m really surprised, but I love him like a dad even if he does have a vicious streak to him and…”

“That’s enough on that, Mr. Potter.” McGonagall said quickly, and in Harry’s peripheral vision, he saw Draco moving so that the blond could look at him. Harry risked a quick look and noticed that for the first time since all of this had started, Draco wasn’t looking at him in anger or hurt.

“Continue with what you were saying before I interrupted you, Mr. Potter.” McGonagall commanded.

“In the letter, Father said that Draco wanted to annul our engagement and I lost it.” Harry said, even the flat voice common to the truth serum tinged with the sadness he felt, and tears started falling down his face. “I love Draco so much and this has all been a mess and I don’t see why. I can’t understand this. I’ve done *nothing* to deserve this, but he can’t. Then when I saw that he wanted to leave me forever, I completely lost it. Hermione and Jeremy got me back to my room and sat me down on the couch, but I kind of zoned out. The next thing I knew I felt lips on mine and I felt so happy that Draco had come back and was kissing me, then I opened my eyes and it was Wood. That’s when I heard a gasp and looked at the door to see Draco and Ron there. Draco ran off, followed by Ron and then Wood said that I was better off without the love of my life and that Wood and I belonged together. Then he tried to kiss me again and I blasted him off of me with a hex, then I was so angry that I just started kicking him. I didn’t really know what I was doing, just that I was in so much pain and the person that caused the pain was right there.”

“That’s a lie!” Wood said from the bed, then gasped in pain, clutching his ribs.

“If I’m lying,” Harry said, looking at the man in the bed with utter disgust. “Why don’t you take

some Veritaserum and tell them so?"

"You can't make me do…" Oliver spat out, but was interrupted by McGonagall.

"Silence, Oliver." McGonagall said angrily. "Mr. Wood, if you wish to refute the statements made under Veritaserum, you will need to take a dose yourself in order to gain my belief of your testimony. Are you willing to do so?"

"No." Wood said sullenly.

"Very well," McGonagall said with a sniff. "Professor Snape, please watch the boys and make sure none leave. Professors Flitwick and Grubby-Plank, oh and Madame Pomfrey, let us confer in Madame Pomfrey's office on this matter."

She turned, followed by the people she named and disappeared into the office. Ron turned as if to leave, but Snape pulled him back into place. Draco moved until he was standing in front of Harry, barely an arm's length away. His face was filled with different emotions before the cool Malfoy mask slid over his features.

"Harry, what happened that day I found you in bed with Oliver?" Draco asked, and Harry let out a sigh of relief before the answers flowed from him. As he told how he came back, totally exhausted from his time at the muggle Prime Minister's residence and collapsed on the bed without even taking his clothes off (he surprised himself there because he hadn't even remembered that before!), and how he woke nude thinking it was Draco, and then went on to tell the events of the last week from his perspective, Draco's expression barely faltered, except for the fact that his eyes watered at several points and that he grew very angry as Harry finished with the events leading to him being there now.

"Attention, everyone." McGonagall's voice sounded just as Draco had opened his mouth to speak. Draco turned to face her, and Harry looked at her expectantly. "We have come to several decisions here. First, would Mr. Weasley or Mr. Wood care to take Veritaserum to refute the testimony of Mr. Potter?"

Both of them shook their head, Wood having the grace to not even raise his eyes from studying his hands lying in his lap.

"Very well, then." She said, nodding her head ever so slightly. "This is the decision of the Headmistress of Hogwarts, affirmed by the minimum required two staff members. First, Oliver Wood, for sexual assault and conduct unbecoming of a member of Hogwarts staff, you are hereby relieved of your position. Upon clearance by Madame Pomfrey based on your medical condition you will remove yourself from the premises and never return unless special permission is granted from the Headmistress. This is a lifetime ban on your presence from Hogwarts."

"But…" Oliver gasped, falling silent as McGonagall stared at him.

"I have never been so ashamed by the behavior of a staff member in my life!" She snapped at him before turning to face Harry. "Mr. Potter, according to your own testimony, you were the victim of unwanted sexual advances by a member of the faculty this evening. However, your reaction to the event is not justified. Physical or magical force to remove yourself from the threatening situation would have been warranted, however the excessive force you used merits punishment. Because of your unique position within Hogwarts, and within the magical community, most common punishments are not possible. If your actions had been committed

with forethought or in a clear frame of mind, the breaking of your wand and expulsion would be warranted. Because criminal matters also play a part in this, I conferred with Minister of Magic Milieu by floo. He has agreed that as long as you do not press sexual assault charges against Mr. Wood, there will be no charges for assault and battery against you. He has also agreed to the punishment we will be enforcing as final in this matter."

"What is the punishment?" Harry asked.

"Tomorrow morning following breakfast," McGonagall said after taking a deep breath, "Your wand will be broken before the assembled student body and you will be suspended from school for three calendar days."

"My wand?" Harry asked, horrified.

"Yes, Mr. Potter." She told him. "Your wand. You will be escorted off campus by Aurors who will be sent by the Ministry. It is my understanding that one of those Aurors will be visiting Olivander's shop before escorting you back to your residence. You may return on Sunday evening after 7:00 p.m. There will be no further punishments or penalties once you have completed your suspension. I will expect you to resume your full schedule, including teaching your classes, on Monday morning. Is this understood? Do you wish to appeal to the Board of Governors?"

"I understand, and I do not wish to appeal." Harry said.

"Very well, Professor Snape, please administer the antidote." McGonagall said. Wood was still looking at his hands, Ron was fuming, and looking like he wanted to run, and Draco was just looking at him behind that cool mask.

"Just a moment, please." Harry said as Snape approached him with a vial. "Draco, I want to say this so that you won't have any way to argue about it. I love you with all my heart. You are the first thing I think about every day when I wake. Just by being around you make my whole day better, everything brighter, and even make the food taste better. When I'm with you, I'm happier than I am when I'm alone. I have never been tempted to cheat on you and I pray that I never will because the thought of betraying your trust makes me sick. These last few days have been worse than being stuck in a cupboard under the stairs for ten years. Will you please come back to me?"

"I…" Draco began, his eyes filling with tears as his voice faltered. He cleared his throat though, and looked Harry in the eyes. "I don't deserve you."

With that, he turned and ran out of the room. Harry gave a groan and collapsed, the entire world spinning around him. Vaguely, he heard Snape's voice.

"A week of detention, Mr. Weasley." Snape was saying as blackness took Harry. "And if I am ever able to prove you had a hand in this mess I will personally skin you alive!"

Then the blackness took Harry and he didn't feel or see a very concerned Professor Snape lifting him into a bed.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

"Very interesting developments, indeed." Harry heard himself saying in a very odd voice. He felt very excited.

“Yes, Master.” Said a sniveling voice Harry recognized immediately

“You are sure this information is accurate, Worm?” Harry heard himself say, and he vaguely recognized that it wasn’t really himself saying this.

“We have received two reports from our agents, although our new agent hasn’t reported yet.” Wormtail said. “According to one of the other agents, though, he is being held in the Infirmary and is being kicked out of the school.”

“He will have to be punished for losing his position.” Harry said coldly. “Still, he has managed to accomplish his mission, it seems.”

“Yes, master.” Wormtail said. “Our agent in your House has reported that the traitor’s son has indeed left the school, most likely to return home and his last words indicated he has no intention of ever returning to the boy.”

“Excellent.” Harry said, warm pleasure filling him. “Then we will catch all three next week instead of just the parents.”

Harry realized fully what was happening and extricated himself from Voldemort very carefully, doing his best to leave no traces. He woke, seeing the infirmary for a few moments, gasping out loud and clasping his scar. Through blurred vision he realized his hand was covered with blood from the scar. His gasp acted like a summons for Madame Pomfrey.

“Vision.” Harry gasped out as she reached his bedside. “Wood, Death Eater, don’t let him leave.”

“Now, now, dear, get back to sleep.” She said, lifting a jar to his lips. He swallowed against his will, and fought as the blackness consumed him.

“Vision of Voldemort, he said Wood worked for him.” Harry whispered, not sure if she heard him or not before darkness reclaimed him.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Harry opened his eyes and saw two blurry forms standing near his bed. He blinked several times, trying to get his vision to clear up, but it was like it use to be, before it suddenly clearing at Hearly Manor. He groaned aloud and he realized the two figures were now facing him, joined by a third.

“Wotcher, Harry!” A very familiar voice said.

“Tonks?” Harry asked the blurry figure with a bright dash of emerald on the top of the blob he thought was a head.

“Yup, Harry.” Tonks said, the emerald dash bobbing. “What, you don’t recognize me with my new hair?”

“Not that.” Harry said, “Everything’s blurry like I need glasses again.”

“I wonder how that could be.” Madame Pomfrey’s voice said. “I checked you over when you came back from Hearly Manor and your vision was perfect. I thought it odd, but there could be so many explanations for it. What happened last night that could have changed that?”

“Wood.” Harry said firmly. “I had a vision and told you to hold him. He’s being held right?”

“What’s that, Harry?” The other voice asked, and Harry recognized it as belonging to Auror

Dawlsey.

“I had a vision of Voldemort last night.” Harry said. “First time it wasn’t initiated on my part in over a year. He was talking to Wormtail and they gave me enough information to identify Wood as a Death Eater. He was following Voldemort’s orders in trying to come between Draco and I. I told Madame Pomfrey before she gave me a potion to put me to sleep.”

“Harry, I didn’t go to your bedside at all last night.” Pomfrey said with a concerned look. She stood back and cast a spell on him. “Someone did give you a sleeping potion last night, but it wasn’t me. As far as I can tell, nothing else was done. Wood was gone this morning when I came to check on him. He’s not in the castle either. Did you actually see me give you a potion or was your vision blurry?”

“Blurry.” Harry admitted, and now that he thought about it, the voice wasn’t quite like hers either. “It might have been another person. Voldemort said they still had a spy in Slytherin House as well. If it was a female, it could have been her.”

“Very likely.” Tonks said. “But what about your eyes?”

“Wait.” Harry said, remembering something. “My vision cleared up when I used Occlumensy to counter the dreams and the effects of Voldemort. The times that I purposely went seeking his mind, my vision was blurry a bit afterwards. I wonder if I clear my mind and reinforce my shields…”

“Try it, Harry.” Madame Pomfrey said quietly, and Harry did. Within a few moments, his vision slid back into a focus.

“Does this mean my blurry vision is a side-effect of the curse-scar?” Harry asked.

“More than likely.” Madame Pomfrey said. “That’s why those spells and potions I tried in first year didn’t work.”

“It’s almost time.” Dawlsey said, reminding Harry of why they were here. He knew his face expressed his feelings at the moment.

“Doncha worry, Harry-o.” Tonks said cheerfully. “We already talked with old Olivander and he’s opening the shop early just for you. He said he’s just finished a few wands he wants you to take a gander at.”

“But doesn’t the bond you have with a wand cause you to lose some of your power when it is broken?” Harry asked.

“Yes, which is why this is still the punishment you deserve instead of a mere performance.” Dawlsey said sharply. That was when Snape appeared in the doorway and summoned the male Auror, shutting the door behind them as soon as they man entered the hallway.

“Quick Harry!” Tonks said, handing Harry his wand. “Look at your wand and say ‘*wandum* finis’. It breaks the bond between you and the bond so you don’t lose your powers. Hurry!”

Harry took the wand he’d known for so many years now, and whispered the words. Immediately he felt magic pouring from the wand back into him, and the warm wood he had come to know so well suddenly felt…strange. Tonks took it back from him and put it the back of the muggle jeans she wore, hidden under the beige jacket she was wearing. Dawlsey opened the door and came

back into the room, followed closely by Snape.

“Are you ready, Harry?” Snape asked him in an almost kind voice. Harry nodded, standing from the bed and glad he was at least still wearing pants. Madame Pomfrey led him to a changing curtain where his best school robes and uniform were hanging. He changed quickly and came from around the curtain in time to see Tonks trip over something. Snape caught her, and out of the sight of Dawlsey took Harry’s old wand from under her coat and hid it up a sleeve.

“I’m ready.” Harry told them, causing all three of them (Madame Pomfrey was no longer anywhere to be found) to turn and nod at him. He left the Infirmary, standing tall and holding his head proudly as Severus walked beside him, the two Aurors following behind.

Peeves flowed out of a wall as they neared the great hall, saw Harry and looked as if he was about to say something. However, he took one look at the Potions Professor and gave a strangled “eep” before disappearing the way he came. Harry almost chuckled, but didn’t. The doors to the great hall were closed, but as they reached it, Severus held out his hand and they opened.

Every student and Professor was there, except a very noticeable absence at the Slytherin table. As Harry strode towards the staff table and the standing Headmistress, he noticed Hermione give him a sympathetic look, and Ron practically gloating. He gave Hermione a small smile in return and stared daggers at Ron until he lowered his eyes before completing the walk to the Headmistress. When he reached her, she looked down at him sternly.

“Harold James Malfoy-Potter has been brought before us today to receive punishment for the crimes committed when he failed to control his temper.” She said in a voice that rang in the silent hall. “While the use of some force was justified in removing himself from the situation he was in, he allowed his anger to goad him into using more force than was necessary. In recognition of this, his punishment has been decreed a three-day suspension and the breaking of his wand.”

A soft gasp filled the hall at that point.

“Professor Severus Snape, you have his wand?” McGonagall asked.

“I do.” Severus said sternly, taking the wand and handing it to her. “It has been in my possession since this morning when you gave it to me, and has not left my possession nor been touched by the accused.”

“Harold James Potter.” She said in the same, loud voice. “For your crimes you wand is hereby broken.”

As she spoke, she bent his wand, and at the last word it snapped. A flash of light followed the breaking, and everyone in the hall watched in shock as a single Phoenix feather floated down. Fawkes appeared out of nowhere, grabbing the feather in its beak before it could touch the floor, and flew out of the open doors of the hall. Harry stared in shock at the broken pieces of wood that McGonagall let fall to the ground and responded numbly as a hand on his shoulder guided him out.

“It’ll be alrigh’, Harry.” Tonks whispered to him as they boarded the carriage that would take them to Hogsmeade. For the first time in a very long time, Harry Potter felt weak and defenseless. He spent the carriage trip, huddled in on himself, wondering what had happened to the wonderful life he had two weeks ago.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N – I've had a really bad weekend, and I'd like to thank everyone who reviewed. Your kind words cheered me up this evening and I can't thank you enough.

Gizachick: angst sucks, but so does life. As I was going over this chapter I couldn't help but remember that. Don't worry though, this story isn't life and the ending has already been written. The journey there though, will be full of ups and downs. Just remember, there's a wedding in two weeks.

Tangled Hair: I've heard of this drug, and am both happy and sad about it. My favorite aunt, who passed away in October of 2002, was crippled from the neck down in an auto accident in 1975. She lived in a wheelchair for every moment I can remember, although there was a picture of her holding me as a baby (yes, I'm that old). I've never known a woman as strong-willled, energetic, and full of life as she was and tears come to my eyes whenever I remember her. Such drugs are a wonder and a boon to society these days.

Calimora: No, Draco's bracelet doesn't chill everytime somebody makes a pass at Harry. I think you can figure some things out from this chapter and that answer. Good question.J

Death-The OnlyTrueFreedom – Read on!

Ash Knight – With any luck, other people in their life will step in and make them face each other.

High?D – trust me, Harry is VERY pissed right now.

LeTimbo: Aha! I hope you enjoy…

Flack – They, and others are trying, aren't they?

Craw/Brad – Was that enough hurting of Wood or does Wood deserve more?

Gilana1 – Draco realizes that Harry only has eyes for him now, but the question is: Is it too late?

Malfoy Snogger – It's a going!

Now a real special treat for all those that scrolled down here…The date of the wedding is coming up (but will it really happen?), as is a face-to-face confrontation between Harry and Voldemort. Not going to tell you in what order those happen, but they will happen in the next 5 chapters that are already written! Hope you enjoy!

Chapter 7 –

"My, my, Mister Potter, it is good to see you again." Mister Olivander said as Harry entered the store. The two Aurors had positioned themselves in front of the door, preventing anyone else from entering, and giving Harry privacy for this most intimate of purchases. "I've been expecting you for a few years now."

"You have?" Harry asked, surprised.

"Yes, yes," Olivander replied with a kind smile. "Can't expect you to duel the dark lord with a wand that locks up every time you cast at each other, now can we?"

"No, I guess not." Harry said with a small smile, moving until he stood next to the counter instead of just inside the door. "I'm sorry about the wand being broken…"

"Nonsense, boy." Olivander said, waving his hands. "I've been working for two years on a wand

just for you ever since Dumbledore, Merlin bless his soul, told me about your duel with You-Know-Who."

"You have?" Harry asked again, in surprise. He hadn't stopped being surprised since he entered the store.

"Yes, I have." Olivander confirmed. "Dumbledore and I talked at great length about you and the things you have done, and that gave me an idea of what kind of wand is really fit for one such as you. Here it is!"

As he finished speaking, the old wand maker held up a long purple box. He lifted the lid for Harry, and there, sitting on a cushion of silk, was a very long and thick wand that Harry could only gasp at. He reached inside the box and pulled it out. Immediately a humming sound filled the store, and as he gave it a wave, a warm silver glow filled the room. When he lowered the wand, his smile matched that of the old wandmaker's.

"Twenty inches long." Olivander said, in what could only be called a reverential voice. "The heartwood of an oak tree on the exterior provides the strength you will need, with the supple heartwood of willow providing flexibility inside, all surrounding the shaved long tooth of a Hungarian Horntail dragon, soaked for a year in the tears of a certain Phoenix and soaked for another year in the blood of a lion to give courage and healing to its bearer."

"It's amazing." Harry breathed, still staring at the long, thick wand he now held. He could feel a connection to it forming already, so different than his old wand, and so much stronger. "How much is it?"

"I will only be charging for the cost of making it, no more." Olivander said in a tone brooking no arguments. "Even then, it is the most expensive wand I have ever made. I am afraid I must ask for 1,200 galleons."

"Done." Harry said, taking the quill he saw on the counter and signing the invoice that the old man was clutching. "Thank you, sir, for a most excellent wand."

"My pleasure." Olivander said, beaming. "A word of advice. This is a new wand. Your old one had six years to get use to you. New wands must be made accustomed to their owner, and if you need to use it facing You-Know-Who it must be familiar with you or things could go badly. Use it as much as you can, for everything that you can. Do not turn on a light, do not pick up a garment to throw in the hamper with your hands. Use the wand. Use it for everything you can and it will not fail you."

"Thank you for the advice." Harry said, feeling a genuine smile on is face. The weakness he had felt on the trip from Hogwarts was gone as he exited the store.

"Where to now, Harry?" Tonks asked.

"I need to find a jeweler." Harry said. Dawlsey scowled.

"I'm done here." He said flatly. "We only had to guard him until he had a new wand."

"I've taken the next three days off from Hogwarts." Tonks told him firmly. "I'll see you on Monday."

"Later, then." The man replied before disapparating with a pop. Tonks just smiled before leading Harry off through the busy street to the best jeweler she knew. Then followed an apparition back

to Black Manor.

Kreacher had been informed of Harry's return over the weekend and was expecting them. The old house elf had a fire going in the sitting room and brought tea in for Harry as soon as he sat down, as well as a hearty late breakfast. He hadn't expected to be hungry, but he was as soon as he saw the food. Still, he had something for Kreacher to do.

"Kreacher." Harry told the house elf as soon as the food and tea was sitting before him. The house elf immediately bobbed its head. "I want you to go to Narcissa Malfoy. I know you are familiar with her and Malfoy Manor, don't argue. I want you to tell her my exact words. Tell her that *he* is planning an attack within the next week and that they must be cautious and prepared. Tell her that I will owl her with more information tomorrow."

"What about Master Draco, sir?" Kreacher asked, then cringed as if expecting to be punished.

"What about him?" Harry said, through a lump in his throat.

"Does Master have a message for him?" Kreacher asked, and Harry realized the elf already knew that Draco was at Malfoy Manor.

"Yes, tell him I miss him and wish he was home." Harry said softly, barely noticing Tonks' nod of approval.

"Kreacher will perform this task with pleasure, Master Potter!" The elf said before disappearing. Harry sat about eating his breakfast while Tonks began interrogating him for all the details. By the time he was done, she was gone, apparently to work on her lessons for the upcoming week. Her mix of Hogwarts Professorship and Auror seemed to be as tiring for her as Harry's workload was for him. Harry left the empty plates and tea service in the sitting room, knowing that one of the house elves would clean it up, and headed upstairs to the library.

With a few waves of his new wand, the furniture was moved aside and Harry was practicing spells. As he worked, he could feel the power of the Oath Stone in the room, and it made him feel closer to Draco. Kreacher returned sometime around mid-day with a message of thanks from Narcissa, but nothing from Draco. The old elf positively cringed when Harry asked for a message from Draco and started slamming his head against the wall. Harry had used his wand to levitate the elf to the middle of the room until he was convinced that no more punishment was needed. Then Harry let Kreacher drop to the floor from four feet up.

Kreacher actually thanked Harry for the punishment before leaving. That caused three chairs to be blasted into kindling wood. Whoops, when he got angry this new wand amplified his powers.

He ate lunch in the library, and continued practicing every spell he could think of casting. By dinner, the library was a mess and should keep the elves busy. Jeremy would probably be getting a list of furniture to replace since Harry had destroyed everything but the mahogany box covering the Oath Stone and the bust of Sirius sitting on top of it (as well as the books lining the room).

After dinner, he went to the garden out back and started blasting plants in his irritation. His mood continued to worsen as he thought about sleeping another night alone and he was soon cursing Draco for not staying with him that night in the Infirmary.

THIS IS NOT MY FAULT! Harry screamed inside his mind while blasting into ash a rose bush

Hermione had planted over the summer.

He was exhausted within a few hours and climbed into bed. He wasn't in the master bedroom, but rather one of the guest rooms. He just couldn't face sleeping in their bed. Maybe he should have Kreacher redecorate the room before the Christmas holidays.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Over breakfast on Saturday morning, Harry was mentally reviewing everything that had happened over the last few weeks, trying to analyze what he'd done wrong, and what he could have done differently. By the time the food was finished, he had come to realize there wasn't much else he could have done without forcing himself on Draco and that was unacceptable.

Right after buying the wand, he had gone to the jeweler and bought something for Draco. He had been thinking he'd go to Malfoy Manor today and convince Draco to come back to him, but the lack of response to the message he sent through Kreacher made him change his mind. No, he decided to himself, if Draco was to come back he'd have to come back on his own.

Instead, Harry would owl Jeremy with instructions to separate anything from the accounts that would belong to Draco and to prepare paperwork to send it back to him. If Draco wanted an annulment, then Harry would get the process started and leave Draco with the choice of either accepting or denying the end of their relationship. Pippy, one of the other house elves, had just removed his plate and Harry was standing to move into his study when Kreacher appeared announcing guests at the door. Harry followed him to the main entrance, wondering who would be visiting him today, and received a surprise.

Three surprises, actually.

"Get inside, boy." Lucius Malfoy said, pushing a very sullen looking Draco with his cane. Draco lurched inside, refusing to even look at Harry, who was standing there with his mouth open. Lucius followed him inside, with Narcissa right behind him. Lucius prodded Draco again with his cane as Narcissa took Harry's arm in a very commanding grip. The older couple headed for the sitting room, and Lucius ordered Kreacher to bring tea for four and then not to disturb them for anything short of Voldemort appearing at the door. The house elf bowed down low, and rushed to comply. Lucius pointed with his cane and Draco sullenly sat on the couch while Narcissa sat Harry down next to him, so close they were touching. Harry's entire right side, the side touching Draco tingled, but he could not bring himself to look at the blond boy he loved. Instead, he sat there staring at the older couple. Narcissa sat in an chair while Lucius stood in front of the fireplace, the very image of an aristocrat, tapping his cane into his open palm. Once the tea was set down and the nervous house elf had shut the doors behind him, Lucius somehow fixed both boys with a steely glare.

"This foolishness has gone on long enough." Lucius said, his voice dripping with anger, and reminding Harry very much of past encounters with this man. "I will not have your relationship made a laughing stock of the wizarding community the way the papers have done this morning. Draco has told us his perspective of what has occurred, and I have had a long conversation with Severus by floo to get more information. You are not to blame for your relationship being manipulated by my former master, but you are both to blame for your behaviors that have let it reach this point!"

“I…” Harry started to say, but was cut off by the elder Malfoy.

“I will not hear your excuses.” Lucius said imperiously. “Harry, from what I have heard, you have in no way, shape, or form, been unfaithful to my son. My son is guilty of failing to listen to you, failing to make an effort to learn the truth, of listening to unwise counselors, and of being seduced.”

That made Harry sit up sharply and with an internal groan he looked over to Draco’s arm, where the bracelet should be. He let out a sigh of relief when he saw a flash of gold on his wrist. Lucius saw his look, while Draco tried to ignore it.

“My son has Severus Snape’s timing to thank for stopping things before they went too far.” Lucius said in a tone that was downright angry towards Draco. Out of the corner of his eye, Harry noticed that Draco hung his head at this.

“When?” Harry asked in a small voice, almost afraid to hear answers. “Who?”

“After I came in and thought I saw you kissing Wood.” Draco whispered. Harry looked at him, but the blond was studying his lap and would not look up. “Ron took me back to his room and was trying to comfort me. Somehow it turned into a kiss and then next thing I knew he was all over me. I couldn’t…didn’t want to stop him. The bracelet was burning but I didn’t care because I thought you’d already…you’d already...well then Severus came in and stopped us and dragged us down to the Infirmary where you…well, you know that part.”

“I’ll kill him!” Harry snarled, standing from the couch, pulling his new wand and preparing to apparate to Hogwarts. Ronald Weasley was a dead man.

“Sit down.” Lucius’ voice cut through Harry’s anger and he sat back down with a thump, eyes wide. “That’s better. A Malfoy does not run off in a fit of rage and murder someone with his own wand. When you’ve calmed down, if you still want him dead, there are other methods that we can arrange.”

Lucius’ words calmed him, and he nodded after a moment of thought. He’d always known that his future father-in-law was a man that didn’t shrink from murder, so hearing him say something like that wasn’t a surprise. A little voice inside him shrieked protests at the thought of murdering anyone, much less someone who had been a friend for so long.

That little voice was strangled when Harry glanced at Draco, who wouldn’t even look at him. He doubted he’d ever hear from that little voice again because it was dead.

“You’re right, sir.” Harry said firmly. “We’ll discuss Weasley’s…accident later. Wood I get to kill myself since he serves Voldemort.”

Draco looked up sharply at that, meeting Harry’s eyes for the first time. He paled even more at whatever he saw in Harry’s eyes, but looked away before Harry could make any meaningful contact with him.

“Yes, Wood is a different situation entirely.” The elder Malfoy said with a smile. Narcissa simply reached to pick up a cup of tea, and hid her smile by taking a sip. When the tea cup lowered, her smile was gone.

“Now, about you two and where you stand now.” She said. “Harry, you asked Draco to come back to you, but he left. Do you still want to ask him back?”

“No.” Harry said firmly, and heard Draco gasp while Lucius just raised an eyebrow.

“Explain.” Lucius whispered fiercely.

“I asked him once, and he said no.” Harry said quietly, but firmly.

“I said I didn’t deserve you!” Draco interjected.

“And as long as you believe that, you won’t.” Harry told him fiercely. Finally their eyes met and his next words crossed the space between them like fire. “I don’t want someone that has to worry about whether I will cheat on him because that will only lead me to wonder if he will cheat on me. I don’t want someone who thinks they aren’t my equal. Sure, you can have different strengths, different weaknesses, but those don’t make you lesser than me. I want a partner who will *sha*re my life, every damn fucking part of my life! I want someone who stands with me because they love me, and because they know they belong with me. I want someone who knows what they want and will take it and hold onto it, grasping it with both hands and never letting go the way you did these last few weeks! I want the arrogant prick who pisses people off whenever he opens his damn mouth and who makes my life wo*r*th living!”

Draco’s lips fiercely meeting his were all the answer Harry needed. A fire erupted inside of his stomach and soon filled every crevice of his body as Draco’s tongue entered his mouth, reclaiming it fiercely. Harry had no idea how long that kiss lasted, but he lost himself in it, and succumbed to the fire burning in his body. He pulled back just long enough to pull out his wand, and with a spell, their clothes disappeared. The fact that other people were in the room was long gone from his mind, nor did he noticed a smiling Lucius and Narcissa leave, with Lucius bending over and nipping at her ear playfully. All he knew was that he was laying on his back now and a throbbing Draco was preparing to reclaim Harry Potter.

That was all that mattered in the world.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Several hours later, a thoroughly satiated Harry carried a very exhausted Draco Malfoy upstairs to their bathroom using a levitating charm. They were both still nude, and very, very sticky, but Harry could care less right now if anyone saw them. Kreacher had their bath prepared and Draco woke up as he was lowered into the almost-too-hot water. Harry joined him a moment later and they slowly cleaned each other’s body in a gentler, softer repeat of the reclaiming that had happened downstairs. Halfway through their bath, Kreacher appeared with a tray of fruits and juices for them, and informed them that the elder Malfoys would be indisposed for at least another hour. Harry smiled at the thought that his display with Draco had caused a similar reaction between the elder Malfoys, but all thoughts of them slipped his mind as Draco began feeding him a chocolate covered strawberry.

It was actually dinner time before all four of them were in a room together again. After the bath, Draco and Harry had fallen asleep in their bed. Poor Kreacher had tried to wake them up three times before Lucius had entered their room and used his wand to sound a loud bang that woke them both up, and had Harry pointing his new wand at the surprised man. Lucius gave an approving nod and informed them that dinner was ready downstairs.

Still tired, the two had dressed in comfortable, but appropriate robes, and headed downstairs. The meal was set in the formal dining room, but the long table had been charmed so that all four

could sit comfortably close enough to talk as they ate. While they ate, dinner conversation was light once the younger couple had nodded in response to the question of "Is everything settled between you two?"

Narcissa spent the most time talking about all the arrangements for their wedding.

After dinner, they retired to the sitting room, and Harry had the grace to blush as he sat once more on the couch, this time with his arms wrapped around Draco, and vice versa. Lucius and Narcissa sat in two chairs, the fire spreading its warmth over everyone as Kreacher brought in some after-dinner coffee. When the diminutive elf had left, Lucius turned to them with a very serious expression.

"Harry, I must say that I am quite disappointed in the fact that you lost your temper to the point you were punished by having your wand broken and being suspended for three days. That is a disgrace to your, and our, name. Please see that a similar occurrence does not occur again."

"Yes, sir." Harry responded with a nod of his head. "It could have been worse though."

"Yes, it could have been." Lucius agreed.

"In more ways than one." Narcissa added. "You were fortunate that Severus and Nymphadora managed to get your wand in time to break the link."

"Yes." Harry agreed.

"Now, I suppose you are calmed down enough to discuss those responsible for this?" Lucius asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Yes, sir." Harry said, as Draco nodded. "Voldemort is ultimately responsible, him and Wormtail. I already plan to kill both so there's no difference there. Ron, well, the way I see it his actions impacted Draco most, so that's Draco's business. Wood is mine."

"What do you want to do with young Mr. Wood?" Narcissa asked sweetly.

"Kill him." Harry said simply.

"Still?" Lucius asked, as Draco pulled away a bit, in shock.

"Absolutely." Harry said firmly. "He came between Draco and me, and I will never forgive anyone who does that."

"What if I decide I want to kill the Weasel?" Draco asked him sharply.

"Do it." Harry answered, and then waited to see if that little voice came back. It didn't. "He gave up my friendship when he acted against us. You want to kill him, you have my full support and I'll help."

"Why do you want to kill Mr. Wood, exactly?" Narcissa asked quietly.

"First, he came between us." Harry said, motioned to Draco with his free hand. "Second, because he's been publicly humiliated now. He's an enemy for life and I wouldn't be surprised that if he's allowed to live he'll try something again. If he's dead, he's no longer a threat.

"All valid reasons." Lucius said, and then he looked at Draco. "What about the Weasley?"

"I want to." Draco said. "However, I don't think we should. Unlike Wood, I don't think he's anything but a tool in Voldemort's hands. He isn't thinking on his own, but letting others guide

his thinking. If we keep a close eye on him, we can spot more trouble before it starts and maybe use him as a trap without his knowing."

"Excellent." Lucius said with a smile, and clapped his hands. Kreacher appeared at the door, and floating behind him was a bound Oliver Wood. Elf magic was holding him in place, and Harry stood in surprise as the elf levitated him into the room before leaving. The bonds disappeared, but the young man stood frozen as Harry took his wand out and pointed it at him. Lucius looked at Harry with a raised eyebrow.

"Harry…please." Oliver Wood begged, starting to move forward until Harry's wand twitched slightly. "I didn't want to…but he made me. Please don't do anything you will regret."

"Lift your sleeve. You know the one I mean." Harry said firmly, and watched as Oliver lifted his left sleeve. His clothes were dirty and tattered, but the Mark was clear on his tanned skin.

"He made the mistake of going to one of Nott's safe houses." Lucius explained. "Nott heard what had happened and sent him to me."

"Wood?" Harry said, with a slightly questioning tone.

"Yes, Harry?" Wood replied hopefully.

"Do you know what your mistake was?"

"He had my mum, Harry." Wood pleaded. "He'd kill her if I didn't…you have to believe me!"

"Wood," Harry said calmly, almost smiling as hope appeared in those blasted eyes. "Your mistake is that Voldemort does not mark those he bribes, blackmails, or curses into following him. He only gives his mark to those that follow him of their own free will. Goodbye, Wood. Crucibus!"

The white knot of force flew from Harry's wand and hit Oliver Wood square in the face, breaking his nose and sending him flying against the fireplace. Harry immediately closed with the fallen form of his one-time friend and checked to see if he was alive, breathing a sigh of relief when he confirmed Oliver Wood was dead.

"Not an Unforgivable?" Lucius asked as he also checked to make sure the young man was dead. Draco just looked at Harry with a strange expression.

"No." Harry said firmly, taking a deep breath as he realized that he really had taken a human life. He was a murderer, and the person he had killed was once a friend. He felt sad for the Oliver Wood he once knew, but there was no sadness in him for this man before him, the man had deserved death. "You know the effect Dark Magic has on people, and Draco told me a long time ago he won't be married to someone who uses dark magic enough to change them. Besides, this spell can be excused as it is one that I'm licensed to use. I just wish I knew where Wood's wand is to make it look totally like self-defense."

"Here it is." Lucius said, pulling it out of his robe and tossing it so that it fell in a place that was believable for it being in Wood's grasp when Harry hit him with the spell.

"Draco?" Harry asked, turning to face his fiancé fully.

"Harry, how do you feel?" Draco asked him, his voice giving the full importance of the question.

"Sad." Harry admitted. "He taught me Quidditch, you know. He was a good mate in school, but

he became the enemy. I wish he'd made different choices so that I didn't have to do this, but that's neither here nor there."

"I love you." Draco said with a sad smile, wrapping Harry in his arms.

Strangely enough, Harry didn't feel like crying.

He felt horny again.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

"So Wood suddenly burst in here, wand drawn, and I reacted." Harry told the MLE agent. Marshbanks, a little corner of his mind reminded him. "I cast *c*rucibus but my aim was a little off and I hit him in the head. He flew back against the fireplace and cracked his head. I saw he was hurt and tried to determine if I could maybe heal him enough to save him, but he was already dead"

"That confirms the spells from your wand." Marshbanks said. "You've been casting a lot with it since you got it."

"Olivander said I needed to cast a lot with it." Harry said sadly. He really didn't need to act to show sadness at Oliver Wood's death. It was just necessary. "I've been using mostly combat spells because that's what I'm most likely to use if Voldemort thinks I'm weak enough to attack right now."

"Good thinking." Marshbanks said with an approving nod of his head. "Well, Mr. Potter, I see no reason to keep your wand any longer. We'll owl you our final report, but you can rest assured that it will confirm that you acted in self-defense and the death was a tragic accident that couldn't be prevented. It will verify that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Malfoy had wands in their possession and that young Draco had left his upstairs. It's a good thing you always keep yours on you."

"Six years of Voldemort trying to kill you makes for certain habits." Harry said with a wan smile, ignoring the flinch at the name.

"Yes, yes." Marshbanks said a little bit rushed. "Well, don't worry about any trouble from the Ministry. This is a clear cut case with everything we have from Hogwarts and the overwhelming evidence here. Sad story. I can't imagine what it feels like to be betrayed by a friend."

"It's happened to me before." Harry said, shaking his head. "I just hope we get Voldemort soon enough to stop the madness."

"Me too." Marshbanks said, after flinching again. He left at that point, taking the other MLE agents with him, although one crossed to Harry long enough to return his wand before they left. From the living room he could hear the crowd of reporters outside and went upstairs to where Draco and his parents were waiting. They talked briefly and decided the only way to get rid of the reporters was to talk to them. They all changed into more presentable attire than the lounging clothes they'd worn since dinner. When they were all clean and properly dressed, they headed downstairs and opened the front door, immediately blinded by flashes of light. Shouted questions greeted them, but soon quieted down as Harry lifted one hand and stepped outside. Draco stood on his right while the elder Malfoys stood behind them.

"Thank you all for waiting to hear from us before publishing your reports." Harry said with a sad smile. "I know it's getting late and you have deadlines to meet, so we will try to be brief. As you

already know from the MLE, I was enjoying an evening with my fiancé's family when we were interrupted by a most unexpected and uninvited guest. In the process of defending my family and myself, our assailant was mortally injured and I was unable to revive him. I will have to live with the consequences of that for the rest of my life. The fact that the assailant was a former friend who chose to support Voldemort makes the matter all the more troubling. We will answer any questions you may have before you need to file your reports."

"Mr. Potter! Is it true that your relationship with Mr. Malfoy had ended? Why were the Malfoys visiting your home tonight?"

"That's two questions, but I think we can manage them both." Harry said with a smile. He lifted his hand so that his bracelet was clearly visible, and Draco grasped it so that his also showed. Cameras started flashing immediately.

"As you can see," Draco said with a smirk. "Whatever rumors you may have heard of infidelity between us are completely false. We were the victims of a sick and twisted plot hatched by Voldemort and executed by two former friends of Harry's to end our relationship. While it came close to succeeding, in the end it failed. My family visited Harry and me this evening, with Ministry approval, to provide comfort after this plot was uncovered and to work on preparations for our wedding, which takes place in a few weeks. It is a good thing that Harry never goes anywhere without his wand or you might have been reporting on the death of all four of us instead of one Death Eater."

"Mr. Malfoy! How does it feel to be a target in an attack by a servant of your former Master?"

"I never really served him willingly." Lucius said, repeating the familiar refrain. "But I have long expected such an attack. I am just grateful that Harry was there to defend us since my wife and I are no longer allowed the means to do so."

"How does it feel to be left defenseless by the Ministry?"

"The Ministry has made its decisions to comfort the citizens of our community." Lucius replied in a kind voice. "If it is necessary for me to die because I am unable to defend myself and my family in order to make people feel safer in their homes, then I will not argue with such a decision. Fortunately, the Ministry has provided Aurors and MLE agents to safeguard our residence. They were even on duty tonight and responded as soon as we called them."

"How is it that Mr. Wood was able to get in your home, Mr. Potter?"

"Well, I believe that first he received information on our wards and got passwords from someone that I once trusted." Harry answered. "Whether this friend gave them willingly or was under the *Impe*rius I don't know, since he has fallen to that curse before. However, Mr. Wood was able to use a broom, he was an excellent flyer being a Quidditch player and all, and entered through our garden. I assure you that we will be working on changing all the wards as soon as possible."

"Mr. Potter, why didn't you use the *Fidelus* charm to hide your residence?"

"My family has a history of picking bad secret keepers. Peter Pettigrew betrayed my parents, leading to their deaths, and the person I would have picked to be secret keeper was the one who helped Mr. Wood. I guess Potters are just too trusting of people sometimes."

"Pettigrew? I thought Black betrayed your family?"

“No, Sirius was my godfather and was faithful. He thought he’d be the obvious choice for secret keeper so he encouraged my parents to switch to Peter Pettigrew, another friend, and Pettigrew turned out to be a death eater. In fact it was Pettigrew who performed the spell returning Voldemort to his full strength. He had faked his own death and framed my godfather for the whole thing. That was all cleared up with the Ministry last year and I was allowed to inherit the Black properties according to the terms of Sirius’ will.”

“If there are no more questions,” Narcissa said softly, “I’d like to get my son and his fiancé back inside. This whole evening has been terribly draining and we’d like some time to console our newest family member over the stresses he’s had to endure.”

“Good night.” Harry said, giving another wan smile as he turned with the Malfoys.

“So, dad.” Draco said with his trademark smirk as the door shut and they entered the sitting room. “How long do you think it will be before they give you permission for a wand so that you can defend your family? Your family that now includes Harry Potter that is.”

“I’d say two weeks.” Harry said with a smirk of his own. “Who would have thought the public would cry out that Lucius Malfoy must have a wand so he can defend poor Harry Potter?”

The Malfoy family actually managed to fill Black Manor with laughter that night.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

*Potte*r Defends Family Fr*om Death Eater* Attack!

Daily Prophet

Sunday Edition

*The Depa*rtment of Magical Law Enfor*cement was called to the home of Har*ry Potte*r* in London tonight to investigate an attack by repo*r*ted Death Eater Olive*r* Wood. M*r*. Potter, cu*r*rently se*r*ving a three day suspension fr*om Hogwa*rts School fo*r* Witchcraft and Wiza*r*dr*y, was enter*taining his fiancé, Draco Malfoy, and his future *in-laws Lucius and Nar*cissa Malfoy, when they were attacked by Oliver *Wood. Wood was killed accidentally as Ha*rry Potte*r* sought to defend his family from the attacke*r*.

*The Depa*rtment of Magical Law Enfor*cement, following an extensive investigation including the checking all spells cast with Mr*. Potter’s wand, has *r*eleased prelimina*r*y findings indicating that Mr. Potte*r* used only spells he has been licensed to use and that the *r*esult was the result of an unavoidable accident during M*r*. Potter’s attempt to subdue the attacker. No charges will be filed, and Mr. *Potte*r will face no penalties other *than his own consciousness since it is clea*r *he did not mean per*manent harm to M*r*. Wood.

*M*r. Wood was closely involved in a scandal that has been rocking Hogwa*r*ts over the last few weeks. Ever since his *r*etur*n f*rom inte*r*views with the muggle government (fo*r* mor*e inf*ormation on that developing stor*y see page 2), Mr*. Potter’s *r*elationship with his fiancé was repo*r*tedly to be on the rocks amidst *r*umor*s of infidelity by Mr*. Potter. The partne*r* in this alleged infidelity was repo*r*tedly Mr. Woods himself!

*The scandal ended seve*ral days ago when Mr. *Woods attempted to sexually molest M*r. *Potte*r. Reacting in outrage, M*r*. Potter caused physical injur*y to M*r. Wood and immediately tur*ned himself into school author**ities while seeking car*e for *M*r. Wood’s injur*i*es. As *r*epor*ted in a*

*statement published ear*lier*, M*r. Potte*r* apologized for his seve*r*e overreaction and accepted the punishments given by Hogwart's Headmist*r*ess Minerva McGonagall.

If this had been anyone other than Harry Potte*r*, the fact that Oliver Wood was killed two days later *might be extr*emely suspicious. However, M*r*. Potter has shown an amazing ability to forgive and fo*r*get past transg*r*ession, as readily evidenced by the fact that he is currently engaged to his school-yar*d* rival, D*r*aco Malfoy. Afte*r* five years whe*r*e the most that could be said of their *r*elationship is that they did not actually kill each othe*r* (although both repo*r*tedly caused injuries to the othe*r* that often requi*r*ed a trip to the infi*r*mar*y and ea*rned them many detentions), and an attempt by Mr. D*r*aco Malfoy to assault Mr. Potte*r*, Mr. *Potte*r *r*esponded by offering a f*r*iendship that eventually turned to love.

*If M*r. Potte*r* is able to transfo*r*m a bitter *r*ivalr*y to the wizar*ding world's g*r*eatest love story, it is easy to believe that a forme*r* fr*iend such as Oliver* Wood would have received kindness at his hands. Ou*r* sympathies go out to Mr. Potte*r* in this trying time.

*In a b*rief appea*r*ance before *r*epor*te*rs, the Malfoy family and Mr. *Potte*r sha*r*ed their ho*rro r* at the attack, and the unfortunate *r*esults.

When asked about the attack, Mr. Potter *r*eplied "In the process of defending my family and myself, our assailant was mor*tally inju*red and I was unable to r*evive him. I will have to live with the consequences of that for* the rest of my life. The fact that the assailant was a fo*r*mer *f*riend who chose to suppor*t Voldemo*rt makes the matter *all the mor*e tr*oubling."*

*Fo*rme*r* Death Eater, and now suppo*r*ter *of Ha*rry Potte*r* and the Ministry, Lucius Malfoy was also pr*esent. Howeve*r, due to Ministr*y* r*egulations is not allowed to possess a wand and was thus unable to assist M*r. Potte*r* tonight. When asked about the Ministr*y* regulations, he had this to say: "If it is necessary fo*r* me to die because I am unable to defend myself and my family in or*de*r to make people feel safer *in thei*r homes, then I will not ar*gue with such a decision."*

*When asked how M*r. Wood has gotten past his defensive wards, M*r*. Potter info*r*med the Daily Prophet that just as his parents we*r*e betrayed by Pete*r* Pettigrew (*r*ead how the Ministry got it w*r*ong 15 years ago and *Si*rius Black*'s Innocence on page 3), now known to be Voldemo*rt's *r*ight hand man (see how he raised Voldemo*r*t fr*om the dead as told in our* exclusive Interview with Ha*r*ry Potte*r*), Harry Potte*r* was betrayed by a close fr*iend. While he* refused to name his betr*aye*r, it is suspected that it might have been his one-time childhood friend Ronald Weasley, Head Boy of Hogwarts and membe*r* of Gryffindo*r* House (Is Gryffindo*r* the new Dark House? See page five for a comp*r*ehensive list of all Gryffindo*r*s who have betrayed the light over *the last 20 year*s). Ronald Weasley was said to have been under Impe*r*ius when he took down the wards of Hogwa*r*ts earlie*r* this year du*r*ing the attack that captured Ha*r*ry Potte*r*. How Ha*r*ry Potte*r* will deal with this new betrayal, and whethe*r* Ronald Weasley was under Imper*ius* or *was continuing a family tr*adition (see the Arrest of Pe*r*cy Weasley as a Death Eater, page 6) of se*r*vice to Voldemort *r*emains to be seen.

*As fo*r M*r*. Potter, the Ministr*y* has granted the elde*r* Malfoy's permission to *r*emain with him until he retu*r*ns to Hogwarts following the ter*m of his voluntar*y suspension. Mr. *Potte*r has p*r*oven himself to once again be a shining example to the wiza*r*ding community, even in his mistakes. Instead of using his money, influence, or abilities to escape punishment for his violation of school r*ules, he volunteer*ed for a ve*r*y str*ict punishment, and when faced with an*

*accidental death stemming f*rom an attack on his family, he immediately summoned law enforcement author*i*ties to deal with the matter without attempting to cover *it up o*r ignor*e* the media. Finally, when faced with another *example of betr*ayal by a close friend, he *r*efused to identify the person and shame their *family unnecessar*ily. Yes, indeed, Ha*r*ry Potte*r* is an example more of us could follow!

Chapter 8 –

Things were as they should be when Harry Potter walked through the entrance of Hogwarts with Draco at his side. It was late Sunday evening, and he was not in the least surprised to see the Headmistress waiting for them. She held out her hand, and instinctively Harry understood, and took his wand out and handed it to her. She looked at it for a long time, running a hand along all twenty inches of it before handing it back to him.

“A wand much more suited to dealing with the Dark Lord.” She said with a nod. Then she looked deeply into Harry’s eyes. “I am sorry to hear about Mr. Wood’s attempt on you and your family. Very tragic.”

“I just wish he didn’t have to die.” Harry said in complete honesty, meeting her gaze unflinchingly.

“As do we all, Mr. Potter.” She said sadly. “You have some guests waiting for you in your common room. I do hope you don’t mind their presence.”

“Thank you, ma’am.” Draco said with a nod as Harry and he moved off down the hallway. They reached their apartment and the portrait expressed her delight to have them back before opening. When they entered, Harry found himself completely unsurprised to see Arthur and Molly Weasley sitting on a couch. Both of them stood as Draco and Harry entered, and Molly’s face looked especially anxious. Harry knew why they were here, and he put aside any anger at Ron immediately. The Weasleys were important members of the Order, and he could still use their support.

“Molly.” Harry said, a note of happiness audible in the sadness of his voice. He rushed to her and hugged her. Both Molly and Arthur immediately seemed to relax, and Mr. Weasley shook Harry’s hand when Molly let him out of the bone crushing hug. Draco took his cue from Harry and also hugged Mrs. Weasley before shaking Mr. Weasley’s hand.

“What are you both doing here?” Harry asked after everyone had sat down. “I hope you didn’t come all this way just to see me?”

“Well, we wanted to see you and make sure that Ron’s…” Arthur began, but Harry cut him off.

“What Ron has or has not done has no bearing on my relationship to the rest of the family.” Harry said firmly. “I love all of you and whatever my relationship with your son, whether we are friends or not, does not make me love the rest of you one bit less.”

“Oh, Harry.” Molly gushed. “You are such a good boy! I was hoping you’d understand.”

“WE do.” Draco said with a soft smile, emphasizing the first word.

“Thank you, both of you.” Arthur said with a wide grin. “We were here all weekend and when the Headmistress told us you were returning tonight we just wanted to stay and hoped that you would talk with us.”

“Anytime.” Harry said with a grin. “I hope the rest of you are still coming to the wedding? Molly, Narcissa has shared how much you have put into it and it would be a shame if you weren’t there.”

“Yes, yes, of course I’ll be there.” Molly said with a pleased grin. “So will Arthur. Bill said he and Fleur should have no trouble being there and Charlie is talking to the Ministry to make sure that he can get the time off from guarding Azkaban. George and Fred are also going to be there, although they weren’t too happy about my warnings about no jokes or pranks, and of course Ginny is so looking forward to going!”

“Good, that’s comforting to hear.” Harry said with a genuine smile. “And if Fred and George do get one or two canary crèmes, and put them somewhere where Severus Snape would try one, I wouldn’t mind too much.”

“Only as long as they get McGonagall as well!” Draco said with a laugh and a nudge at Harry. Even Molly laughed at that.

“Okay, okay.” She said. “The grooms want two practical jokes, they’ll get two practical jokes, but no more!”

“Hey, Potter.” Draco asked with a smirk, and Harry just raised an eyebrow. “You’ve heard about the cat who ate the canary, right? How about the cat who turned into a canary?”

“Arggghhhh!” Harry groaned, while the older Weasley couple chuckled. They spent probably a half-hour while Harry and Draco tried to outdo each other with bad jokes and even worse puns. The Weasleys seemed to enjoy it, and that made Harry feel a little better about his relationship with them. They finally stood, claiming a need to work (him) and clean the Burrow (her) in the morning. As Harry was showing them out of the room, Mrs. Weasley turned to give him a hug and a sad look.

“Harry, we’re sorry.” She whispered to him, tears filling her eyes. “We have no idea what we did wrong with Percy or Ron, but they’re both so filled with jealousy and rage that we just don’t know what to do. We decided after talking to Ron all weekend that we’re formally disowning them, the full ritual, and you know how much I hate ritual magic.”

“I’m sorry, Molly.” Harry said with true sympathy. “I honestly think you didn’t do anything wrong. They just made wrong choices in their lives. You’re probably doing the right thing. Look at Bill and Charley and Ginny, and even the twins. They’ve all done good things with their lives. It’s just that Ron and Percy didn’t make the right choices like they did. We all have to stand or fall based on our choices in life and no one else is responsible for those choices. If you think disowning them is the right punishment, then you do that.”

“Thank you Harry.” She said gratefully. She seemed to walk a little straighter as she left. Draco was already in their bedroom, and as soon as Harry followed him in, he found the blond in his arms.

“So, what was that whispering in the end?” Draco asked.

“The Weasleys are going to disown their Weasel.” Harry said with a smirk.

“Oh, really?” Draco said, his eyes gleaming with mirth at the idea. “How long before I can tease him about that?”

“Wait till she sends the Howler.” Harry advised.

“Got it love.” Draco smiled. Then he started purring. “So, how long has it been since we’ve used this bed really well?”

That was all Harry needed to pick Draco up and throw him on the bed. Draco’s laughter filled their room, quickly turning into moans as Harry jumped on top of him and started using his mouth on Draco’s tender neck. It was a good thing they had no plans to rejoin the school routine until the next morning because they were far too busy to deal with anyone or anything.

Hermione stood outside their room, unable to enter because of a changed password, and decided that with all of the noise coming from inside they’d be a while. After she left, a crowd of third and fourth year students stood at the portrait listening to what they could hear, greatly improving their sex education.

The lady in the portrait had long since fled to calmer abodes.

Pansy Parkinson and Millicent Bulstrode, on the way to the library from the dungeons, saw the group of younger students and scattered them before stopping to listen themselves. They both let out sighs of relief before they resumed their trek to the library.

Crabbe and Goyle wondered by after having raided the kitchen and chased another group of younger kids away. They decided to eat their honeycakes there and stop any other eavesdroppers. Of course they didn’t last much past curfew, rushing back to their dorm room to try a few things they’d heard shouted out.

Inside the Headmistress’s office, Minerva McGonagall listened to a shrieking portrait that normally hung outside of a certain set of private quarters and let a most decidedly un-prudish smile form on her face. She relaxed into her chair for the first time in two weeks and tuned out the shrill portrait, mentally cataloguing the portraits in storage and deciding that maybe the picture of a Menora Slytherin and her pet snake would be the best choice for a replacement.

Yes, that would do nicely.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

The morning came far too quickly for them, but they managed to find the bathroom and get cleaned up, followed by getting dressed, and walked into the great hall in time for breakfast. Harry took one look at the Gryffindor table, where an anxious Hermione was talking to a pale, almost shaking Ron, and decided that he wanted nothing to do with them for now. So, he followed Draco and sat at the Slytherin table.

“It’s over.” Draco said as his house mates looked between the two. “Harry didn’t cheat, I made the mistake of trusting a Weasley, and Wood paid the price.”

“You going to eat that?” Crabbe’s question was the only response and Harry possessively struck Vincent’s hand away from his sausage. The big Slytherin grunted, grinned and turned back to his already full plate. Harry just relaxed in the quiet acceptance of the Slytherins. They didn’t need all the gory details like Hermione would have demanded, and it was relaxing.

“Harry, can I talk to you?” Ron’s voice drifted towards him very weakly.

“Speak.” Harry said shortly without looking up. The seventh year Slytherins were all extremely

taut, as if waiting for an order to pummel the red head.

“Not here, outside.” Ron pleaded

“Speak here, now, or go away.” Draco fumed, his hand seeking Harry’s and finding it on the table.

“Uh, I just wanted to talk to Harry.” Ron continued

“You talk to me, you talk to Draco.” Harry said, finally raising his head and spearing his one-time friend with the anger in his eyes. “We’re a couple, if you haven’t noticed and what you say or do to one of us, you do to both of us.”

“Uh…um.” Ron began, looking extremely nervous. He raised a hand and tugged at his collar. “Harry, I just wanted to say I’m sorry that I didn’t stop Oliver and…”

“Shut up, Weasel.” Harry spat at him angrily. “If you’re going to apologize, apologize for what you did, not what someone who is now a rotting corpse did!”

Ron seemed shocked at Harry’s use of Draco’s old nickname for him. He opened and closed his mouth several times. His face turned several different shades of red and his entire body started shaking. Harry just stared at him, his insides burning with a desire to hit him, but he controlled that desire.

“You killed him!” Ron finally gasped out in a hall that had been quiet ever since Ron had approached their table.

“Of course he did, Weasel.” Draco said, so softly that no one further away than Ron could hear a word he said. “Wood tried to break us up, as you know so well. He paid the price and the MLE decided it was self-defense. Everyone knows Harry was just defending his family!”

The last was said so loudly that the entire hall heard, and a quick glance by Harry showed that many of the students, and most of the staff, were nodding their heads in agreement. He also knew that every Slytherin around them that had heard the other comments would testify that Draco hadn’t said anything the least bit incriminating, and from the look on Ron’s face he knew that as well. Besides that, who would believe anything Ron had to say against them at this point?

“You, you murderer!” Ron spat loudly at Harry. Harry just shrugged.

“So much for your apology, Weasel.” Draco said, and for some reason that calmed Ron down.

“I really am sorry about that.” Ron said much more calmly, looking at the floor. It was Draco who responded for them.

“Words, Ronald Weasley, mere words. We’ve heard them from you before and your actions proved how false they were. You had your second chance and you squandered it. You’ve been asked again to prove you were under a curse, but you refuse. If you want to ever try to earn forgiveness from us, you will have to prove yourself.” Draco said, and Harry raised Draco’s hand in his and kissed it in a show of support for what he had said.

“Fine, Ferret!” Ron screamed, his face red. If it’s war you want, its war you’ll get.”

With those final words, Ronald Weasley turned and left the hall, never to be seen within Hogwarts again.

“My what an eventful breakfast.” Draco said with a slight shrug, and the Slytherins all sat down

with grins on their faces. The staff table was silent, but the rest of the hall was filled with whispers as people talked about what they had just seen. Hermione looked sick where she sat, but was soon talking to Lavender Brown, and Harry relaxed a little.

After breakfast, Harry had a training session with Remus, and instead of working on a set of defensive spells that Harry had been having trouble with, they talked about his relationship with Draco and the events of the last week. When their time was over, Harry mentally kicked himself in the butt for not talking to the werewolf or to Severus before this. Remus' final words still echoed in his mind.

*"Ha*rry, you've been functioning as an adult for ove*r* a year now, and that's caused you to forget that you still don't know everything yet, especially when it comes to relationships. Don't let your f*r*eedom, your independence make you for*get that the*re a*r*e older people a*r*ound who've been through simila*r* pr*oblems befor*e. Just yeste*r*day I was talking to Professo*r* Flitwick about an a*r*gument I had with Sev. We all need advice and help on occasion, and you have many people who ar*e willing to help you out, if you will let them."*

Remus was right, and the only reason he wasn't going to keep kicking himself over it was that he had a class of second year students waiting for him to teach them the effects of various curses and hexes on vampires. His mind focused on the lesson as he entered the already full classroom, and he was shocked to see a few of the students actually wince. It reminded him of reactions that Professor Snape got when entering a classroom.

"Who can tell me the effects of the jelly legs jinx on a vampire?" He asked in a friendly voice, giving the shaking Ravenclaw who correctly answered five points. By the end of the class, his students had all left happy, apparently, that they had their old teacher back.

The rest of the day passed much better for Harry, and he soon felt himself getting back into the soothing rhythm of life at Hogwarts. There was no sign of Ron throughout the day, and at dinner, McGonagall announced without explanation that Ernie McMillan of Hufflepuff would be completing the year as Head Boy. After dinner, Harry chose to attend the DA sessions, pairing off with Draco and dueling fiercely.

Neither noticed that by their third spell exchange, the entire group of fifty students had stopped and were now watching. Remus had set a shield around them so that their bounced spells wouldn't hit the other students. As they progressed into the duel, they went from basic spells to an extensive repertoire of spells taught in seventh year, to spells only taught for Auror training. They summoned creatures, dispelled them, caught each other in binds that were quickly broken. Draco even used the thorned vine spell Neville had captured Cho with, but Harry broke it before the vines passed his knees. Harry's new wand was fitting perfectly into his hand and he found himself very grateful for having wielded the Sword of Gryffindor since the wand was longer and heavier than his old wand. Finally, he managed to get Draco with an unexpected stunning charm, and as Draco fell, Remus lifted the shield. Everyone applauded after Harry revived Draco and the two bowed as if they had intended to put on a display.

With that, they left the room in a hurry; they had some sudden, urgent business with the bed in their room.

Unfortunately for their intended business, they found Hermione and Ginny waiting outside their rooms. With a sigh, Harry welcomed them warmly and opened the portrait before inviting them

inside. Both seemed very nervous as they sat on couches around the fireplace, but it was Ginny who finally spoke up.

“It’s about Ron.” Ginny said quickly, almost wincing when she said the name.

“If he’s convinced you to come here and plead on his behalf, forget it.” Draco said

“No!” Ginny said, her face flushing. “I wouldn’t defend that slimy git! I’m glad Mum and Dad have decided to disown him and Percy. Mum’s already taken their arms off the clock and replaced them with arms for you two!”

“Then, what is it?” Harry asked with a little smile.

“He’s left Hogwarts for good.” Ginny said. “McGonagall found a note in his room saying he was leaving and wouldn’t be back.”

“We figured that, since Ernie’s now Head Boy.” Draco said.

“It’s not all, though.” Ginny said, squirming a little now. “He showed up at the Burrow and told Mum that Harry had killed Wood on purpose and that Draco had said so. Mum got so mad when he said that she blasted him out of the house without any of his things. He kept on banging on the door trying to get in, but the wards refused to recognize him. Mum gathered all his stuff and threw it out on lawn. Supposedly he gathered it all up and no one has seen or heard from him. Mum wanted you to know.”

“Thank you Ginny.” Harry said with a smile. “We changed the wards on Black Manor on Sunday so I doubt he’ll be a problem there. Is there anything else?”

“No, just that I still consider you a friend.” Ginny said softly.

“Thank you, Ginny.” Harry said with a soft smile. “We consider you a friend too, and hope you will still be a part of our wedding ceremony.”

“Oh thank you!” Ginny cried, leaping off the couch and landing on Harry in a hug. She quickly transferred it to Draco before leaving the room to seek out whoever it was she was dating this week. (Harry had long since given up hope of keeping track.)

“So, what can we do for you?” Draco asked Hermione, his voice almost teasing.

“Oh, let me watch the next time you and Harry go at it?” Hermione said crossly, causing Harry and Draco to both blush and all three to burst out laughing. Her words though, said that as far as she was concerned there was nothing wrong between them.

“Request denied.” Draco said haughtily when he’d stopped laughing.

“Thank Merlin!” Hermione said with a laugh. “No, a little more seriously, I came to ask if you still wanted me in your wedding party? I mean I’m due to have the baby shortly before the wedding date, but Madame Pomfrey said I should be back on my feet by then, but I didn’t know if you wanted someone who…”

“Hermione, take a deep breath.” Harry said calmly. She’d been having these panic attacks for the last month now. “We aren’t going to change our minds about the wedding ceremony, or about the governess and apartment in Hogsmeade. We aren’t going to drop you because Ron finally showed his true nature and we aren’t going to turn our backs on you. If you don’t remember, you are now officially my oldest friend and I can think of no one better to stand for me at my

wedding!"

"Oh, Harry." Hermione sighed with tears in her eyes. "I've been meaning to ask this, but would you two be the godfathers of my baby?"

"We'd be delighted to." Draco said immediately, answering for both of them. Of course this called for a group hug, and Harry jumped when he felt the baby kick.

"He likes his godparents!" Hermione laughed while rubbing her sore belly. "I swear I'll be glad to give birth just so I don't have to feel the kicking anymore!"

"Hermione, have you figured out what you're going to do after school?" Harry asked her after they sat back down.

"You mean what I really want to do, or the dream world that Ron was trying to create where we lived happily ever after? Hermione said with bitterness in her voice. That was when Harry realized she did still care about Ron, and that his departure must have hurt her greatly.

"I mean the future where you can do, or be, anything that you want." Harry told her firmly.

"I'd love to be a researcher." Hermione said wistfully. "You know, research new spells, charms, and things like that. I really love it, but it requires so much money. You have to have a good library, a good lab, and have to have the money to spend years on research before any spell can be copyrighted."

"Twenty percent of your earnings on those copyrights and we'll front you everything you need." Draco said before Harry could open his mouth. He shut his mouth and realized Draco was right. She wouldn't accept charity at this point. Her pride was developing very, very strongly."

"I'd love to Draco." She said with a wistful smile. "I love Black Manor now that you've fixed it up and your library is one of the best besides Hogwarts but I don't know if I feel comfortable there or raising my child there. Every time I've been there over the past year it feels like I don't belong and I haven't even been comfortable enough in the library to read there! It's so unusual and I don't know if I could live there. I spent a lot of time with Millie and Pansy over the summer there and I even have gotten to like them a lot. They've been very helpful even here at school. They keep visiting me in my rooms and we talk all the time now, but whenever we're at Black Manor it seems like they belong and I don't!"

"You've become friends with Pansy and Millie?" Draco asked in shock.

"Yes." Hermione said, a look Harry knew very well appearing on her face. She was arguing with herself over something. When she spoke next, her voice held that thoughtful tone he knew meant she was speaking a hypothesis she'd been deliberating for some while.

"I know that Pansy was a Death Eater." She admitted. "I also know all the Slytherins that were there over the summer are somehow connected to you two and are doing things that you tell them to do. I overhead Pansy and Millie talking about how you'd gotten Michael Corner a job at the Ministry and how he'd reported something that you didn't like before they saw me and shut up. I kind of figured that you two were running something to give those that were Death Eaters an option besides Voldemort or Dumbledore, but I haven't been able to figure out exactly what. I know you Harry, and although you've changed you still haven't changed enough to use Dark Magic and you haven't acted like someone who has done that stuff."

Harry shared a very long look with Draco. He knew how smart his friend was, and they had discussed so many scenarios like this that they had several plans on how to handle things. Draco nodded, mouthing a word that told Harry his opinion clearly. Harry took his wand out and cast a silencing charm on the only portrait in the room, a landscape above the fireplace.

“Hermione, what do you know about Blood Oaths?” Harry asked her in a calm voice. Her face scrunched up a bit as she thought through his question.

“Of course! It makes sense now!” She exclaimed excitedly. “You’ve performed a Blood Oath with the Slytherins! Probably with both of you as the lords and the Oath Stone is in the library which is why I feel like I don’t belong there because I’m not part of the Oath! What were the conditions of the Oath?”

“That we seek to preserve the wizarding community, and prevent the dilution of wizarding power through unnecessary mixed marriages.” Draco told her.

“What about mudbloods like me?” She asked him with a sharp frown. “Keep us out of important positions? Keep us from schooling?”

“Actually, no.” Draco replied calmly. “It is quite the consensus in Slytherin House that people like you deserve the best education they can receive. We’ve grown up and moved past silly prejudices that don’t really do the wizarding world any good. You obviously are smart, and strong in magic and will probably do the Longbottom line good for having your blood mixed with theirs. Sure, your child won’t be as pure as it would be if both of you had been purebloods, but it will not be a mudblood because the parents were a wizard and a witch. There’s no shame or problems with that. In fact, I know for a fact that three pureblood families are interested in having their sons court you as a future wife.”

“What?” She asked, her eyes wide. “Who?”

“Nott, O’Mally, and Zabini.” Draco told her. “Not the Zabini in school, but the one who graduated two years ago. Their lines, like the Longbottoms, often suffer too much from inbreeding and mixing fresh blood like yours helps to preserve and strengthen them.”

“So I’m nothing but a breeding cow?” Hermione said angrily.

“Just like I am, and like Harry here.” Draco replied smoothly. “But that is only part of it. You see, you’ve already earned a name for yourself as the best friend of Harry Potter, the smartest witch currently in Hogwarts, as well as a strong and brave witch who sticks to her wand when the going gets rough. There’s not a pureblood family out there who doesn’t wish you were pureblood so they could offer your parents large sums of money in order for you to marry their sons.”

“Are you serious?” Hermione gasped, her hand going to her belly.

“Yes,” Draco replied simply. “I know the idea must seem revolting to you because you grew up in the muggle world, but genetics and breeding are the key to survival for the magical world, a world *you* now belong to. Tell me, do you want your child growing up being told what to do by muggles or do you want to your child to grow up and be who they want, and can be in the magical world? Believe me, coming from the Longbottom line and from you, your child will be well respected in this world.”

“But I don’t understand why…” Hermione began, but Harry cut them off.

“Hermione, think about it this way.” Harry told her softly. “The only reason the wizarding world exists as it does today is because it is strong enough to stay hidden and to regulate itself. In order to keep its strength, each generation of wizards and witches must be strong enough to use their magic to keep us hidden. Voldemort took the fact that strength mostly comes from those born to parents who are both magical and twisted that into a hatred matching his own hatred for his muggle father. The fact that good, strong, witches and wizards can come from muggle or squib families is something that he managed to obscure in his twisting of wizarding history. Dumbledore realized this but he went a little overboard in opposing Voldemort. Instead of opposing the man and the way he used pureblood history and beliefs, he attacked the ideals of Voldemort and that divided the wizarding world. What we’re doing is healing that breach so that both sides win. Emphasis on pureblood marriages and strong children will remain a part of the wizarding world, but we won’t discriminate against half-blood and muggle-born either. It is possible to do both, but during the hatred and violence in Voldemort’s rise to power, that little fact got lost.”

“What about Hogwarts?” Hermione asked calmly, her eyes reflecting the fact that her powerful brain was working hard on what he’d said. “Will it be closed to those not of pureblood status? I know you two have seats on the Board of Governors so you obviously intend to do something.”

“Have you noticed how overcrowded the school is getting?” Harry asked her. “How the classes are getting so big that next year McGonagall is considering stopping joint House classes? The staff are talking about how to enlarge the dorms so they can fit more students?”

“Yes.” Hermione said shortly, waiting for him to continue.

“Britain needs a new school.” Draco said. “We need a new school to take in the growing amount of kids in our community. Oh, right now Hogwarts can handle it, but in twenty or thirty years it will be extremely difficult. Harry and I plan to study how Hogwarts was made and then found a new school when we’re much older. A smaller school, a little more specialized, with the finest teachers around. It will be governed by the same Board of Hogwarts and will be run in conjunction with this school, not in competition.”

“Let me guess, only purebloods?” Hermione said with a snort.

“No.” Harry told her. “Only the best, the brightest, the strongest. It will start educating at third-year level instead of first. Students at Hogwarts, no matter their background, who have proven themselves to be among the strongest, most cunning, and most intelligent in their years will receive an invitation to attend for the rest of their schooling. They’ll receive the best education because they have the ability. If that school existed today, you’d be attending there.”

“So, this is what your Blood Oath is about? She asked him, looking deep into Harry’s eyes. “Not discriminating, but keeping the wizarding world strong?”

“Yes.” Harry replied with the utmost of honesty.

“I want in.” She told him, shocking him tremendously. He expected her to accept the fact that the Oath existed, but he never though she’d want to take it!

“What?” Draco asked, obviously in equal shock.

“Those who take this Oath are in your inner circle, right?” She demanded. “They are the ones

you listen to the most, who you trust the most?"

"Hermione, you don't need to take the Oath for me to listen to you." Harry told her.

"But I do if I want *them* to listen to me as well." She told him, and her words made sense. "If I'm going to be a part of your household then I will need to be bound to your Oath just like everyone else is, and I won't take no for an answer."

"You win." Draco said, holding his hands up in defeat and smiling at her. "After your baby is born, though. The Oath would bind the baby you are carrying and no child should be subjected to that."

"Thank you, Draco." She said with a very kind smile. "The fact that you said that settles any doubt I may still have had about the Oath. You really have changed."

"You're welcome." Draco replied, his own face bearing a smile that Harry knew he only revealed to those he considered family.

"Oh, before I go." Hermione said as she stood up, this time she bore a quite wicked smile. "You don't have to worry about Mrs. Malfoy and Mrs. Weasley searching for mothers to bear your children any more. She's found them and they'll be sending their acceptance of the contract very soon."

"What?" Harry gasped, this news taking him by total surprise and making his stomach feel like it was filled with lead.

"When Ginny and I told Molly about our relationship last night, she thought we'd make the perfect couple to bear your children and she called Narcissa by floo immediately. Ginny and I talked to her and she decided even though I'm muggle-born that she couldn't think of a better combination. They'll be owling the contracts to us tomorrow and then they'll present the contracts to you at Christmas."

"You and Ginny!" Harry exclaimed in complete shock.

"Yes, I knew I loved Weasleys." Hermione said with a gleam in her eye as she moved towards the portrait. "I just never thought of Ginny until a few weeks ago. She's ever so much better in bed than Ron could have dreamed of being! Good night!"

Harry turned to Draco as she walked out, speechless. His blond lover had a look of shock on his face that matched his own. Draco's mouth moved for several minutes before he actually uttered a sound.

"Our children…" Draco muttered, his voice drifting off.

"Mothered by a Weasley?" Harry finished for him.

"My mother…" Draco muttered.

"Accepted a muggle-born as one of the mothers?" Harry finished for him, the same thoughts running through his own head.

"I can't think about this right now…" Draco muttered.

"So I'll kiss you." Harry said with a grin, fitting actions to his words and placing a gentle, loving kiss on those pale lips. Draco leaned hungrily into the kiss and all thoughts of children, and their

mothers, fled from both of their minds.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N – Before anyone gets into a long essay on the children aspect of things here, let me clarify how things work in my version of JK Rowling's world. Basically, the wizard population has a higher rate of gay/lesbian relationships and developed spells to allow such couples to have children. Similar to cloning in the muggle world, the cell strips the egg in the female of any DNA from the host mother and combines the DNA of the males in the egg causing fertilization. Side effect of this process is that the only possible gender of such combining will be male children. For two mothers, the DNA of one egg is combined with that of an egg from the other mother and only girl children will result.

How it will work for this situation is that one 'mother' will have a boy child that is Harry & Draco's. The other will bear a daughter that is Hermione's and Ginny's. Next time around, they'll have another set of kids until the mother's decide they don't want to bear any other children. This way both couples get children that are theirs, and all of it is paid for by Harry and Draco (very expensive, very complex magic).

As for why Narcissa might allow a non-pureblood to be a mother for the children, who says that Hermione will actually bear the male child? Ginny might be bearing all the boys and Hermione all the girls. Presented with an option where the woman bearing her grandchildren will be born by a pureblood, and where she finds two girls that have been close friends with Harry for many years, she might just grab onto the opportunity with both hands.

Once again all the reviews are appreciated. I'll try to respond to them in the next chapter update, but for time's sake, I'm yielding to the demand to update NOW. Review responses usually take anywhere from 1-2 hours so..enjoy!

Chapter 8 –

Things were as they should be when Harry Potter walked through the entrance of Hogwarts with Draco at his side. It was late Sunday evening, and he was not in the least surprised to see the Headmistress waiting for them. She held out her hand, and instinctively Harry understood, and took his wand out and handed it to her. She looked at it for a long time, running a hand along all twenty inches of it before handing it back to him.

"A wand much more suited to dealing with the Dark Lord." She said with a nod. Then she looked deeply into Harry's eyes. "I am sorry to hear about Mr. Wood's attempt on you and your family. Very tragic."

"I just wish he didn't have to die." Harry said in complete honesty, meeting her gaze unflinchingly.

"As do we all, Mr. Potter." She said sadly. "You have some guests waiting for you in your common room. I do hope you don't mind their presence."

"Thank you, ma'am." Draco said with a nod as Harry and he moved off down the hallway. They reached their apartment and the portrait expressed her delight to have them back before opening. When they entered, Harry found himself completely unsurprised to see Arthur and Molly Weasley sitting on a couch. Both of them stood as Draco and Harry entered, and Molly's face looked especially anxious. Harry knew why they were here, and he put aside any anger at Ron

immediately. The Weasleys were important members of the Order, and he could still use their support.

“Molly.” Harry said, a note of happiness audible in the sadness of his voice. He rushed to her and hugged her. Both Molly and Arthur immediately seemed to relax, and Mr. Weasley shook Harry’s hand when Molly let him out of the bone crushing hug. Draco took his cue from Harry and also hugged Mrs. Weasley before shaking Mr. Weasley’s hand.

“What are you both doing here?” Harry asked after everyone had sat down. “I hope you didn’t come all this way just to see me?”

“Well, we wanted to see you and make sure that Ron’s…” Arthur began, but Harry cut him off.

“What Ron has or has not done has no bearing on my relationship to the rest of the family.” Harry said firmly. “I love all of you and whatever my relationship with your son, whether we are friends or not, does not make me love the rest of you one bit less.”

“Oh, Harry.” Molly gushed. “You are such a good boy! I was hoping you’d understand.”

“WE do.” Draco said with a soft smile, emphasizing the first word.

“Thank you, both of you.” Arthur said with a wide grin. “We were here all weekend and when the Headmistress told us you were returning tonight we just wanted to stay and hoped that you would talk with us.”

“Anytime.” Harry said with a grin. “I hope the rest of you are still coming to the wedding? Molly, Narcissa has shared how much you have put into it and it would be a shame if you weren’t there.”

“Yes, yes, of course I’ll be there.” Molly said with a pleased grin. “So will Arthur. Bill said he and Fleur should have no trouble being there and Charlie is talking to the Ministry to make sure that he can get the time off from guarding Azkaban. George and Fred are also going to be there, although they weren’t too happy about my warnings about no jokes or pranks, and of course Ginny is so looking forward to going!”

“Good, that’s comforting to hear.” Harry said with a genuine smile. “And if Fred and George do get one or two canary crèmes, and put them somewhere where Severus Snape would try one, I wouldn’t mind too much.”

“Only as long as they get McGonagall as well!” Draco said with a laugh and a nudge at Harry. Even Molly laughed at that.

“Okay, okay.” She said. “The grooms want two practical jokes, they’ll get two practical jokes, but no more!”

“Hey, Potter.” Draco asked with a smirk, and Harry just raised an eyebrow. “You’ve heard about the cat who ate the canary, right? How about the cat who turned into a canary?”

“Arggghhhh!” Harry groaned, while the older Weasley couple chuckled. They spent probably a half-hour while Harry and Draco tried to outdo each other with bad jokes and even worse puns. The Weasleys seemed to enjoy it, and that made Harry feel a little better about his relationship with them. They finally stood, claiming a need to work (him) and clean the Burrow (her) in the morning. As Harry was showing them out of the room, Mrs. Weasley turned to give him a hug

and a sad look.

“Harry, we’re sorry.” She whispered to him, tears filling her eyes. “We have no idea what we did wrong with Percy or Ron, but they’re both so filled with jealousy and rage that we just don’t know what to do. We decided after talking to Ron all weekend that we’re formally disowning them, the full ritual, and you know how much I hate ritual magic.”

“I’m sorry, Molly.” Harry said with true sympathy. “I honestly think you didn’t do anything wrong. They just made wrong choices in their lives. You’re probably doing the right thing. Look at Bill and Charley and Ginny, and even the twins. They’ve all done good things with their lives. It’s just that Ron and Percy didn’t make the right choices like they did. We all have to stand or fall based on our choices in life and no one else is responsible for those choices. If you think disowning them is the right punishment, then you do that.”

“Thank you Harry.” She said gratefully. She seemed to walk a little straighter as she left. Draco was already in their bedroom, and as soon as Harry followed him in, he found the blond in his arms.

“So, what was that whispering in the end?” Draco asked.

“The Weasleys are going to disown their Weasel.” Harry said with a smirk.

“Oh, really?” Draco said, his eyes gleaming with mirth at the idea. “How long before I can tease him about that?”

“Wait till she sends the Howler.” Harry advised.

“Got it love.” Draco smiled. Then he started purring. “So, how long has it been since we’ve used this bed really well?”

That was all Harry needed to pick Draco up and throw him on the bed. Draco’s laughter filled their room, quickly turning into moans as Harry jumped on top of him and started using his mouth on Draco’s tender neck. It was a good thing they had no plans to rejoin the school routine until the next morning because they were far too busy to deal with anyone or anything.

Hermione stood outside their room, unable to enter because of a changed password, and decided that with all of the noise coming from inside they’d be a while. After she left, a crowd of third and fourth year students stood at the portrait listening to what they could hear, greatly improving their sex education.

The lady in the portrait had long since fled to calmer abodes.

Pansy Parkinson and Millicent Bulstrode, on the way to the library from the dungeons, saw the group of younger students and scattered them before stopping to listen themselves. They both let out sighs of relief before they resumed their trek to the library.

Crabbe and Goyle wondered by after having raided the kitchen and chased another group of younger kids away. They decided to eat their honeycakes there and stop any other eavesdroppers. Of course they didn’t last much past curfew, rushing back to their dorm room to try a few things they’d heard shouted out.

Inside the Headmistress’s office, Minerva McGonagall listened to a shrieking portrait that normally hung outside of a certain set of private quarters and let a most decidedly un-prudish smile form on her face. She relaxed into her chair for the first time in two weeks and tuned out

the shrill portrait, mentally cataloguing the portraits in storage and deciding that maybe the picture of a Menora Slytherin and her pet snake would be the best choice for a replacement.

Yes, that would do nicely.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

The morning came far too quickly for them, but they managed to find the bathroom and get cleaned up, followed by getting dressed, and walked into the great hall in time for breakfast. Harry took one look at the Gryffindor table, where an anxious Hermione was talking to a pale, almost shaking Ron, and decided that he wanted nothing to do with them for now. So, he followed Draco and sat at the Slytherin table.

“It’s over.” Draco said as his house mates looked between the two. “Harry didn’t cheat, I made the mistake of trusting a Weasley, and Wood paid the price.”

“You going to eat that?” Crabbe’s question was the only response and Harry possessively struck Vincent’s hand away from his sausage. The big Slytherin grunted, grinned and turned back to his already full plate. Harry just relaxed in the quiet acceptance of the Slytherins. They didn’t need all the gory details like Hermione would have demanded, and it was relaxing.

“Harry, can I talk to you?” Ron’s voice drifted towards him very weakly.

“Speak.” Harry said shortly without looking up. The seventh year Slytherins were all extremely taut, as if waiting for an order to pummel the red head.

“Not here, outside.” Ron pleaded

“Speak here, now, or go away.” Draco fumed, his hand seeking Harry’s and finding it on the table.

“Uh, I just wanted to talk to Harry.” Ron continued

“You talk to me, you talk to Draco.” Harry said, finally raising his head and spearing his one-time friend with the anger in his eyes. “We’re a couple, if you haven’t noticed and what you say or do to one of us, you do to both of us.”

“Uh…um.” Ron began, looking extremely nervous. He raised a hand and tugged at his collar. “Harry, I just wanted to say I’m sorry that I didn’t stop Oliver and…”

“Shut up, Weasel.” Harry spat at him angrily. “If you’re going to apologize, apologize for what you did, not what someone who is now a rotting corpse did!”

Ron seemed shocked at Harry’s use of Draco’s old nickname for him. He opened and closed his mouth several times. His face turned several different shades of red and his entire body started shaking. Harry just stared at him, his insides burning with a desire to hit him, but he controlled that desire.

“You killed him!” Ron finally gasped out in a hall that had been quiet ever since Ron had approached their table.

“Of course he did, Weasel.” Draco said, so softly that no one further away than Ron could hear a word he said. “Wood tried to break us up, as you know so well. He paid the price and the MLE decided it was self-defense. Everyone knows Harry was just defending his family!”

The last was said so loudly that the entire hall heard, and a quick glance by Harry showed that

many of the students, and most of the staff, were nodding their heads in agreement. He also knew that every Slytherin around them that had heard the other comments would testify that Draco hadn't said anything the least bit incriminating, and from the look on Ron's face he knew that as well. Besides that, who would believe anything Ron had to say against them at this point?

"You, you murderer!" Ron spat loudly at Harry. Harry just shrugged.

"So much for your apology, Weasel." Draco said, and for some reason that calmed Ron down.

"I really am sorry about that." Ron said much more calmly, looking at the floor. It was Draco who responded for them.

"Words, Ronald Weasley, mere words. We've heard them from you before and your actions proved how false they were. You had your second chance and you squandered it. You've been asked again to prove you were under a curse, but you refuse. If you want to ever try to earn forgiveness from us, you will have to prove yourself." Draco said, and Harry raised Draco's hand in his and kissed it in a show of support for what he had said.

"Fine, Ferret!" Ron screamed, his face red. If it's war you want, its war you'll get."

With those final words, Ronald Weasley turned and left the hall, never to be seen within Hogwarts again.

"My what an eventful breakfast." Draco said with a slight shrug, and the Slytherins all sat down with grins on their faces. The staff table was silent, but the rest of the hall was filled with whispers as people talked about what they had just seen. Hermione looked sick where she sat, but was soon talking to Lavender Brown, and Harry relaxed a little.

After breakfast, Harry had a training session with Remus, and instead of working on a set of defensive spells that Harry had been having trouble with, they talked about his relationship with Draco and the events of the last week. When their time was over, Harry mentally kicked himself in the butt for not talking to the werewolf or to Severus before this. Remus' final words still echoed in his mind.

*"Ha*rry, you've been functioning as an adult for ove*r* a year now, and that's caused you to forget that you still don't know everything yet, especially when it comes to relationships. Don't let your f*r*eedom, your independence make you for*get that the*re a*r*e older people a*r*ound who've been through simila*r* pr*oblems befor*e. Just yeste*r*day I was talking to Professo*r* Flitwick about an a*r*gument I had with Sev. We all need advice and help on occasion, and you have many people who ar*e willing to help you out, if you will let them."*

Remus was right, and the only reason he wasn't going to keep kicking himself over it was that he had a class of second year students waiting for him to teach them the effects of various curses and hexes on vampires. His mind focused on the lesson as he entered the already full classroom, and he was shocked to see a few of the students actually wince. It reminded him of reactions that Professor Snape got when entering a classroom.

"Who can tell me the effects of the jelly legs jinx on a vampire?" He asked in a friendly voice, giving the shaking Ravenclaw who correctly answered five points. By the end of the class, his students had all left happy, apparently, that they had their old teacher back.

The rest of the day passed much better for Harry, and he soon felt himself getting back into the soothing rhythm of life at Hogwarts. There was no sign of Ron throughout the day, and at dinner,

McGonagall announced without explanation that Ernie McMillan of Hufflepuff would be completing the year as Head Boy. After dinner, Harry chose to attend the DA sessions, pairing off with Draco and dueling fiercely.

Neither noticed that by their third spell exchange, the entire group of fifty students had stopped and were now watching. Remus had set a shield around them so that their bounced spells wouldn't hit the other students. As they progressed into the duel, they went from basic spells to an extensive repertoire of spells taught in seventh year, to spells only taught for Auror training. They summoned creatures, dispelled them, caught each other in binds that were quickly broken. Draco even used the thorned vine spell Neville had captured Cho with, but Harry broke it before the vines passed his knees. Harry's new wand was fitting perfectly into his hand and he found himself very grateful for having wielded the Sword of Gryffindor since the wand was longer and heavier than his old wand. Finally, he managed to get Draco with an unexpected stunning charm, and as Draco fell, Remus lifted the shield. Everyone applauded after Harry revived Draco and the two bowed as if they had intended to put on a display.

With that, they left the room in a hurry; they had some sudden, urgent business with the bed in their room.

Unfortunately for their intended business, they found Hermione and Ginny waiting outside their rooms. With a sigh, Harry welcomed them warmly and opened the portrait before inviting them inside. Both seemed very nervous as they sat on couches around the fireplace, but it was Ginny who finally spoke up.

"It's about Ron." Ginny said quickly, almost wincing when she said the name.

"If he's convinced you to come here and plead on his behalf, forget it." Draco said

"No!" Ginny said, her face flushing. "I wouldn't defend that slimy git! I'm glad Mum and Dad have decided to disown him and Percy. Mum's already taken their arms off the clock and replaced them with arms for you two!"

"Then, what is it?" Harry asked with a little smile.

"He's left Hogwarts for good." Ginny said. "McGonagall found a note in his room saying he was leaving and wouldn't be back."

"We figured that, since Ernie's now Head Boy." Draco said.

"It's not all, though." Ginny said, squirming a little now. "He showed up at the Burrow and told Mum that Harry had killed Wood on purpose and that Draco had said so. Mum got so mad when he said that she blasted him out of the house without any of his things. He kept on banging on the door trying to get in, but the wards refused to recognize him. Mum gathered all his stuff and threw it out on lawn. Supposedly he gathered it all up and no one has seen or heard from him. Mum wanted you to know."

"Thank you Ginny." Harry said with a smile. "We changed the wards on Black Manor on Sunday so I doubt he'll be a problem there. Is there anything else?"

"No, just that I still consider you a friend." Ginny said softly.

"Thank you, Ginny." Harry said with a soft smile. "We consider you a friend too, and hope you will still be a part of our wedding ceremony."

“Oh thank you!” Ginny cried, leaping off the couch and landing on Harry in a hug. She quickly transferred it to Draco before leaving the room to seek out whoever it was she was dating this week. (Harry had long since given up hope of keeping track.)

“So, what can we do for you?” Draco asked Hermione, his voice almost teasing.

“Oh, let me watch the next time you and Harry go at it?” Hermione said crossly, causing Harry and Draco to both blush and all three to burst out laughing. Her words though, said that as far as she was concerned there was nothing wrong between them.

“Request denied.” Draco said haughtily when he’d stopped laughing.

“Thank Merlin!” Hermione said with a laugh. “No, a little more seriously, I came to ask if you still wanted me in your wedding party? I mean I’m due to have the baby shortly before the wedding date, but Madame Pomfrey said I should be back on my feet by then, but I didn’t know if you wanted someone who…”

“Hermione, take a deep breath.” Harry said calmly. She’d been having these panic attacks for the last month now. “We aren’t going to change our minds about the wedding ceremony, or about the governess and apartment in Hogsmeade. We aren’t going to drop you because Ron finally showed his true nature and we aren’t going to turn our backs on you. If you don’t remember, you are now officially my oldest friend and I can think of no one better to stand for me at my wedding!”

“Oh, Harry.” Hermione sighed with tears in her eyes. “I’ve been meaning to ask this, but would you two be the godfathers of my baby?”

“We’d be delighted to.” Draco said immediately, answering for both of them. Of course this called for a group hug, and Harry jumped when he felt the baby kick.

“He likes his godparents!” Hermione laughed while rubbing her sore belly. “I swear I’ll be glad to give birth just so I don’t have to feel the kicking anymore!”

“Hermione, have you figured out what you’re going to do after school?” Harry asked her after they sat back down.

“You mean what I really want to do, or the dream world that Ron was trying to create where we lived happily ever after? Hermione said with bitterness in her voice. That was when Harry realized she did still care about Ron, and that his departure must have hurt her greatly.

“I mean the future where you can do, or be, anything that you want.” Harry told her firmly.

“I’d love to be a researcher.” Hermione said wistfully. “You know, research new spells, charms, and things like that. I really love it, but it requires so much money. You have to have a good library, a good lab, and have to have the money to spend years on research before any spell can be copyrighted.”

“Twenty percent of your earnings on those copyrights and we’ll front you everything you need.” Draco said before Harry could open his mouth. He shut his mouth and realized Draco was right. She wouldn’t accept charity at this point. Her pride was developing very, very strongly.”

“I’d love to Draco.” She said with a wistful smile. “I love Black Manor now that you’ve fixed it up and your library is one of the best besides Hogwarts but I don’t know if I feel comfortable there or raising my child there. Every time I’ve been there over the past year it feels like I don’t

belong and I haven't even been comfortable enough in the library to read there! It's so unusual and I don't know if I could live there. I spent a lot of time with Millie and Pansy over the summer there and I even have gotten to like them a lot. They've been very helpful even here at school. They keep visiting me in my rooms and we talk all the time now, but whenever we're at Black Manor it seems like they belong and I don't!"

"You've become friends with Pansy and Millie?" Draco asked in shock.

"Yes." Hermione said, a look Harry knew very well appearing on her face. She was arguing with herself over something. When she spoke next, her voice held that thoughtful tone he knew meant she was speaking a hypothesis she'd been deliberating for some while.

"I know that Pansy was a Death Eater." She admitted. "I also know all the Slytherins that were there over the summer are somehow connected to you two and are doing things that you tell them to do. I overhead Pansy and Millie talking about how you'd gotten Michael Corner a job at the Ministry and how he'd reported something that you didn't like before they saw me and shut up. I kind of figured that you two were running something to give those that were Death Eaters an option besides Voldemort or Dumbledore, but I haven't been able to figure out exactly what. I know you Harry, and although you've changed you still haven't changed enough to use Dark Magic and you haven't acted like someone who has done that stuff."

Harry shared a very long look with Draco. He knew how smart his friend was, and they had discussed so many scenarios like this that they had several plans on how to handle things. Draco nodded, mouthing a word that told Harry his opinion clearly. Harry took his wand out and cast a silencing charm on the only portrait in the room, a landscape above the fireplace.

"Hermione, what do you know about Blood Oaths?" Harry asked her in a calm voice. Her face scrunched up a bit as she thought through his question.

"Of course! It makes sense now!" She exclaimed excitedly. "You've performed a Blood Oath with the Slytherins! Probably with both of you as the lords and the Oath Stone is in the library which is why I feel like I don't belong there because I'm not part of the Oath! What were the conditions of the Oath?"

"That we seek to preserve the wizarding community, and prevent the dilution of wizarding power through unnecessary mixed marriages." Draco told her.

"What about mudbloods like me?" She asked him with a sharp frown. "Keep us out of important positions? Keep us from schooling?"

"Actually, no." Draco replied calmly. "It is quite the consensus in Slytherin House that people like you deserve the best education they can receive. We've grown up and moved past silly prejudices that don't really do the wizarding world any good. You obviously are smart, and strong in magic and will probably do the Longbottom line good for having your blood mixed with theirs. Sure, your child won't be as pure as it would be if both of you had been purebloods, but it will not be a mudblood because the parents were a wizard and a witch. There's no shame or problems with that. In fact, I know for a fact that three pureblood families are interested in having their sons court you as a future wife."

"What?" She asked, her eyes wide. "Who?"

"Nott, O'Mally, and Zabini." Draco told her. "Not the Zabini in school, but the one who

graduated two years ago. Their lines, like the Longbottoms, often suffer too much from inbreeding and mixing fresh blood like yours helps to preserve and strengthen them."

"So I'm nothing but a breeding cow?" Hermione said angrily.

"Just like I am, and like Harry here." Draco replied smoothly. "But that is only part of it. You see, you've already earned a name for yourself as the best friend of Harry Potter, the smartest witch currently in Hogwarts, as well as a strong and brave witch who sticks to her wand when the going gets rough. There's not a pureblood family out there who doesn't wish you were pureblood so they could offer your parents large sums of money in order for you to marry their sons."

"Are you serious?" Hermione gasped, her hand going to her belly.

"Yes," Draco replied simply. "I know the idea must seem revolting to you because you grew up in the muggle world, but genetics and breeding are the key to survival for the magical world, a world *you* now belong to. Tell me, do you want your child growing up being told what to do by muggles or do you want to your child to grow up and be who they want, and can be in the magical world? Believe me, coming from the Longbottom line and from you, your child will be well respected in this world."

"But I don't understand why…" Hermione began, but Harry cut them off.

"Hermione, think about it this way." Harry told her softly. "The only reason the wizarding world exists as it does today is because it is strong enough to stay hidden and to regulate itself. In order to keep its strength, each generation of wizards and witches must be strong enough to use their magic to keep us hidden. Voldemort took the fact that strength mostly comes from those born to parents who are both magical and twisted that into a hatred matching his own hatred for his muggle father. The fact that good, strong, witches and wizards can come from muggle or squib families is something that he managed to obscure in his twisting of wizarding history. Dumbledore realized this but he went a little overboard in opposing Voldemort. Instead of opposing the man and the way he used pureblood history and beliefs, he attacked the ideals of Voldemort and that divided the wizarding world. What we're doing is healing that breach so that both sides win. Emphasis on pureblood marriages and strong children will remain a part of the wizarding world, but we won't discriminate against half-blood and muggle-born either. It is possible to do both, but during the hatred and violence in Voldemort's rise to power, that little fact got lost."

"What about Hogwarts?" Hermione asked calmly, her eyes reflecting the fact that her powerful brain was working hard on what he'd said. "Will it be closed to those not of pureblood status? I know you two have seats on the Board of Governors so you obviously intend to do something."

"Have you noticed how overcrowded the school is getting?" Harry asked her. "How the classes are getting so big that next year McGonagall is considering stopping joint House classes? The staff are talking about how to enlarge the dorms so they can fit more students?"

"Yes." Hermione said shortly, waiting for him to continue.

"Britain needs a new school." Draco said. "We need a new school to take in the growing amount of kids in our community. Oh, right now Hogwarts can handle it, but in twenty or thirty years it will be extremely difficult. Harry and I plan to study how Hogwarts was made and then found a

new school when we're much older. A smaller school, a little more specialized, with the finest teachers around. It will be governed by the same Board of Hogwarts and will be run in conjunction with this school, not in competition."

"Let me guess, only purebloods?" Hermione said with a snort.

"No." Harry told her. "Only the best, the brightest, the strongest. It will start educating at third-year level instead of first. Students at Hogwarts, no matter their background, who have proven themselves to be among the strongest, most cunning, and most intelligent in their years will receive an invitation to attend for the rest of their schooling. They'll receive the best education because they have the ability. If that school existed today, you'd be attending there."

"So, this is what your Blood Oath is about? She asked him, looking deep into Harry's eyes. "Not discriminating, but keeping the wizarding world strong?"

"Yes." Harry replied with the utmost of honesty.

"I want in." She told him, shocking him tremendously. He expected her to accept the fact that the Oath existed, but he never though she'd want to take it!

"What?" Draco asked, obviously in equal shock.

"Those who take this Oath are in your inner circle, right?" She demanded. "They are the ones you listen to the most, who you trust the most?"

"Hermione, you don't need to take the Oath for me to listen to you." Harry told her.

"But I do if I want *them* to listen to me as well." She told him, and her words made sense. "If I'm going to be a part of your household then I will need to be bound to your Oath just like everyone else is, and I won't take no for an answer."

"You win." Draco said, holding his hands up in defeat and smiling at her. "After your baby is born, though. The Oath would bind the baby you are carrying and no child should be subjected to that."

"Thank you, Draco." She said with a very kind smile. "The fact that you said that settles any doubt I may still have had about the Oath. You really have changed."

"You're welcome." Draco replied, his own face bearing a smile that Harry knew he only revealed to those he considered family.

"Oh, before I go." Hermione said as she stood up, this time she bore a quite wicked smile. "You don't have to worry about Mrs. Malfoy and Mrs. Weasley searching for mothers to bear your children any more. She's found them and they'll be sending their acceptance of the contract very soon."

"What?" Harry gasped, this news taking him by total surprise and making his stomach feel like it was filled with lead.

"When Ginny and I told Molly about our relationship last night, she thought we'd make the perfect couple to bear your children and she called Narcissa by floo immediately. Ginny and I talked to her and she decided even though I'm muggle-born that she couldn't think of a better combination. They'll be owling the contracts to us tomorrow and then they'll present the contracts to you at Christmas."

“You and Ginny!” Harry exclaimed in complete shock.

“Yes, I knew I loved Weasleys.” Hermione said with a gleam in her eye as she moved towards the portrait. “I just never thought of Ginny until a few weeks ago. She’s ever so much better in bed than Ron could have dreamed of being! Good night!”

Harry turned to Draco as she walked out, speechless. His blond lover had a look of shock on his face that matched his own. Draco’s mouth moved for several minutes before he actually uttered a sound.

“Our children…” Draco muttered, his voice drifting off.

“Mothered by a Weasley?” Harry finished for him.

“My mother…” Draco muttered.

“Accepted a muggle-born as one of the mothers?” Harry finished for him, the same thoughts running through his own head.

“I can’t think about this right now…” Draco muttered.

“So I’ll kiss you.” Harry said with a grin, fitting actions to his words and placing a gentle, loving kiss on those pale lips. Draco leaned hungrily into the kiss and all thoughts of children, and their mothers, fled from both of their minds.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N – Before anyone gets into a long essay on the children aspect of things here, let me clarify how things work in my version of JK Rowling’s world. Basically, the wizard population has a higher rate of gay/lesbian relationships and developed spells to allow such couples to have children. Similar to cloning in the muggle world, the cell strips the egg in the female of any DNA from the host mother and combines the DNA of the males in the egg causing fertilization. Side effect of this process is that the only possible gender of such combining will be male children. For two mothers, the DNA of one egg is combined with that of an egg from the other mother and only girl children will result.

How it will work for this situation is that one ‘mother’ will have a boy child that is Harry & Draco’s. The other will bear a daughter that is Hermione’s and Ginny’s. Next time around, they’ll have another set of kids until the mother’s decide they don’t want to bear any other children. This way both couples get children that are theirs, and all of it is paid for by Harry and Draco (very expensive, very complex magic).

As for why Narcissa might allow a non-pureblood to be a mother for the children, who says that Hermione will actually bear the male child? Ginny might be bearing all the boys and Hermione all the girls. Presented with an option where the woman bearing her grandchildren will be born by a pureblood, and where she finds two girls that have been close friends with Harry for many years, she might just grab onto the opportunity with both hands.

Once again all the reviews are appreciated. I’ll try to respond to them in the next chapter update, but for time’s sake, I’m yielding to the demand to update NOW. Review responses usually take anywhere from 1-2 hours so..enjoy!

Chapter 8 –

Things were as they should be when Harry Potter walked through the entrance of Hogwarts with Draco at his side. It was late Sunday evening, and he was not in the least surprised to see the Headmistress waiting for them. She held out her hand, and instinctively Harry understood, and took his wand out and handed it to her. She looked at it for a long time, running a hand along all twenty inches of it before handing it back to him.

“A wand much more suited to dealing with the Dark Lord.” She said with a nod. Then she looked deeply into Harry’s eyes. “I am sorry to hear about Mr. Wood’s attempt on you and your family. Very tragic.”

“I just wish he didn’t have to die.” Harry said in complete honesty, meeting her gaze unflinchingly.

“As do we all, Mr. Potter.” She said sadly. “You have some guests waiting for you in your common room. I do hope you don’t mind their presence.”

“Thank you, ma’am.” Draco said with a nod as Harry and he moved off down the hallway. They reached their apartment and the portrait expressed her delight to have them back before opening. When they entered, Harry found himself completely unsurprised to see Arthur and Molly Weasley sitting on a couch. Both of them stood as Draco and Harry entered, and Molly’s face looked especially anxious. Harry knew why they were here, and he put aside any anger at Ron immediately. The Weasleys were important members of the Order, and he could still use their support.

“Molly.” Harry said, a note of happiness audible in the sadness of his voice. He rushed to her and hugged her. Both Molly and Arthur immediately seemed to relax, and Mr. Weasley shook Harry’s hand when Molly let him out of the bone crushing hug. Draco took his cue from Harry and also hugged Mrs. Weasley before shaking Mr. Weasley’s hand.

“What are you both doing here?” Harry asked after everyone had sat down. “I hope you didn’t come all this way just to see me?”

“Well, we wanted to see you and make sure that Ron’s…” Arthur began, but Harry cut him off.

“What Ron has or has not done has no bearing on my relationship to the rest of the family.” Harry said firmly. “I love all of you and whatever my relationship with your son, whether we are friends or not, does not make me love the rest of you one bit less.”

“Oh, Harry.” Molly gushed. “You are such a good boy! I was hoping you’d understand.”

“WE do.” Draco said with a soft smile, emphasizing the first word.

“Thank you, both of you.” Arthur said with a wide grin. “We were here all weekend and when the Headmistress told us you were returning tonight we just wanted to stay and hoped that you would talk with us.”

“Anytime.” Harry said with a grin. “I hope the rest of you are still coming to the wedding? Molly, Narcissa has shared how much you have put into it and it would be a shame if you weren’t there.”

“Yes, yes, of course I’ll be there.” Molly said with a pleased grin. “So will Arthur. Bill said he and Fleur should have no trouble being there and Charlie is talking to the Ministry to make sure that he can get the time off from guarding Azkaban. George and Fred are also going to be there,

although they weren't too happy about my warnings about no jokes or pranks, and of course Ginny is so looking forward to going!"

"Good, that's comforting to hear." Harry said with a genuine smile. "And if Fred and George do get one or two canary crèmes, and put them somewhere where Severus Snape would try one, I wouldn't mind too much."

"Only as long as they get McGonagall as well!" Draco said with a laugh and a nudge at Harry. Even Molly laughed at that.

"Okay, okay." She said. "The grooms want two practical jokes, they'll get two practical jokes, but no more!"

"Hey, Potter." Draco asked with a smirk, and Harry just raised an eyebrow. "You've heard about the cat who ate the canary, right? How about the cat who turned into a canary?"

"Arggghhhh!" Harry groaned, while the older Weasley couple chuckled. They spent probably a half-hour while Harry and Draco tried to outdo each other with bad jokes and even worse puns. The Weasleys seemed to enjoy it, and that made Harry feel a little better about his relationship with them. They finally stood, claiming a need to work (him) and clean the Burrow (her) in the morning. As Harry was showing them out of the room, Mrs. Weasley turned to give him a hug and a sad look.

"Harry, we're sorry." She whispered to him, tears filling her eyes. "We have no idea what we did wrong with Percy or Ron, but they're both so filled with jealousy and rage that we just don't know what to do. We decided after talking to Ron all weekend that we're formally disowning them, the full ritual, and you know how much I hate ritual magic."

"I'm sorry, Molly." Harry said with true sympathy. "I honestly think you didn't do anything wrong. They just made wrong choices in their lives. You're probably doing the right thing. Look at Bill and Charley and Ginny, and even the twins. They've all done good things with their lives. It's just that Ron and Percy didn't make the right choices like they did. We all have to stand or fall based on our choices in life and no one else is responsible for those choices. If you think disowning them is the right punishment, then you do that."

"Thank you Harry." She said gratefully. She seemed to walk a little straighter as she left. Draco was already in their bedroom, and as soon as Harry followed him in, he found the blond in his arms.

"So, what was that whispering in the end?" Draco asked.

"The Weasleys are going to disown their Weasel." Harry said with a smirk.

"Oh, really?" Draco said, his eyes gleaming with mirth at the idea. "How long before I can tease him about that?"

"Wait till she sends the Howler." Harry advised.

"Got it love." Draco smiled. Then he started purring. "So, how long has it been since we've used this bed really well?"

That was all Harry needed to pick Draco up and throw him on the bed. Draco's laughter filled their room, quickly turning into moans as Harry jumped on top of him and started using his mouth on Draco's tender neck. It was a good thing they had no plans to rejoin the school routine

until the next morning because they were far too busy to deal with anyone or anything.

Hermione stood outside their room, unable to enter because of a changed password, and decided that with all of the noise coming from inside they'd be a while. After she left, a crowd of third and fourth year students stood at the portrait listening to what they could hear, greatly improving their sex education.

The lady in the portrait had long since fled to calmer abodes.

Pansy Parkinson and Millicent Bulstrode, on the way to the library from the dungeons, saw the group of younger students and scattered them before stopping to listen themselves. They both let out sighs of relief before they resumed their trek to the library.

Crabbe and Goyle wondered by after having raided the kitchen and chased another group of younger kids away. They decided to eat their honeycakes there and stop any other eavesdroppers. Of course they didn't last much past curfew, rushing back to their dorm room to try a few things they'd heard shouted out.

Inside the Headmistress's office, Minerva McGonagall listened to a shrieking portrait that normally hung outside of a certain set of private quarters and let a most decidedly un-prudish smile form on her face. She relaxed into her chair for the first time in two weeks and tuned out the shrill portrait, mentally cataloguing the portraits in storage and deciding that maybe the picture of a Menora Slytherin and her pet snake would be the best choice for a replacement.

Yes, that would do nicely.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

The morning came far too quickly for them, but they managed to find the bathroom and get cleaned up, followed by getting dressed, and walked into the great hall in time for breakfast. Harry took one look at the Gryffindor table, where an anxious Hermione was talking to a pale, almost shaking Ron, and decided that he wanted nothing to do with them for now. So, he followed Draco and sat at the Slytherin table.

"It's over." Draco said as his house mates looked between the two. "Harry didn't cheat, I made the mistake of trusting a Weasley, and Wood paid the price."

"You going to eat that?" Crabbe's question was the only response and Harry possessively struck Vincent's hand away from his sausage. The big Slytherin grunted, grinned and turned back to his already full plate. Harry just relaxed in the quiet acceptance of the Slytherins. They didn't need all the gory details like Hermione would have demanded, and it was relaxing.

"Harry, can I talk to you?" Ron's voice drifted towards him very weakly.

"Speak." Harry said shortly without looking up. The seventh year Slytherins were all extremely taut, as if waiting for an order to pummel the red head.

"Not here, outside." Ron pleaded

"Speak here, now, or go away." Draco fumed, his hand seeking Harry's and finding it on the table.

"Uh, I just wanted to talk to Harry." Ron continued

"You talk to me, you talk to Draco." Harry said, finally raising his head and spearing his

one-time friend with the anger in his eyes. “We’re a couple, if you haven’t noticed and what you say or do to one of us, you do to both of us.”

“Uh…um.” Ron began, looking extremely nervous. He raised a hand and tugged at his collar. “Harry, I just wanted to say I’m sorry that I didn’t stop Oliver and…”

“Shut up, Weasel.” Harry spat at him angrily. “If you’re going to apologize, apologize for what you did, not what someone who is now a rotting corpse did!”

Ron seemed shocked at Harry’s use of Draco’s old nickname for him. He opened and closed his mouth several times. His face turned several different shades of red and his entire body started shaking. Harry just stared at him, his insides burning with a desire to hit him, but he controlled that desire.

“You killed him!” Ron finally gasped out in a hall that had been quiet ever since Ron had approached their table.

“Of course he did, Weasel.” Draco said, so softly that no one further away than Ron could hear a word he said. “Wood tried to break us up, as you know so well. He paid the price and the MLE decided it was self-defense. Everyone knows Harry was just defending his family!”

The last was said so loudly that the entire hall heard, and a quick glance by Harry showed that many of the students, and most of the staff, were nodding their heads in agreement. He also knew that every Slytherin around them that had heard the other comments would testify that Draco hadn’t said anything the least bit incriminating, and from the look on Ron’s face he knew that as well. Besides that, who would believe anything Ron had to say against them at this point?

“You, you murderer!” Ron spat loudly at Harry. Harry just shrugged.

“So much for your apology, Weasel.” Draco said, and for some reason that calmed Ron down.

“I really am sorry about that.” Ron said much more calmly, looking at the floor. It was Draco who responded for them.

“Words, Ronald Weasley, mere words. We’ve heard them from you before and your actions proved how false they were. You had your second chance and you squandered it. You’ve been asked again to prove you were under a curse, but you refuse. If you want to ever try to earn forgiveness from us, you will have to prove yourself.” Draco said, and Harry raised Draco’s hand in his and kissed it in a show of support for what he had said.

“Fine, Ferret!” Ron screamed, his face red. If it’s war you want, its war you’ll get.”

With those final words, Ronald Weasley turned and left the hall, never to be seen within Hogwarts again.

“My what an eventful breakfast.” Draco said with a slight shrug, and the Slytherins all sat down with grins on their faces. The staff table was silent, but the rest of the hall was filled with whispers as people talked about what they had just seen. Hermione looked sick where she sat, but was soon talking to Lavender Brown, and Harry relaxed a little.

After breakfast, Harry had a training session with Remus, and instead of working on a set of defensive spells that Harry had been having trouble with, they talked about his relationship with Draco and the events of the last week. When their time was over, Harry mentally kicked himself in the butt for not talking to the werewolf or to Severus before this. Remus’ final words still

echoed in his mind.

*"Ha*rry, you've been functioning as an adult for ove*r* a year now, and that's caused you to forget that you still don't know everything yet, especially when it comes to relationships. Don't let your f*r*eedom, your independence make you for*get that the*re a*r*e older people a*r*ound who've been through simila*r* pr*oblems befor*e. Just yeste*r*day I was talking to Professo*r* Flitwick about an a*r*gument I had with Sev. We all need advice and help on occasion, and you have many people who ar*e willing to help you out, if you will let them."*

Remus was right, and the only reason he wasn't going to keep kicking himself over it was that he had a class of second year students waiting for him to teach them the effects of various curses and hexes on vampires. His mind focused on the lesson as he entered the already full classroom, and he was shocked to see a few of the students actually wince. It reminded him of reactions that Professor Snape got when entering a classroom.

"Who can tell me the effects of the jelly legs jinx on a vampire?" He asked in a friendly voice, giving the shaking Ravenclaw who correctly answered five points. By the end of the class, his students had all left happy, apparently, that they had their old teacher back.

The rest of the day passed much better for Harry, and he soon felt himself getting back into the soothing rhythm of life at Hogwarts. There was no sign of Ron throughout the day, and at dinner, McGonagall announced without explanation that Ernie McMillan of Hufflepuff would be completing the year as Head Boy. After dinner, Harry chose to attend the DA sessions, pairing off with Draco and dueling fiercely.

Neither noticed that by their third spell exchange, the entire group of fifty students had stopped and were now watching. Remus had set a shield around them so that their bounced spells wouldn't hit the other students. As they progressed into the duel, they went from basic spells to an extensive repertoire of spells taught in seventh year, to spells only taught for Auror training. They summoned creatures, dispelled them, caught each other in binds that were quickly broken. Draco even used the thorned vine spell Neville had captured Cho with, but Harry broke it before the vines passed his knees. Harry's new wand was fitting perfectly into his hand and he found himself very grateful for having wielded the Sword of Gryffindor since the wand was longer and heavier than his old wand. Finally, he managed to get Draco with an unexpected stunning charm, and as Draco fell, Remus lifted the shield. Everyone applauded after Harry revived Draco and the two bowed as if they had intended to put on a display.

With that, they left the room in a hurry; they had some sudden, urgent business with the bed in their room.

Unfortunately for their intended business, they found Hermione and Ginny waiting outside their rooms. With a sigh, Harry welcomed them warmly and opened the portrait before inviting them inside. Both seemed very nervous as they sat on couches around the fireplace, but it was Ginny who finally spoke up.

"It's about Ron." Ginny said quickly, almost wincing when she said the name.

"If he's convinced you to come here and plead on his behalf, forget it." Draco said

"No!" Ginny said, her face flushing. "I wouldn't defend that slimy git! I'm glad Mum and Dad have decided to disown him and Percy. Mum's already taken their arms off the clock and

replaced them with arms for you two!"

"Then, what is it?" Harry asked with a little smile.

"He's left Hogwarts for good." Ginny said. "McGonagall found a note in his room saying he was leaving and wouldn't be back."

"We figured that, since Ernie's now Head Boy." Draco said.

"It's not all, though." Ginny said, squirming a little now. "He showed up at the Burrow and told Mum that Harry had killed Wood on purpose and that Draco had said so. Mum got so mad when he said that she blasted him out of the house without any of his things. He kept on banging on the door trying to get in, but the wards refused to recognize him. Mum gathered all his stuff and threw it out on lawn. Supposedly he gathered it all up and no one has seen or heard from him. Mum wanted you to know."

"Thank you Ginny." Harry said with a smile. "We changed the wards on Black Manor on Sunday so I doubt he'll be a problem there. Is there anything else?"

"No, just that I still consider you a friend." Ginny said softly.

"Thank you, Ginny." Harry said with a soft smile. "We consider you a friend too, and hope you will still be a part of our wedding ceremony."

"Oh thank you!" Ginny cried, leaping off the couch and landing on Harry in a hug. She quickly transferred it to Draco before leaving the room to seek out whoever it was she was dating this week. (Harry had long since given up hope of keeping track.)

"So, what can we do for you?" Draco asked Hermione, his voice almost teasing.

"Oh, let me watch the next time you and Harry go at it?" Hermione said crossly, causing Harry and Draco to both blush and all three to burst out laughing. Her words though, said that as far as she was concerned there was nothing wrong between them.

"Request denied." Draco said haughtily when he'd stopped laughing.

"Thank Merlin!" Hermione said with a laugh. "No, a little more seriously, I came to ask if you still wanted me in your wedding party? I mean I'm due to have the baby shortly before the wedding date, but Madame Pomfrey said I should be back on my feet by then, but I didn't know if you wanted someone who…"

"Hermione, take a deep breath." Harry said calmly. She'd been having these panic attacks for the last month now. "We aren't going to change our minds about the wedding ceremony, or about the governess and apartment in Hogsmeade. We aren't going to drop you because Ron finally showed his true nature and we aren't going to turn our backs on you. If you don't remember, you are now officially my oldest friend and I can think of no one better to stand for me at my wedding!"

"Oh, Harry." Hermione sighed with tears in her eyes. "I've been meaning to ask this, but would you two be the godfathers of my baby?"

"We'd be delighted to." Draco said immediately, answering for both of them. Of course this called for a group hug, and Harry jumped when he felt the baby kick.

"He likes his godparents!" Hermione laughed while rubbing her sore belly. "I swear I'll be glad

to give birth just so I don't have to feel the kicking anymore!"

"Hermione, have you figured out what you're going to do after school?" Harry asked her after they sat back down.

"You mean what I really want to do, or the dream world that Ron was trying to create where we lived happily ever after? Hermione said with bitterness in her voice. That was when Harry realized she did still care about Ron, and that his departure must have hurt her greatly.

"I mean the future where you can do, or be, anything that you want." Harry told her firmly.

"I'd love to be a researcher." Hermione said wistfully. "You know, research new spells, charms, and things like that. I really love it, but it requires so much money. You have to have a good library, a good lab, and have to have the money to spend years on research before any spell can be copyrighted."

"Twenty percent of your earnings on those copyrights and we'll front you everything you need." Draco said before Harry could open his mouth. He shut his mouth and realized Draco was right. She wouldn't accept charity at this point. Her pride was developing very, very strongly."

"I'd love to Draco." She said with a wistful smile. "I love Black Manor now that you've fixed it up and your library is one of the best besides Hogwarts but I don't know if I feel comfortable there or raising my child there. Every time I've been there over the past year it feels like I don't belong and I haven't even been comfortable enough in the library to read there! It's so unusual and I don't know if I could live there. I spent a lot of time with Millie and Pansy over the summer there and I even have gotten to like them a lot. They've been very helpful even here at school. They keep visiting me in my rooms and we talk all the time now, but whenever we're at Black Manor it seems like they belong and I don't!"

"You've become friends with Pansy and Millie?" Draco asked in shock.

"Yes." Hermione said, a look Harry knew very well appearing on her face. She was arguing with herself over something. When she spoke next, her voice held that thoughtful tone he knew meant she was speaking a hypothesis she'd been deliberating for some while.

"I know that Pansy was a Death Eater." She admitted. "I also know all the Slytherins that were there over the summer are somehow connected to you two and are doing things that you tell them to do. I overhead Pansy and Millie talking about how you'd gotten Michael Corner a job at the Ministry and how he'd reported something that you didn't like before they saw me and shut up. I kind of figured that you two were running something to give those that were Death Eaters an option besides Voldemort or Dumbledore, but I haven't been able to figure out exactly what. I know you Harry, and although you've changed you still haven't changed enough to use Dark Magic and you haven't acted like someone who has done that stuff."

Harry shared a very long look with Draco. He knew how smart his friend was, and they had discussed so many scenarios like this that they had several plans on how to handle things. Draco nodded, mouthing a word that told Harry his opinion clearly. Harry took his wand out and cast a silencing charm on the only portrait in the room, a landscape above the fireplace.

"Hermione, what do you know about Blood Oaths?" Harry asked her in a calm voice. Her face scrunched up a bit as she thought through his question.

"Of course! It makes sense now!" She exclaimed excitedly. "You've performed a Blood Oath

with the Slytherins! Probably with both of you as the lords and the Oath Stone is in the library which is why I feel like I don't belong there because I'm not part of the Oath! What were the conditions of the Oath?"

"That we seek to preserve the wizarding community, and prevent the dilution of wizarding power through unnecessary mixed marriages." Draco told her.

"What about mudbloods like me?" She asked him with a sharp frown. "Keep us out of important positions? Keep us from schooling?"

"Actually, no." Draco replied calmly. "It is quite the consensus in Slytherin House that people like you deserve the best education they can receive. We've grown up and moved past silly prejudices that don't really do the wizarding world any good. You obviously are smart, and strong in magic and will probably do the Longbottom line good for having your blood mixed with theirs. Sure, your child won't be as pure as it would be if both of you had been purebloods, but it will not be a mudblood because the parents were a wizard and a witch. There's no shame or problems with that. In fact, I know for a fact that three pureblood families are interested in having their sons court you as a future wife."

"What?" She asked, her eyes wide. "Who?"

"Nott, O'Mally, and Zabini." Draco told her. "Not the Zabini in school, but the one who graduated two years ago. Their lines, like the Longbottoms, often suffer too much from inbreeding and mixing fresh blood like yours helps to preserve and strengthen them."

"So I'm nothing but a breeding cow?" Hermione said angrily.

"Just like I am, and like Harry here." Draco replied smoothly. "But that is only part of it. You see, you've already earned a name for yourself as the best friend of Harry Potter, the smartest witch currently in Hogwarts, as well as a strong and brave witch who sticks to her wand when the going gets rough. There's not a pureblood family out there who doesn't wish you were pureblood so they could offer your parents large sums of money in order for you to marry their sons."

"Are you serious?" Hermione gasped, her hand going to her belly.

"Yes," Draco replied simply. "I know the idea must seem revolting to you because you grew up in the muggle world, but genetics and breeding are the key to survival for the magical world, a world *you* now belong to. Tell me, do you want your child growing up being told what to do by muggles or do you want to your child to grow up and be who they want, and can be in the magical world? Believe me, coming from the Longbottom line and from you, your child will be well respected in this world."

"But I don't understand why…" Hermione began, but Harry cut them off.

"Hermione, think about it this way." Harry told her softly. "The only reason the wizarding world exists as it does today is because it is strong enough to stay hidden and to regulate itself. In order to keep its strength, each generation of wizards and witches must be strong enough to use their magic to keep us hidden. Voldemort took the fact that strength mostly comes from those born to parents who are both magical and twisted that into a hatred matching his own hatred for his muggle father. The fact that good, strong, witches and wizards can come from muggle or squib families is something that he managed to obscure in his twisting of wizarding history.

Dumbledore realized this but he went a little overboard in opposing Voldemort. Instead of opposing the man and the way he used pureblood history and beliefs, he attacked the ideals of Voldemort and that divided the wizarding world. What we're doing is healing that breach so that both sides win. Emphasis on pureblood marriages and strong children will remain a part of the wizarding world, but we won't discriminate against half-blood and muggle-born either. It is possible to do both, but during the hatred and violence in Voldemort's rise to power, that little fact got lost."

"What about Hogwarts?" Hermione asked calmly, her eyes reflecting the fact that her powerful brain was working hard on what he'd said. "Will it be closed to those not of pureblood status? I know you two have seats on the Board of Governors so you obviously intend to do something."

"Have you noticed how overcrowded the school is getting?" Harry asked her. "How the classes are getting so big that next year McGonagall is considering stopping joint House classes? The staff are talking about how to enlarge the dorms so they can fit more students?"

"Yes." Hermione said shortly, waiting for him to continue.

"Britain needs a new school." Draco said. "We need a new school to take in the growing amount of kids in our community. Oh, right now Hogwarts can handle it, but in twenty or thirty years it will be extremely difficult. Harry and I plan to study how Hogwarts was made and then found a new school when we're much older. A smaller school, a little more specialized, with the finest teachers around. It will be governed by the same Board of Hogwarts and will be run in conjunction with this school, not in competition."

"Let me guess, only purebloods?" Hermione said with a snort.

"No." Harry told her. "Only the best, the brightest, the strongest. It will start educating at third-year level instead of first. Students at Hogwarts, no matter their background, who have proven themselves to be among the strongest, most cunning, and most intelligent in their years will receive an invitation to attend for the rest of their schooling. They'll receive the best education because they have the ability. If that school existed today, you'd be attending there."

"So, this is what your Blood Oath is about? She asked him, looking deep into Harry's eyes. "Not discriminating, but keeping the wizarding world strong?"

"Yes." Harry replied with the utmost of honesty.

"I want in." She told him, shocking him tremendously. He expected her to accept the fact that the Oath existed, but he never though she'd want to take it!

"What?" Draco asked, obviously in equal shock.

"Those who take this Oath are in your inner circle, right?" She demanded. "They are the ones you listen to the most, who you trust the most?"

"Hermione, you don't need to take the Oath for me to listen to you." Harry told her.

"But I do if I want *them* to listen to me as well." She told him, and her words made sense. "If I'm going to be a part of your household then I will need to be bound to your Oath just like everyone else is, and I won't take no for an answer."

"You win." Draco said, holding his hands up in defeat and smiling at her. "After your baby is born, though. The Oath would bind the baby you are carrying and no child should be subjected to

that."

"Thank you, Draco." She said with a very kind smile. "The fact that you said that settles any doubt I may still have had about the Oath. You really have changed."

"You're welcome." Draco replied, his own face bearing a smile that Harry knew he only revealed to those he considered family.

"Oh, before I go." Hermione said as she stood up, this time she bore a quite wicked smile. "You don't have to worry about Mrs. Malfoy and Mrs. Weasley searching for mothers to bear your children any more. She's found them and they'll be sending their acceptance of the contract very soon."

"What?" Harry gasped, this news taking him by total surprise and making his stomach feel like it was filled with lead.

"When Ginny and I told Molly about our relationship last night, she thought we'd make the perfect couple to bear your children and she called Narcissa by floo immediately. Ginny and I talked to her and she decided even though I'm muggle-born that she couldn't think of a better combination. They'll be owling the contracts to us tomorrow and then they'll present the contracts to you at Christmas."

"You and Ginny!" Harry exclaimed in complete shock.

"Yes, I knew I loved Weasleys." Hermione said with a gleam in her eye as she moved towards the portrait. "I just never thought of Ginny until a few weeks ago. She's ever so much better in bed than Ron could have dreamed of being! Good night!"

Harry turned to Draco as she walked out, speechless. His blond lover had a look of shock on his face that matched his own. Draco's mouth moved for several minutes before he actually uttered a sound.

"Our children…" Draco muttered, his voice drifting off.

"Mothered by a Weasley?" Harry finished for him.

"My mother…" Draco muttered.

"Accepted a muggle-born as one of the mothers?" Harry finished for him, the same thoughts running through his own head.

"I can't think about this right now…" Draco muttered.

"So I'll kiss you." Harry said with a grin, fitting actions to his words and placing a gentle, loving kiss on those pale lips. Draco leaned hungrily into the kiss and all thoughts of children, and their mothers, fled from both of their minds.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N – Before anyone gets into a long essay on the children aspect of things here, let me clarify how things work in my version of JK Rowling's world. Basically, the wizard population has a higher rate of gay/lesbian relationships and developed spells to allow such couples to have children. Similar to cloning in the muggle world, the cell strips the egg in the female of any DNA from the host mother and combines the DNA of the males in the egg causing fertilization. Side effect of this process is that the only possible gender of such combining will be male children.

For two mothers, the DNA of one egg is combined with that of an egg from the other mother and only girl children will result.

How it will work for this situation is that one 'mother' will have a boy child that is Harry & Draco's. The other will bear a daughter that is Hermione's and Ginny's. Next time around, they'll have another set of kids until the mother's decide they don't want to bear any other children. This way both couples get children that are theirs, and all of it is paid for by Harry and Draco (very expensive, very complex magic).

As for why Narcissa might allow a non-pureblood to be a mother for the children, who says that Hermione will actually bear the male child? Ginny might be bearing all the boys and Hermione all the girls. Presented with an option where the woman bearing her grandchildren will be born by a pureblood, and where she finds two girls that have been close friends with Harry for many years, she might just grab onto the opportunity with both hands.

Once again all the reviews are appreciated. I'll try to respond to them in the next chapter update, but for time's sake, I'm yielding to the demand to update NOW. Review responses usually take anywhere from 1-2 hours so..enjoy!

Chapter 9 –

With a glimmer of sadness and a lot of laughter, Harry's seventh year at Hogwarts was speeding by. The weeks between the abrupt departure of Ronald Weasley and the onset of the winter holidays were extremely busy. Harry's mornings were spent teaching or in private lessons with various teachers and Aurors. His afternoons were spent in classes and cramming for the end of term tests and remaining N.E.W.T. exams (which Hermione constantly reminded him were only a few months away now). His evenings were filled with DA sessions or the private tutoring McGonagall had somehow snaked him into doing for several fourth and fifth year students. For the rest of the night he would grade or write essays, and then spend private time with Draco before they both fell into an exhausted sleep.

His one meeting with the Ministry during those weeks was boring. Almost no hint of Death Eater activity anywhere in England, and only the vaguest of rumors from Europe were to be found. A team of Aurors had been sent to Bulgaria, but not one heard anything or suffered anything more severe than a head cold. Even Durmstrang was quiet. Harry made several attempts to get inside Voldemort's mind, but had no success at all. The supposed attack on the Malfoys never occurred, and Harry had to wonder if maybe Voldemort had felt his presence and cancelled the attack.

The muggle government was also quiet. After having called a few more Ministry officials for "talks", nothing more was heard from them. Some of the muggle-born in the Ministry had hinted that their attention was likely being take with some muggle problems overseas. Whatever the cause, the silence was causing Harry to worry a little, and he didn't like it at all.

The last week of school was pure hell for Harry. Writing, administering, and correcting tests for four classes consumed so much of his time that he ended up staying up late every night to study for his own tests. Then to add to that stress, Narcissa and Molly had dragged them off for a wedding rehearsal. Fortunately, Draco was prepared for Harry's distraction and had Jeremy and Pansy plan things for the Yule Ball, or both of them would have been unprepared for the night. Draco had even formally asked Harry to be his date for the Ball, something Harry would never have thought of doing.

“Let me get that!” Draco snapped irritably as Harry fumbled with the sash on his formal robes for the night. He sighed and let Draco tweak it so that it hung *just* perfectly. He’d never understand all these little nuances of clothing, which is why it was a good thing Draco did. “There.”

“You look beautiful, love.” Harry told the blond, and it was the pure truth. Draco’s platinum blond hair was not gelled. His bangs hung down, just touching his eyebrows, while the rest of his hair was plaited into an intricate braid woven with silver and green wires. Loose, it reached a good three inches below Draco’s shoulder blades and Harry loved it when it was unbraided and fanned out around Draco’s head in bed. However, that wasn’t a sight anyone but Harry ever got to see. Draco was also wearing a forest green robe that practically clung to his body. Black and Gold embroidery lived up the cuffs and ran down the inside seams providing even more definition of the young man’s frame. A black velvet sash ran around his middle, and his wand stuck out from the sash as if it was the sword he’d stopped wearing following the destruction of the Sword of Gryffindor.

Harry was dressed in a crimson robe of similar design, but with silver and gold embroidery and a gold sash. His own, much larger wand was also running through the sash. His hair, usually so resistant to brushes, gels, and other forms of control, had cooperated tonight, letting Draco sculpt it into a form that resembled the waves of the ocean, and showed his scar off quite nicely. Draco had wanted to make sure everyone remembered that Draco was with the Boy-Who-Lived, and Harry could think of no argument worth not giving Draco what he wanted.

Naturally, they were the last students to enter the hall. The golden lion that Draco had made for Harry roared after the band had finished a lively dance tune, and the silver dragon Harry had made for Draco let out its own roar and a foot long finger of flame, gathering everyone’s attention as Draco and Harry entered, arm in arm. The two toy animals immediately made their way to the long table of refreshments and took statuesque poses they would hold all evening until their masters left. Anyone that tried to touch them got a nipped finger in return for the efforts, and Professor Tonks’ dropping a ladle of punch resulted in a jet of flame that evaporated the punch before it could touch the silver dragon.

Meanwhile, Draco called out to the wizard band for a dancing tune, and led his lover through a dance. Harry’s fumbled steps of past dances didn’t even hint at an appearance tonight as he glided across the floor. For an entire song, they danced alone and no one dared ruin the moment by joining. Many sighs were heard, especially from the crowd of fourth and fifth year Hufflepuff girls. A motion from Harry on the second tune brought several Gryffindors and Slytherins onto the dance floor.

Harry smiled several times that night, figuring that his past with Draco had probably helped keep the shock down when Hermione and Ginny had shown up as each other’s dates, and then spent as much time on the dance floor as Hermione’s *ve*ry advanced pregnancy caused. She was in fact due to give birth any time now, and Harry was very much on edge. There was even a betting pool going on that she’d go into labor at the Yule Ball.

To the dismay of many, the Ball passed without pregnant students going into labor, without an attack by Voldemort, and without even one lover’s squabble. Harry couldn’t remember a more perfect night, or a more perfect after-Ball activity than what Draco and he did that night.

The next morning, Draco had gone straight to Malfoy Manor while Harry went to Black Manor. According to tradition, the couple had to spend the last 13 days before the completion of the engagement ceremony apart. That meant that Christmas would be separate this year, and only Hermione's reminder that there would be many more Christmases to come kept Harry from breaking tradition. Besides, Black Manor was quite full with Hermione, Ginny, Jeremy, and eight Slytherins there. Draco was surrounded by an equally sized group of Slytherins, plus Seamus, Lavender, and the Patil sisters. Luna Lovegood had declined their invitation because her dad was taking her hunting for something called the bruvis bovinus, supposedly found only in North America.

The weeks before Christmas passed slowly for Harry. Hermione went into false labor four times, and Millicent jokingly remarked that the child was as clumsy as his father since he obviously couldn't find the birth canal. Hermione had chased her (clumsily) around the Manor for two days after that comment, much to the amusement of everyone else. On Christmas Day, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley showed up with the twins for a Christmas feast. No word had been heard of Ron or what he was up to, but Harry had a hard time sharing the grief they showed at that fact.

Ron could rot in hell for all Harry cared.

Severus, Tonks, and Remus arrived together just as the Weasleys were leaving and Harry found himself blushing as Tonks and the Potions Master took turns giving him advice on married life. The rest of the people at the Manor enjoyed the display until Harry lost his temper and pointedly reminded his two 'parents' that they'd never been married before. Before either could respond Remus got down on one knee and asked a horrified Severus Snape to be part of his pack.

"Oh, you Merlin-forsaken Gryffindor!" Snape had growled before grabbing Remus' hand and pulling him upstairs to the bedroom. After that, Tonks became the butt of everyone's jokes as they asked how she was getting along with Professor Flitwick. The Auror turned Professor left after half an hour, and the group of students turned on Millicent, who only lasted ten minutes before fleeing.

At four a.m., Harry was greatly regretting staying up until past midnight. He barely had time to shower before Severus dragged him downstairs to the Manor's apparition point. They appeared at Malfoy Manor long enough before sunrise for Harry to enjoy an early breakfast with the elder Malfoys while Draco ate with Severus and Tonks.

"So, are you ready for everything?" Lucius asked him quietly.

"I think so." Harry replied nervously.

"Don't worry, you really don't have to do much at this ceremony." Narcissa said with a smile.

"Still, I didn't really understand that there were spirits in these bracelets until Severus explained it last night." Harry admitted. "He still wouldn't say who they were, but from the look in his eyes he expects me to be shocked."

"Does he?" Lucius said, hiding his grin behind a cup of tea. "Well, you don't have long to find out if he was right. We should all be heading upstairs to change."

Hermione was waiting for him, now a week past her due date and showing no signs of having gone into labor. She'd been brought by the Malfoy limo along with most of the other students since she couldn't apparate or floo this late in her pregnancy. She helped Harry dress in scarlet

and gold robes for the ceremony, and also helped him get his hair into some semblance of order, or at least down to “well-shagged” instead of “wildly-shagged.”

His nervousness increased as they returned to the garden where the original ceremony had been held, and he looked at the pre-dawn sky. A moment later, Draco appeared in green and silver robes, with his hair flowing freely instead of tied into a pony tail or braid. Almost two weeks of separation had made just enough difference for Harry to notice every little thing about him, and the smiles that lit both of their faces were completely unguarded despite the group of nearly thirty people that were watching them. Hand in hand, they moved through the seated people and approached the old wizard, who was flanked on his right by the Malfoys and on his left by Severus and Tonks. All five of them were smiling brightly as Harry and Draco moved to stand before them.

“One year and a day ago, we stood in this spot and bound together Harry James Potter and Draconis Malfoy in the most ancient of rites to determine their compatibility as mates. During this time they have faced challenges and separation, but both still approach once more at this, the conclusion of their trial. Lucius Malfoy, father of Draconis, have you found Harry Potter to be a worthy mate for your son?”

“Beyond all expectations.” Lucius said formally, bowing his head slightly to Harry.

“Narcissa Black-Malfoy, has Harry Potter met your expectations of a worthy mate for your only child?”

“He has, and more.” Narcissa said elegantly, smiling at Harry. He felt his cheeks blushing at her words, and her smile.

“Severus Snape, standing for the father of Harry Potter, has Draconis Malfoy met your expectations as a worthy mate for Harry Potter?”

“He has shown that neither force nor trickery will sway him from the side of his beloved.” Severus said in his most captivating voice. “He is…acceptable.”

“Nymphadora Tonks,” She winced at her first name, and the old wizard smiled. “Standing for the beloved mother of Harry Potter, have you found Draconis Malfoy to be acceptable for Harry Potter?”

“I have.” Tonks said simply, also smiling.

“Having heard the acceptance of the families of these two who wish to wed, is there any who might know of reasons why such a union would be unacceptable?”

The silence was broken only by the sobs of Mrs. Weasley, who was crying in happiness. Harry stood proudly, his stance daring anyone to speak up, but no one did. The old wizard had to wait one full minute before continuing, and as he reached forty-five, Harry began to relax. Why did these blasted ceremonies have this damn custom? Even muggle ceremonies did! Of course this wasn’t a wedding but…

“I object!” A very familiar and unwelcome voice called out from the edge of the garden. Harry spun, grabbing for a wand that wasn’t there. None of the party was allowed to carry their wands except for the Master of the Ceremony, but at least he had his wand pointed at the fiery red-haired young man that stormed towards them in dirty, ragged robes.

“HOW DID YOU GET IN HERE YOU SAD EXCUSE FOR A SON?!” Molly Weasley roared at her youngest son. “GET OUT NOW!”

“Please, mother.” Ronald Weasley snorted as he closed with them. “You know the ceremony. Any with business at this ceremony may pass whatever wards are set at the location, and I have business here.”

“I always said you were a gate-crashing, scum, Weasel.” Draco sneered from Harry’s side, while Harry tried to control the rage that demanded he smashed his old friend’s face.

“Be quiet, Ferret.” Ron sneered.

“Everyone will be silent.” The old wizard commanded, and his voice seemed to silence everyone. “Step forward, objector, identify yourself and your objection.”

“I am Ronald Weasley.” Ron said fiercely. “And I object because that scum Malfoy has corrupted my best friend, forced him into the Dark Arts, and has failed to remain faithful!”

“What one views as corruption, others may view as saving,” The old wizard said grimly. “The use of dark arts, or lack thereof, has no bearing on this ceremony. Only the charge of infidelity has bearing. Present your proof.”

“Draco Malfoy kissed and attempted to have sex with me.” Ronald said in a voice that showed he expected that to be enough.

“How say you to this charge, Draconis Malfoy?”

“I admit I did kiss him.” Draco said, and there were gasps from those that did not know. “He was attempting to sabotage my relationship with Harry and had succeeded in fooling me to believe that Harry had cheated on me with another.”

“Did you not see the bracelet on his arm?”

“I did, but I doubted it due to rumors that Harry had found a way around the charm.” Draco said, his head lowering, but Harry squeezed his hand tightly.

“Such trickery has often been attempted, but the spirits of the bracelets do not lie. Harry Potter, Draco Malfoy, are you willing to hear the words of your guardians on these matters?”

“I am” Harry said defiantly.

“As am I.” Draco said a moment later, his voice less sure.

“*Guardians Patronus!”* The old man roared in a voice that seemed like thunder. Harry’s bracelet grew warm, and he was surprised to see the snake that adorned the Malfoy crest crawl down his hand and drop to the ground, where it grew larger and larger. The lion on Draco’s bracelet also leapt to the ground and began to grow. Then, the two forms shimmered, and Harry felt his knees almost give way as the snake turned into his mother and the lion into his father. His father’s appearance was filmed over with gold, while his mother’s was silverish, but they both smiled at him. Behind him everyone gasped, including Ron.

“Guardians.” The Old wizard said into the silence that followed their transformation. “A challenge has been issued on the fidelity of this couple. How say you?”

“Silly.” Harry’s mother said, and he shivered at her voice. Tears came to his eyes as she smiled down at him. “My son is everything a mother, or a husband, could ever hope to have. He is full

of love, a love he gives freely to all those who want it. He has been tempted in ways many others have succumbed to, but has not failed in his dedication to his love. His heart is pure."

"My son's chosen one is not what I would have expected." Harry's father said, looking directly at Harry, and his heart swelled at the look of pride he could see in the man's face. "Still, he is not me and he must choose his mate based on his needs and his desires. Draconis loves my son, and that love has never wavered even though his faith in my son did for a time. Yet, how can you trust something unless it has been tested, and Draco was tested. No matter what kept him from breaking the fidelity he swore, the fact remains he did not break that fidelity. He did not perform any actions irredeemable and he has tortured himself every day since it occurred, vowing to make himself a stronger person and earn the love and trust my son has placed in him. I am proud of him and he is a worthy mate to Harry. The objections are groundless."

"*What?"* Ron nearly screeched at the ethereal creatures. "You can't want your son with a Malfoy! They're nothing but evil!"

"Enough, objector." The old wizard said before casting a silencing charm on the red-head. "Your objection has been heard, and found wanting. Depart."

With that, it was like some invisible creature grabbed Ron by the back of his robes and pulled him out of the garden. Everyone's attention returned to where Harry stood next to Draco, but Harry's attention was solely on his shimmering parents as they smiled at him.

"We declare they are worthy." The two spirits said in unison, each of them placing ethereal hands on the couple. "Let your love guide you, may the years be kind to both of you, and may you live together for the rest of your days."

With those words, Harry's mother leaned in to give him a kiss on the forehead, and Harry closed his eyes as the ethereal lips touched him for a cold, fleeting moment. When he opened his tear-stained eyes, they were gone and the old wizard was waving his wand again.

"The year and a day has been served, all objections have been rejected, and the period of trial is over. In accordance with the wishes of the couple, they shall be wed in five days."

With a pop, the old man was gone, and the couple was immediately surrounded by cheering friends and family. The sun had just risen, and a new day began. Harry smiled, putting any thoughts of their objector out of his head, and walked into the house beside the man who would soon be his husband.

It was going to be a very long day.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

"Were those really my parents?" Harry asked Draco in the quietness of Draco's bedroom at Malfoy Manor.

"Yes." Draco whispered softly. "It was your father that guided me to Hearly Manor."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"We didn't know until that day, and after that well, Severus though you'd just obsess over it."

"Of course I would have!" Harry said forcefully. "We could have called them forth and talked to them!"

“No, we couldn’t have.” Draco told him softly. “The spirits could only be called forth in certain circumstances and said certain things. They stretched it a lot tonight, and if the Weasel hadn’t challenged them they wouldn’t have been able to say even that much.”

“Oh.” Harry said, thinking about what Draco had said, and then relishing the memory of what his parents had told them. The fact that they had approved of Draco meant everything to him, and answered any last doubts about their wedding in five days. Fortunately, there were no traditions about separation before the wedding since it was just a ceremony solidifying something that the magical events of this morning had already established.

Harry and Draco were forever bound together as a couple.

“Harry?” Draco’s voice interrupted Harry’s thoughts.

“Yes, love?” Harry responded softly.

“Do you have any regrets? I mean, you’ve lost Ron as your friend, you’ve changed, and so much is different now…”

“Draco.” Harry broke in firmly, but with love in his voice. “My life, and this world are both better because we are a couple. Ron is in the situation he is in because of the choices he made, not the choices either of us made. I would have it no other way.”

“Thank you, Harry.” Draco whispered, and Harry bent so that his lips touched his lover’s gently.

“No, Draco, thank you for trying to kill me that day.” Harry whispered as he ended the kiss, and Draco succumbed to a fit of laughter.

“Only Harry *fucking* Potter would take someone trying to kill him and try to seduce him!”

Both drifted off to sleep with smiles on their faces.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

“*Morag!”* Harry screamed the name as he came out of sleep, and he realized he wasn’t the only one. Draco was sitting up in bed next to him panting heavily as that name, and a strong echo of pain echoed through Harry’s mind again. He could see Draco wincing as well.

“*Cruciatus.”* Draco whispered in horror.

“Can’t feel where she is.” Harry whispered, “Not well enough to apparate.”

“Must be shielded.” Draco whispered back, wincing again as another flash of pain echoed inside Harry’s head. Both young men moved as one, getting out of bed and wrapping themselves in silk night robes before heading into the hallway. Harry followed Draco, who knew Malfoy Manor much better than he did, through several passageways until they reached a large set of double-doors.

“Father?” Draco said loudly, banging on the door. “Mother?”

“Enter!” Lucius’ voice was faint, even though he was obviously yelling. Draco pushed the door open and for a moment, Harry was astounded at exactly how *huge* the room really was. It was nearly four times the size of the room he shared with Draco at Hogwarts, and there were several doorways into side rooms. Near the far end of the room was a huge canopied bed with green and black curtains. Lucius and Narcissa were both standing near it in evening robes of their own,

brown and black for Narcissa and pure emerald green for Lucius.

For a moment, Harry realized just what Draco might look like in thirty years or so and he fought a wave of horniness. One did not admit to being attracted to one's father-in-law no matter how much he looked like one's husband. Harry winced, and Draco actually put a hand to his forehead as another bout of pain echoed through their foreheads.

"What is it boys?" Lucius asked in a very concerned voice, rushing towards them with Narcissa not far behind. He gently took Draco by the shoulder, leading him to a nearby couch while Narcissa did the same for Harry. It was a few moments before Harry felt like he could speak.

"Morag." Harry finally ground out. "One of our oathbound. She's being tortured."

"We can't tell where." Draco said in a much calmer voice than Harry had managed. "It's like she's someplace shielded.

"Blast!" Lucius muttered. "You're going to need to use the Oath Stone if she's in a shielded space. That will amplify your ability to sense your oathbound and locate them through any shielding. You've both got your wands on you, good. I'll lower the apparition wards, and you two go to Black Manor. Narcissa and I may have our wands back but we still can't leave the Manor without Ministry approval. PINCY!"

"Yes, Master Malfoy?" A house elf said, appearing right after Lucius had called her name. "What can Pincy do to serve?"

"Awaken all the guests that are Slytherin students and inform them to attend Masters Malfoy and Potter at Black Manor." Lucius ordered. "Boys, summon the rest of your group that aren't here and take them with you when you go. Message me by floo as soon as you know the location. I'll wait twenty minutes and go tell Auror Mitchells that Harry woke with a vision about Voldemort attacking a student. That will give you a cover for how you know and give you reinforcements."

"Yes, sir." Harry managed as a fresh bout of pain hit him.

"The wards are down. Go." Lucius said firmly. "And good luck."

Harry and Draco apparated, barely hearing Lucius's last words. Kreacher was immediately at their side as soon as they arrived and Draco started issuing orders while Harry moved up to the library. By the time Draco arrived carrying clothes more suited for hunting down whoever was hurting one of their oathbound, Harry had the Oath Stone uncovered and had found a good enough lock to apparate to where Morag was being held. He could sense that there were blocking wards, but nothing to stop apparating. Behind Draco the first of their other oathbounds showed up. Within ten minutes, both Harry and Draco were dressed, and the remainder of their group had arrived. While Draco went downstairs to tell his father where they were going, Harry informed the group of what was happening. Everyone nodded grimly, and when Draco returned they were ready. Harry drew his wand out, a motion followed by everyone else present, and they apparated together, the older oathbound taking those still too young to apparate on their own.

They appeared in a hallway just outside the room where Morag was being held. A single wizard in Death Eater robes was standing there, and twelve stunning spells hit him at once. Remembering Professor McGonagall's collapse after being hit by multiple spells in his fifth year, Harry checked the prone form for a pulse and closed his eyes briefly when he realized that the wizard was now dead.

The expected wave of guilt never materialized through Morag's echoed pain. He stood firmly, the group behind him and Draco was quiet as he took four steps back.

"Reducto!" Harry yelled, his spell blasting the door so hard it flew into the room. Without hesitation, he moved into the room with Draco at his side and the rest flowing around them in a rush.

Eight Death Eaters, one still pointing its wand at a sobbing form on the floor looked up in surprise. The door had missed all of them, and they all had their wands out. Still the odds were over three to one, and Draco only had to block two spells from Harry before all eight of the enemy were on the floor.

While Harry went to take the still collapsed form of Morag into his arms, Draco began overseeing the binding and sorting of the Death Eaters they had captured. Ten of their people guarded the entrance in case more Death Eaters appeared. Morag was weeping senselessly and Harry tried using the bond between them to calm her down. Surprisingly, it worked.

"Harry?" She gasped out, looking into his face with wonder.

"Sorry it took us so long to get here." He told her with a wan smile.

"You actually came!" The dark-haired Slytherin whispered, a smile almost forming on your face.

"Of course we did, it's part of our Oath." Harry told her, his smile growing in strength. That seemed to calm her more.

"V...V…Voldemort was here." She managed to stutter out. "I wasn't telling them anything but then he used some spell to get into my mind and he left really quickly. He didn't tell the others anything so they kept torturing me."

"Don't worry about that now." Harry told her as a commotion at the doorway took his attention away from her.

"Aurors are here, Harry!" Crabbe called from the doorway.

"Let them through." Harry ordered. Moments later, Kingsley Shacklebolt led a team of ten Aurors into the room, his expression dark.

"Mind telling me what you think you are doing?" Kingsley raged as soon as he spotted Harry.

"Rescuing a schoolmate." Harry replied shortly. "I see you got our message."

"I knew all this was going to your head!" Kingsley was practically yelling now. "I don't care how good you think you are but you have no right to lead a group of half-trained children on a rescue mission when there are Aurors to do that!"

"Time was of the essence." Harry replied calmly to the angry man. "Voldemort sensed my presence and was about to order her to be killed. I couldn't let that happen and it would have taken far too long if I waited until you assembled enough Aurors. She would have been dead by the time you got here."

"He *saw it?*" One of the female Aurors gasped.

"It's classified information." Kingsley snapped at the woman. "Mr. Potter can occasionally see what the Dark Lord is doing because of the curse when he was a child. He's been trained on how

to keep the Dark Lord out of his own mind."

"When Voldemort gets angry, I can sometimes break through the barriers on his mind." Harry told her firmly, enjoying her wince at that name. "It's how we've come close to tracking him down several times over the last year. It infuriates him to know that I can spy on him while he hasn't broken through my barriers in years."

"Oh." The woman said, her eyes wide.

"There's still the problem that you can't be leading a vigilante group every time someone is in danger." Kingsley said, still pursuing the topic Harry had tried to change.

"Kingsley, everyone I brought here is extremely well trained." Harry said firmly. "They're among the best, and several of them are Defenders. I didn't bring half-trained students with me. Every single one of these people could take their N.E.W.T. in the DADA field and pass with an 'O' right now. There are several more wedding guests back at the Manor who didn't fit that qualification and they weren't brought. Time was of the essence in this situation."

"Okay." Kingsley gave in with a sigh. "It sounds like you at least did think things through a little. I want your word though. No traipsing off to save the world without Aurors around."

"Whenever it is possible, you have my word." Harry said defiantly. "If it's not possible, I'll make sure to get word just like I did tonight."

"That'll have to do." Kingsley said, and then he looked at the girl Harry was still holding. "How is she?"

"She'll be okay." Harry said with a small smile. "She's been under Cruciatus for a while, but given some rest she'll be fine."

"Any idea why they were torturing her?" Kingsley asked.

"She's a student at Hogwarts." Draco answered, coming to stand next to Harry. "She's probably the only student in Slytherin right now whose parents had ties to Voldemort but aren't in Azkaban, hiding, or worse. She didn't want to go home for the Holidays but there was no legitimate reason for her to be kept away. Her mom's over there, stunned. She was the one performing the curse. Her dad's not in this group nor was he the man outside. All the others are foreigners, I think."

"Well, there should be a medic team here soon and we'll figure out what to do with her then." Kingsley said. "What happened to the man outside?"

"Too many stunners." Harry said evenly, hiding his surprise that he still felt no guilt even though one of the spells had been his. He'd always thought killing someone would make him feel guilty, but now he'd emotionlessly killed twice. A little part of his mind told him that maybe he really did accept the difference between necessary death and unnecessary death. Voldemort killed indiscriminately, but he didn't. Maybe that was the key to his lack of guilt.

"It happens even with trained Aurors." Kingsley said comfortingly. "Don't beat yourself up about it. Even if it had been me and my team showing up here, we'd have probably had the same result."

"Thanks." Harry said, making his voice as soft as possible and trying to look relieved.

“My dad offered to take Morag for the holidays.” Draco said. Harry knew it was a lie. Morag had been allowed to go home in the hopes of getting information from her parents about Voldemort’s activities. Harry *did* feel a little guilt at that, but the girl had volunteered.

“If he’s still willing…” Kingsley said softly.

“He will be.” Draco replied confidently.

“Harry, this is the first real Death Eater activity we’ve seen here in a while.” Kingsley said, moving on to another topic as a team from St. Mungo’s appeared. They took the girl from Harry, and he finally stood up, moving to Kingsley’s side while the medi-witch checked the girl over. “Do you think this means he’ll be active in Britain again?”

“I have no idea.” Harry admitted. “I did get the sense that he plans something, maybe focused on Hogwarts. He was quite pleased at how many people he’d recruited while overseas, but he’s not staying here. I know that much.”

“The Minister will probably call a meeting about this.” Kingsley warned him.

“Frankly, unless you arrest me and force me to go with you, I need to focus on our wedding in a few days.” Harry told him.

“Do you think he’ll attack the wedding?” Kingsley asked worriedly.

“I doubt it.” Harry said with a snort. “I mean, the guest list is over three hundred people, and I know that most of them will bring their wands. Then there’s what, forty Aurors and sixty more MLE agents on duty? I remember hearing Lucius grumble about paying all the overtime.”

“Yeah, there’ll be a lot of us there.” Kingsley said with a smile. “I doubt he’s gotten several hundred followers yet. He’d need a small army to pull something like that off.”

“That’s why we’re going with so much protection.” Draco said firmly, smiling at Harry.

“Okay, you and your friends can leave now.” Kingsley said.

“Don’t you need statements from all of us?” Harry asked in surprise.

“No.” Kingsley said. “Just write up a report and give me the names of everyone who was here. I trust you.”

“Thanks, Kingsley.” Harry said with a genuine smile. “Malfoy Manor, everyone.”

With that, the group of students apparated from the room after some shuffling around to make sure everyone who couldn’t apparate was partnered. They appeared at the apparition point just outside the Manor’s gate, and made the long walk in complete silence. Once inside the main entrance of the Manor itself, Draco instructed a waiting house elf to provide rooms for those who hadn’t been staying at the Manor already, and Harry advised the group to get some rest. The sun was just rising, and Harry realized that he was still tired. Before everyone left he told them they’d get together after lunch to make sure everyone had their stories straight before Harry sent a report in to Kingsley. They nodded, and the house elf led away those without rooms while Harry joined Draco in heading for the master suite of the Manor.

They found Lucius pacing in worry and Narcissa frowning into the fireplace. As they entered, Lucius face shone with relief, and Narcissa stood, wringing her hands. Harry smiled slightly at their worry.

“How did it go?” Lucius demanded.

“Good.” Harry said.

“One dead Death Eater.” Draco said with a tight smile. “Eight more captured, no one from our group injured. Morag should be okay. They’re checking her out at St. Mungo’s. She’s going to need a place to stay so they’ll probably be contacting you.”

“Good,” Narcissa said with a nod of her head. “We’ll be more than happy to take her in for a while.”

“Voldemort was there before we arrived.” Harry told Lucius. “He used legillimancy on Morag. She’s pretty certain he’s aware of the Blood Oath now.”

“That is going to be tricky.” Lucius said slowly. “Still, good job. You two should get some rest.”

“Yes, sir.” Draco said, taking Harry’s arm and leading him out. By the time they got back to their room, Harry was dead on his feet, and he fell asleep as soon as he laid down. However, instead of the darkness of the truly exhausted, he found himself looking at a fire from a sitting position. Then he heard a voice in his head and it sent chills through him.

*“I’ve been waiting fo*r you, Ha*r*ry Potte*r*.” The mental voice was one he recognized intimately. “It is time we had a little talk.”

*“Talk, Tom?” Ha*rry fo*r*med his response ca*r*efully. “What makes you want to talk to me now?”

*“You’ve su*rpr*i*sed me.” Voldemort *r*esponded, his voice sounding amused. “When you were eleven I gave you a wondr*ous offe*r and you *r*efused. I see now I might have been wr*ong to make the offer* the way I did. You were *r*ight to turn me down. You are fa*r* too crafty to be me*r*ely a servant. I’ve found that little island we have both called home isn’t as important as it once was. I was wondering if you wouldn’t consider *a t*ruce?*”*

*“Go on.” Ha*rry *r*eplied carefully, biting down the instinctive response of telling Voldemor*t to fo*rget the idea. “I’m listening.”

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N – You know, I went to the harry potter official site and tried the sorting hat on. It told me I am very much Slytherin, and with this cliffhanger I find I must agree.

Don’t you?

J

Okay, to all the responses about the children and why Harry/Draco genetically should be able to have children. You’re right, according to biological science, their sperm does carry the necessary genetic material (There’s a reason why I got a ‘C’ in college biology). But, try telling that to a wizard developing the spell that creates the pregnancy. It was a) invented several hundred years ago when people really didn’t understand what caused a child to be a boy or a girl b) operates on the laws of magic, not science.

Now, Hermione probably could figure out how to change it, if she ever bothered to, and who knows she might sometime down the road. However, whether Draco would be willing to use the changed spell is a different story. Remember, he’s a big believer in tradition.

Once again, thanks to all of my reviewers (both new and old). Some of you have been reviewing

since the first chapter, and others are new, but all of your comments and thoughts are greatly appreciated. I don't mind mistakes being pointed out at all, and hope that I've been able to make this story better for them being raised! My beta, stampedelover has been very great in the development and proofing of this story. I've currently started writing chapter 14 (well, I'll start after posting this chapter). It took me almost two weeks to write chapter 13, and it usually takes me about half a day of typing. We'll see what y'all think about it in a week or two. I'll be reviewing chapter 10 and having it ready to post here within the next few days (depending on homework of course). Well, enjoy!

Chapter 10 –

*"Go on." Ha*rry *r*eplied carefully, biting down the instinctive response of telling Voldemor*t to fo*rget the idea. "I'm listening."

*"What would Dumbledo*re say if he knew that his Golden Boy was actually holding a civil conversation with me?" Voldemor*t taunted him.*

*"If that's what you have to say," Har*ry *r*etor*ted. "then this conv*ersation is ove*r*."

*"Nice gi*rl you have the*r*e... Mo*rag."* Voldemo*rt's* mental voice was a hiss this time.

"Jealous, Tom?" Harr*y* responded with sa*r*casm lacing his thoughts.

*"It explains how you took the Par*kinson girl and the othe*r*s fr*om me." Voldemor*t's thoughts this time were neut*r*al. "I wonde*r* why you haven't claimed Lucius or the othe*r*s yet. They've been suffer*ing my w*rath th*r*ough their Ma*r*ks for a while."

*"Too conspicuous." Ha*rry admitted.

*"Wise decision." Voldemo*rt *r*esponded. "You ce*r*tainly have grown ove*r* the last few years. I find myself grudgingly imp*r*essed."

*"Is that why you haven't come to face me one-on-one, yet?" Ha*rry asked.

*"Tell me, Ha*rry, what did the pr*ophecy have to say about us?" Voldemo*rt *counte*red.

*"Something I'm su*re you guessed when you killed my parents, Tom." Ha*r*ry responded, *his* rage ve*r*y much present in his thoughts. "It's going to be you o*r* me, Tom, and I plan on making sure that it's you."

"Ahhhhh." Voldemort's hiss filled Harr*y's mind. "So my assumption was co*rrect then. How…pleasing."

*"Pleasing?" Ha*rry *r*esponded angrily. "You killed my parents!"

*"They defied me th*ree times, Ha*r*ry." Voldemo*r*t r*esponded calmly. "If they hadn't defied me, they might still be alive today."*

*"And I'd be dead?" Ha*rry's ange*r* was a hot fire now.

*"Not necessa*rily." Voldemo*r*t r*eplied, causing Har*ry to pause fo*r* a moment.

"What do you mean?"

*"Did the P*rophecy say that we **had** to kill each other, o*r* is that an assumption?"

*"Conside*ring that I'll never *join you, your* point is moot." Harry's ange*r* gr*ew hot once mor*e.

“You killed my pa*r*ents, you killed Cedric Diggo*r*y, and you used me to get Sirius killed!”

“And who have you killed in your path to greatness?” Voldemor*t’s wo*rds stung Ha*rry,* and he couldn’t stop the images of Oliver Wood and the nameless Death Eater f*r*om forming in his mind.

*“Yes, I thought so.” Voldemor*t’s voice was satisfied. “Tell me, Harry, whe*r*e is the guilt from those deaths?”

*“They dese*rved what they got.” Harr*y’s mental voice was cold now, not hot.*

*“Yes, so they did.” Voldemor*t’s agreement shocked Harr*y. His next w*ords we*r*e even more su*r*pr*ising. “So, Ha*rry, what would you say if I agr*eed to* remove all my people fr*om* England and never bothe*r* you or that d*r*atted island again?”

*“Why would you do that?” Har*ry asked, once mo*r*e sur*p*rised.

*“Because you will achieve my goals the*re *with your Blood Oath.”* Voldemort answe*r*ed calmly. “The *r*est of the world, I am finding much mor*e to my liking. You can have the wizarding* community of B*ritian*, I will take the rest of the wo*r*ld, and we will never have to wo*r*ry about finding out which of us survives the P*r*ophecy.”

*“You expect me to believe that?” Har*ry snapped.

“Wizard’s bond, Harry, the full spell.” Voldemort’s mental voice was a whisper *now. “I will seal my wo*rds with my blood, as will you. I will leave England alone, and you will not pur*sue me o*r any of those whom suppor*t me unless they enter* your realm.”

*“So, Voldemo*rt and Ha*r*ry Potte*r* divide the world?” Ha*r*ry said sa*r*castically. “A*r*e you really that af*r*aid of me?”

*“Now that you have embar*ked on the dark path on you*r* own, Harry, the*r*e is no more need fo*r* us to try to kill each other.*” Voldemo*rt’s answe*r* chilled Harry to the bone this time. “I will have the g*r*eater *po*rtion of the wo*r*ld, as is my due. We both know that unless one of us kills the othe*r*, we are invincible. Think about it, Harry. We are wiza*r*ds and life for us is ve*r*y long indeed. Who knows, maybe someday we will rec*r*eate Flammel’s work and have ete*r*nal life with the Philosopher’s Stone. Think, Harr*y, of life forever with that blond haired beauty at your side.* All you have to do is give your *wo*rd that you will leave me alone. You have tasted power*, now, Ha*rry. Can you say that you do not feel its pull?”

*“I…I…” Ha*rry’s thoughts faltere*d. As much as he didn’t want to, he under*stood *what Tom Riddle was talking about.*

*“I am patient, Ha*rry.” Voldemo*r*t’s voice was soft now. “There *is much power* in what blind fools call the Dark A*r*ts. More than enough for *both of us.”*

*“I want nothing to do with the Dar*k Ar*ts!” Ha*rry sna*r*led, his thoughts clearing.

*“Really, Ha*rry? You’ve killed now. That changes a man fo*r*ever.*”*

*“I didn’t do it with the Dar*k Ar*ts!” Ha*rry snapped.

*“The f*irst time I killed, I had never *touched the Dar*k Ar*ts, eithe*r.” Voldemo*r*t’s admission horrified Ha*r*ry. “Face it, Harry. You’ve moved down a path that you cannot reve*r*se. Tell me, honestly, do you desir*e pow*er? Does seeing your o*r*der*s obeyed please you? Would you* rathe*r*

tr*ust othe*rs to do things o*r* have them done under you*r* dir*ection? No, don't answe*r now, Ha*r*ry. Think on them. Your *wedding is in a few days, it is a t*r*aditional wizar*d wedding is it not?"

*"Yes." Ha*rry answe*r*ed the last question, trying to igno*r*e the others. His confidence was once more shaken.

*"Ah, that is good." Voldemor*t sounded quite pleased. "Enjoy the festivities. As a gift, I promise that none of mine shall disturb the festivities. Farewell, Ha*r*ry. We'll talk when you've had time to think ove*r* my questions."

Harry sat bolt upright in bed as the presence of Voldemort left him. Draco was asleep, and Harry's movement hadn't awakened him. He laid back down, putting an arm around the sleeping form next to him, and closed his eyes. This time, he drifted off to sleep, marred only by whispers of thoughts in his mind…

*Tell me, honestly, do you desi*r*e* power?

The pleasure of blasting the flowers in the garden with his new wand filled him. The rush as his spell hit Oliver Wood flowed through him once again.

*Does seeing you*r or*der*s *obeyed please you?*

The unquestioning obedience when he placed his hand on the Oath Stone filled him with a sense of power. Watching the Minister of Magic that he picked take his oath of office filled him satisfaction, Kingsley backing down after Harry had led a rescue party felt so *r*ight.

Would you rathe*r* tr*ust othe*rs to do things o*r* have them done under you*r* dir*ection?*

The incompetent Fudge fleeing the Ministry offices with tears in his eyes was amusing, and at least the right people would get things done now. Maggie Lawton leaning on her new executive assistant, whose ideas came from Harry, had no idea how much of Harry's orders she followed. The looks on the committee members faces when he spoke at meetings was always quite…satisfactory.

Over and over again, these thoughts, these images, played themselves out in his sleep. He didn't realize he was jerking in his sleep, or that when Draco was awakened by a sharp jab of Harry's elbows, the blond took him in his arms, driving the thoughts out, and Harry passed into a more restful sleep.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

"So, do you plan to accept his offer?" Lucius drawled slowly after hearing of Harry's dream. After a large and lively gathering for breakfast, Harry had managed to meet with his lover and the two elder Malfoys to discuss his dream meeting with Voldemort.

"No." Harry said firmly, taking notice of how Draco sighed in relief at that word. "The Wizard's bond wouldn't keep him from plotting against me once he felt he was strong enough. It'd just warn me when he moved against me."

"The thought of taking power here in Britain didn't tempt you?" Narcissa asked him, a serious expression on her face.

"It did." Harry admitted, lowering his head a little.

"Do not be ashamed, young man." Lucius admonished him lightly. "You told us once that the

Sorting Hat thought you were ambitious enough for Slytherin. You are not surrounded by your noble Gryffindor colleagues. We understand the desire for power, and appreciate the ambition to achieve that power."

"It's not like you're talking about using the Dark Arts, Harry." Draco said from where he sat next to Harry. "I have no problems with the idea of being married to the man who runs Britain."

"Er…oh." Was all Harry could get out. Of course they wouldn't be upset about his thoughts along those lines! They were Malfoys…

"Still, this does present some interesting possibilities." Narcissa said thoughtfully, tapping one finger against her cheek as she thought. "He asked if it was a traditional wedding? Of course…"

"Of course, what?" Harry asked, mildly perturbed at her Ravenclaw type behavior.

"One ancient part of the wedding ceremony regards the protection wards for the ceremony itself." Narcissa explained. "They keep those who have no business, or are not invited, from being able to enter or even be aware of the place where it is being held."

"Yes, yes, that is why he asked." Lucius' eyes seemed to gleam as he leaned forward. "He will be coming to the wedding."

"But he won't even be able to bring any of his followers except Pettigrew." Narcissa added, and Harry's bewilderment got the better of him.

"What do you mean he'll be there!" Harry exclaimed angrily. "If he shows up without an army behind him he'll be arrested or killed. He knows that!"

"He won't be." Draco said softly from behind him. "It's still the law that liege lords like Voldemort may attend the wedding of their vassal, or their vassal's kin, without fear of attack on the way to, during, or returning from the wedding itself."

"You mean he'll be allowed to waltz right up and take a seat?" Harry exclaimed in total surprise.

"It's the law." Lucius said firmly, with a hint of sympathy in his voice. "I still bear his mark, and that gives him right of lordship even though I have renounced him. Milieu is from a pureblood family and will not even think of breaking tradition or Ministry law, even if it does involve Voldemort. Pettigrew will be able to come as Voldemort's attendant. He's allowed one escort."

"I don't want either of them at our wedding!" Harry snarled.

"I don't either, love." Draco said, putting his hand on Harry's shoulder to calm him. "But there really is no choice."

"I want to say screw traditions…" Harry murmured.

"Sometimes we all do." Lucius granted with a small smile. "But you know that we can't."

"I know." Harry agreed. "He can't do anything though, can he?"

"No." Lucius said with a smile. "Tradition requires that in honor of the happy couple everyone must be polite. Maybe we should save him a seat next to Molly. She knows how to use sweetness and politeness as a weapon quite well, and the Dark Lord will be nearly apoplectic at her incessant babble and carrying on over how beautiful everything is."

"You are a cruel man, Father." Draco said with a short laugh.

“Why, son, whatever did I do to give you any other impression?” Lucius asked in his most put-upon tone. All four of them chuckled. “Harry, there’s a book I want you to read regarding these types of traditions. It might give you some ideas.”

“Thank you, Lucius.” Harry said softly, accepting the book the man handed over.

“Now, we have more guests arriving.” Narcissa said with a smile. “Including your family, Harry. I must say I never thought to see muggles entering the Manor for a party!”

“Squibs, dear.” Lucius snorted. “Just think of them as squibs. It makes it easier to deal with.”

“Quite right, husband.” Narcissa said with a smile of her own.

The meeting was ended at that point. Harry retired to the rooms he shared with Draco to start reading the book immediately. Draco went downstairs to entertain their guests. It was quite chilly outside, but blazing fires kept the Manor warm, and soon Harry was completely engrossed in the book. It gave him several ideas by the time he finished it just before lunch. When a house elf appeared to tell him that lunch was ready, he closed the book after finishing the last page and made his way to lunch, mind whirling with half-formed plans. They had a few days yet to make some preparations, but it should all work out.

Hermione went into false labor again at lunch, and that caused Harry to start worrying again. She was well over a week overdue and he healers had begun discussing forced labor and magical delivery. Magical delivery was something akin to a cesarean section, but wands and magic were used instead of a muggle scalpel. However, Hermione and Ginny were adamant that the baby was to be born naturally.

Molly had taken the news of the burgeoning relationship with the two extremely well, and had been overheard plotting a wedding immediately after Ginny’s graduation next year. Narcissa had presented Harry and Draco with the mother contracts, but they wouldn’t be signed until after the wedding. The contracts specifically stated all children from Harry and Draco would be borne by Ginny, setting off another round of Draco’s rantings that he should have known he was cursed the moment he saw Harry sitting on the train in first year with a Weasley.

Molly had just glowered at him until he shut up and apologized to her.

Lunch was followed by an impromptu Quidditch match. Those that weren’t playing huddled together in the cold winter afternoon while Harry faced off against Draco in a hunt for the golden snitch. Draco won the game after two hours, cheating horrendously.

It should be illegal for one Seeker to tell the other how much he wants to have sex with him while they’re chasing the snitch. It just wasn’t fair!

Harry had just finished showering, alone, when a house elf announced that more guests had arrived and Mistress Malfoy was requesting his presence in the salon. Harry sighed, telling the house elf he’d be down in a few minutes. He was dressing in the robes Draco had left out for him, muttering about the blond’s cheating habits at Quidditch, when he felt his scar burn.

He muttered more oaths under his breath.

No, Voldemort wasn’t nearby. It was just burning with some emotion that the Dark Lord was feeling. Still, it wasn’t something meant to give him happy thoughts so close to his wedding. Finally dressed, he made his way downstairs and entered the salon to find a small group

assembled.

His first shock was how…fit Dudley looked. The whale was still big, but a large part of his fat had been replaced by muscle and he actually looked healthy. Deidre, who had given birth several months ago, looked well on her way to recovering her slim figure and was positively glowing with the baby she held in her arms. The child was asleep, but Harry's brief glimpse of her showed that she looked quite healthy and quite large. Aunt Petunia was smiling brightly and rose to greet him with a hug. She was sitting between a very uncomfortable looking Remus and even more uncomfortable Severus. Draco was present, having showered before Harry, as were the elder Malfoys.

"Harry, you're looking splendid!" Petunia said with genuine affection in her voice.

"As are you, Aunt." Harry replied with a slight smile. Deidre rose as Harry's Aunt returned to her seat and he moved towards a seat next to Draco.

"It's good to see you again, Harry." Deidre said softly, refusing to look him in the eyes. "I would like to introduce you to our daughter, Harriett Petunia Dursely."

"It's good to see you again as well, Deidre." Harry said, accepting the baby as she held her out to him. He took the soft, sleeping bundle in his arms and instantly fell in love with the child. "It's good to meet you as well, Cousin."

"Harry." Dudley said with a nod, and Harry returned the nod. He was friendlier with his cousin than he had been in the past, but there was still a lot of unease between them. He handed the still sleeping baby back to her mother, who sat next to her large husband and positively beamed.

"I am so pleased you could all attend the wedding." Narcissa said to Aunt Petunia.

"We were happy to be invited." Petunia replied. "Thank you for sending that car. I have no idea how long of a trip it would have been without such convenient transportation."

"Many hours." Severus said, looking at Harry's Aunt out of the corner of his eyes.

"Many thanks then." Petunia said with a nod. "You have no idea, Sev, of how several hours in a car can be tiresome to a newborn!"

Harry choked at the familiar way his Aunt addressed the scowling Potions Professor. Remus' smile made him even more uncomfortable.

"Excuse me for being so rude as to ask, but do you know each other?" Draco asked, his eyes alight with curiosity as he pounded Harry on the back.

"Yes." Petunia said with a smile at the coughing Harry. "Sev was great friends with Lily and he visited on Holidays before Lily started dating James. Then when she dated James he stopped coming around as much and I had to put up with *his* friends."

"Hey!" Remus said in feigned affront. "You said you liked me at least!"

"Only because you kept that dratted creature from trying to put dye in my shampoo!"

The reference to Harry's deceased Godfather didn't hit him like a hammer anymore. Actually, it caused a bittersweet smile as he remembered the troublesome prankster the man had been. Then he remembered comments from Remus on how he'd once thought of dating Petunia, and wondered if that might be why Severus looked so uncomfortable.

“I was trying to be nice.” Remus said. “Even though you were with that dratted muggle at the time.”

“Now, now.” Petunia said with a soft smile. “He’s getting his due. The divorce is final and the courts didn’t give him much. The last time I heard of him he had moved in with his sister and was looking for a job.”

“Congratulations.” Severus said with a smile. “I never knew what you saw in him.”

“Well, at least I got my Dudley from him.” Petunia said, causing Dudley to relax a little. He’d tensed at the mention of his father, and put his arm protectively around Deidre as if he was guarding her from the absent man. “Besides, what other choices did I have? A young man so enamored of my sister that he never looked at me or a man far too polite to tell Vernon to shove off?”

“I never thought you might be interested…” Severus said at the same moment that Remus said “If I’d known I’d have…”

Both men stopped suddenly as they realized that they were talking at the same time, and silence filled the room. The two looked at each other over Petunia’s slight frame while she looked at both of them in turn. Severus nodded at the look that Remus gave him, and turned to Narcissa.

“Madame, if you wouldn’t mind, I feel that we need to hold a private discussion. If we might be excused?” Severus said very formally.

“Yes, of course.” Narcissa said with a smile. “Please, feel free to use the music room. I do believe it has not yet been claimed by our other guests.”

Both Remus and Severus stood at her words, and both offered their hands to Harry’s Aunt, who took both of them. Harry just stared in shock as they left, and found his gaze meeting an equally surprised Dudley’s. His large cousin seemed to fumble at trying to find words, and Harry felt the same way.

“So, Dudley, have you made any plans on what you’ll be doing now that you’re out of school?” Draco broke the silence with a polite question that seemed to snap Dudley out of his shock.

“Deidre’s parents have offered me a position in one of their…regular companies.” Harry’s cousin replied, his voice a little quiet, as if he was unsure of himself.

“What kind of work will you be doing?” Harry asked, wondering what work his cousin could ever pull off.

“Working as a trainer.” Dudley said a little more firmly. “It’s a company that runs Health spas and the like. I’ll be helping people work out and so forth.”

“Well, from the way you’ve shaped up I can tell you’ll do a good job.” Harry said with genuine smile. It really was true, Dudley must have been working very hard to turn from a whale into the muscular man he was now.

“It’s a start.” Dudley said with a shrug. “He’ll be wanting me to move up in the company and learn to run it, but that’s years from now.”

“Everyone starts somewhere.” Draco said with a smile of his own.

“So, Deidre, how are the Gallenfry’s?” Lucius broke into the conversation, changing the topic.

“Oh, wonderful.” Deidre said. “They were so happy that we spent the holidays with them. They just adore Harriett, especially since the medi-witch said that she showed definite signs of being a witch. They were so happy about Dudley being related to Harry that they decided to put me back in the will and even offered Dudley that job.”

“As they should.” Lucius said with a nod. “Marriage relations to young Harry can do no family anything but good. It is good that they recognized that.”

“I still don’t understand all of this.” Dudley said in exasperation. “It seems like all you folks have a bloody obsession with bloodlines.”

“Don’t worry Dudley.” Harry said with a chuckle. “I’ve been a part of the wizarding world for almost seven years now, and I still don’t get all of it.”

Everyone laughed at that comment, and conversation turned to less controversial topics.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

It was the day before Harry and Draco’s wedding and Harry wondered how things could get any worse. Hermione’s continued false labors were becoming irritating, and he’d finally convinced her to agree to a magical delivery the day after the wedding. He’d been up until two in the morning with her and Ginny, and breakfast at eight left him feeling decidedly peckish.

Dudley had been introduced to Crabbe and Goyle, and to Harry’s irritation the three had struck up an immediate friendship. Somehow he knew that shouldn’t surprise him, but seeing the three walk around the Manor excitedly talking about boxing and working out made him decidedly uneasy.

Almost as uneasy as the sight of Aunt Petunia being waited on hand and foot by both Severus and Remus. The relationship between the two Professors now appeared to be a three-way relationship that included his Aunt and somehow they all seemed quite at ease with the whole thing. His one attempt to talk to Remus about it had ended when the werewolf gave him a very sharp look and told him to mind his own business and not worry about Remus’ pack.

Still, none of those things were what had Harry’s stomach tied in knots. Instead, it was the *Daily P*rophet and the three articles on the front page that had him so worried he could barely eat any of the food on his plate. Beside him, Draco was also fidgeting, just as worried about the articles. Forcing himself to take a bite of sausage, Harry looked over the least irritating article again.

*Wedding of the Centu*ry – An Insider*’s Look at the Wizarding World’s Greatest Marriage of the 20th Centu*ry.

In a Daily Prophet exclusive, we are p*r*oud to present ou*r* r*eade*rs with an insid*e*r’s look at what is being called the most impo*r*tant wedding in the Wizarding Wo*r*ld over the past 100 year*s. As ou*r *faithful* reade*r*s ar*e quite awa*re, tomo*r*row is the day when Har*old* James *Malfoy-Potter* will wed Draconis Potte*r*-Malfoy. Thei*r* wedding rep*r*esents the greatest combination of wizar*ding families in the 20th Centu*r*y.*

*M*r. Potte*r* is perhaps most famous as the Boy-Who-Lived. Following an attack on his par*ent’s home in 1981 the boy sur*vived the dreaded killing cu*r*se, leaving him with a scar on his fo*r*ehead and the Dark Lo*r*d without a body. Left with muggle relatives fo*r* safe-keeping, he grew up ignor*a*nt of his proud he*r*itage until his 11th Birthday. After *his 11th Bir*thday, he entered the Hogwa*r*ts *School* of Witchcraft and Wiza*r*dr*y, and* resumed his family’s str*uggle against the*

*Dar*k Lor*d.*

*The enti*re wizar*d*ing world is well awa*r*e of his defeat of the Dark Lo*r*d every yea*r* at Hogwarts, and of the whir*lwind* romance following an attempt on his life by Draco Malfoy nea*r*ly two years ago. The two young men had held a long-existing *r*ivalr*y since their* fir*st yea*r, but that all changed when Harr*y showed mer*cy on his rival. The two quickly became friends and eventually lover*s du*ring that summe*r* and were engaged the next Chr*istmas.*

The relationship between Harr*y Potte*r and D*r*aco Malfoy is repo*r*ted to be the cause of Lucius Malfoy's rejection of the Dar*k Lo*rd. His staunch support of the Boy-Who-Lived and help in the rescue of the boy fr*om the clutches of the Dar*k Lor*d has led sever*al other impo*r*tant Death Eaters to defect f*r*om their Lo*r*d.

While still attending their seventh year at Hogwa*r*ts, both young men are quickly becoming impor*tant leade*rs in the wiza*r*ding community. Both are named as Special Advisor*s to the Minister* of Magic and are key playe*r*s on the Emergency Wa*r* Committee. With M*r*. Potter's inhe*r*itance of the Black Estates, their wedding tomo*r*row will also *r*epr*esent the union of two of the r*ichest young men in the wizarding wo*r*ld. Indeed, when M*r*. Malfoy comes into his inheritance, they will be the r*ichest couple in our* wor*ld.*

*Both young men a*re *r*epor*ted to be spending the days pr*ior *to thei*r wedding *r*elaxing with friends and *r*elatives. One sou*r*ce stated that they have played several Quidditch games against each other, and a*r*e curr*ently tied in catching the golden snitch. Both boys played Seeker* for *thei*r school teams until the war *against the Dar*k Lor*d fo*rced them to *r*esign so that they could focus on other duties. Mr. Potte*r* was the youngest seeker in ove*r* a hundred yea*r*s at Hogwarts and in fai*r* games was undefeated.

*The wedding tomo*rrow is the most anticipated event of the century. Everyone who has invitations r*efuses to consider* not attending, and many hope to somehow receive last minute invitations. The wedding colo*r*s ar*e* repo*r*ted to be combinations of their Hogwa*r*ts House colors, *r*ed and green as well as silver *and gold. It will be a fully t*raditional ce*r*emony with a guest list to be envied by all (see the main sto*r*y for *the biggest sur*pr*ise guest!).*

Minister of Magic, O*r*rin Milieu, will be an honor*ed guest along with most of the Minist*r*y's Depa*rtment Heads. Prominent business leader*s and othe*r impo*r*tant personages will also be attending. Ove*r* thr*ee hund*red p*r*ivileged guests will be attending in all. For the post-wedding enter*tainment, five of the top wizar*ding bands will be perfo*r*ming.

*The wedding dinne*r is *r*epor*ted to have cost for*ty thousand galleons alone. Total costs for the wedding ext*r*avaganza have been rumo*r*ed to approach th*r*ee hundred thousand galleons. All we have to say about that is, when it comes to the wedding day of the Boy-Who-Lived, it was money well spent.

Harry didn't even want to think about how much money was being spent, even though a good portion of it was coming from his accounts. Still, every knut was worth it as long as Draco was happy. It was the first article that made him worry that the money might be wasted.

*The Da*rk Lord to Attend the Wedding of the Centu*ry?*

*In anothe*r Daily Prophet exclusive, we have lear*ned that the Ministr*y of Magic received a special owl last night from none othe*r* than He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named! The contents of this

owl are *r*epor*ted to be a statement of his intention to attend the wedding of Ha*rry Potte*r* and Draco Malfoy. While no comment was available f*r*om Malfoy Manor, site of the wedding, or *f*rom the Minist*r*y, we have learned that the Da*r*k Lor*d is not an invited guest but is making use of a little-known clause in Minist*ry law and Wiza*r*ding tradition to fo*r*ce his presence on the happy couple.

*This clause allows the Lor*d of any kin of the couple to attend unmolested. Although Lucius has *r*ejected the Dark Lo*r*d, his forme*r* allegiance to the man allows He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named to attend the wedding despite the objections of the participants. Sou*rces inside the Ministry state that they will abide by the law as long as He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named also abides* by the laws.

*Acco*rding to those laws and tr*aditions, no har*m is allowed by either par*t*y. Ther*e*fo*re, while his attendance will be a dampe*r *on the celebr*ations, it is widely believed that he will be unable to *r*uin the ceremonies by action. Furthe*r*, by attending, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named will be unable to attack the cer*emony with other* for*ces without facing immediate hexes from ove*r th*r*ee hundred attendees. A force of nea*r*ly one hundred Au*r*or*s and MLE agents will be on duty to ensu*re *that no tr*icker*y succeeds*.

*Neve*rtheless, one must wonder *why the Da*r*k Lor*d has chosen to attend this celebr*ated event and what the significance of his attendance might be. Does his attendance signify a lessening of the hostilities between him and the Potter family? What effect will this have on the wiza*r*ding world's wa*r* against the evil Dark Lo*r*d? Rest assu*r*ed, dear *r*eader*s, that the* Daily Prophet will seek to answer *these questions!*

The fact that Voldemort would be arriving tonight definitely had Harry troubled, but it was only part of why he was so upset. The other part was the middle article, the source of which was all too familiar. Custom demanded that Harry remain at the table until the meal was completed, and although Lucius had seen the article, he was too set in custom to end the meal early so Harry could go to Black Manor. Instead, Harry read the article one more time.

*Is Ha*rry Potte*r* Planning to be the New Da*r*k Lor*d?*

*Eve*ry day, this pape*r* r*eceives dozens of letter*s filled with crackpot ideas and false r*epo*rts about the famous Boy-Who-Lived. While we ignor*e* most of these, a letter was *r*ecently received that we couldn't ignor*e because of the per*son who wrote the lette*r*. His claims while wild and exagge*rated,* must be given some credence due to his close r*elationship with the Boy-Who-Lived ove*r *the past six year*s.

*In this lette*r to the Daily Prophet, the author claims that Ha*r*ry Potte*r*, with the aid of his soon-to-be-husband Draco Malfoy, is planning a coup against the Ministry of Magic and to claim power *fo*r himself. According to the letter*, his goals ar*e quite similar to that of the Dar*k Lo*rd as it is claimed that Harr*y Potte*r wishes to eliminate muggle influence on the wizarding wo*r*ld and limit or dest*r*oy muggle-born wiza*r*ds and witches. It also claims that Harry Potte*r* has begun to use Dark Magic, which was the r*eal* reason fo*r* the breaking of his wand by Hogwar*ts Headmistr*ess Minerva McGonagall following the attempted seduction by Oliver Wood.

*In fu*rthe*r*ance of these claims, the author has stated to have pr*oof that Har*ry Potte*r* has perfo*r*med the Blood Oath with unknown people, and fo*r* unstated purposes, in Black Manor. *He claims to have found an Oath Stone bea*ring the magical signatur*es of Ha*rry Potte*r* and Draco Malfoy as well as other *people in the libr*ar*y of Black Manor*, Mr. *Potte*r's cu*r*rent place of

residence. Inquiries with the Ministry of Magic were met with statements by various Aurors *officials that they had been in Black Manor many times and detected no dark* magic in the building.

Still, one must wonder why these claims are *being made now, and by whom they are being made. Ronald Weasley, the author* of this letter, was Mr. Potter's close friend and confidant since his first year at Hogwarts. Mr. Weasley is *rumored to have been a primary assistant to Mr*. Potter in his continual encounters *with the Dark* Lord. *Over the past two years*, the relationship between the two has deteriorated. Mr. Weasley was rumored to have been put under the control of Death Eater Cho Chang and helped to br*ing the wards* of Hogwarts down in last year's attack on the school. He was also recently implicated to help Oliver Wood in his attempted seduction and attack against Harry Potter.

While the youngest son of Ministry official Arthur Weasley, Ronald Weasley has recently proven himself to be made of stuff other than his upstanding parents. Following the revelation of his role assisting Oliver Wood in his nefarious goals, Mr. Weasley fled Hogwarts and has not been seen by many since. He did appear at the ceremony completing Mr. Potter's and Mr. Malfoy's engagement period and attempted to object to their union. His objections were refuted and he fled the scene before he could be questioned.

We must conclude, therefore, that his wild charges are simply that…wild, unfounded, and truth-less accusations. Instead of following in the proud paths of his father, and four older brothers, it appears that Mr. Ronald Weasley is following in the shamed path of convicted Death Eater spy Percival Weasley, who is finishing his one year sentence in Azkaban for spying on behalf of Death Eaters.

"Thank you all for attending another wonderful breakfast." Lucius Malfoy said, drawing Harry's attention. As the man stood and left the table, Harry was up in a flash, Draco at his side, and they both headed for the apparition point. When they appeared at Black Manor, they were just in time to see Kingsley Shacklebolt leading a team of Aurors inside, over the objections of a shrieking Kreacher.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N - My, my another cliffhanger.

Sorry (not really). J

Jacquie: Thanks for the many compliments. As for more Snape…well there was a little more of him here this time. Hope you enjoyed!

Tangledhair: Imagine my surprise when I'm reading a very good story the other day and !bam! there's an author's note recommending my story! Thank you for that compliment and for the compliment in your review. As for Ron, he will show up and we will learn what happens with him before the story ends. That's all I'm going to say about him for now. In this chapter, you can see an effort of his to get revenge!

Vividian: Thanks for your compliments. In defense of JKR, though, she's the millionaire and I'm not. She's also written her books for children, and I would not want anyone under the age of 13 reading this book, and those older than thirteen to think carefully before the do read any of my works. These are different genres we write, although they are all based on her creation. It's a

tribute to her skills that she can write a book for children that also captures the imagination of adults.

Craw/Brad: Harry does appear to be on the dark path. Mixing genres though, I would remind you to look at the Star Wars trilogy. The story of Anakin Skywalker is a "road down the dark path" that ends with redemption and death. (okay, this is really going to put an age to me here). I remember the first time I saw Star Wars (the original). I was five years old and it was on the big screen in its original release. Darth Vader gave me nightmares as a kid. Then when I was 12, Return of the Jedi came out and I actually had tears in my eyes when Anakin/Darth Vader died, redeemed by the love of his son. Now, I don't want to reveal too many plots here, but Harry is NOT a wizard version of Anakin Skywalker. However, walking down a dark path does not mean Harry will forever be doomed, although that is possible. Read on and find out where I'm taking the story. Both those that want to see an evil Harry and those that want a good Harry should find something to hold onto.

~D: yes, they legalized gay marriages in Canada in the year 2003. The story is set in 1998 though. Great Britain, and the EU also have more recognition of gay couples than most other countries from 1999 onwards, and several European nations have legalized gay marriages as early as 1999.

Magician Molecule: Children will always play a big role in the lives of their parents. However, in the time frame of this story, they are just part of the world their parents live in.

Ash Knight: The spirits of Harry's parents had a purpose to play, and that purpose is now complete. They won't be seen again. Harry got a chance to learn more about them, and to learn of their approval for his match. That's all he needed, and more than most people would ever get. He's very happy for that.

Malfoysnogger: Well, you got your wish and found out how the Malfoys reacted. Hope it was enjoyable!

Kimra Dattei: Who needs a Slytherin to corrupt a Gryffindor? Listening to Voldemort isn't the problem…it's what he does after listening to Voldemort that could be the problem.

DragonSoul: Thanks for the compliments! Harry may act more and more Slytherin at times, but he is still at heart a Gryffindor. He lived in the Gryffindor House for five years and still holds many of their beliefs to his heart, although he is changing somewhat. Now, the Harry Potter of this story, and the Harry Potter of my other story are two different creatures in these respects and those differences will be more noticeable as the stories progress. Losing Ron will hurt Harry, in ways I hope too many readers won't expect (at least until you get to Chapter 13).

Dragonisdagger: Thanks! It's hard to be original when there's so much fanfiction out there. I was writing a chapter for my SlytherinHarry story and finished a scene before feeling the need to *r*ead instead of w*r*ite. I read a story that had a VERY similar scene to the one I had just finished writing and had to think about changing it immediately. Instead, I realized that while they were similar, they were also very, very different (shower scene – get your minds out of the gutters). So, being told my story is different than others is definitely a BIG compliment. Thanks again!

Dragenphly: Something wrong with Hermione's child? It's a stubborn git is probably the worst thing about the unborn baby. It's determined not to just be born but to make an entrance. Imagine 11 years from now as the baby is getting ready to enter into Hogwarts, head held proud and

telling some other first years that "I'm a Longbottom. My godparents are Malfoy and Potter. My father died rescuing Potter from Voldemort. My mother is *the* Hermione Granger. My family must be the most famous family in history. It would be wise to listen to me." Imagine Hermione's grief at having a miniature Draco running around with Neville's face and her hair (gelled into some form of control).

High?D: Here's more for ya!

LeTimbo: Hmmm….should have thought that one out more…hope you enjoyed this…although there was another cliffhanger!

Benjis VIP: It won't fully turn out until around Chapter 16-18, but it gets more clear as time goes by.

Gizachick: There's a lot for Voldemort to say, but will Harry want to hear? As for the wedding…it's getting closer. Just another chapter…or two.

Calimora: Regarding the kids…hmmm…Blond hair it's a Malfoy. Dark hair it's a Potter. Red hair: Curse the MOTHER!

Flack: Hmmm…I really didn't like Ron after Goblet of Fire. I thought Harry should have cursed him after that book. He'll still be around a bit, never fear!

Shadow Bandit: I was surprised when I check my stats page the other day. 43 people have me on their favorites list, 93 on author alert, and 153 people to date have reviewed this story (Sword of Gryffindor was at 160, my Slytherin rewrite has 68 reviews). That's an impressive total for me and I was very surprised. On average, between 2 and 10% of readers review stories so I was enchanted at having so many people write reviews. My thanks to you and all those who have reviewed (which is why I take so much time -1 hour 14 minutes- to add these review responses. They are all appreciated very much!).

Fanfiction is being sluggish so I hope this all loads correctly!

Chapter 11 –

"Kreacher, settle down. I'm sure the house is in order for visitors." Harry ordered the nearly frantic house elf. The ancient thing stopped its harangue of the Auror at Harry's command and slinked off. Harry turned his attention to the Auror, who's hair was more gray than it had been when they first met.

"Auror Shacklebolt." Harry recognized him in a firm voice. "To what do we owe the pleasure of your company?"

"Ministry business, Mr. Potter.' Shacklebolt said formally. The other four Aurors were standing there, shuffling a little. "I'm sure you've seen this morning's *Daily Prophet?*"

"Yes, we have." Harry said firmly. "Quite upsetting to be stabbed in the back so publicly."

"Yes, well, the Minister has requested that we search the library of Black Manor so that we can publicly denounce the accusations as false." The Auror said a little more softly.

"And you didn't see fit to inform us when you knew we were at Malfoy Manor?" Draco drawled imperiously.

"It was felt best not to bother you." Shacklebolt replied, looking down slightly. That told Harry

he half-believed the accusations.

“Well, let us proceed to the library.” Harry said with a small smile. “The sooner this is done with the sooner we can get back to Malfoy Manor.”

The Auror nodded, and Harry led the way to the library. They hadn’t been here ever since rescuing Morag. That thought sent a jolt of fear through Harry. He remembered that night clearly, and one important fact was foremost in his mind: He hadn’t replaced the cover of the Oath Stone! He almost panicked right then, but they were already mere feet from the door, and Harry couldn’t think of anything to delay them or get away so that he could replace the damn thing! Draco was rambling on about nuisances before their wedding and damn lying scum as he opened the door for the Aurors. Harry breathed a sigh of relief when the library was revealed to look exactly as it should.

Warm furniture was set around the room, and in the middle was a rich mahogany cabinet with a bust of Sirius Black resting on top. Harry held in the sigh of relief. Kreacher must have fixed everything after they had left that night. But that left the question of how Ron knew about the whole thing.

“What’s in the cabinet?” Shacklebolt’s voice brought him out of his thoughts.

“It’s my…monument to Sirius.” Harry said sadly. “There’s some mementos from the man I keep there.”

“I see.” Shacklebolt said softly. “How do you open it?”

“It requires a drop of my blood to open.” Harry said softly. “I don’t open it much.”

“That explains the…feel of the magic on it.” Shacklebolt said, looking back at his team of Aurors who just shook their heads. “We apologize for the intrusion, Mr. Potter. Thank you for your cooperation.”

With that, the Aurors all turned and left with Draco showing them out. Kreacher appeared as soon as they were gone, wringing his hands nervously. He looked up at Harry like he expected to be punished.

“Did Kreacher do right in fixing the library back?” Kreacher asked.

“Kreacher did perfect.” Harry acknowledged with a smile.

“Oh, Kreacher is so happy!” The elf cried out, dancing a bit. “Kreacher wasn’t sure when Masters left the other night. Then Mr. Weasley appeared and said Masters wanted him to stay. He went to the library and left the house laughing.”

“When was this?” Harry asked sharply.

“Two days ago.”

“I see.” Harry said slowly. “Kreacher, from now on, Mr. Ronald Weasley is not welcome in my home. If we ever leave this room uncovered again, you are to fix it up immediately. Is that understood?”

“Yes, Master!” Kreacher quailed. “Oh, Kreacher shouldn’t have let nasty Weasley inside. Kreacher must punish himself!”

“Just make sure you do no lasting harm.” Harry said. “You must look presentable for guests at all

times."

"Yes, Master!" The elf said before disappearing. Draco came back and fumed about their carelessness after Harry had shared the news of how Ron had discovered the Oath Stone. There wasn't much either could do about it though, so they left to return to Malfoy Manor. A quick conversation with Lucius earned them a lecture about being careful in the future and then they went outside for another match of Quidditch. The game seemed to calm them both down.

All that calmness was gone, though, when dinner was finished. Harry and Draco were in one of the Malfoy Manor sitting rooms. A warm fire was roaring in the fireplace, expensive furniture filled the room, and five seats sat waiting to be used. Harry had no desire to sit down at the moment, and even less desire to be in the room. He was pacing back and forth, while Draco stood near the closed door, watching him anxiously.

"Harry, you can do this." Draco said after Harry had let out a growl.

"I know I can do this!" Harry nearly shouted, giving voice to what he was feeling at last. "That's never been in doubt! The thing I'm thinking is *do I want to do this?*"

"I know it's not going to be easy." Draco said comfortingly, moving to where Harry stood, placing his hands on Harry's shoulders and facing him directly. "But by Tradition we can't refuse to be hospitable."

"Fuck tradition." Harry snarled. When Draco had said that word, he'd said it in a way that made the capital letter clear.

"So, fuck marrying me as well?" Draco said in a voice that told Harry he was hurt.

"I…I didn't mean it like that." Harry said, taken aback.

"You didn't mean it like that, but that's what you said." Draco replied, still facing Harry directly. Harry was finding himself lost in those silver-gray eyes. "The Malfoy family stands for Tradition. It is part of who we are, all of us. My father has renounced following Voldemort because of Tradition, he gives us his support now because of Tradition. When you say 'fuck tradition' you are saying you don't want us, any of us."

"I want you, Draco." Harry whispered, letting his pain show in his voice.

"Then do this, please, for me." Draco whispered back.

"Okay." Harry sighed, leaning in for a kiss, but there was a sound at the door, and Draco moved quickly so that he was standing on Harry's right side as the door opened. Lucius had opened it himself, but it was the figure dressed in dark robes, and burning eyes that was the center of Harry's attention at the moment. Harry's entire body was screaming to pull out the wand he wore and blast the *thing* that stood before him. Instead, he pushed all that down for Draco, smiled and took four steps forward, extending his hand.

"Glad you could make it to the wedding, Tom." Harry said, suppressing a shudder as his oldest enemy took his hand in a polite grip, those red eyes scanning him carefully. Harry knew that his scar was shrieking in pain, but his Occlumensy shields, and the charms he'd placed before hand, allowed him not to feel it. A little corner of his mind noted that Voldemort's hands felt like dried, crusty parchment that was about to fall to dust.

"I wouldn't have missed it for the world, Harry." Voldemort's voice grated on Harry's every

fiber, but he refused to shiver.

“Why don’t we all have a seat.” Harry said, motioning towards the five chairs and the tea service in the middle. Voldemort, as the guest, was the first to sit. Lucius took the chair to his right, and Narcissa sat on the other side of Lucius. In a last second change, Harry took the seat on the other side of Voldemort so that Draco would sit next to his mother. His message was quite clear, any attempt, ever, on Draco, would have to go through Harry.

“How was your journey?” Lucius asked their visitor as Narcissa began pouring tea, fixing it to each person’s preferences.

“Tiring.” Voldemort hissed, in what was almost a conversational tone. As Narcissa handed Voldemort his tea, followed by serving Lucius, Harry, Draco and then herself, a sense of surrealism fell on Harry.

He was drinking tea with Voldemort, and having a civil conversation.

“Really?” Narcissa asked in a honey-sweet voice.

“Yes, most unfortunately.” Voldemort answered, a grim smile spreading across his face. “An old injury, you understand. Makes traveling long distances a trifle…tiresome.”

Harry smiled at the man widely.

“So, young Harry, have you given any thoughts to your future after Hogwarts?” Voldemort asked, his voice polite in the extreme.

“Oh, let’s see.” Harry said, raising his tea cup to his lips. Ah, it was Earl Grey, his favorite. “First there’s the matter of settling an old family debt, then there’s dealing with the Ministry and making sure it has its head on straight, then I think we’ll go on a bit of a vacation for a few years.”

“Indeed.” Voldemort hissed, staring hard at Harry. “You know, when I left Hogwarts I spent quite some time studying the Dark Arts and gaining power. It was a hard path without a good, strong mentor. You have many opportunities I did not.”

“I would have to have a interest in the Dark Arts for that to appeal to me.” Harry said, frowning at the very idea.

“Surely with everything you’ve been doing recently the Dark Arts haven’t become more appealing? After all, many would consider the Blood Oath a Dark Art.” Voldemort asked in that awful voice.

“Blood magic may or may not be Dark, depending on its use.” Harry said calmly, although inside he was seething. “For the use that I put it to, it was not Dark. I have no interest in your secrets, Tom.”

“Really?” Voldemort murmured, taking a sip of his tea before continuing. “Whatever will you do, though, when the Ministry searches your residence after this morning’s article?”

“They already have.” Harry said with a short chuckle. “They found nothing suspicious.”

“Lucky for you, Harry.” Voldemort hissed, and Harry detected a note of anger in the voice. The implications of those words, that maybe Ron was somehow connected to the man, made Harry a little worried.

“So, Tom,” Draco said, breaking the momentary silence following Voldemort’s last words. “How is winter in Russia?”

“Cold.” Voldemort hissed, nodding his head to Harry’s lover. “Still, North Africa is a much nicer climate this time of year.”

“Yes, it is.” Lucius broke in with a drawl of his own. “We’ve enjoyed many a winter holiday in Egypt.”

At that point the conversation turned to preferred vacation spots and memories of past vacations. It was almost pleasant, except for the fact that the man sitting not two feet from Harry was the man who had killed his parents, and who had tried to kill him many times over the past years. The sense of surrealism was still in full force and Harry found himself wondering if his life would ever be more bizarre than this moment. It was Voldemort’s voice that jarred him out of his moment of introspection.

“So, young Harry, have you considered my offer any more?” Voldemort asked him, and Harry almost jumped in surprise at the switch to a more serious topic.

“I have given it…some thought.” Harry admitted.

“But you have a difficult time trusting me, or even dealing with the thought of coming to an arrangement with the man who killed your parents, who you blame for the death of your godfather, and countless other tragic events.”

“You forgot to mention the multiple attempts to kill me directly.” Harry spat out, finally giving voice to the anger he was feeling. How dare the man even mention his parents or Sirius!

“Yes, well, such is war.” Voldemort said nonchalantly. “You never gave me a glimmer of hope that you would be anything other than my enemy. Your parents defied me several times, and I knew that being raised by them you would be nothing but an opponent. Dumbledore hid you with those muggles and then trotted you out at age eleven, the very embodiment of a Savior, and my enemy. What else was I to do? Besides, tell me honestly that if you went back in time, and stood over my crib when I was a child the same age as when we first met, would you kill me at that moment, knowing what you know now?”

“Yes, I would.” Harry admitted sourly.

“There, can you say that I did not have valid reasons for doing what I did?”

“You had reasons valid to you.” Harry said sharply. “That does not make what you did right, or anything other than murder!”

“Would killing me, as an infant in by cradle be anything other than murder?” Voldemort asked, and Harry knew the answer as clearly as he did.

“It would be murder.” Harry admitted with a soft sigh. “Justified murder, but still murder.”

“Justified to you, maybe.” Voldemort said, throwing Harry’s own words out. “But justified for my mother? For me?”

“For your father?” Harry spat back at the man, knowing it would hurt.

“Touchy.” Voldemort said with a chuckle, shaking an admonishing finger at Harry.

“Sorry.” Harry said sharply. “Sitting two feet from the murderer of my parents, and the man

who's tried to kill me all my life, has me a little on edge."

"Apology accepted." Voldemort said, his voice still grating on Harry. "Sitting a few feet from you is also making me a little on edge."

"Nice to know I'm not the only one, then." Harry said softly.

"I never expected to find you such an…adept conversationalist." Voldemort said. "I understand that my offer, and your current situation, must have you slightly off-balance. Therefore I will make you a much less extensive offer. I offer a truce for six months, Harry Potter. For six months none of mine shall operate in Britain. None shall operate against you in any way. You will be left alone. In return, you shall not actively assist the Ministry in their hunt for me. You shall not use your skills to spy on me. Any of my marked ones you find in this land who have not already betrayed me in loyalty to you, you may do with as you please. What do you say, Harry? I have enough trained followers now to begin killing wherever we wish in Britain, and I was thinking of focusing on Muggles. I have heard of the problems you are facing from the muggle government. I do not think they will be too happy with such a development, and all of your precious training of witches and wizards will be worthless if none of them are where we strike."

"One condition." Harry replied after a few moments. Draco was resting his hand on Harry's arm in a gesture of support, but also one that allowed him to tap out his opinion in their secret code. He found that he agreed with Draco's opinion, but he had a price of his own.

"What is this…condition?" Voldemort asked.

"You brought Wormtail with you?" Harry asked calmly. Voldemort started laughing loudly.

"Yes, I did." Voldemort said when he got his laughter under control. "The Ministry has already cleared your godfather's name, and given you his estates, why do you wish me to turn him over to them?"

"Who said I was planning to turn him over to them?" Harry asked. Draco's hand on his arm turned into an almost painful grip at Harry's words. Harry just gave his blond lover a look, and he smiled as Draco calmed down.

"I will have to erase most of his recent memories for my own safety." Voldemort said after a few moments. "But I don't see why not. When I leave, he will remain. I will give him a sleeping potion before I leave, ensuring he has no chance of escape."

"Then you have my agreement on a truce." Harry said firmly. "You understand that I cannot speak for the Ministry or other government bodies, but only for me and my followers?"

"As I only speak for myself and my followers." Voldemort said, a smile appearing on the thing he called a face. Harry lifted his arm, and they shook on the deal.

"I will give you my final answer on June 1st." Harry told the man. "It will be in the classified section of the *Daily Prophet*. A message from 'Harry to Tom' and will have a one word answer."

"I look forward to seeing your answer." Voldemort said with a nod of his head, standing as he finished speaking. He turned to Lucius and Narcissa who had been watching everything very carefully. "Narcissa, wonderful tea as always. Lucius, your hospitality is as gracious as always. If you wouldn't mind, please show me to the rooms you have prepared for me."

"This way, if you please." Lucius said with a nod of his head as he rose. Narcissa also rose, as

did Harry and Draco. Narcissa gave a slight, very slight, curtsey as Lucius led Harry's enemy out. When they were gone, all three of the room's remaining occupants let out huge sighs.

"So, how do you think he'll react when he finds that his rooms are in the dungeons?" Draco asked, his voice full of amusement.

"He will get your father's message loud and clear." Narcissa told her son a little reprovingly. "He will also have nothing to complain about. The rooms were transfigured to be comfortable, even if they are in the dungeons. Quite well done, Harry."

"Thank you." Harry told her politely, lost in thought as he stared at the door where Voldemort and Lucius had exited. His mind was making plans for Peter Pettigrew, plans that were becoming very, very appealing.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

"Right now Harry." Arthur Weasley's voice reflected the nervousness that Harry was feeling. Harry didn't react immediately to the man's comments, instead staring out of the window for another moment, delaying what was to come in a very short period of time. The light snow fall outside didn't obscure the wedding festivities taking place on the back side of Malfoy Manor.

Two magical domes, one of which included the back doors of the Manor, protected those under them from the cold, wet snow. He knew that inside those domes it was warm and dry, with those inside them enjoying themselves since early this morning. One dome was for the entertainment area, where the reception after the wedding would take place. Currently it was being used to entertain the children of their guests with magical rides, face painting, and a whole slew of jugglers and several witch entertainers, whom were currently throwing balls of fire at each other.

The other dome covered the actual area where the wedding would be held. Already, two hours before the wedding itself, two hundred people were milling around, greeting each other, or just staring at those they didn't like. The whole assembly was a riot of colors as everyone dressed in the best robes they could find. He could even see several photographers moving around, the bright purple flashes of their cameras going off constantly. With a groan, Harry turned away from the window and faced Mr. Weasley, who was dressed in a very nice set of dark gold dress robes that clashed horribly with his red hair.

"Right then." The man said with a wide grin as Harry turned to face him. "Let's get you down to the dressing room."

"Maybe it's not too late." Harry muttered.

"Now Harry!" Mr. Weasley cried out in mock shock. "I am not going to let your little bout of cold knees affect the happiest day of your life!"

"Oh, I get to kill Voldemort after all? And it's cold feet, not knees." Harry asked, his eyes suddenly gleaming.

"Now, Harry." Mr. Weasley said firmly. "I don't like it any more than you do, but you're the one who decided to marry a Malfoy, not me. Oh, I know it's feet. Just trying to cheer you up, old boy."

"Thanks, Arthur." Harry said glumly. "Let's get this over with."

Together they exited the room Harry had run to after he'd gotten into an argument with Draco.

They were both extremely tense and had been arguing over everything since they woke up, so Mr. and Mrs. Weasley had decided to separate them. Lucius, Narcissa, Severus, and Tonks as the 'parents' had been stuck in the entry way all day welcoming guests and making sure everything was in place and ready for the day's events. The two oldest Weasleys had arrived with the rest of their family (except Ron and Percy of course) early in the morning and immediately taken charge of the two young men.

Harry and Arthur finally arrived on the ground floor, where the rest of his attending party waited for him. The Malfoy family had insisted on the fully traditional wedding, and even here in private, with none of them present, their wishes were being followed to the full letter of bloody Tradition. As bloody Tradition required, there were seven people in his attending party. They'd be responsible for the 'dressing' for the actual ceremony, and would accompany him to the dais where the wedding would actually be performed.

"Honestly, Mr. Weasley." Seamus Finnegan said as they entered the room. "Which one of your ancestors do you have to thank for that color of formal robes?"

"Old Mandamus Weasley was quite color blind, thank you very much." Mr. Weasley said with a sniff. "Still, he was a nice old bugger and no one in the family has the gumption to change the official Weasley colors. He stuck around you know, and no one wants his ghost to hear about such a change. He might decide to stop haunting the Mursley family and come haunt us."

Everyone laughed at that, and Harry felt a little better. Then Colin had to break the mood by bemoaning the absence of his camera. He'd made a fortune (and eventually paid Draco a portion of his royalties) from his pictures of Harry's battle with Voldemort, and was clearly upset that he was losing more money now. Since he was a part of the wedding party, he wasn't allowed to take pictures.

Harry almost decided to tell the guy that was the reason why Harry had picked him as part of the group.

Instead, Harry just sighed as Fred and George came up to him, and began taking off the robe he was wearing. This was part of the tradition. He wasn't allowed to dress or undress himself, and even had to take bath attended by the group. After much discussion, he'd chosen his group completely from Gryffindor, while Draco had chosen his completely from Slytherin. Hermione and Ginny finally entered from a side room where the bath was located and told them that it was ready. Hermione was waddling badly and Harry hoped that her baby would come out soon, but not before the ceremony was finished.

Oh wait, if she went into labor then maybe they'd have to delay the wedding.

Now totally nude, and blushing at the appraising looks given to him by Hermione and Ginny, he followed the twins into the bathroom and got into the rose and lily scented water. There were actual flower petals floating in it! He blushed even more as they started washing him, growling at Draco. This was all Draco's fault. Harry had never had anyone do this to him before and it was embarrassing.

"Geez, Ginny," Fred was saying lightly. "You should have tried harder for Harry!"

"Yeah, look at that package!" George added, as everyone laughed at Harry's blush.

"Oh please." Seamus said as he scrubbed Harry's back. "I'm the one who should have tried

harder."

"Seamus…" Harry growled warningly as the young man's hand seemed to drop a little too far down Harry's back.

"Oh, please." Seamus said again. "Like I want Draco turning me into a gnat and then squashing me for touching his Harry boy."

"Now, now, Harry." Arthur chided from the doorway, a look of amusement on his face. "Be nice to your friends. You could have just had a nice quiet wedding."

"Not with Draco." Harry muttered, and everyone laughed.

"Exactly, so is he worth all this?" Hermione asked as the laughter died down.

"Of course." Harry sighed, getting a round of 'awwww" from the seven people around him. He just blushed even more.

"I saw a twitch down there!" Seamus said excitedly. "Someone say something about Draco!"

"Shut up you Irish voyeur." Harry grumbled, again getting them to laugh. The more people laughed, the easier it became for Harry to accept the…ministrations of his friends. Still, an element of sadness came to him whenever he thought about his one friend that wasn't here. He found he missed Ron, even though he was still angry about the betrayal of his former best friend, and he could see the same thoughts echoed in everyone's faces except Seamus and Colin. Everyone tiptoed around even the merest hint of the youngest Weasley boy.

Tradition required a bath at least one hour long, and when that hour was up, Harry was out of that bath like a flash. Hermione's appraising look as he stood there being dried with a towel by Seamus and Colin made him blush again, but he matched her stare until she looked away.

They dressed him slowly after moving into the other room. He was thankful for the warm fire that kept the room at a comfortable temperature. Mr. Weasley cast a spell on each piece of clothing, as Tradition required, and the group was unusually solemn as they proceeded. It had never taken him so long to get dressed before, and he grew increasingly uncomfortable by the time they put the black, flat, fur cap on his head. His robes were rich velvet, dyed in crimson, with gold embroidery. The Potter family crest was outlined with gold on his chest, complete with lion stalking around the golden chalice.

When the dressing procedure was finally done, Mr. Weasley cast the last spell and they prepared to move out. Hermione and Ginny were directly in front of him, the twins on either side, while Colin and Seamus stood side by side behind him. Mr. Weasley led the way out of the room, setting a slow, formal, pace. Everyone's faces were quite serious as they moved towards the doorways that would lead out to the ceremony area.

Their timing was perfect, Harry saw when they finally approached the entrance. Severus and Tonks were standing off to the left, waiting for them to line up in front of them. Severus gave a small nod of approval as they approached. Also perfectly timed, the group led by Mrs. Weasley, with a calm-looking Draco surrounded by his Slytherin friends, approached the waiting Lucius and Narcissa.

Behind Mrs. Weasley (who was wearing a robe in the brown and red of her maiden house) were Blaise Zabini and Pansy Parkinson. Crabbe and Goyle stood on either side of Draco while

Theodore Nott and Millicent Bulstrode brought up the rear. As the two groups settled in front of the four ‘parents’, everyone let out a sigh of relief. Harry managed to meet Draco’s eyes, and much of his discomfort fled at that point. Draco looked positively magnificent in the green and black Malfoy robes.

The four ‘parents’ turned and led the way out, music flaring from the live band at the back of the room. It wasn’t the traditional muggle wedding waltz, but instead a wizard song that dated back into unknown millennia. It’s strange beat set the slow pace as the wedding parties marched down the center aisle, past seats filled with scores of guests on either side. On the far side of the wide benches for the guests, tall poles held gently billowing banners. On the left, Harry’s side, they were red and gold, while on the right, Draco’s side, they were green and silver. Flowers adorned the similarly colored benches, and the swish of robes could be heard clearly as people sat after they had passed them.

It seemed like an hour before they reached the first row of benches and stopped before the dais. Harry could feel his scar burning through the charms and his Occlumensy shields, since Voldemort was sitting in the first row on Draco’s side. The Minister of Magic, sitting in the first row on Harry’s side, was staring daggers at the archenemy of the wizarding world, but managed to turn his attention to the dais as Minerva McGonagall appeared with a *pop*. She was dressed in robes made of pure white satin and looked quite impressive with her gray hair hanging loosely to her shoulders instead of in the typical bun.

“Step forward, parents of the intended.” She said in ringing, clear tones. Severus, Tonks, Lucius and Narcissa all stepped forward two paces and stopped. “Who speaks for Draconis Malfoy?”

“We do.” Draco’s parents said in unison.

“I, Lucius Malfoy, Head of the Malfoy Family, do speak for my son.” Lucius followed up clearly.

”I, Narcissa Malfoy, of the Black Family, do speak for my son as well.” Narcissa said in turn.

“Who speaks for Harold Potter?” McGonagall said in the same ringing tones.

“We do.” Severus and Tonks said in unison.

“I, Severus Snape, scion of the Snape line, do stand in the place of the deceased James Potter and do speak for his son, Harold Potter.” Severus Snape said in elegant tones.

“I, Nymphadora Tonks, of the Black Family, do stand in the place of Lily Evans and do speak for her son, Harold Potter.” Tonks said, and Harry mentally congratulated her for showing no dislike of her first name.

“The betrothed have completed the *Engagement Trial* successfully.” McGonagall said after Tonks had finished speaking. “Do you, their parents and those who stand for their parents have any final objections to this union?”

“We have no objections.” The four said in complete unison.

“Then take your seats, your time as guardians for the young couple is complete. Today they join together and begin their own family.” McGonagall said firmly. Lucius and Narcissa moved to the two empty seats on Voldemort’s left side, with Lucius actually sitting next to the man he had once called master. Severus and Tonks took their seats next to the Minister of Magic. Mr. and

Mrs. Weasley moved up the five steps of the dais until they stood before the Headmistress of Hogwarts. Mr. Weasley bowed while Mrs. Weasley curtseyed, their wands in their hand.

“In accordance with tradition,” They both said in unison.

“Then let the couple approach.” McGonagall said. Those standing in front of Harry and Draco, and to their sides, moved back so that they formed a wall behind the two. Moving in carefully measured steps they ascended the dais until they stood on the step below where McGonagall waited. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley turned and took two steps backwards so that Harry and Draco were now standing directly in front of Minerva McGonagall. Harry mentally steeled himself for what was about to happen.

“Let nothing stand between those who are about to be wed.” McGonagall said, giving Harry a sympathetic look as she took out her wand and cast the spell required. All the clothing the couple had been dressed in disappeared immediately, as did the charms keeping Harry from feeling the pain in his scar. As tradition required, Harry also lowered his Occlumensy based shielding, and Draco did the same. From within her robes, McGonagall removed a slim vial full of a bluish liquid. Harry’s vision blurred at that moment, and he nearly collapsed from the pain in his scar. He felt Fred reach forward, helping him keep his balance.

“Harold James Potter, son of wizard James Potter, of the honored Potter family, and son of witch Lily Evans, has petitioned for the hand of Draconis Malfoy in marriage.” McGonagall said, her voice ringing with pride as she spoke. “In answer, Draconis Malfoy, son of wizard Lucius Malfoy, of the honored Malfoy family, and son of witch Narcissa Malfoy, daughter of the honored Black family, has likewise petitioned for the hand of Harold Potter in marriage. Both have accepted, both have passed a trial of engagement, and both have fulfilled the traditions of their heritage to stand before those assembled here today.

“Unlike the marriages of those not born to magic, the marriage of wizards and witches is not based on empty vows, or mere words, but the true desire of those joining in marriage to be with one another. Even in those marriages that are arranged, instead of chosen by the couple, those born to magic know themselves, and their betrothed in ways that no muggle can comprehend. Draconis, Harold, you have lived with each other through the Engagement Trial, you have known each other through your own eyes, your own thoughts, your own feelings. Are you prepared to learn of each other through the eyes, the thoughts, the feelings, and the memories of each other?”

“We are.” Both Harry and Draco said in unison. McGonagall gave Harry a worried look at the pain in his voice, then a harsh look to where Voldemort was sitting in the audience. There was nothing that could be done about that though. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley both conjured goblets half full of water at that point, and she filled both evenly with the bluish potion she was holding. The older couple approached and held the goblets to both young men’s lips for them to drink.

“Drink the Potion of Awareness, then.” McGonagall said as the goblets reached their lips. “Look into each other’s eyes, and learn of the person you will marry.”

Harry drank down the potion completely, then turned to face Draco. The moment he met those silver eyes, all pain left him and he felt slightly disoriented. Then he was looking at a set of emerald eyes, familiar to him only in a mirror. He watched in momentary horror as he saw himself start to collapse, only Mr. Weasley’s and Fred’s quick support keeping him from falling

completely.

“The pain, oh Harry, how could you stand the pain!” He heard his own voice say, and a gasp rising from the audience. Then a wave of memories took him, and he lost all connection to the present. Draco’s childhood flashed before him, and he felt what Draco had felt as child. A father hard to please, bitter about something he never spoke of, a loving mother, lonely days broken by the occasional visitor his own age. The joys of those precious moments of companionship, giving rise to a high value on those few he could call friends. The stern father occasionally showing pride in his accomplishments, the warmth of those wonderful moments when the man was happy, and the pain, sometimes physical, when he wasn’t pleased all ran through Harry in a moment that seemed to stretch forever.

Then there was the mild curiosity of meeting a strange boy as he prepared to attend Hogwarts for the first time. The flash of disappointment and hurt when that boy rejected his offer of friendship, the fierce hatred fueled by that rejection, and the continuous wounding of pride that followed. He felt the pain of losing a father to prison, and the desire for revenge that warred with the love he was denying. Then he felt the first stirrings of happiness as the object of that hatred and that love became a friend, and he felt the relief as the hatred faded until only love remained. He felt the strength of desire to stand by the side of the man he loved, the pain he shared, the desire of fame and achievement, together, and the utter dedication to one Harry Potter.

Harry opened the eyes he had unknowingly closed, and found that he looked into familiar, yet strange emerald eyes once more. Those eyes were clouded with pain, but with a love that he returned whole-heartedly. There was another moment of disorientation, and the familiar pain of his scar returned. Now he was looking back at a set of silver eyes, clouded with the familiar pain Harry was feeling. Taking a deep breath, Harry shook the hands holding him up, and stood firmly. Together, he and Draco moved so they once more faced McGonagall.

“I have seen the life, the thoughts, and the dreams of Draconis Malfoy.” Harry said in accordance with the tradition they were following, and with a deeper understanding of its importance to the man he loved. Tradition allowed the next words to be his own. “I have found him to not only be a man I can love, a man I wish to spend the rest of my life with, but also the only person, man or woman, on this earth I could ever be with. My heart, my life, is his and his alone.”

“I have seen the life, the thoughts, and the dreams of Harold Potter.” Draco said in a voice filled with pride. “I have never dreamed of such pain, such loss, and such love as I have felt within him today. I only hope that I will prove worthy, over the passage of time, to be his husband.”

“You have seen each other in a way few ever share.” McGonagall said proudly. Her words were true. The potion they had taken was very rare, and cost nearly a 100,000 galleons alone. Not many families could afford such an expense. “You have, after sharing each other’s lives, chosen to commit yourselves to each other. As in the greatest traditions of our people, I now pronounce you married, bound together for the rest of your lives on this earth.”

The cheers that erupted at that point were thunderous. Harry and Draco found themselves clothed once more as McGonagall waved her wand and those that had stood behind them on the dais stepped aside. Hermione seemed to falter a bit, but Ginny helped her move aside so that the audience could see them. Everyone but Voldemort was on their feet, cheering, and Harry finally remembered to settle his Occlumensy protections around him again. His vision sharpened and he

noticed an odd puddle of liquid on the step below him. He looked over to see Hermione clutching her stomach while trying to smile at him and he gasped.

“Harry, Draco, my deepest congratulations.” Hermione managed to gasp. “But I think I need to head inside now.”

Mr. and Mrs. Weasley immediately surrounded the young woman, while Fred and George somehow managed to lift her between them and cart her off into the Manor. Neville’s grandmother was after them in a flash, her vulture hat looking like it would take off, followed by a beaming Madam Pomfrey.

“Malfoy,” Draco’s voice was light in his ear, full of amusement. “What is it about you that keeps anything you do from being *normal*?”

“I don’t know, Potter.” Harry whispered back as a stunned audience watched the most unusual end to the wedding ceremony. “But don’t complain love.”

“Why not?” Draco whispered back.

“If I was any different, would I have ended up married to you?” Harry asked, barely containing the laughter he was feeling.

“Good point.” Draco conceded, and then paused for a moment. “Don’t change, love.”

“I won’t.” Harry assured his husband as they stepped off the platform and led their guests to the waiting feast.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N – I hate weddings. I hope that was sufficiently sappy, emotional, and interesting to satisfy most readers. Sorry it took so long to get this up, but life isn’t being good to me right now!

Now where’s my damn tissue? (b/n lol J)

Disclaimer: All works belong to JK Rowling and her publishers/studios. I’m just dabbling for fun.

This chapter is rated R.

Chapter 12 –

Normal

Oh yes, that dratted word: Normal.

Not a word that Harry Potter ever thought he’d attribute to himself, but the past few months of life as the husband of Draco Potter-Malfoy made Harry rethink his definition of normal. Lately, what his life was like now was ‘normal’ and would be ‘normal’ for well over a century and half.

At least once each day, he found himself remembering an event in his fifth year with longing.

Yes, his *fifth* year.

Fred and George, declaring that they had outgrown full-time school and flying off into the sunset on their brooms was a treasured memory for Harry, as his last year of school continued. Each time he remembered that event, he got a dreamy, wistful smile on his face and wondered what it would be like for Draco and him to imitate that flight. He even remarked once that he wished

that Umbridge would come back to the school to give him a chance.

Headmistress McGonagall, who had been in the room at the time he voiced that, gave him his first detention in two years. Filch had been literally glowing with glee as he watched Harry polish every trophy in the Trophy room, carefully pointing out any spot that he missed. Harry spent the time wondering if this qualified as an event worthy of 'doing a Weasley' as the third-years so commonly referred to the twin's departure.

Still, on this particularly chilly March night, Harry was just sitting in front of the fire, writing a response to a request from the International Confederation of Wizards for information on the portkey used by Voldemort last June. He finished his response, which basically said to read the attached essay, attached a copy of the essay (by a seventh-year Ravenclaw who had used it for her Charming Magical Objects thesis), and prepared it for mailing. Jeremy would handle it in the morning with all of the other mail. Draco was just finishing up reading a report for the Ministry of Magic's Death Eater Rehabilitation committee. Harry could tell from his long sighs and frequent scratching of a quill that he'd be a long time in writing a reply.

Instead of the wild session in bed that he wanted, Harry picked up the next batch of essays from his second-year DADA students and began reading their thoughts on what spells, herbs, animals, or potions would help a wizard or witch defend themselves against vampires. After the fifth essay, and third sarcastic note that 'Harry Malfoy-Potter will **not** comply with a magical summons from a former student who **should** be able to defend themselves', he was ready to give up and pull his blond-haired husband into bed whether he had finished writing his response to the Ministry or still had ten pages to go.

'I wonder if this is how the rest of my life will be?' Harry wondered to himself as he looked over at his husband. He was seventeen years old now, and he felt like his life was almost in an eerie dream state.

Every morning he woke up and had a private breakfast in the outer room of their suite here at Hogwarts. Draco would sit next to him and Pansy and Jeremy would sit across from them. Over breakfast they'd review the day's schedule, important correspondences that their two aides had received the day before, and discuss the handling of various private affairs concerning their estates. Then three days a week Harry had DADA classes to teach. Two mornings a week he spent time at the Ministry of Magic, in his very own office (with a magic window). Lunch was usually at the Ministry those days, followed by afternoon classes where *he* was still the student. Late afternoons were usually occupied by studying in the library. Dinner was in the Great Hall (usually but not always) and he usually sat with his Gryffindor classmates (those that were still there at least). He hardly ever got to see them anymore. Of the boys in his year, only Seamus Finnegan was still at Hogwarts, and Hermione spent most evenings with her son, Neville Franklin Longbottom. Lavender Brown was still there, as was Parvati and the other two girls. Most of the sixth year Gryffindors were intact so they formed the new 'leadership' of his House, and he always felt like an outsider with them.

Then there were the long hours each night where he would sit with Draco, and occasionally other people, looking over report after report, requests for information that required his personal attention, and of course grading assignments for his classes, and finishing assignments for his other classes. He felt like he was on the cusp of something, one foot in the world of being a

child, and one foot being in the world of adults.

They had over twelve registered, and four hidden (unregistered), portkeys in their rooms. The long walks, or even carriage rides to Hogsmeade had become too cumbersome, so they could now portkey to just about anywhere they needed to get to these days. Weekends were usually spent with Hermione in their Hogsmeade flat, spoiling little Neville to death. The governess they'd finally chosen was actually none other than Katie Belle, a Gryffindor who had graduated last year and who had a baby a month before Hermione. The father of Katie Bell's child had been killed by Voldemort during the fighting at Kings Cross Station, and she had been very grateful for the position. Having known both Hermione and Harry, she fit easily into the five bedroom flat they'd chosen. Her son, Kenneth (named after his father), was absolutely gorgeous. Both Harry and Draco found themselves spoiling both boys each and every weekend (so much so that Hermione and Katie threatened to hex them if they bought another toy before summer).

"Out with it, Potter." Draco's voice startled Harry a bit. He bit his lower lip as he looked up to see Draco looking at him with concern. He only used Harry's original last name when he was annoyed, teasing, or worried.

"Er…" Harry began before clearing his throat.

"English, Potter. Use proper English." Draco teased, a hint of a smirk appearing on his face. As always, the teasing relaxed him.

"I feel…" Harry tried to explain, but couldn't find the word to describe how he was feeling.

"Discombobulated?" Draco supplied. "Tense? Anxious? Unnerved? Unsettled? Confused?"

"Um, yeah." Harry agreed.

"Which is it, Potter?" Draco asked him, his smirk now full blown. "I know they are all big words but you're smart enough. Especially since most of them are only one or two syllables."

"How the hell do you do that?" Harry demanded as he broke into laughter.

"I'm a Malfoy." Draco drawled smoothly. "Words are my tools."

"I needed that laugh." Harry said when he calmed down.

"I figured that." Draco said, still in that drawl, but with a smirk that was filled with self-satisfaction. "No one has tried to kill you or even hex you in the last two months. Well, not including the time that you entered Hermione's room right after she finished pushing out the newest Longbottom boy, but then that doesn't really count. I knew I was always right about you. You're only happy when the world's about to come to an end and only you can save the damn thing."

"So, are you going to start an evil plot to take over the world just so I can be a hero again?" Harry asked him, a smile on his face.

"Um, give me a few days to think of something." Draco said with a genuine smile.

"Good." Harry replied. "I'm getting sick and tired of paperwork."

"Oh, that's too bad." Draco moaned, still smiling. "Since you decided we'll be running things, paperwork is our destiny."

“Sure, blame it all on me.” Harry said with a groan.

“If you insist.” Draco agreed with a shrug of his shoulders. He looked down at his own paperwork and let out a long sigh. He put the paperwork onto the table, leaned back on the couch he was sitting on, crossed his legs and raised his eyebrows at Harry. “Forget this crap, I need some loving. Care to supply?”

“Oh yeah.” Harry agreed, getting up without touching the scrolls sitting in his lap. They fell to the floor as he sat down in Draco’s lap, faced his husband, and started kissing him.

“Harry Potter, sir! Master Draco, sir!” Dobby’s voice caused them both to groan aloud since it came at the same time as the *pop* announcing Dobby’s appearance in their chambers.

“Yes, Dobby, what is it?” Harry said in a most exasperated voice.

“The Headmistress has asked me to tell you to come to her office right now. You is needed!” The house elf said, and Harry closed his eyes briefly.

“Merlin’s Beard, you damn Gryffindor.” Draco muttered. “Can’t you wait to save the world at least until you’ve serviced your husband?”

“Shut up you greedy Slytherin.” Harry muttered, giving Draco a kiss before standing. “C’mon, let’s go find out what we’re saving the world from this time.”

“We?” Draco muttered, accepting Harry’s hand to help him off the couch. “This time we ask them how much we get paid before we say yes. I’m sick of doing this for free.”

“You can ask if you want.” Harry muttered as they grabbed their cloaks and headed out the door. “Just leave me out of the whole thing.”

‘So, this is what Voldemort had planned all along.’ Harry thought to himself an hour later. They were in Paris, France, at an emergency meeting of the International Federation of Wizards, and the news they were hearing was not good news.

“After putting the appropriate Muggle government leaders under *Imperius*, they successfully passed initiatives that effectively separated the magical governments of Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine, and eight other countries from their Muggle counterparts. They also set up laws that allow wizards to cast any spell they want on muggles without it being declared a crime.” Harry sat there, stunned by the scope of what was happening as the aged wizard Mark Tellerby (the current chair of the Federation) spoke.

“What exactly happened in Greece?” Minerva McGonagall asked the wizard sharply.

“The Greek Department of Magic was raided by over three hundred Death Eaters.” Mark replied, his voice sharing his sense of awe at the direct assault. “They managed to take down every law enforcement official in the office at the time, as well as a good number of their Directors. They’ve all been replaced with Death Eater members or supporters of Greek heritage.”

“Ve have received ultimatums also.” The German Chancellor of Magic told the assembled wizards in heavily accented English. “Two veeks to pass a list of laws they haf sent.”

“Voldemort has never acted this openly before.” McGonagall said in a stunned voice.

“He has never had such a base of support, either.” The Italian Minister of Magic replied softly.

“The wizarding communities of Eastern Europe are not as opposed to his message as Great Britain is, or even was during his first rise to power.”

“What will his next move be?” The French Minister of Magic asked quietly, and all eyes turned to Harry, who shifted nervously in his seat.

“Consolidate.” Draco said from where he sat next to Harry. Orrin Milieu, the British Minister of Magic nodded his head as Draco continued. “He’ll consolidate the smaller countries not yet under his control and then he’ll move against the larger governments like Italy, Spain, France, and Germany.”

“The list of demands to Germany is a test.” Harry added. “He wants to see if you’ll comply. If you do, the other countries will see similar lists with demands, and he won’t need to move against you.”

“We understand that very well, young man.” The Spanish Minister of Magic said scathingly. “We have seen this before, not more than sixty years ago, among the Muggles.”

“Word is spreading that the wizarding governments, such as they are, from Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia are considering joining this ‘Alliance of European Wizards’ as he is calling his new regime.” A soft-spoken witch from Northern Italy, the Headmistress of the Italian school of Magic said softly. “Many of my students from that region are receiving owls telling them to prepare to journey home.”

“We need to find where he is and send a joint force of our magical police there and kill him immediately!” The French Minister said angrily. “Before he tears this continent apart.”

“Can you find him through your scar, Harry?” Orrin Milieu asked, his voice carrying through the chamber.

“No.” Harry told the man in all honesty. “He has recovered enough of his strength that he is able to keep me blocked completely, although he is far too weak to break through my own barriers.”

“You should have killed him when you had the chance!” The French Minister yelled at Harry. “Now we will find him and kill him ourselves!”

“Bon chance.” Draco said nonchalantly, glaring at the Frenchman.

“What do you mean?” Mark Tellerby asked quickly.

“I was just wishing the man good luck.” Draco drawled.

“No, you meant something by that!” Telleby roared with a slap of the table. “You are both part of this organization because of your experience with him. If you know something that you have not shared with us before, now is the time.”

“It is a prophecy.” McGonagall said quietly. “Spoken almost twenty years ago, and verified as a true prophecy. Harry Potter will either kill, or be killed, by Voldemort. No other is able to kill either of them.”

“Then he will be part of the army we send!” The French Minister said forcefully. “This time you *will* kill him, boy.”

“Mr. Potter is nowhere near trained enough to survive a magical duel with him.” McGonagall retorted calmly. “He is being prepared as quickly as can be for that day, but Voldemort has had

over sixty years to perfect his magic."

"He almost beat him with that Sword he had." The Italian Minister pointed out. "Find another magical sword and give it to him."

"When the time comes, I will be ready, and I will kill him." Harry said in a quiet, but forceful tone. "That time has not yet come. Yes, a war is on the horizon, but it is not here yet. When it does arrive, I and the rest of the wizarding world must be ready. He will not move against the stronger Ministries, those here tonight especially. We must prepare ways to repel any such attacks he might pose until the day comes that he declares open warfare."

"What do you mean?" The Spanish Minister asked, leaning forward in his chair and staring hard at Harry.

"Er…alarms must be charmed at each Ministry, so that if anyone attacks, the other Ministries can respond and send reinforcements to help them fight off his forces."

"What if he's there himself?" The French Minister asked. "If none of us can kill him, he can walk in there and kill us all himself!"

"If he shows up, I can be summoned there myself." Harry said confidently. "He's not ready to face me, and I doubt that he'll want a confrontation anytime soon, so he will retreat."

"If he's so scared of you…" The French Minister started to say, but Harry cut him off.

"Him simply retreating is not a complete victory for us." Harry's voice was very forceful now. "He won't fight with me unless he thinks he will win or we can trap him. If we have a superior force, he'll simply retreat instead of facing me. The prophecy doesn't mean that I can't be stunned, tied to an altar and have him cut my heart out. Same goes for him being incapacitated. It's doesn't say that we're meant to fight each other in a wizard's duel either. There are so many ways either of us could kill the other that we don't know which it will be in the end. What we need to do is to develop a plan to capture him and then I can kill him. We also need a plan to take out his followers so that none of them are able to take his place."

"All valid points, Mr. Potter." Orrin Milieu. "The hour is late now, and most of us are tired. I suggest that we meet again soon to begin to draw up such plans, and to organize a united effort if any of our Ministries are attacked."

"I agree." The American chair said softly. "Any objections?"

There were none, and the four British representatives rose quickly, heading for the portkey locations before any of the others could intercept them. Milieu whispered that they should meet as a group later in the morning, and McGonagall nodded her agreement. Harry and Draco's portkey took them directly back to their room at Hogwarts, where they immediately sat on one of the couches, absolutely exhausted, but clinging to each other fiercely.

"Merlin, Potter." Draco whispered softly as they sat there, gripping each other. "He might really pull this off."

"No, he won't." Harry replied just as softly. "He hasn't taken any country with a really strong magical heritage and strong government. He's only picked up the weak ones. He'll be spending a lot of time training them, consolidating his hold on them. By the time he's done that and is ready to move, we'll be ready to take him out."

“What about his followers?” Draco asked softly.

“We’ll be ready for them, too, won’t we?” Harry answered him.

“I’ll start going over our list of people and figuring out who would be best to send after he’s gone.” Draco said softly.

“We need Hermione bound by the Oath soon.” Harry added. “We might as well add some of the parents at the same time. I think a few of them would be among those we want to send.”

“The Bulstrodes definitely.” Draco supplied. “Probably the Crabbes and Goyles as well. The Zabinis would be extremely helpful also.”

“That should be a good enough group.” Harry said, feeling another wave of exhaustion creep over him. “Easter break?”

“Sounds good.” Draco agreed. “The Ministry is more protecting than watching them now, so that’s no longer a concern. I think it’ll work.”

“Bedtime.” Harry said softly. Draco didn’t say anything, but his slow effort of standing spoke his agreement. Luckily, neither of them had an early class to teach right after breakfast, so they would have time to sleep in a little.

They needed every minute they could get at that point.

“We have been assured that you both could pass your remaining N.E.W.T. with at least an ‘A’ in each course.” Orrin Milieu’s voice held a tinge of sympathy, but it was still stern, brooking no argument. “You can either take them when they are given to your classmates or a special testing will be arranged as we did over the summer.”

“But we’ve…” Harry knew it would be useless, but he had to try to argue out of this.

“Frankly, you’ve had two-thirds more of a year at Hogwarts than you really should have.” Milieu’s voice was void of sympathy now. “I know you are both young, and quite frankly I would prefer not to have to do this to either of you. However, neither of you have had anything resembling a normal childhood and you both have the maturity of people a decade older than you. We can’t let that go to waste at Hogwarts. You have enough points right now to graduate, and you’ll attend the Leaving Feast along with the rest of your classmates. It’s not like you’ve spent any real time at Hogwarts in the last week anyway.”

His words were deadly accurate. Since that emergency meeting of the International Federation of Wizards, they’d spent more time at the Ministry, in France, and even on a trip to America, than they had at Hogwarts. McGonagall had even warned them what this meeting was about, and told them she’d argued for six hours with the Minister about this.

“You can’t just force us to work for the Ministry.” Draco stated firmly.

“I can give both of you a choice.” Milieu stated very, very firmly. “I will put every single former Death Eater on trial for crimes and have them shipped off to Azkaban. Or you can work for the Ministry.”

“Why would you make that threat?” Harry demanded sharply.

“Simple, really.” Milieu replied calmly. “There was a riot yesterday in Diagon Alley. Everyone’s

upset about what is happening in Europe and they want to see something done about it. I can either give them a front page article about how Harry Malfoy-Potter and Draco Potter-Malfoy have chosen to work full time with the Ministry to meet this threat, or put up some Death Eaters on trial in order to make people feel safer. Not much else will satisfy them."

"So what exactly will we be doing?" Draco asked as Harry let out a sigh of defeat.

"You, Draco, will be working with the Department of International Magical Cooperation and coordinating with the International Federation of Wizards against the increased Death Eater raids. Your father and certain other former Death Eaters who have proven themselves somewhat reliable, are being brought in to help our allies respond more effectively. You'll be the liaison between the Law Enforcement staff and our 'advisors', and help evaluate the information received. I don't need to tell you abut the distrust there is between these groups, so you'll be used a lot as a go-between."

"I think I can handle that." Draco said with a short nod of his head. The Minister returned the nod and looked at Harry before speaking.

"Mr. Potter, you are going to have a little more difficult job."

"Let's hear it." Harry said with a sigh.

"You, Mr. Potter, are going to be the liaison between the International Federation of Wizards and the Muggle Governments."

"Why don't the Ministers interact with their counterparts in their own Muggle governments?" Harry asked quietly.

"The Muggle governments are really scared right now." Minister Milieu said in a very blunt manner. "Many of their counterparts in the countries where Voldemort's forces have taken hold were put under Imperius, fell sick, or are dead. They seemed especially frightened with the recent changes in the Russian government. They worry about Voldemort gaining control of their armies and starting Muggle wars."

"Shades of Grindelwald." Harry muttered, and the Minister of Magic nodded gravely.

"Precisely." Minister Milieu said after several seconds of silence. "You will be my direct liaison to the British Prime Minister, and as necessary a liaison between the International Confederation and the Prime Ministers of the various countries. There's a meeting of some organization they have like the Confederation next week. You'll attend that meeting. You'll also assist the Auror team I'm sending over to set up wards at the Prime Minister's residence. We're warding the residences of all the Prime Ministers, but he's insisted that you be a part of setting them up at his own residence."

"Is that all?" Draco asked.

"No. We've moved your offices here down to the fifth floor and assigned both of you a secretary. She'll handle all your Ministry related appointments, calendars, and mail. I know you both have personal assistants at Hogwarts. You can have them contact your secretary to make whatever arrangements they need to make. I assume you'll be using your London residence?"

"Yes." Draco and Harry both said at the same time.

"Good, good. Now, if neither of you have any more questions, I'll have Leona show you to your

new offices." The Minister said with a sly smile. Harry and Draco stood, shaking his hand before heading out. One of the Minister's secretaries stood, and they followed the witch to their new offices.

Both of them were happy when they saw the offices. They both had magical windows, private fireplaces connected to the floo network, and were also connected to each other. Their secretary was an even better surprise. Christopher Warrington was one of the older former Slytherin students that had taken part in the Blood Oath, and who had gotten a job in the Ministry. Like Crabbe and Goyle, most students had assumed him to be little more than a big sloth, but he was actually quite intelligent. His presence there meant that they could trust their secretary more than if someone else had been assigned to them.

They flooed the Headmistress as soon as the Minister's secretary had left. She nodded as they told her the Minister's news, and informed them that she'd make sure that they were ready for the remaining exams by having their Professors send them reading lists, and she'd let Pansy and Jeremy continue to use their apartment to handle their business. She even agreed to pass on a message to have the two ready for a fire call just after dinner time.

Harry placed another fire call to Black Manor. He gave Kreacher instructions to get their baggage from Hogwarts as well as to get the manor set up for their resumption of residence there. The elf sounded positively elated to have them home full time. Meanwhile, Draco had used the fire in his office to place calls to his father, and to Katie in Hogsmeade. By the time they were done, Chris (as he insisted on being called) came in with their schedules. Since Draco's office was slightly bigger (to his immense delight), they moved in there to listen to what he had to give them.

The Minister had apparently forgotten that they'd both been scheduled for three hours a day, at least three times a week, to train with senior Aurors. Draco had a lot of meetings scheduled for the rest of the week, as did Harry. Fortunately most were here in the Ministry building, although Harry would be leaving for the Muggle government buildings several times during the week. Their workdays were scheduled to begin shortly after eight in the morning and often carried on well past supper time.

"It should settle down in a few weeks." Chris said with a grunt after he was done running through their week. "Plus you only have a few events to handle on the weekends. Not like it was at school where you were there everyday and could never get away. You'll start to understand the difference when you get used to going home at night."

"But it really won't end there, will it?" Draco asked, a knowing tone in his voice.

"Not for you two." Chris said, this time smiling slightly maliciously. "For us minions it's that way, though."

"So, how'd you get saddled with us, Chris?" Harry asked congenially.

"I begged for it along with nearly every one else who wasn't already the personal assistant to an assistant director or higher." Chris said with a smile. "I won because I was a personal friend of Draco's at school and could prove my friendship with you two thanks to those invitations you sent me for parties over the summer. They figured you'd be a little happier with someone who was a friendly face than someone you didn't know."

“Glad we got you.” Draco said with a smile. Chris beamed at the approval in Draco’s words.

“I also know Jeremy and Pansy.” Chris continued. “We’ll be able to coordinate things just fine even with them still being in school. Jeremy’s a good kid. I’m glad you two hooked him up with a job. I was trying to get old Bishus at *Wizards Premier Printing* to hire him, but the bloke just couldn’t hire another person without firing someone who already had family connections.”

“You were trying to get him a job?” Draco asked in surprise. “Why?”

“Oh, he’s my second cousin, father’s side.” Chris explained. “He’s a good candidate.”

Those words answered a question Harry had been kicking around with Draco for the last month. Jeremy was the closest to their Inner Circle, besides Hermione, who had not taken the Blood Oath. He was really good at his job, and they both wanted to keep him on their personal staff, but without him having taken the Blood Oath he was becoming even more of a security risk every day. They’d been trying to feel him out about the concept of the Oath, but had not had much time or privacy to do that lately. Chris’ words said that he already had, and that Jeremy would amenable.

“Well, I think that settles everything.” Draco said with a nod at Jeremy’s hidden statement. Jeremy would be initiated at Easter Break, along with Hermione and a few others. “I should get started on those reports I see on the desk.”

“I should do that as well.” Harry said, standing along with Chris and heading back to his own office.

Lunch was with Arthur Weasley, Maggie Lawton, and Archibald Neweather (who had replaced Barty Crouch as head of the Department of International Magical Cooperation). They were in the Ministry’s Executive Dining Room, and Harry had to agree that the food was almost as good as a Hogwarts Feast.

After lunch, Maggie escorted them down to the Auror’s office levels, and showed them the training room where the Aurors practiced. Dawley, and another Auror whom Harry didn’t recognize, were waiting for them. They spent the next two hours practicing some of the more advanced Auror spells.

By six that evening, both of them were exhausted. They’d had meetings with Ministry staffers after their workout with the Aurors, and those were tiresome. Several of the wizards Harry spoke to were quite brainless in his opinion, and more closely resembled Fudge than Milieu.

They were home, in Black Manor, by seven that night. They talked over the different meetings, made some adjustments to their plans based on this sudden change in their situation, and then retired upstairs to the attic to pay a visit to their most special guest. He’d been up there since their wedding, and Harry couldn’t help the wicked smile that his face wore as the pathetic excuse for a human being cowered before them.

“Well, Peter, you seem to be surviving decently up here.” Draco said with a drawl worthy of Lucius himself. Harry noticed the thin pallet that they allowed the man, and equally thin blanket, did little to take the chill off of the night. The attic was clean, but filled with items that would remind Peter Pettigrew constantly of those he had betrayed.

“Harry, please…” Peter wailed as soon as Draco spoke, and then flinched as Harry raised his

wand.

“What have I told you about my name?” Harry said sternly, and Pettigrew flinched.

“S...s…sorry Mr. Potter.” Peter Pettigrew stuttered.

“That’s better.” Harry’s voice was cold, as cold as he could make it, and his stomach was churning now, as it always did when he looked at this creature that had once been his parent’s friend. “So, tell us, have you been able to remember anymore information we might find interesting?”

“Nagini.” Peter said slowly.

“Voldemort’s snake. Oh, do stop flinching, Peter. It’s just a name.” Harry’s words were sharp, and Peter Pettigrew flinched again.

“Y…yes. The snake. It died a few weeks back. Someone poisoned a muggle that was to be fed to it, so it died after eating the muggle. *He* was very upset, even though he didn’t need it anymore.”

“Interesting.” Draco said slowly. “So, do you remember where this occurred?”

“N…no, Mister Malfoy.” Peter said, flinching as Draco frowned at him. Before turning the man over to them after the wedding, Voldemort had practically wiped the man’s memories of the last two years. He still remembered everything else, though, and he remembered more the longer he was here. Not for the first time, though, Harry felt the temptation to use the *Cruciatis* curse on the man.

“Anything else we should know about?” Harry asked before leaving. The pathetic excuse for a human being shook his head, but then stopped.

“Could I please have a thicker blanket?” Pettigrew asked in a trembling voice.

“NO!” Harry shouted angrily. Figures the slime would ask for something for himself.

“But…James would never have been so cruel.” Pettigrew whined, and something inside Harry snapped. Rage flooded through him, rage like he had never felt before at hearing his father’s name from those lips.

“*Crucio!*” Harry bellowed, his wand pointing at Pettigrew. Pettigrew stiffened, then gave out a cry of pain as he fell to a fully prone position, limbs jerking as the spell hit him. Unlike the other time he’d used this spell on Bellatrix Lestrange, it didn’t stop after a moment. The rage Harry was feeling seethed for a moment and finally started to lessen the longer Pettigrew shrieked in pain.

The sudden memory of a slap and Draco’s voice filled him, and he looked over at his husband with uncertainty. What he saw though, surprised him. Draco was just standing there, arms folded across his chest and looking at Pettigrew with a slight grin. Harry lifted the spell off Pettigrew, who still shook in the aftereffects and thought of what he should say.

“I warned you, Pettigrew.” Harry’s voice was harsh with unshed tears. “Never mention my parents again.”

With that, Harry turned and left the attic through the trapdoor. Draco followed behind him, carefully shutting the door and casting the warding spells before he turned to look at Harry. Harry was dreading the words Draco would have for him. What he got stunned him.

“The worm deserved what he got.” Draco said simply, looking Harry in the eyes.

“But…but you said…” Harry stuttered.

“Do you feel any wild urges to put me under the curse?” Draco asked.

“No.” Harry said with a soft sigh.

“How about little Neville, or Hermione?”

“No.” Harry said firmly. The mere thought of doing that was revolting.

“Then there’s no problem.” Draco said with a shrug. “You’re not my father. Occasional use of Dark Magic isn’t going to make you into the kind of man he was, and still can be at times. You have a much firmer control of yourself. I’m not worried.”

“Oh.” Harry said, the tears he’d felt threatened with before finally leaked out, and Draco hugged him silently for a few minutes.

“Let’s get some sleep.” Draco said softly when Harry had stopped crying. Harry couldn’t find any disagreement with that, so he followed Draco into their bedroom and was asleep within minutes.

A/N – Another chapter done! A few items here. You will remember in OoTP that Dumbledore created a Portkey to take Harry and the Weasley children to Black Manor after Mr. Weasley was attacked. The Apparition wards prevent apparating or disapparating from the grounds. I figure portkeys, made by someone who had “permission” from the Headmaster/Headmistress could indeed work through those wards. Unauthorized portkeys, by someone who didn’t have permission would not work.

That’s how, in Book 4, a portkey made by Crouch, Jr. disguised as Mad-Eye Moody worked. Dumbledore gave him “permission” with the wards.

As for Harry and Draco’s unauthorized portkeys…well if they were given permission to make portkeys for their use, and they made a few more than they were supposed to…well as long as they don’t get caught it’s not a problem.

As for the ending…I’ve said the Harry I write will be a *darker* Harry than the one in the books. I did not say how dark Harry will get, whether he will just touch his toes into the dark water or dive right in. If you want to know, you’ll have to read and find out.

If I can get my readers to laugh a little, cry a little (or at least get a little choked up), then I will have accomplished the purpose of my story. Now, I will give you a little warning here, the next chapters will have more of an edge to them as we move back into the conflicts Harry and Draco face.

Chapter 13 –

Those slit, red eyes no longer held the fear in him the way they once did. Still, they did command some respect. Even in his weakened state, the Dark Lord was a fearsome wizard with many powers at his beck and call. There were not many who could enter into a private meeting with Voldemort and not shake in fear, but he was one of them.

“I have felt the boy’s use of the Cruciatus on the Worm over the last few weeks.” Voldemort

hissed in a very pleased tone. "It seems he is well on the road we have set for him."

"Yes, my lord. He is progressing more and more along that path." The visitor said confidently. "I believe he has devised a plan to keep his truce, and dispose of Pettigrew at the same time, but I do not yet know what this plan may be, and when he will execute the plan."

"Interesting." Voldemort said from where he stood. The visitor, dark cloak and hood covering his features kneeled before him. "It matters not, what he does with the Worm, so long as he keeps his truce for the next few months. Once I am ready, he must be firmly on the path we have set him."

"He will be, my lord." The visitor said confidently, and asked a question no one else would dare. "Has the weakness increased?"

"No, it hasn't." Voldemort hissed angrily. "Still, I can feel my days coming to an end. I never should have trusted that fool Pettigrew to make the resurrection potion. He must have botched it, and the wound from Potter only made things worse. I have less than a year left, when I should have immortality!"

"I am sorry, my lord." The visitor extremely deferentially.

"Nevertheless, I am determined my legacy will continue." Voldemort said sternly. "He still does not know this?"

"No, he does not." The visitor assured him.

"Make sure he does not." Voldemort hissed. "It will be many years before my reborn body is able to mature to the point where it can handle my memories, my soul, and begin the work of reclaiming my place in this world."

"Yes, my lord." The Visitor agreed.

"Very well, you had best return." Voldemort told him. "The date of the final battle has been set. Make sure nothing deters him from the path I have set for him."

"As you command, my lord." The visitor said, rising to his feet and bowing before leaving.

Voldemort's plans, indeed. Harry Potter would be the next Dark Lord until Voldemort rose again and knocked him from that position.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

It was remarkable, Harry reflected as he stared into his office fireplace, just how much life at Hogwarts really had prepared him for the routines of the Ministry. Of course the fact that on his desk was a half-completed essay for his Care for Magical Creatures class didn't hurt the impression. Still, his days at the office were not much different than his days at school had been.

Draco had portkeyed that morning to a meeting in Paris, so the adjoining office was empty, and the door closed. Their secretary, Chris, was at lunch, and Harry had just returned from the Executive lunch room on the Ministry's first floor. He'd taken a few glances at the half-finished essay and let the fire distract him from thoughts of how to secure rampaging graphorns safely. Still, he could feel the subtle change in the room as someone stood at his doorway even before they knocked politely.

"Richard." Harry said, a genuine smile on his face at the sight of the muggle man standing in the doorway. His smile was returned just as easily.

“Hello, Harry.” Richard said as Harry stood and crossed the office to shake his hand. He followed Harry into the room and sat in the chair next to the desk. “Just thought I’d stop by and say hello.”

“How was the meeting?” Harry asked politely. He’d known the muggle was going to be there today, and had told Chris to mention to another secretary that Harry was friends with the man. Sure enough, the secretary had probably mentioned Harry to Richard, and that had sent the man down to his office.

“Far to long, and far to useless.” Richard admitted with a sigh. “We spent the first hour this morning doing nothing but trying to explain how our primary school system works. We didn’t even get into the advantages of minimum standard of education for all young witches and wizards before they broke for lunch. We spent the last two hours in an argument over whether wizards and witches are subjects of the Queen or whatever it is they think of themselves.”

“The wizarding concept of government is quite different than the muggle concept.” Harry said with patience. “Most wizards and witches don’t really care *how* it operates, so long as it keeps them safe from unsavory elements and doesn’t intrude too closely into their lives. We don’t even operate from taxes like muggle governments.”

“I heard that was another big argument.” Richard said with a chuckle, a chuckle that Harry joined in on for a few moments.

“Let’s just say no one in the wizarding world understands the concept of being forced to pay for the government to operate, or that anyone has the right to take a part of the galleons they earn or pay more for products in a store so that some of it will go to the government. The Ministry of Magic exists to regulate the misuse of magic, stop people like Voldemort from imposing their will on others, prevent magical creatures from rampaging through wizarding villages, and to safeguard us from muggles. When wizards break those rules, they get fined and the Ministry uses that money to operate, or they ask upstanding citizens to contribute for specific purposes. Forcing everyone to pay for the Ministry’s operations is not conceivable.”

“But they’re British citizens!” Richard exclaimed. “Everyone pays taxes to the Crown.”

“If you ask most wizards if they’re British citizens they’ll look at you funny and ask you what a British citizen is and why would they be one.” Harry responded calmly.

“That’s why we’re looking at having all wizarding children attend regular schools until they reach Hogwarts age.” Richard said a little more calmly. “That way they will know their place in our society.”

“Which is why you’re getting nowhere in your meetings.” Harry replied, pouncing on the core of the problem. “Wizards don’t have a place in muggle society. We are separate, and have no desire to end that separation. If the common muggle ever finds out about us, we’ll be hunted down and exterminated, and we know that.”

“That was the past.” Richard said, a plaintive tone returning to his voice. “We’re more advanced now than we were in the middle ages. More accepting of differences in people.”

“Really?” Harry asked quietly. “Then why aren’t you married to your boyfriend?”

“That’s not really pertinent to the situation with magic.” Richard said quietly, his face going

slightly pale.

“What about the guy that murdered last week because he was gay?” Harry asked. “Or how about the problems you have with Ireland? What about the people in your society that are saying immigrants shouldn’t be allowed into the country because they’re so different than the people already here? We see all these problems you are facing and we know that deep down muggles haven’t changed all that much.”

“Isn’t this a little paranoid, all this ‘us versus them’ attitude?” Richard asked with a sigh.

“You forget, we live a lot longer than muggles.” Harry said crossly. “You also forget that ghosts really do exist and that they talk to us. You’ve talked to Nearly Headless Nick, The Bloody Baron, and a few others yourself. When you have people you can talk to who remember the last time muggles tried to burn a witch or wizard at the stake, it’s not paranoia.”

“Are you sure you’re only seventeen?” Richard asked for the fiftieth time.

“A very old seventeen.” Harry said with a laugh.

“Well, it’s almost time for the meeting to start back up again.” Richard said, rising to his feet.

“Good luck.” Harry said, rising to his feet and shaking the muggle’s hand. He paused for a moment, as if an idea had just come to him. “I’ve got a question for you.”

“Okay.” Richard said, curiosity now showing on his face.

“Why do wizarding children have to attend muggle schools?” Harry asked. The idea for this had come from Narcissa, and he’d been waiting for the opportunity to bring it up.

“Well, there are no wizarding schools for children below the age of eleven.” Richard said calmly.

“What if there were?” Harry asked. “Obviously magic wouldn’t be a part of the curriculum, but all Hogwarts students need to know how to read, write, and do arithmetic. Some know it better than others depending on if they went to a muggle school like I did, or how they were tutored. If a system of public schools were set-up in wizarding villages, funded by some of the prominent families in the wizarding world, then there would not be a need to have them go to muggle schools.”

“Interesting.” Richard admitted slowly. “The question is could the funding be found for such schools?”

“I’m sure that’s possible.” Harry said. “I know I’d check with my assistant to see how much I could contribute. I’m sure the initial costs can be covered from select families, and tuition payments similar to what Hogwarts does now could always be arranged for the poorer families.”

“There would also need to be lessons on government and society.” Richard said slowly. “But it might be a better solution.”

“I’m sure curriculum on their government and society would be included for wizarding children.” Harry said, being careful not to say, or even really imply, that lessons on government and society would focus on wizarding government and wizarding society.

“I’ll bring it up to my superiors.” Richard said before leaving. Harry sat back down at his desk and returned to the essay he’d been working on. Several hours later the essay was done, and Harry was once again staring at the fire in his fireplace, reflecting on how much different his life

was now.

A large part of his life was now based on partial-truths, and outright lies. These had created so many layers in his life he no longer understood who he was at times, especially at times like now. There was the Boy-Who-Lived, who led the great fight against the evil Voldemort. There was the Oath Lord, bound to keep the evil muggles at bay. There was the man who loved Draco Malfoy with all his heart. There was the man who had watched Dumbledore die, and felt *relieved* at the old man's passing. Don't forget the man who'd killed Oliver Wood in cold blood, then lied so very easily to the DMLE agents that they didn't blink an eye at his explanation.

Then there was the man who had been holding Peter Pettigrew in his attic, and casting the *Cruciatis* curse on the man several times a day for the last few weeks.

Draco had only shrugged at that when Harry expected him to react with anger. It confused him, at first. Then they'd talked about it and Draco had told him Harry wasn't acting any differently than he had before using the curse. The moment Harry did something to hurt Draco, his husband would tell him to stop. That let Harry feel safe, safe enough to take out his anger, his pain, on the man who had started it all.

Yes, Peter Pettigrew was to blame for the tragedy that had been Harry Potter's life.

Okay, Voldemort was also responsible, but it had been Pettigrew who had been trusted, who had held the lives of James, Lily, and Harry Potter in his hands, and who had given them to the Dark Lord. It had been Peter Pettigrew who had framed Sirius Black and sent him to Azkaban for twelve long years. It had been Peter Pettigrew who had been given a second chance to save Harry Potter and instead helped to resurrect Voldemort. Peter Pettigrew owed Harry Potter a Wizard's Debt like few others in the history of the world, and Harry was going to collect on that debt with so much pain and misery that Peter Pettigrew's soul would be weeping for eternity!

"Mr. Malfoy-Potter?" Chris' voice came into Harry's office, startling Harry out of his mental diatribe. He found he was grasping his wand tightly, and had to fight down the urge to Apparate home and spend some time with Pettigrew.

"Yes, Chris." Harry replied, looking at his entryway where Chris was standing, a look of concern on his face. Harry smiled gently at the former Slytherin student.

"The Prime Minister is here to see you, sir." Chris said, raising an eyebrow in a silent question.

"Show him in then!" Harry said with a smile, and a slight shake of his head to tell Chris that nothing was wrong. His aide nodded and disappeared for a moment, returning quickly with the muggle Prime Minister behind him.

"Harry, it's good to see you!" The man said cheerfully, and Harry moved to shake his hand. Chris returned as soon as they were seated with a tea service for two before shutting the door on his way out.

"How did your meetings go?" Harry asked once the door was shut.

"Most excellent!" The Prime Minister said with a smile. "It seems we're finally reaching some middle ground between our two worlds. Your advice has been most helpful!"

"I'm glad to hear that, sir." Harry replied.

"Please, I've told you, call me Tony." The man said to Harry, and Harry smiled, slipping easily

into the role he played with this man.

“Of course, sorry.” Harry said. “Sometimes I forget.”

“Not a problem.” The Prime Minister said, still smiling. “I’m just happy I was able to stop by today. Cherie has been having a go at me to have you and that handsome young man of yours come over for dinner.”

“We’d be delighted.” Harry said, handing the man a cup of tea. The man took milk in his, and didn’t even notice that there were two milk containers on the tray, nor did he notice that Harry used a different milk container for each of their cups.

“So, how goes the hunt?” The Prime Minister asked after taking a sip of the tea.

“About the same as it has been.” Harry replied honestly. “Voldemort’s got himself a good stronghold in eight countries so far, and the few times we know where he is he is so protected that any assault would be far too costly in lives, or far to public to cover up effectively.”

“Pity that.” Tony Blaire replied with regret. “We can’t even use regular troops in those situations.”

“No.” Harry agreed, phrasing his comments very carefully. “It’d do no one any good to use non-wizarding forces in an assault against Voldemort.”

“Quite so.” The muggle said with a soft sigh. “Where’s your…husband now?”

“At a conference on the continent.” Harry answered. “He’ll be back tomorrow.”

“Excellent, then you’ll be able to come over for dinner on Friday?”

“Certainly.” Harry agreed with a smile. “By the way, Richard stopped by earlier today.”

“Miles?” The Prime Minister asked after a moment of thought. “Bright chap in Education?”

“Yes, absolutely wonderful man.” Harry said, planting that seed as well. It always helped to nudge along the careers of those that could be used. “We were talking about his meetings regarding education of the younger children. We came across a smashing idea about how to handle that matter and I hope that it gets heard.”

“I’m sure it will.” The Prime Minister said with a soft smile. “I think we’ll invite him to dinner as well.”

“That would be nice.” Harry said. “I don’t think I’ve spent any real time catching up with him since he stayed at Hogwarts.”

The rest of the hour was spent in idle chatter about various topics, none really touching on areas of importance. They had found that through his work as a barrister in the past, he had connections to the Malfoy family business (those that touched on the muggle world at least), and some of their associates. Harry had come to know some of these people over the last year so they were able to talk about them politely. He poured the man a second cup of tea, this time filling it with milk from the same container he used since he didn’t want the effects to last beyond the meeting, and it was a very carefully timed potion. At the end of the hour, he told the man farewell, and escorted him out of the office. Then he told Chris to cancel his scheduled time with the Aurors so he could head home and take care of some personal business.

He wanted to remind Pettigrew of what it meant to cross the Potter family.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N – Okay, probably the shortest chapter, and the most difficult I've had to write yet for this story, or the first story. For some reason I've written and re-written this thing eight times now. I'm ending it here and moving on to the next chapter.

Chapter 14 –

It felt weird to be back at Hogwarts. The day before Easter Break marked the second day Harry and Draco had spent at the school since the night they learned Voldemort had moved into power in Russia and Eastern Europe. Although most of their remaining studies were being taken care of with Aurors and through essays, there were a few practical classes they had to attend, and for the past two days business the Ministry had allowed them to go to school instead of their offices.

Professor Grubby-Plank was nothing like Hagrid when it came to Care of Magical Creatures, but her classes were still somewhat entertaining. Draco was off somewhere in with Professor Vector taking exams while Harry played with horn-tailed salamanders. Still, it was relaxing to be surrounded by his old school friends instead of Ministry officials. He was also amazed at how…childish everyone seemed.

"Harry, have you been studying for your N.E.W.T exams at all?" Hermione questioned him after the fourth time the Salamander bit him.

"Yes." Harry said crossly, sucking on the bleeding finger and glaring at her. "That's why we're here now though, because sometimes book knowledge just isn't the same as practical knowledge!"

"Fine." Hermione said rather persnickety. "You really should be making the Ministry let you spend more time here. Not even Pansy has been bitten by a salamander in the last two weeks."

"Watch it, Granger." Pansy said from the other side of Hermione, where she was tickling her own salamander. "Harry may not be here to see you sneaking off to cuddle with your baby every night instead of staying in your Head Girl's room, but some of us are."

"I take my books with me…" Hermione said defensively.

"But how often do you even pick them up?" Vincent (Crabbe) asked from the other side of Pansy. "Katie told me that you always drop the bag near the entrance and don't pick it up again until you leave back for Hogwarts."

"Neville's my son!" Hermione was very defensive now.

"Of course he is, Granger." Greg (Goyle) said as they all laughed. "No one in Hogwarts really cares that you leave, but when you tease Harry about the need to study…well we just have to tease you as well."

"Oh, all right." Hermione said in a very exasperated tone. Professor Grubby-Plank interrupted them then and told them to put the salamanders back into their cages before heading to their next class. While the Slytherins headed back inside, Harry walked with the remaining Gryffindor seventh-years towards the greenhouses and Herbology with Hufflepuffs.

"Wow, you're both actually walking with other Gryffindors!" Seamus said, his tone a little testy

as they walked in a group.

“It’s amazing isn’t it?” Parvati said in a sickly-sweet tone. “You spend years and years living with them in a dormitory and then they get into the upper years and you never see them anymore.”

“Well we see Hermione when she comes back to cuddle with Ginny.” Lavender reminded them.

“Okay, okay.” Harry said sharply. “Message received. Now, how’s Gryffindor House doing?”

“Just fine.” Seamus said. “I’ve got a room all to myself now. There’s not a single bloke in the dormitory that I started school with so I get my own room.”

“Um…” Harry said, unsure of where this was going.

“Girls room is now just the two of us.” Lavender said airily. “Of course it’s been that way for a while.”

“Is this somehow my fault?” Harry asked sharply.

“Not really complaining, Harry.” Seamus said a little more pointedly. “I mean, Neville died rescuing you, but you didn’t make him go. He volunteered and I would have gone too if I could have. Dean’s in Azkaban where he belongs. Ron’s disappeared off the face of the world, which is good riddance as far as I’m concerned. Still, mate, it’s like we’ve all lived together for years and it kind of hurts that you’ve abandoned us all now.”

“Seamus, sorry.” Harry said as they entered greenhouse number six. “I haven’t been thinking about much besides the war lately. Draco and I were going to have a party a couple of weeks after graduation. I’ll make sure you’re all invited.”

“What are you doing over Easter Break, Harry?” Parvati asked him while they waited for Professor Sprout.

“Work, mostly.” Harry said. “Draco’s throwing a party for his friends one day. I was going to throw one myself but I really just don’t have the time. I’ve got so many meetings with the muggle government and at the Prime Minister’s that I just don’t have the time to organize everything.”

“The Prime Minister?” Seamus squeaked, his eyes wide. “You bloody meet with the Prime Minister?”

“Yes.” Harry said, giving his old dorm mate a questioning look. “Draco and I had dinner with them the other week.”

“Bloody hell, Harry.” Seamus croaked just before Professor Sprout entered. “No wonder we hardly ever see you anymore. Hanging around the good old PM you are.”

“Okay, class.” Professor Sprout said, ending their conversation. “Let’s get ready to do some re-plotting of the Amazonian Strangling Vine!”

Harry managed to escape that class with only a minor bruise on his arm when he let the vine get to close to him. Still, it went a little better than he had expected. Lunch was…odd, to say the least. He sat at the Gryffindor table catching up on idle chatter with Seamus and his other year mates, occasionally listening to the excited banter of the lower years, and returning warm greetings to the kids he’d been teaching until earlier in the year. Still, it felt odd to be in a room

full of children and he really felt like he didn't belong. A glance at Draco showed a similar feeling on his husband's face and that caused both of them to grin slightly.

The afternoon was spent reviewing with various Professors and going over completed essays and a schedule for practicals during the weeks remaining before the N.E.W.T exams were given to the school. The Ministry had promised them every Friday off for school, and as many Thursdays as possible until the N.E.W.T exams, then they'd be done with Hogwarts until the Leaving Feast. After that, they'd be considered fully graduated, educated adults.

Not that they weren't functioning in that capacity already, but then they'd have the paper that made it all official.

After dinner, they made their way to Hogsmeade with Hermione. Little Neville had grown so much that they were shocked when Hermione picked him up from Katie's arms. The little boy giggled and played with Harry's scar when Hermione let him hold the boy. Draco just smiled as the boy kept tapping Harry's scar with a very inquisitive finger.

By ten p.m. they were back at Black Manor and asleep in bed, luxuriating at being able to sleep so early.

Saturday morning they spent in each other's company, making love wildly. Something about having been back to Hogwarts stimulated their desire for each other, and they were very happy that the house elves were seeing to all the preparations. By six that night, they were both worn out as their guests arrived in a large, excited, and talkative group.

"You so did not scare me with that stupid trick!" Seamus was bellowing at Pansy as they entered Black Manor, preceded by one of the house elves. "I was just pretending!"

"Say that now, Irish boy." Pansy smirked while holding Jeremy about the waist as they entered the living room where Harry and Draco had been sitting in armchairs before the fire. "But you still screamed like a little girl."

"Give it up, Seamus." Hermione said, switching Neville from one arm to the other while Katie brought in the bag of baby things behind her. Ginny was by her side. "They got you good."

"Score another one for the Slytherin team." Greg said with a broad smile on his large face. Vincent was smiling just as broadly as the pair lugged several overnight bags, presumably for all the girls. Morag was the quietest, her dark hair framing her smiling face beautifully. She'd completely recovered from her encounter with Voldemort over the Christmas holidays.

"Harry, you have to come back to school." Seamus said as he entered the room. "These Slytherins are winning the practical joke wars. Poor Fred and George's legacy is doomed!"

"I seem to remember a certain second-year Gryffindor with good prankster skills." Harry said warmly, also smiling.

"She's on THEIR side!" Seamus wailed, and everyone laughed. The house elves came in, taking all the bags upstairs to their respective rooms. Harry and Draco greeted their guests and soon everyone was sitting on couches and chairs around the fireplace while Kreacher and another of the elves took trays of drinks around the room.

"So, how was the train ride?" Draco asked to no one in particular.

"Boring." Hermione replied. She was bouncing Neville gently in her lap while the baby giggled.

“Poor little Neville didn’t like being in the compartment and insisted we walk through the whole train.”

“Oh please.” Jeremy groaned from where he sat between Pansy and Seamus. “The little guy was just fine. It was his mother that kept pacing up and down the train.”

“So what?” Hermione said in a waspish tone. “Maybe I’m a little nervous.”

“There’s nothing to be nervous about.” Pansy said firmly, and Harry suppressed a groan.

“So what is up with you two?” Vincent said with a smile of his own, changing the topic quickly.

“Nothing much, really.” Draco said shaking his head slightly. “Poor Harry’s been locked up in meetings except the last couple of days. I’ve been portkeying all over Europe for the last couple of weeks. I think we’ve seen more of each other since we went to study at Hogwarts this week than we have in the last month!”

“What do they have you traveling all over Europe for?” Seamus asked. Of all the people in the room, he knew the least about what they were doing. Harry still didn’t believe the floo call from Hermione that morning talking about him and how she thought they should include him in the Blood Oath. However, she’d said she’d dropped hints with him the night before and surprisingly he had expressed many of the same concerns that Harry and the others had stated. During the train ride, Greg, Vincent, and Morag had sat him down in a compartment while Hermione walked around with Neville and felt him out a little more, before explaining the Blood Oath in detail and what was expected of him. If he’d refused, they’d been ready to alter his memory. However, he had agreed after a long hour of thinking.

Or at least that’s what Harry assumed since that had been the original plan and Seamus was here, memory intact.

“Dealing with those bloody awful wizards calling themselves Aurors over there.” Draco replied, a dark scowl on his face. Harry grinned slightly. Seamus was about to get an earful.

“Doesn’t sound like you’re too happy about that.” Seamus said softly, his eyes slightly wide. He hadn’t spent much time with Draco yet.

“Good.” Draco spat scathingly. “I wouldn’t want you to get the wrong impression. The bloody French are bad enough. Over a century ago they decided that spells worked better in French than Latin and they were quite wrong but refuse to admit that. The Germans at least use Latin spells, but they think all that’s needed is enough blunt force. Worse than you Gryffindors. Then there’s the Aurors from the other countries. The Spanish are decent enough, but they haven’t looked beyond their own borders for so long that they seem to have forgotten how to work with other wizards. The Italians are decent when they don’t have their eyes focused on each other waiting for a knife in the back, and those from the eastern countries don’t have any real organization or training. I swear, after working with them for the last few months I’m convinced that Hogwarts really is the best wizarding school in all of Europe.”

“What about the Americans?” Ginny asked, her eyes bright with curiosity.

“Don’t get him started.” Harry warned, before Draco could launch into an even longer rant. “They’ve gone completely nuts. The seem convinced that magic is limited to these ‘laws of science’ of theirs and refuse to acknowledge that something magical does not have to conform to

their silly scientific laws."

"They insist Time Turners aren't really time turners." Draco said in a low growl.

"What do they think they are?" Hermione asked in surprise. She had a lot of experience with Time Turners.

"Trans-dimensional devices." Draco quoted with a look of disgust. "They insist that all a time turner does is transfer you to an 'alternate dimension' that you can change from your original dimension, but they insist the 'original' dimension remains unchanged."

"That's…weird." Hermione said after a few minutes. "Still, if you think about muggle science you can see where they get the idea. While Einstein might contradict the possibility of time travel, the Chaos theory will…"

"Enough, Hermione." Harry growled, feeling his eyes glaze over already. Half the people in the room had very vacant expressions on their faces, including little Neville. She looked at him in surprise for a moment, but blushed slightly after he smiled at her.

"Why won't she shut up when we tell her to?" Seamus groaned, then winced when Hermione slapped him on the knee.

"You're not Harry." Hermione said primly, glaring at the Irish wizard.

"Yeah, you're not Harry, Finnegan." Draco said smarmily, leaning over and giving Harry a kiss on the cheek. "You don't get to be kissed by me either. Harry's special."

"Special my arse." Vince groaned aloud, and everyone cracked up. Kreacher chose that moment to announce that dinner was ready, and Harry led the group into the formal dining room. The next hour passed noisily as everyone at the wonderful meal the elves had cooked. Roast beef so tender it melted in the mouth, potatoes, carrots, the works. Over dinner most of the conversations focused on the upcoming N.E.W.T. exams, and Hermione gave another long speech about studying that had everyone's eyes glazed. Fortunately, Kreacher arrived with desert at that moment, and everyone began to recover from Hermione's speech with help from the wonderful assortment of tarts, cakes, and puddings.

"Is the library ready?" Harry asked the house elf when everyone had finished their desserts. Kreacher nodded, and Draco stood to lead everyone upstairs. Hermione gasped when she entered, and seeing the Oath Stone for the first time she gave in to her curiosity and headed right towards it to peer at it closely.

"You can study it more later." Harry told her with a kind smile. She jerked a little, and grinned at him sheepishly. Neville was being cared for by the house elves while the others were taking the Oath. Ginny looked almost as nervous Katie did. Those who had already taken the Oath stood in an outer circle while those taking the Oath stood in a closer circle with Harry and Draco next to the Stone.

The actual ceremony itself took less time than it had before. When it was done, Harry and Draco had increased the number of their 'followers' by four, and everyone was smiling, even Hermione. The house elves entered the room at that time and quickly rearranged the furniture so that they were now all able to sit down. Little Neville had been brought upstairs and was

drinking from a bottle while Hermione rocked him softly in the cradle the elves had provided.

“So what now?” Seamus said, staring idly at his hand that had provided the blood for his part in the ceremony.

“Now, it’s time for us to plan for the defeat of Voldemort and the prevention of muggles from taking over the wizarding world.” Harry said solemnly, gathering their attention immediately.

“Bugger!” Seamus snorted. “Are things that bad?”

“Yes.” Draco replied seriously. “Voldemort is first though, and probably the most dangerous to us at the moment.”

“Why is that?” Jeremy asked. “He’s operating in Europe and he attended your wedding without even doing anything. Everyone I know has been speculating that he’s afraid of Harry and has given up on ever controlling England as long as Harry’s alive.”

“At the wedding, Voldemort and I agreed to a truce.” Harry said. Everyone gasped a little at that. None of them had been told anything about that. “It wasn’t with the Ministry of Magic, it was with Draco and me personally and Voldemort. The truce ends on June 1st, and he expects my answer on a more…permanent solution by that day.”

“What do you mean by ‘permanent’?” Hermione asked, her eyes narrowed suspiciously.

“Voldemort has offered to divide the wizarding world with Harry.” Draco answered.

“Divide the world?” Pansy asked with a curious look in her eyes.

“Yes, I get to control England and he gets everything else, something he’s likely to achieve unless I oppose him because of the Prophecy.” Harry said with a frown.

“But the Prophecy says ‘neither can live while the other does’ or something like that, doesn’t it?” Hermione’s voice was firm as she spoke.

“He doesn’t know that.” Harry answered her. “I only let him know the little bit that I wanted him to know. I also know that once he secures the west of the wizarding communities, he’ll come after us, agreement or no agreement. If we wait for that to happen, we will never stand a chance and he will kill me, all of us, really.”

“So what are we going to do?” Greg asked.

“That’s what we are supposed to figure out tonight, and in the weeks ahead.” Draco answered. “When June 1st comes around, Harry is going to send Voldemort his response, a resounding ‘No’. We’re pretty sure through the contacts we have that Voldemort will respond by attacking.”

“At Hogwarts, the Leaving Feast?” Hermione asked, her eyebrows furrowed in thought.

“Most likely.” Harry agreed. “The school stands as a bastion against him. We’ve locked him out almost totally from the student population. Everyone who is going to go over to him already has, and has either left the school or been found out and contained. Dumbledore, Hogwarts, and I have stood as a symbol of his weakness for years now, and any attempt to take over our wizarding community is going start with the destruction of the school.”

“Why doesn’t he just attack you here?” Jeremy asked. “I mean, you don’t have hundreds of students, faculty, and Aurors here. I figured you’d be an easier target.”

“There are so many spells and wards around this house and the whole area that the Ministry of Magic would know of any attack long before they go through the first ward.” Draco answered.

“Besides, it’s too visible to the muggle world.” Harry added. “Any attack that would succeed would bring the muggle government down on the wizarding community so fast that Voldemort’s efforts would be seriously hampered. An attack in remote Scotland, where muggles don’t even know a school exists, would affect the wizarding world directly, but not have a big enough impact on the muggles for them to take severe action.”

“Or so he thinks.” Draco finished. “He doesn’t know just how…involved the muggles are trying to become here in England so he doesn’t realize that any attack is going to set them off…unless he loses.”

“Doesn’t he know that you will be prepared for this?” Hermione asked.

“Of course he does.” Draco said sharply. “But he also knows that he has no other choice but to attack now. As soon as Harry is officially done with school, there will be no chance that Harry would not be involved in any operations in Europe. Everything he’s achieved there will be in jeopardy as soon as Harry takes an active part in the hunt for him. We also know he has agents in place at the different Ministries over there, and that they are filtering word to him of the preparations that are being made.”

“By late summer,” Harry continued, “the Ministries of France, Germany, Spain, Italy, and even America will begin to move against his holdings in Eastern Europe. Both Draco and I will be certified as qualified to take part in those operations. By the end of summer, the wizarding world will be at open war with him and his followers over there. The plans being drawn up include creating hunting teams with me along to find and kill him once his power base is destroyed.”

“Merlin.” Seamus gasped. “This is serious.”

“Yes, it is.” Draco said firmly. “His exploits in Russia and Eastern Europe have shocked the wizarding communities all over the world. They are moving to take action, and are being supported in that by their muggle governments. England is the best prepared to take him on, so if he can score an early victory here he might be able to fracture the alliance that is forming. Instead of fighting, he might be able to force the weaker governments to give in to some of his demands.”

“How many people does he have to attack with?” Vincent said, leaning forward with a gleam in his eyes.

“Several hundred wizards and witches.” Harry replied. “But he also has at least ten werewolf packs, three vampire clans, two tribes of giants, and there are reports that he has a few dragons as well. There are also some assorted dark creatures that he’s also gotten to ally with him.”

“That’s pretty much an army.” Hermione said, looking down at Neville with a worried expression.

“And we can’t really warn the Ministry beforehand without revealing too much about ourselves.” Draco admitted.

“We will however, tell them that I’ve had a vision he might be up to something.” Harry told them. “That should give us a few dozen Aurors and MLE on the Hogwarts grounds, plus the

students. Once the attack begins reinforcements should arrive within an hour."

"The disapparition barriers will prevent them from magical means of leaving." Draco reminded. "The reinforcements should prevent them from leaving the grounds. The trick is going to be getting to Voldemort himself and actually killing him."

"He's got so many protective spells about him that harming him is going to be difficult." Harry said. "I'm pretty sure that in a duel, I will have a slight advantage. The Sword of Gryffindor weakened him while I'm as strong as I've ever been. The real problem though is that once his body dies, it is his spirit we have to worry about."

"Will he try to possess you like he did in fifth year?" Hermione asked.

"Probably." Harry agreed. "But I know how to stop that from working. What the problem is that when he tried to kill me as a baby, the killing curse rebounded on him and destroyed his body. His spirit still lived and we saw the result of that."

"He has a protective spell that binds him to the earth." Draco told them. "When his body dies, his soul lives on. What we need to do is find some way to counteract that, or to trap his soul."

"I'll need to get into the restricted section of the library." Hermione said immediately, her eyes gleaming, and Harry smiled. This was one of the reasons he was glad she had agreed to the Blood Oath.

"We'll help as well." Vincent said, and Greg nodded. Hermione almost said something, but then smiled and nodded at them.

"There's also quite a few books here that I'll show you how to access." Harry told her.

"Let me guess, Dark Arts?" Hermione said with a frown.

"What else did you expect?" Draco asked her. "You don't have to use the Dark Arts to realize that knowing about them can save you when facing dark wizards."

"True." Hermione admitted, then smiled happily. "I've always wanted to read up on them some more. Looks like I finally get my chance."

"So, what happens once we face Voldemort and kill his body, then trap or destroy his soul?" Morag asked quietly from where she sat.

"Well, the various Ministries will have a lot of clean-up to do." Harry answered with a sigh. "That'll take a few months or even years."

"Then we have our muggle government to worry about." Draco added. "Voldemort, or the threat of him at least, has slowed down their efforts to take charge of the wizarding world. They're worried that any overt actions to reduce the authority of the Ministry of Magic would cause a backlash and increase in support for Voldemort."

"Why do they think that?" Ginny asked with a puzzled expression.

"Because that's what I've told them, basically." Harry said. "I've been able to get close to their leadership and am probably one of the people they trust most right now. They are planning to weaken our ability to govern ourselves and increase their control of us. According to them, we are all 'their' citizens and need to answer to 'them' instead of our kind."

"That's preposterous!" Millicent screeched, getting a dirty look from Hermione when Neville

started to cry. Hermione cooed over the baby and he quieted down. Millicent looked apologetic, and her soft “Sorry” calmed Hermione down as well.

“Regardless of what we think,” Draco said when Neville was again quiet, “that is what they believe.”

“So what do we do about this?” Chris, their secretary at the Ministry asked.

“We have to maneuver them carefully.” Harry said. “After Voldemort is defeated, we have to maneuver them so that they make a very public, and aggressive move against the Ministry and totally discredit them with the wizarding population. Then we can step in and broker an agreement that fits our purposes.”

“How do we do that?” Morag asked.

“That’s why we’re bringing it to all of you.” Harry told her. “Most of our ideas involve the risk of people dying, and we don’t want that. We want you guys to think this over and come up with some ideas. We can work with them and refine them.”

“We’ll work on that.” Vincent said with a nod of his head, then he got a thoughtful look on his face (still on odd sight for Harry to see). “Back to the Voldemort thing though. You have a truce with him and the Ministry doesn’t know about that. How are you going to keep them from sending you to Europe or keep from acting against him there?”

“It hasn’t been a problem for the most part.” Harry answered honestly. “Most of the planning we’ve been doing with the European groups has been defensive in nature only, not actively hunting him down.”

“But that is changing.” Chris said softly. As their secretary he knew a lot of what they were up to.

“True.” Draco admitted. “We’ve got meetings scheduled next week about some plans to make moves against those Ministries currently doing his bidding. That would violate the terms of the truce.”

“So what are we going to do about that?” Hermione asked with a frown on her face. “I don’t like the idea of actually letting him go, but we need the time this truce gives us to prepare for him.”

“Kreacher.” Harry called out, and the house elf appeared in front of Harry immediately.

“Yes, Master Harry?” Kreacher said with a low bow. “How may Kreacher serve?”

“Go up to the attic and bring our guest down here.” Harry ordered softly. “Make sure he is bound appropriately.”

“Yes, Master.” Kreacher replied, disappearing with another pop.

“Guest?” Hermione asked quietly.

“You’ll see soon enough.” Harry told her with a wan smile. Fortunately they had prepared for this event. Silence reigned until the door to the library opened and Kreacher led in the short, portly, and balding figure of Peter Pettigrew, hands bound before him.

“Pettigrew!” Hermione gasped, rising from her chair, little Neville in the crook of one arm and her wand pointed fiercely at the bound man with the other.

“Calm down, Hermione.” Harry told her with a smile. It seemed she was just as angry at the man as he was.

“Harry…how long have you had him here?” Hermione savagely bit out as she sat down and curled her arm more protectively around Neville. She still had her wand out.

“Since the wedding.” Harry answered her with a grim smile. “He was the price I demanded of Voldemort for the truce.”

“Who is he?” Morag asked, confused. Most of the people in the room did not know the full story.

“Peter Pettigrew was the secret keeper for the Potter family.” Hermione answered, her voice dripping with anger.

“It was in the news a couple of years ago when Harry inherited the Black Estates.” Pansy reminded the others. “Sirius Black was imprisoned for killing Pettigrew and thirteen others, but it turns out he wasn’t to blame.”

“Pettigrew betrayed my family, framed Sirius Black, then hid for nearly twelve years.” Harry summarized more quickly. “Then he returned to his master, Voldemort, and helped him get Barty Crouch to rig the Tri-Wizard Tournament so that I would be portkeyed at the end to where they were. It was Pettigrew who brewed the resurrection potion, using my blood and his hand to revive Voldemort. He owes me a life-debt, and he will pay that debt on Monday.”

“I’m surprised he can still walk if you’ve had him since the wedding.” Greg said with a snort. “If it had been me, he would be a bloody mess right now.”

“Take him back to the attic.” Harry ordered, and grinned when the house elf started kicking the man back out the door. Pettigrew just hung his head as he walked out.

“I’d have cursed him so bad he wouldn’t know which way was up.” Hermione growled when the man had left.

“He has a purpose to play.” Harry told them quietly. “Now, if there’s nothing else, how about we all get some sleep? It’s been a long day.”

Most of the people got up and left at that point, quietly telling each other goodnight. Ginny had pried Neville from Hermione’s grasp and was cooing at the boy as she passed and smiled at Harry. Soon enough, the room was empty except for Draco, Harry, and two others.

“We felt your mental tug to stay.” Greg said softly. “Did we get it right?”

“You did.” Draco said firmly. “We’ve got a little problem that you two are the perfect ones to take care of for us.”

“What is the problem?” Vincent asked.

“The French Ministry has caught two Death Eaters that know of our truce with Voldemort.”

“Not good.” Greg remarked.

“No, not good.” Harry agreed. “They haven’t managed to break them yet. They’ve been dosed against Veritaserum and most common interrogation methods, but that will soon break down. Voldemort can’t get them out, and neither Draco or I can do anything directly.”

“So you want us to go in there and kill them?” Greg asked.

“We can’t kill them. That would break the truce.” Vincent remarked, and Greg blushed.

“Very true.” Draco agreed. “They have to escape. We’ve gotten permission to send two Aurors down there Monday. You will intercept them before they portkey across the channel, stun them, and take their place using polyjuice potion. We’ve kept a stock of the stuff just in case something like this happens. You’ll have enough for three days. Make sure you take enough of their hair for those three days. On the second day you will meet alone with the prisoners. That is when you’ll tell them you’re there to help them escape. We’ll give you a portkey that takes them to Sarajevo. Then you get your asses back here.”

“You can’t be caught on this guys.” Harry told them. “Don’t give them wands, don’t help them do anything but get to Sarajevo. Once that’s done…their fate is in their own hands.”

“How are we supposed to stun two Aurors?” Vincent asked.

“Easy, you’ll use the polyjuice to look like us first, then use it again once you have stunned them.” Harry replied with a grin. “Meanwhile we’ll be with the Minister of Magic and he’ll be able to say we really were there since we’ll be talking about things no imposter could possibly know.”

“Which means they’ll suspect Death Eaters using polyjuice potion.” Draco added. “So long as they don’t catch you two, they’ll be nothing to suggest it wasn’t Death Eaters doing the job. Plus, Death Eater activity in the middle of the Ministry, along with what is going to happen with Pettigrew will freak the Ministry out so much that they will fear for our safety.”

“And since they’ll believe from everything that Draco and I are the main targets, and that their defenses are not so strong as they thought, they’ll likely pull back from offensive action and focus on strengthening defenses.” Harry concluded.

“Okay, we’ll do it.” Vincent agreed with a grin. “This sounds like fun.”

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N – Well, the plot thickens and it seems like things are becoming hectic for our couple now. We’ll just have to see how things go.

I’m sorry this took so long to get out, but I’ve been working through some plot issues and I wanted to hold onto this chapter in case I changed anything major. Well, I’ve worked my way though them, and figured that this chapter fits perfectly with how I want things to work. That and a rather nasty case of writer’s block kept me from making much progress here (although the other two stories did work me through that just fine).

Hope you enjoy!

Chapter 15 –

The weekend with his school friends passed all too quickly for Harry Malfoy- Potter. First of all, Hermione was all but locked in the library with Morag, Pansy, Blaise, and Jeremy. She was directing their research with an iron fist that Harry was all too familiar with from studying with her for so many years. The only difference now was that Neville’s play pen floated around the library where she could keep an eye on him as he happily played with the new toys Draco had bought.

Katie had gone to pick up her own son, Kenneth, from his grandparents on Sunday morning, and the two boys were now happy to have their favorite playmates back.

Harry got stuck going over reports from the Ministry and on Sunday afternoon had to make a trip to the Muggle Prime Minister's residence. Some stupid American witch had set off the alarm wards when she attempted to accio a particularly beautiful vase from the inside of the residence. She had been on a specially invited guided tour, but had somehow not been identified as a witch. That set of a long discussion about how to figure out if tourists were wizards or witches with the whole "secrecy" thing.

Then there was another incident on Sunday evening that was oddly reminiscent for Harry. A muggle-born wizard, who was one week away from turning eleven and receiving his Hogwarts Letter and a visit by the Ministry of Magic Muggle-Born Integration Unit, had visited the London Zoo and dissolved the bars on the cages of several hungry lions. The lions had immediately pounced into the crowd, severely injuring several people until the zoo keepers had sedated some of a couple of them. The magical alarms recently installed by the Ministry in the area had sounded inside the Ministry, and Harry who was visiting the Aurors to discuss security at the Prime Minister's residence before returning home, apparated to the zoo with the Auror team.

They had to stun four lions themselves, and it was only the healing spells of from the group of three wizards that prevented several of the severely mauled people from dying. The emergency team from the Magical Incidents squad arrived when things were secure and began to modify a few hundred memories. Fortunately, the Zoo had not been very crowded at that point. While they were talkingworking, Harry took aside the muggle-born wizard who was still white-faced, and began to explain to him what was happening. It was quite funny, he felt, to be in thea reversed situation toof when he had started Hogwarts all those years ago.

"So, can you tell me what happened to the bars on the lion's display?" Harry asked the brown-haired, wide-eyed boy. His parents were staring at Harry like he was an alien. He understood their wariness. Harry was wearing an expensive designer robe in charcoal grey with gold and silver embroidery, and his long wand was sticking out through a sash of black velvet.

"I was jus' lookin' at them and thinkin' I wouldna' be happy caged liked that and then...poof! The bars were gone!" The boy managed to stutter out.

"You know how they disappeared?" Harry asked the boy, and could see the stunned parents were starting to recover and getting ready to interfere.

"I dunno." The boy said.

"Well, what's your name?" Harry asked politely with a broad smile. Just then one of the sedated began to growl, and get got to its feet. Harry reacted quicker than the other wizards nearby and shot a stunner at it with his wand, making the muggle family jump.

“How’d you do that?” The boy asked with wide eyes as Harry returned his wand to his waist.

“Magic.” Harry answered with another smile. “The same way you made the bars disappear.”

“Magic does not exist!” The boy’s father said grumpily, grabbing his boy by the arm and pulling him away from Harry. Harry just smiled and drew his wand again, pointing it at the lion he’d just stunned.

“Wingardium Leviosa!” Harry said just loud enough for them to hear. He levitated the lion and put it back into the display without breaking a sweat, and the boy’s father started licking his dry lips at that point.

“Oh wow!” The boy shrieked with a smile as the lion floated away. “You mean I can do stuff like that too?”

“Yes, you can.” Harry replied with a smile. He looked at the boy’s parents who were both turning white. “My name is Harry Potter.”

“Thomas Jensen.” The Father replied, shaking Harry’s proffered hand. “My wife Monica Jensen, and our son Jimmy Jensen.”

“Pleased to meet you.” Harry said as the lead Auror came up to him and whispered in his ear that they were going to put the last of the lions back in the cage, conjure up some new bars, and then they’d be leaving. He motioned to Mr. Jensen towards the exit. “Why don’t I walk you out to your car?”

“Jimmy’s not in trouble is he?” Mrs. Jensen asked, speaking for the first time.

“Not at all!” Harry replied. “We know that underage wizards sometimes lose control of their magic and things happen. That’s why the Ministry of Magic has teams for this type of situation. No one died, everyone will be healed, and I bet pretty soon young Mr. Jimmy Jensen here will be receiving a letter from Hogwarts.”

“Hogwarts?” Mr. Jensen asked.

“Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry.” Harry supplied the full name. “It’s a school I’ve gone to for seven years now. We teach young wizards and witches like Jimmy here how to control their magic and keep things like today from happening. If they don’t learn the control...whereell things could get dangerous as I’m sure you’re very aware of by now.”

“But how?” Mrs. Jensen asked. “I mean...we aren’t...like that. No one we know can do...magic! I mean I thought it was make-believe until today!”

“The basic explanation is really quite simple.” Harry said with a grin. “Some people are born with the ability to do magic like some people are born with blond hair. Probably somewhere back

a few centuries, one of your ancestors married someone who had magic or who came from ancestors that were magical and the genetics just worked in your son so he could do magic. We keep ourselves hidden, but the regular government knows about us and we work together to keep situations like today from spiraling out of control."

"Why do you stay hidden?" Mrs. Jensen asked.

"Because many people would not like finding out magic existed and they couldn't control it." Harry answered very seriously as they exited the Zoo and entered the parking lot.

"So, like when we read about people who were burnt at the stake a few centuries ago for witchcraft, you mean some of them were real?" Mr. Jensen asked.

"Yes, sir." Harry said.

"I wouldn't want people to hate Jimmy just because he can do magic." Mrs. Jensen said, clutching her son close in worry. Jimmy just shrugged out of her grasp, blushing furiously.

"So you work for the government?" Mr. Jensen asked Harry.

"Right now I do, yes." Harry told him.

"Aren't you kind of young?" Mrs. Jensen asked, eying him closely.

"Not really." Harry prevaricated. "A lot of wizards start working for the Ministry young, right out of school. Older wizards get kind of tired of the work and go do something else."

"So, Jimmy might be able to enter this Hogwarts school?" Mrs. Jensen asked.

"How old are you Jimmy?" Harry asked him.

"Ten. I'll be eleven next week." Jimmy told him proudly.

"Then he should be getting his letter on his birthday." Harry told them with a smile. "The Ministry will send some experts to talk to you tomorrow though. Normally they come by after you get the letter, but after today they will have to explain a lot of things to you."

"This is so hard to take in!" Mrs. Jensen said nervously. "I must say though, you look like a nice young man so it can't be all that bad. It's not like you're riding a broomstick or brewing a potion in a black cauldron!"

"Not today at least." Harry said with a smile, and saw her wince. "I used to play Seeker on my House Quidditch team, but had to give that up pretty much the last few years. I haven't been on my broomstick in at least a few months. I was brewing a potion though, just the other day."

“You mean...you actually...” Mr. Jensen stuttered.

“Ride a broomstick?” Harry asked. “Yes. We use them in a wonderful sport called Quidditch and also for transportation sometimes. It’s really fun flying on the broom, not like flying in an aeroplane (b/n is this how they spell airplane in England?) at all. As for potions, just think of them like medicine or make-up, or any other thing that requires preparation by a chemist. They teach everyone in Hogwarts basic potions for healing minor injuries, antidotes to poisons, hair color changing potions and stuff like that. Sure, you can buy them in stores as well, but if your son wants to, when he’s done with Hogwarts, he’ll be able to make all those things for himself instead of having to buy them.”

“Amazing.” Jimmy said with wide eyes. “When does school start?”

“September the First, for you.” Harry answered with a wide smile, then pulled his wand out and summoned a book from the Black Library. The Jensens all jumped when it arrived with a pop.

“What’s that?” Jimmy asked, looking at it excitedly.

“Hogwarts: A History” Harry replied, handing it over to him. “It will give you an idea of what the school is like.”

“Thanks!” Jimmy cried out, opening the book and gasping. “The picture is MOVING!”

“Wizard pictures always move.” Harry told him, as the parents began looking at the moving pictures with gasps. By the time they reached the family’s car, the boy was totally enraptured by the book and constantly showing something to his mother. Mr. Jensen had a lot more questions for Harry, asking about costs for the school and where to buy supplies, and how to exchange money. Harry answered as best as he could before saying farewell . He said farewell as heand disapparating to ed and returned home.

When he apparated into Black Manor, he was struck by an odd thought. He remembered how Jimmy had looked at him in wide-eyed wonder before he left and realized that the boy was probably reacting to him much like Harry had reacted to Hagrid. He missed the affable half-giant, who had been living in France for the past two years with Madame Maxine at Beauxbatons. He made a promise to write to his old friend soon and catch up with him. He really did miss the huge man.

Monday rolled around and Harry woke up nervous. Draco was nervous as well, lashing out verbally at Harry and the house elves as they served breakfast. Vincent Crabbe and Greg Goyle were gone already, preparing their ambush of Aurors Dawley and Fromburg. Kreacher was upstairs feeding Pettigrew and getting him dressed for his part in the mission today.

Harry had promised him that if he completed the mission he would be set free, allowed going his own way. Of course he’d then wiped the man’s memories of the last few weeks and placed several fake memory charms that would hold up under interrogation. He’d become quite good at

them lately, much better than even Draco could have imagined.

Their first meeting of the day took place at nine a.m. sharp. They arrived at their offices shortly before eight, had a quick conversation with Chris before going over the accumulated correspondence on their desk. Harry chuckled at note from the Muggle-Born Integration Unit about a planned visit to the Jensen household later that day. They wanted to thank him for giving the family a basic introduction to magic (he had used a floo call after returning home to speak to their Department Head). Then it was time to head up to the Minster's office and listen to him tell them the bad news.

They would be going to Belgium next Monday to take part in preparations for raids on two eastern Ministry office complexes. They hoped to nab some of Voldemort's top agents in those raids, and the participation of Harry and Draco was not an option. In fact, it was all but demanded by their European allies in case Voldemort showed up. They reluctantly agreed, and the Minister walked with them to their next meeting, a meeting he was also attending. They had just reached the lifts when a very familiar sound happened behind them.

Harry and Draco both turned around, whipping their wands out and pointing them at the short, lumpy man that had appeared behind them. The Minister turned around a fraction of a second later, his own wand just beginning to be drawn and gasped in shock. Harry moved to stand in front of the Minister before speaking.

"What do you want, Pettigrew?" Harry demanded in a cold voice, and the man gulped visibly as he looked at Harry's wand pointing his way.

"I...I have a message for you Potter." Pettigrew said in a shaky voice.

"How did you get in here?" Millieu demanded from behind Harry. He wasn't a stupid man and did not move from behind the protection Harry was offering.

"My Master has his ways." Pettigrew snarled back, much braver in front of the Minister than in front of Harry.

"What is your message, Pettigrew?" Harry demanded sharply.

"My Master wants to warn you not to join the fools on their raids in the next week." Pettigrew said in a menacing tone. "He is ready for them, and he doesn't want to see you die yet."

"Since when has Voldemort cared for Harry's health?" Draco demanded in his own sharp tone.

"My Master wants the two of you to enjoy your married life for a while before he destroys you." Pettigrew sneered. "That will make it all the sweeter when you watch each other die in the end."

"Tell your master he can shove his warning up his arse!" Harry roared angrily. Pettigrew flinched, drawing out a small, silvery object that had to be a portkey. Harry reacted quickly,

casting a spell that hit Pettigrew just as he started to disappear.

The result was not pretty. Pettigrew had already started to disappear with the portkey when Harry's spell hit. The spell Harry used was intended to stop someone from Portkeying out of a location and was a very advanced Auror spell. However, the spell had not been cast absolutely correctly. If it had, it would have not have had the effect it did. As it was, half of Pettigrew had disappeared, while the other half remained, sagging to the floor in a bloody mess.

"Oh Merlin!" Harry groaned aloud. The sight before him was sickening, far more sickening that he had thought it might be.

"Oh, Harry." Draco groaned, grabbing him in a tight hug and moving him so he couldn't see the bloody remains, and so that the Minister could not see the expressions on either of their faces. Neither of them seemed to be able to do anything but smile at the demise of Peter Pettigrew.

"Don't let this get to you, Harry." Orrin Millieu said in a comforting tone as he examined the remains a little more closely.

"I...I...killed him." Harry gasped out, sinking his face into the shoulder of Draco's robes so the Minister would not see that there were no tears in his eyes.

"It was accidental." Millieu said firmly. "You used the wrong inflection on the second word of the spell. It's a mistake that happens even to experienced Aurors. Don't blame yourself."

"But...but..." Harry stuttered as the lift beside them opened and a team of Aurors streamed out, led by Shacklebolt Kingsley Shacklebolt.

"Harry, I was there!" Millieu thundered seriously. "You did what any good Auror would do and tried to stop a criminal from escaping. The fact that you miscast the spell in the heat of the moment lays no blame on you! What I'm more worried about is that he was able to use a portkey through the Ministry wards! Only someone who has been granted that access could have made the portkey and that means we have a traitor in our midst!"

"How many people have such access?" Draco asked.

"Twenty in the time since I took over as Minister." Millieu said. "But then again we didn't change the wards after Fudge left office. He could have let anyone have access to them."

"We should question him." Draco said firmly.

"We've been looking for him since he left office.' Shacklebolt said as the other Aurors began to clean up the mess that had been Peter Pettigrew. "He's disappeared just like that Weasley brat."

"We'll need to have teams reset the wards." Millieu said firmly. "We can't risk Death Eaters being able to portkey anywhere in this building."

“Potter should be on the team.” Shacklebolt said. “He set up some fairly damn good wards at the Prime Minister’s residence. None of us could dent them or even bypass them without using magic that every wizard in London would feel.”

“But we’re going to be in...” Harry protested, lifting his head off of Draco’s shoulder.

“That will have to cancelled.” Millieu said firmly. “If Voldemort knows about it, we have to figure out how he knew before we do anything. We’re not risking either of you when he’s ready for you.”

“Then I’d be happy to help if I can.” Harry said firmly. Draco was right, this was working perfectly. Since Harry would be setting the anti- apparition and anti-portkey wards, he’d have the ability to make portkeys that would bypass the wards whenever he wanted. No one expected the great Harry Potter to build his own trap doors into the wards that he made so he could access them anytime. Draco, yes, he might do such a thing, but Harry Potter?

“Set up a schedule for that to be done over the next week.” Millieu ordered Kingsley sharply. “I want the new wards in place by Sunday. Then Harry can transfer control of them to me and we can go from there on who needs portkey access. Once I have control of them, I’ll be the only one who can make portkeys except those that I give special permission. I plan to be a lot stricter on this than any other Minister has ever been!”

“Yes Minister.” Kingsley said firmly before looking at Harry. “I’ll talk to your secretary about setting up a schedule. We’ll have to do this at night after most people have left, but we should be able to get it done quickly.”

“Thank you, Shacklebolt.” Draco said, his arm still around Harry. “If you don’t mind, we’re going to go to our offices now. Harry needs a little bit of time.”

“Of course, I’ll get the information on what happened from the Minister if he doesn’t mind.” Shacklebolt said softly, a look of sympathy in his eyes. Harry just nodded and went with Draco into the lift and settled down in their offices with the door shut. Naturally word had already spread through the building and although Chris knew vaguely something was going to happen, even he hadn’t gotten the full story yet. Still, he nodded as Draco instructed him to take all incoming floo calls and leave them in privacy.

“Well, that was a little more messy than expected.” Draco said once they were sure of their privacy.

“Yeah, a little.” Harry admitted, ashamed of the sense of glee he’d felt at Pettigrew’s death and truly shaken by the gore. His feelings were on a see- saw, one moment he was happy and the next disgusted.

“Still, he felt nothing.” Draco said comfortingly, a soft smile on his face. “We also achieved our

goal of getting you into the remaking of the wards on the Ministry."

"Yeah, we did, didn't we?" Harry said softly, a smile lifting his face a little.

"I'm horny now." Draco murmured into his ear, then proceeded to nibble a little.

"Me too." Harry said with a low growl in the back of his throat, and surprisingly he was. Not even the spatters of blood on his robe reduced the desire he felt for Draco at that moment, and they proceeded to make love once more in Harry's office. (b/n *blinkblink* that was rather...sudden...that means death makes them horny?)

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

If there wasn't so much to gain from being one of the people casting the new wards on the Ministry of Magic, Harry would have been very pissed at the job. He spent most every evening for the next week as part of the team that cast the powerful wards, and he went home exhausted every night. Draco was upset with him because he had no energy for sex, or even a decent conversation, but his blond lover calmed down by Wednesday as he remembered just how draining ward generation could be for Harry.

Still, by the time the last night came around, Harry was awfully glad that the job would be over. He still had to make several portkeys while he still held the ward keys, and he'd have to do those tomorrow night before he turned the ward keys over to the Minister of Magic. Of the team of four wizards reinstalling the wards, it was Harry who handled the final part of each spell and held the actual ability to generate anything that would bypass the new wards.

The Minister of Magic trusted only him for this job.

This last night saw Harry in a part of the Ministry that he had not entered since his fifth year at Hogwarts. The Department of Mysteries had objected to his being alone here, and an escort waited for him outside each room, checking the room before and after he cast the spells. Still, he was left alone in each room for a time, and when they entered the large room where Sirius had died, Harry felt an old grief welling in him.

"I'll be back in twenty minutes." Mitchell Conklin, the Department of Mysteries wizard working with him said before leaving the room. Harry just nodded as he stared intently at the Veil Sirius had fallen through. As the door shut behind him, he moved into the center of the room and began casting the spells needed to take down the old wards and establish new ones.

"Harry." The voice was a whisper, barely audible, but it broke Harry's attention. He knew where it was coming from, and had been working to ignore the faint sounds that could be heard from the other side of the veil.

"Harry." The voice whispered again when Harry had finished the first spell of establishing the new wards. It was familiar, and a hitch formed in Harry's throat as he recognized the voice. He

walked towards the Veil slowly, but he refused to touch the curtains that hid the thing.

“Harry, hear me, Harry.” The voice whispered again.

“I hear you.” Harry replied flatly, keeping tears from falling down his eyes by strength of will alone. “Why are you trying to torment me?”

“Harry?” The voice sounded surprised, and seemed to be stronger. Harry felt like something was draining his magic, but the voice grew stronger for a moment. “Harry, it’s me Sirius.”

“I know that.” Harry replied. He also knew why he was being drained. If he talked for too long, he’d have no strength left, and it was only because he was so tired already that the spirit of Sirius was communicating, and draining him as it did so. “Are you enjoying feeling my powers flow into the Veil?”

“Not really.” Sirius’ voice was sharp with disapproval. “I just had to talk to you. I promise I won’t take long, not long enough to hurt you.”

“I...I’m sorry Sirius.” Harry whispered, giving voice to things he’d ignored, or thought resolved long before. “I didn’t use the mirror you gave me, I fell into the trap.”

“I’ll forgive you if you’ll forgive me.” Sirius said sharply, and Harry smiled as he imagined how Sirius’ face would look when saying that.

“Okay.” Harry agreed. It made him feel a little better.

“Harry, I’m worried about you.” Sirius continued, his voice holding a trace of that fear. “I can feel the changes in you, and I don’t like what I feel. There’s darkness in you now, darkness that wasn’t there before.”

“It’s necessary.” Harry said firmly. “Draco wouldn’t let me fall into the trap of Dark Magic. If I go overboard with it he’ll pull me back.”

“You put too much faith in a Malfoy.” Sirius said sharply, and Harry felt himself growing angry. “No matter how much is changed, the Malfoys will always be dark wizards.”

“One could say the same thing about the BLACKS.” Harry retorted angrily. “Your family was just as soaked in dark magic. You said so yourself. It was only because you refused to follow Voldemort that they kicked you out.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about!” Sirius’ reply was a shout now, and the drain on Harry increased.

“I know what I’m talking about alright!” Harry’s reply was just as angry. “You’re just jealous because I’m happy with Draco now and because it was ME that got Wormtail, not you. Well, get

over it godfather! As for Dark Magic, you know this Veil was created by a dark wizard, and you know that its effects are classified as DARK, but you're on the other side there, draining me right now. You're not afraid of Dark Magic, are you?"

"I'm DEAD!" Sirius' voice roared. "But if you're not careful you're going to become another Voldemort."

"That's where you are wrong." Harry retorted. "I will never become another Voldemort."

Harry decided he had had enough. A flick and swish of his wand, and a whispered word cut the tie that Sirius had established through the Veil. The voices receded and Harry had to kneel down for a moment to recover. Another spell prevented any further communication for the time it would take him to finish, and he pushed any thoughts of his godfather out of the way as he finished establishing and keying the new wards.

With the final section done, Harry returned home and collapsed immediately onto his bed, more unconscious than asleep. He slept so long that he was late for work the next day, and surprised that Draco hadn't even tried to wake him. It took him longer than normal to get ready, so by the time he got into work it was nearly ten in the morning. Harry walked into his office, ignored the pile of messages that Chris had left and shut his door. He sat there for a while, staring at the fire that was always lit in his office until he heard Draco enter from the door that joined their offices.

"Bad night?" Draco asked, a slight smile tugging at his lips.

"Sirius contacted me through the veil." Harry said softly.

"Oh." Draco said, moving over and rubbing Harry's clenched shoulders with his hands. Harry felt the relaxation of his lover's touch flowing into him, and the tension of that voice from beyond the veil flowing out.

"He...he said I was becoming another Voldemort." Harry whispered into the silence that followed Draco's one word statement.

"And of course you believe him because it was the spirit of Sirius Black." Draco's statement was calm, but held something inside of it that set Harry on edge.

"I didn't say that." Harry snapped back, his temper rising.

"No, but you're thinking that." Draco said, and Harry's temper flared. He stood and faced his blond husband.

"Oh you can read my mind now?" Harry spat at the blond, who was just staring at him with a raised eyebrow. Silence followed that statement, and something in Draco's gaze calmed him down. "Sorry."

“As long as all it takes to calm your temper down is me staring at you, I’m not worried about you turning into a Voldemort.” Draco said after Harry’s apology. He stood up and wrapped his arm around Draco carefully. “Voldemort, nor my father when he was at his darkest could ever be calmed down by words or a look. You’re better than them, Harry, and you will never fall into the trap of dark magic like they did. You don’t use it often, and there are always good reasons when you do.”

“Pett...Pettigrew.” Harry stuttered, remembering with horror how much he’d tortured the man.

“Deserved every second of what he got.” Draco murmured into his ear, and those words released the last of Harry’s tension. “Unless you haven’t told me about it, you’ve never been seriously tempted to torture someone who follows us, or an innocent with that curse. Voldemort uses it on his own followers. Sirius Black was overreacting, just like so many other people who are scared of any magic they don’t understand.”

“I know.” Harry sighed, leaning into the embrace, and allowing Draco to guide him back into his chair. “It’s just...I idolized him for so long. He was like the father I never had growing up, and I guess I’ve never really gotten over losing him.”

“You’re too much Gryffindor for me, sometimes, Gryffindor.” Draco chuckled lightly. “Still, I understand. If it had been my father, it would have freaked me out.”

“So, what do you have on the schedule for today?” Harry asked, changing the topic.

“Oh, a meeting with a team from the American Aurors.” Draco sighed. “Another day of listening to them say that ‘magic doesn’t work that way.’ I’ve gotten permission this time from Minister Millieu to show them the felicus curse.”

”That should be fun.” Harry chuckled at the thought of the befuddled expressions on the Americans’ faces when Draco used that particular curse. “You’re lucky. I’ve got some of our work to take care of this morning and then I turn over the wards to the Minister later this afternoon. Then I have a meeting at the muggle Education Ministry.”

“Is that to go over the grammar school issue?” Draco asked, his interest perking up.

“Yeah.” Harry sighed in relief as Draco’s hands moved to his temples. “We have to go over funding issues for establishing the schools in the more populace communities.”

“So what did they ever decide on being a good approach?” Draco asked.

“Six schools spread through Great Britain.” Harry answered, thinking over the debates and conversations. He’d actually been little more than the go- between for the magical and muggle officials as well as the fund raiser on the magical side. He’d gotten fourteen of the richest families to contribute funds for the project. They might, in twenty years see their funds recouped, but even that was doubtful. At least it would allow most wizarding children to not be forced into

muggle schools.

“How is it going to work?” Draco asked in interest. After all, unless the tide shifted in the next six or seven years, their own children would be affected by these decision.

“Four hour school days.” Harry explained with a smile. “They’ll run from half past noon to four thirty. Four fifty minute sessions with a ten minute break in between. All students will have to pass a basic test their last year and they’ll be set up to correspond with Hogwarts’ schedule. They’ll include some muggle history, but no where near as in-depth as they teach in muggle schools, and the last year will include a course in government, focusing on the Ministry of Magic and how it interacts with the muggle government. It’s been decided to connect the school sites to the floo network so kids can floo in and out each day.”

“That’s going to be a mess.” Draco murmured and Harry chuckled.

“Their talking about setting up four grates at each school to speed up the process.” Harry said. “Each family gets assigned a grate and times to use the floo network.”

“You know how wizard families are about keeping time.” Draco reminded him and Harry laughed.

“You know that, I know that, but muggles can’t just grasp the wizard lack of concept regarding time.” Harry said with a smile. “I even told them about all those times with the Weasleys and how rarely we were ever on time. Mr. Bargraves from the muggle government just said ‘That’s one of the reasons we need these schools!’ It was quite funny.”

“Draco?” Chris’ voice interrupted them. Harry looked at their secretary and smiled. Chris smiled back, and Harry could see the relief in his eyes at Harry’s better mood.

“Don’t tell me.” Draco moaned to Chris. “The Americans have arrived.”

“Yes,” Chris chuckled. “Auror Mitchells said they’re making a mess already and you better get down there and get them back under control.”

“I’ll be right down.” Draco told him. Harry spun around in his chair and grabbed Draco’s hand, bringing his love to a halt. He raised that hand to his lips and kissed it gently.

“Thanks, love.” Harry said softly, his voice husky.

“No problem.” Draco said with a smile, bending down and kissing Harry gently. After that rocky beginning, Harry’s day passed quickly. He was drained from the wards already, and creating thirty odd portkeys while he still held the wards only drained him further. He had finished the last one before going to lunch. Draco was taking the Americans to a pub in London, so he ate with Arthur Weasley.

As he listened to the man talk about a recent case of a wizard causing havoc with muggles, Harry regarded the man who had been the first regular adult wizard he'd ever known. Arthur was slightly more bald, and his trademark red hair a little more pale, but he was as jovial as ever. His recent financial gains, in part thanks to Harry, had done his wardrobe a world of good as well, and he now looked much more the image of a important person in the Ministry. He still refused to be transferred out of his department, although with recent events it was being regarded as much more important as it once had.

"So anyway," Mr. Weasley was continuing, his mouth still partially full of food (a trait that made Harry wistful for his one-time friend Ron), "we found that old Swaggart had stayed at this muggle hotel a few weeks before. They had these key card thingies and he never could figure out how to use it, so he transfigured it into a key lock. Then he got the idea the things were nuisance so he was going around to all the hotels and changing their locks. Poor guy, we had to fine him over 300 galleons for that. I just hope he doesn't do it again."

"I'd hope not." Harry said with a smile. The whole conversation reminded him that despite the world-changing things he was working on, other things continued on as they always had, and wasn't that what he was fighting for?

"Oh, Molly was just wondering the other day when you might be coming for a visit?" Arthur asked after taking a few more bites of his sandwich.

"I'm so sorry, Arthur." Harry said with a sad smile. "Everything's been so hectic that I haven't had much time, and what I do have I've been trying to spend with Draco. You'd think living together, and even having connecting offices we'd see more of each other, but we have so many meetings and so much work from school that we saw more of each other while we were still at Hogwarts. At least we sometimes had classes together there!"

"I can imagine." Arthur Weasley said with a smile. "You know, Molly worked for a while when we first married, before we had Bill, and we hardly ever saw each other. After we started having children, we actually started to see more of each other."

"I can imagine." Harry said with a laugh of his own. "I still remember that first time I came over to the Burrow, after Ron, Fred, and George rescued me in that Ford Anglia. You'd been out all night on a raid, but you were back at breakfast time!"

"Oh my!" Arthur started laughing, turning a pale red as he did so. "I had almost forgotten about that! Reminds me though, you owe me 70 galleons for the fine I had to pay!"

"I knew I should have kept my mouth shut." Harry said with a mock-grimaced.

"You know, I never could figure out how you and Ronnie got into so much trouble all the time." Arthur said with a very sad smile. "Keep you two apart, and neither of you got into much trouble, but put you together, you're stealing flying cars, breaking wands, breaking every school rule in the book, and then some!"

“I think it was me.” Harry said. “For some reason I haven’t stopped doing any of those things.”

“No, no, it was always worse when you two got together.” Arthur said, this time his smile a little less sad. “For some reason I’d always hoped the two of you would hit it off the way you did with young Draco.”

“I don’t think that would have worked out too well.” Harry was chuckling now. “Ron was always squeamish about stuff like that.”

“Ah, yes, that he was.” Arthur was actually chuckling now, no hint of sadness about his face. “When the twins first started experimenting with each other he thought it was the ghoul making noises. It was so funny to see him come down complaining about the ghoul’s new way of moaning out Fred and George’s name, and then watching them blush. Thankfully Molly’s a little dense about stuff like that as well.”

“That was NOT an image I needed in my head, Arthur.” Harry gasped as he laughed long and hard. “I’m going to have to stop by their store today and make some comments.

“They’ll enjoy that.” Arthur said, still smiling. “They haven’t seen you since the wedding. I should warn you though, they were so upset that they didn’t get any jokes in, and that the gnomes refused to go near the Malfoy Manor that they’ve been plotting their revenge ever since then.”

“Uh, maybe I’ll send Draco in first.” Harry said cautiously, and they both burst out laughing. Then something occurred to Harry and he knew he had to ask.

“Has there been any word on Ron?” Harry asked more soberly, both hoping for a positive answer, and a negative.

“Nothing.” Arthur said sadly, his good cheer evaporating at Harry’s question. “Both Molly and I are hoping to hear something, and praying we don’t. I know he hurt you, but he also hurt as bad. Coming on top of Percy I’m surprised Molly has let Ginny out of her sight. At least she’s done better than her brother and stayed close to you. Molly was absolutely happy she agreed to be the mother for your children.”

“Ginny’s a wonderful young lady.” Harry said with a smile. “I’m glad she’s part of my family.”

“We all are.” Arthur said.

“You know, it’s going to be busy the next couple of months with N.E.W.T.s and the meetings I’ve got coming up, but maybe during the summer I might be able to pop in for a visit.” Harry said, and Arthur’s face lit up, and then it darkened slightly.

“Uh, I, uh, that might be good, but then again it might not.” Mr. Weasley said in a slightly

flustered voice. “You see, well, we’ve heard from Percy.”

“Percy?” Harry said, choking slightly on the pumpkin juice he’d just swallowed. He set the goblet down carefully.

“Yes, well, um, you see,” Arthur was stumbling now. “Molly went to see him in Azkaban the other week. Well, actually she was visiting Charlie but she got this idea in her head to check on Percy. The guards, well, since she’s Charlie’s mum, they let her see him. She said he didn’t look good, but that he started crying as soon as he saw her and hugged her and wouldn’t let her go. He thought he was dreaming, she said. He apologized to her and begged her to take him back, and she told him she would. He’s going to be staying with us when he gets out in June and we’ll be helping him get back on his feet.”

“Then I’d be even happier to stop by.” Harry said, smiling even more. “If Percy is truly sorry, and he’s served his time, I don’t have any problems with seeing him again. I think it’d probably do him some good to see that people can accept him back if he’s truly sorry for what he’s done. I mean, look at my husband, and who his parents are. If they can be accepted back into society, Percy most definitely can be as well.”

“You’d do that?” Arthur said excitedly. “You know Harry, you’ve changed a lot in the last few years, but it’s good to see that you’re still the same person I first met in my kitchen that morning, what was it? Five years ago?”

“About that, yes.” Harry said with another smile.

After lunch, he met with the Minister and changed over the wards, secure in his knowledge that he’d still have access through the portkeys he’d made. Part of him was inwardly pleased in that he’d managed to pull something off that Voldemort had never dreamed of accomplishing. Another part wondered if he was going too far. Nevertheless, they’d be tools he hoped never to use, but would be beyond value if he ever needed them.

By the end of the day, he was glad to get home and see Draco, and Draco was glad to see him as well.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Chapter 16 –

June 1st dawned grey and clammy in the seventh year of Harry Potter’s education. It was very different than the day two years ago that had marked the beginning of his O.W.L. exams, and Harry had to admit that his life was very different as well. First, he didn’t wake up in Hogwarts, alone. Instead he woke up in his London home with his husband Draco Malfoy by his side.

Together they got ready for the day, and carried their traveling bags out to the waiting Ministry car. The car took them right to Kings Cross Station, and there they boarded the Hogwarts Express and made what would be their final journey to Hogwarts, at least as students. Unlike the September 1st train, this one only had two carriages.

In the first carriage Harry and Draco were joined by the retired Professors who made up the Wizarding Examination Authority. The second carriage was made up mostly of people who lived in Hogsmeade and had traveled to London for whatever reason. Harry was almost nervous about sitting with Professor Tofty, Marchbanks, and the others, but their immediate good cheer put him at ease immediately.

Truth be told, he was trying to forget what would happen when Voldemort read his message in the Daily Prophet this morning. He knew that the word 'No' was not what the man had been expecting, or hoping for, and Harry hoped the rage that resulted would not result in a hasty attack against innocent people. He didn't want to feel the guilt for that, and he especially didn't want to be distracted by such things when he was about to take his final N.E.W.T. exams.

When the train finally arrived at Hogwarts in the late afternoon, he helped the tiny Professor Marchbanks towards the waiting thestral-driven carriages. He recognized one of the thestrals that was tied to the carriage and left the elderly professor's side for a moment to greet the creature. It seemed to remember him as well and let out a loud snort of pleasure as Harry ran his hand alongside its neck.

"How are you doing, Tenebrus?" Harry asked it, and it whuffed Harry's hair gently. Harry patted its neck again and returned to the carriage to help Professor Marchbanks up. Professor Tofty followed, and Harry was surprised to see Draco was helping the other Professors into another carriage.

"Come on up, boy." Professor Marchbanks said in a cheerful tone, loud as she ever was.

"Yes, ma'am." Harry said with a smile, climbing into the carriage. It started moving as soon as he was seated.

"So, you know the Hogwarts thestrals, eh?" Professor Tofty asked with that weird smile of his.

"Ah, yes." Harry said, surprised at the memory of riding them didn't sting as much as it had before. "I could see them in my fifth year and Hagrid taught a class on them. Then, later in the year, some friends and I had to get somewhere fast, so we rode a few of them."

"You've ridden a thestral?" Professor Marchbanks exclaimed in rather loud surprise.

"Er…yes." Harry replied, shaking his ear out with a finger.

"Oh, well then you'll definitely have no problem with your exams." She said, then made a little shrug as if to say "oops." Professor Tofty just grinned at him.

For the rest of their trip, they talked about other things, and it was Professor Tofty who mentioned that there was a new examiner this year, and that he'd already arrived at Hogwarts a day early. That surprised Harry since they only added new examiners when another became too old to continue testing, and they always picked a former Hogwarts Professor. Harry was wondering idly who it was, but got no hints from the two examiners riding with him. He didn't have long to wait, though, as the carriages pulled up to the Hogwarts entrance and he helped the elderly professor climb out.

"Cor, 'Arry, you're lookin' all grown up!" Hagrid's familiar voice boomed out from the entrance. Harry turned rapidly and smiled broadly at the sight of the man who had rescued him all those years ago and introduced him to the wizarding world.

“Hagrid!” Harry shouted happily, running across the distance between them and wrapping his arms around the half-giant. Harry realized that Hagrid’s usual coarse clothing had been replaced with finer clothes, but the man’s arms wrapped around him in the same powerful hug Harry remembered and he just let himself feel the joy of being around the man again. He’d missed Hagrid’s presence ever since he moved to France, but he hadn’t realized just how much until now.

“You’re lookin’ good there, ‘Arry.” Hagrid rumbled as he ended the hug by placing his hands on Harry’s shoulder and moving Harry back so Hagrid could look at his robes.

“You’re not doing too bad for yourself either.” Harry said, checking his old friend out and seeing that he was dressed far better than he used to, and that his hair and beard were almost neatly groomed.”

“Olympe insists the ‘usband of Beauxbatons’s Headmistress look presentable.” Hagrid shrugged, blushing slightly.

“Married life agrees with you.” Harry said with a fond smile. Professor McGonagall was welcoming the other examiners, and Draco was moving towards them. He had a hesitant smile on his blond face.

“It agrees with you too.” Hagrid boomed as Draco neared them. “Malfoy.”

“Professor Hagrid.” Draco said with that hesitant smile on his face. “I take it you’re the mysterious new examiner they’ve been hinting at?”

“Ah am.” Hagrid answered sheepishly, ducking his head. “Olympe wouldna let me say no.”

“Good.” Draco said, his smile growing. “Your presence should spark quite a bit of concern in the students and distract them from scoring as high as Harry.”

“Draco, stop teasing.” Harry said lightly. Hagrid started laughing. They entered the premises as a group, though. Hagrid said farewell for now, and followed McGonagall and the other examiners into the staffroom while Harry and Draco headed to their old apartments. To their non-surprise, Pansy and Jeremy were there waiting for them with piles of paperwork ranging from their examination schedules to their social calendar for later in the month.

Luckily, Hermione came in after thirty minutes, arms laden with books and dragged them away to start their studying for their exams. Pansy tried to argue, but a glare from Hermione and short reminder that Pansy’s own exams were coming up sent the Slytherin girl running to the library, followed closely by Jeremy.

“Good.” Hermione said when the portrait had closed behind the two. “Now, the two of you didn’t do too well on your essays for herbology so let’s start there.”

It wasn’t until dinner time that she let them escape to the great hall. Harry found that he enjoyed the dinner, eating with students, and hearing their excited chatter about the last match of the year, Gryffindor versus Ravenclaw. He soon learned that Gryffindor pulled the Quidditch Cup out of their opponent’s hands by a mere ten points, the skinniest margin in ages, and that as long as disaster didn’t strike in the next few weeks, Gryffindor House would claim the House Cup as well for the seventh year in a row.

Switching from discussing world-shaking topics like new education systems and the war against

Voldemort, to topics like the House Cup and Quidditch, relaxed Harry tremendously. He found himself looking forward to the next three weeks. The Ministry had only wanted him to leave for the bare minimum time to take his remaining exams. Harry however, wanted to enjoy the last few weeks of school. He knew it was his last chance to be a student, and he also knew that Voldemort was likely to attack the school, and he had to be here for that.

Of course he couldn't just blurt that out to the Minister, so instead he'd gotten Arthur Weasley to throw a fit that Harry's last moments of childhood were being stolen.

It was after dinner when a 'study group' formed in their private apartments. Hermione was there of course, as were Jeremy, Pansy, Vincent, and Greg. They were the group that had been working on exactly how Voldemort could be killed, and they had said they had something ready. Dobby, excited to see them back at Hogwarts, had provided a virtual feast of biscuits and other treats along with tea before disappearing. The single painting in the room was spelled so that anything they said would not be heard, and the relaxation of being around his fellow students faded from Harry as they began to discuss business.

"The biggest thing we had to get around was the misperception that you, Harry, were the only wizard to survive the killing curse." Hermione began once things were secure. "You see, when the curse backfired after Voldemort cast it on you, he disappeared. Most people assumed he'd died, but as we found out years later, he did survive."

"Although not as well as you did, obviously." Jeremy broke in, his eyes shining much like Hermione's were. "He was seriously weakened and deformed, but the spells and potions he'd used to make him as immortal as possible protected him. We talked with Professor Snape since he knew a great deal about those things, and he was quite helpful."

"What we learned is that even if you use the killing curse on him, he'll likely survive." Hermione continued. "Most of the other spells that can kill someone will likely also have a similar result."

"That's when we thought of transfiguration." Vincent Crabbe said smoothly. "But the truth is that he's so powerful any transfiguration you can work he would likely reverse instantly."

"What it boiled down to is that the spells he used ties his soul to the physical world, but differently than how ghosts remain behind after death." Greg Goyle added. "His physical form, on death, shrinks into that thing you saw during fourth year, but he's able to survive and even grow stronger again with certain potions. Then he performs the resurrection potion and is as strong as ever again. You can defeat him this time, but now that his followers know how to get him back, he won't be gone for a decade, but will be right back in action within weeks."

"So, what have you figured out?" Draco demanded. He hated summaries of stuff he already knew and dealing with Americans who seemed to do nothing but summarize had made him very short tempered in that area.

"We haven't figured out a way to break the tie between his soul and the physical anchor into this world." Hermione admitted.

"But your message said you'd figured out how to beat him once and for all!" Draco nearly shouted, his face going slightly red with anger. Everyone but Harry flinched, and Harry put his hand on Draco's arm to calm him down. Draco took a deep breath and relaxed slightly, motioning for Hermione to continue. She took a deep breath before doing so.

“We haven’t figured out how to break the link holding his spirit to a physical anchor, yet.” She said slowly. “That doesn’t mean we won’t, and that doesn’t mean we haven’t found a way to change his physical anchor from his body to something else.”

“What do you mean, something else?” Harry asked.

“This.” Hermione said softly, holding up a small necklace in her hand. It was a silver chain, with a small crystal sphere. She handed it to Harry, who took it in his hands. He could feel magic in it, and it felt very strong.

“How does this work?” Harry asked softly.

“Simple, really.” Vincent said slowly. “When you kill Voldemort, you wait about thirty seconds, and then cast the switching spell Hermione’s devised. It’s a derivation of two other spells, and as closely as we can tell it should work. We’ve tested it out at Malfoy Manor since you guys have been so busy. Mr. Malfoy was quite glad to help.”

“Why did you have to go somewhere to test the spell?” Harry asked.

“Because it’s dark magic.” Hermione said in a very low voice. “I had to test it myself because I was the only one who could get away without raising suspicion. Mr. Malfoy helped me with a portkey from Hogsmeade, so I’d go see Neville and then take off to the Manor. He also helped me because I’d never done dark magic before.”

“I bet father was…intrigued.” Draco said with a slight smile.

“Well, he’s gotten over the whole ‘mudblood in my home’ thing since the wedding.” Hermione said with a wicked grin. “Still, I think ‘helping a mudblood perform dark magic’ had him quite discombobulated.”

“Okay, teach me the spell.” Harry said. “I’ll practice it this weekend at home since we’re supposed to go back to London for a dinner on Sunday.”

“Where you going for dinner?” Jeremy asked with a puzzled look. “It’s not on your social calendar. You just told me to block off the weekend.”

“Prime Minister’s.” Harry replied. “Ministry business.”

“Oh, yes, Ministry business.” Vincent said with his nose upturned. “We must leave you lowly little students for our evening meal with the Prime Minister.”

“Shut up, Vin.” Draco growled as everyone chuckled. As Harry put the charmed necklace around his neck and fixed the clasp, he felt as if he was putting the fate of the world squarely onto his shoulders.

“So, once the spirit of Voldemort is contained inside, we just have to find the way to sever the link permanently.” Hermione said, continuing on with business. “Until then, as long as he’s held in the crystal he will be powerless, unable to communicate or interact with anyone in any way. I’m sure you won’t want to leave the thing lying around anywhere, but once the spell is performed you can have Draco or anyone else you trust wear it. The only danger of course will be if someone gets a hold of it and destroys it.”

“Then his soul would be released.” Draco said, and smiled at her confirming nod.

“Okay, so let’s talk about the N.E.W.T.s” Harry said with a smile. “None of you appear ‘nearly

exhausted' so obviously we haven't been studying hard enough."

"Shut up." Pansy groaned aloud as Jeremy and Hermione began pulling books out.

~

"So, wonder boy, how do you think you did?" Draco purred as Harry sat next to him on the couch in their Hogwarts sitting room. Harry leaned into the open arms of his husband and let out a big sigh.

"I think I got an 'A' on everything except Care of Magical Creatures." Harry sighed. Sure, two years ago he'd have been happy with so many "A" grades, but not now, when everyone would be examining his scores so in-depth. "I'm pretty sure I got an 'O' in Care though. I mean, the practical was all about thestrals. No wonder they were laughing when we got into the carriages the other week."

"Well, that's not too bad considering everything we have going on." Draco reminded him.

"Oh yeah?" Harry retorted with a chuckle. "Tell me how you think you did."

"I got 'O' in everything of course." Draco said with a wry grin, tightening his grip on Harry. "But then I spent more time on my schoolwork than you did. Plus, I Ancient Runes, Arithmancy, and the other courses, are all things I've taken since third year and rely mostly on theory you learn between third and fifth year."

"Shove it, pig." Harry growled, grinding an elbow into Draco's ribs for a moment. They both chuckled.

"I'm exhausted." Draco sighed after a few minutes of comfortable silence.

"So am I.' Harry agreed. "Still, I promised I'd go by the Gryffindor party tonight, and you promised to go to the Slytherin party.

"Don't remind me." Draco groaned.

They sat there for another fifteen minutes or so before getting up and heading to their respective common rooms. Harry enjoyed the party in the Gryffindor common room. It was bittersweet as he realized that this really would be the last time he ever entered that room as a student, and member of Gryffindor House. He noticed the same looks in Hermione's face, and several of the other seventh year Gryffindors as well. As the party wound down, they sat around each other, just staring into each others faces for longer and longer periods of time.

Finally, Harry got up and gave each of them a sincere hug before leaving. Lavender and Parvati were both crying openly as Harry left with Hermione at his side. Of them all, those two were the ones with the least contact with the others. Both of them had plans for after school that took them in different directions. Seamus, surprisingly, had been accepted for Auror training. Harry almost felt wistful that Seamus was going where Harry had once wanted to go, but he knew that path was no longer open to him.

As he walked Hermione back to her Head Girl's room, they discussed the weekend. There was a meeting she had arranged for him in the morning, followed by a trip to the flat to visit Neville and Katie's little boy. Harry was actually looking forward to an afternoon with both boys, full of nothing but playtime and fun. Then they'd be going back to Hogwarts for another planning

session. Graduation was next week, and Harry and Draco would be staying until the last day.

Word was that Voldemort was gathering forces together and everybody was on edge. The Ministry had scheduled meetings in Paris the day after graduation to discuss likely moves that Voldemort was going to make. There had been several near-frantic floo calls from London, worried that the opening move of the battle was about to happen.

Harry had told Minister Millieu that he was quite certain the first moves would be weeks away.

It wasn't an outright lie. He didn't know exactly when Voldemort was going to move, he just suspected. Still, he was almost absolutely certain that the move would take place on the final day of the term. The 'big finale' hadn't happened for Harry's interrupted school year yet, and it was a tradition that hadn't failed during his attendance at Hogwarts. Something always happened that ended his school year with a bang.

He slept nervously that night, tossing and turning several times. It was a good thing Draco was such a sound sleeper or he wouldn't have slept much either. Harry worried over the pendant he was wearing. Would it work? Would Voldemort wait until the last day of the term to attack as Harry expected or would he do it sooner? Would he change his mind and attack at a different time, maybe after Harry had left?

When Draco finally woke that morning, Harry sighed with relief at no longer being alone with his worries. Draco just chuckled at him and drew him into the bathroom for a nice, long hot soak, and a little playing that left him much more relaxed. During breakfast, they received a floo call that settled the little doubts that had kept him up all night.

"Ah, good, both of you are here." Lucius Malfoy's head said from the fireplace. Harry jumped slightly, earning himself an amused glance from the older man.

"Good morning, father." Draco said cheerily as he buttered his toast.

"Good morning, son." Mr. Malfoy seemed almost cheerful. "How did your exams go?"

"Excellent." Draco responded.

"How did yours go, Harry?"

"Good." Harry mumbled, quickly taking a gulp of pumpkin juice.

"It's good to hear that you're finally done with the last bits of your schooling at Hogwarts." Lucius Malfoy drawled. "Now it's time to get on with the rest of your lives."

"Does that mean you've had word?" Draco asked nonchalantly, taking a bite of his toast.

"Yes, it does." Lucius Malfoy's grin was almost feral. "Voldemort's gathering his forces for an attack on the school. He's arranged portkeys that will take them to right outside the grounds and they'll break through the wards from there. He even has a diversionary force to prevent reinforcements from Hogsmeade and reserves to prevent attacks from the rear by Auror and MLE forces."

"How many people, and what allies?" Harry asked, surprised at how steady his hand was.

"He's got six hundred wizards and witches gathered for the attack." Lucius Malfoy said, and Harry's heart thumped at his words. There'd never been an army that large of wizards and witches before.

“That’s impossible!” Draco muttered, his eyes wide. “That almost outnumbers all the Aurors and MLE types from all the countries added together!”

“The good news is that most of them aren’t well-trained in magical combat.” Mr. Malfoy said quickly before Harry’s now-shaking hand could drop the goblet of pumpkin juice.

“Just how well-trained are they?” Harry asked weakly, managing to take another gulp of the juice.

“Based on what I saw when I visited the school last month, your third year students could take them out even with two to one odds.” Lucius’ voice held a tinge of humor to it as he spoke. “He’s dragged everyone he can scrape up into following him. They haven’t worked together as a team, they have no discipline, and they aren’t very practiced at using their magic on someone who is ready to fight back. The real danger lies in his allies.”

“What does he have for allies?” Harry asked, dreading the answer.

“Three tribes of mountain trolls, one Giant clan, four werewolf packs, two herds of bicorns, three banshees, several dozen ashwinders, as well as several other poisonous snakes of all types, a basilisk, and several other creatures, the types of which I’m not familiar with.”

“Seamus is just going to love this.” Harry muttered. “He’s scared of banshees.”

“Sweet Merlin!” Draco exclaimed. “How did he amass so much strength?”

“He’s had a free hand pretty much for the last six months.” Lucius Malfoy said with a stern glare at Harry. “We knew he wouldn’t sit around, but to be fair I didn’t expect him to reach out to the nonhumans so effectively. From what I’ve heard about things, his successes in the last few months with the eastern countries brought a lot of these beasts to believe he could succeed. He’s quite certain that taking, or at least causing tremendous damage to Hogwarts, as well as killing you Harry, will bring everyone else in the wizarding world to their knees.”

“He’s quite right about that.” Harry said. “Even if he doesn’t get me, Hogwarts remains the best protected place in the wizarding world. Causing enough damage to it and escaping would make everyone scared of his abilities. It’s time we put most of our cards on the table with certain people.”

“I agree.” Mr. Malfoy said cautiously. “I will be making a call on the Headmistress and asking that she allow me, and the parents of several other students graduating this year to attend the Leaving Feast.”

“That would be…helpful.” Harry said. “We’ll talk with the Headmistress as well.”

“I’ll leave the two of you to your breakfast.” Lucius said with a grim smile right before his head disappeared. Harry looked at his food with no appetite as visions of Hogwarts burning to the ground filled his head. He was starting to shudder when the clatter of a knife and fork broke into him. He looked up to see Draco eating calmly.

“How…how can you be eating after hearing that?” Harry muttered.

“We need to keep our strength up if we’re going to win.” Draco said primly. He looked at Harry’s plate with a stern gaze. “You need to eat as well. I remember the way you always barely touched anything before a Quidditch match and I won’t stand for that now. Eat your food.”

“But…” Harry protested, his stomach rolling.

“Harry, people are going to look at you in the coming days.” Draco said in a firm voice. “We are both leaders now, and people gain their confidence from us. Do you ever remember Dumbledore looking like he was hopeless? Do you remember the confidence you always got from the way he acted normally even when things were falling apart around him? You told me how he was in his office that time Fudge and Umbridge found out about the D.A.”

“Yeah, and I also remember a very nicely executed tripping jinx.” Harry snorted, taking a deep breath and pushing the anxiety he was feeling away. Draco was right. Dumbledore had always kept that twinkle in his eyes until the danger had passed, the crisis over. He had always been a bastion of strength, and a stalwart pillar for everyone to look at in times of trouble. No matter how much she tried, and how much strength she had, Minerva McGonagall was not the same in those regards. Harry knew that as the only wizard to survive Voldemort’s repeated efforts to kill him the wizarding world now looked to their Golden Boy in the same way that they had once looked at Albus Dumbledore.

He no longer had even the thin, veiled protection of Hogwarts to shield him from the expectations of the wizarding world. He vaguely remembered the time when he wanted to be normal, but that time was so long past that Harry knew it would never come again. Maybe one day, he’d be able to do what Dumbledore had done, and take a position at Hogwarts to stay out of the spotlight, but he knew that day was far off. For now there was too much work to be done.

“There, that’s better.” Draco said softly as Harry leaned forward and resumed eating, a determined look on his face. “Now just remember your Harry Potter Trademark Look.”

“Huh?” Harry snorted, having just taken a bite of egg.

“You know, that shy little look you get when you’re nervous.” Draco continued on, doing an imitation. “You look down at the floor, then up at whoever you’re talking to through your bangs, and you begin your sentence with the word ‘Er’ and you blush ever so slightly. There! Just like that!”

Harry just looked at Draco like he was crazy, and then realized he was in exactly the same pose that Draco had been describing. He started laughing softly, and then began to wonder just how crazy Draco was for even bringing that up.

“Look.” Draco said firmly, obviously seeing the indecision on Harry’s face. “Dumbledore had the twinkle in his eye, I have the patented Malfoy smirk. You have that little shy look. Trust me, it melts everyone who sees it into little puddles, ready for your molding. Just use that when you’re about to give an important speech and everyone will be your plaything.”

“But I can’t control it!” Harry snapped, and realized he’d just walked into Draco’s trap when his husband smiled mischievously.

“You just haven’t practiced enough!” Draco retorted, and then set about making Harry practice. That took up their entire morning, and Harry realized that it was time for their meeting. They left their apartment together and climbed up to the Room of Requirement. Harry contemplated his need for this meeting and the door appeared. Hermione, who had been the first to arrive as per the plan, had thought about what was needed, and the Room had responded with a hall big enough to hold nearly eighty students. A dais on the far side of the room had a single wood

podium, and Harry noticed that Hermione stood there along with Seamus, Luna, Pansy, and a few other seventh years. The room had been filled with the muted buzz of eighty people conversing with their neighbors, but that dropped into stone silence as people noticed the two new arrivals. Smiling and murmuring softly to people they knew, Harry led his husband up onto the dais. There were a few chairs and everyone but Hermione and Harry.

"I want to thank everyone for coming." Hermione began, her voice ringing clearly around the room. "For many of us this will be our last weekend as Hogwarts students, and taking time out of your last weekend here is an honor for me, and for Harry. I promise you that it will be worth your time. While Harry Potter has spent most of this last school year away from Hogwarts, I do believe that he has still touched all of us greatly. Everyone here has been regular participants in the D.A. meetings, and have been identified as among the best in those sessions as well as in your classes. You've helped your classmates out, and have proven yourselves to be leaders here at Hogwarts, and likely to be leaders when you graduate. The news you have been invited here to receive is not good news, but it is news that will affect us all. We ask that you do not reveal what you are about to learn until the time is right. Now, I'm going to turn this over to my good friend, Harry Potter."

At Hermione's introduction, a swelling of applause filled the room. Someone from a corner of a room started chanting Harry's first name. As Harry stood at the podium, he looked down at the wood of the podium, and blushed. He realized he was doing that Harry Potter Trademark Look without even thinking about it, and his shy grin grew wider.

"Er…thanks." Harry said softly, and realized there was some type of sonorous spell on the podium that made his voice fill the room without being overly loud. The chanting calmed down as he spoke. He looked up from the podium to see all of the students looking at him expectantly, and Draco's words about Dumbledore and hope reminded him that he had to be strong now. When he spoke again, his voice was filled with a confidence he didn't really feel, but knew they needed.

"Seven years ago I came to Hogwarts, wide-eyed with wonder at the sight of this grand, old castle. For me, and for several of you as well, Hogwarts represented a mysterious world I didn't know existed until just a few days before I came here. Since then, I and all of us really, have learned many things about how to fulfill the potential that lies within us. However, the journey to where we are now has not been an easy one.

"Every year, as students we have faced tests by our Professors, and tests set by each other. Some of us have faced more tests, tests where we risked more than a bad grade or public embarrassment, but rather we risked our lives. I know that many people have said that since I came to Hogwarts, the school has seen more dangers and peril than ever before.

"To a large extent, that statement is true. Contrary to the belief held by several students, including the blond Slytherin I trapped into marrying me," Harry had to pause here as several people laughed. "Okay, maybe he was the one who trapped me. Anyway, what I was saying is that despite what some people might believe, I never did really seek the dangers that came to Hogwarts at the same time I did. However, like the idiot I can be at times, I just had to stick my curious nose into things and try to solve the mysteries I saw.

"During my First Year, it was the Philosopher's Stone, and the fact that Professor Quirrell was

carrying Voldemort in that ugly, stinky turban. During my Second Year, it was that the magical diary of Tom Riddle, the Hogwarts student who later became Lord Voldemort, had possessed a student and opened the Chamber of Secrets. In my Third Year, it was that my Godfather, Sirius Black, who was wrongfully accused of betraying my parents and killing thirteen people, was in fact innocent. My Fourth Year was the Tri-Wizard Tournament, and I fell into a trap set by Voldemort himself.

"That was my first confrontation with a strong, capable Voldemort since I was one year old." Harry said, taking a deep breath as he reached this point in his speech. "I barely escaped with my life, and Cedric Diggory died within a few moments of meeting Voldemort. During fifth year, I fell into another trap set by Voldemort, and my godfather Sirius Black died in a battle at the Ministry itself. Yes, I know most of you didn't know that, but I was lured to the Ministry by Voldemort. He tricked me into thinking that he had my godfather held there, and I fell for his trick.

"My godfather and his friends came to my rescue then." Harry said, sadness filling his voice, and his eyes were wet, but he held onto his control. "He died at the wand of Bellatrix Lestrange. It was only the arrival of Dumbledore, and his duel with Voldemort himself, that kept me from dying as well that night. It was only luck that kept his goal in luring me to the Ministry out of his hands.

"What was his goal?" Harry asked rhetorically. He could see everyone leaning forward slightly. Most didn't know this story at all, and he experienced a moment of pure pleasure at having them so interested. "His goal was a prophecy."

"I know that anyone who has taken a class by Professor Trelawney has wondered why Albus Dumbledore hired her." Harry continued, and smiled as several people shouted their agreement with that statement. "The reason, I found out after the Ministry attack, was that when he interviewed her for the position, Sybill Trelawney gave a true prophecy. At the time, Voldemort's forces were ravaging the wizarding world. Nothing seemed able to stop him. The prophecy Professor Trelawney uttered said that one would be born who would either kill, or be killed by Voldemort."

The room erupted into excited chatter at Harry's news and he let it continue for a few moments. When he thought it had gone on long enough, he held up his hand and motioned for silence. It took a few minutes, but he got the silence and he noted with a pleased smile that he now had their undivided attention.

"An agent of Voldemort heard part of this prophecy and told it to his lord." Harry continued. "From what his agent heard, Voldemort knew that it had to be one of two boys born at the end of July. It was either Neville Longbottom or me. Since he had an agent close to my parents, he attacked my family's home killing my parents and nearly killing me. The prophecy was brought into play, because it said he would mark the one who could kill him as his equal, and this scar so many of you have looked at over the years is that mark."

This time the room erupted into a wild clamor as everyone began speaking to each other at once. Again, Harry let it continue until it started to die down. As people once again began looking at him instead of their neighbors, he noticed that they'd moved several steps closer to the dais where he stood on. It was all he could do not to chuckle.

“During my sixth year,” Harry continued when the room was again silent, “Voldemort attacked twice. The first time he nearly achieved killing me, but for the timely rescue by my husband, Draco, and several of you, my fellow students. Neville gave his life in that fight, another one of our fellow students fallen to the malice of Voldemort. Later, he attacked us at the Kings Cross Station, and he learned there that it wasn’t just me he had to fear.”

“Damn RIGHT!” Several students shouted out and Harry smiled at them.

“That’s right.” Harry said with a wide grin. “He learned then that it wasn’t just me he had to fear, but the entire student body of Hogwarts. Together we taught him that we aren’t sheep to be slaughtered at his whim, and he retreated. He fled England and went to Europe where Hogwarts could not bother him.

“Since then, I’ve been working closely with the Ministry and others to limit his power, but he has succeeded in luring many people to his cause. However, Hogwarts remains a thorn in his side, because we have handed him defeat time and time again when he has moved against us. That is why, I believe, he is preparing now to make us the first casualty of the war he is about to begin.”

Murmurs now filled the room, and he noticed people were scared. He didn’t let that continue, like he had the past moments of outburst. Instead he cleared his throat and immediately regained their attention.

“Even as I speak to you, he is amassing an army.” Harry said in a grim voice, and he noticed several people going pale. “He has gathered an army of hundreds of wizards and witches, he has gathered dark creatures to him, and on the last day of the term, he intends to attack and destroy Hogwarts, and kill many of us.”

“WE WILL NOT LET THAT HAPPEN.” Harry’s voice overran the sudden outburst, and everyone focused on him. “This army he has collected, is not a true army. They are hundreds of individuals, most of who have not spent more than a few hours practicing against someone who can cast spells back at them. They have not spent a tenth of the time you have learning how to fight, and they are not prepared for the strength you have within you.

“Voldemort intends to destroy Hogwarts as the first battle of his new war.” Harry’s voice was now ringing throughout the room, and filled with a confidence he did not know he possessed. “I intend, with your help, to make it the last battle the wizarding world ever faces with him. When he comes, with your help, I will fulfill the Prophecy and kill Voldemort once and for all!”

This time his voice was drowned by the cheers of his fellow students. He mentally blessed Hermione for outlining this speech for him. The words were his own, but the way he said them, and the order, came from her. She’d said: ‘Give them the bad news, make them wonder how they were going to survive, and then give them the hope that it will be the end.’

She’d been right, as had Draco.

“Make no mistake.” Harry’s voice quieted the room once again. “The Professors will be at our side in this fight, as will Aurors and the Ministry. However, it will be us, the students of Hogwarts, who will be remembered as the people who defeated the greatest Dark Lord of the age. He has hung as a shadow over all of us for our entire lives. His memory, his ghost, has tainted what should have been the happiest years of our life, and when he comes to take our lives, we will instead take his and reclaim our freedom!”

This time the cheers continued on for several minutes, and Harry was surprised that the entire school wasn't wondering where the noise was coming from. Harry again motioned for silence. It took longer this time, and he smiled at the students.

"Er…okay." Harry said when at last he got the silence he'd been requesting. "Here's how we're going to do this. First of all, I have to face Voldemort, and it has to be here on the Hogwarts campus where he can't disapparate or portkey to safety. Hermione, Seamus, and Vincent Crabbe have been working on designing squads. Each squad will be composed of, or led by the students you see here. Everyone else, especially the lower years, will be taken to the safe room just like in the last attack. However, the groups organized here will be given specific tasks to handle during the actual battle. Since Draco and I work with the Ministry on their planning for such attacks around the world, we know how they will react and are able to take that into account. What we, the students of Hogwarts will be doing is cutting a straight line to Voldemort where I will duel him, and kill him. Yes, I do believe I can face him now, and win. I am ready. Now, Hermione is going to take the podium again and begin to call out names for squad leaders and squad assignments. Thank you."

With that, Harry stepped back and let Hermione take charge. Harry then led a quick discussion with the others on the dais about the types of creatures they'd be facing. He felt drained after his speech and Draco whispered in his ear that maybe he should just head to Hogsmeade now. Harry agreed and left the room, heading out of Hogwarts without being stopped by anyone before he got out of the entrance. He ran over his speech again and realized he'd done very well indeed.

"Heya Harry." Katie said happily as he entered the flat. She had both boys in her arms and he smiled at them and at her. She took one look at him, chuckled slightly and leaned forward, urging him to take Neville. Sure enough, once he had the growing boy in his arms, he felt better and laughed as Neville gurgled happily, grabbing Harry's hair and pulling hard.

"Stop that, Neville." Harry said, not really meaning it. Neville just stared at him before yanking again. Harry chuckled. Katie had gone into the boys' room, and from the slight smell, she was changing her son's diaper.

"Hey, Harry." Katie's voice called from the room. "There's a letter for you on the counter. I think it's from Fred and George since everyone normally writes to you through your secretaries."

"It better not be a gag gift." Harry moaned, but inwardly hoped it was. He made sure to keep a tight grip on Neville in case it was a gag and picked up the envelope. Sure enough it had something inside of it, and he noticed the 'WWW' in the upper right corner. He was pretty sure it was from Fred and George, so he opened the letter. His eyes were half closed in case it would make a loud noise, but nothing happened. Inside was a letter and a small Chudley Cannons pin. Harry frowned at the reminder that gave him of Ron. He pulled out the letter, holding Neville in one hand and dumping the pin into his open palm with the other. He'd just read the one word on the letter, 'Surprise!' when he felt the tug behind his navel that announced he was holding a portkey. His scream of rage was cut off before it had even begun as the swirls of color and noise surrounded him and the baby in his arms.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N – What, you thought I was done with evil cliffhangers? There's always a bump in the road, isn't there?

I know that updates are coming a little more slowly to all my stories, and there's a very good reason for that. I enjoy fanfiction, and writing fanfiction, but my greatest love has always been writing original fiction. For a while now, I've totally been blocked every time I write a story, and I think the fanfiction I've been writing has helped me over come that. I've finally gotten a story going that I believe is worthy of being read by others, it has become a higher priority. Don't fret though. I AM continuing all the HP stories I started and I will not 'rush' the ending, but complete them exactly as I intended to from the beginning.

What this does mean though, is that the updates will come out less frequently than they had been. They will not be rushed, shortened, or cheapened as happens sometimes when authors start another story. However, when my muse is screaming at me about one thing, I have to wait for it to go 'oh yeah, and then Harry did this…'. Of course that happened today so I focused on another chapter here. If you're interested in reading my original fiction work, click on my author's profile and you'll find the link to that site (hint, there's other authors on that site, and their works include some HP fics that are darn good and not available here)

Destiny of Prophecies Chapter 17

The darkness was the first thing that Harry noticed as he fought his way back to consciousness. A dry mouth and slight headache from being hit with stunners were the next things he noticed. When he remembered recent events, he sat up with a jolt…or at least, tried to,.

He couldn't sit up though, because a binding spell had him held tightly to a pallet on the grimy floor. He found it possible to groan though, and he did while he struggled against the restraining. The room was dark, and it was overly warm. Being so close to the floor was actually a good thing, Harry realized as he managed to raise his head a little. The floor was slightly cooler than the rest of the room, and he was already soaked in sweat. He could hear a door opening and the light from a *lumos* spell filtered inside.

"So you're awake now." A very familiar voice said from behind the lit wand that was more blinding to Harry than aiding his sight. Still, he recognized the voice and its owner and felt a surge of anger rising through him.

"Cornelius Fudge." Harry said in a grating voice, filling it with as much hatred as he could muster. "If you've hurt Neville I swear I'll tear you apart!"

"I don't think you're in a position to threaten me anymore, boy." The former Minister of Magic said smoothly. The man lowered his wand a bit and Harry could see his face now. It was thinner, more drawn, and the man's eyes looked even more pinched than before as he glared at Harry.

"What are you doing this for?" Harry demanded. "You can't possibly believe you'll get your old job back."

"You mean the job you stole from me?" Fudge retorted with a dry chuckle. "By the time I'm done with you they'll be begging me to take the job back. I'm on to you, boy. That old fool Dumbledore may have been blinded by your wide eyes and innocent looks, but I never was. I knew you were trouble from the first time I met you, using your magic on your poor muggle relatives. You've been dabbling in the dark arts, fooling everyone into believing you're hunting down Voldemort when you're really in league with him. Now we're going to prove that and you'll be given the Dementor's Kiss!"

“Ha!” Harry said loudly. “You’ll have to find a live Dementor first, and most of them are on Voldemort’s side. You’re wrong, Fudge. I’m not in league with him so you have nothing to prove. Now let me out of these bonds and if Neville’s unhurt you may go unharmed.”

“Shut up, Potter.” Fudge exclaimed nastily. “The baby is fine, and soon enough you’ll be telling us everything you know. We’ll record it in a view-all and when we deliver that to the Daily Prophet your toadies in the Ministry won’t be able to save you!”

“It’s ready, Minister.” Another familiar, feminine voice said from the open doorway behind the former Minister.

“Very good Dolores.” Fudge said as he took a step to the side. He waved his hand towards Harry impatiently. “Give him the truth serum and let’s get things set up for the recording.

Harry recognized the froggish face of Dolores Umbridge as she edged around Fudge, a vial of clear liquid in her hands. He tried to struggle harder against his bonds, but they held firm. The woman had a smug look on her face as she approached Harry and watched him struggle in vain. She made that familiar, and hated, sound like she was clearing her throat and he gave up on struggling as she smiled nastily and set the vial against his lips. He spat out the first few drops she poured into him and she slapped him hard with her free hand.

“Don’t make me do this the hard way you sick boy.” She spat at him angrily and Harry just glared, trying to think of a way out of this. Fudge was moving around the room, lighting magical torches and setting up some type of equipment that would be recording whatever it was they forced out of him. While he was distracted by Fudge’s movements, Umbridge poured more of the liquid down his throat and he swallowed reflexively. By the time Umbridge stood, he could feel the truth serum taking affect.

“Now, Mr. Potter, I asked you once before where Sirius Black was, what is your answer now?” Dolores Umbridge’s voice was honey sweet, and she sounded as if she was speaking to a toddler, something completely familiar to Harry.

“He’s dead, you bitch.” Harry said hoarsely, trying to sit up more and staring at her with furious eyes.

“Yes, yes, so he is.” Umbridge taunted him, sneering at him. “Now whose fault was that?”

“Voldemort’s.” Harry answered her, the truth slipping past him and he realized that he really did believe that now. It was odd, but her first few questions seemed to help him, calming him down a little.

“Enough of that, Dolores.” Fudge said impatiently, stepping forward with a look of anticipation on his face. “Now, Potter, tell us about how you’re conspiring with Voldemort.”

“The only conspiring I’ve been doing with Voldemort is to see him dead.” Harry answered, the potion flooding his system forcing the truth out, but in the way he chose to share. “Something you’ve jeopardized by bringing me here! He’ll be attacking Hogwarts soon, and I have to be there to kill him when he steps into my trap!”

“Give him some more of that truth potion, Dolores.” Fudge’s voice was filled with anxiety now and the toadlike woman scampered back towards Harry with more of the stuff.

“I don’t think so, bitch.” Harry cursed softly, and then whispered a word. The ropes binding his

hands fell away, and he smiled as he stood, rubbing his wrists to restore circulation. His head swam briefly as got up, and he wondered how long he had been asleep.

“Impossible!” Fudge snapped, bringing his wand to bear on Harry.

“Expelliarmus!” Harry said softly, pointing his still tingling hand in the direction of Fudge’s wand. It flew out of the former Minister’s hands. Umbridge screeched and drew her own wand, only to have Harry send it flying.

“Sincecurus.” Harry muttered idly, waiving his hand again towards Fudge, and fine lines of barbed wire curled up from the floor, tying the man completely, the barbs digging into through his robes and into his flesh. Harry repeated the spell on Umbridge, she had turned as if to flee out of the door. Harry felt dizziness come over him again and he braced himself on a nearby wall.

“How…how did you do this?” Fudge whimpered, pain obvious in his voice from the barbs in his flesh. Umbridge was twitching now, trying to get rid of the painful barbs but doing nothing except digging them deeper.

“Wandless magic, Fudge.” Harry answered, again the truth thanks to that damn potion. He moved carefully, collecting their scattered wands and putting them into his own robe’s pocket. The room was dark again, the only light coming from the open doorway and the still-glowing record-all. It only took him a moment to turn that off as well.

“But…but…only the strongest…” Fudge stammered in shock.

“Only the strongest of wizards have been able to master control of wandless magic.” Harry finished for the man. “Yes, I know that. You two now know a secret only Dumbledore knew before he died.”

“That’s why you had him killed!” Fudge said angrily.

“No, I had nothing to do with his death.” Harry said fiercely, fixing the disgusting man with a stare at those hurtful words. “You did it when you let those idiot muggles through the barrier. I may not have always agreed with the old codge, but your killing him is something I’m never going to forgive. Now, where’s Neville?”

“Safe.” Fudge answered in a short, quaking tone that told Harry he was scared.

”Of course he’s safe.” Harry said with a shrug. “If he wasn’t, you’d be weeks dead already and I’m sure you know that. Hermione’s awfully protective of her son. Answer me, where is he?”

“I’m not going to tell you anything!” Fudge nearly shouted and Harry just twisted his hand slightly, using his magic to pull the barbed wire tighter around the man. The gasps Fudge started making let him know the barbs were sinking deeper.

“I am not the same little boy you knew, Fudge.” Harry warned him in a low voice. Umbridge’s eyes were almost popping out of her sockets now, and she was whimpering softly. “You were the Minister of Magic, Fudge, when I was a little boy. It was your responsibility to protect me and instead you turned on me. Thanks to you, Sirius Black had to go into hiding instead of being the free man he deserved to be. Thanks to you, Barty Crouch, Jr. was kissed by a Dementor before he could tell you the truth about Voldemort’s return. You have a lot to answer for, Cornelius Fudge.”

“Dumbledore…” Fudge began, as if to excuse his actions of the past, but a surge of anger made

Harry cut him off.

“Dumbledore always kept his eyes focused on the goal, Fudge.” Harry snapped angrily. Fudge blinked at the harsh tone of his voice. “He made mistakes, but they were mistakes in being too protective of me, while you were just the opposite. You were scared, trying to protect your position of power, and in doing so you lost that position. Now, where is Neville?”

“You’re wrong, Potter.” Fudge spat out and Harry decided the man had spoken enough. He drew out Fudge’s wand from where he’d pocketed it, and smiled cruelly. The look of fear on Fudge’s face was perfect as he waved the wand and cast the spell. Fudge’s body shimmered for a moment before shrinking and morphing into that of a small, black scorpion. Another flick of the wand and the scorpion was frozen.

“Now, Dolores, where is Neville?” Harry asked, turning to the toad-faced woman who was whimpering.

“He…he’s upstairs with Weasley.” Umbridge managed to stutter out in fear, her eyes locked onto the frozen scorpion. That was why she didn’t see Harry moving the wand again and her scream was cut off as she was also transfigured. Another spell froze the toad that was standing where Umbridge had been. Harry smiled to himself as he picked both of them up and put them in his pocket. It figured that Ronald would be a part of this.

“What have you done with them?” Ron’s voice sounded from the doorway as Harry had turned, checking to make sure his new wand wasn’t in this room. There, in the doorway stood Ron, with Neville in one arm and his wand in the other. He motioned with his wand and Harry dropped Fudge’s wand onto the floor.

“They’re in my pocket, transfigured.” Harry answered honestly.

“How did you get free?” Ron demanded angrily, his face nearly as red as his hair.

“How could you do this to Hermione?” Harry countered. “You know she’s probably freaking out about Neville right now.”

“She’s been freaking out for the last few days.” Ron said and Harry’s heart leaped in his chest. Days! The attack could be happening at any moment!

“Expelliarmus!” Harry shouted, moving his hand from his side and catching Ron by surprise. The spell was just enough to send the wand flying from Ron’s hand. “Accio Neville.”

“No!” Ron shouted as Neville left his grasp and floated to Harry’s waiting arm. As soon as he had the baby boy, Harry used the same spell to summon Fudge’s wand to him.

“Wandless Magic, Weasel.” Harry said while Ron froze, staring at the wand now in Harry’s hand. “That’s how I got free.”

“That’s…impossible.” Ron breathed out in surprise and Harry just shrugged.

“Why, Ron?” Harry asked finally. “Why did you turn your back on me?”

“Turned my back on you?” Ron spat in disbelief. Neville chose that moment to wake up, and he giggled at Harry. Harry smiled back, but was careful to keep his main attention on the red head. “I didn’t turn my back on you, Harry, you turned your back on me and everyone else who ever loved you! Look at what happened to Dumbledore! All because you shacked up with that blond

git!"

"So that's how you've justified this to yourself, by putting the blame on Draco." Harry muttered darkly. He wanted to kill Ron for that alone!

"Look at you, Harry!" Ron was nearly shouting now. "Look at the things you've done since you hooked up with your precious husband! You've used the Dark Arts! I know you tortured Pettigrew! I know about your bloody Oath! Who else have you seduced with you? Hermione? Seamus?"

"Seduced?" Harry barked in a fit of dark humor. Neville frowned at him as he did so, but stayed quiet. "I've seduced no one, and I haven't been seduced either. I've done what's necessary to make our world safe, Ron. What would have happened if I'd defeated Voldemort without doing what I've done? There'd have been another dark lord in ten, twenty years. That's the way it's always happened in the past. Now I've got a hold on those who might have followed that route. I know who they are and none of them can go that way without me finding out and taking them out!"

"Of course there won't be another dark lord from them, they already have you and Draco in training!" Ron shot back angrily and Harry squinted at him in disbelief.

"You can't believe that, Ron." Harry said in a low voice. "I haven't been seduced by the Dark, I'm not going to be a Dark Lord. I'm who I've always been, and the world is going to be a lot safer place."

"You're deranged, Harry, and I can't let you carry out your plans." Ron said firmly and Harry actually laughed. There was nothing Ron could do to stop him, and Harry knew that perfectly well. A wave of the wand, a spoken word, and a red-furred weasel stood where Ron had been a moment ago. Unlike the scorpion or the toad, the weasel tried to run, but Harry's petrification spell hit him before he could get away. He joined the other two animals in Harry's pocket.

"C'mon, Neville, let's get out of here." Harry said to the boy who was now giggling at Harry's use of magic. It only took a few minutes of searching the old house they were in to find Harry's own wand. Another minute after that to break the three wands he'd collected, and then he was walking outside.

They were on the edge of a small village, a muggle village from the looks of it, and there was even a small stream nearby, just visible in the early dawn. Harry sauntered over, reminded of an old saying he'd heard Uncle Vernon use one time. It was deep enough for his purposes and he put the petrified toad on a rock just barely above the water. He put the scorpion on its back, and stepped back onto the bank.

While too shallow for a human to have to swim across, the stream was deep enough that scorpion would drown from where he had put them. Harry waved his wand, unfreezing the two animals and turned his back, chuckling. He really didn't care if they made it across or not, as the old saying implied, but he felt it was poetic justice. (b/n what was the saying?) Neville stared at him with those big eyes all children seemed to have, and giggled in his own childish way.

Pop.

The Hogsmeade flat was full of people as Harry appeared in the doorway. Hermione was the first one to see him, and her scream alerted all the others. Harry barely had a moment to react before

Neville was ripped from him by a very anxious Hermione. Draco was next to her, and wrapped Harry in a very tight hug. His husband's face was full of concern.

"You were too far away for us to figure out how to find you!" Draco whispered in his ear.

"South of France, I think." Harry said softly. The long-distance apparating had taken a lot of energy, and he was tired. "How long until graduation?"

"A few hours." Draco said with a whisper, barely reducing his grip on Harry. "We were trying to figure out what to do if we couldn't find you."

"I'm here now." Harry said, pulling himself a little straighter and with a squeeze of Draco's arm, getting him to step back as well. "It was Ron, Fudge, and Umbridge that kidnapped us. I transfigured Umbridge and Fudge before leaving them there. I doubt they're still alive by this point. I brought this as a reminder."

He held up the frozen weasel as he said the last, and wasn't surprised at Hermione's narrowed gaze. She frowned for a moment before a cruel smile lit her face. She transferred Neville to another arm and took the frozen ferret in the other hand.

"Look, Neville." Hermione's voice was honey-sweet. "Uncle Harry brought you your first pet. I'll transfigure a cage for it and you can play with Weasel later."

"I have a feeling Weasel is going to regret ever having crossed us again." Draco said with a satisfied tone. Harry just nodded. "We've got time for a bath before we have to get ready for graduation."

"Let's go." Harry said with a nod, and they worked their way through the crowded room. Most of the people wanted to talk, but Harry wasn't in the mood. He felt dirty, and wanted to get clean again.

"You were totally blank, totally gone from the bond." Draco said as they climbed into a hastily filled and hot bath tub. Harry was lying in the comfortable space between Draco's legs, and the blonde's careful massaging was relaxing in the extreme.

"I think I was unconscious the entire time, until just a few hours ago." Harry admitted. It was a hole in their defenses, something they hadn't really planned for.

"We'll have to figure a way around that little problem in the future." Draco said with a rueful chuckle. "I do like the new pet, though."

"He wouldn't shut up about how I've been corrupted by the dark magic." Harry whispered, a little worriedly. He'd been using an awful lot of the stuff lately.

"Did you kill him?" Draco asked rhetorically. No, Harry hadn't killed him, and a Dark Wizard would have done that. Killing Ron would have been nothing to a Dark Wizard, but Harry just couldn't bring himself to do that to his one-time friend. Instead he'd let him live where he could keep an eye on him.

"Is everything ready?" Harry asked, moving on from the past to the future. In a few hours, the culmination of months of effort, of years of trials and tribulations, would be coming to a head. If he wasn't surrounded by Draco's strong arms and legs, both of them immersed in hot water, he'd be fidgeting like crazy.

“We’re more than ready.” Draco answered, raising his arms to start kneading Harry’s tense shoulders. Harry let out a sigh as Draco continued. “We have all the students who will be fighting ready to go, those that are taking the rest of the student out of Hogwarts are also ready, and we’ve told McGonagall that we think something will happen. We’ve covered up your absence, no one knew except those that were here, all from our own group. Ginny will be staying in our quarters with the portkey to go warn the Ministry. They should be able to respond within an hour.”

“Anything changed with the battle plan?” Harry asked as he relaxed into Draco’s firm massage.

“Nothing.” Draco answered in a calm voice. “We’re expecting the dragons to lead off the attack, and Charlie Weasley has sent up a herd to help with that. Then it’ll be the giants, werewolves, and other creatures followed by the non-Marked followers of Voldemort. He’ll keep his Death Eaters as an honor guard and try to keep from having to confront you directly. We’re pretty sure he plans to have them capture you so he can kill you.”

“The Prophecy just says that one of us will kill the other, not that it will be in battle or even in a duel.” Harry noted, something that had been gone over repeatedly by everyone. That was the biggest concern he had, that they would somehow capture him during the battle, or incapacitate him, before he could pin down Voldemort. That was why he would hopefully not even cast a spell before it came time for the direct confrontation.

“He can’t help but know that we’ll be prepared for him.” Draco said in a soft voice, and Harry felt him move a bit, taking something from the edge of the large bathtub. “I just hope he has no idea just how prepared we are for him.”

“Is that…?” Harry’s voice dropped off as he felt something go around his neck. It was cool, and his skin tingled slightly as it touched him. He looked down, and saw the small, clear globe on a silver chain. No more than two centimeters across, it was the key to their plans.

“It’s so small, but Hermione promises that it will do the job.” Draco said, and Harry believed him. There were two things Harry could count on in life, one was Hermione finding and implementing answers, and the other was, of course, Draco.

“I hope she’s managed to finish the debate about muggle-borns.” Harry noted in a tone full of irony and smiled as he felt Draco chuckling.

“She may not be as strong with a wand as a pureblood, but she does have her moments.” Draco allowed, and Harry let out a sigh of relief. “You know, even the Quidditch teams have gotten some good ideas for this upcoming battle. Voldemort’s going to be surprised.”

“I hope so, love, I hope so.” Harry said, sighing as he relaxed against Draco’s warm chest, and letting the hot water relax him even further. The coolness resting on his chest was a counterpoint to that warmth.

Of all the things Harry Potter expected to be feeling at this point in time, boredom had never been on the list.

Yet, no other word fit how he was feeling as he poked at the dinner on his plate. It was the Leaving Feast, the last event of his last year at Hogwarts, and nothing had happened yet. He’d expected Voldemort’s attack in the early morning while he attended his last ‘class’ with his fellow students. Before lunch, he’d met with the Headmistress to discuss the impending attack

and she had sent a summons to the Ministry, who had begun assembling Aurors in Hogsmeade.

Lunch had passed interminably slowly, with everyone expecting the attack at any moment. The Great Hall had been all but silent as people looked to where Harry sat with Gryffindor House, and out the great windows, but nothing had happened. The afternoon's festivities, designed to the celebration for seventh years leaving after successfully completing their education were subdued.

By the time the Leaving Feast had started, nearly everyone was exhausted from being on the edge all day. Harry found his mind drifting back to that wonderful morning, safe in Draco's arms. He'd been exhausted, falling asleep in the bath, only waking a few hours later when Draco told him it was time to get ready for Hogwarts.

Mrs. Weasley had arrived while he was asleep. She'd be staying with the kids while everyone was at school, and he found her kneeling down next to a large structure that Hermione had conjured. It was a wire-frame castle, complete with four floors, three towers, and two wheels for the red-haired weasel that was lying on the ground floor. Mrs. Weasley had an odd smile on her face when Harry had entered.

"Oh, Harry dear." She had said in that typical way she always greeted him. "Did you get enough sleep? Thanks, dear for not killing Ronald. I just hope he appreciates this nice home Hermione's given him. At least he won't be able to complain about everything he owns being rubbish. It's quite nice really."

"Um…uh…no problem, Mrs. Weasley." Harry had stuttered at her. He'd expected any reaction but the one he'd gotten. When they'd finally left the flat, she'd been back at the cage scolding the depressed weasel about having a bad attitude and how he'd just better get adjusted to his new situation since it was far more than he deserved.

Mr. Weasley and Mr. Malfoy had been waiting for them by the carriages that would take the entire group into Hogwarts for the morning. The two men, long-time enemies, had been chatting amiably about the new wizarding primary schools. Lucius Malfoy was preparing a proposal that all muggle-born children should be sent to the wizarding primary schools even though they wouldn't be taught magic until they turned eleven and went to Hogwarts, arguing that it would familiarize them with their place in the Wizarding World at an earlier age. Mr. Weasely was actually agreeing with him and had asked if Mr. Malfoy would want him to co-sponsor the proposal.

For a moment Harry experienced a surrealistic spinning of his head, as if he'd been transported into a new dimension. Still, he knew that this was the effect of the last two years, and the changes he and Draco had made together. He realized Draco knew that as well, from the small smirk on his face as had dismounted the carriages.

Harry's wandering mind had drawn his attention away from the extremely quiet hall, but the explosion of magic against the outer wards brought him back to the present. His gaze immediately went to the tall windows behind the high table, and for a moment nothing out of the ordinary was evident. It had been a partially cloudy day, and now the sun setting, turning the sky red and orange as the day ended.

It was those colors that blinded him to the fire that was now raining down from above. The blow to the outer wards had been strong, strong enough to punch a hole through them, and in the few seconds since they had failed, he could see Minerva McGonagall staggering in her seat, and

Severus Snape barely turning to face her. Outside the windows, the flaming dragons could be seen growing bigger as they closed in on Hogwarts.

The attack had begun, and no one needed the warning bells that were starting to ring to tell them.

“Tell Ginny to go!” Draco hissed from the Slytherin table to a first-year Slytherin. The girl took off at a run towards their nearby apartments, where the Weasley daughter waited with a portkey to take her to the reinforcements now in Hogsmeade. The Headmistress was standing now, with the help of Professor Snape, but all eyes in the Hall were on Harry. Even she realized this, and turned to where Harry sat in the middle of the Gryffindor table.

“The time has come.” Harry said, standing slowly, but confidently. He looked out over the hall, covered in the bright banners of Hufflepuff House (he was still shocked that Hufflepuff had won the House Cup in a surprise move over the last week). For five years he’d come into this hall, and tried to ignore the way his every move was followed by many of these students. Now, though, he knew everyone was looking at him, and it no longer bothered him. He was a leader, and it was only right that they’d look to him at this moment in time. “The battle we’ve been expecting has begun, but before we take our places, let me tell you why it is being fought, here, now.

“Eighteen years ago, our world had suffered through several years plunged into terror by Voldemort and his followers.” Harry stated in a tone that was firm and carried throughout the Hall. “Eighteen years ago, his time of terror ended when he attacked my family, when he attacked me. Since I’ve come to Hogwarts, he’s been rebuilding his power towards this day. He has focused much of his efforts on me, over and over again, but why he has done so has been a mystery known to few. Two years ago, I found why he attacked me as a baby, and why he was so determined to kill me since then.

“The reason is simple: A prophecy given by our own Professor Trelawney before I was born. It was a true prophecy, and Voldemort himself has only known a part of it, but that part was enough for him to try to kill me as a baby. The Prophecy says that one of us, Voldemort or I, will kill the other. Voldemort will die by my hand, or I by his. The day of Prophecy is at hand, today our destinies will be decided. Clear me a path to Voldemort, and this will be over. I am Harry Potter. Voldemort has tried to kill me for eighteen years and failed, but today is the day I will kill him!”

The roar that greeted his ending was tremendous, and only redoubled as outside the great windows dragons descended on those that were attacking the castle. As Harry, and the rest of the school watched the incoming flaming beasts, more descended on them, screaming in anger, talons tearing into flesh as only once dragon could do to another. A great cheer echoed throughout the hall, and Minerva McGonagall turned to face the students with a feral grin.

“First and second years!” McGonagall’s voice was confident, and grabbed the attention of the students. “Stand by to rush the wounded to the infirmary! Third and fourth years, you will protect them. Fifth through seventh year Gryffindors, form behind me at the Great Entrance. Slytherins with Professor Snape, Ravenclaws with Professor Sinistra, and Hufflepuffs with Professor Sprout. Remember, we only hold them back until the Aurors arrive and clear a path for Mr. Potter. Quidditch teams and Mr. Potter, take your places on the Astronomy Tower!”

Movement followed her commands at once, and Harry took a deep breath before joining Draco and the others. His blond husband’s smirk was all he needed to help rebuild the confidence that

had flooded out of him after he'd spoken. These students were now rushing out, many to their deaths, all in an effort to allow Harry to confront Voldemort in a real wizard's duel. The moment of the prophecy was at hand, and he could only think of how it did not guarantee his victory as he made his way up to the Astronomy Tower, surrounded by the House Quidditch teams, Draco, and his Oathbound guards.

Once he was on the Tower's clear, flat roof, he could see the first ranks of Voldemort's followers as they made their way towards the tower. Overhead, the dragons were fighting each other, both those that followed Voldemort and those that were brought by Charlie Weasley. On the ground, there were packs of werewolves, a flock of Harpies, an entire tribe of giants, and other magical beasts coming their way. From around the corner, he could see Hagrid leading Grawp and several other giants, as well as an assortment of beasts that included Hippogriffs, Fluffy, and the centaur Firenze.

Behind Voldemort's menagerie of beasts marched about three hundred wizards and witches. They weren't well-organized, and they weren't wearing Death Eater masks, so he guessed they were followers from the continent. Further behind them came Voldemort himself, surrounded by almost a hundred and fifty masked Death Eaters, the elite of his forces. Harry was so entranced by the closing forces that he almost missed the Bloody Baron floating up through the Astronomy Tower's roof.

"Milord, the Headmistress sends that they are ready." The Bloody Baron said with a slight bow. The taciturn ghost had taken to calling Harry 'milord' since he'd seen how the Slytherins now deferred to Harry. It had worried Harry that the ghost would tell McGonagall, but that concern had been dismissed by Snape himself, who had pointed out the Baron's first loyalties were always to Slytherin and while Harry was not of that house, Draco was.

"Tell Hagrid to focus on the Harpies and werewolves before tackling the giants." Harry ordered the ghost, who nodded grimly. McGonagall would be fighting, and it would be up to Harry who had the advantage of height to direct their forces, and the ghosts themselves would be contributing to the battle by carrying messages. "Then tell the Headmistress we've got about three hundred basics coming up the main path. If she pushes them to the left, and Snape pushes from the right, the incoming Aurors should be able to catch them in a vise."

"An excellent plan." The Baron said with a short bow before disappearing back through the roof. The Fat Friar took his place next.

"Sir, Madame Pomfrey reports the medi-wizards from St. Mungos have arrived." The Friar said with a bow of his own. "They have portkeys set for the most critically injured, but for now we can raise those wards."

"Good, tell her to do so." Harry said and the Fat Friar disappeared. During the battle itself, while Professor McGonagall was fighting, the medi-witch would be the holder of Hogwarts' wards. Unless she needed to send a badly injured patient immediately to St. Mungos, portkeys would not work, preventing another avenue of escape for Voldemort.

"None of them have brooms." Draco said from Harry's side. He was using a pair of omnioculars to scan the approaching forces.

"Good, then we should be able to pin him down." Harry replied as another great roar turned his attention to the southwest, where Hagrid and his forces clashed against the flock of harpies.

About fifty wizards moved towards him, but the sounds of the Great Doors opening at the Entrance pulled them back.

“Hogwarts stands ready to defend itself!” McGonagall’s amplified voice swept over the grounds, and for a moment the battle between the dragons in the sky, and Hagrid’s creatures with the Harpies, paused. “Leave now if you value your lives!”

No sooner had she spoken than she led the way out of the castle. Immediately behind her were Aurors Shacklebolt and Tonks, followed by several other Professors, and behind them ran a hundred screaming students from the upper years. Voldemort’s forces were frozen at that moment, and the stunning spells hit them first, cutting down a large swath of them including all of those that headed towards Hagrid, where the fighting had begun again. In the skies above, Harry noted that the dragon forms were small dots now, as Charlie’s dragons chased the fleeing followers of Voldemort. Charlie had warned this would happen, that his dragons once in the fight would chase the others, but at least the skies were clear. That was a good thing, because Charlie and his fellow dragon handlers rose from where they’d hidden under the edge of the Forest, riding their brooms and heading for Voldemort’s weakly protected flank.

The sky was darkening as the sun set beyond the mountains, and Harry accepted a pair of omnioculars from Draco. These had been spelled so that they could see in the dark, something he’d thought unnecessary but was now glad for having. Voldemort’s forces had recovered from the initial attack by the Hogwarts students and staff, and were now firing spells of their own back, including many killing curses. Harry determinedly kept himself from looking to see how many hit students. Instead he turned to the people behind him.

“Beaters, to the air.” Harry ordered simply, and there was still enough light to see the grins that lit their faces. A muggle-born beater from Hufflepuff had come up with this idea after hearing of the rogue bludger in Harry’s second year. While the muggle-born, whose name was Gary Gudger, climbed his broom and headed off into the air, the others on the tower roof opened up the boxes of eight specially prepared bludgers. The deadly balls streaked into the air, where the waiting beaters began to bat them back and forth.

Gudger, the Hufflepuff, was leading the Beaters as they shot through the air towards Voldemort’s forces. Harry recalled that the Hufflepuff’s father was an RAF fighter pilot and he wondered what the father would have to say when he learned his son was in air combat on a broom. That line of thought was cut short though, as Harry saw the effect of the air attack, and the modified bludgers. Gary Gudger’s shot was particular painful as he beat a bludger right through a group of Death Eaters heading to reinforce the other forces. The bludger hit one directly in the chest, and by zooming in, Harry could see the man’s chest had been totally caved in by the blow. Crabbe swung at the bludger as it headed back into the sky, knocking it right into another Death Eater’s wand arm, breaking it so badly that bone fragments could be seen poking out of the man’s sleeve.

Harry didn’t have to order the remaining Quidditch players to the sky as a wall of spells went skyward from the massed Death Eaters. Even as Gary Gudger fell from his broom, hit by the green light of the killing curse, the chasers, keepers, and seekers were in the sky, casting spells towards the grounds as the surviving beaters regrouped and knocked the deadly bludgers back towards the enemy. For a moment, the battle hung at equilibrium, with both sides screaming spells, the booms and clangs of those spells filling the air, as did the screaming of the wounded

and dying.

Then the Aurors arrived.

Like a tidal wave, they flowed from the direction of Hogsmeade and their spells hit Voldemort's forces with deadly accuracy. Unlike most of the student's stunning and petrifying spells, the Aurors used more deadly methods, and Voldemort's forces began to crumble. Harry summoned his broom, as did Draco and the rest on the tower, preparing for the final confrontation when a glimmer of movement from behind Voldemort caught his gaze.

Harry turned his eyes just in time, to avoid the gaze of the basilisk that was moving towards the battle zone. Cries of terror began to ring out from the students as the front line of aurors fell dead from the beast's deadly gaze, and dozens of smaller poisonous snakes made their way towards the fighting. This was something totally unexpected, something that Harry had not planned on facing, but fortunately someone else had.

From the direction of Hagrid's hut, the sound of frightened poultry and other beasts had been heard, but now a new sound rang out. Harry had never been so glad to hear a rooster crow as he was at that moment. The crow grew louder as it sounded again, and the sounds of a large beast flopping in death drew Harry's gaze back to where the Basilisk was. He also caught a glimpse of a screaming Voldemort.

Still, the beast had turned the tide back to Voldemort's favor slightly, and the rooster did nothing for the smaller poisonous snakes that had now reached the lines of aurors and students. Nearly thirty aurors had died from the basilisk's gaze, as had almost a dozen students, and the snakes began adding to those numbers with a vengeance. The students and aurors were now faced with trying to kill small, deadly threats as well as dealing with the spells Voldemort's men were casting at them.

"Go back to your homes!" Harry hissed in Parseltongue, after amplifying his voice. His command had little effect beyond making the snakes pause in their attacks, but it was enough. Below him, Professor McGonagall whirled her wand, and dozens of grass blades were transfigured into mongooses. The small creatures tore into the snakes with a vengeance and the slithering beasts turned away from the humans to fight McGonagall's transfigured creatures.

The Headmistress's action seemed to inspire students, who started turning any object nearby into other creatures. Snakes started being turned into mice, and ordinary plants nearby became dogs or cats that turned and attacked either snakes or Voldemort's people. The Aurors, who had been stunned by the basilisk attack and by the snakes, regrouped as well, and once again began pressing Voldemort's followers. More than two-thirds of the regular followers were down now, and the rest were barely standing. More than a third of the Death Eaters were dead, while all but a handful around Voldemort were fighting for their lives. Some of the students, mostly Slytherin, were now casting curses that glowed the same green as what was being thrown at them. There would be no punishments for that, he was certain, because this was a battlefield and they were fighting for their lives.

"Harry, it's time." Draco's voice was close, sounding in his ears, and Harry took a deep breath. Draco was right, it was time. Both sides had fully engaged all their forces, and the circle around Voldemort was backing up, heading off the grounds slowly, to where they could apparate or portkey away. That could not be allowed.

“Let’s go.” Harry said, swinging onto his broom and pausing only to make sure all the others still with him were on theirs. As he kicked off the ground, he was followed by ten other Firebolts, and they zoomed through the battle. A few spells headed their way, but the Quidditch teams still in the air formed a shield and blocked most of them. The beaters beat a path with their bludgers, and Harry dropped to the back of the group as they neared Voldemort’s inner circle.

As a group, they hit the ground, dismounting and dropping their brooms, ready for an onslaught of spells, but none came their way. With a small portion of his brain, Harry noted a few things happening at one time. Voldemort’s circle drew aside, forming into a half-circle around their black clad leader. As Harry’s guard did the same, the sounds of battle sputtered and then died. He knew without looking that everyone, from both sides, was now watching what was about to happen.

“So, Harry Potter, are you ready for your final duel?” Voldemort’s voice was grating as always, and Harry took the chance to study his foe. Voldemort seemed…shorter than he once had, when they faced each other in the Riddle cemetery, and of course at Harry’s own wedding. The skin was still pasty white, skeletal, the eyes glowed red, and there was the dull throb of the scar on Harry’s forehead, but he found that he was no longer afraid of this…man.

“I only hope no one is ever foolish enough to duel me after you are gone, Tom.” Harry retorted with a wry grin. His new wand was in his hand, warm and ready for action. It only took a flick to bring it up into the traditional salute. “Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten your manners, old boy.”

“I see your wit hasn’t grown as fast as your ego, Potter.” Voldemort quipped back, bringing his wand up in the traditional salute as well. They both bowed, and assumed the traditional stances of readiness, but Harry moved quicker than Voldemort, taking a cue from Draco’s bag of tricks.

“Avada Kedavra.” Harry said softly, willing with all his might that this thing would be dead. A hollow howling sound filled his ears, and a rush of pleasure filled him as the spell launched itself with green fury at a stunned Voldemort. The spell, the unstoppable killing curse, hit Voldemort squarely in the chest, his own wand had only moved halfway towards Harry. As the spell hit, a scream filled the air, a scream filled with rage, with anger, and with a dark lust. At that same moment, Harry’s scar burst out in pain like he’d not felt in years, and his head spun. He fell to his knees, as did the body of Voldemort, now glowing with green sputtering energy as the spell crackled along its skin.

Something pushed inside Harry’s head, and he could feel the evil, cold malice of Voldemort filling him. Harry fought it, fought for control, but he could tell he was losing the battle. Still, he’d prepared for this. Voldemort had possessed him briefly in fifth year, taunting Dumbledore, trying to get the old wizard to kill Harry in the hopes of also killing Voldemort. It had been Harry though, that had driven Voldemort out then. As the spirit possessing him raised Harry’s wand arm and began to stand, Harry called up the memories that had saved him before.

Memories of Sirius flowed into Harry, but they did not push Voldemort out of him as they had before. Instead, Harry’s mind floated back to that last encounter with the voice of Sirius coming out of the Veil, questioning Harry’s choices. Voldemort’s control over Harry grew stronger, and Harry’s spirit screamed out in silent terror and pain.

Voldemort was winning!

Voldemort already controlled Harry’s movement, and as Harry lost the silent battle inside of his

own body, Harry's vision began to dim even as his hearing grew silent. Still, he could hear someone shouting his name, as if from a great distance, and in the growing darkness he could see a pale form in front of him. The face was blurred, but the pale blond hair could only belong to one person.

Within the space of a breath, even that vision was gone and Harry could feel his very soul being crushed in Voldemort's invisible grasp. Harry had been so sure that he could beat Voldemort as he'd done before, by remembering Sirius, but he'd failed. It had all been for nothing. In that growing darkness, and silence, he could hear Voldemort's laughter, but another voice was also there, a memory of years ago, when he had hurt and raged against the awful events in the Ministry of Magic during fifth year.

"In the end, it mattered not that you could not close your mind." Dumbledore had told Harry, referring to Harry's failed attempts at Occlumensy as they discussed the Prophecy and why Harry's life had been ever entwined with Voldemort. "It was your heart that saved you."

Those words, and that last vision of Draco before him reminded Harry of something important. Voldemort would be defeated by 'a power he knew not'. Voldemort was evil, he'd turned his back on humanity and sought evil, sought power, and as such had long since given up the one thing that Harry had always craved and until lately had never received enough of: Love. Voldemort did not know love, but Harry Potter knew it in ways that the Dark Lord had never dreamed possible.

Sirius Black, who Harry had loved as a mixture of father and older brother. Remus Lupin, Severus Snape, both who had become favored uncles. Aunt Petunia had shown him love, love suppressed, forgotten in petty jealousies, but love that found its way out at last. Hermione Granger had shown him love that exists between good friends, ever present when needed, giving and taking freely from one another. Molly and Arthur Weasley, parents with a large family of their own, who had welcomed him as if he was one of their own, surrogate parents. Draco Malfoy, who had been his nemesis, his rival, but who had taken Harry to such heights of passion and love that he knew what it meant to be two joined as one. It had been Draco who had filled his failing vision, Draco whose voice he'd heard last, and his heart filled with love for the blond aristocrat, who had chosen to live his life as Harry's husband.

As Harry remembered those whom he loved, and who loved him, Voldemort's spirit lost more and more control. Harry's hearing returned, and he could hear Draco whispering his love for Harry, and that only strengthened the love filling Harry's own heart. When his vision returned, that love redoubled again, gaining even more strength until he thought his heart would burst at the sight of that pointy face and blond hair that somehow managed to remain in place despite being in the middle of a battlefield. With a final silent scream, the spirit of Voldemort wailed in defeat as Harry regained control of his voice and whispered one word.

"Placatas." Harry whispered the incantation, and he felt his own magic seizing the shrinking spirit of Voldemort and forcing it into the prison of the crystal Harry wore around his neck. The cool metal and crystal globe on Harry's neck turned warm as the last vestiges of Voldemort were torn from Harry's body and imprisoned within.

Night had come to the battlefield, and Harry looked through the darkness to see the red glow of the crystal he wore. Voldemort was defeated. Harry looked up into the pale, worried eyes of his

husband and smiled.

“I love you, Draco Malfoy.”

After two years, the scar Hermione had earned in the Battle of Hogwarts still stood out on her skin. It did nothing to diminish her beauty though, Harry thought, as he held her hand and smiled. She chose that moment to open her eyes and smiled weakly. From the other bed nearby, Ginny also chose that moment to wake up and smile at Harry.

“Are they asleep?” Hermione asked quietly and Harry smiled back at them both.

“Yes, both Albus Lucien James Potter-Malfoy and Minerva Henrietta Granger-Weasley are sleeping.” Harry answered, using the full names of both children that had just been born a few hours ago. “Draco’s still in there staring at them both.”

“He better not wake them up.” Ginny said irritably. “I’m still exhausted.”

“Don’t worry, I doubt he will.” Harry said with an ironic smile. “He’s still smarting from that little hex you threw at him last week. He’s developing a real fear of bats now, thanks to you.”

“He should know by now I’m pretty good with that hex.” Ginny said with a nasty grin. She’d been a very temperamental pregnant woman, and Harry shuddered at the mere thought of another nine months with her in a foul mood.

“How’d the meeting with the Prime Minister go?” Hermione asked. Harry had been in that meeting when they went into labor, and had rushed to their sides at Potter Manor as son as he could.

“It went well.” Harry said with a sly grin. “We’ve rounded up the last of Voldemort’s supporters, and convinced them that muggle involvement in the wizarding world would only lead to the rising of another dark lord as resentment against muggles grew. They’re going to back off, and let us get things ‘normalized’ for a while. By the time they think to change anything we’ll have things comfortably in place that it won’t be possible.”

“Good.” Hermione said with a nod. “We’ve got kids to raise, Harry, and I want to make sure they grow up without another Voldemort around.”

“Speaking of which, I better go see Draco.” Harry said with a glimmer of pain. Harry really wanted to feel his husband’s arms around him right now.

Draco Potter-Malfoy stood at his son’s crib and looked down into the sleeping infant’s face with a sad smile. He was so small, and his first glimpse of his newborn son had almost given him a heart attack. Seeing dark-red hair on a Malfoy was impossible, but the medi-witch had wiped the infant’s head and he realized the redness had been from the birthing fluids. The little boy in the crib had Malfoy-blond hair, and Potter-green eyes.

Draco had never seen a more beautiful child.

Even the dark-red haired girl in the other crib was beautiful, but this boy, this child was his child, his and Harry’s. That thought sent all manner of thoughts tumbling through Draco’s head, but he forced them down for the moment. The moment he’d been waiting for was at hand, and five years of patience and hard work were at hand. The waiting was over and the Dark Lord would rise again.

Draco thought back to those many years ago, and the wild plan that he'd been given by Voldemort himself. The Dark Lord had known Pettigrew's potion had not worked, had known he was dying even then, and had hatched this plan, a plan Draco had thought would be impossible, but turned out to have worked nearly perfectly.

The Dark Lord needed life, and he knew his possession of Harry Potter would fail. Thus he'd known that something else was necessary. Of all the potential followers he could use to seduce Harry Potter and lead him down this path, the Dark Lord had chosen Draco Malfoy.

Initially Draco had resisted. He hated Potter, totally and completely. Potter represented everything that Draco despised, and the mere thought of being with him was revolting. Besides, Potter wasn't even Pureblood!

Still, the Dark Lord had given him an order, and Draco had complied, as the Dark Lord knew he would. Draco was a Malfoy after all. The plan would have failed though, if Draco hadn't taken that first potion.

The potion was subtle, something that required brewing at a level only Draco could achieve without using Severus Snape. Snape was kept out of this plan, to keep his initial reactions genuine. They'd suspected he might have more loyalty to Dumbledore, but back then no one had suspected the level of the Potion Master's duplicity.

The potion had been subtle indeed, inverting Draco's feelings for anyone he cast a spell at while it was in his system. That had been what allowed him to befriend Potter at first, and then to go deeper. By the time the engagement bracelets had been locked on his wrist, the feelings were so deeply engrained that they fooled all the tests. They had only begun to fade after their wedding, long after the protective spirits had left the bracelets.

Still, he'd been faithful to Potter because any unfaithful acts would have caused the bracelet to fall off, even after marriage. He'd guided Potter down the path of the Blood Oath, and the Dark Arts out of feelings of love and protectiveness for his husband. As the potion's effects wore off, and his memories of Voldemort's orders returned, Draco saw just how grand the Dark Lord's plans were, and how perfect.

Now, the moment of the Dark Lord's birth was at hand, and he, Draco Malfoy, would be the Dark Lord's savior. Draco took the necklace out, smiling at how easily Harry had let him start wearing it over the past year. It still glowed red, the color of Voldemort's eyes, and Draco knew the spirit locked inside still waited to be released into a new body.

Draco stared down at the sleeping child, his first-born son, and smiled again. Moving carefully he held out his hand so the crystal globe hung over the child's forehead. Now all Draco would have to do is say the spell, and the Dark Lord's spirit would flow from the crystal and into the newborn child, his child, and Harry's.

Harry's.

That was the one flaw in the plan, the one weakness that threatened Voldemort's grand scheme. The one thing that stayed Draco's hand from casting the final spell. He'd told Granger that there was no way, short of breaking the crystal to release Voldemort's spirit, but that had been a lie. There were two ways. One would allow Voldemort to enter, to possess another.

That was what the plan was, for Voldemort's spirit to enter this child's body. As the child grew,

so would the memories of his life as Voldemort until he reached eleven, when Voldemort's full spirit would revive and forever take over the body. As the father, and for having made it possible, Draco would experience rewards undreamed in the history of Death Eaters.

Yet, Draco paused in casting the spell.

The Malfoys had supported the Dark Lord to rid the wizarding world of the threat posed by muggles. Harry had done that in a different way, but the wizarding world was no longer threatened by muggles and would not be for the foreseeable future. Voldemort's objectives had been achieved in a way the Dark Lord would never have dreamed.

The Harry that Draco had known in school, the whining, insufferable prat, was long gone. In his place was a strong, confident, and powerful Harry Potter who was more than worthy of being Draco's equal. More importantly, Draco had to admit that while the effects of the potion had worn off and he was able to feel his own real emotions, one thing had not changed.

He, Draco Malfoy, loved Harry Potter completely and truly.

"Absolvus!" Draco half-muttered, and half-shouted, waving his wand at the crystal globe of his and Harry's son's head. For a moment he heard a silent shriek, and then the crystal was pure, clean of the spirit that had been housed there for two years. That spirit, instead of entering their son, dissolved into nothingness, gone to wherever the spirits of the dead left once their bodies were dead. History might record that Harry Potter destroyed Voldemort at the Battle of Hogwarts through the power of his love for others, but Draco knew that it was here, in the nursery, where Harry Potter destroyed Voldemort through the power of the love another had for Harry.

"I love you, Harry Potter." Draco said aloud, for the first time admitting to himself the full truth: that his heart and his future lay with Harry.

"I love you, too, Draco Malfoy." Harry's voice startled him, and he turned to see Harry putting his own wand back into the sash of his expensive green robe. Harry's face had a gentle smile on it, and Draco sighed in both relief and amazement. It wasn't until he felt the wetness dripping down his face that he realized he was crying. With a sob, he crossed the distance between him and Harry and buried his head in Harry's chest. Harry made soothing sounds as he slowly rubbed Draco's head in a comforting gesture.

"I…I'm so sorry, Harry." Draco managed to mutter as he sobbed in a way that he knew was undignified, but he didn't care at that moment.

"Shhh, it's okay my love." Harry's soft voice was like a balm to Draco's soul. "I love you now and forever."

The End