Storyid: 4088595
FanFiction.net
Name: Nicodemus
Author: desolate03
Chapter 1 to 18

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 1

Disclaimer: I own nothing, but the storyline.

Author's notes: Hi! I'm back from a very long break. I have officially graduated college and I am on my way to working for Johnson and Johnson out it California. As you can see, I'm writing another story. This one is entitles 'Nicodemus'. I can't remember from which language it can from but it roughly means: 'The one who rules over the conquered' or something like that. I started this story before DH came out so I will finish it that way. This story is AU from OoTP and on. Sixth year basically didn't go down the way it did in HBP, and it starts roughly a year after their Seventh year. Hopefully this will be a bit darker than my other stories, and hopefully you like where it's going. Constructive feedback is always nice. ! It's good to be back. Enjoy!

Oh and ACL, HLD, Wicked, No Other Way, and Sticks and Stones have all be re-read and betaed by my lovely beta LeeLee. I love this chick, she's great. I will repost those chapters this week; hopefully for all of them. And she beta read these to chapters to so thank you from the bottom of my heart LeeLee!

Okay for real now, enjoy!

Prologue

"It seems that this ill begotten world is learning to take its life into its own hands." Voldemort said smugly as he grinned at the young lord sitting beside him.

"Is that so?" The young lord's voice had deepened over the course of the nine months that he had been in Voldemort's company. It began to carry more weight and power with every cultured word that came from his mouth. He had learned well, had been an eager student, and now…Voldemort smiled to himself, it seemed that his training was complete. "And how do you think they have done this?"

"Well for starters, actually setting up some preliminary defenses against our soldiers. They have finally realized that magick is more than just magick. It takes on different forms with every different intent that its master bends it to do. Light magick and dark magick, what is the main difference hmm?"

"Although light magick is very different than dark magick, the intent is all the same," a small smile flitted across the young lord's face. "It is the heart of the user that shapes what comes from the end of his or her wand. However," A gloved hand came up as the flames in the fireplace spiked and then fell again as that gloved hand fell to its linen trouser knee. "In our case I would say whatever comes from our own two hands. With darker magick, the call is stronger, because the intent behind it is stronger. Darker spells require more concentration and power of will, but dark magick also extracts a higher price. Your mortality slowly ebbs away unless you have a focus…outside of your magick."

"Very well said," Voldemort said, "And I agree with that thought."

"I can assure you that most of this world will not embrace the dark aspects of magick. They cling too fiercely to their mortality. It grounds them, makes everything black and white instead of the gray that it usually is. They feel that they can label and place everyone and everything into a nice little box, but if they were to accept this…then what is the need for labels or these nice boxes to put everything in to? Everyone would have a dark secret, everyone would be the same." A bitter chuckle escaped the young lord. "It is really funny Tom." Voldemort arched an eyebrow.

"Oh?"

"They planned for me to have all of this power that you have brought forth within me. Only they planned to control it, bind it to themselves, and have me walk around like a puppet on strings while they, the Puppet Masters, yanked those strings to place me where they wanted me to be. And yet you," His eyes flashed with power, "You who had every reason to want me dead for this power alone, nurtured it and helped me control it. Why?"

"Because I saw that you had potential, especially when you married your Consort. The person you were before would have never done that and this new older, wiser you intrigued me. I had to know, for a fact that you had truly changed and then when you came willing under my tutelage, the reasons I had for wanting you dead became obsolete. You were no longer a threat to my cause…you became an ally to it."

"Would you like more tea Tom?" He asked. Voldemort let his crimson gaze rest on the young man seated across from him and nodded with a smile.

"Indeed."

"Darling, would you be as kind as to get our guest more tea please?" The young lord called out. Within moments, the petite lithe body of his consort swept through the room with a tray in hand.

"But of course dear," was the drawled reply, "Would you care for more?" Voldemort watched the interplay between the couple and was quite surprised to see those deep emerald green eyes soften at the young man who was making their tea. An elegant hand handed him his tea, just how he liked it with one teaspoon of cream, and three lumps of sugar.

"My dear Draco, how are you doing? I hear congratulations are in order?" Voldemort said softly to the young man. Silvery gray eyes flickered with a tenderness that was replaced with a cool mask after moments. The same hand that had given him his tea went to the man's slight protruding abdomen for a moment before it flicked the silver blond rope of hair behind his back showing his slightly pointed ears.

"I am quite well Lord Riddle and I thank you for your congratulations." He said coolly. "I take it that you will be joining us for dinner? My father and his lover will be coming to dine with us, you are more than welcome."

"I would rather not over stay my welcome. I will leave the rest of this fine afternoon to you and your husband. I must say he is quite an exemplary man." He watched as those silvery gray eyes softened and that alabaster skin flushed as the husband in question lifted his left hand and kissed the back of it.

"Yes, I dare say he is." Draco agreed softly. "I take it that your business has been concluded?"

"Yes, business has been concluded for now." Voldemort sipped the last of his tea and then stood bowing to Draco and his husband who had also stood. "I bid you both good day and Draco, tell your father that he and his lover are to meet me within a weeks' time to discuss…their problem." Draco arched an eyebrow but nodded nonetheless.

Voldemort walked briskly down the understated yet elegant marble hallway of the Potter-Malfoy Manor towards the front door. A house elf got him his coat and he left their residence with a small smile curving his lips and more than a few ideas in his head.

Lord Harry Potter-Malfoy reflected on his dealings with Tom for a moment before the calming sensation of his bonded seeped into his bones. "A long meeting, I presume?" Draco asked quietly, as was his way. Harry stared at his husband as the young man sat in the chair that Tom had just vacated. Had it really been nine months since their wedding day? To Harry it seemed as if years had passed more than mere months.

However, Draco did have that effect on him.

"Yes, long, but no longer than usual. Mostly we just talked and planned the next skirmish to this seemingly endless battle." Draco smiled softly at him.

"You sound like Father." He murmured as he let a hand gracefully flow over the discarded dishes and both of them watched as they vanished.

"Yes, well, he was the one who taught me how to speak." Harry said raising an eyebrow. They gazed at each other before looking away at the same time. A lot had changed between them and now they had more to think about than themselves. "Come to me please." Draco rose gracefully and practically glided towards Harry's seat. Harry pulled the lithe body in front of him between his legs and then let his hands wander over the protrusion of his mate's belly. "Do you feel well?"

"Yes, my morning sickness has gone and I can eat more now," he said in soft reply. Harry smiled at that. Draco had had the worst morning sickness; he had not been able to keep anything down and was almost forced to go to one of the few Veela doctors in England, for something that would set him to straits.

"I am glad of that my darling." Harry told him. Draco smiled and then sighed softly as Harry stood up and pulled him close, wrapping him in his arms as he kissed him gently. "Come we must meet Lucius and Severus soon, there has been a change of plan."

"Oh?"

"Dinner will be held out tonight." Harry said as he wrapped an arm around Draco's lithe waist and guided him out of his private study and down the hallway towards the main entrance of their large home.

"Is there something that you are not telling me that would make you change the plans this way?" Draco asked with a small frown. It was not his place to know certain things about his husband's dealings, however his husband's health and well-being was one of his top priorities. Draco blinked as he thought of this; though they were bond mates as well as heart mates due to the Veela blood that ran through his veins, and Draco knew that he and his kin were quite possessive and down right protective of their mates, it was something else entirely that made Harry's safety a priority for him. Something beyond instinct and their bonds.

"Draco?" Harry asked as he watched his mate pensively. The Veela blinked and then smiled at him.

"I am fine."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, husband." Draco said exasperated, "I am not made of china." As Harry helped him into his black velvet cloak. He gloved his hands and then was surprised but inwardly pleased when Harry kissed him again albeit a bit more tenderly than he did in his private study.

"I worry over your health as well as the health of our child Draco; I do not want to lose you both." Harry admitted quietly. Some of Tom's teachings were rearing their ugly heads. He had just admitted to weakness and that weakness could be used against him. However, as he saw Draco's eyes soften as they gazed up at him, he knew the risk was worth it.

"I will take care Harry, do not worry so. It is my job to do the worrying in this relationship." Draco told him. Harry just nodded solemnly as he laid Draco's hand on his forearm and grabbed his cane and nodded to the house elf. The elf bowed and opened the doors to let them out into the rapidly cooling October evening. A long stretch limousine awaited them and their chauffeur was already waiting by the door.

"My Lords," he said opening the passenger door for them.

"John, how are you this evening?" Harry asked, as he made sure Draco was comfortable in the car.

"Very well milord."

"Good, we are going into the muggle world tonight, to the Ritz Carleton I believe."

"Very good milord." John bowed and then shut the door, hurrying to his own door, climbing in, and driving off towards London, leaving Lords Harry and Draco Potter-Malfoy both contemplating how their relationship even started.

R/R!

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 2

Disclaimer: I own nothing.

Author's Note: Beta-read version. Enjoy!

Chapter One

One year earlier…1st of September

Harry Potter stepped off the train and looked at the beautiful towering structure of Hogwarts and snorted disdainfully. If he had thought that all of his hopes and dreams would lie here in this castle, he'd been proven wrong time and time again. The gaiety that buzzed around him from other students didn't even really reach his ears. It was a like an infinite echo, something he could barely hear, but never experienced for himself.

"Hey, Harry!" Ron shouted and Harry rolled his eyes and stared at his friend through narrowed

green eyes.

"Did you want something?" He asked a bit coldly. Ron blinked at him and then frowned at him glancing in concern towards Hermione who also looked a bit surprised at the abruptness of Harry's reply.

"Yeah, uh, just wondered how your summer went?"

"Ron, you ask that every summer. Isn't my reply always this same?" Harry asked arching an eyebrow. "It sucked." He said succinctly. "You should know…oh that's right neither of you bothered to write me this summer. I believe you were both too busy was it?"

"Hey, Harry look we're really sorry mate but…"

"I understand you have your own lives to live." Harry said a bit bitterly before disappearing through the main doors and escaping up to Gryffindor tower. Hermione and Ron both looked at each other and then scurried up the stairs after him, they failed to notice the cool silver grey gaze of one Draco Malfoy gazing up after them.

"Interesting," He murmured before pivoting on his heel and turning towards the dungeons.

Harry sat through the opening feast in a daze. He ate the food, barely listened to what Ron and Hermione had to say, and then totally blocked out the now grating cheerful voice of the Headmaster.

He didn't understand how the man could be so cheerful. Sirius was dead, had been dead for nearly a year now, the war was becoming more dangerous by the day, and yet Dumbledore was acting as if none of it had ever happened. "Bubbling fool," Harry muttered and drank some of his pumpkin juice. As he set the glass down the hairs on the back of his neck rose and his eyes focused on those present. It was strange, he was suddenly so much more aware of everyone around him now. Harry looked around and his gazed fixed on Draco - who was looking right back at him.

He'd changed, Harry thought faintly. Though very handsome before, Draco Malfoy seemed to have grown even more exquisite over the summer break. His hair now fell to at least the middle of his back in a silky sheet of silver blond locks and his eyes fairly glowed with power. As they continued to lock gazes Harry felt something change, it felt like the air around him was suffocating him, he felt trapped and this feeling inside him was urging him towards the other boy.

"Bloody hell," Harry muttered, as he stumbled out of his chair and hurried towards the doors to the hall. He slammed the doors behind and began to make his way back towards his dormitory only to be stopped by the very person he was running from. "Malfoy." He said in greeting. A small smile flitted over Draco's lush lips before he nodded in return.

"Potter, I believe we have a few things to talk about." Draco said quietly without a hint of malice. Harry blinked and then he arched an eyebrow.

"And what would we have to talk about Malfoy; we've hated each other since we laid eyes on each other."

"Now that isn't exactly true, you didn't start hating me until I insulted the Weasely clan and I didn't start hating you until you refused my hand in friendship." He brought up a hand and casually flicked a few strands of his hair from out of his face. "However that is the past this is the present, and right now we are both in a situation that can either make both of us dreadfully miserable or as happy as we could ever be together."

"Is that so?" Harry asked a bit warily. Draco strode towards him with that effortless grace he always had and even now Harry envied, to a certain extent, that mask he always wore. But that was the least of his problems. The feeling inside of him had not faded and it seemed to grow worse with every step Malfoy took that brought him closer towards Harry. He stopped a good inch away and looked up at Harry with a hesitant look in his eye.

"If I were to say that the rumors about me for once are true, what would you say to that?" Draco asked him carefully. Harry didn't have to ask him what rumors. It was even in the Daily Prophet last year. Draco had mysteriously vanished during mid-term and the rumor was that he was a Veela, one of the strongest, that had been born in centuries. His father, Lucius, had taken him out of school and he'd been home schooled for the rest of term. Rumor also had it that his mate was at Hogwarts and the pull was so strong that in the best interest of both parties, Draco Malfoy was to stay at Malfoy Manor until the start of his seventh year. Harry felt something twist in his gut and he some how knew that whatever Malfoy was about to say to him was going to change his life forever.

"I would say congratulations on getting your inheritance, but what does it have to do with me?" Unbeknownst to him, Harry had instinctively moved closer to the drugging heat that was emanating from Draco's form.

"And if I was to tell you that you, Harry, are the mate that I have been looking for?" Harry couldn't breathe. He gazed into those silver grey eyes as he struggled to think of something to say.

"Then I would say you might want to choose someone else because my lifespan seems to be very extremely limited." Harry replied softly. Draco chuckled softly but still stood there in front of him.

"I cannot choose someone different, you know that." He said quietly, "However even if I did have the choice, I would choose no one but you." He looked up at Harry with hesitation in his eyes. "Are you going to reject me?" It was asked almost brokenly and Harry realized what kind of position they were both in. It was a dangerous precipice to be on in any situation but theirs it

was almost sheer insanity. They were on opposing sides of the war raging underneath the Ministry's nose and yet if Harry accepted Malfoy's courting him then their lives would be irrevocably entwined, but if he rejected him…Malfoy would die.

It wasn't a position he liked to be in.

The silence between them was electric and the pressure building inside Harry seemed to be on the verge of exploding, he knew it had to do with Malfoy standing right in front of him and not touching him, kissing him, doing *something anything* to him, with him, or all of the above. If that didn't convince Harry that Draco Malfoy wasn't spinning a tale, he didn't know what would. "No," he as he slowly wrapped his arms around Draco's lithe waist, "I won't reject you, I don't think I ever could reject something like that."

"Well, good for me then," Draco said a bit shakily even as he let his arms wrap around Harry's neck. Just touching him was more than Draco could even ask for and he hated being this vulnerable. It was like touching a live wire all his nerve endings were standing on end and the delicious scent of jasmine, rainy days, and lilies was nearly turning his insides to mush. Harry slowly bent his head and just as his lips brushed Draco's, a firm hand clamped down on his shoulder. Harry straightened and turned quickly and found himself staring into the fathomless gaze of on Severus Snape.

"If both of you do this now, the ramifications are endless." He said carefully. A low whimper came from the younger Slytherin and Harry was surprised and those hard eyes softened in sympathy as the Potions Master gently untwined Draco's arms from around Harry's neck and pulled him away from him. "It is too soon Draco, he needs to think. Just be glad that he didn't reject you like you thought." Severus said calmingly. Draco looked forlornly at Harry before covering his face with his hands and began taking deep breaths to calm the clawing and clamoring Veela inside of him. When he straightened he looked aloof and cold, like nothing had ever happened.

"I will see you later…Harry," Draco said almost resignedly and then he strode down the hall disappearing around a dark corner. Harry ran a shaky hand through his unruly raven locks and then looked at Severus.

"How long?" Harry asked him. Severus arched an eyebrow but shrugged gracefully.

"I believe he knew you were his mate even before he was taken from classes. He's been waiting for nearly a year to have you." Severus said. A year, Harry thought in sympathy. A year of waiting, watching, and wondering and then not even knowing if your mate will reject you or welcome you with open arms.

"Merlin a whole bloody year." Harry muttered and then his eyes narrowed. "Does Dumbledore know?" Severus looked at him impassively for a moment but then shook his head.

"No, with the glamour Draco's using he won't find out any time soon, but if both of you go off

and get bonded right this second, of course he's going to find out." Severus said a bit scathingly. "I would watch how you and Draco interact, just being here is putting unnecessary strain on the bond you two have already."

"I know that, I can feel it. I feel like I'm going to be suffocated to death." Harry said and then blinked. "You know I think this is the first civil conversation we've ever had." Severus sneered.

"I believe so Mr. Potter. Now, I have to leave you, the feast is ending, however, I would like to meet with you and Draco in my office in a week's time. We have a lot of things to discuss. The first and foremost is how to get the two of you through this year and graduated before Dumbledore concocts a plan that has to do with the two of you." And with that said, Severus strode down the hall, his robes billowing behind him.

Harry stared after him in bemusement. "Well this is shaping up to be an interesting year."

"Father he didn't reject me." The awe in his son's voice coupled with the heady flush along his alabaster skin was more than enough incentive not to go and kill Harry Potter. They were sitting in Draco's private Prefect rooms talking over a glass of wine for Draco and a whiskey on the rocks for Lucius.

"I'm very pleased to hear that." Lucius said warmly his silver grey eyes softening as he stared at his gorgeous son. He'd never seen him so happy, although he knew from experience what it was like to find your mate and have them not reject you. Some of his happiness dimmed though as he remembered his own childhood. His mate may not have rejected him but his own father had surely objected to who his mate happened to be.

"Father?"

"I'm alright, I'm just glad history will not be repeating itself." He looked at his son and the stated simply, "Know this Draco, you will never have any opposition from me about your mate being Harry Potter." Draco gave his father's hand a sympathetic squeeze and he smiled.

"He's so gorgeous, and yet he is still so sad." Draco said, "I have a feeling this year is going to be quite eventful, especially if Harry and I get married and bonded like we are supposed to."

"You have three months before that will happen Draco do not rush it."

"Of course I'm not going to rush it. Severus has set up a meeting for us in his offices next week. By then Harry will probably have thought it over and what Severus has to say to him will not make it anymore difficult…hopefully." Draco added with a rare spark of mischief in his smile. Lucius chuckled at that, yes, Severus and Harry were well known enemies, but he was glad his old friend was taking such an active part in making sure that Draco had a very effortless and yet meaningful courting period of his mate.

"Did you tell him that you could sire children?"

"No we actually hadn't gotten that far yet Father. I am ashamed to admit that I nearly let my feelings get away from me and we were about to kiss before Severus came and stopped us. The pull is so strong between us and his scent is intoxicating." Draco pushed a strand of his hair behind his ears revealing their pointed edge. Veela blood ran strong in the Malfoy family and even then some had more Veela heritage in them than others. Draco was a throwback from nearly two centuries when one of their ancestors had mated with an Elf causing one of their offspring to have slightly pointed ears. It hadn't been seen in ages until Draco's inheritance left the evidence to speak for itself.

It was rumored that that young man, Lucius recalled his name being Demias Malfoy, had been quite powerful and had been able to control some if not all of the Elemental magick running about the wizarding world. To think if Draco had also inherited that gift…Lucius shook his head. If that happened, then neither of them would ever be out of Voldemort's clutches.

"If your powers develop anymore you must come and tell me." Lucius said his voice brooking no argument. Draco noticed his father's rigid bearing and nodded solemnly. It wouldn't do them any good if Voldemort knew how powerful Draco might become.

"Of course Father, I will." Draco said. Lucius smiled at him.

"I am very proud of you my little Dragon. I really don't think you know how much you mean to me." Draco looked at his father with soft eyes and smiled beautifully at him.

"You are a wonderful father to me, I am proud to be your son." Draco murmured, "I just wish that there was something that I could do for you and your…mate. What Grandfather and Mother did was horrible. If only…" Draco shook his head, "It's too late for regrets now, what's done is done, but now I am sure that since I am of age and legally considered an adult that you and he could…" Lucius was shaking his head.

"I'm sorry but it really isn't that simple. The bond tying me to Narcissa through you is fading yes, but we still have to deal with Lord Voldemort and the bond that was placed on both of us through him. I cannot bond with my mate unless I am free of any and all other bonds bonding me to certain people. It was a moot point, we will still have to wait."

"I wish things had gone differently."

"Yes, so do I." Lucius said quietly but then he grinned, "But then I would not have you and I don't think that I would change that for the world." Draco laughed at his father's antics but rose from the table gracefully.

"Classes start on the morrow and I need some sleep. I bid you good night Father." He said as leaned forward and hugged his father. Lucius tightened his own grip on his only son and prayed to whatever gods there were that they would keep him and his mate safe.

"Good night Little Dragon." He said gruffly and watched Draco until the door to his bedroom closed. Lucius cleaned up the goblets used with a wave of his hand and then dowsed the fire before slipping silently out into the cold dungeon hallways. He approached the door that he was looking for and then opened it and silently closed it behind him. The sight that greeted him sent all of his insides melting in one scorching hot minute. Severus Snape stood in front of the blazing fire dressed in a deep night blue floor length robe. His hair had been recently washed and fell in soft waves around his face softening the rigid lines and the harshness of it. His bottomless gaze seemed to eat Lucius whole as he approached him quietly. Though not a beautiful nor handsome man in any form the word, to Lucius, Severus Snape outshone everyone on the bloody planet.

"Good evening Lucius," Severus purred and Lucius cupped his face in his hands and kissed him within an inch of his life. Severus moaned in passion as he felt their bond roll over both of them like a tidal wave.

"My mate," Lucius muttered as he hastily stripped out of all his finery and practically tore the robe off of Severus' lithe form. "My mate, my love, mine, mine, *mine!*"

"Yes," Severus agreed breathlessly as they laid in front of the fire. If they couldn't bond and marry as most Veela and their mates do, then this would have to do. And when the bond that tied Lucius to Narcissa finally faded and the bond to Voldemort disintegrated into dust, they would finally get to be together like they should have twenty years ago. But now…this was enough, Severus thought even as Lucius made passionate love to him body and soul. This had to be enough.

R/R!

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 3

Disclaimer: I own nothing

Author's Note: Beta read version of chapter. Enjoy!

Chapter Two

A week later…8 of September

Harry stared at Draco's bent head. The Veela was reading something as they waited for Snape in

his office in the dungeon. The week had been supremely dull and quite aggravating for Harry. Hermione and Ron wouldn't leave him alone. They were worried about him for sure, this Harry knew without a doubt. He just wished that they would give him time.

He hadn't received any disturbing visions through his scar from Voldemort in weeks. In fact, Harry frowned as he pondered that thought. It was abnormally quiet with respects to Voldemort and his Death Eaters. Usually the madman always made some kind of statement in the beginning of the year, just to gloat. Harry had been expecting something even grander considering that this was his last year here at Hogwarts.

Nothing had happened as of yet, but he was still waiting, not necessarily patiently, but he was waiting nonetheless. Harry suddenly felt as if he was being scrutinized closely and looked up to find Draco watching him, his book closed and placed on Snape's desk in front of him.

"Sickle for your thoughts?" Draco murmured quietly. Harry shook his head and gave him a smile back in kind.

"No, just the usual Voldemort related thoughts. I'm surprised to find that he isn't trying to kill me as we speak." Draco blinked in surprise for a moment and then amusement lit his gray eyes making then glow silver.

"I believe right now the Dark Lord has a few more important things to worry about than you." Harry looked at Draco warily.

"Really?"

Draco nodded but said nothing as Snape strode into his office, black cloak billowing behind him.

"Draco, Potter," He said by way of greeting as he sat in his high backed chair behind his desk and watched them both of fathomless dark eyes.

"Professor Snape," Draco said with warmth that was usually absent in his voice. Harry watched on silently as Professor Snape nodded in kind to Draco, his eyes growing slightly warm. It was short lived however as he turned to regard Harry.

"Professor," Harry muttered and watched Snape as his eyes rolled and he gave a snort of amusement.

"You have yet to make yourself a pompous ass this year Potter, hopefully it is because you are getting more mature with age. I can't say the same for your friend, Weasely, however," A sneer spread across his face, "he seems to be a bit more immature of late."

"It probably has to do with the fact that I am basically ignoring them." Harry snapped back. Draco watched the exchange with amusement. He quietly approved the way Harry was holding himself with Severus. It seemed he had learned a thing or two.

"Sev, Potter, I believe we have business to discuss." Draco said firmly and he turned his bright silver gaze on Harry.

"Quite right, we do have many things to discuss. The top most priority, dealing with the fact that you two seemed to be destined to be the bane of each other's existence for the rest of your lives." Severus picked up a stack of papers tucking them neatly into his desk as he said this. Draco's lips curved into a smirk and Harry rolled his eyes at the over dramatization that seemed to be part of Severus' rather sarcastic lectures every day of the past six years.

"Severus you make it sound like a curse." Draco scolded but Harry saw that he was fighting to keep the grin from emerging on his face. Severus turned toward him and frowned.

"Well, I feel sorry for you Draco for having to deal with him. Potter here is just lucky that he gets you."

"Oh come on!" Harry said angrily. Draco merely rolled his eyes and then turned to Harry and smirked.

"He does it because he knows that he can get a rise out of you. You should do better than to merely persuade him to continue." Harry's jaw dropped. "Now that you are relatively quiet can we get down to business please?" Draco turned away from him and stared at his godfather with a small frown on his face. "And no comments from you, Sev."

"Yes, Draco," Severus said his tone sarcastic but amused as well. He turned to Harry and the boy immediately knew that he was all seriousness now. " As you learned last week, Draco is Veela and you are his mate. Now the last year has been a trying time for him as it has been for you no doubt. Now, the way that we handle this situation is based primarily on you acting out one of two options." Severus held up a finger, "One: is that you reject Draco and watch as he slowly wastes away, or Two: you accept the bond for what it is and continue with your life, irrevocably changed no doubt, however but still whole.

"Seeing as you already dispelled the first notion, we are moving on with the second. Due to the time frame of how long Draco has already gone without his mate by his side, your courting time will be relatively short. Draco must be fully bound and married to his mate by the end of this year." Harry blinked.

"What do you mean by the end of this year?" He asked and Severus gave him a withering glance that made Harry feel dumber than a box of rocks.

"As in by December you and Draco shall be bonded like a mated Veela pair should be and married like a wizarding pair would be. I don't think I can put it in any lamer terms for you." Severus snorted, "If we had approached you at the beginning of both of your Sixth years then all of this would be moot point. However, you were going through some…hard times at that point and Draco was going through his own."

"But, what about everything else!" Harry protested, "I mean, this entire bloody school knows that Dra- I mean Malfoy and I loathe one another, not to mention the mere fact that Lucius Malfoy is supposed to be in Azkaban, and then there's still the small insignificant detail of Voldemort still having it in for me." Harry glared at Severus, "What of that, o wise one!"

"Now see here…"

"Oh bloody hell!" Draco snapped, "Both of you just shut it." He turned to Harry glaring at him, even though half of him wanted to just fall in his lap and practically *purr* in simplistic contentment of the fact that his mate was there and not rejecting him. "Harry, listen to me. This wedding between us is going to remain strictly confidential so that no one and I mean absolutely no one will know of our marriage and subsequent allegiance until we are good and ready to tell them. For your second concern; yes, Father should be in Azkaban, however, the Ministry is corrupted through and through so he was able to afford to pay a handsome amount of Galleons and secure his freedom. Now as to the part of Voldemort still after your blood, there is no denying that. We will have to find someway around that when it comes upon us.

"And just so you know, I know all about the Order of the Phoenix as well as Sev being a spy for that Order so you don't have to worry about dishing out any secrets on my part." Draco turned Severus and then scoffed. "And Sev will you please stop antagonizing him, I know that you both practically want to strangle each other,"

"Literally," they both admitted and Draco rolled his eyes.

"Well you both are going to be practically family within a few months time, so get over it. Bloody hell your both acting like a bunch of ponces." Draco said scathingly. "I can not choose between either of you, so it looks like you're stuck together as part of my family. Harry is my mate Sev and will not have you belittling him, and Harry, Sev is my godfather and someone I trust implicitly and I will not have you both at each others' necks, is all of that clear?"

"I will try, for you Draco." Severus said stiffly. Harry slumped in his chair.

"Crystal." He muttered. Draco sat back in his seat with a small smile gracing his lips.

"Now can we get back to the matter at hand?"

It was strange how it happened.

One moment he was plotting yet another hair-brained scheme to rid the world of that Potter boy and then the next…

He thought: *How did I get to this point?*

Voldemort sat in a large circular room, the hood of his cloak shadowing his face, as he looked inward at himself. He was brooding, which usually ended up in someone dying; most times it was the first person that showed up.

However, Voldemort couldn't be bothered with all his idiot minions right this second. His mind was preoccupied with other thoughts.

How did I get to this point?

What made me think that? He wondered, his blood red eyes glowing in anger as well as confusion. His life, or what was left of it, was all a blur to him. Orphaned, bullied, brought to the wizarding world, bullied again for being in Slytherin, anger, hate, and the life turning thought of: *I can change this world…* and then darkness.

Death.

Blood.

Laughter.

Insanity.

Darkness, a dark so fathomless when he came back from it, it was no wonder he had lost a most of the humanity he had had before. Fragments of thousands of thoughts whirled in his head, pieces of memories almost like a dream of how the last seven years had been for him and yet still he couldn't answer that damn question.

How did I get to this point?

Voldemort growled at nothing as he stood, prowling the empty room, his volatile magick rolling off him in waves. He didn't know, he didn't *know*!

How did I –

I DON'T FUCKING KNOW! Voldemort whirled around to pace the empty room yet again until he saw that his hood had come off and he was standing right in front of a large ornate mirror. For once, his own mind was silent and he looked at himself, really *looked*, for the first time in a long time.

He was a monster.

You made yourself this way. His mind whispered then. The door opened to the room, he placed his hood back over his face and watched as his Death Eaters walked in. Some were as insane as he was and gleefully took part in whatever scheme he came up with, others did so from fear, and Voldemort could almost taste it. However what once gave him some modicum of pleasure, now

made him grimace in displeasure. There was a flickering of presence to his left and he turned his head as Lucius Malfoy and Severus Snape walked into the room.

He knew that Snape was a spy, had known he supposed in little ways for a long time. It didn't bother him too much, except for the fact that this man was once proud to be a part of his inner circle…what had made him change? Voldemort frowned as he looked at Lucius only to find that the Veela was watching him as well. Voldemort let a semblance of a smile twist his lips and he chuckled quietly.

Nothing ever got past Lucius.

Voldemort said nothing as his thoughts finally seemed to cease their chaotic prattle and formed something more coherent.

Do you want to be this way? His mind whispered.

No.

So how are you going to fix it? The question gave him pause, but didn't deter him in the least. He began to notice that those on the floor at his feet were shifting restlessly, in fear of him. And Voldemort realized it was because he hadn't said a word since they got here and had been standing eerily still for that entire time.

So how are you going to fix it?

"Malfoy and Snape, stay; the rest of you peons get out of my sight until something resembling a backbone finds its way up your pathetic spines."

Surprise ran through the crowd of people, but none would disobey him. The room quickly emptied all of them save the two he requested. Both had stood and were watching him warily. Ever the cunning Slytherin, those two: he needed that now.

Voldemort tossed back his hood and cocked his head and said calmly, "We have much to discuss, but the first line of business is to find a way to get rid of my ghastly half human half corpse of a body. Severus, do you have any suggestions?"

Lucius watched Severus flip through book after book, however none of it could get through the shock that reverberated through his mind. For the first time in nearly a decade, Voldemort had had sanity in his gaze. Lucius had watched as the man, Thomas Riddle, emerged from the shell of a monster and dictate what he wanted. That steady gaze had surprised them both and Voldemort had quietly explained that he wanted to look as human as possible, already knowing without Severus making a comment that he could never look like the man he had been before.

"It's amazing." Lucius murmured as he walked over to help Severus find all the ingredients he

needed to make the potions to give Voldemort what he had asked for.

"I wonder what brought this on; don't you?" Severus muttered and then scribbled something down on the long list of supplies he needed.

"Honestly? I could care less. He is back, from where ever he had been, and that's all that matters to me now." Lucius murmured as he slowly rubbed the small of Severus' back.

"I know; things are going to be quite interesting for the foreseeable future." Severus smirked and then turned to Lucius, "Now if you could be good mate, and help me find the other ingredients I will need to make this potion my best yet."

Lucius chuckled, "As you order it beloved, but can one potion really restore what insanity and death broke apart?" Severus stopped hunting through his large tombs of potions ingredients and looked at Lucius calmly.

"The man that was black haired and green eyed, will never exist again. He has been too altered for that. What I can do, with his help of course, is give him a human body from what we have to work with. It will take a lot out of him, his magick is the key ingredient needed to make this work; however, now that he is thinking clearly once more, I doubt there is room for failure."

Lucius looked thoughtful for a moment but then kissed Severus on the lips and smiled. "I'm sure everything will work out. How long will it take to make the potion?"

"Three days, and then it will be another three before anyone will be able to see him. He will be in a coma like state for the better part of that time. On the third or fourth day is when he will wake up and the reconstruction will be complete."

"So a week," Lucius murmured. "How will you work it around your schedule?"

Severus didn't look up at him from searching as he answered, "I can work in my private lab before class, most times I won't have classes when I am making the potion." He stopped looking in the book and wrote something down before turning to Lucius, "I could probably get Draco to help me. He is always wanting to learn more about Potions making." Lucius nodded his consent.

"It will be good for him, especially since there is all this secrecy now around him and his mate."

"Potter has surprised me." Severus said with a hint of sarcasm, "He hasn't done anything stupid so far. Granted it's only the second week of class, but still…"

"How did the meeting go?"

"As well as expected; Draco put both Potter and me in our places and we got down to business. Draco and Potter will be meeting four times a week at least to begin getting to know one another as well as letting the bond between the two of them begin to form. A tentative wedding date of

December 20 has been discussed and agreed upon, and that was it." Severus looked up at Lucius, "It is really quite amazing to see them get along so well. They are well matched. Now though, I a more concerned on how this new development with Voldemort will change the plans that we made to save Draco from our fate."

"Let's not discuss it now." Lucius said quietly. "We will see how everything begins to shape up before making any decisions."

15th of September

Ronald Weasely sat staring pensively at the chessboard in front of him. He was playing himself, just playing around, while his mind was preoccupied with other more important things.

One of the many was about Harry. He wanted to know what was up with him. He'd been different these past few weeks; nothing too noticeable, but still…Ron frowned as he gazed out the window. He'd been disappearing of late, more so than his normal disappearing acts and even then usually those happened closer to Christmas time, not at the beginning of the year.

Then there was Draco Malfoy. Bitter distaste welled up inside him as he thought of that prick. He was up to something, he had to be; Malfoy had been far too calm and quiet, no bickering or snide stares had come from him this year, which put Ron on edge.

He had a feeling it was going to be quite an interesting year.

Harry wandered the halls of Hogwarts late Tuesday night. He had just come from spending some time with Draco.

Draco…

He smirked; it was becoming easier and easier thinking of him like that instead of Malfoy. They were well matched, seemingly the perfect balance between each other. Of course he still had reservations about everything and then there was the fact that if Dumbledore ever found out about what was going on…

Harry frowned. That pompous ass couldn't find out. He would use Draco and his bond against him and Harry so thoroughly that there was no telling what could happen. Snape was right to keep most of their meetings confined to his personal quarters. Harry snorted; it looked like he was going to be getting 'detention' with the infamous Potions Master more so this year than any other. As he turned the corner returning to his dorm, Harry's thought shifted to Voldemort.

The maniac hadn't done anything of late. Things were much too quiet for him to be easy with. If Voldemort was anything, it was being very predictable. Why hadn't he done anything? What was he waiting for?

"What *are* you up to Voldemort?" Harry murmured to himself. "Honor and Loyalty," he said to the Fat Lady and disappeared through the portal to Gryffindor Tower.

Draco looked up and down the corridors before making his way quickly towards Severus' rooms. He reached the portrait and placed his hand in front of him. The static of wards washed over him before the portrait swung open, recognizing his magickal aura. Draco didn't hesitate and walked in completely bypassing the sitting room in favor for the Potions Lab connected to it.

Severus was already there standing over the cauldron that was simmering. Draco smiled a little as he saw his father standing right behind the man watching him closely. "Father, Sev," Draco said quietly and then walked up beside his godfather, "How is this potion going?"

"It's completed, thank you for your help." Severus said. "Lucius will take it to him tonight. By next week, we will see if our efforts were successful."

"Well, it should work." Draco murmured, "I'm just surprised that he would even want something such as this. Do you know what made him change?"

"No, we are still trying to figure out what is going on." Lucius said thoughtfully, "He ordered all of his operatives back to England, and for none of us to take action against anyone; the Ministry, Harry Potter, nor any of the people against him. One person spoke out against him and he struck him dead, but not with *Avada Kedavra*, but with a different spell, I've never heard of. No one has said anything since."

"Do you think that he might be becoming what he once was?" Draco asked, "If he began again, would you and Sev stay in his services?" Lucius and Severus looked at each other and then turned to Draco again.

"We've decided to wait and see," Severus said finally, "We cannot afford to be hasty now."

25th of September

His eyes opened readily and he slowly got up. He looked around the room and noticed a pair of black trousers and an expensive looking ribbed gray sweater. Pulling on the clothes and looked into the mirror for the first time.

The man staring back at him had short black hair, the temples were streaked gray giving him a more distinguished look. High cheekbones, roman nose, lips were slightly full, skin an alabaster pale in color, and some age lines around his eyes.

His eyes were still a bold crimson, the color of blood and they gazed at him with intelligence and the insanity around the dark edges. He smirked and his eyes began glowing. Well…the door

opened and Lucius and Severus came in. Both of them seemed speechless, but bowed nonetheless.

"Lord Volde- " He held up a hand and stopped Lucius before he spoke anymore.

"I think Voldemort can be laid to rest for now. I believe it's time for me to come back from the dead, don't you?" Lucius and Severus both snorted and then smirked.

"Lord Thomas M. Riddle I presume?" Lucius asked silkily.

"I like the sound of that," Tom Riddle said, marveling at the slight change in his voice as well.

"Welcome back Milord." Severus murmured. Tom laughed and looked at himself in the mirror again.

"Yes, welcome back indeed."

R/R!

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 4

Disclaimer: I own nothing. I wish I did, but I don't. :-)

Author's Note: Hi! Sorry about no update last week. I was finishing the last of my move and hadn't had the time to write. Well here is the next chapter, beta read by my beta LeeLee. I hope that I can get the next chapter out by next week Friday night as well. However, it is my first week at work so please be kind! So please enjoy!

Desolate

Chapter Three

1st of October

Draco had never been as content as he was at this moment. He and Harry were walking along the lake's edge; the tree leaves had just started turning a variation of gold, red, and bronze. They had not spoken for over thirty minutes but the silence between them was companionable and not the least bit stressed.

"Has Severus mentioned anything about Voldemort lately?" Harry asked suddenly and Draco could almost see his blissful mood explode in nothing. Of all the questions, why did it have to be that one?

"Father and Severus have spoken of him, however the Dark Lord hasn't called them to his services in quite some time." Draco hedged, not willing to upset his mate with any news about Lord Riddle, just yet.

"He must be doing something." Harry said softly, "I haven't had any nightmares at all for months." He looked over at Draco and shrugged, "perhaps I am a bit paranoid, but I am worried about what that means." Draco nodded, completely understanding Harry's fear.

"I know, but I assure you that we would let you know anything, if he does contact Father or Sev." Harry gave him a smile in return and Draco felt a tad bit guilty for lying to him; but it was too soon. Lord Riddle, or so Severus had explained, needed to recoup from being in a coma like state for four days. However, Draco knew it was only going to be a matter of time before Harry grew impatient with waiting and decided to go look for answers on his own.

Harry knew Draco was lying.

He could see his hesitation and then his guilt at telling the lie to Harry and Harry knew then that Draco was beginning to bond with him and was becoming more comfortable in his presence; there was no other way to explain his lapse in showing Harry his true feelings.

Draco was the Slytherin Prince after all; he knew better than that.

He didn't comment on it though for he could see that it would tear Draco apart. He was trying to be loyal to those who mattered most, which meant Severus and Lucius had to be protected from Harry, and Harry had to be protected from whatever those two had been telling Draco.

He walked Draco back to the Slytherin common room and smiled, "I will see you this weekend, yes?" Draco nodded regally, however his eyes glowed with pleasure that hadn't been there a month ago.

"Yes, thank you Harry." He said quietly and then walked away as the portrait closed behind him. Harry frowned and turned down the corridor heading back towards Gryffindor Tower.

What was Draco hiding?

"Sickle for your thoughts Draco?" Draco glanced up from the fire and smiled.

"No, my thoughts aren't even worth that much right now. Please, come and sit Blaise." Draco watched Blaise approach and then gracefully sprawl across the couch that he was sitting on. He appraised him silently; Blaise's mother was a model and he had her model good looks Draco

supposed. His skin was the color of mocha and his eyes were a rich brown. Blaise had high cheekbones and gorgeous nose and full mouth. Over the last year or so it seemed that he had decided to let his hair grow and had it twisted into locks. They looked well cared for and beautiful, already approaching his shoulders in length.

"Then what has you brooding?" He asked, his voice a deep drawl and his eyes missing nothing.

"I think the bond between my mate and I is progressing rather…rapidly." Draco admitted. "There are some things that I am not able to tell him, and it saddens me to lie to him."

Blaise hummed in agreement and looked into the fire. He said calmly, "And would this have anything to do with the Dark Lord?" Draco didn't even blink, but after a few moments he nodded. "And your mate…would that be the Golden Boy, by any chance?" Blaise guessed; he realized it was a very good guess, one that he had been thinking for the better part of a month. Draco turned and chuckled dryly.

"Am I that transparent?" He asked and Blaise laughed and shook his head.

"No my friend, you are the hardest person to read. But the way you left…and then the fact that we haven't met your mate and you rarely spoke of this person…it led me to believe that they, your mate, was very important, and also not from our circle." Blaise replied gently. "Besides it is almost like my situation, only I am not so important." Blaise winked.

Draco laughed, "You are important Blaise." He said, squeezing Blaise's thigh as he stood to leave, "you are very important to me."

"Be careful Draco." Blaise called to him.

"I always am."

"Blimey Harry where have you been all this time?" Ron asked him. Harry rolled his eyes and then frowned at his best friend.

"Minding my own damn bloody business, if that is all right with you?" He asked sarcastically. Ron jerked back, his face and eyes showing his shock and hurt at the callously made comment. Harry sighed and ran a hand through his messy hair.

"Sorry Ron, just…I've been thinking about a few things is all." Harry sighed and turned away from the boy, sitting by their window instead.

"Well that's alright Harry, I – didn't mean to bother you." Ron muttered an apology and began to walk away.

"Ron," Harry called out and the gangly tall boy turned, his eyes shadowed by his bright orange locks. "Can you answer something for me?"

"I can try." Ron said hopefully. Harry gave him a tired smile.

"Hypothetically speaking of course: If you found yourself the mate of a Veela and this person happened to be in league with some very shady people, but you found yourself falling for him anyway, and then this person turns around and lies about a question you put to them, what the bloody hell would you do about it?"

A chill swept over Ron as he gazed at Harry's face. Though he seemed to be jokingly referring to the scenario, Ron couldn't help but pick up on the seriousness in his emerald green eyes. Whatever he was asking so subtly in the question was deadly serious to him. Ron felt a moment of disquiet before he answered in a very serious tone.

"I would think that this person was trying to protect all parties and keep themselves out of it." Ron told him, Harry nodded and turned away, but Ron kept going, "I would keep in mind though mate, that this person who I am falling for has probably been with this league of ponces for far longer than we've been together." Ron stared Harry down. "I'd be pretty careful myself mate," Ron paused a moment before laughing jovially, though his worry for his friend grew inside. "Hypothetically speaking of course."

Harry returned the laugh, however, it sounded hollow and faintly strained to Ron's ears.

Blaise walked stealthily through the corridors towards the main entrance of Hogwarts. Night was falling earlier and earlier, making it easier for their little rendezvouses. It would be so much better if they didn't have to hide at all, but that was an impractical hope and Blaise prided himself on being practical. Fitting his hood over his head, Blaise pulled open the doors and slipped outside.

The weather was getting cooler as well, he noticed, as he pulled on his gloves and pulled his cloak tighter; they would have to find a different place to meet unnoticed. He made his way quickly to the tree that was by the lake. A smile worked its way across his lips as he noticed a small figure shivering from the cool night. As he approached, the figure turned to greet him.

"What took so long?" The familiar amused voice came through the darkness and Blaise grinned as he bent down and kissed his lover. His lover moaned and wrapped his arms around Blaise and held on tightly. Blaise finally lifted his head for air and looked into the deep brown eyes he loved so much.

"I was speaking with Draco earlier, Nev." Blaise murmured and he kissed his lips again. Neville Longbottom hummed in agreement and then laughed lightly as he was tickled.

"Yes and what did Draco have to say?" Neville asked.

"His mate is Harry Potter," Blaise said quietly. Neville reared back, his mouth dropping open in surprise.

"Bloody hell," He said and Blaise nodded.

"My thoughts exactly. It won't be easy for them. But I have a feeling that no one is going to know or find out if Draco and Professor Snape have anything to say about it."

"Hmm, I wonder how Harry feels about it." Neville murmured as Blaise and he began their usual walk around the lake. Blaise shrugged, holding him tighter as he shivered.

"I'm not sure. All I know is that he hasn't rejected Draco, which to me is the most important thing."

"True; I haven't heard anything about it up in the Tower, I guess Harry hasn't told anyone yet either. It's really strange; he's changed a lot over the summer."

"How so?" Blaise asked curiously. Neville sighed and shook his head.

"I can't put my finger on it, but I don't think he is as…I guess gullible as he used to be. He, Ron, and Hermione haven't really spoken to each other since the beginning of the school year. Of course, that may just be because when I see them Ron and Harry aren't saying anything to each other, but we Gryffindors have definitely noticed something wrong with the Golden Trio." Blaise was silent for a long time before he spoke again.

"This is going to be a very drama filled year I believe Nev." Blaise said dryly. "Do you think the Headmaster knows something is amiss?" Neville stopped and looked up at his lover.

"Why would Headmaster Dumbledore care about what is going on with them?"

"Because Harry is his weapon against Voldemort, babe, and he's not about to let that boy out of his sight." Blaise said bluntly. "It's all about power Nev; and whoever has Harry Potter, has the winning piece in this chess match."

Dumbledore sat behind his desk, a pensive frown on his face. He had summoned Harry to come to him in a note nearly two weeks ago and the boy still hadn't come to see him. Dumbledore clucked his tongue; it was all so very unbecoming for the Savior of the Wizarding World. Perhaps he was still having a temper tantrum about his Godfather Sirius, but that was over a year ago, surely the boy has mourned enough?

After all the things that I've done for him, this is how he repays me, Dumbledore thought with a huff; so very immature.

"Well no matter," Dumbledore muttered to himself. "I can find out for myself just what Harry has been up to. After all," he chuckled, "these walls always talk."

Emerald green eyes stared blankly upwards as he lay there in bed at almost midnight. He shifted

slightly as he heard the door open slightly and raised an eyebrow as a disheveled Neville Longbottom hastily walked into the room and made his way to his bed. *How interesting, I wonder whom he's seeing.* Harry thought to himself as he turned over. He caught a glimpse of the parchment sitting on the window sill right where he had left it.

Dumbledore's summons, Harry snorted and rolled over. He wasn't some dog that would come when his owner ordered him to. Of course he knew that Dumbledore probably had spies everywhere in Hogwarts just *itching* to tell Dumbledore what he had been up to these past few weeks.

It was one of the many reasons that he and Draco met as far from the school as possible. However, there was still some risk of being seen talking to each other even walking around the lake. Perhaps they would have to start meeting in Snape's rooms again.

Harry sighed and closed his curtains and closed his eyes. He hoped that he could go to sleep soon; he would be meeting Lucius Malfoy, cordially, for the first time tomorrow.

As he drifted off he thought he saw a flash of red across his semi-conscious mind.

Lord Riddle was sprawled over a settee facing the forested area behind his own personal manor. He let his crimson eyes roam the opulent surroundings and smirked. Lucius had given him a document a few weeks ago and informed him calmly that he had been investing the money that Riddle had had prior to his…subsequent bout of insanity. Riddle had laughed out loud at the comment, but had gone quiet in surprise when he saw the number of Galleons in his account had increased substantially over the years under Lucius' calculating machinations.

Lucius along with Severus had kept changing the name of the barrier on the account, to make it less suspicious every so often, but now that he was back with his full faculties Lucius had changed the name back to his and handed him all the documents he would need to prove that he was Thomas M. Riddle.

"Fascinating man," Riddle murmured to himself as he thought of Lucius. The man was Veela and had his mate by his side. However, though he and Severus had mated, they were unwed. Riddle frowned at that; he had a feeling it had something to do with the manipulations of Lucius' father as well as his wife Narcissa.

Perhaps it was time to test out his newfound control of his magick, and the seemingly bottomless depth of said magick. Riddle stood and walked back to his desk and poured himself another glass of Scotch. He took a sip, and his mind wandered to Draco and his mate…Harry Potter.

That name evoked a myriad of feeling in him: hate, anger, jealousy, envy, intrigue, and a surprisingly large dose of grudging respect. The boy was a wealth of untapped talent and the potential for so much more. Riddle even suspected that the boy could probably surpass him in a few decades or as soon as a few years with the right tutelage.

However, he'd probably rot under the wing of that hypocritical… Riddle heard the growl in his voice as he thought of Dumbledore and blinked as his glass as well as the decanter shattered before his eyes. *Hmm…better work on that*, he murmured to himself. It seemed that Voldemort lurked in him and he knew that that beast of a man was a manifestation of all his hate and insanity wrapped into one body, one being. It wouldn't take much right now to turn him back into that person. He had to be cautious, careful…calculating in his overthrowing of Dumbledore.

He felt the brush of a powerful mind to his and knew that it was Harry Potter. The connection was broken as quick as it was established. Riddle smirked to himself. Perhaps he could look to Harry Potter for some assistance in this brand new goal of his. He laughed as he walked out of the room thinking of the look on Dumbledore's face when he realized that he had lost all hold over his puppet weapon.

"Yes, let the games begin."

2nd of October

"Are you absolutely sure I look okay?" Harry asked pensively; who knew he had wanted to make such a good impression on his mate's father? He did not want to embarrass Draco. Said Veela was watching him with dry amusement, making his silver eyes glow like liquid mercury. He stood up and arched an eyebrow as he approached Harry and smoothed out his robes, slapping the other man's hands away.

"You look very handsome Harry, stop worrying, and quit picking at the hem of your robes. You aren't eleven anymore." Draco chided. Harry gave him a glare and Draco merely smirked. "If I had thought that speaking with Father would send you into shock like this, I would've employed it as one of my schemes *ages* ago."

"Ha, ha. Yes, let's all laugh at the hapless Boy Who Lived." Harry snapped. Draco chuckled and then let his arms circle Harry's neck. He combed his fingers through Harry's untamable black hair and stared into his eyes, no emotion showing on his face at all.

"You will impress him." Draco said in a voice so controlled and so *sure*, anyone would be forced to listen. "He already thinks highly of you for not rejecting me. That is a point in your favor. Though you've been a thorn in his side for the past few years trying to defeat his Master, I am sure that he holds a grudging respect for you, or at least I would hope so." Draco smiled slightly as he continued, "And besides, you are my chosen mate, and Father wouldn't stand in our way of our being mated and wed even if you are a Gryffindor and The Boy Who Lived."

"Is there a reason why he will not stand in our way of bonding?" Draco stared at him and stayed quiet for so long, Harry almost started fidgeting again, but since his hands had made their way around Draco's slim waist, they didn't seem too incline to move anytime soon.

"Grandfather and Mother manipulated him into marrying her when it was found out that Severus was Father's mate. It was only because of Grandmother that Father and Sev were able to bond

before the wedding, making any other bond pale in comparison. Mother couldn't fully bond with Father, and Grandfather couldn't kill Sev because that meant his heir would die as well. Since Grandfather and Grandmother are gone now, that still leaves Father and Mother at a stalemate. Mother doesn't hate Sev, she just resents and envies his hold over Father." Draco turned away and looked around his room before speaking again. " That is why he won't stand between us. It pains him to be bonded to Sev but not able to call him Husband. He would go to hell and back before he denied me that same pleasure that was denied him."

Harry still heard Draco's explanation in his head as he met with Lucius. The wizard was still tall and forbidding. His platinum blond locks were held back with a black tie, his dress robes impeccable and expensive. His ever-present cane was leaning against the window sill where he was standing, within in his reach at all times. His eyes were grayish silver, like Draco's, only much harder and a lot cooler. Harry could almost feel the temperature around him drop to nearly sub arctic.

"It seems we meet again, Harry Potter, however, the circumstances are much better." He drawled. Harry felt his palms begin to sweat. He felt fear and a grudging respect for that instant fear and this man who inspired it in people.

Harry wondered if he would have a tenth of that power when he got older. A brow rose and those icy features thawed slightly as Lucius gave him a small smirk.

"One day, you will be able to command a room just by walking into it. Give yourself some time. What I do is ninety percent learned and ten percent instinct." Lucius gave him an appraising glance and then nodded, "It took me nearly a decade to learn the art of intimidation, and I can have you doing the same in no time."

"How?" *How did he know what I was thinking? How…how can I achieve what he has learned to do?* The questions seemed to be in his eyes for Lucius chuckled dryly and his smirk became a fatherly smile.

"Power, Mr. Potter. Your magick encapsulates all that are around it and with a few choices phrases, a few learned tricks, you could have them eating out of your hand. My magick is formidable, but there are only two people I know of that can command a room with just a look."

"And who are they?"

"The Dark Lord and you." Lucius said bluntly. " Or you *will*, once I am through with you."

"Well, when can we start?" Harry asked boldly and Lucius replied quietly.

"We just did."

The boy is intriguing. Lucius thought to himself as he watched Harry squirm under his watchful gaze. He nearly laughed out loud at how he intimidated the infamous Harry Potter. His magick

was incredible, and yet the majority of it untouched. How could Dumbledore sit on a well of talent like this and not do something with it?

Lucius rolled his eyes and glared out of the window. The Headmaster was a fool, but a manipulative one as well as a smart one. He knew what he was doing. He left nearly the whole of Harry Potter's power untouched for a reason; it made the boy make mistakes. Without being tutored on how to use the excessive magick at his command, he was leaving Potter dependent on him for guidance as well as counsel. It really was ingenious in a way but also stupid. The boy wanted to learn and teach him he would and so will Lord Riddle, as soon as he's ready.

"So what are your plans Mr. Potter?" Lucius broke the uneasy silence with a very probing question. Harry's emerald eyes narrowed and he sat quietly before speaking.

"Plans?"

"Yes, what do you plan on doing after graduating?"

"That's if I am alive after graduating." Harry said coolly, "it all depends on if Voldemort decides to kill me or not." Lucius gave him a cutting glance and sneered.

"You won't have to worry about that happening now."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that, the Dark Lord has …reevaluated his thinking and has decided he no longer wants to rid the world of your presence." Harry took a shaky breath and then asked his next question.

"Why not?"

"Before he went insane, the Dark Lord was a very charismatic, powerful, and cunning man. His goals for the Wizarding world were those of the Pureblooded households. It was how he got so many of us into his fold in the first place." Lucius said, "it wasn't until he became heavily steeped in the Dark Arts that his mind and sanity slipped away and he became Voldemort as you call him; before he was merely Lord Riddle. When the *Avada Kedavra* curse bounced back at him when your mother's love protected you, it nearly destroyed what remained of his sanity; which wasn't much.

"It was the perfect excuse for many of us to leave his services." Lucius sighed, "Some of us still held out hope that he would regain that sanity he lost and continue on course with his previous goals."

"Like you?" Harry asked and Lucius nodded.

"And a few others, however, he did not and when he returned he was a shell of what he had been. Twisted by the Dark Arts and insane with hatred with a thirst for your death that ate up his entire

existence; the reason you ask? He wanted world domination and he knew that you were all that stood in his way. Now though, that sanity has returned. Don't ask me how, just know that it did, and the Lord Riddle I once followed has now returned. He wants to speak with you, but not now."

"When?" Harry asked warily.

"In November," Lucius said, "Tell me, will you speak with him?"

"What have I got to lose?" Harry asked. Lucius arched an eyebrow.

"My son." Harry paled and stuttered a hasty apology. Lucius held up a hand and shook his head. "No matter, I know that you do not love him as of yet, but you will. Draco is quite attached to you, Mr. Potter, and for the simple reason of you not rejecting him is why you really sit here before me now. Because if you *had* rejected him, I would have killed you."

Harry swallowed heavily at the calculating look Lucius shot his way. There was no doubt in his mind that Lucius Malfoy would have found a way to circumvent all the security Dumbledore had on Hogwarts to make good his threat. Lucius loves his son; that was plain to see.

"I understand." Harry whispered. "I do care for him though, you have to believe me."

"I will believe it when I see it. And the only way I will see it is if you wed him, as you should. He will be truly happy then." Lucius said flatly. Harry watched him closely before he spoke again.

"Is it true that your father and your wife plotted against you and Snape?" He asked, almost regretting it at the sheer *emotion* that came across Lucius' austere face. There was anger in that face, hatred, and a longing so powerful Harry couldn't believe that it was real.

"Yes," he said haltingly, " I found out Severus was my mate during our second year here. Our relationship was always kept secret, we knew that our families would not be pleased." Lucius snorted self mockingly, "it was only a matter of time though before we were found out. My father decided that Veela or no; he would not have an heir with a male spouse. Narcissa Black wanted the reputation and Galleons that were behind the Malfoy name.

"They made up a plan that would have separated us forever. If I was bonded to Narcissa with bonds and magick similar to Veela magick, then I would have been irrevocably hers, forever." Lucius paused and looked at Harry, "my mate Severus would've died and I would have been forever bound to that bitch; unable to die with him and dying slowly forever by her side. My mother, practical woman that she was, saw that error in this hastily drawn up plan and warned both Severus and I of what was coming. We both knew that we wouldn't be able to stay together so instead we gave them a compromise and our final stand. We bonded like True Veela mates do, when we reached our majority. By the time Father and Narcissa found us, they were too late; we had already bonded and had become inseparable.

"Father of course wasn't too pleased, but he still had his way. I married Narcissa and did my duty, having sex with my wife until we had produced an heir. After Draco was born, I sent Narcissa to her own rooms in the Manor and took Severus as my lover. Of course over the years Narcissa and I have come to respect each other, hell I even like the woman's cunning, but I will never love her. And she resents that, hates it even. Severus is the ever-present reminder that she will never have what she truly wants and that is me, heart and soul, bond to her for eternity. For she loves me Mr. Potter and I merely tolerate her presence."

Harry was too stunned to speak.

"Does that answer your question and satisfy your curiosity on why I will not come between you and my son?" Lucius asked him in a bored tone.

"Yes," Harry bit out. Lucius stood and bowed to him.

"Excellent, then it is with great honor that I welcome you to this family Harry Potter." Lucius smirked at him as he walked out of the room. "I hope we exceed your expectations."

Harry watched him go and then ran his sweaty hands through his hair and gave a shaky laugh.

What had he gotten himself into?

R/R! I hope you liked

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 5

Disclaimer: I own nothing.

Author's Note: Beta read chapter.

Beta: LeeLee

Chapter Four

8th of October – A week later…

"I don't understand why you just lie there afterwards. There are things to be done." Hermione said slightly short of breath and she picked up her discarded clothing off the floor. Ron laid on

his back, sapphire blue eyes a dark navy; he winced at her comment.

"Why don't you come back to bed? We could just…" One of her hands cut the air and Ron had grown wise enough to keep silent.

"Ron please, stop being such a lazy dumb sod would you? Get up, we have to figure out what Harry has been up to."

"Why?" *Why?* Ron spoke aloud and his question echoed in his mind. Was it really their business what Harry chose to do in his spare time? Did they truly have to do *everything* Dumbledore told them to? Ron was beginning to feel used and guilty. He was beginning to wonder why he mindlessly had to go with whatever Dumbledore or Hermione said.

"Because it's for his own good!" Hermione retorted as she meticulously cleansed herself with magick and redressed. She gazed down her nose at him and sniffed disdainfully. "Would you get the hell up, it wasn't *that* good." Ron felt himself flush as he awkwardly got off the bed and reached for his pants, carelessly using a cleansing charm over his body as he dressed. He watched Hermione casually straighten her already pristine robes and try to tame her busy hair as she did.

"I'm not going to do it anymore." Ron told her, "If Harry wanted to tell us, he would."

"Oh is that so? If you haven't noticed Harry isn't telling anyone *anything*." Hermione snapped. Ron watched her stomp out of her own Prefect rooms and then he remembered:

'Hypothetically speaking of course: If you found yourself the mate of a Veela and this person happened to be in league with some very shady people, but you found yourself falling for him anyway, and then this person turns around and lies about a question you put to them, what the bloody hell would you do about it?'

Ron felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. The only Veela he knew of was Draco Malfoy. And if Harry meant Death Eaters by 'shady people' then Ron couldn't think of anyone more in league than Malfoy.

It seemed Harry had told him all he needed to know.

Ron looked around the room making sure that everything was in order before he left. Hermione always hated it when he left anything of his behind. He snorted as he walked hastily out the door. You would think after dating for six months that they would have a deeper relationship than they did. He wondered what a real relationship would be like.

"Don't wish for things that will never happen Ronny boy." Ron muttered to himself as he stayed as far behind Hermione as he could. Harry didn't want anyone to know about Malfoy yet, Ron was sure. It was too surreal; Harry was Malfoy's mate. What were the odds?

Hermione took a turn and headed down the stairs into Slytherin territory. Ron clenched his jaw and followed her.

Harry didn't want to get up.

He sighed contentedly as long elegant fingers corded through his unruly hair as he lazily lay on Draco's bed in the Slytherin dorms. He turned his head slightly and a warm chuckle floated down to him as he opened his eyes and gazed up into Draco's flashing silver eyes.

"Are you comfortable, Harry?" Draco asked dryly. Harry chuckled and nodded, Draco continued to massage his scalp as he did. Lucius' conversation with him over Voldemort had nearly thrown him head long into denial about his growing relationship with Draco. He had too much to lose, he realized, being the mate to a Veela. Draco's fate was inexplicably entwined with his and there was really nothing he or anyone could do about it.

Draco had calmly told him that he would stand by him through it all, even if that meant fighting on the opposite side of the war that they knew was coming. At that moment, Harry realized his fear of getting too close to Draco was unfounded and clearly they were past that point. Harry didn't want anything bad to happen to the Veela and bullocks to anyone who tried.

He'd surely kill them if they harmed his mate. And Harry really wasn't known for keeping his temper.

It brought them to this moment of peace. It seemed in Slytherin most of the kids here had their own rooms after awhile. And it was the same with Draco. He had the largest room of the singles in the dorm and Blaise, who Harry had yet to meet, lived directly next door.

"You know," Harry said shaking out of his silent musings, "I haven't met Blaise formally yet. And where are Crabbe and Goyle…and Pansy?" Harry asked. Draco's hand stopped moving and his entire body stiffened. Harry lifted his body out of its lounging position and turned to Draco in concern. "Draco?"

"Pansy's parents shipped her off to a private school in France." Draco's jaw tightened, " Vincent and Greg…they told their father's respectively that they would not take the Mark and would follow me, to whichever side my mate was on." Draco turned away from Harry and stared into the flames. " Lord Crabbe and Goyle made an example out of them. Their bodies were thrown on our doorstep about six months ago. They held out to the bitter end and never betrayed my trust by telling their fathers who my mate was." Draco sucked in a ragged breath the sheen of tears in his eyes growing more by the second. "I miss them."

"Bloody hell," Harry murmured and wrapped his arms around Draco, gently embracing him. Draco was stiff for a moment before he sagged in Harry's arms; his own wrapping around Harry's broad back and his took one deep breath after another, trying valiantly not to let his feelings show. Harry detested how composed, unemotional Draco could become out of sheer engrained

habit, but he understood it now. It was a coping mechanism that bordered on survival instinct. It was something that Draco *had* to do. "I'm sorry I asked."

"No," Draco whispered into his neck, "it was truly a valid question, one that I knew would come up, but not so soon." He shifted slightly as did Harry and then gazed up at him, his silver eyes luminous. Harry didn't hesitate, just leaned down and kissed Draco softly. Draco gasped and Harry took advantage, thrusting his tongue into Draco's mouth, taking control so thoroughly Draco merely tightened his arms around Harry and began kissing him back in earnest.

Ancient magick crackled around them as the bond that had been slowly forming nearly engulfed them in its own magick. Harry tore his mouth away from Draco's soft yet firm lips only to kiss and nip and suck his way down the long elegant column of the Veela's neck. Said Veela moaned and wriggled fully into Harry's lap before slowly and erotically undulating along Harry's fast growing erection. "Yes," Harry groaned holding tightly to Draco's slim hips, pushing his own up into Draco rhythmic humping. *"Yes, so beautiful."*

Draco felt his eyes roll as his body shuddered in pleasure at the words hissed along his skin. The fact that Harry was so far gone, that he was speaking in parseltongue, without even realizing it, made Draco wonder just how far would he have to push to see Harry just let go…of everything. Their passion grew higher and higher, Harry's mouth found its way back to Draco's and he groaned when he found his mouth open and waiting. Harry's hands grappled with the fine hooks of Draco's robe as he and Draco both hastily got him out of it and Harry found success when his hands finally found warm smooth skin.

The bond wound tighter moving them along, making their urges that much more undeniable… "Harry, Harry please…" Draco's needy pleas fell breathlessly into Harry's ears.

"Yes, Draco, yes!" Harry breathed before kissing Draco again as those slim fingers fell to his slacks, trying to undo them…

There was a knock at the door.

Harry tore his lips from Draco's and clasped his wandering hands. "Did you hear that?" The knock came again and Draco collapsed against Harry, cursing under his breath.

"Whoever it is will be hexed to within an inch of their lives." Draco growled. Harry chuckled weakly though he would support Draco in his endeavors. Harry pulled Draco up gently from where his face was hiding in Harry's shoulder and looked upon him. He looked like he'd been shagged…royally shagged. Draco arched a cool eyebrow as he licked his lips. "You look like the cat that got the cream."

"I did," Harry said and kissed him hard before letting him go. "We'll finish this at a later date." He said his emerald eyes dilating as he watched Draco's shaking hands try to get his clothes and then Harry's back in order.

"I'm counting on it." Draco murmured and kissed Harry again before going to answer the door. He blinked and then stepped back letting Blaise come in. "Blaise, to what do I owe this very unexpected pleasure." Draco said wryly. Blaise looked from him to Harry and then smirked.

"So sorry I interrupted, but we have a problem." He said and then nodded respectfully in Harry's direction. "A couple of do-gooders have been spotted and they are making their way here, fast."

"Do-gooders?" Harry asked and Blaise turned to him and replied.

"It seems to me that members of your House have wandered into enemy territory and I'll give you just two guesses at who they are." Harry cursed.

"Ron and Hermione." Blaise eyed him carefully.

"Got it in one, so what are you going to do about it? Your big secret is about to not be a secret any longer and we can't have that at all."

"I'll take care of it." Harry replied, throwing on his school robes and striding out the door.

Ron watched from a dark alcove as Harry seemingly appeared out of nowhere. He began to make his presence known when he saw Draco Malfoy looking, for once, not so perfect. His shirt was un-tucked and his long platinum locks fell around him haphazardly. He nearly snorted until Harry wound his fingers through the other boy's hair and kissed him fast, hard, and deep.

Well, there was Malfoy's reason for being so disheveled. As much as he really wanted to stay hidden now he couldn't. Ron knew Hermione would be coming around soon and if she found them…

Mind made up, Ron made enough noise to where Harry and Draco moved apart quickly and Harry's wand was pointed at his throat in a blink. "Ron?" Harry asked. Ron nodded quickly and looked around.

"You don't have much time," Ron said quietly, "Hermione is on her way here snooping around to look for you. You have to come with me now." Harry's mouth set into a frown and Ron was afraid he wouldn't believe him. But Harry nodded, kissed Draco again before ushering the Slytherin back to the door Ron now saw, and then motioned for them to hide and quickly.

Both Ron and Harry held their breaths as they stepped back in the alcove Ron had been hiding in earlier. Hermione came around the corner and looked around carefully. Her wand was out and she glanced about as she walked. Harry glanced at Ron and Ron stared back as they both pressed themselves even further into the darkness. Just then Harry's foot scuffed up against the wall, the sound echoed throughout the hall. Hermione's head whirled around and she started to approach the alcove.

We are so fucked. Ron thought. Hermione was nearly on them, only a few feet away, when Ron heard the unmistakable drawl of Draco Malfoy.

"Just what in the hell do you think are you doing here Granger? Or should I say Weasely? I see you both together so often." There was a sneer in Draco's voice and Hermione turned sharply away from the alcove and faced him.

"I am doing nothing that concerns you Malfoy." She said and then continued, "And my business is my own. You can taunt Ron with that all you want, I am sure he'll rage and vent and whine like a baby like he always does. Furthermore I wouldn't marry him if you paid me too." Harry stared right at him and Ron averted his gaze from the penetrating look.

"That is quite harsh, Granger." Draco said thoughtfully. Ron watched silently as she shrugged her shoulders.

" I've come to the conclusion that he will never mature. I have a bright future ahead of me; I can't have anything holding me back while I try to make a success of myself. If he'd apply himself, I am sure Ron could be an adequate match for me, however he doesn't. I guess you could say everyone thinks that we should be together and so Ron and I play at having a relationship. I can't have urges messing with me as I strive to succeed; Ron is merely an outlet that I use and he knows it."

"How…Slytherin of you." Draco murmured.

"I'll take that as an insult." Hermione snapped and Draco snorted.

"Maybe I should've said how pragmatic of you. Now back to the real reason I stopped you; what are you doing down here? You can't possibly think that your Golden Boy or your 'outlet' are down here do you?"

"I'm checking everywhere, the Headmaster wants to speak with Harry post haste. I am merely trying to find him for him." Draco's voice grew as cold and flinty as ice.

"If Potter doesn't want to be found he won't be. Why don't you tell our manipulative headmaster to wait until his weapon feels like talking to him?"

"Harry isn't a weapon, he is the Savior of the Wizarding World." Hermione retorted.

"Yes, well, it is a matter of perspective then." Draco drawled. "Now, that you know the two-thirds of your Trio are not here, why don't leave the rest of us in peace." Hermione huffed inelegantly and strode back the way she came.

"Bitch," Draco murmured and then turned, his gaze catching Ron's sullen face. "You are much better off without her, Weasely." Draco told him gently.

"Yeah? How can you be so sure?" Ron snapped. Draco arched a brow but said nothing merely walked to Harry's side as Harry turned toward Ron.

"You protected me, *us*," Harry murmured. "How did you figure it out?"

"You told me yourself with that bloody hypothetical question bull shit." Ron said. He turned to Draco and blinked as Draco pulled his hair back into a loose ponytail, revealing his pointed ears. Draco was astute enough to murmur the glamour spell he used while he was at it and soon he looked like his regular self.

"Well, thank you." Harry smiled, "I really appreciate it." Ron smiled warmly, his blue eyes sparkling.

"It's what friends are for, mate." Ron told him softly. He nodded cordially to Draco Malfoy, probably the first time in the history of their history together, and slowly walked away. His thoughts were already on the words the Hermione had said and he sighed in resignation. He knew she had changed, gradually, through the years, but enough was enough.

He wasn't anyone's doormat, especially hers.

22nd of October – 2 weeks later

Neville Longbottom glanced up from his book as Ron shuffled into their room. Observant brown eyes watched the tall gangly red head sprawl on his bed and sigh despondently. "What's wrong Ron?" He asked gently. Ron looked at him and then turned away staring up into his canopy like it held all the answers in the world.

Neville didn't press and went back to his Charms homework, but he kept himself aware of Ron incase he opened up at all. They were silent for nearly an hour when he heard a muttered response.

"I just broke it off with Hermione." Neville blinked and looked up at the prone figure.

"You did what?" He asked in surprise. Everyone knew how crazy Ron was about Hermione.

"I said I dumped Hermione, didn't you hear me the first time?" Ron snapped. Neville winced and then smiled a bit uncertainly.

"But why? You're crazy about Hermione, you said so yourself."

"I know, but she's changing." Ron said his voice losing some of its heat. Neville watched as he began fiddling with the ends of his already frayed robes. "I don't like who she is turning into. And then some of the things she's said to me…" he trailed off and then just shrugged. "It was just time I guess."

Neville almost snorted. Blaise had already spoken with Draco in regards to how the situation went two weeks go. Draco had told Blaise how surprised he had been by 'Granger's callousness with regards to Weasely.' When Blaise had relayed what was said, Neville was shocked as well as saddened that Hermione would say so many hurtful things. Of course she hadn't known Ron was standing right there listening to every word, but Neville had begun to wonder even if she had known, would she have cared?

"You are better off without her." Neville murmured and was surprised when a flickering of a smile spread over Ron's face. "What?"

"Funny, that's what Malfoy said as well."

"Perhaps you should listen to him. Draco is very smart in his own way." Ron's head snapped up and he regarded Neville warily.

"When did you start calling him Draco?" He asked and Neville cursed at himself for slipping. He looked at Ron and then shrugged, smirking at him.

"Harry isn't the only one with all the secrets." He said calmly and went back to reading his book. He watched, out of the corner of his eye, as Ron opened his mouth to say something else, thought better of it, and began studying himself. Neville grinned to himself. He wondered what Ron would do when he found out about Blaise. Neville sighed happily and hummed to himself; oh he couldn't wait until he introduced them. It was going to be fun indeed.

"I wonder if your thoughts are even worth a sickle, Mr. Potter." The cool drawl jerked Harry back into reality and he turned and frowned at Severus as he walked out from behind the tree. And just when had he begun thinking of the man as Severus instead of Snape? He turned his gaze back to the lake and said nothing; many things were changing. Severus stood with him and they stayed that way in companionable silence until Harry finally got up the nerve to ask his question.

"What is going on with Voldemort?" He asked bluntly. Severus arched a brow and then smirked.

"Just what are you trying to ask?" He stared at Harry shrewdly, "the question is very broad."

"Stop being deliberately obtuse." Harry said coolly. "I know that *something* is going on. He hasn't caused any anarchy or pain this year as of yet. There were no nasty surprises for me when I came back from the hellhole that is my relatives' house. I haven't had any grotesque visions in months. It's quiet, *too* quiet and I am done waiting until things are so bad that there isn't anything I can do about it. I have too much to lose now." He turned to glare at Severus and found the man already looking at him. There was actually shock on his face, as he seemed to look, *really* look at Harry for the first time.

"Well," he drawled, "you have changed." Severus smirked. "I'm impressed."

"I didn't say all that to impress you. It's just the truth."

"I understand that Potter, and now you will understand what I am about to tell you." His voice was brisk and businesslike once more and Harry gave him his full attention. "The Dark Lord has been through some recent… changes if you will. He lost a lot of his power due to stress on his body, mind, and magick. He has already reached his full magickal power as it was before the change he endured. He will probably be even more powerful come next week during Samhain." Severus paused and then said quietly, "He wants to meet with you before he makes his presence known to Dumbledore."

"Why would he want to speak with me? I thought he merely wanted me dead." Harry said seriously.

"Things change, and his priorities are different now. He is no longer out for your blood; you can be rest assured of that. The meeting will take place in my personal quarters here at Hogwarts. Be there promptly at ten at night. Lucius, Draco, and I will be there as well. Times are changing Mr. Potter, are you ready to change with them?" Severus asked before walking back towards the castle.

Harry watched him go and then gazed back towards the seemingly depthless lake. He knew that there was a giant creature in that lake, but right now nothing could be seen but endless unrelenting water. Harry felt as if he were drowning underneath all his responsibilities, like there was no way out, nowhere to turn, and no one that could help him. He wondered if this feeling of helplessness was what drove suicidal people over the edge.

Only he wasn't alone, he realized calmly. He had Draco. And the reality of that was enough to pull him back from the water and to walk back to the castle.

Lucius let out the breath that he was holding as he came out of the shadows and watched Harry get safely back into the building. For a moment he thought the boy was going to just walk into the lake like a suicidal fool. The hollowness in his eyes shook Lucius to the core. They, the Wizarding World, had put so much pressure on him to defeat the Dark Lord. Lucius understood why the temptation of death was so seductive to someone bearing the brunt of that responsibility.

He chuckled though as he made his way back the way he came. The boy resisted the temptation and Lucius knew that most it had to do with his son.

As soon as he reached a clearing, he activated his port key and vanished.

30th of October – 8 days later

Lord Riddle smiled gently as he helped a little witch select her favorite children's book off the shelf. She smiled at him sweetly and scampered off toward her mother. The older woman blushed at his smile and the care he took with her daughter.

He wondered what they would do if he calmly informed them of just *who* he was.

Riddle chuckled and moved to another stall as he strode through Diagon Alley. These people, he thought darkly, were cowards. They followed the Ministry like a flock sheep to the slaughter. The Ministry tried to establish leadership, however it was so easy to corrupt the politicians that were there already. Greed was such a motivator for some people. And then there was Dumbledore…

Rage swept through him and coiled around him like a serpent. That man was a manipulative bastard. The Ministry was under his thumb and had been for years. *Well, no matter,* Riddle thought as he smiled absently at some wizards and witches that gazed at him with awe in their eyes. *I always get what I want in the end.*

His magick was nearly twice as strong as it had been before he took human form again. It practically churned on itself as he tried to veil it from others. It seemed that they could still feel it. Riddle chuckled to himself as he ignored the awed looks and continued on his way. Powerful magick was more an aphrodisiac to wizards then even the most ardent love spell. It could suck them in, make them do anything that you wanted, just to get the feel of all that power aimed at them.

As he rounded a corner he found Lucius waiting for him by an entry point into Muggle London. "Is everything ready?" He asked, already knowing the answer. When had Lucius ever left anything to chance? Lucius nodded his head and flicked his fingers, getting the driver's attention. The chauffeur opened the limousine door for him and he motioned for Riddle to precede him into the vehicle. Once they were on their way Riddle turned and smiled at his companion. "When do we meet with the Prime Minister?"

"Our meeting is for six this evening."

"Wonderful," Lord Riddle said with a satisfied smile, "Simply wonderful."

R/R!

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 6

Disclaimer: I own nothing but the storyline and any original characters that pop up.

Author's Note: Sorry for the delay, Real Life work just got interesting. As always betaed by LeeLee, I hope you enjoy it!

Desolate

Chapter Five

31st of October – Samhain Night

"Are you bloody mad?" Ron hissed as he pulled Harry into the dormitory room and slammed the door in Neville's stunned face. Harry wrenched his arm from Ron's grasp and then set up privacy wards around them. Ron did the same over Harry's wards as they both glared at each other. "What possessed you to agree to something like that? It's bloody Vold- you know who I am talking about!" Ron yelled in exasperation. Harry narrowed his eyes.

"Look Ron, I appreciate that you seem to think that I need a bodyguard at all times, but I have to know just what is going on with Voldemort and this is the best time to go and find out some information. You know Dumbledore isn't going to tell me anything unless *he* deems it worth his time to inform me of something."

"And how do you know that Malfoy, Malfoy Senior, and bloody fucking Snape aren't setting you up huh?" Ron retorted. Harry averted his gaze and shifted from foot to foot mumbling something underneath his breath. "What? I didn't get that."

"I said that I trust them." Harry said calmly. "Lucius wouldn't put Draco in that kind of danger and neither would Severus for that matter."

"You've gone insane. You think that just because Malfoy has been playing nice with you for the past few months that he has just changed overnight? He's still the selfish, cunning, annoying prick that's he's always been."

"How can you say that?" Harry said angrily, "He hasn't done anything to you or any other House members since he's been back. Draco is not the same person that he was two years ago any more than you and I are. Hell, look at how much Hermione has changed in the past year or so."

"I'm not saying that he hasn't made the effort to change. All I am saying is that what do you have to go on that says that he won't up and give you to that bloody madman on a silver platter?"

"If I die, so does he." That stopped Ron's protest cold, and Harry doggedly continued. "And from what I remember, Draco was a very self serving bastard so he wouldn't do that just based on his own self preservation." Harry said lowly. Both stood and stared at each other before Ron backed away and banished his ward. Harry in turn broke his apart as well and left without saying a word.

Neville looked at Harry's retreating form and then arched a brow at Ron.

Ron scowled, "Don't say anything."

Neville wisely remained silent.

Harry glanced around him before knocking on Severus highly warded portrait. When the portrait opened it was Lucius who greeted him. "Happy Samhain," Harry said tightly. Lucius arched an eyebrow.

"And who pray tell made you such wonderful company tonight?"

"Don't ask." Harry glowered and walked past the older wizard. He rubbed his forehead, his scar a tolerable itching below his skin. Voldemort was close, but he frowned as he realized his scar was barely giving him any of the pain he'd become used to when in the monster's presence.

"They are in the office." Lucius said in the silence between them as he guided Harry toward the room. A fire was burning brightly in the fireplace. Severus was standing close to his desk pouring a glass of red wine. Draco was sitting in one of the chairs in front of the large oak desk. Severus handed the glass to a figure in that high backed chair of his. The person was facing the bookcase, away from Harry's line of sight.

"Harry," Draco murmured and Harry smiled absently in his direction, his eyes focused on the back of that damn chair.

"Mr. Potter," Severus inclined his head.

"Professor," Harry replied. The figure in the chair chuckled and turned into the light. Harry was confused for a moment but realization came quickly, his heart beating wildly.

The man looked to be in his late thirties, early forties. Black hair streaked silver at the temples, an aristocratic face. The man stood and Harry added quite tall and commanding to his list, but what had him frozen were his eyes; red eyes, the color of blood bore into him. And the sense of, *yes, I know you*, spread through his body.

"Bloody hell, you're Voldemort." Harry said tightly.

"Bah, that name sounds god awful now that I think about it. Please call me Riddle or Tom or Thomas for that matter." Lord Riddle grinned and then laughed. "Your face boy is priceless. Come," That grin became a smirk, his eyes glowing in the firelight, "We have many things to discuss."

"How, I mean, bloody fucking Merlin." Harry reached out for something to hold onto and jumped when a cool hand entwined with his. He looked to see that Draco was standing by him

now and was gently propelling him to the seat next to the one he'd been sitting in. Lord Riddle watched him silently as he hesitantly sat in the chair and stared back at the man in amazement.

"Severus is truly a Potions Master," Riddle murmured, respect in his voice. "He found a very difficult potion that would create a body from the half-man you saw before. I am sure that I don't look how I did before my physical and psychological change."

"You don't," Harry concurred, "but your eyes will never change. I've had nightmares about you too much to forget your eyes." Harry turned to Draco and frowned at him. "You knew? All this time you knew and didn't tell me." Draco lips tightened into a line and his jaw clenched.

"I apologize for lying to you, but this wasn't something that I could just tell you. I was asked to wait until the Dark Lord was ready to meet you himself. We had hoped that you would understand," Draco tightened his grip on Harry's hand, as if he were afraid that Harry would bolt out of the chair.

Harry thought it was a valid assumption.

"If you want to blame someone, blame me Mr. Potter," Lord Riddle murmured, "I asked Draconis to keep this a secret and so he has. He wanted to tell you, he truly did, so don't doubt the trust that you have given to him."

"What do you want?"

"Like I said, we have many things to discuss. This first on the agenda is pretty simple: what will you do now that you know just who and what I am?" Harry opened his mouth, but closed it when Riddle lifted a hand to silence him. "Make no mistake Mr. Potter, I am still the man who killed your parents, tortured countless wizards and witches, and basically seeks to destroy the British Wizarding world as it stands now. However, I am also different from that man and have realized that I can't merely kill to get what I want. Human manipulation will now be the name of the game, the first starting with my so called 'death' if you will." Riddle smiled at him, "And I believe you will help me stage it."

"Do you?" Harry snapped, "Look, this is all still very much a surprise for me." He glanced at Draco and then said tightly, "I am the mate to Draco, who before this was basically a bastard to me since the time I got here. You are the first and foremost fear and danger in my life and now you are asking me, no practically *telling* me what I am going to do, so excuse me if I balk under that order." Harry practically vibrated in his seat with tension.

"There are only so many things that can change around me before I get really angry, confused, and frustrated. I don't know what to do. I know I can't turn my back on Draco and I won't. I know that Dumbledore is basically using me for a pawn and I also know that I want to stop him from doing that." His gaze rose to Riddle and he said quietly, "I know that you are still the man that destroyed my life, I just don't know what to do with this 'new you.'" Harry shook his head and slumped back into his chair. "I don't know about anything anymore."

No one said anything for a moment, but Harry glanced up when he heard Riddle shift in the seat. The man was looked at him through narrowed eyes and seemed to nod to himself over something. "I understand your hesitance. Many things are changing around you and you can't be made to adapt to every single one seamlessly." His crimson gaze landed on Draco and then he frowned. "Draco and your relationship must be sealed by the end of December, that is only two months away. The Veela bond that bonds the two of you together must be made without any regrets or doubts. Will you be ready to truly accept him by that time? If you aren't Draco could still die, regardless of the fact that you did not reject him in the first place."

"Our relationship isn't any of your concern, but I will be ready by then." Harry said wearily.

"Very well, now to the next order of business; our relationship." Harry nodded silently, though his eyes held a vast amount of distrust in them. It wasn't anything that was unexpected considering the bad blood between the two of them. "You don't trust me, and I don't trust you either. However, I want to work with you, and I want to work to help you as well."

"And how do you figure we should to that?" Harry asked sarcastically.

"A test if you will," Riddle murmured, "Just last night I spoke with the Muggle Prime Minister." Harry's eyes widened. "It seems that he is aware of the Wizarding community, however doesn't *know* that much about us and how we run things. I believe now that instead of attacking muggles and wizards alike how I use to, I need to enlist his aid."

"Why would you want that?"

"Do you know why most Pureblooded wizards chose to follow me in the first place?"

"You had like goals," Harry responded and Lord Riddle nodded.

"We did, we still do. A goal or wish, if you will, for the pureblooded populace was to have restrictions placed on how far into the muggle world our arms would reach. Basically, the only contact pureblooded witches and wizards have with the muggle world as of now is through muggle-born wizards and witches. Many of those who come from the muggle world are torn between the two worlds. Perhaps their parents love them regardless, or perhaps as you and I have found," Riddle said gesturing to himself and Harry, 'that muggles are very abusive and destructive to things that they don't understand.

"Needless to say it is and will continue to be proven problematic if laws are not set in place. Muggle-born wizards tend to bring their own prejudices from the muggle world here to the Wizarding world. They also do not understand the pureblooded customs and tend to look down their noses at them. They feel that purebloods should change and evolve now that muggle born wizards and witches make up a good portion of the population. However, who are they to ask that of these people? Pureblooded wizards are more likely to stay within the world they know versus venturing out into the muggle realm. Why should they change, when they know that their

world will, traditionally speaking, stay the same for many more decades or even centuries to come? It is quite a problem. So much of one that they decided to fight back…with me."

"You agreed with them?" He asked.

"I still do Harry." Lord Riddle said softly. "Though I am a half-blood myself, as are you, I agree with their ideas. Granted some of them chafe, but some mindsets can be changed slowly with time. Change cannot be invoked all at once and that is what I have found out from personal experience. To get back to the question at hand, I want to enlist the Prime Minister's aid because he can help to draft new laws that can force the Ministry into restricting access to the Wizarding world."

"But the Ministry makes our laws." Harry protested. Lord Riddle sneered, his eyes glowing deviously.

"Well, then, I had better make sure I have certain people in place to ratify the law then shouldn't I?" Harry blinked but cocked his head to the side in thought.

"That would help you." He said simply and then glanced at Riddle again, "Why do you want to fake your death?"

"If we become allies we will have to work together, be of like minds. Consider it a symbol of rebirth; I was once a monster and now I am a man, a wizard yet again. The other fact of the matter is that with Voldemort 'dead' people will be open to change. They will feel that the tyranny that had engulfed this world will be gone and be more receptive to the changes that we would make, it will give them hope."

"How are you going to this anyway?" Harry asked, more out of curiosity than anything else.

Riddle's eyes glowed and he smiled a bit sinisterly.

"I am so glad you asked."

Draco said nothing as he walked with Harry back towards his prefect rooms. His mate had been silent for a while, as Lord Riddle had explained his plan. It sounded quite ingenious, but a lot of it hinged on whether or not Harry would help. He quietly opened the portrait to his rooms, both he and Harry hurrying through the shared common area so that they wouldn't have to speak with Granger if she was there.

Once Draco had his bedroom door warded for privacy he turned back to Harry. "Will you forgive me?"

"For what?" Harry asked flippantly and Draco clenched his jaw against the scathing answers that entered his mind.

"For lying to you."

"I knew you were lying even when you were doing it. I just didn't know why." Harry said surprisingly cool about it. However Draco watched his eyes glow like emerald fire and he knew the Harry was very upset with him.

"I explained…"

"Oh just shut up Draco! You can explain all you want, but you've just proven to me that your loyalties to your family and Lord are much more important than your loyalty to me!" Harry shouted angrily.

"What did you expect? That once I found out I was bound to you for eternity I would just break my back to please you? That I would bow down to whatever whim you wanted? I may be your bonded but I am not some submissive little arse that goes around following you, hanging on your every godforsaken word!" Draco snapped back. "My Father and Sev would die to keep me safe. What would you do?"

"What would *I* do?" Harry asked angrily. "I just backed you and your family up to Ron. I said that I could trust you! And you just proved me wrong!"

"You said that you already knew I was lying so why would you do that? You're not making any sense!"

"Neither are you! On one hand you will support me in all of my endeavors and then on the other you would betray me just because your father and his Lord say so?"

"No, I keep my options open until I know for certain that you will stand by me and risk everything, just as I am about to do for you!" Draco snapped his mouth shut and turned his back to Harry his body vibrating with suppressed rage.

"What did you just say?" Harry asked, Draco said nothing. Harry snarled, grabbed his arm and slammed against the bedroom door harshly. "Tell me what the hell did you just mean by that?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Draco asked flippantly.

"No, no its not." Harry said, his voice still angry, but his demeanor softening. "You believe I would ask you to leave your family behind and come over to my side? You really think I would do that?"

"Have you said that you wouldn't?" Draco retorted. "I don't have much of a choice. I must follow you everywhere, whether I agree with you or not. There hasn't been a scenario in Veela history where a mated pair has one killed and the other survived. My father and Sev have one of the most strained bonds I've seen ever. It surprises everyone that they are still sane, from the amount

of time they spend apart. If you decide to stay with the Headmaster, I will follow you, and my allegiance will change regardless of what I think. My friends will become my enemies and that is that."

"I would never do that to you Draco." Harry said rubbing his arms gently. "I- well why did you never bring it up? I would've told you this."

"It is not something I wish to discuss when we haven't bonded yet. You still have time to change your mind about bonding with me." Draco told him seriously. "This is something that must wait…"

"No, we'll deal with this now. Our situation isn't the best, we'll have to improvise some, but this new situation with Vold- Riddle might make it easier." Harry said. "We still have a lot to learn about each other huh?"

"Your insight is astounding Potter, truly astounding." Draco rolled his eyes. Harry pinched him and Draco gasped first at the slight pain and then in surprise as Harry kissed him gently on the lips.

"I won't make you change sides if you don't want to." Harry murmured against his lips.

"Harry, I think you fail to understand that wherever you go, I go." Draco murmured slipping his hands around Harry's hips.

"What if I chose to be in the same place that you already are?" He said in Draco's ear. Draco stilled his body and turned to look Harry in the eye.

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that, if I decide to plan this coup with Riddle, then it will be your side that I will be on. I won't separate you from your family Draco."

"But Harry, this has to be right for you too. You hate Lord Riddle."

"I don't *know* Riddle. I only know Voldemort."

"He is still the same."

"I realize that, but he's…different even still." Harry looked at Draco. "Dumbledore isn't giving me all the information I need. I hate being kept out of the loop. I want to know what is going on, not just be thrown into the mess and have to fix it on the fly. Riddle is giving me the chance to stand by him and have input and a place, instead of being treated like a weapon. I think…I think I am willing to give it a chance."

Draco said nothing but he rested his head on Harry's collarbone and sighed. "You do, whatever

you feel is right." Draco murmured, "I will stand by you Harry, no matter what."

"I will try to believe that." Harry said. "So, are we good?" He asked. Draco gave him a small smile.

"We're good."

November 14th – Two weeks later…

Ron was worried. Harry hadn't come back until the early hours of the morning on the first of November and ever since he'd been leaving at all hours of the night. Now Dumbledore had finally had enough and was actually calling Ron to his office.

"Bloody fucking hell." Ron muttered as he approached the gargoyle that led to the Headmaster's office. He knew this had to do with Harry, he'd bet his life on it. "Tootsie Pops," Ron said clearly and the gargoyle moved for him immediately. As soon as he reached the landing, Dumbledore was in front of him smiling merrily.

"Ah, Ron, come in, come in, how are things? It is unfortunate that you and Hermione couldn't work out your differences, unfortunate indeed."

"With all due respect Sir, it's none of your business." Ron said his jaw clenching slightly. It seemed Hermione had been talking to him, but then again, the walls at Hogwarts seemed to have ears all over the place.

"Quite right, quite right, but what does Mrs. Weasely think about it?" Ron looked at the Headmaster and wondered how he missed how nosy he was?

"Like I said, it's none of your business. What is this about anyway? You said you needed to speak with me?" Ron asked. He watched as some of the merriment dimmed in the wizard's eyes and Ron slowly swallowed against the fear that suddenly made it hard to breath in the tiny room.

"Do you know what Harry has been up to?"

"No not really, he's asked Hermione and I to leave him alone a bit this year." Ron shrugged it off. "Why?"

"Well Mr. Weasely, he's your best friend, aren't you worried that he'll get himself into trouble? I mean his track record isn't that good when he ventures off on his own. Why, you and Miss Granger are always cleaning up after his messes when he does things like that." Dumbledore said a few other things, but Ron had already tuned him out. He needed to get back to Harry on this.

"Sorry I couldn't help you Headmaster." Ron said apologetically and then began to leave.

"Mr. Weasely," the tone was what stopped Ron short. It was distinctly cool and very polite. Ron looked over his shoulder as he reached for the door.

"Mm yeah?" He asked, curiosity coloring his tone.

"If Harry begins to act a bit…unusual, you will let me know right away correct?" The smile didn't reach his eyes this time. Ron nodded and then smiled.

"Sure thing Headmaster." He said pleasantly and then left. His heart was beating triple time as he made his way down the stairs as calmly as possible. As soon as he reached the gargoyle entrance he went right and kept walking. Though the halls were somewhat populated Ron swore someone was following him. The hairs on the back of his neck stood up as he nonchalantly turned his head and spied Hermione just a ways back, her gaze steady on him.

He picked up the pace. As he rounded a corner a hand snaked out of the darkness and pulled him quickly into a narrow break in between the walls. "Wha-," A hand covered his mouth and his eyes widened as he took in the sight of Blaise Zabini. Blaise motioned for him to be quiet and they both watched silently as Hermione walked purposely right past their hiding spot. Blaise waited for a few more minutes before he motioned for Ron to follow him out of the small space and back into the hallway walking quickly the way he had originally come from. "How did you know?"

"I've been following you. Draco asked me to keep an eye on you." Blaise said as he quickly walked down the steps into the dungeon. Ron followed him in surprise.

"*Malfoy* asked you to keep an eye on me?"

"Yes, he felt that if Potter was trying to be nice to Severus, just for him, he would extend the same courtesy to you." Blaise told him with a slight smirk. "Come this way, I doubt your ex will try to come down here a second time around without someone to back her up."

"But, that still doesn't make any sense. Malfoy could just be nice to me and that would please Harry."

"Yes, however, leaving you alone didn't change Harry's mind about how Draco use to act, so he thought if someone would watch over you, then that would be better." Blaise turned to him with a genuine smile. "I think he's right that you need looking after. Between the Headmaster and Head Girl, you may be annihilated."

"So not funny." Ron muttered and Blaise chuckled as he knocked on a portrait of a dragon. The portrait swung open and Harry popped his head out. He looked at Ron and grinned.

"Hey Ron, so Blaise found you?"

"As you can see." Ron said sarcastically. "I need to talk with you Harry, you have some problems

coming your way." Harry arched an eyebrow but then smiled sadly.

"Don't I always." He muttered and then smiled and murmured a greeting to Blaise. Ron looked on; it seemed Harry was becoming quite comfortable with the Slytherin down here. "Take a seat Ron and tell me what is going on." Ron hedged into the expensively decorated room and then met Draco's eye.

"Uh, thanks for watching out for me I guess." Ron mumbled fiddling with the ends of his frayed robes nervously. He heard Draco snort and looked up to see the boy smirking at him an amused glint in his eyes.

"It isn't a bother Weasely. After all your are my mate's best friend." He drawled, "Have a seat, and tell Harry what you intended to tell him." Ron still eyed him warily but he sat and waited until Blaise made himself comfortable lounging against the doorframe before he told Harry about his meeting with Dumbledore and then Hermione following him.

"What's going on Harry? Why won't you see the man, and how are you going to kept this," he motioned between Harry and Draco, " a secret?"

"We've been doing fine so far, but it will be difficult once we bond." Harry told him. "From what I guess, we won't be able to be separated for long periods of time afterward so something will have to give." Harry sighed, "I'll think about it when it comes. Now with Dumbledore that is a different story. Ron you know he leaves out information when he tells me certain things. It is almost as if he *wants* me to fail just so I will come back to him. I can't go through that anymore. I've been putting off so that I could think of what I will say to him, but obviously that isn't working any longer. I'll speak with him soon."

"If you would like Weasely, you are welcome to stay here," Draco said quietly, "during the day to get away from Granger. I have a feeling that things are going to get very complicated very soon." Ron looked at Draco as if he'd grown a second head and Blaise chuckled.

"You are his mate's best friend. It makes you almost…family." He explained and watched Ron's expressions change from shock to thoughtfulness. Ron didn't say anything but he nodded and left. Harry hesitated but kissed Draco and then went after his friend. Blaise turned to Draco, who arched a brow at him and smirked.

"Gryffindors," Draco chuckled, "so easily startled." Blaise grinned.

"Too true, but speaking of Gryffindors, I think I will go have a snog with my own." Blaise winked and turned to leave Draco's laughter following him.

"Does he mean it?" Ron asked Harry once he'd caught up with the tall redhead.

"Yes, he does," Harry, said with a small smile. "He may have done it just because you are my

mate or maybe he finally sees that you aren't that bad." Ron snorted and Harry laughed, " I think it is because you are my mate like Blaise said. Just please, give him a chance."

"I will," Ron said after a few moments of silence. "I will."

Hermione sat fuming in her Prefect quarters. She'd lost Ron again! How could he keep giving her so much trouble? He wasn't that smart! Hermione stood and began pacing her room. Dumbledore was getting tired of excuses, she *had* to figure out what Harry was up to, and she knew that if Ron didn't already know what was going on, he would and soon.

"Just one little mistake, Harry. That's all you have to make; just one wrong move, and you're mine." She murmured.

R/R!

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 7

Disclaimer: I own nothing but the storyline and any original characters that may come out of the wood work.

Author's Note: Sorry about the wait, but I wanted to make this chapter really understood and a very informative chapter for everyone. The story should be picking up the pace a little more after this because many things will be happening. I've planned for there to be maybe up to four chapters before the story will be on the present time line. I hope you enjoy this, because I had fun writing it! Oh and on a side note, I have started to write an original story, that will hopefully be published. So wish me luck and enjoy!

Oh and as always this story is betaed by LeeLee! Thanks hon!

Okay, no you can enjoy! :-)

Desolate

Chapter Six

November 21st – One week later…

When Dumbledore finally caught up with Harry; Harry was ready for him. He'd spent a lot of the weekend with Draco and Draco's confidant Blaise. The taller Slytherin had a very dry sense of humor and an intellect that was honed to make a weaker person cringe with fear at having their words skewed against them. He liked him; he liked him even more when Draco told him that Blaise was secretly dating Neville Longbottom.

"I can't believe Nev is dating someone in Slytherin." Harry had said with surprise. "I wonder how they met."

"It is not my place to say. I merely got permission to tell you. It is a secret from everyone save those in Slytherin. Blaise mentioned that you could tell Ron if you wanted to." Draco told him. Harry shook his head.

"No I won't do that. Ron will just have to find out on his own." Harry had stated calmly and then had left to return to Gryffindor Tower.

Now, he was standing in Dumbledore's office, the older wizard trying to stare him into submission. Harry had felt him trying to ease into his mind, but he'd worked with Severus and Lord Riddle to combat Dumbledore's little tricks. Harry felt his mouth twitch and wanted to smile when Dumbledore frowned at him.

"What have you been up to Harry?"

"Oh this and that." Harry said flippantly and watched as Dumbledore's eyes narrowed slightly.

"I've been sending you notes to come and see me."

"Well, I couldn't be bothered to come. I had other things that I had to do." Harry said calmly. "What is so important?"

"Have you had any visions?"

"No."

"Nothing at all?" Dumbledore didn't sound convinced.

"Not a one," Harry said, "was that all?" Dumbledore nearly out-and-out scowled at him.

"No, that isn't all! I haven't seen you since you started school. How is everything going Harry?"

Harry narrowed his eyes. "I'm doing fine, just fine."

"Good, good," Dumbledore said finally after a period of awkward silence. "Well, I want you to update me on your visions if you have any."

"And what have you heard about Voldemort?" Harry asked. Dumbledore brushed off his question like he had done so many times before.

"Nothing of import my boy, I will tell you what you need to know."

"Yeah a little too late if I remember right." Harry snapped back. Dumbledore turned to him and glared.

"I tell you when I deem its right and not before. Do you understand me?"

"Crystal." Harry said and then turned and stalked out of his office. He stomped all the way down the stairs and then made his way to the Slytherin Common room, watching for Hermione as he went. The man was insufferable. Had the disaster with Sirius taught the man nothing? Harry scowled at the wall as he knocked harshly on the portrait. The snake hissed him and Harry hissed right back. When the portrait opened Blaise was looking at him with an arched brow, his long elegant fingers casually flicking one of his locks behind his ear.

"I take it Dumbledore put you in this mood of yours."

"Yes," Harry said as he stepped through the portrait and followed Blaise to his room. "And I didn't see Hermione stalking me but that doesn't mean Dumbledore still doesn't know where I am."

"As long as he doesn't find out the truth of *why* you are here, then everything is fine for now." Blaise murmured as he dropped the wards around his door to let them both in. Harry blinked when he saw Neville lounging on the bed talking quite animatedly with Draco about Herbology. Neville looked up and smiled absently at Harry as his gaze caught Blaise's. Blaise grinned and went and kissed him and then winked in Harry's direction before taking off his robe and hanging it in his wardrobe. Harry just arched a brow and then hummed in pleasure as Draco walked up to him and wrapped him in his embrace. The tension that had built up melted off him. He felt Draco's small smile against his neck and Harry smiled as well.

"How was your day?" Harry murmured in Draco's ear.

"Good. Productive. Have you given any thought to the offer?" He asked equally quiet. Harry knew Draco was talking about Riddle's offer. His arms tightened around Draco's body and he brushed his lips against the Veela's ear.

"Yes," He said simply and left it at that. Draco wisely said nothing but moved back to the chair he'd been sitting in and continued his conversations as if nothing had happened. "Hey Blaise, can I talk with you?" Harry jerked his head toward the door and Blaise nodded.

When both of them were outside the door, Harry set up privacy wards, and Blaise covered his. "So what's up?"

"I need to get a letter out of Hogwarts, and I would like to use your owl. Dumbledore wouldn't think twice about looking at your mail. But mine…" Harry shrugged. "You know how he is."

"Not entirely but I have my theories." Blaise drawled, but he looked around and tapped his wand against a stone behind him. Harry watched as the stone shifted revealing a set of paper and pens. "Here, write your note now and I'll charm it to attach to my owl only."

"Thanks Blaise," Harry said and he hurriedly wrote his message.

"What are allies for," Blaise said quietly. Harry looked him in the eye and smiled but said nothing. "Where is it going?" Blaise asked, Harry hesitated but then responded.

"Malfoy Manor." He said. Blaise nodded and murmured his charm and Harry watched his message disappear from sight.

Lucius looked up and frowned when he saw an owl pecking gently at his window. He unwound his arms from Severus' sleeping form on the couch and tied his house robe together before going to the window. He passed his desk and picked up his cane as he did. When he opened the window the owl hooted softly and dropped a letter in his hands and left. Lucius arched a brow, but nevertheless closed the window and murmured a series of spells to see if the note was jinxed. Finding that is was just a letter, he opened it and felt his eyes widened in surprise.

Lord Malfoy,

Give Riddle my regards and tell him that I want to set up a meeting with him about putting his game into play.

Harry Potter

"Merlin, I can't believe it." Lucius breathed; he never thought the bloody boy would do it, but he had. An arm wrapped around his waist and he turned his head and then let Severus read the note.

"I can't believe he's done it." Severus said after a moment. "He's switched sides. I wonder what made him decide."

"I'm not too ashamed to say I don't care at this point." Lucius said with some amusement. "I'm sorry to leave you Sev, but I must get this to Lord Riddle." Severus nodded and kissed Lucius chastely on the neck.

"I know and that's alright, I should be getting back anyway. Your wife," he said snorting, "does not like me here."

"I would order her not to say anything if I thought it would help matters, but I believe at this point in time it will merely make her vindictiveness worse. We will find a more…permanent

solution within due time. Perhaps Lord Riddle can suggest something."

"Perhaps, but enough. You must go." Severus said as he picked up his robe and began to button the multitude of clasps on it. Lucius went to get his winter cloak and quickly donned it. He and Severus both walked out into the brisk November cold together before Lucius apparated with a near silent *crack!* Severus looked out into the night for a moment before chuckling.

"Excellent move, Potter, excellent move."

Tom was sitting staring blankly into his fireplace when his butler murmured in his ear. "Milord, Lord Malfoy is at your gates."

"Let him in, and bring a glass of bourbon please." Tom said and then stood as the man left. What was Lucius doing coming to his house this late? A few minutes went by and then Tom looked up and arched a brow. Lucius strode into his office; his hair haphazardly braided and tossed down his back and his eyes practically glowing in the dim light. Tom chuckled in amusement. "Why Lucius, you look like you just rolled out of bed."

"I practically did," he said bowing to him and then offering him a glass of bourbon. "I received this, and had to get it to you post haste." He handed the note to Tom. Tom frowned but opened it nonetheless and then he grinned.

"Excellent choice my boy." He breathed. This was very good news; no wonder Lucius had come as soon as he received it. "How did he get this out of Hogwarts?"

"My guess is through one of my son's confidants. I would probably think it was Blaise Zabini. Pansy is in France, and the other boys…" Lucius shook his head, his jaw clenching.

Ah, yes. Tom remembered Draco saying something about his guards being killed by their father's for siding with him. Tom smiled wolfishly into the flames. "That reminds me Lucius, Lords Crabbe and Goyle will be joining me for a small meeting tomorrow night. Make sure they know it and meet me accordingly. Schedule Harry Potter the audience he has asked for an hour before." He grinned at Lucius, "I think it's time for Voldemort to appear for one last time before meeting his end, don't you?"

"As you will it Milord, as you will it." Lucius said with a sneer.

The next day…

Harry paced his dormitory room anxiously. Ron and Neville were sitting on their respective beds, having already shooed Seamus out of the room. "Harry mate, just tell us what it is that has your knickers in a twist, will you? You've been pacing for the past fifteen minutes."

"It can't be as bad as your making it out to be." Neville said in agreement. Harry paused and stared at them both, still hesitant about telling them exactly what he was up to. He could feel their anti-eavesdropping wards, as wells as the numerous privacy wards they put up. Hopefully it was enough.

"I'm siding with Lord Riddle," he said still fidgeting a little. At first Neville and Ron both frowned in confusion but then Neville's eyes widened and Ron's face flushed a high red.

"What! You're siding with Volde- !" Harry slapped a hand over Ron's mouth.

"Listen to me, Lord Riddle has gotten his sanity back and he's planning a huge coupe against Dumbledore. He wants my help, and I think I should give it. Now are you going to sit quietly or am I going to have to body-bind you and knock you out?" Ron rolled his eyes but nodded silently. Harry looked at Neville and he nodded as well. Harry took his hand from Ron's mouth and then sat next to his best friend. "He has this plan to make everyone believe that he's dead. It will work, merely for the fact that he doesn't look like the monster he did before. I know it sounds crazy, but it might work."

"But what is he going to do after?" Ron said angrily in a hushed voice. "I don't want to find you in a ditch somewhere."

"Not going to happen. Riddle knows that if he kills me, Draco dies too, and if that happens Lucius and Severus will find a way to make his life a living hell. Believe me, those are two men that I wouldn't want after me alive or dead." Harry said with a shudder.

"I agree," Neville said hesitantly, "So, Lord Riddle huh? Jeez, when did this happen?"

"A month or so ago." Harry said, "Sorry I didn't say anything but I didn't make my decision to work with him until yesterday night. Dumbledore is still just going to use me as weapon and not tell me anything. He said he would only tell me the things he *thought* I would need to know, when he thought it was best. I just can't take that anymore, especially after the whole thing with Sirius." Harry bowed his head.

"What about Remus?" Ron asked, but Harry shook his head.

"I haven't heard from him in months. I think Dumbledore sent him on a mission for the Order or something. I had to make a decision and this is it." Ron said nothing for a few moments but then sighed heavily.

"Well, I can't have you going off and getting yourself killed now can I? Count me in." Ron said with a small smile. Neville laughed and then slapped Harry on the back.

"I'm in too, and I believe Blaise will be in as well?"

"Zabini, what does he have to do with this?" Ron asked and Neville and Harry groaned.

"Well Ron, Blaise is my boyfriend and Draco's best friend, so I am sure that he will be willing to help Harry as well."

"You're dating Zabini?" Ron asked and then looked and both Harry and Neville and rolled his eyes. "Bloody hell, both of your are dating Slytherins! Harry's going over to the dark side, and I'm about to follow…" Ron shook his head tiredly, "what is the world coming to?"

"Oh it's not as bad as all that." Neville said with a glint of mischief in his warm brown eyes. "We just have to find *you* someone in Slytherin and then we can all be nutters together!" Ron looked at him and Harry just chuckled.

"I knew I could count on both of you."

Tom stood when Harry entered Severus' private rooms later that night. He noted that the boy seemed nervous, but he held a grudging respect for the young man as Harry squared his shoulders and walked towards him. "Mr. Potter," he said with an inclination of his head.

"Lord Riddle," Harry said back, "Thank you for meeting with me."

"Absolutely, tell me Mr. Potter, what made you change your mind?" Harry sighed and then smiled slightly.

"Dumbledore has become very predictable. He won't give me any information that I ask for, and then when I go off my own assumptions, many people that I care for end up getting hurt." He turned to Tom, "I had asked him to keep me in the loop essentially and he basically blew me off as usual saying that he wouldn't tell me anything of any importance until he was ready. I've been doing it his way for a long time and it's not working. I'd rather work with you than to be thought of as nothing but a weapon."

"I see," Tom said and then chuckled dryly, "I am the lesser of two evils, which is really quite ironic." Harry gave him a guilty look but then laughed.

"Yes, in my eyes right now your are the lesser of two evils, however, I still do not trust you whole heartedly."

"I would be worried if you did."

"So, what have you planned then?" Harry asked switching back onto the main topic at hand. Tom gazed at him, sizing him up. Dumbledore was a fool; Harry Potter was a well of untapped potential. The boy would be more powerful then even him someday. It was quite intoxicating really to be the one to teach him. And Tom knew that Harry had a lot to learn.

" First off, you can call me Tom, Thomas, or Riddle if you prefer. 'Lord Voldemort' as of this day

is dead to you. Consider yourself the victor in a battle that has been waged for years."

"A hollow victory that is, considering you are alive and well, but I agree that you are not the madman I had been fighting before. You can call me Harry or Potter, whichever you prefer."

"Good, now that that is settled, we can get down to business." Tom said seriously, "It has come to my attention that two of my followers killed Draco's friends. Has he spoken to you about it?"

"Yes, Vincent and Greg, well, Crabbe and Goyle to many people here." Harry said, "Draco misses them."

"Yes, fine lads; loyal to a fault." Tom agreed, "I've decided to make an example of them and a test, if you will, for you. You need to learn how to kill with no…hesitation." Tom paused and watched Harry's reaction. The boy had paled slightly, but his gaze was steady.

"I don't know if I'll every be able to kill with ease." Harry said quietly. Tom shook his head.

"You misunderstand me. Each death at your hands should never be taken with ease. You should feel remorse yes, but you should also know with a certainty that there are no alternate options and this must be done." Tom sighed, "I wandered into insanity for many reason, the primary being my obsession with darker magick. Another reason that I went astray is quite simple; I began to stop feeling anything with every death at my hand. It changed the way I viewed death and how I processed it in my mind. The more numb I felt, the more torture I inflicted on my victim to see if I could feel *anything*. I never want that for you.

"Lords Crabbe and Goyle will die by my hand and hopefully through this experience I can show you how to distance yourself from the kill enough to not hesitate, but *never* enough to where you feel nothing. Are you willing to do this?" Harry stared into the flames for a long time and then finally lifted his head and met Tom's gaze steadily.

"Yes."

Draco looked up with a suspicious frown as soft knocks filtered in from the Prefects' main door. Hermione was still studying in the library so it must be for him. He slowly rose from his desk, withdrew his wand from his robes, and walked towards the door purposefully.

"Who is it?" He asked.

"Draco." Draco blinked and opened the door quickly ushering Harry inside and then to his bedroom.

"Harry, Harry what's wrong?" Draco asked calmly as he shut, locked, and warded his bedroom door. He pulled Harry's cloak off his shoulders and then paused. There was blood on one of the sleeves of his shirt and then on the front of it. Draco looked into Harry's wounded gaze and

pressed a hand to his face gently. "Harry," He said gently again and he got a small smile for his efforts.

"I met with Tom," he said so softly that Draco had to step closer to him to hear. "We discussed a few things and then we went on a trip." Harry looked Draco in the eyes and took a deep breath before adding, "He killed Lords Crabbe and Goyle. Your friends are avenged." Draco said nothing, but he leaned into Harry's stiff frame and Harry wrapped his arms around him.

"How do you feel?" Draco asked; his voice a bit muffled in Harry's shirt. Harry tightened his hold and sighed again.

"I feel sad, but I understand that he made an example of them for not aligning with his new regime. I don't think that I will ever be able to kill with no hesitation."

"You will," Draco said.

"And how can you know that?" Harry asked.

"Because I know you," Draco stepped back and looked into his eyes. "You will do whatever you think is necessary. If that means the death of someone, then you will do it. You will never be able to take a life without feeling guilty, but you will be able to do it eventually. Hopefully you will not have to."

"I doubt that will ever come to pass." Harry said pessimistically. Draco smiled a bit sadly.

"True, but let's not think about that now. Come to bed Harry, it's time for you to rest." Draco pushed him towards the bed, stripping him as they went. Once Harry was underneath the comforter, Draco turned off the lights pulled the curtains around the bed closed, stripped to his boxers as well and climbed into bed. Harry pulled him into his arms saying nothing, merely playing with the tendrils of Draco's hair.

It took a while for both of them to fall sleep.

November 30 – A week later…

Harry wanted to throttle Dumbledore.

Everyone in the Great Hall was silent after his jovially given order: each student would have to sit under that ridiculous sorting hat again and see if they were still a member of their current House. He could feel Hermione's critical gaze on him as well as Ron and Neville's worried ones. Even Harry was a bit worried; they all knew just the House that he would go into.

Harry turned from Dumbledore's calculating gaze as the man began calling name. Harry met Draco's eyes across the room. Draco blinked and then leaned closer to Blaise, whispering

something. Blaise nodded his head minutely and began speaking with a Slytherin next to him. Harry watched in fascination as the entire table seemed to shift seats quickly and a neatly leaving two innocent empty spaces; one beside Draco and the other opposite of Blaise.

Harry smiled slightly and caught Draco's fleeting gaze; Draco winked at him as he picked up his pumpkin juice and took a sip. Harry's gaze turned to Severus at the Head Table and the man gave him a slight nod, a rueful half smirk forming on his lips.

"Neville Longbottom." Dumbledore said with a smile. Neville walked steadily up to the stool, sat and waited as the hat was placed on his head. Harry nearly grinned when the sorting hat called out "Slytherin!" in a very loud and surprised voice. Dumbledore's smile dropped some as Neville smiled at him and then walked confidently toward the Slytherin table, taking the seat opposite of his lover. "Harry Potter," Dumbledore said, still smiling, yet his voice was stiff, as if he didn't want to see where Harry would end up.

The sorting hat was placed on his head and immediately the hat began speaking with him. *"Just what is going on with you and your friend Mr. Longbottom? I can't believe I put him in Slytherin."*

He has changed and so have I.

*"Yes well, I **did** tell you before that you would do well in Slytherin. Now are you going to contradict me again Mr. Potter?"* The sorting hat sounded amused and Harry grinned.

No, do what you do best, however when Ron Weasely comes up here, keep him in Gryffindor.

"Why wouldn't I?"

Just do it.

"Will do my boy, will do. Congratulations on your mating with Mr. Malfoy." The sorting hat said slyly and then cried out , "Slytherin!" The gaps of horror rolled off Harry's back like water. He walked toward the Slytherin table sedately and took the seat next to Draco. The room waited with bated breath and Draco turned and arched an eyebrow, seeming to look Harry over and find him slightly lacking.

"Welcome, Potter," He drawled out, pitching his voice loud enough to everyone who wanted to hear. "I hope that you will live up to the reputation of our illustrious house."

"Oh I think I'll do just fine." Harry answered. Draco sniffed and went back to eating, but Harry felt his hand squeeze his thigh underneath the table. The sorting went on until finally Ron was called up. He warily eyed the sorting hat, but sat and placed it on his head. The hat's mouth opened wide, probably in surprise, and Harry had a funny feeling the hat was eyeing him somehow.

"Gryffindor!" Ron eyed Harry discreetly as he walked back to his table. Harry mouthed the word 'later' and Ron nodded, turning to talk with Seamus and a few other friends of theirs. Harry watched Dumbledore watch him and he smiled up at the man.

Dumbledore scowled and Harry felt himself grin.

He loved messing up Dumbledore's plans for him.

Same day - Malfoy Manor…

Tom sipped his tea as Narcissa Malfoy sat prettily on her settee. "You wished to see me Lady Malfoy?"

"Yes Milord, I want to ask if you could help me with a small problem." She said with a demure smile. Tom laughed silently, Narcissa was trying very hard to seem meek and innocent, but he knew that she was as calculating as her husband in some ways.

"And the problem is…?" He trailed off purposely because he thought that he had a suspicion at what she was looking for and he knew that she'd never get it.

"I want a little help in getting rid of Severus Snape." She said coolly, "He's been apart of Lucius and Draco's lives too long, and is a bad influence."

"Really?" Tom drawled.

"Yes." She said succinctly. Tom took another sip of his tea and then eyed her carefully.

"And what will you do if I don't help you?"

"I will find another way. I am tired of playing second fiddle to a man, a *man* for Merlin's sake, for my husband's affections." Narcissa sniffed, "I am Lucius' *wife*…"

"And Severus is his *mate* for life." Tom said harshly. "That has a whole other set of rules, Lady Malfoy, and a magick far older than our paltry marriage vows and bindings." She opened her mouth again but Tom cut a hand through the air, sending her an irritated glance. "I will think about it, but right now I would like to be alone." His tone was hard and one Narcissa knew not to argue with.

"Milord," she curtseyed and left, and gracefully as she came. Tom sat and stared out the floor to ceiling windows to the beautiful garden below. He turned his head, slightly and smiled.

"Did you hear all of that?"

"Yes," Lucius stepped out of the shadows and stood by Tom his arms crossed and his expression

cool.

"What do you intend to do about it?" Tom asked, "It may prove problematic."

"She's threatened to do something for a time, but I will take care of her." Lucius growled low in his throat and Tom arched an eyebrow as Lucius' glamour wavered slightly and his eyes flashed a deep violet. "*No one* threatens my mate and gets away with it, *no one;* not even her."

Tom thought of the beautiful Narcissa and sighed; she picked the wrong man to turn into an enemy.

R/R! Tell me what you think!

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 8

Disclaimer: I own nothing but the storyline and any orginal characters or settings my devious mind comes up with.

Author's Note(s): Hello, I hope everyone had a good Memorial Day. Here is the next chapter. It is long so fair warning, but I had a lot to cover and discuss in this chapter. The story is going through a transitional period, so I apologize for any confusion I may cause. At any rate, I hope you enjoy it, since it was really fun to write. As always the credit for beta reading goes to the lovely LeeLee.

Enjoy!

Desolate

Chapter Seven

7th of December – One week later…

"Ah, Mr. Weasley I know that you would never…well, well, well. It seems you have changed after all Mr. Weasely." Ron closed his eyes against the Sorting Hat's words as he had for the past week ever since that stupid re-Sorting of Houses. He looked around the room and sighed unhappily. Harry and Neville had moved out immediately, leaving him with Seamus and his ever-loud mouth boasting on all his conquests.

Ron missed his friends and if it were not for the fact that they needed someone to stay in Gryffindor he would be with them. Ron turned onto his side twirling his wand in his fingers as he looked over the miniature chessboard and it's pieces intently.

"It seems Mr. Potter was right; you do indeed belong in Slytherin now. However, he's asked me to leave you in Gryffindor." The Sorting hat had been quite sympathetic about having to put him back in his House without his best mate, but Ron understood. And as he looked at Harry and how much calmer he was being by Draco's side, Ron realized just how much of a strain it had been on his friend. Ron was quite happy to help his friends Harry and Nev, even Draco could be considered something of a friend, but Ron still had his doubts about him from time to time.

The door crashed open, jerking Ron abruptly from his thought. So abruptly that he had his wand pointed at Seamus and a curse on his lips before he stopped to realize just who it was. "Bloody hell Seamus!" He snapped. Seamus grinned and just breezed by.

"Hey your Mum and Da are here, standing right outside Hogwarts, they want to talk with you." He said loudly as he went. Ron frowned in confusion but left the room and traveled down the stairs to the front of Hogwarts in an almost daze like state.

"Hey Mum," Ron said quietly as he hugged her and then hugged his Father. "Hey Dad."

"Hello Ron," Mrs. Weasely said staring up at him with concern. "How are you doing after all the dreadful business of Harry Potter being placed in that horrible House?"

It was the way she said 'Harry Potter' that clued him in that something was wrong. He stared at both of his parents and then shrugged.

"Everything is fine, we're still friends, we just don't live together anymore." Ron said with a tight smile. Mr. and Mrs. Weasely frowned and Ron felt that something was more wrong then he had thought before.

"We really don't want you associating with him anymore." Mrs. Weasely said gently, "It seems that he's become a mite unstable."

"What are you talking about Mum?" Ron asked his bright blue eyes narrowing. "Dad, what is she talking about?"

"Dumbledore brought up his concerns that Harry was becoming unstable. He wouldn't listen to Dumbledore's directions anymore and…" Mr. Weasely trailed off as Ron snorted.

"That's because the Headmaster wouldn't *give* Harry direction at all." Ron snapped angrily, "I can't believe that you two are asking me to give up on my best mate!" His parents eyed him with apparent pity.

"Ron, you can make new friends, *better* friends, why just ask that charming girl Hermione and

I'm sure she could…"

"I don't speak with Hermione anymore." Ron interrupted and then he took a deep breath and let it out, trying to calm the fury that was building inside of him. "I don't care what you do to me, but I'm not going to stop being Harry's friend."

The silence between them was painful but he saw resolve hardened into his parents' faces and he felt his own become just as determined. "Very well," his mother sniffed, "you aren't welcome for Christmas and you won't receive any gifts from us. Maybe after spending your time *alone* and with no family then you will see that we know what's best for you." His dad looked ready to cave but a stern look from the Weasely matron made him think better of it and he looked at his son beseechingly.

Ron felt his throat tighten at the pain of being left to his own devices this Christmas. For all his whining he actually did love the presents he got from his family each year. This years Christmas would be very hard, but doable. "Fine, Happy Christmas, I'll speak with you in a month or so." Ron said haltingly and then turned his back on his parents and walked inside.

Blaise stood with his back against Hogwarts and watched as Ron's parents walked away. He scowled at their backs and then swept into the building, but he was too late, Ron had already disappeared up the stairs to the Tower.

"Damn and blast," Blaise muttered as he made his way back to his dormitory room where he knew Draco would be waiting for him. He didn't know why he felt the need to help Weasely. Blaise frowned as he remembered feeling such pain on behalf of the tall gangly red head as his parents laid out their mandate to him. Blaise smiled to himself though, he was sure Weasely's parents never thought that he wouldn't cave to their demands. "Good for you Weasely." He muttered and then let himself into the Slytherin Common room and then into his bedroom.

Draco was standing near his desk and he looked up with a smile, but it faded as he saw the pensive look on Blaise's face. "What's wrong, what happened?"

"We have a problem." Blaise said and then he explained.

Draco watched Harry's face as he absorbed the news that Draco had told him. "But why would they do that to him?"

"It's all about power Harry. The Weasely Clan trusts Dumbledore implicitly; they think that he can do no wrong. By Ron sticking up for you and himself, he is essentially going against his family. This is their way of retaliating."

"B-But Ron loves Christmas, this was the first year that they would've had enough money so that he *could* go home! He's been looking forward to this since September!" Harry protested.

"I know that, you know that, and Ron knows that, but this is a larger game, and it's not all about our wants and needs." Draco said sympathetically." Draco watched Harry's face fall and he wanted to grind his teeth in frustration. He didn't understand how the Weasely's could do that to their son, hell it sounded like something *his* parents would do, not the other way around. He had underestimated Dumbledore's hold over them. It seemed that when pushed, they would side with Dumbledore every time. "Perhaps, we could invite him to come with us for Christmas?" Draco posed it as a question.

Harry lifted his head with a surprised look on his face. "Are you sure that would be okay with your father?"

"I am sure he will get over it. He is letting *you* come to his house." Draco said with a grin. Harry arched an eyebrow and then laughed.

"This is true, but that is because Tom will be there and Tom has requested my presence, and I'm sure you had something to do with it as well." Harry smiled and pulled Draco closer to him. The Veela came willingly and cradled Harry's head against his stomach, cording his fingers through his unruly black locks. "That's sounds good, I'd like Ron to be with us for Christmas." Harry's voice was soft and slightly muffled against Draco's robes but he heard him regardless.

"It will be a good Christmas." Draco murmured, slightly breathless as Harry nuzzled his middle.

"It will be a *great* Christmas. Our wedding is very soon." Harry said with a soft smile. Draco felt his face heat slightly at the intensity in which Harry looked at him.

"Yes," Draco said smiling contently. Harry smiled back at him with a happiness that Draco had rarely seen in him.

Nothing else needed to be said.

14th of December – One week later…

"So, I hear that you aren't going home." Ron sighed and then turned and faced Hermione's triumphant face. "You know it was I that relayed the message to your parents about Harry."

"You had no right." Ron seethed. "No right at all!"

"I'm just looking out for you. It seems like you would need looking after." Hermione said with a frown. Ron laughed in her face, which made Hermione blush furiously.

"You aren't looking out for me, you are looking out for you own best interest." Ron said, "So what do you want from me? Because you must want something, to write a letter to my parents telling them about Harry already knowing what ultimatum they would put out." Ron just stared

at her and Hermione stared back, but her gaze was the first to drop away.

"I think that we should start up our meetings once more." Hermione said quietly and Ron blinked in surprise.

"You can't be serious?" Ron asked an inelegant snort coming for him. When she didn't respond he laughed, "You *are* serious? Wow, well, no Hermione."

"What?" Hermione asked in a shocked voice. Ron frowned at her and then shook his head.

"No, I am not going to sleep with you anymore. I dumped you months ago and I won't just start back up at the drop of a hat. Find someone else to relieve your tension or whatever you want to call it."

"I can't believe you! I was the one that started it!" Hermione practically shrieked. Students passing in the hall gave them a wide berth and Ron just shook his head.

"And I'm the one that ended it. Sorry Hermione, but I won't do it anymore." He said, not sounding sorry at all. He stared at her for a few moments before walking away.

"Enjoy your holiday!" Hermione called after him. Ron didn't turn around but his eyes burned with repressed tears of anger and sadness, as he made his way outside.

Neville sat silently in a small alcove that overlooked the fountain at the tall shadow sitting alone gazing into the frozen water. Neville sighed heavily as he saw the dejected look on Ron's face. It was all over the school how Ron and Hermione had argued and from what Blaise had mentioned about him not going home for the holidays, Neville could only imagine how lonely he was.

A pair of lips brushed against his neck and Neville hummed as Blaise shifted behind him, pulling him into his arms. "How is he?" Blaise asked. Neville shrugged.

"He seems dejected Blaise. But can you seriously blame him? I never knew Hermione could be such a harpy." Blaise chuckled.

"Her priorities are different. Granger is more concerned with her education and how smart she becomes, how far her career can climb, than focusing on such petty things as emotions."

"She broke his heart," Neville argued and Blaise shook his head, "What then?"

"I think Ron gradually fell out of love with her. His heart isn't broken, he's merely sad or disappointed." Blaise rested his chin on Neville's shoulder. Neville still watched Ron with a thoughtful look on his face. His fingers played with Blaise's growing locks as he drifted in thought.

"So how can we help him?"

"Draco and Harry are going to invite him to Malfoy Manor for Christmas."

"That will be wonderful." Neville said happily, "but what are they going to do about gifts?" Blaise chuckled dryly.

"The Malfoy family is one of the wealthiest in England. And Harry isn't a slouch in the galleon department either; I am sure they can spare a few galleons getting some last minute gifts."

Neville rolled his eyes and pinched Blaise's thigh. "Smart ass," he joked.

"That I am, but you love me." Blaise murmured in his ear. Neville curled into Blaise a bit more and then kissed their entwined fingers.

"That I do," Neville murmured, "that I do."

The next day...

Ron watched morosely as students left to go home for the holidays. He knew that he was doing the right thing, but that still didn't mean that he was happy about it. Hermione had been infuriatingly smug when she'd left. As he watched, someone coughed behind him and Ron turned and was surprised to find Draco behind him.

The Veela was ready for travel in a very expensive looking midnight blue outdoor cloak. He smiled slightly and then said, "Why aren't you ready?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm surprised Harry kept his promise to not tell you. You are coming with us to the Manor for the holidays." Draco said. He looked around surreptitiously before stepping closer to Ron and handing him a portkey discretely. "Take a carriage with Harry into Hogsmeade and meet me at the outskirts. We will portkey together." Draco touched the portkey gently, "It's one of a trio. You won't go anywhere without the other two."

"Why are you doing this?" Ron asked him quietly. Draco said nothing for a few moments but then shrugged.

"My mate's feelings are more important than a petty house rivalry." He looked into Ron's eyes and sneered, "Although, from what Harry has told me, it seems the Sorting Hat wanted to place you in Slytherin."

"It did," Ron said and Draco nodded.

"Then that's that. Change is coming Weasely, and whether you like it or not, you will be in the center of the storm. Harry needs his closest friends by his side and I know that you are one of them." Draco's eyes narrowed and Ron felt the hairs on the back of his neck rise as the air around them thickened. Draco's eyes became tumultuous and Ron swore he could see the color shifting from silver to the steel grey of storm clouds. "I will warn you only once; you break Harry's trust and I will flay the skin off your bones for the rest of your life. Have I made myself clear?"

"Thoroughly," Ron said shaking and as soon as it began it was over. Draco looked as impeccable as ever and was walking towards the front of the school. Ron shuddered slightly, remembering the thick air around him and the look in Draco's eyes. He knew Draco would keep his promise because Ron knew he would do the same for Harry as well if the situation had been reversed.

He stood there for a moment before hurrying back to the Tower to retrieve his things a smile on his face the whole while.

Perhaps this Christmas wouldn't be so bad after all.

24th of December – Christmas Eve…

Lucius stared into the merrily burning fire lost in thought. This year had been full of surprises. First Draco's mate being Harry Potter, then Lord Riddle, and now he had a Weasely under his roof. He chuckled quietly, going silent again as Severus' slumbering form shifted against him. Lucius looked down at the man and couldn't help but smile. Through everything, the snarky Potions Master has been by his side. Sometimes he wondered what would've happened to them if they'd been able to marry, but Lucius wasn't the type of man that settled morosely in the past.

The past was gone, nothing could be changed and the future was still full of uncertainty. The sound of his study door opening drew his attention and he frowned as he saw his wife enter the room.

"You know this area is off limits to you." Lucius said lowly. Narcissa sniffed but nodded her head in deference to him.

"I know, but I wanted to talk with you. I had hoped that you would be alone." Anger flashed across her face as her gaze dropped to Severus' form across his lap, but then it was gone.

"You know that I am never far from my mate. What do you want Narcissa?"

"I-I had hoped that you would come to me tonight. I've missed you." She said very softly. Lucius saw the fleeting hope in her eyes and he felt his gut clench. He turned away from her and glared into the flames.

He hoped his father was rotting uncomfortably in his grave. He couldn't pinpoint the exact moment he knew Narcissa had fallen in love with him. But once he had known, it was like a

knife in his gut, just waiting to turn vengeful and rip him into shreds. "You know that I won't." He turned back and looked at her, "And you know why."

"Because of that *man*? One man, Lucius, he's just a man."

"No he isn't and you know it!" Lucius hissed; the fire roared to life behind him and he saw the fear that flashed across Narcissa's face until she masked it behind her jealousy and rage. "I did my duty by you and you by me. You bore me a son an heir and I gave you the riches and status that only the Malfoy name could provide. I *never* said that I would give you my heart!"

"No, you didn't, but you didn't even try!" Narcissa said angrily. Her eyes landed on Severus and Lucius placed an arm around him. "I never had a chance, he's always had your heart not I."

"Yes, that's because he's my mate Narcissa. You should have thought of that before you and my father concocted that ridiculous scheme to keep us apart." Lucius sneered at her, "We're all from Slytherin darling, manipulation and subterfuge is in our blood. Severus and I knew something would happen and thank Merlin my mother wasn't as stupid as my father or you." Narcissa gasped in outrage.

"I am not stupid."

"No," Severus' voice cut through the heated argument like a cold wind. "You are a fool." He looked sleepy, but his ebon eyes were alert and focused on Narcissa. She could still not see why Lucius would be so enamored with this man. So what if he was his mate? Severus Snape had to be one of the least attractive wizards Narcissa knew. He was gaunt, his skin was white, and his hair always greasy from his damn potions. *She* was much more of a perfect match for Lucius, why couldn't he see that?

"Stay out of this!" Narcissa seethed and Severus raised a haughty brow and then sneered.

"We've been having this fight for the better part of two decades Lady Malfoy. Lucius is Veela, you daft woman, and all Veela mate for life. His magick and Veela instinct chose me, and that should've been enough for you and his damnable father. However, it wasn't enough and you and he went and made utter fools of yourselves." Severus narrowed his eyes at her and then turned to Lucius and he sighed heavily, "You will never know the pain Lucius feels at your love for him. He never wanted this to happen and neither did I. We wanted to be left alone and because of your greed and the late Lord Malfoy's tyranny, all our lives have been intertwined.

"Be grateful that he has afforded you a life of utter luxury and that you have his respect. He could have just sent you away to one of his other many estates and kept Draco for us to raise, but he didn't. He respects and cares for you too much. You are the mother of his son and he gave you the respect that you were due because of that." Severus said scathingly.

"I want his heart for my own." Narcissa said hating that her voice wavered. Severus blinked slowly at her and then for once he looked on her with more than disdain but to her it was far

worse; he looked on her with pity.

"I'm sorry but his heart will never be yours." He murmured. Narcissa glared at him.

"Why is that?" She snapped.

"Because, Lucius gave me his heart a long time ago and I will not give it to a woman who has become so embittered by her own folly that she'd treat it more as a trophy now than the treasure that it is." Severus gave her a small sad smile. "We Slytherins do not love lightly, you of all of us should know that the most."

Narcissa stared at the two of them. She watched as Severus shifted and Lucius, so in tune with his mate, shifted with him; like he was part of the same body. She'd never seen anything like it before. Lucius had everything; a perfect wife, a perfect heir and son, galleons coming from every direction imaginable, and yet all of that had never made him as happy as when he was sitting quietly with this Potions Master.

She turned away from them and faced the door. Her vision had gone red with a rage so blind she wanted to scream and curse anyone in her path, but she had guests. She'd never embarrass Lucius like that. She took a deep breath and stalked out of the room. She'd make them pay, she'd make them pay dearly; even if it killed her.

Lord Tom Riddle stood in the shadows lowering his gaze as an oblivious Narcissa rushed right by him. He walked silently towards the opened study door just in time to see Lucius kiss his mate senseless. The pain he felt at watching the action surprised him, he had seen this many times, so why was it affecting him now? Tom shook his head free of its silly thoughts and turned his crimson gaze back towards the retreating figure of the Lady Malfoy.

He'd keep an eye on her. Tom had a feeling Narcissa wouldn't let this New Year pass without exacting revenge some how.

25th of December – Christmas Day

"Blimey Harry, these clothes must've cost him a small fortune." Ron was fidgeting with the mound of new clothes strewn all over his guest bed again. Harry just laughed at him. Ron blushed, "I'm serious! How will I pay him back for this? This was too much!"

"Don't say you'll pay him back, it was a gift, an extravagant one, but it was gift." Harry said with a smile. The door opened and Draco sauntered in, kissing Harry happily and then grinning smugly at Ron's flushed face.

"Get over it Weasely. If you will be seen around my mate, I had to do my duty as future spouse and make sure you were appropriately outfitted."

"But Malfoy…"

"Shut it you sod, just nod and say thank you to me and we will call it even." Draco rolled his eyes, "Merlin! It's Christmas, it's a gift! I had to get you something I thought would be useful to you." Ron opened his mouth to retort but then sighed; he'd never win. The clothes were made by top designers and probably cost more than his family's wardrobe combined and then some. They were perfectly made, custom fitted and it flabbergasted him that Draco had been able to get them all here on such short notice.

Harry smiled and Draco smirked; Ron laughed and finally gave in. "Alright, Happy Christmas and thank you for the gift!" Draco nodded but the glint of amusement in his eyes didn't go away.

"You're welcome Weasely. Now you will be suitably attired to attend our wedding."

"That's great I…wedding?"

31st of December – New Year's Eve

Harry was so nervous his palms were sweating. The moon was full in the night sky and a small-secluded area of the Malfoy Gardens was lit up making the area seem ethereal in its beauty. He stood in dress robes the color of night hemmed in gold with a high collar. Standing next to him, Lucius was similarly attired only his robes were silver blue, flashing just like his eyes in the dim light. Ron looked quite handsome in his own new dress robes that were a startling emerald green that complimented his fiery mane and blue eyes. He stood calmly next Severus Snape who was wearing his customary black ensemble.

Harry turned the other man who flanked him, Lord Riddle, and eyed the man discreetly. He looked devastatingly handsome attired midnight blue dress robes. His crimson gaze glowed and he gave a barely perceptible smile when he caught Harry staring. "Is there something wrong Harry?" He asked.

"No, just I'm surprised I'm standing right next you and not in agony." It was a fact that kept surprising him; his scar hadn't burned once near the man in perhaps a month. Riddle chuckled and then replied dryly.

"I am not the man I once was, but that is for a later discussion." He looked over Harry's shoulder and Harry turned and promptly stopped breathing.

Draco was approaching the dais gracefully. His hair fell in a sheet of platinum blond around him, his pointed ears peeking through. His eyes were fairly glowing silver in the dim light and matched perfectly with the silver of his robes that were hemmed in black. He looked exquisite to Harry and it was then he knew that Draco would mean more to him than anything once this ceremony was through.

Lucius easily stepped towards his son clasping his hand while wielding a ceremonial dagger in his other. He watched his son with soft eyes and a small smile. "Are you ready Draco?"

"Yes," Draco was vibrating. Harry could feel his tension and the tension in the bond. They'd waited to the last possible moment and now there was no turning back. Lord Riddle stepped to his side gently taking Harry's right hand, mirroring Draco's left hand that Lucius held open, and Harry saw the second ceremonial dagger in Riddle's hand poised and ready.

"Are you ready Harry?" Lord Riddle asked and Harry nodded as he locked eyes with his mate. Lucius brought his blade down quickly as did Tom, both younger men hissed and watched as the blood pooled in their palms.

"Now repeat after me," Lucius said quietly nodding to both boys. "*Flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood, I come with an open mind, a solid heart, and a pure soul. This binding is of the Highest Order and can never be torn asunder. Our enemies will fall beneath its might and fury if they test us. Our wills are one, ours hearts are one, and our souls are now one forevermore.*"

"Flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood, I come with an open mind, a sold heart, and a pure soul. This binding is of the Highest Order and can never be torn asunder. Our enemies will fall beneath its might and fury if they test us. Our wills are one, our hearts are one, and our souls are now one forevermore." Harry and Draco murmured in tandem. As they spoke Lucius and Tom held their hands above a chalice and all watched as their blood mixed together in the bottom.

Harry could feel the bond, *see* it even, a gold and silver helix of energy, binding them together tighter and tighter, until both colors blended together and for the first time Harry could touch Draco's mind without any barriers. He gasped in the wonder of it, and could see Draco across from him reveling in the feel of him. Harry could practically taste the magick that made up *Draco* and he hungrily accepted everything the bond had to offer.

He was barely paying attention when Lucius and Tom cut their own hands adding their blood to the mixture and Harry watched in mild fascination as the blood boiled and then began changing color.

"We've witnessed this binding, and blessed it accordingly." Lucius and Tom said, their voices clear and authoritative. "By the Rites of the Veela Clan, this union is irrevocable, and whomever challenges it can be summarily punished by death, so it was spoken, so shall it be." Harry watched as the color of the blood in the chalice turned an angry violet before settling back to its crimson state. As he was taught in the past weeks, Harry took the chalice and lifted it to his lips, drinking deeply before handing the cup to Draco.

He looked into the Veela's eyes and smiled as he whispered, "I freely give you my life to bind to yours for eternity." Draco took the chalice and drank until there was nothing left he in turn replied,

"And I except your life, will treasure it always, for now I am bound to you for eternity and more." He whispered. Lucius and Tom placed their bloodied palms together and Harry and Draco clasped hands as the bond wound tighter still. Harry could barely breathe at the force of this joining. However when Draco's lips met his, his entire body melted and his only thought was that this beautiful man was his.

The bonding was a beautiful yet painful process. Harry could feel his mental shields being ripped to shreds and then new once being formed in deference to a bond that was made from a magick so ancient even the Veela Council didn't know how it came to be. When it was over, Harry found that they'd been gently laid out on the dais. Draco was curled into his arms, his eyes open but his breath ragged as if he'd just run around Hogwarts twice.

"Merlin that was brutal." Harry said hoarsely. Ron was right there helping them to sit up and then drink some water that was conveniently nearby.

"That had to be the coolest thing I've ever seen," Ron, said with a grin, "You and Draco together are pretty powerful, magick wise anyway." Harry smiled weakly and then looked over to Severus and Lucius. He could see their bond a bit more clearly now, it was powerful in and of itself, if a bit strained. It looked almost…incomplete.

Severus must've read the question in his eyes because he spoke quietly, "The only part of the bond we could accomplish ourselves was the physical aspect. It is the one part of the bond that binds most closely without the ritual. The reason it is strained so is because it was supposed to be linked with the ritual you just performed."

"Perhaps now you could…" Lucius shook his head sadly.

"It's been too long." He said abruptly, "However it is still strong enough to make us inseparable." Harry nodded and said nothing else, knowing that it was a sore subject between them. "Come we must get you both back to the house. You don't have much time before the second phase of the bonding hits."

Harry was too tired to argue and nodded grateful for the hand Tom extended in helping him up and carrying Draco for him. "Is he going to be alright?" Harry asked in concern. He couldn't feel anything wrong with him, but he had slept through everything.

Tom chuckled, "If I remember correctly, he will be just fine in a short while." Lucius and Severus seemed to laugh at Harry's expense and Harry rolled his eyes.

What the hell was so funny?

Draco was insatiable. Harry had no sooner stripped the Veela of his clothes and his own when Draco came out of his stupor, stretched like a cat and then kissed him so passionately that every thought of leaving Draco alone that night vanished from Harry's thoughts.

Their hands roamed over each other so quickly, feverishly, as if something was driving them to move as fast as they could to completion. Draco gasped and moaned as Harry nipped and licked, and slowly made his way down his body tasting every inch.

"My God Harry!" Draco cried out as Harry took his cock deep into his mouth until his gag reflex hit and he released him. Harry was quite curious about blowjobs, considering he'd never given one, and never received one either. But what he lacked in experience he made up for with enthusiasm and Draco wasn't complaining. "Harry I want you to fuck me into orgasm, not blow me there!" Draco pulled Harry's head up and kissed him, practically purring at the taste of himself in Harry's mouth.

He was burning alive, Draco thought. He knew it was the bond, striving for total completion, but all he was concerned about was the hunger that was slowly driving him insane. He searched blindly for the small jar of oil that had been strategically placed by the bed. Once he found it, Draco shoved it blindly at Harry, who quickly dipped his fingers in the oil and slowly circled his entrance before pushing one finger deep inside him. Draco arched and gasped his hips involuntarily bucking at the intrusion. Harry kissed his stomach gently working his finger in and out of Draco's body slowly. "Another, Harry please," Draco begged.

"Anything for you, anything." Harry murmured against his navel as he inserted another finger, working them in and out of Draco's body. Draco undulated underneath Harry and the emerald-eyed boy wanted so much to feel his husband's tight body around his cock, but knew in his head that Draco wasn't prepared enough for it. The third finger didn't slip in unnoticed and a grimace of pain flitted across Draco's features, but it was gone as quickly as it came as his body adjusted. Harry started wiggling his fingers inside just to find…

"Merlin!" Harry grinned against Draco's stomach; found it! He gently massaged Draco's prostate loving the cries that sang from Draco's swollen lips. "Now, Harry now!"

Harry dipped his fingers in oil again lathering his cock with it before aligning his body with Draco's and easing inside. Draco's eyes rolled as Harry steadily and cautiously filled him to his core. He'd be lying if he said it didn't hurt some, but the pain was gone almost immediately and Draco was left with the distinct feeling of an aching fullness in his body and the sighing purring pleasure of the bond in his mind.

Harry groaned as he pushed his cock deep into Draco's body until he filled him to the hilt. He waited as Draco's body adjusted and when Draco finally shifted underneath him, Harry pulled out and then pushed back in. Draco cried out in pleasure and Harry gritted his teeth trying to keep his orgasm at bay as the muscles around his cock contracted. "Draco, if you keep doing that, I am not going to last."

"Well," Draco gasped as Harry upped his pace, "Then you'd better move faster!" He smiled so beautifully, his face writhed in such pleasure that Harry laughed breathlessly, sitting back on his heels, pulling Draco's legs higher and thrust faster. He found Draco's prostate again and Draco's

moan of pleasure sang along every one of Harry's nerve endings.

"That's it, Draco," Harry breathed and he moaned as Draco tightened around him on purpose and began to meet him thrust for thrust. It was exquisite agony and Harry knew neither of them would last long. Draco stared up at him and Harry looked down into his eyes as they both hurled each other toward their goal. Harry released Draco's legs, letting the slender young man wrap his legs around Harry like a vice, as Harry grabbed his arms holding them about Draco's head and kissed him in a frenzy, feeding the Veela his moans of pleasure as Draco fed his to Harry.

They both came almost simultaneously and pleasure so acute rolled over them. Harry blinked the sweat from his eyes and licked the sweat from Draco's neck, nuzzling him. Draco ran his newly freed hands up and down Harry's back gently. Both of them were panting still and Harry had to clear his throat a few times before he could speak.

"That was…" Harry trailed off.

"Yeah," Draco agreed quietly. He turned towards Harry and kissed him gently. Harry felt the surprise, the tenderness, and sheer joy radiating off the bond with his mate. There was no need for words between them. The bond spoke for itself. Harry smiled and then laughed as Draco rolled them over and sat up. It was then that Harry realized that even though both of them had come, they were still hard.

Draco began undulating on top of him and Harry felt the pleasure begin to build all over again. Draco grinned down at him wickedly. "Are you up for round two?" He asked impishly. Harry grinned and replied cheekily.

"I was born ready. Bring it on, you wicked man, bring it on."

R/R!

I hope you liked it!

Until next time! Ciao!

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 9

Disclaimer: I own nothing.

Author's Note: Beta-read version of Chapter!

Chapter Eight

1st of January – New Year's Day

Harry ducked under the curse that had been flying at his head and pointed his wand at the culprit with a grin on his face. Severus Snape looked a bit put out, but he nodded, there was a flash of recognition behind his Death Eater mask and then he vanished. Harry turned to his side and saw that Ron was more or less in one piece already grumbling about how some of his new clothes were ruined.

Harry felt the adrenaline in his veins as he took down another Death Eater over the 'corpse' of Voldemort. Tom and his plan went off without a hitch. Harry and Ron and walked through Hogsmeade without a care in the world as a swarm of Death Eaters bore down on the sleepy little town, Voldemort in tow.

Or at least that's how it seemed to everyone else.

What *really* happened was that the Death Eaters that were now being slaughtered or arrested save Lucius and Severus, were hand selected by Tom and himself to be either slaughtered or arrested. Tom himself wasn't even there, but at Malfoy Manor with Draco awaiting Severus and Lucius' return just before the Ministry could come down on the family like a bunch of raging hornets. Harry kicked the corpse of the pretend Voldemort and smiled in satisfaction. Underneath the glamour and a series of other transfigurations was the dead body of Bellatrix Black-LeStrange.

She had put up quite a fight when it was revealed to the majority of the Death Eaters that their Master was not the one they'd been serving for the past six years. Bellatrix was let down the worst and didn't want to go to a more 'refined' way of taking care of their enemies. She thrived on the bloodshed that they had been doling out and Tom wasn't standing for it.

He cursed her with *crucio*, immobilized her with rope and his own magick, before killing her…with Harry's wand. Tom made sure to do it in the midst of the battle before disappearing back to Malfoy Manor as planned. As Harry looked down, he felt little pity for the woman, and was put more at ease because his godfather had been avenged. Perhaps not the way he would've *wanted* to be avenged, but avenged nonetheless.

"Harry they're coming." Ron whispered in his ear, as his friend looked him over. "Are you alright mate?" Harry looked over his tattered robes, brushing off the dust and grimacing at the flakes of dried blood that fell from his robes, hair, and face.

"I'm fine, just anxious to return to Draco." Harry said lowly as they watched the Aurors surround the building and come to check on them. "Our bond is newly formed, we shouldn't be this far apart." Harry was already feeling the affects of the long distance. He was tired, snappy, and wholly not in a good mood. He could feel that his tiredness was equally making Draco tired as

well, which was not a good thing considering Harry was depending on him and his magick to keep his weary body from betraying them both.

"Well my boy, it seems you've done it!" Harry gritted his teeth as Dumbledore's voice grated in his ears. He smiled tightly and leaned on Ron slightly. The redhead wrapped an arm around his shoulders and glared at the Headmaster.

"Harry's tired, so if you don't mind I think questioning him can wait, don't you?" Ron said quietly. Dumbledore's eyes flashed at the reproach, but his smile remained in tact.

"I am fully aware, Mr. Weasley that your friend has been through a trial, but I just want to make sure that events align the way they are supposed to." Harry felt his eyes narrow slightly; the man was up to something.

"What more evidence do you need?" Harry snapped, "the bastard is dead, can we just leave it at that?"

"Harry, my boy, there is so much else to do, we have to round up the rest of the Death Eaters and such, then get the Ministry back in order, and…"

"You can do that without me." Harry said wearily, "Didn't I do what you and all the other bloody wizards wanted? I killed him, my job is done."

"No," Dumbledore said his eyes gleaming slightly, "You're job has just begun."

Harry and Ron listened intently as Dumbledore laid out his plans.

4th of January – A few days later…

Draco glared out at the falling snow that covered the Gardens. Harry's head was in his lap and Draco slowly rubbed his back in soothing motions. He didn't like Harry being exhausted, he didn't like the Aurors that were currently mucking about in his house, and he absolutely *loathed* Dumbledore. The man was as nosy as an old woman and twice as devious.

They'd been locked in Draco's room for the better part of two days. Well, the Aurors didn't know Harry or Ron were here, and they definitely didn't know that Lord Riddle was still alive and in residence, which was a good thing. He glanced over to the chess table that had been set up in his rooms and had to chuckle.

Ron was studying the board, frowning in concentration. He'd never played muggle chess, however he was giving Lord Riddle quite the challenge. Draco truly believed the Tom has more of an advantage over Ron merely because he scared Ron to the point the redhead had nearly fainted when he met him the first time. Slowly, over the course of the last couple weeks, Tom had coaxed Ron into playing games of muggle chess, and wizards' chest, and slowly but surely

Ron had become somewhat comfortable around the older man.

Draco doubted he'd ever be very close with Lord Riddle, but at least he wouldn't be petrified of him any longer. Harry shifted in his lap and Draco watched as he woke up, eyeing the room sleepily. "Has anything happened?" Harry mumbled, half asleep and half awake. Draco kissed his forehead and shook his head.

"No, the Aurors and Dumbledore are still in the Manor." Draco told him quietly as to not disturb the game. Harry nodded and then his eyes caught the game between the rooms' other two occupants.

"Is that Ron playing chess with Tom?" Harry asked incredulously. Draco chuckled.

"Yes, that would be him."

"Who would've thought," Harry said with a tired smile. Draco said nothing and let Harry fall back to sleep. In the next moment he heard Ron murmur, "checkmate" and saw the Dark Lord's eyes widen and then saw him smile.

"Well played Mr. Weasely, well played." Tom murmured approvingly. Ron flushed but nodded and grinned at him bit hesitantly.

"Another game Milord?"

"No," Tom laughed, "I've been beat soundly by you twice. My ego couldn't take another game." He stood gracefully and made his way over to where Draco was sitting and dropped into a crouch before him. He studied Harry and then Draco. "How are you feeling?"

"Much better now that Harry is here, but I believe he's more exhausted because he was the one so far away." Harry had been detained coming back due to having to tell his story again and again to the Ministry. The longer he'd stayed, the longer the bond was strained until Harry hadn't been able to stay any longer and hurried back to the Manor. That had been yesterday, today Harry had slept for more hours than he'd been awake and Draco was beginning to worry.

"Do not worry Draco," Tom said as he brushed a hand across Harry's forehead, his fingers lingering on the tell tale lightning bolt scar seared there. "He is stronger than you think, in another day or so, he should be fine."

"How does it feel Milord?" Draco whispered. Tom arched an eyebrow and Draco smirked, "You are free, how does it feel?"

Tom said nothing but then his eyes flashed and he replied equally as quiet, "Liberating."

11th of January – One week later…Hogwarts…

Ron made his way through the halls to his Transfiguration class. Many people had turned to stare after him, whispering and wondering, about his new clothes, and if it was true, true that he'd gone home with Malfoy for the holidays that year. Ron didn't pay them any attention, and he hadn't earlier in the Tower, until his sister cornered him in the Gryffindor common room.

"*Where the hell did you get galleons for these clothes Ron? Just who are you trying to fool?"*

"Ginny just leave me alone, the clothes were a gift."

"A gift from who? Malfoy?" Her voice was sarcastic but when Ron couldn't look her in the eye Ginny paled. *"Malfoy! Ron are you nuts! Is it true then you actually went home with him over Christmas!"*

"Yes, I did, and I had a fucking fantastic time too! What do you want me to say 'Gee Ginny, I spent the entire two weeks bawling my eyes out because the one time I stand up for what I believe is right Mum and Dad leave me here to rot on my own!'" Ginny couldn't even meet his gaze after his tirade.

"Well you can't trust him Ron he's Malfoy!"

"Yes, and that Malfoy *actually treated me with better respect then I have ever received from anyone of my flesh and blood!"* Ron had left before he'd said anything else.

Shaking his thoughts away, Ron stepped into the classroom only to find that his regular seat in the class had been filled by someone else and as he looked around many of the Gryffindors glared at him openly. He clenched his jaw tightly as he watched Hermione turn in her seat and give him a smug smile. He could only imagine just *who* had started the rumors. He wondered how she knew, but then again since Harry had not been speaking to Dumbledore, the elder wizard had been relying a lot on Hermione, especially since Ron wasn't helping him either.

He was hurt that his House would betray him so, but even as the hurt turned to anger, he suddenly wondered; is this how Harry felt every time they turned their backs on him? Ron remembered numerous occasions when he'd been suspicious and had turned his back on his friend just because of heresy. It humbled him now, and put many things into perspective. He was learning that the minds of these people were fickle, and he used to be one of them. Ron said nothing but sat in one of the seats that was completely and utterly in 'Slytherin territory' for the rest of the class.

The silence was deafening and he hid his smile behind as he rummaged through his bag for his quills and parchment. He was surprised when he felt a warm hand on the middle of his back and a fleeting one on his thigh as Blaise moved from behind him, taking the seat to his left, and Neville took the seat closest to the exit. They flanked him on either side and stared coolly at the Gryffindor party who was sneering.

"Why are you doing this?" Ron murmured to Neville as the class began, Professor McGonagall eyed him a few times but said nothing.

"We protect our own." Blaise murmured his hand still rubbing soothing circles on Ron's back. Ron looked at him and then wrote on the parchment in front of him.

I am not one of you.

Blaise smiled and wrote back,

You will be.

25th of January – Two weeks later…

Lucius leaned against the doorframe as he watched Harry Potter through half lidded eyes. The young man had his hands stuffed into his tailored black slacks and his shoulders were stiff underneath the emerald green cashmere sweater he wore. His expression was brooding as he stared into the flames in the fireplace. Lucius wondered what he was thinking about.

"Do you think I will be able to do this?" Harry's voice had deepened some, but the hesitation was still apparent. Lucius pushed off the doorframe and walked slowly toward Harry.

"Do what exactly?" Lucius asked. Harry turned to stare at him and Lucius was surprised to find him wearing a nice pair of wire-rimmed glasses. His surprise must've shown in some way because Harry gave him a fleeting smile.

"I wear contacts more often now, but I had a really bad headache. Do you think I will be able to go through with Dumbledore's plan?" Lucius frowned as he thought about what Ron and Harry had relayed from the old coot's mouth.

Dumbledore was planning to have Harry testify against all the Death Eaters arrested in the raid that had ended in the 'death' of Voldemort. It would be a very lengthy process and he would be away from Draco for a few weeks at least.

He was sure that the bond would be able to hold up against the strain, however that wasn't what had Lucius apprehensive about the whole thing. Many of those Death Eaters had thought Harry was allying with them. What would happen if they saw him testifying against them on the stand? They may destroy already made plans that Harry and Lord Riddle had previously discussed.

"I am not sure," Lucius, said slowly, "It is a precarious position the man had put you in. I am sure you and Draco are strong enough to sustain yourselves through the process, however, I am not sure about those that you will be testifying against."

"I am not sure either." Harry turned and sighed as he stared into the flames again. "I wonder if

there is a way that I can completely withdraw myself from the proceedings? Dumbledore was pretty adamant that I am there, but I am sure that I can work around it somehow. And that is only one of my problems."

"What are the others?"

"For one, how am I going to stop Dumbledore from having access to my accounts after I graduate? My parents made him the custodian of all the accounts I own, save the Black accounts that Sirius willed to me. I don't know enough about the system in place to do anything about it. Second, Ron is getting a lot of backlash for standing by me. His family is too much under Dumbledore's influence to help him and I believe it is going to get a lot worse for him. What is the worse that they can do if he still decides to stand by me?"

"The worst is disownment." Lucius said, "but I doubt they would take it that far."

"Why not?"

"Disownment is almost worse than being a Squib or a Muggle-born. The wizard or witch's family name is completely taken away. They have no standing, no money, and nothing attached to them. The only way to be reinstated into society is to become a part of another Wizarding family and take on their name. Many times family characteristics such as, stronger magick, eye color, or hair color, will be absorbed by the disowned wizard or witch when he or she becomes part of the family." Lucius frowned and then said quietly, "I doubt it is something that they would do."

"I don't know; I am sure their loyalty to Dumbledore will make them do many things that they wouldn't do normally." Harry said softly. "At any rate, I hope they don't take it that far."

"Well, it is of no matter now. The most important thing for you to do right now is to let me help you with your galleons. That is something that is very easy to do if you know the right people." Harry watched the man smirk and he chuckled to himself.

"Well, if it will be that much of an enjoyment for you to intimidate wizards, witches, and goblins, then be my guest."

"Tomorrow morning?" Lucius inquired and Harry nodded.

"Tomorrow morning," He said and then stepped out of the room. Lucius watched him go and then glanced into the shadows. "Did you hear?" There was a low chuckle and then Tom stepped out of the shadows.

"I did, it brings up causes for concern. But I think we can come up with something to get him out from underneath Dumbledore's thumb."

"What about your meeting with the Prime Minister, would he be able to go to that?"

"It does fall on the same day so yes, I believe that will be good enough, at least for the first few days or so. Remember we are having a series of meetings with Minister Fudge as well. If he can be persuaded, which he can, then he can write a note to Dumbledore requesting Harry's presence. Dumbledore still doesn't have a sure footing with the Ministry so he'd look at this as his chance." Tom said. "It is enough. Help him with his finances. I know that he's already started redecorating the Black House, I am sure that's where he will set up his residence. However, he may choose to build on his family plot as well."

"For right now, just renovating the house will be enough. The next undertaking can be rebuilding at his family's plot." Lucius said agreeing with Tom. "I am sure his finances can be out of Dumbledore's reach by tomorrow evening. Now what about Mr. Weasely's predicament?"

"The lad is an excellent strategist, if a bit weak in spirit. However he is showing much improvement in every way by standing up with Harry. If it come to disownment, he will be taken care of." Tom's eyes softened as he looked into the flames. "I hope it doesn't come to that."

"Yes, I hope it doesn't either." Lucius said. "That is a fate worse than death."

Ron watched the note from his parent's burn, his mind whirling. He never thought it would get this bad. He swallowed around the lump in his throat and went back to doing his homework. No one was in the Common Room, everyone had left it as soon as he had entered. Seamus had moved out of their dorm room, so he had the place to himself, but it had been so lonely, and now here nothing had changed.

They were closing rank, he was now an outcast in his own House. The thought terrified him. He didn't know what to do anymore, he only knew that he had made the right choice. Was it so wrong to make the right choice for yourself? Were you always just supposed to give in to the popular choice? He didn't think so, not anymore. He sighed heavily, his loneliness eating at him.

He wished the Sorting Hat had just put him in Slytherin.

"The House has closed rank against him. He'll cave eventually, Ron hates it when he's ignored for too long." Hermione said knowingly as she reported to Dumbledore. The Weasely's were sitting around in Dumbledore's office. Molly nodded at Hermione's assessment but Arthur looked ill.

"Is there something the matter Arthur?" Dumbledore asked. Arthur swallowed but he nodded.

"This isn't right, Ron is just sticking by Harry, there should be nothing wrong with that."

"Harry Potter is a loose cannon Arthur!" Molly snapped at him, "He is unpredictable, there is no telling what he is up to. I don't want Ron consorting with him anymore, especially now that the boy was placed in the horrible House!" Hermione nodded.

"I agree with Molly, Harry is too unpredictable, the only way to get him to reason with us is to take away those things that he cares most about. His friendship with Ron is very important to him. Without Ron by his side, he'll break I know it. There is nothing more important to him right now." Hermione said, she turned to Dumbledore, "What do you want to do next?"

"He will stand before those Death eaters for one as they go to Azkaban, then we must start the celebrations and mold him into a politician. He would be brilliant as Minister of Magick. And if he is in that position then, I can steadily feed him policies and laws that could revolutionize the way the Wizarding World is run here in Britain, and collapse the hold the pure-bloods have on the Ministry." Dumbledore smiled at Hermione. "Get him prepared for his testimony, I don't want his indecisiveness to sway the verdict any way but *my* way."

"Understood Sir." Hermione said before leaving. Dumbledore turned to the Weasely's and then smiled.

"Keep pressuring Ronald, I am sure once he cracks we will have our victory."

Molly smiled and nodded, Arthur said nothing.

The next day…

Harry stared up into the dark green canopy covering their bed. Draco was curled at his side, breathing easy in sleep, but Harry was wide-awake. Today had been a very busy day. He and Lucius had gone to Gringotts that morning, and started dismantling all of the ways Dumbledore was dipping into his accounts and taking money. Some of the transactions Harry was aware of, most were not. The goblins worked with them to ensure that Dumbledore could never touch his galleons again and that all the money that had left his vaults without his knowledge would be refunded with interest.

Then he and Draco had taken a tour around the old Black House and began to itemize the things that would stay, change, or be taken and placed in the Black vaults. Renovations had already started, and they would be complete in time for them to move into the house at the end of the year. He'd also taken a trip to his family's house and had a builder already working on the schematics for his and Draco's family Manor.

With that taken care of, Harry and Tom had met to plan their next course of action, a meeting with the Prime Minister Gordon Brown. It was scheduled on the same day as the trials for the arrested Death Eaters, but Tom told him not to worry, his excuses were already being written for not being at the trials. Lucius, Severus, Tom, and himself would go into muggle London to speak with Prime Minister Brown before turning and going into meetings with Minister Fudge in their own world. He would be away from Draco for a while, but not nearly as long as it would've been if he'd had to go to the trials.

Harry stroked Draco's back and the man moved closer in his sleep. Things were going to get worse before they got better, Harry knew that and he knew that Draco knew as well. The Veela had already started making potions with Severus in preparation. If all went according to plan, Dumbledore wouldn't find out that Tom wasn't dead around their Spring break in April or maybe some time before.

Harry hoped that everything went according to plan. If not things were going to get extremely difficult for everyone involved.

15th of February – three weeks later…

Severus felt Dumbledore behind him before he actually saw the man out of the corner of his eye. The Headmaster made himself comfortable sitting in Severus' chair and waited patiently as Severus finished up a sleeping draught. He wondered what the man wanted. Severus had been in a fairly good mood before he showed up.

"Is there something you wanted Albus?" Severus snapped.

"How are you doing my boy?" Dumbledore asked cheerfully. Severus arched an eyebrow at him in disdain before turning back to his potion.

"I was fine until you interrupted me, now, what is it that you are after?" He turned around again and felt some satisfaction as Dumbledore's eyes narrowed at him.

"I want information on how Harry is doing in your House." He said, Severus snorted.

"Why do you want to know?"

"He is still the Savior Severus. I need to know what he's been up to."

"Oh, so you are not concerned about his welfare, merely interested in what he is doing." Severus said in a cool voice. Dumbledore's face revealed nothing, but he could feel the man trying to get past the shields in his mind and he snarled. "You are treading on dangerous grounds Headmaster." Severus narrowed his gaze and with some effort pushed Dumbledore out of his mind. Dumbledore winced and then chuckled.

"You are still the very best Severus my boy…"

"I am not your boy at all Albus." Severus said haughtily. "Now, Harry is fine. He is excelling in his studies, for once, and hasn't been into any mischief. I assume you've received the missive from Minister Fudge detailing that he will not be present for your little coo in the courtroom?" Dumbledore nodded and Severus knew that he was unhappy about that. "Good, if you hadn't I was supposed to contact you."

"Have you heard that I am no long custodian of Harry's vaults?" Dumbledore asked. Severus blinked slowly and then arched a brow.

"Really? And what pray tell happened to make you lose control of that?"

"Apparently Harry and Lucius Malfoy went through and filed the paperwork legally emancipating Harry to have full control over all his account ahead of schedule. Why was he with Lucius Malfoy?"

"You'd have to ask him." Severus chuckled quietly to himself at the vexed expression on Dumbledore's face.

"He will not speak to me." Dumbledore said in low tones. Severus shrugged,

"Then you will never know." Severus said, quietly finishing his potion. "Was that all Albus?"

"For now." The older wizard murmured as he walked out of the potions laboratory. Severus narrowed his gaze at the man's back and then frowned as he stared back into the cauldron.

He'd have to tell Lucius about this conversation. He had a funny feeling they may not have as much time as they had planned.

22nd of February – one week later…

Draco leaned against the wall, holding his breath, just waiting for the right moment to appear. He knew that there was trouble from the raised voices. One of them was distinctly Hermione Granger's and the others were boys. He had no idea what was going on, but he knew intuitively that he didn't want to have any part in it.

Draco eased around the corner silently to take a look at who he would be dealing with. When he saw who was there he nearly cursed; it was Granger, Finnegan, and Thomas all against one Ron Weasely. This was not going to end pleasantly.

"So Ron, what is Harry up to?" Hermione asked. Ron just glared at her and shook his head.

"If Harry hasn't told you himself then you don't need to know." He snapped back, "Now will you please leave me alone?"

"No, traitor, the lady asked you a question and you should answer." Seamus said lowly. Ron stared at him and then shook his head.

"I have no reason to answer you. The information she wants is not information that is mine to give. If you want to know what Harry is up to, like I said before, I ask him. Now let me pass."

"You haven't answered one of my questions Ron." Hermione sniffed and he glared at her coolly.

"That's because I don't *want* to answer you." He snapped. "Besides you are not asking the right questions."

"Well, then how about this one? Is it true that your parents are talking of disowning you if you keep associating yourself with Potter?" Dean asked laughing. Ron's face paled but he smiled bitterly.

"Yes, that is true. Thank you Hermione for that by the way." Hermione's face flushed, "Oh don't be embarrassed by it now, after all you thought nothing of it reporting what the Headmaster said to them before." He looked at them and then shook his head. "And if you want to tell my parents something then tell them I am not going to stop being Harry's best friend."

"Regardless that you'll be no better than dirt in the process?" Hermione asked appalled.

"Yeah, regardless of that." Ron said and then shoved his way past them.

Draco stood there until the three left, his eyes cool and calculating. Weasely's parents were thinking of disowning him over his friendship with Harry? "Headmaster, you have gone *too* far this time, much too far." Draco murmured as he melted into the shadows and made his way to the Dungeons.

1st of March – One week later…

Tom stared down at the letter he'd received. He read it once, and then read it again, and then again. Finally after trusting that what was really written there was actually there, he snapped his fingers summoning a house elf and said quietly.

"Set up my muggle chess set, and two glasses of wine. I am having a visitor." Once the elf had gone, Tom turned back towards the setting sun and stared unseeing into his gardens.

He wondered what Ronald Weasely had to ask him.

"Checkmate," Riddle's voice was deep and smooth as he said it and Ron stared blankly at the board before rolling his eyes at his mistake.

"Bloody hell," he muttered, "I haven't made such a mistake in years." Riddle said nothing but merely nodded and then watched him with those disturbingly crimson eyes.

"What has you troubled so much that you would voluntarily come to my Manor to play a game of chess?" Riddle asked quietly. "You are still uncomfortable around me, Mr. Weasely. I can see

it in your eyes. And yet, you wrote that you would come to ask me something and you came, and we have played our game, so now I would ask you; what is it that you had to ask me?

"My parents are going to disown me." Ron blurted it out. He saw a black eyebrow arch and Riddle's hand hesitated as he brought his wineglass to his lips.

"And how could you know this?"

"They've been writing me for the better part of two months or so. They have threatened to do it, and since last week, after my confrontation with Granger, they have cut off all contact with me." Ron gritted his teeth. "I know they will do it in public, probably by a Howler in the middle of the Great Hall, most likely during the morning with the owls deliver mail. It would be the most ultimate humiliation and I'm sure Granger would have told them it would make the most impression on me."

"I hadn't realized that your parents would go so far to make a point." Riddle said almost gently. Ron looked at him and gave him a small laugh.

"I am not doing what they want, and I refuse to listen. The Headmaster has far more sway than one of their children. I am not leaving Harry's side like they thought I would. This…this is the only way they can get their point across. I just…I don't know what to do. I won't be able to stay in school after the disownment and…"

"I will pay your school fees, until your graduation which I am sure, they will try to get reimbursed. And if I know Dumbledore, which I do, he will reimburse them." Riddle said. "Lucius and I had discussed this, that this might happen. I will tell him to try and plan. I would offer you my name, but…"

"You must remain in hiding a bit longer. I know that, I wasn't here to ask for your money or your name, I just…I just needed someone to play chess with, and talk to about this. It's been…hard in the Tower lately, and I…" Ron trailed off. He looked up at the Dark Lord and for once was not so unsettled by his penetrating gaze. They sat there for a few minutes without speaking and then Riddle stood and approached him, holding out his hand. Ron took it and gasped as that hand brushed across his mouth.

"You have been lonely." Riddle murmured and Ron nodded, "As have I." Ron gasped again as knowing hands kneaded his sides. That crimson gaze watched him intently.

"I am not the one you want." Ron said quietly. He'd seen the way Riddle had watching Lucius Malfoy and he knew that Riddle wanted Lucius, but would never say.

"No, you aren't." Riddle agreed, "however, I am not the one you desire either. Or should I say the *pair* you desire?" Ron felt his face flush. His friendship with Blaise and Neville had grown, and yet there were times when one or the other or both of them would look at him and he *wonder*…

"No you aren't." Ron whispered, "but I…you…" It had always been a fact that wizards were drawn to powerful magick in a person, regardless if they were man or woman. He had wondered if he'd ever experience that pull, and he knew now how devastating it could be. Especially when he was angry and hurt by his parents, cast aside by his friends, and was just so damn *alone.*

"If you don't want to I understand. It wasn't something I had planned, but the opportunity presented itself quite nicely. It is not something a Gryffindor would do." Riddle said. Ron smiled and for the first time ran a hesitant hand along the side of Riddle's body.

"Ever the Slytherin," Ron said with a smirk, "but you are wrong."

"Am I?" Riddle asked.

"Yes, I doubt I am any more Gryffindor then you are now." Riddle said nothing but he did take Ron's hand and lead him out of the room.

And Ron followed him.

When Ron felt a hand caressing his bare back in a soothing manner. He shifted slightly, pressing closer to the warm body he was draped over. Lips brushed against his forehead and then he spoke, "I have to go." He realized he didn't want to. He wanted to stay right where he was.

"I know; I can't believe you snuck out of Hogwarts. How…very cunning of you." That deep voice was rife with dry amusement. Ron smiled and pushed himself up, to look at Rid- Tom, in the face. The man gazed him with a gentleness Ron wouldn't have believed if he had not experienced it himself. "Will you be alright?"

"I will, will you?" Ron asked. Tom laughed, pulling him back down and kissing him breathless.

"I am the Dark Lord, loneliness is no match for the things that I have done in the past. And if insanity couldn't stop me, this won't either. I ask after you because I have a great deal of affection for you. You are a brilliant strategist and you sell yourself cheaply to your peers. After the announcement of your disownment they will shun you publicly. Be strong Ron, don't let them cut you down. And Luc and I will find a way to make it all right in the end, I give you my word."

"I will." Ron's voice was thick with emotion. He kissed his lover once more before hurriedly dressing and vanishing out into the coming dawn.

Tom laid back in his bed, his eyes glowing eerily with a fury he hadn't felt in almost a year. Ron was going to be eaten alive by those in that damn house. They would find away to get him out of there and to solve the problem of his imminent disownment.

They would find a way and then Tom would exact a fitting revenge for him. Because as of now, until they amicably parted, Ron was his lover, and *no one* would mess with him and not be

cowering at the end of Tom's wand.

No one.

R/R! Hope you liked it.

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 10

Disclaimer: I own nothing.

Author's Note: Beta-read version! Enjoy!

Chapter Nine

15th of March – Two weeks later…

His hands were shaking…damn, that was never a good sign. Ron could hear the muted tones of the Great Hall in the back of his mind but he didn't care. He didn't care about anything anymore.

YOU ARE AN INSULT TO THIS FAMILY! AN EMBARRASSMENT, AFTER ALL THE THINGS WE TAUGHT YOU, YOU TURN YOUR BACK ON US! IF THAT IS WHAT YOU WANT YOU WILL GET IT. AS OF THIS MOMENT YOU ARE STRIPPED OF YOUR NAME, WE DISOWN YOU! AND DON'T EVER COME BACK!

His mother's words echoed in his head, and he replayed them over and over. He had known it would happen, he *knew*, he just couldn't have ever expected that it would hurt this bad. And then Dumbledore had had to make it worse and tell him that he'd reimbursed his family for all his school expenses over the last seven years, and now Ron himself had to pay all that money back to Hogwarts. How fucked up was that? Ron wanted to rage against the injustice of it all, but he had no one now, and he was nothing.

A disowned wizard; who had no name and no family standing now, and who couldn't be anything without a name. His chest hurt, his eyes burned, and he clutched his head, his fingers still shaking from the abruptness of it all, the shock, and piercing shriek of his mother's voice through the Howler she sent to humiliate him in front of the entirety of Hogwarts at breakfast.

Ron heard soft footsteps approaching his hiding place and He froze. He watched the shadows along the crack at the bottom of the door. One shadow became two, and then the door was gently

opened. He turned his head away and he felt two strong hands curl around his face and gently turn his head. He didn't have to look, but he would never treat the only few friends he had like that.

Sad chocolate brown eyes gazed back at him as Blaise, gently caressed his face. "Come with us Ron," Blaise said softly. "We would never hurt you." Ron stared at him and then looked slightly to Blaise's right and saw Neville crouching there.

"Can you take me to someone?" Ron whispered, his voice was hoarse with emotion but he didn't care.

"Who?" Neville asked quietly.

"Take me to Tom." Ron asked as he closed his eyes, "just take me to Tom."

Harry was still seeing red. Draco sat on the couch as he prowled around his Prefect room and watched him with a steady gaze. "How could they do that to him? They fucking humiliated him!" Harry roared. Draco said nothing and Harry was thankful for it. Thankful merely for Draco's presence in his life, in his mind, and as a steady foundation when he was clearly about to go insane with rage.

"I know that Harry, however we *did* discuss that this may happen." Draco reminded him.

"I know, I know, but I didn't think…"

"Wrong, you didn't *want* to think that they would do this to him. But they have, and now he has to live with it and so do you. Where are Blaise and Neville?" Draco said in a cool tone.

"I don't know, I think they went to find him. They should've been back by now." Harry frowned as he turned back to Draco. Draco tapped his quill feather to his lips, as he thought and then hurriedly wrote something down on the parchment in his lap. "What are you doing?"

"I am writing to my father, perhaps he will be able to assist us. I'm sure he and Lord Riddle have already discussed a scenario like this happening." Harry snorted.

"Are they always this thorough?" He asked sarcastically. Draco arched an eyebrow and then smirked as he tied the parchment to his owl and then opened the window and watched him fly away.

"Yes, Harry, we are Slytherin, it's in our very nature to plan for the worst and then also plan away to even the odds when it finally does come to pass."

"I can help Ron, I know it." Harry said.

"Yes, and I am sure that Father and Lord Riddle have already taken that into consideration." Draco leaned against Harry and slowly ran his hand in a circular pattern at Harry's lower back. "I mean Ron is going to need a new family name after all."

"Yeah, it would be weird if he had my last name but –" Harry cut himself off and then he grinned. "I can give him the Black name." Draco blinked.

"Can you?"

"We'll have to ask Lucius and Tom, but I think it's possible. When is the next time we are going to meet face to face?"

"You will see them for the meeting with the muggle Prime Minister, and then on our spring hols."

"Good. That will give me time to think about it some more." Harry said, "I am sure there is some legal…whatever to be done." Draco smiled at his terminology and then nodded.

"Yes, there is but you need to rest. You won't be any good to any of us, working yourself into a snit like this." Draco told him calmly. Harry rolled his eyes but nodded; Draco was right.

"I wonder where they are." Harry mused and Draco sighed in exasperation.

"We can ask Blaise and Neville later, right now, to bed with you."

Tom laid a hand on Ron's head and slowly corded his fingers through the fiery locks. His hand was shaking, and he noticed that everything in the room was vibrating as well. He took another deep breath and then let his piercing gaze fall on the two boys who brought Ron to him.

He saw a flash of jealousy in Blaise's face before it was contained and he eyed Neville's down cast look. He smirked to himself and then eased Ron's head onto the bed murmuring in his ear. Ron shifted slightly in his exhausted slumber, but he did not wake.

"Come, we must talk." Tom murmured and led them both to his office. Once the door was closed he sat down behind his desk and immediately began writing a missive to Gringott's Bank. "You have nothing to worry about," He said as he hastily wrote.

"What is there to worry about?" Blaise's voice was stiff and wary. Tom looked up and gave him an enigmatic smile.

"Ron's yearns for the two of you like I yearn for Lucius. Our relationship is fairly new, barely a few weeks old, borne out of necessity and perhaps loneliness." Neville gasped in surprise at his candidness and Blaise nodded his head, knowing that Tom had given him an apology and his trust in one statement.

"Does he really want us both?" Neville asked hopefully, "We've discussed it but…"

"He does Mr. Longbottom," Tom said, "Now that that is cleared up, please make sure that he is well cared for at Hogwarts." His eyes flashed, "He may desire you both but for right now he will keep it secret and will not tell you, probably until he get back into a higher standing than his current circumstances. Until the time when you feel that he is ready he will be my lover, and I would hope you would extend us both the courtesy of not mentioning this to anyone save those you trust."

"We will not betray your trust, and I understand that his standing is important to him." Neville said quietly, "He is your lover until we both feel, and he does as well, that he's ready." Neville had eased close to Blaise's still form and the taller boy wrapped an arm around him.

"He is yours…for now." Blaise said his eyes narrowing, "And I will not betray the trust you bestowed upon me, nor will Neville. Your secret is safe."

"Thank you. As Ron and I discussed before, I will pay his fees for school. I would hope that you both and Harry and Draco have taken pains to get his things from his dorm room?"

"Yes, that was taken care of right after breakfast. All his things have been moved into the Slytherin dorms." Neville said and Tom nodded. He looked at the two young men and then he looked towards the fireplace.

"Excellent, now, I am sure both of you have to find your way back to Hogwarts. Don't worry about Ron, he is safe here, and he will be back at Hogwarts…soon."

Neville moved to argue, but Blaise shook his head and ushered him out of the office. Tom waited until he felt his Manor's wards realign before going back to his quarters.

"My own sister spit in my face." Ron's voice was soft, devoid of any emotion and Tom stayed silent as he stripped to his skin, eased into the bed behind Ron, and wrapped an arm around him. "She told me that I was no better than dirt and I should be ashamed of siding with Harry rather than my own family."

Tom still said nothing.

"And then Dumbledore stood up and in front of everyone, *everyone*, and told me that because I am legally an adult by wizarding society, that he had issued a refund to my parents that covered all of my school expenses over seven years as well as the *disappointment* they've had to face from their *former son.* I have four days to pay Headmaster Dumbledore."

"The Headmaster will get his blood money." Tom said quietly. "Enough, Ron, just rest. It will all turn around in the end."

"How?"

"Because I am the Dark Lord, and I will make it happen."

March 22nd – One week later…

Harry watched the London streets pass by as he stared out of their limousine. The meeting with the Prime Minister had gone well. He'd been fairly surprised at the existence of an entirely different world parallel to his own, but after getting over his shock and being unnerved by Tom's piercing gaze, he became all business, but fear still radiated off of him like a beacon.

He was a smart man to fear them.

Harry turned back to Lucius and Tom. "So do you think it will work?"

"I am sure of it." Lucius said with smug satisfaction. "The Prime Minister doesn't want any riots on his hands and that is what would happen and still could happen if we, as a society, are found out. Muggles do not take kindly to differences among them and it would be that much worse if they find that we have spells and potions that could kill someone in an instant."

"Lucius is right, we have accomplished what we set out to do, now we need to sway more voters in the Ministry to back us. It is only a matter of time before it will all flow smoothly, and time is on our side considering our life spans are indeed longer than that of a muggle man or woman." Tom looked at Harry, "Are you having second thoughts?"

"No, not at all. I do believe that there needs to be some rigor from both sides like how to contain our worlds and keep them separate as possible. I never thought it would be hard to sway the Muggle Prime Minister, however it will be hard sway our own people."

"Yes, well, that will come in time. All in due time." Tom murmured. Harry nodded and then turned to Lucius who was watching them both carefully.

"Lucius, can I give Ron the Black family name?" Harry asked. Lucius' eyes widened slightly and then he looked back at him in thought.

"Well you *are* heir to the Black fortune, but it would have to be someone directly from the Black bloodline to at least donate the blood needed to complete the process." Lucius blinked and then narrowed his eyes. "Narcissa is the only living direct descendant of the Black family. She will have to be the one to donate the blood."

"Will she?" Harry asked a bit doubtfully. Lucius sneered.

"If she knows what's good for her, then yes, she will."

30th of March – A week later…

Narcissa was not happy.

No, she was bloody furious!

How dare she have to use her own blood to help some bumbling idiot become part of *her* family? "How the devil did he go and get himself disowned anyway? He's a bloody bumbling idiot to let it happen!" She snapped harshly. Lucius' eyes fairly glowed with repressed rage and Narcissa reveled in giving him no choice but to bend to her endless sea of opposition.

"He was protecting his friend."

"This friend better be worth it!" She snapped back.

"Its Harry Potter you insignificant woman!" Lucius snapped back. Narcissa pursed her lips and took a deep shuddering breath. Damn, she couldn't say anything against that. Harry Potter was a strong ally; it wouldn't do her any favors to get on his bad side. After all, the bloody boy was heir to the Black fortune as well.

"Well I still don't want to do it. He was a *Weasely*." Narcissa sniffed. Lucius looked at her incredulously then rolled his eyes.

"Fine, if you want to be this stubborn then have it your way." Lucius said quite calmly. Narcissa let herself preen in her victory until she watched as Lord Riddle entered the room. His wand was pointed right at her and the look in his eye was anything but calm.

"Lady Malfoy," he practically purred and Narcissa shivered not from the cold, but from fear. It wasn't good to cross the Dark Lord, wasn't good at all.

"M-My L-Lord Riddle." She said curtseying. "Can I be of service to you?"

"Yes, I dare say you can – by shutting your worthless trap and doing as your husband bids." Narcissa narrowed her eyes and then stood her ground.

"I will not. Lucius ignores me in favor of that worthless Potions Master and then just expects me to roll over like a dog when he sees fit to want something from me! I'm not going to stand for it."

"Well now, after all this time of 'rolling over like a dog', as you put it, you finally grow a back bone at the wrong moment. This won't do at all." Lord Riddle said calmly, and advanced on her swiftly. Narcissa stumbled and fell, ungracefully, into the chair behind her. Lord Riddle hovered over her, his eyes piercing her.

"That *bumbling idiot* as you called him happens to be my lover, and if I said that I would help

him in any way possible, then I will. So that happens to mean that you need to keep that foul-mouthed tongue inside your mouth before I rip it out and feed it to you with my bare hands. Now what say you? Will you give me what I want or will I have to take it from you?" He was practically snarling by the end of it.

Narcissa said nothing but lifted her pale wrist in offering.

"I thought so." Lord Riddle sneered. "If I hear a whisper of my personal business outside of this house, you'd better hope to the gods that I am no where near you. Do I make myself clear?" Narcissa nodded. He smirked at her and then just like that was on his way out the door.

Lucius approached her calmly, steadying her shaking hand, as he murmured a cutting spell to her wrist and held a small cup to catch the required amount of blood. He said nothing to her, and Narcissa was glad.

She didn't think she'd manage to say anything without stuttering if he had.

Ron stared at his destroyed homework for a moment before hastily gathering it up and throwing it away. The snickers behind him grew but he ignored them, like he had been doing for nearly three weeks. He smiled faintly to himself. They were bloody idiots if they didn't think he'd caught onto their game and had made a habit of duplicating his work.

It seemed that the entire school, save the Slytherin House, was after him. The professors seemed to pity him, but that was all right, he really didn't care what they thought anymore. The term was almost over and after a secret re-Sorting he was now a member of the Slytherin House. Harry and Draco had helped him to catch up on the work he'd missed for those two days that he was at Tom's Manor. Blaise and Neville had become his constant companions, much to his dismay. He was uncomfortable around them now that he didn't have anything to offer them.

Perhaps when he found a family to become part of, perhaps then they could…Ron shook his head and hunched his shoulders as he made his way down to the Dungeons. It didn't do him any good to long for something that was so far out of his reach. Then again, he thought of Tom and smiled, he didn't think being the lover of the Dark Lord had been on his top ten list of attainable things to do either.

"Oh bugger it all then," Ron muttered to himself as he entered the common room and made his way straight back to his dorm room. The whole situation was making his head hurt. Although the look on Dumbledore's face when he handed him the sack full of galleons to repay for his schooling was priceless. He and Tom had had a good laugh at the man's expense later on that week. Ron entered his room and shut the door behind him and had it re-warded before he sensed that he wasn't alone. Turning swiftly with his wand out, he blinked and then a weary smile appeared as Tom emerged from the shadows of his four-poster bed.

"Good Afternoon Ron," He murmured and kissed him softly on the lips. Ron murmured

something like a greeting before slowly relaxing into Tom's arms. He was just short enough to bury his face into Tom's shoulder and it had become his favorite place to be in the past few weeks. "How was your day?"

"A trial, everyone is out to get me." He muttered darkly. Tom chuckled and let his hands wander along Ron's lanky body. "How was your day?"

"Quite amusing actually, but productive. Now don't frown at me, I don't have to tell you everything. It happens to be a surprise actually. So come along." He took Ron's books and placed them on his desk and then opened the door and looked out before reaching for Ron to take him wherever they were going.

"How did you get in here anyway?" Ron asked. Tom chuckled and led him towards Snape's private quarters. When the portrait was opened immediately he knew that they'd been waiting for them. Blaise and Neville were curled up together on Snape's couch, while Harry was pacing in front of the fireplace, and Draco was watching him with a delicately raised eyebrow. Ron snickered; he clearly thought his husband had gone off the deep end. The Elder Malfoy was conversing quietly with Snape, a small bowl in his hand.

Harry's head snapped up as soon as he entered the room and the grin on his face was a welcome sight. "Hey mate, finished wearing a hole into Snape's rug?" Harry laughed with him and then beckoned him closer.

"I'm sorry it's taken so long to give you this well deserved present from me." Harry said seriously, "I would hope that you would be happy with the name that I can give you." Ron blinked, and then stared at him, shook his head, and then stared again.

"What are you going on about?"

"I want to give you a family name that I seem to have no use for, one given to me by my Godfather." Harry said hesitantly. "I'm sure he would have wanted you to have it."

"You want to give me the Black family name?" Ron asked as if his hearing wasn't quite that good. Harry nodded and smiled turning slightly to face Lucius. Ron followed his gaze and the Lord Malfoy gave him a nod.

"Narcissa is the last living descendant of the Black House. She has given her blood as a donation to the ceremony that has to be performed. Harry himself can perform it since he is the heir to the Black fortune courtesy of his Godfather. We've already straightened out the family accounts, Harry will get a small portion since he is, or was, the heir until this was decided, and the rest is yours. Lord Riddle and I can assist you in how to manage your vast estates."

"Harry, you didn't have to…"

"I know, but I wanted to. If you hadn't stood up for me none this wouldn have happened." Ron

scowled.

"Stop being such a dunderhead Harry, you will always be my best friend, of course I'd stand up for you. You are proving that you'd do the same for me, by doing this." Ron grinned, "I'd be honored to take the name." Lucius gave Harry the bowl and Harry accepted it before turning back to Ron.

"I've read that the process came be a bit painful, after all you will taking on some of the characteristics of the family. It's quite brief though, just answer the questions: Do you come here with a sound mind, good judgment, and the will to become a member of this House? Do you swear to uphold the family name, by creating an heir to take your place once death embraces, by spilling your blood in an effort to keep hold of it, and by learning the history and the magick that this name has to offer? Answer with one word: yes or no?"

"Yes," Ron said steadily. Harry smiled, and Ron watched as his eyes began to glow, and his magick began to pulse through the room.

"You chose wisely." Harry murmured as he held up the bowl. He dipped his forefinger into it and then ran the same finger down each side of Ron's face. Ron gasped as he felt the heat of the blood; it felt like it was scalding his skin. "Take on the features of our House that closely resemble yourself." Harry murmured, and then he traced Ron's lips with the blood before offering him the cup. "Drink well, and let your body absorb the magick essence in our blood as you become one with our House. Welcome to the Illustrious House of Black."

Ron tipped the cup and drank; he grimaced at the metallic taste and licked his lips afterwards. He still watched Harry as his friend watched him, until his vision blurred and he gasped in discomfort. "It's so hot…burns." He dimly realized he'd fallen to his knees as he rode out the ancient rite of passage into a different House. He wondered at the pain, how come it hurt so much?

"Don't fight it," Harry murmured in his ear, "Ride it out." Ron nodded and when the pain became unbearable he let himself fall into oblivion.

Harry bit his nail as he stared at Ron's still figure. Was it just his imagination or had Ron's skin paled some? Some of the other changes weren't as startling but still it cut him deeply to see his friend take on the changes and features of a completely different family. Ron's freckles had lightened until they were practically non-existent. His fiery red hair and darkened and deepened to a rich dark auburn that bordered on the color of blood.

His magickal signature had also changed. Ron's magick use to be very light, Harry guessed the most apt description was pure. Now he could feel the undercurrents of power that was much darker than what he was use to feeling from his friend. Draco had explained to him that the magick that had always run in the Weasely family was more of the so-called 'Light' magick. Houses that had dabbled in the darker arts had darker auras and the House of Black had always

been on par with the Malfoy House when it came to their obsession for darker talents.

He felt Tom appear next to him and he watched him walk over to Ron's side and run his hand through the darkened red locks. He couldn't say that he'd been at all surprised when Blaise told him that Ron was Tom's lover. Harry couldn't fault him for it at all. He'd known Ron had been lonely, he'd just been too busy to do anything about it, but it seemed the relationship was working. He hoped the best for both of them, but he had a feeling that they wouldn't be together for much longer.

If the looks that Blaise and Neville kept throwing Ron were anything to go by.

"I'm glad it took to him so well." Tom murmured and then he smiled with affection down at the younger man, "He is quite strong."

"Yes, he is. He's a stubborn guy, it's what makes him such a good friend." Harry said with a smile. "I take it you are happy with him"

"Happier," Tom said softly, "I doubt I could ask for anything more than that."

"Are you so sure that Lucius would turn you away? After all you are his Lord." Harry said softly. Tom stiffened and then looked toward Harry and then he laughed.

"I have taught you too well. It seems that you have figured me out."

"It is not that hard considering your gaze travels to wherever he tends to be. It's what makes you human." Harry said with a shrug, "I am sure I am no better when it come to Draco."

"Believe me you aren't, it is the reason that I started having our meetings without Lucius and Draco, we both are much too distracted." Tom said with dry amusement. Harry laughed a bit and then stopped as Ron shifted and opened his eyes. Harry looked into the deep midnight blue eyes and smiled as he still saw his friend in them.

"How are you feeling?" He asked. Ron grimaced and then whispered hoarsely.

"Like I've been hit by a bunch of curses."

Tom and Harry chuckled; it seemed Ron would be just fine.

4th of April – 5 days later…

Dumbledore thought he was about to die. His anger was nearly consuming him. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. "This has to be a mistake." He said his voice a bit strained. The Aurors with him gulped as they felt the swell of his magick, barely held in check.

"I'm afraid not, Dumbledore. The Dark Lord is still alive. He was quite clever, the body had so many transfigurations and glamours over it, it took us months to find out exactly who was dead instead of him.

The body of Bellatrix Black-Lestrange had been found under the guise of the dead Dark Lord. Dumbledore had never been handed his arse so well. How could the Dark Lord have done this alone? He must've had help, but they'd already sentenced all the Death Eaters they had rounded up, and those idiots weren't talking except to say that there was another Lord working with theirs and he was quite the protégé.

Dumbledore muttered to himself, now what did they call him? "Lord Nicodemus," he whispered almost reverently. It was the name of the man working with the Dark Lord. He'd never heard of him, which was unfortunate he would just have to see exactly who he was.

For the time being he had to go deliver this disastrous news to Harry, but perhaps this would give him a bit more sway over the boy now that he was no longer a Gryffindor. He'd become quite miffed that the boy wasn't following his orders as of late. And it seemed that he was become quite good friends with Draco Malfoy.

That just wouldn't do at all.

"Can I be of any more help to you Lord Nicodemus?" The butler murmured. Harry smiled politely and shook his head.

"No thank you," he said and then waited until the man had left and then turned to Tom. "So, I heard from the Headmaster, it seems that you are not dead after all." Harry chuckled and Tom laughed. "Our plan seems to be running smoothly."

"Yes," Tom said, "very smoothly, we will discuss our next steps during your holiday. I assume that you will be at the Manor?" Harry nodded.

"Yes, Draco is quite eager to be out of Hogwarts and we will have more time alone." Harry grimaced slightly, "our bond has been strained these past few weeks. Everything will be set to rights as soon as we leave Hogwarts."

"That is true." Tom agreed, "As soon as you have graduated I think it will be time to reveal myself. Your part in our little coup against Dumbledore will have to be hidden for some time. I hope you understand why."

"Yes, it is better to have two spies than one." Harry said and then his eyes narrowed, "However my marriage to Draco will have to come out at some point."

"It will but not now. Perhaps later in the year, maybe October or November? The bond will have stabilized itself by then and we will be ready." Harry nodded and smiled, his eyes glowing dimly

in the firelight. Tom held up his glass. "To a wonderful partnership."

"And the ultimate demise of Dumbledore and his regime." Harry added and leaned forward as they held a toast to their silently waged war.

R/R! Hope you liked it.

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 11

Disclaimer: I own nothing.

Author's Note: Beta read chapter

Beta: LeeLee

Wording that is ***Bold, Italicized, and Underlined*** are the words of the Sorting Hat.

Chapter Ten

April 7th – Three days later…

He never thought he'd live to see the day when Headmaster Dumbledore was absolutely speechless.

Ron could feel laughter bubbling inside him, but he held it close to his heart and knew his face was a detached mask for the world to see. Murmurs rose up as he walked, for once, confidently down towards the Head Table. He knew that he was immaculate: his new robes were custom tailored to his slimmer form, the Slytherin emblem was worn proudly on his chest, for he already knew which House he truly belonged to now.

"May I ask who you are sir?" The Headmaster asked. Ron smirked.

"Why, Headmaster, how could you have forgotten me so quickly? It's Ron, sir." Ron spoke quietly but his voice floated across the hall nonetheless. He watched McGonagall's mouth drop open and watched her speak furiously to a highly amused Severus Snape next to her. Out of no where the Sorting Hat appeared and he took it up, turned, and faced the entirety of the Hogwarts students as he placed it casually on his head.

Well hello again, it's good to see you so comfortable in your new skin. The Sorting Hat laughed.

Sort me, and let us be done with this. Ron told him and he gave a small smile to Harry, Blaise, Neville, and Draco as they watched him from the Slytherin table below.

Very well…. " Ronald Black…Slytherin!"

The school gasped, Dumbledore's jaw clenched, and Harry and the others applauded as he walked towards them to join them for breakfast. It felt good to have taken his dignity back from the likes of his so-called friends and classmates.

Damn good, indeed.

April 18th – Two weeks later…

Draco moaned quietly, his fingers clenched and unclenched around the sheets bunched in hands as Harry slowly and thoroughly shagged him senseless. His hair was hopelessly tangled around his shoulders, both of them slick with sweat from their activities. Harry nipped the back of his neck as he slowly thrust is cock deeper in Draco and Draco spread his legs wider, causing Harry to slide deeper, his pleasure ricocheting through Draco's body as Draco knew his pleasure was running through Harry.

It's been awhile since we've done this. Harry's voice was breathless even in his head and Draco smiled at the thought. Yes, it *had* been awhile since they'd been able to spend any time alone with each other. Between taking their NEWT's, helping Ron, Draco's potion making, and Harry and Lord Riddle's plotting, the two of them hadn't done anything more then kiss in months.

*Yes, but the wait was worth it.*Draco practically purred. Harry chuckled out loud and shifted inside him. Draco's eyes widened and then rolled in his head as Harry steadily hit his prostate. "Merlin, this feels wonderful."

"Yeah," Harry groaned and began to speed up his thrusts. Draco trembled and gasped as the pleasure rose higher and higher until finally he reached his climax. Draco felt practically boneless. Harry eased him onto his side and Draco moaned in disappointment as Harry's flaccid cock slipped out of his body. He felt empty without the connection of Harry's body to his, but the bond in his mind more than made up for it. Harry slid a warm damp cloth over Draco's body and then his own, cleansing them both. Draco curled into Harry as soon as he lay down beside him. "It gets better every time." Harry murmured, kissing his brow. Draco hummed in agreement. He caressed the bronze skin underneath his fingertips and just basked in their afterglow, not caring what was in store for them in the morning.

He was very happy right where he was.

Harry listened to Draco's deep breathing, enjoying the sound and also the feeling of bone deep satiation. It had been a long time since they'd had sex; both of them had been much too busy for it. It was good that this break had come up when it had otherwise Harry probably would have flipped Tom and Lucius off and just locked himself and his husband in a room for two days. He glanced at the clock on the nightstand and grimaced, he'd have to get up soon; more planning, more plotting, more, more, more.

He wondered albeit briefly what it would be like to still be working with Dumbledore. The wizard would just steam roll right over any of his opinions and ideas and just do what he wanted to do. Tom made sure that Harry was an integral part of anything that they did. He made sure that all of Harry's questions were answered, all his worries taken care of, but most of all Tom made Harry feel wanted and useful, like what he said and did really mattered.

Harry wouldn't trade that for anything. He was learning so much from just listening to Tom, and even Lucius was helping him with anything else that he felt was relevant for Harry to learn. It was amazing to him how far he'd come from the beginning of the school year to now. And the more time that past, the more he was sure that he'd made the right decision to side with Tom in the first place.

"Stop thinking so hard," Draco muttered, "and go back to sleep." Harry chuckled as he turned and looked into the sleepy silver eyes of his mate. He'd become so important to him. Harry really didn't know where he would be without Draco by his side. Their bond thrummed between them stronger than ever and Harry reached out, caressing Draco's pointed ear. Draco's lips curved into a smile and his eyes softened even more. "You are such a sap Harry." He whispered. Harry smiled and kissed Draco slowly.

"Only for you." Harry whispered.

April 25th –One week later…

Harry looked up and watched Tom come toward him. They had decided to meet at one of the more exclusive restaurants in Diagon Alley. The staff was discreet and they wouldn't go blabbing to the papers about Harry Potter being in such a place. All their clients valued discretion, and they wouldn't stake their reputation on a few galleons reporters would throw at them for such a story.

"Thank you for meeting me on such short notice Harry."

"Not all Tom, what seems to being going on?" Tom grimaced slightly and ordered fire whiskey as his drink of choice. Harry arched a brow; it must be serious for him to be drinking so early in the day.

"It has been brought to my attention that Dumbledore is trying to solidify Kingsley or Weasely

for placement as the next Minister of Magick." Tom's eyes glowed brightly, " and we cannot let that happen."

"How so?" Harry asked. Tom nodded to the waiter who brought his drink and then turned back to Harry.

"Right now with Fudge in office, the Ministry is susceptible to our ideas. If Kingsley or Weasely is in office, Dumbledore will be the one who manipulates them into doing his bidding. He has a lot of sway with both of them."

"I am not so sure." Harry murmured, "There is a rumor going around the school that the Weasely clan is not as united as they would want to appear. Many are saying that Arthur is not pleased at what has happened."

"While that may be true Harry, I don't think that he has the spine to stand against his wife and Dumbledore." Tom said and Harry sighed but nodded.

"I realize that but it is still worth something. I do agree with you on the Minister front though. I am sure that there are still more pure bloods that would be willing to go with the baseline plans we want to implement. I am not so sure on how they will like the fact that we are still keeping the Wizarding world and the muggle world aligned with each other versus just closing the Wizarding world off to the muggle one permanently."

"They will have to accept defeat on that," Tom said. "To make sure that our way is the way that rules we cannot just obliterate the opposition like I was trying to do before. The rigor that will be placed on traveling between worlds will be good enough. Plus, what would happen if there were more children found with Wizarding blood? It could happen and then where would they go? They'd be condemned, just as we were, by society and bigoted family members." Tom stared out the window and finished quietly, "I will not let that happen."

Harry agreed with him. The Wizarding society would just have to get over it. This was going to happen whether they approved whole-heartedly or not. "I agree with you. It's for the best."

"Yes," Tom said and they sat in silence for a moment until Tom spoke again. "Also we have to think about the second part of that law we want passed."

"Oh the one where if any muggle-born wizards choose to live in the muggle world, they turn in their wand?"

"That's the one. How do you think people will react?" Tom asked. Harry frowned as he thought for a moment but then replied confidently.

"There will be opposition to it of course, primarily from the muggle-born wizards themselves. However our points would still remain valid. They only have to turn over their wands if they choose to go back into the muggle society for the rest of their lives. If they sign the appropriate

paperwork documenting their intent to return to the Wizarding world after certain times, then they'd still be treated as any other wizard or witch. I am sure some people will agree that the rigor needs to be in place to make sure that there aren't any incidences beyond our own borders.

"We can even use me as an example. There were many times I was reckless with the use of my magick while at my aunt and uncle's home. Then again, sometimes it was called for, but I don't even want to think about all the things the Ministry would have had to do if my house wasn't warded like it was and they got to me first."

"That is a good point. I will tell Lucius to add it to the list." Tom murmured. Harry nodded and then smiled at him.

"How are you and Ron doing?" Tom blinked at him and then a slow smile edged across his face.

"We are well, why do you ask?"

"Just asking, we discuss business but rarely if ever do we discuss anything as random as our relationships. I had hoped that we are somewhat friends now." Harry said hesitantly. It had been something he'd been thinking about for a while now. For all the times that they'd met together, Harry could count on one hand the number of times anything personal had come up.

"Are we friends Harry?" Tom asked quietly. Harry blinked and then grinned sheepishly.

"I would like to think so. Our lives are pretty much entwined. It would be quite tense if we weren't. Besides, you've helped me a lot this past year. You've been almost like a –a father to me. I don't know how to thank you for that." Tom's crimson gaze was intense, but Harry stared him in the face, his own gaze strong and true. The older wizard chuckled and then he held out his hand.

"Well, I don't think I can argue with such logic." Tom's voice was dry with amusement and Harry rolled his eyes at the small dose of sarcasm he heard between the lines.

"Think of the sentimental nonsense in all of that as part of my Gryffindor upbringing. Every once in awhile it will slip out, forgive me." He said with a laugh as he shook Tom's hand. The Dark Lord said nothing but the softening of his gaze said it all.

It seemed that he felt the same way.

May 2nd –One week later…

Draco stirred the potion counter-clockwise before adding in the ground dragon's tooth it called for. He nodded to himself as the color went from red to a dark purple like it was suppose to. He turned slightly to watch Severus meticulously bottle and seal the potion he'd been brewing. Hogwarts had been…interesting the past few weeks. The highlight had to have been when Ron walked into the Great Hall after his startling transformation. Draco didn't think he'd ever seen

Dumbledore so pale before. It had been priceless. Draco chuckled to himself at the thought and his godfather turned to him with an eyebrow arched.

"And what is so funny Draco?"

"I was merely thinking about Ron's entrance into the Great Hall a few weeks back." Draco said. Severus chuckled as he went about tidying up his part of the lab.

"It was very entertaining. Minerva asked me if I had known that the Black family had another child. I took great pleasure in informing both Minerva and Albus that the boy was Ronald Black formerly Ronald Weasely." Severus turned to Draco and helped him bottle and seal his potion as well. "I have to say I was also surprised at how he looked. The coloring suits him better and he seems more confident now."

"He has a name again, a better one in my opinion, but he also has his friends behind him."

"Being the lover to the Dark Lord isn't bad either." Severus sneered and Draco chuckled to himself.

"No, I'd say that helps as well." Draco waved his wand, cleaning up his mess and then he followed Severus into his private suite of rooms. "I am not as surprised as I thought I would be at their relationship."

"Oh? Aren't you the one who said they'd never be more than mere acquaintances?" Severus asked sarcastically. Draco rolled his eyes.

"True, I did say that, I guess I was a bit premature in my thinking." Draco admitted, "But now that it has happened, I find that I'm merely happy for them." Severus gave him a rare grin.

"It's probably because you are so content in your own relationship." He drawled. "How is your husband?"

"He's actually doing very well. He and Tom met last week to discuss more of the same about the laws they want passed. I am surprised that Dumbledore hasn't figured out that something is going on, but I won't go as far to say as he hasn't already thought about it and put the necessary restrictions in place because of it. The man may be a bit barmy but he isn't dumb in the least." Severus nodded in agreement and Draco continued, "Speaking of that, why is it that Lord Riddle is always planning with either Father or Harry but never with you?" Draco frowned in thought, "It's almost as if he's avoiding you."

"That's because he is." Severus said, Draco blinked and Severus chuckled at his surprised face. "You didn't think I noticed?"

"Well, no, I guessed that you were just being too polite by not saying anything. Why is he avoiding you?"

"Because I know something about him that he doesn't want anyone else to know." Severus said his eyes narrowing as he thought of it. Draco blinked and then watched his godfather carefully.

"And just what secret would this be?" He asked the older wizard. Severus merely gave him a small smirk before turning away from him.

"That is Lord Riddle's secret to tell. I have a feeling that most everyone knows, save for the man it surrounds."

Draco said nothing but he made a mental note to prod Harry and Blaise for information later. Just because he was seemingly the last person to be left in the dark didn't mean he had to stay that way. "Be cryptic if you want, I will find out sooner rather than later."

"I am sure you will, you never did like to be left out of the loop of things." Severus drawled.

Draco frowned as he listened to Harry and then once he was finished speaking, he turned and tilted his head to the side slightly as he considered what he should say. "You don't like it." Harry surmised.

"It's not a matter of if I like it or not, but more a matter of if society will go for it. It will spark a very big change for them, especially the muggle-born population." Draco narrowed his eyes and he gazed at Harry, "Some of your former friends will be directly affected by this, and I know that that hurts you even if you don't say it does." Harry nodded seriously.

"It does and will hurt me Draco, but I think it's a step in the right direction to the compromise that Tom and I think will do our society some good. The reason the pure bloods detest the muggle born so much is due in fact that they don't share the same customs, and don't seem to realize the impact they are making on the wizarding society. If they were forced to choose to either stay here or go back to the muggle world, then they would have the option of choosing to learn about the society that they were thrown into."

"That's not the only reason Harry, some pure bloods just simply hate the muggle born because they can. Granted that you do have a point and it would simplify some matters but then the muggle born would come back and say that we are taking away some of their own rights to come and go as they please."

"And that brings us right back to the underlying debate. If muggle born wizards still come and go as they please then there is even more of a chance that our world is discovered by muggles. I know that isn't what pure bloods want, and I would hazard to guess most muggle born wizards and witches don't want it either." Harry ran his hand through his hair in frustration. "This is the only thing Tom and I can come up with to sort of keep the peace." Harry turned away from Draco to stare at the wall, his back tense, and his aura as volatile as his temper. Draco said nothing for a few moments before easing an arm around Harry's waist and looking up into his eyes.

"It is a fine line you walk and I am proud of you that you choose to walk it. It is a good idea. If you want my approval you have it, I just want you to be careful. When Dumbledore finds out that you are no longer fighting for him but against him, this will get bloody and deadly, he is not a man to mess with lightly Harry."

"And neither am I or Tom." Harry said lowly. Draco nodded, but said nothing as he kissed his husband and walked towards their bedroom. Harry watched him go and sighed heavily before following him.

He couldn't wait for this year to be over.

9th of May – Two weeks later…

Harry sat down beside Ron as they both sat in silence watching the sun set over the lake. It had been an eventful year, but finally it was ending. Harry turned to his friend, who had a faint smile on his face and realized that he hadn't been that good of a friend to him as he thought. Just looking at the paler skin, the darker red hair, and deeper eyes made him realize that Ron had sacrificed a lot for him.

"I haven't been a very good friend have I?" Harry murmured. Ron stirred next to him and arched an eyebrow; Harry grinned, Ron was spending way too much time with Tom these days.

"That's just absurd Harry. Of course you've been a good friend. You are my best mate after all."

"Yes, but all the things…"

"Bloody hell Harry, life is life. Shit happens," Ron said and then laughed at Harry's surprised look. "I realize that you have been very busy. You got married, changed allegiances, and are now working with Tom in order to outsmart Dumbledore at his own game. You haven't had the time to really sit with me and coddle me, which is fine. I had to grow up Harry. This has made me grow up."

"But Ron, you had to change so much about yourself."

"Well, perhaps it needed changing. I mean, I know I didn't realize things would go so far, but I feel that it is all worth it now you know?" Ron said raking his fingers through his deep auburn locks. "I don't hold you accountable for every little thing that goes wrong in my life anymore Harry. What's done is done, I'm just happy that the year is ending and we've officially graduated. I have things that I want to do."

"Like spend all of your time with Tom?" Harry teased him and Ron blushed.

"Between you and he I don't know who is busier. But it would be nice to see him on a more

regular basis." Ron added softly. Harry stared at his friend and then spoke carefully.

"Do you still want to get together with Blaise and Nev?" He asked. Ron said nothing for a long while and then he turned to Harry his eyes troubled.

"I don't know." He said so softly Harry had to lean in to hear him. "I still care for them but…Tom…I – it's complicated." Ron shook his head and lifted himself gracefully off the ground. Harry followed him and they began to walk back to the school in silence.

"Whatever your decision, I will back you on it." Harry told him fiercely. Ron smiled, the relief in his gaze apparent and Harry nodded with a smile.

Nothing more needed to be said.

23rd of May – Two weeks later…

Draco sat next to Severus and watched with amusement as Ron soundly trounced Harry at chess for the fourth time that night. He heard Severus snort under his breath once again and a grin tugged at his lips. "You shouldn't be getting so much amusement out of seeing your husband lose so abysmally Draco."

"Bah, I haven't been this at ease since this school year began. I am quite happy now that it has ended." Draco told him. Severus nodded and eyed Lucius and Tom who where once again speaking privately. "When are you finally going to confront Lord Riddle?"

"I don't know that I will have to anymore." Severus said sounding thoughtful. Draco frowned in confusion but said nothing more of the matter. He watched the interaction between his Father and Lord Riddle for a moment and was amused to see how both of them couldn't keep their eyes off their respective partners. Tom's gaze was fairly steady, however, every now and again his eyes would roam to find Ron and then look back to Lucius again. And Draco watched as his father's eyes tracked Severus like a hawk; although he equated that with their Veela possessiveness, but it was still funny. Draco found his gaze traveling to rest on Harry again and again, so maybe he couldn't really say much either.

Their bond had progressed quite nicely if Draco was any judge and he could feel a sense of contentment surrounding him now more than ever before. He was hesitant to voice his good mood though, he felt as if something was coming, a sense of foreboding that hung over them like a dark cloud. Draco watched his husband, his gut churning suddenly and he hoped that they would all be ready for what lie ahead.

Harry stared out into the night with a smile. They had all graduated tonight, he thought the day would never come. Work on his and Draco's house had been completed and they were moving in within the next week. Ron had already moved most of his things to the Black House, though

Harry knew he wouldn't be spending much of his time there anyway. He watched Tom and Ron out of the corner of his eyes and smiled as Tom murmured something in Ron's ear that caused the younger man to blush.

They looked happy, which suited Harry just fine. His gaze shifted to Nev and Blaise who were watching the exchange as well. Blaise looked a bit put out but he seemed resigned to the fact that Ron seemed to be happy in his relationship for now and Nev, well Harry knew Nev was happy with whatever decision Ron made. Hopefully everything would work out for everyone.

His thoughts drifted to Dumbledore and his mood soured. The man had been awfully quiet the last couple of months before graduation. Harry didn't know what to make of it. He knew that Dumbledore had found out about the deception and he knew that the old wizard knew Tom was still alive.

What Dumbledore *didn't* know was that Tom was no longer insane and masquerading around as Voldemort, but Harry was sure he would realize it soon. The next few months were going to be very busy, but he was ready.

"Harry?" Harry turned and smiled at Draco as he motioned him over.

"Yes?"

"What has you looking so serious?" Draco murmured as he kissed Harry's temple.

"Nothing that I haven't told you before?" Harry said with false lightness. Draco's perceptive gaze sharpened and he frowned.

"Dumbledore?"

"Yes, but let's not worry about it right this second okay? I just want to enjoy the night, after all we graduated today; that counts for something right?" Harry said with a teasing lilt to his voice. Draco rolled his eyes but smiled.

"Of course it does, you big dolt. Fine then, let's go celebrate." Harry laughed and kissed his mate before ushering him back towards their family. His mind strayed back to Dumbledore once more, but he firmly didn't worry over it.

Whatever happened; would happen. Harry just hoped that they'd be ready for it.

R/R!

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 12

Disclaimer: I own nothing.

Author's Note: Greetings, sorry for the wait, this chapter gave me fits. I have mixed feelings about it as does my beta, so I figured I'd post it and see what you all think of it. Already writing on chapter twleve and just to give you a heads up: this chapter ends the whole 'in the past arc.' The next chapter will pick up straight away from where I left off in the prologue.

Anyway, a big thank you to LeeLee for beta-reading!

Enjoy!

Desolate

Chapter Eleven

July 23rd – Two months later…

Calm deep blue eyes watched unblinkingly as the Aurors scurried around like mice in a maze. Ron held back his chuckle of amusement, but clenched his jaw in frustration and anger. It was funny to him that they thought he wasn't home, and yet in their arrogance of thinking they knew it all, decided not to check the entire house for inhabitants. It angered him that they were rifling through his home.

He turned to Harry; those green eyes of his were glowing eerily as his best friend calmly gazed at the men hurriedly ransacking Black Manor. "Perhaps now would be a good time?" Harry murmured, his lips barely moving. Ron looked again at the people in his home and then his eyes widened a fraction as he saw the bushy brown head of one Hermione Granger.

His smile was cold and his voice colder as he said, "Now is the time."

"I'm sure that there is a very good reason that you are all ransacking my home, *without* my consent." The voice was deep, controlled, and as cold as ice. Hermione whirled around and her eyes widened as both Ron and Harry appeared out of the shadows of the staircase. She still really couldn't believe that this very handsome man use to be the gangly awkward Ron Weasely.

The two of them were like night and day. Ron's taste in clothing had become impeccable, his skin flawlessly pale, and his manners polite. He seemed the epitome of a wealthy wizard aristocrat of one of the oldest Wizarding families in Britain. He stared at her now impassively, his midnight blue eyes blank of emotion and shuttered by his lashes.

The Aurors behind her had ceased their snooping watching Ron and Harry fearfully. Hermione felt her lips dry and she licked them nervously. "Good day to you gentlemen, I am…"

"We know who you are; pardon my interruption." Ron said as he began to sneer, "And you did not answer my question. Why are you here?"

"We are looking for anything that would make us think that you would be in line with Voldemort." Hermione spoke bluntly and to the point. From the way she heard the outraged and fearful gasps behind her, perhaps she had been a bit *too* literal in what they were doing here. Ron arched an eyebrow and Harry laughed in her face.

Hermione felt her face warm as she gritted her teeth; she *hated* being laughed at.

"And what would make you think that we'd be stupid enough to leave any evidence for you to find, *if* we were working for Voldemort?" Ron asked seemingly puzzled. Hermione blinked her mouth parting in surprise at his bluntness. "I suggest you leave, before I call the *proper* authorities and have you arrested…unless you are telling me that *someone* signed off on this illegal search and seizure?"

The Aurors behind Hermione began to shuffle towards the door and she seethed at being made to look like a fool. "I'd humbly like to apologize for the inconvenience."

"Apology not accepted," Ron murmured, "I will be writing to the Minister about this. However I have a feeling I would be writing to the wrong person." He said it slyly and the accompanying smirk on his face led Hermione to believe that he was referring to Dumbledore, who was actually the one who'd given them clearance to do this. "Now if you don't mind, I have company coming." It was an outright dismissal and Hermione stomped out anger and embarrassment coloring her face as she did so. The rest of the Aurors mumbled apologies and hastily retreated behind her.

Ron turned to Harry, "Will you be telling Lucius about this?"

"Oh absolutely, I think it's time to start fighting back." Harry murmured, "I'll talk with Tom as well, but perhaps at another time. I take it he's coming over for dinner?" Harry asked with a smile and then he grinned as Ron felt his face flush with pleasure at the thought of his lover.

Tom and he had said nothing about ending their arrangement or was it a relationship now? Ron was never sure, but he never voiced any objections. They'd been growing even closer since his graduation, spending untold amounts of time together. Of course they'd had their disagreements, the age difference between them being one issue fought over and discarded, but Ron thought it was all worth it. "Yes, he's coming." Ron finally answered and then eyed Harry. "How is Draco?"

"I don't think he's feeling well for some reason." Harry frowned in concern as he thought of his husband. "He's been getting up really early and locking himself in the bathroom, throwing up everything that he'd eaten the night before. He can't keep a meal down, and there are certain

things he's always loved that he doesn't even touch anymore." Harry looked at Ron with a bewildered face. "If I didn't know any better, I'd say he's pregnant."

"I would say that he is." Ron said chuckling to himself. "I mean he did finally tell you that he could carry children…"

"Yes, and that was like prying Severus from his favorite cauldron." Harry rolled his eyes, but Ron could still tell that he was worried.

"He'll tell you in his own time."

"Yeah, when he can't deny it anymore."

Draco groaned and then grimaced at the sour taste in his mouth as he picked himself up off the floor and unsteadily made his way to the sink. He grabbed the glass next to the sink and filled it with water before carefully drinking it down. He stood for a few moments before making his way back to his and Harry's bed and collapsing there.

He wasn't dumb, he knew that he was pregnant, but he hadn't thought that the symptoms would appear so soon. He closed his eyes and willed his stomach to stop rolling. There was a knock at the door and then Severus came in. He paused taking in Draco's disheveled appearance, and his smirk faded as his concern rose.

"What's wrong?" Severus asked coolly. Draco sighed and then smiled faintly.

"I'm pregnant."

"Of course you are you daft child. Your father and I were wondering when you would be telling everyone. Or better yet, admit it to yourself and Harry. Now tell me your symptoms." Draco listed them all softly and Severus said nothing until he stopped speaking. "I don't think it is good for you to help me with potions anymore until you feel better. I'd better check with a Veela Healer to see what types of nutrients you will need. I am surprised that your symptoms have started so quickly. Do you know when you conceived?" Severus asked. Draco shrugged.

"I am sure that it has been almost a month. I know I am around three weeks along. I did the test myself."

Severus frowned, "I still think it's a little premature for you to be so sick. I'll talk with your father maybe he can give some insight as to what is going on." Draco nodded but didn't meet Severus' gaze, he had an inkling of why, but it would be best if his father said something first.

Lucius was excited to know that Draco was pregnant, but he was concerned from the way it seem his body was reacting to the pregnancy. He could tell that Severus was concerned as well; the

man had already contacted a highly trained Veela Healer and was currently in a heated debate with him. Lucius had a feeling it was because of Draco's gifts as an elemental, but considering he and Draco had no idea what those gifts entailed, there was no way of knowing.

"Severus, please leave the man in peace. We will contact him shortly, I need to speak with you." Lucius said with a small smile. Severus turned to him and arched a brow frowning as he did so. The Healer seemed to wilt with relief and then his face vanished. Lucius chuckled as Severus approached him and he kissed the scowling man. "You'll get to rip him to shreds later, for now I think we should wait."

"Wait? Lucius, Draco is very sick. He shouldn't be this way and…"

"It's because he's an Elemental I believe." Lucius interrupted. Severus just stared at him.

"He's a bloody what?"

"The Veela Council said as much when he was first born. They specifically told us that Draco was an Elemental, but they weren't sure how powerful he would be or what element he'd have most control over. In fact, Draco has never really showed *any* signs of being an Elemental since then. He's been a very bright wizard with an affinity for potions and that is it. However now that he is with child, I am sure that his magick will be fluctuating dangerously, it's probably why he is so ill right now."

"Why did you never tell me?" Severus asked, his tone was cold but Lucius could see the flickering hurt in the man's eyes.

"I am sorry love, but the Council told me not to tell anyone until there was no other choice. Since Draco's health is a concern, I feel that this is the time. I doubt Draco has even told Harry about his gifts and even if he has told Harry, there isn't much to tell considering we don't even know what he can do." Lucius explained. Severus didn't even look the slightest bit placated but he said nothing as he continued to let Lucius hold him.

Harry frowned when he stepped into his and Draco's suite later that day. The curtains had been drawn around their enormous bed; the fading light of the sun could not even permeate the thick curtains. He slowly and quietly approached the bed and pushed some of the curtains aside. He then pressed a kiss to Draco's platinum locks spread messily along his pillow. Draco's eyelashes fluttered open and he gazed up at Harry without moving and smiled.

"You're back early." He murmured. Harry looked at him in shock.

"Draco, it's half past five in the evening!" He exclaimed quietly. Draco's eyes widened and he sat up too quickly. Harry hastily got out of his way as his mate bolted out of bed to their bathroom. Harry closed his eyes as the sounds of retching traveled from the bathroom into their bedroom. When Draco came back out he was pale and shaky. Harry helped him back into bed and then

followed him down, curling around the slim figure in his arms.

"I didn't know it was so late." Draco said. Harry rubbed his shoulders.

"Think nothing of it. Draco, what is going on? Are you…pregnant?" Draco's body went stiff and then Harry heard him sigh.

"Yes." He said softly. Harry smiled at the joy he felt from Draco and he knew Draco could feel his happiness as well. "There is…something else I have to tell you as well."

"Oh?"

Draco turned in his arms and watched him before he spoke once more. "When I was born, my father took me before the Veela Council. They told him that I was going to be a powerful child and that I was also an Elemental." Harry could feel his eyes widened and he opened his mouth to speak but nothing came out. Draco rushed on, "That's why I think I'm feeling so awful. I've never shown any signs of being anything more than a gifted wizard with an affinity for potions, save my Veela heritage. I think because my body is changing and preparing to carry the child to term, that perhaps some of those elemental gifts are coming to the forefront."

"Will they harm the baby?" Harry asked. Draco shrugged.

"I'm not sure. I've never been this sick before. Severus and Father are worried about me."

"So am I, and Blaise, and everyone else." Harry said quietly. "Is there anything I can do?" Draco shook his head slightly and smiled tiredly.

"Never change, Harry, just never change." He murmured as he fell quietly back to sleep. Harry held him tightly, only moving when he heard the sound of the door opening behind him. Severus kneeled by the bed and Harry saw the concern in his eyes.

"He's so sick." Harry whispered, "What are we going to do?" Severus sighed.

"You do know that he's an Elemental?" Harry nodded, "then we wait until we can figure out what his gifts are. Either that or we wait until the morning sickness has passed."

"But that could take months!" Harry snapped, "I can already tell that he's lost weight, in a few months he could be…a lot worse off."

"I know that Harry!" Severus snapped back. "I know, and Lucius knows. It's all we can do. I'm making him nutrient potions as we speak. That should help." Harry wanted to yell at them all, but he knew that it wouldn't make a difference. If Severus said that that was all they could do, then it probably was. Harry turned away from the older wizard and curled around Draco's sleeping form. He heard rustling of robes behind him and then Severus' hand squeezed his shoulder.

"He is strong, he would never leave you. We'll find away to make this work." Severus murmured and then left. Harry closed his eyes as if it could block out his ultimate fear of Draco leaving him. He tightened his arms around the Veela and fell into an uneasy sleep.

August 1 – Nine days later…

Draco breathed deeply, content just sitting in the garden watching the tumultuous storm clouds in the sky. He felt a lot better, at least for today. Severus had been forcing nutrient potions down his throat constantly trying to replenish those that he lost. Harry was beginning to hover, and though it annoyed him, he understood why Harry did it and he couldn't begrudge him of it.

The rustling of robes against the grass caught his attention and he looked up, an eyebrow arching as his mother came and sat next to him. As they sat in silence, Draco thought of the months that had past and realized that he hadn't heard of any altercations between his father and mother for quite some time. At dinner, they had been polite, even cordial; his mother's attitude seemed to have improved, but then again he wouldn't put it past her to be plotting something.

After all once a Slytherin, always a Slytherin.

"Is there something that you wanted, mother?" He asked carefully. She turned to look at him, her blue eyes turbulent.

"Nothing in particular," she murmured and then turned to face the manicured expanse that was their family garden. Draco chuckled, flicking his hair over his shoulder as he did so.

"You never search me out for 'nothing in particular'." Draco murmured. Narcissa smiled softly and then she too laughed a bit.

"This is true. Well, I've heard that you are with child, congratulations." She started out saying.

Draco smiled, "Thank you," he replied and then descended into silence once again. Draco had learned over the years to let his mother speak when she wanted to and never to force the conversation. It was either that or face her displeasure and he had had enough of that by the time he was eleven.

"I wanted to ask you how you felt about Lucius and my relationship." She said finally. Draco frowned and turned to look at her.

"What about it? You are my parents, I care for you both." Draco said in slight confusion.

"I know that, we both do. However I was thinking more along the lines of how you feel your father treats me and I him."

Oh.

Draco turned away from her least she see the pensive frown on his face. He thought back over the years and he wasn't even sure he wanted to give his opinion, but…she'd asked. "I think that Father thinks very highly of you, he respects you, and values your opinion on many things." Except anything to do with Severus. "I would say that he loves you in his own way." Draco didn't go any further, merely sat and waited for his mother's next move.

Narcissa nodded almost absently before she turned back to face the garden. "And do you think that I am being unfair in my request that he spend…more time with me?" Ah, yes, the tricky question. Draco had figured it would come sooner or later. He sighed.

"Mother, Father has given you everything that you have every wanted, he's held nothing back, but that which is not his to give." Draco murmured, "Grandfather was wrong to push him into your arms as you were wrong to go along with the plan, knowing that in the end he would never feel more than deep affection in his heart, when it so plainly belonged to another." Draco murmured. "Let it go." He whispered harshly. Narcissa looked at him in surprise. "Severus and Father have been through too much to be parted now. And Father would rather die than give him up."

Narcissa said nothing but nodded. She leaned over and kissed him gently on the cheek, her lips trembling in suppressed emotion as she did so. "Thank you, my son." She whispered and then left as quietly as she had come. Draco watched her leave, frowning at her back. He shook his head minutely and went back to his silent musings as he enjoyed the stormy weather.

August 21 – Three weeks later…

Harry looked on in concern at Draco's huddled figure on their bed. This morning sickness thing was become a very big concern for him and everyone else close to Draco. He was losing weight because everything he ate came back up again eventually, and then he'd be hungry and the process would begin again. Severus had stocked them with a large supply of nutrient potions to rejuvenate him, but for the most part it wasn't working as well as it should.

He looked at the clock and cursed at the time. He had a meeting with Tom and Lucius and surprisingly Severus, that couldn't be missed. But still…

"Go to your meeting." Draco said quietly.

"But Draco…"

"This meeting is important to the plans you've made. You will be presenting the rough draft of the law you have been slaving over with Lord Riddle *and* you will be revealing him to all of Britain's Wizarding Society. This is important." Draco said in a cold and practical tone. Harry sighed in aggravation. Draco smiled smugly; he knew he'd won. "I'll be fine, *we* will be fine. Go

on now, Father and Riddle are waiting." Harry rolled his eyes, kissed Draco and then left quickly.

He walked down the hallway at a break neck pace, before reaching Lucius' private office. He knocked once and then opened the door. Lucius and Tom stopped discussing whatever it was they'd been talking about and Severus eyed him in disdain. It was a look Harry hadn't seen in nearly a years. "Oh sod off would you Severus, I'm sorry I'm late. Draco is still not getting better."

"And I've told you, that this would pass." The words were delivered with his ever present drawl and cold tone, however Harry saw his body tense at the mentioning of Draco's poor health and knew the man was just itching to go back and research something else that might help him.

"Enough of this," Tom said and motioned for everyone to be seated. He looked at each of them and then chuckled, "I'm sure Draco was happy to be rid of all the mother hens he's collected around him." Lucius arched an eyebrow, Harry rolled his eyes, and Severus snorted. Tom merely smiled again and then the smile became a smirk. "Let's get down to business shall we?"

August 28 – One week later…

Dumbledore watched as Harry and Lucius walked into the assembly of high Ministry officials, including Minister Fudge. He had to admit that Harry cut an impressive figure in his fine dark green robes, his eyes flashing behind a pair of stylish glasses. Lucius carried his ever-present cane; his tall figure cloaked in his usual all black. They looked smug, but Dumbledore knew that he had them, them and their mysterious new ally. He'd never seen him before, however, the aura of his magick was very familiar…

Dumbledore's thoughts slowly centered on what Fudge was trying to say, not what the bumbling idiot was saying. All he needed was a good opening to denounce everything that Lucius and Harry had worked up. If they thought the Wizarding population would let them change the law the way they had planned, they really were clueless to the political game. He knew that Harry was, but from Lucius he would've expected better.

When it was his time to speak, he felt that he did it well. He told the members of the Ministry why Arthur or Kingsley would be better as Minister and then launched into his commentary about the laws in which Harry and Lucius had wanted to place upon the society. Having muggle born wizards surrender their wands before they leave the Wizarding worlds, making them sign documents, on and on he went. Dumbledore felt that he made a sound argument against them; they didn't have the backing of the Ministry, nor any one in the muggle Ministry either. Their backer wasn't even in the stands nor was he seated with them, it was open and shut case that he knew absolutely would go in his favor. Once this was done, he could instate Arthur or Kingsley or maybe both…

Fudge and other members of the board were chuckling. Dumbledore stopped speaking and silently regarded them, but his mind was running on overdrive. He hadn't calculated for this

response. Anger, fury, and win in his corner, yes, but this? Not the response he'd been going for. "I beg your pardon Minister Fudge, but what is so funny?"

"Why, everything you've just said is a bunch nonsense!" Fudge said chuckling shaking his head in laughter. "I don't know where you got your information from but they are very poor sources."

"Do explain."

"I will let Lord Malfoy-Potter explain." Dumbledore felt his smile freeze in place. Had he just said Malfoy-Potter? Dumbledore watched Harry stand and face him. Emerald green eyes flashed behind his glasses and a small smirk played across the younger man's lips.

"Certainly Minister, thank you for the opportunity to defend myself and that of my father-in-law and our backer." Harry bowed to Fudge, and the man preened like a peacock at the gesture. "I can tell you Headmaster that we do have sound backing for our plans from the Ministry, but they are not the ones you described." Harry paused and then moved on, "the plan that is being implemented now is that wizards and witches, pure and muggle born alike will have to have a small set of credentials like that of the muggles. Muggles call it a passport. There is one for each country and when they travel over certain countries borders they must show it to the authorities. We want to implement something like it for wizards and witches who wish to travel between our world and the muggle one. It's quite ingenious really and because we also have backing from the Prime Minister of muggle England, it should be flawless.

"All of this was previously discussed in a private session of this very same meeting." Harry went on and then he gestured towards a figure that was sitting beside Lucius. When had he gotten there? "And here I would like to introduce our backer, Lord Thomas M. Riddle." Dumbledore locked gazes with the wizard, who was at the moment tossing his hood back to reveal a handsome face and crimson eyes.

By the looks of welcome, if a little trepidation, on the faces of those seated in the assembly, Dumbledore knew that they had met previously at some point.

He'd been duped…royally. All the information he'd ever received coming from all his informants had been a pack of lies. He'd thought he had gotten lucky, that following them around at a distance had made them relax their guard. But it appeared that it had not. He'd thought that this may happen and yet…

He never thought he'd be wrong about *everything*. The session had come to a close, the vote unanimously in Harry's favor since they'd made a fool of him. He walked towards them, sure that a smile was on his face, even as his mind began working overtime with ways to come back for this highly miscalculated wrong move.

He didn't know how they had accomplished such a thing as bringing Riddle back from the brinks of insanity as Voldemort, but they had accomplished it and by the calculating look in his eyes, Riddle was back with a vengeance.

"I hope you have a pleasant day Headmaster." Lord Riddle said, his lips curled into a smirk. Dumbledore knew his eyes had gone cold.

"I doubt it." His tone was abrupt, not jolly at all. He turned to Harry, who was standing between the two older men. "Am I the last to know about your marriage?"

"Perhaps," Harry said.

"Well congratulations anyway. Tell me, when did you marry?"

"Last year, at the end of December." Harry said with a smile. Dumbledore felt his smile freeze again for the second time that day. How had he not *known*? But then again, from what he'd seen, and heard the portraits from the school, save those in Slytherin, Harry and Draco were merely acquaintances in the same house. He'd never, not in decades would have put them together in marriage.

He'd never been so easily manipulated in his life! It left a bitter taste in his mouth. "Well congratulations," he said and then left before his temper got the best of him.

As soon as he got a hold of his team…

Dumbledore took a deep breath and then apparated.

R/R! Tell me what you think!

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 13

Disclaimer: I own nothing.

Author's Note: Beta read chapter

Beta: LeeLee

Ok, this chapter start directly after the scene in the prologue, just as a reminder.

Chapter Twelve

October 15 – One and a half months later…

Draco watched the scenery pass them by as they sped towards muggle London. Harry sat beside him, quietly holding his hand, as he had taken to doing when he was nervous. "What worries you?"

Harry turned to him, a wry smile on his face. "You always know when I am troubled."

"It isn't that hard, you take my hand and rub my skin, just like you are doing now, every single time you are nervous about something." He and Harry laughed together. "So will you tell me what is bothering you?"

"Dumbledore has been too quiet." Harry said, "I was so sure that when he found out all of his plans were based on a pack of lies that we fed him, he'd be calling for our blood. It's been too quiet, and I'm worried."

"Let's not think of it right now." Draco said carefully, "I understand you are worried, but until he makes a move, we are unable to do much but sit and wait. He wants us to feel unnerved, and that is the one thing we cannot let him think he's done to us." Harry said nothing but kissed Draco's hand and turned his gaze out the window. Draco smiled minutely and then laid his head against Harry's shoulder.

It will all be well Harry. He murmured to his husband telepathically. Harry squeezed his hand and Draco felt his lips brush against his forehead as he shifted to let Draco rest even more comfortably on him.

Thank you for your confidence. He whispered back and Draco smiled.

When they arrived, Harry had to chuckle to himself. Ron was sitting extremely close to Tom and his face was flushed by whatever Tom was whispering in his ear. He watched Tom laugh and then kiss his best mate softly before releasing him. Ron had a dazed look in his eyes, but immediately began tidying himself and seemed to be back to his normal self by the time Harry and Draco were seated.

"Where are Lucius and Severus?" Harry asked.

"They were held up, speaking with Lady Malfoy." Tom said smoothly. Harry arched an eyebrow.

"And would I be wrong in assuming that she is the 'problem' you eluded to earlier?"

"No, you wouldn't be wrong." Tom murmured as he sipped his wine. "From what they've managed to gather from her it seems as if she would like to leave."

"Leave? As in give up and let Severus have Lucius?" Harry asked incredulously. "That doesn't

sound like the Narcissa Malfoy I know." He turned to Draco and asked, "Did you know about this?" Draco narrowed his eyes and then shook his head.

"No, but it sounds like something she'd do if she'd already planned something devious." Draco laughed, "Mother is always painstakingly polite just after she's managed to do something that will cause a bit of pain and suffering later. I would say if she wants to leave then I'd let her leave. We won't figure out whatever she planned until the plan is executed."

Tom's eyes flashed for a moment and then dimmed. Ron placed a hand on the older man's thigh and rubbed slightly, his expression troubled. Harry watched them together, and realized this was probably how he and Draco interacted in front of a lot of people, including their family. They cared deeply for one another and knew each other quite intimately. And he could see the same in Tom and Ron.

Even though the two of them would never admit it to anyone.

"Well what's done is done." Ron said softly, "I agree with Draco, we will take it as it comes."

Hermione stood outside the Ritz Carlton unabashedly watching Harry and his…family she supposed she should call them. From the way they looked as they spoke to each other it had been a serious conversation before it had become a lively chat. They looked like any normal group of close friends. Sometimes it was hard for her to distinguish them from any other normal wizard, from the powerful lords she knew them to be. Not only had their law been passed and instated into the Wizarding society, people actually *liked* them. Even when they found out Thomas Riddle was Voldemort, after weeks of hesitation they embraced him with open arms.

Of course there still was extreme hostility from people who had lost family and friends to him and his Death Eaters, but the way he was glossing over those hurt feelings, going as far as to dismantle most of his own large force, was making progress into making him quite powerful in Britain and abroad. Many countries were already tripping over themselves to get him to come and speak to their own heads of government.

Hermione slowly walked away, keeping her collar high to fight off the brisk chill that was reminding everyone that fall was indeed here to stay. Dumbledore had been furious and still was, and rightly so, after the neat dressing down that Lucius, Riddle, and Harry had given him. Many of his allies were still in his corner, including Mrs. Weasely and most of her children; however, Hermione knew that she and Mr. Weasely were beginning to have their doubts.

Perhaps she'd been a bit over eager and naïve to believe that everything Dumbledore wanted was such a good thing. She knew she hadn't really given Harry or Ron a chance to explain their choices fully. It had been hard to see them go to Slytherin and be embraced so well into their fold. It had hurt even more to see Ron stripped of his family name. She'd never thought the Weasely's would go so far, but…

Hermione sighed and stopped by Madam Malkin's, looking in either direction before she hedged her way into the cold alleyway. A figure was already there and when the person flipped back their hood just enough for Hermione to see who they were, she relaxed slightly. "Lady Malfoy," She said hesitantly, a sudden foreboding washed over her and for the second time in her life, Hermione felt like she was making a mistake.

Lady Malfoy smiled coolly at her. "Miss Granger, it's very nice of you to finally join me. I would hope that you aren't having any…doubts?" It was posed as a question but Hermione heard the implied threat behind it. She straightened her shoulders and looked the Lady Malfoy in the eye.

"No, I don't have any doubts. What do you want me to do?"

Blaise looked up as Neville entered his study and he smiled. The young man's nose was stuck in a Herbology book yet again. Neville had been accepted into a prestigious Wizarding university to study to be a Herbology Professor. It was what he loved the most in the world, or so Blaise thought, until those deep brown eyes fell on him and then it seemed like he was the only person in the world Neville was watching.

"Hello love," Neville murmured and kissed him softly. Blaise hummed and then tapped the book.

"What are you studying for, class just started mere weeks ago." Neville chuckled.

"The classes are very difficult, I have to study to stay ahead. Not everyone can be a Lord of a wealthy estate." Neville teased. Blaise just shook his head as Neville made himself comfortable in his lap. "So how are you doing?" Blaise frowned in confusion.

"I'm fine, why wouldn't I be?" He asked. Neville looked at him and then smiled a bit sadly.

"Even about Ron?" He asked gently. Blaise straightened in the chair and then sighed.

"Even about that, he made his choice and I've come to realize it is a good one for him." Blaise said. "And you? How are you feeling about it?"

"I – I am still hurt a little, but I think that it is what it is. We should just let it be. He is very happy where he is right now and surprisingly I think Lord Riddle returns his feelings." Neville said, "They make a good couple, a strong one. I am happy for him."

"Good," Blaise said, "He needs us to still be there as his friends. We've been a bit distant of late and I think it is time to stop by for a visit. I've still been keeping up with Lord Malfoy and Draco. I think it is about to get a bit more interesting around here."

Ron collapsed onto the bed, his body practically singing with pleasure, boneless and sated. Strong arms wrapped around his waist, and when he mustered up the energy to move, Ron began to play with the loose tendrils of Tom's hair. They were both still breathing hard, their bodies

covered in sweat and the bed linens tangled about them.

"What brought this on?" Ron asked quietly and then he chuckled, "Not the I'm complaining." He felt more than saw Tom's lips curve into a smile, before the man kissed his stomach and then pulled himself up off the younger wizard to lie beside him.

"Do I need a reason to fuck you senseless?" Tom drawled. Ron felt himself flush as he smiled.

"No," he replied. He ducked his head and then looked out of the window, catching a glimpse of the setting sun. Strong yet gentle fingers grasped his chin turning his head to face Tom. He was frowning slightly, his expression saying he was confused. It was the most Ron had ever seen the man express himself since they had begun this…whatever it was.

"Ron, what is it?" Tom asked him seriously. Ron said nothing for a few moments before his mouth opened and he spoke.

"What are we doing? Why are we still together? *Are* we together? I just – I don't know. I'm just so confused. Everything is happening so quickly now, with all of your plans coming to fruition and you…"

"Easy, easy, Ron slow down." Tom said his voice steady but he was surprised, Ron could tell. "I'm not sure I understand you correctly, but do you want to end what we have together?" The thought had never entered his head and Tom was surprised that he wanted to grab the young man and shake sense into him until the thought of leaving was wiped for him mind.

"*No*! I don't want that at all," Ron said vehemently shaking his head.

"Then what are you saying?" Tom asked. Ron bit his lip.

"I'm just saying that we've been together for so long now, I would've thought that our arrangement if we didn't…care for one another would be over. You haven't said anything about wanting to end it and I know that I don't want to end it, but I know you still love Lucius and I still love Blaise and Neville but its different now, everything is different." Ron sighed softly. Tom took Ron's hand in his and tangled their fingers together.

"How is it different?"

"The love I feel for them now is nothing compared to the depth of feeling I have for you. They are my friends and I think that they realize that. You are – Tom I – I want to be with you. As in a real relationship, not just – just sex." Ron looked him in the eyes. Tom held his gaze as he lifted Ron's hand to his mouth and kissed it.

"I understand and I'd be honored if you were to enter into a true relationship with me. I did not realize that you had been worrying over this. If I had I would've put you at ease for I do not want to part with you either." Tom said solemnly. Ron swallowed but nodded, his eyes burning with

repressed tears and he smiled hesitantly. "Now, how about our customary shower?" Tom asked lightly and Ron grinned.

It seemed on the surface that nothing had change, but Ron knew differently. Tom knew differently and that was all that mattered.

October 22 – One week later…

Hermione twisted the hem of her robe in nervousness. Dumbledore still did not look up at her as he finished writing some documents, before handing them to Minerva. The Deputy-Headmistress, said nothing to her, but merely patted her shoulder in sympathy. Though Minerva agreed with some of Dumbledore's principles, she didn't agree with all of them and she'd told the man so. Their relationship had been pure business from then on and nothing more was said.

Hermione wished now that she had been as cautious.

"So, did you meet with the Lady Malfoy?"

"Yes, Headmaster," Hermione said. Dumbledore nodded and then his gaze narrowed a bit. "Is there something wrong Miss Granger?"

"I don't know. I think we should rethink what we're doing. Lady Malfoy may act…far harsher than we may think when dealing with Lord Malfoy and Professor Snape." Hermione hedged. Dumbledore blinked and then shook his head.

"I doubt it, she loves Lucius far too much to hurt him…much."

"I am not so sure." Hermione murmured. "I think –I think you've gone too far this time." Dumbledore said nothing but the hairs on the back of her neck stood on end. The room vibrated with repressed magick.

"Are you saying you want to leave my services?" He asked, his voice still jolly, but there was an undercurrent of anger underneath. Hermione shook her head in a hurry.

"N-No! That's not what I'm saying at all, I'm just concerned…"

"Well it's my job to be concerned, not yours. You are dismissed." Dumbledore said in a tone that brooked no argument. Hermione moved hastily, overturning her chair as she did so. She set the chair back the way it had been and bolted out the door like a skittish colt.

Once out onto the Hogwarts grounds she bit her lip in indecision. She didn't know what to do anymore. What would Harry or Ron do? The answer came to her, but she didn't like it.

She didn't like it at all.

29th of October – One week later…

Ron paused outside of the shop and looked up at the title once more with trepidation. *Weasely's* Wizard Wheezes stood out in funny shaped letters. He smiled though he felt like screaming in anger. Even after all the time that had past, it still cut him deeply to remember the family that had tossed him out. Without another thought, Ron straightened his shoulders and opened the door, slipping into the shop quietly.

He'd been keeping tabs on their business; he knew that it would probably become the largest joke shop in the Wizarding world. Fred and George were just that good at making and implementing their practical jokes. It was the reason that he was here; to do business with them. Tom had made the suggestion lightly, but after months of watching and listening to him and Lucius speak on numerous occasions, he felt that he could trust Tom's judgment when it came to a good business deal.

"Good Morning there! Welcome to Weasely's Wizard Whe-," Ron turned to the voice and said nothing as Fred and George's eyes widened.

"Ronny Boy!" They both crowed. Ron stood in shock as first Fred hugged him within an inch of his life and then George did the same.

"Nice new – " Fred began.

"Look! Did the evil –" George picked up.

"Malfoys make you do it?" Fred finished, teasing him. Ron blinked but shook his head.

"No, Mu—," Ron faltered and then shook his head, "Harry gave me the Black family name after…"

"We're sorry Ron, for what happened. You know how Mum gets." Fred said seriously. George nodded as well his blue eyes turbulent.

"Charlie doesn't agree with what's happened either. He hasn't come home since Mum kicked you out. Bill won't speak with her and Percy…well Percy's just plain weird. He doesn't say anything at all."

"How is everyone else?" Ron asked, he hadn't realized how much he missed the chaos that used to be apart of his life. Fred and George both shrugged.

"Mum is…Mum, Dad is Dad, and Ginny well… she's one of Dumbledore's faithful little soldiers." They chorused together. Ron chuckled.

"You two are still the same." He said and they grinned shamelessly back at him. "The reason I came in today was primarily to do business with you. I'd like to be a silent partner, like Harry, and help you expand. I feel you could do your life's ambition…take over the Wizarding world with your jokes."

They blinked and then grinned and began talking a mile a minute. Ron just stood and smiled. At least some things never changed.

Lucius, Severus, and Tom looked over the letters they'd received carefully. Tom smiled grimly. "So they are fighting back now?"

"It does look like it." Lucius said he tapped the letter, "Dumbledore was good enough not to seal it with his own seal, and his magickal signature is not on the letter at all. He made someone else write it." Severus nodded.

"Probably one of his students." He murmured, "He is not one to make idle threats."

"No, he is just very methodical in carrying them out." Tom said, "Just like we are. Do you suppose Draco and Ron are also in danger?"

"I don't think so, however, I wouldn't put it past Dumbledore to include them on the list." Severus said coolly. "I'm sure Harry has received a letter as well; a better worded letter, but a letter nonetheless."

"He would never tell us though." Lucius murmured, "We wouldn't have told each other if they hadn't arrived at the same time, which means…"

"That we're being watched like we surmised. Someone is in our club, we'll have to tell the manager…or we can take care of it ourselves." Tom said. Lucius and Severus eyed him carefully.

"I think it would be best just to let the manager know. We are trying to make you seem as normal as possible. This would not be a good time to let them know you are still as formidable as ever." Severus said carefully. Tom nodded but said nothing. Lucius looked to Tom and said softly,

"I know that you worry for Ron but he is a strong young man, he can take whatever comes his way."

"I know that Lucius." Tom said, "I just know that if anything happens to him, you nor your consort will be able to stop me." And he said it with a smile. Lucius arched an eyebrow and Severus sneered.

"Duly noted." Severus said dryly.

Harry frowned as he stared down at the letter he'd just received. "Dumbledore, what are you up to?" Harry mumbled to himself. The letter was worded nicely, but underneath all of that politeness Harry could tell that the man was fuming mad and clutching at loose ends. More and more of the initiatives that Tom had put forth were going through the Ministry and straight to law status like lightening.

Not only had the law for carrying a passport been passed, but also one to work with the muggle government. The law stated that Wizarding children in muggle parts of the country are to be found and brought to Wizarding London in different safe houses. Another that was being finalized was for a Wizarding elementary school to be started; one for pure-bloods who knew Wizarding culture, and then another for muggleborn children, who would need to take a few extra classes in order to be on par with their classmates.

The initiatives were all very well thought out plans, and it seemed that the public loved them. They were good for the Wizarding world, at least Harry felt they were, and would make for better relations between those who'd been born to the world and the others that weren't. He looked down at the letter again and sighed. He didn't understand why Dumbledore was so dead set against letting any of them pass.

Was it jealousy that he didn't come up with them or was it something else? Either way the older wizard was trying to make trouble for them whenever and wherever he could. Harry dropped into a chair, frowning as he did so, and he stayed there until he felt the brush fingers across his shoulder and the warmth and hum of the bond he shared with Draco come alive as it always did when they were together.

"Sickle for your thoughts?" Draco murmured. Harry smiled and then shook his head.

"My thoughts aren't worth that much." Harry joked. Draco frowned as he watched his husband. He looked down at the letter that was hanging negligently from Harry's fingers. His silver eyes narrowed and his lips pinched together, anger flushing his face.

"What does Dumbledore want *now*?" He seethed. Harry shook his head.

"It's nothing, he's just using his old tricks." Harry said waving it off. Draco wasn't fooled so easily. He snatched the letter from Harry's fingers and scanned the letter. His face paled some and then looked down at Harry in anger.

"He's basically threatened your life and you say it's *nothing*!" Draco hissed. Harry arched an eyebrow at Draco's anger. They'd had their share of disagreements, but Harry hadn't seen him this upset in awhile.

"He didn't threaten my life per se…"

"Harry, semantics!"

"Alright Draco, Merlin, what's with you?" Harry snapped back. He felt a torrent of emotions coming from the Veela but nothing concrete. Draco turned away from him, his body vibrating with repressed emotion.

"Nothing, it's nothing!" Draco snapped back. Harry frowned and caught hold of Draco before he left, holding onto him tightly in case the Veela tried run away before they discussed this.

"Obviously it is something." Harry tried gently. Draco rolled his eyes.

"Don't placate me Harry Malfoy-Potter." Draco sneered. Rattling across the room caused Harry to look toward the window. The wind was beating against the glass at a furious pace. In fact…Harry watched the flames in the grate almost be put out from the wind coming through the chimney. He turned his attention back to Draco who was staring at him intently.

"I'm not trying to placate you, just trying to calm you down." Harry murmured letting his side of the bond seem as calm and quiet as possible. Slowly but surely he could feel the tension leave Draco's body and at the same time, the wind outside and within the room seemed to still. Harry looked at Draco again and smiled. "Alright?"

"Yes, I'm just…worried for you." Draco murmured quietly. "You are very cavalier sometimes about your well being Harry and I don't want to lose you." Harry frowned slightly.

"You were the one telling me not to worry about anything nearly a month ago…"

"I know. That was before this letter and that was before I came to the realization that Dumbledore will not stop until he sees you either controlled or put down like a rabid dog." Draco said seriously. "He wants to control you, mold you, and use you for his own plots. You are his weapon Harry, the one that he was trying to mold since you came to the Wizarding world, and the weapon that got away." He finished quietly.

"I am not going to let that happen." Harry said anger in his voice. "You said that you had faith in me, where is it now?"

"I *do*!" Draco insisted, "I do, Harry, I do have faith in you I'm just…I don't know. I'm pregnant, my emotions are getting the best of me and all that is happening around me is making me second guess the assurances that I've told you and me, and – " Draco stopped his rambling, "It's nothing." Harry pulled his bonded closer, holding him tightly.

"It's alright, nothing, and I do mean *nothing* will happen to me, you, or our child." Harry murmured into his ear, "I won't let it Draco. I understand that your emotions are erratic. It's okay, your body is changing as is your magick." Harry just held him, not wanting to worry about the letter that Dumbledore sent, not wanting to worry about anything but Draco. "Everything is going to be fine, isn't that what you always tell me?" Harry teased. He felt Draco's lips curve into a smile against his neck, and he smiled himself. The shadows along the door shifted and Harry

heard the door shut quietly. He'd seen a flash of black, it had probably been Severus; he shrugged and focused his attention on Draco once more.

Narcissa calmly took off the voluminous black cloak and carefully placed it back in the exact spot Severus had left it. She congratulated herself, preening, as she carefully made her way towards the secret staircases that she'd found, making her way into the gardens. Apparating, once she could, Narcissa soon stood in a small, dirty room. She wrinkled her nose in distaste but immediately went to the crackling fireplace and threw floo powder into the flames, making them flare green as she said the name of the person she sought.

"Albus Dumbledore." His face appeared, that humble Headmaster face, glasses and all, but she could see the cunning and ambition that gleamed in his eyes. They weren't so different at all.

"Did Harry get the letter?"

"Yes,"

"And?" He asked. Narcissa flicked a strand of her hair off her shoulder and sniffed.

"He brooded a bit, then Draco came in. They didn't have a row but it was a disagreement of some kind. At any rate he didn't take it seriously enough to suspect anything I don't think." Dumbledore chuckled.

"Good," he said briskly and then vanished.

"How rude." Narcissa hissed. She grabbed up her things, traced her steps making sure no trace was left of her in the room before apparating again.

Remus Lupin frowned as he walked into the dilapidated shack. He looked around, but he didn't find any traces of her anywhere. She'd cleaned up after herself well, he reasoned, either that, or she hadn't been here long. He wondered whom she'd been speaking to. Not that he really cared, but he was curious. He walked out of the small shack and made his way towards Hogsmeade. He'd stop and get something to eat before reporting into Dumbledore.

He had a lot of questions to ask but for now they could wait…

For now.

R/R!

#####
#####

#####

Chapter: 14

Disclaimer: I own nothing.

Author's Note: HAPPY HALLOWEEN! I hope everyone has a fantastic day today. Get plenty of candy, scare the crap out of people and all that jazz. Anyway here is chapter thirteen. It has been beta read by LeeLee; you are the best chica! Be advised there is a hell of a cliffhanger at the end...and you need me alive to find out what happens next. I promise everything will turn out well in the end! ^^

So, enjoy!

Desolate

Chapter Thirteen

1st of November – Three days later…

Draco opened the main door to their Manor and his eyes widened at the man standing there. Remus Lupin looked a bit more haggard than usual, but his brown eyes were warm behind his a pair of rimmed glasses, and his tousled salt and pepper colored hair fell haphazardly around his face. "Good Afternoon Mr. Malfoy."

"It's Lord Malfoy-Potter now Professor Lupin and it is good to see you. Won't you come in?" Draco stood back and let the wizard into the foyer.

"Forgive me, I've been away for awhile." Remus said with a sheepish smile. Draco smiled slightly and then motioned for the man to follow him. Draco was aware of the wizard looking around his and Harry's home, curiosity probably getting the better of the man. He took him to Harry's office and knocked on the door.

"Come in," Harry's voice drifted through the door. Draco opened the door and stood back as Remus preceded him into the room. Harry was still reading a document, and hadn't lifted his head. Draco pulled out a seat for Remus and then went around the desk and kissed the tip of Harry's ear before whispering, "Remus Lupin is here," softly.

Harry's head snapped up, his hand immediately reaching for Draco, for comfort. Draco gave his hand and chuckled quietly to himself as Harry began to draw soothing circles into Draco's skin like always. His eyes, however, remained on Remus Lupin.

Harry couldn't believe it. Remus was sitting right in front of him after being gone for nearly a

year or more. "What are you doing here?" Harry winced at his cool tone, but then again, he was a bit miffed at the man who was practically his godfather; like Sirius used to be.

"I just got back into the country and I- I wanted to see you; see how you were, how your seventh year went." Remus said quietly. "I couldn't quite believe it when Dumbledore said that you had married into the Malfoy family."

"Circumstances had changed by our seventh year. I'm sure you heard that the Malfoy's are Veela?"

"Yes,"

"I am Draco's mate and we got married in secret." Harry turned to Draco and smiled, "Our one year anniversary is in a month and a half." Remus blinked, but then he smiled and bowed his head.

"Congratulations to you both. And I sense that I should say another congratulations?" He said with a tilt of his head in Draco's general direction, his eyes flashed amber for a moment and then faded back to their chocolate hue. "How for along are you?"

"Three months; give or take a few days." Draco said, "Would you care for some tea?"

"That would be nice, thank you." Remus said surprise still evident in his voice at the fact that a Malfoy was being cordial to him. Draco passed his chair and then bent slightly towards his ear.

"You are family, now, get use to it." Draco murmured and then he was gone.

Remus turned back towards Harry and he sighed. "Will you stay upset at me forever?"

"No, not forever, but I don't understand why you would come back at this time all of a sudden." Harry said warily. "I am sure you heard about what is going on here."

"Who hasn't? The Dark Lord regaining his sanity, Harry Potter aligning with the new and improved Lord Riddle's ideals, and then a mysterious Lord Nicodemus, who is also backing Lord Riddle. Dumbledore has yet to find out who this Nicodemus is and he wants my help. I was hoping that perhaps you would be able to help me find him. Or give me a clue to his whereabouts."

"Why should I when you are going to run back to Dumbledore like a good, obedient soldier?" Harry snapped. Remus frowned at Harry.

"He has told me that he wants to ally with this Lord."

"No, he merely wants to control him, just like he wants to control everything." Harry said evenly, "We've passed so many laws that are for the good of the people. We are allied with the Muggle

government for the first time in centuries. All of these advances are taking place because of the policies that Lord Riddle is implementing. How can he be against this, unless it's just because *he* isn't the one in charge?"

Remus said nothing, because Harry did have a point. However, it was just so hard to go against the man who had taken care of him. And he had a feeling that Harry knew that as well.

Draco came back with the promised tea and the rest of the visit was filled with Remus telling of his travels and Harry telling his godfather of the changes in his life.

Harry walked Remus to the door. "It was good seeing you." Remus told him. Harry said nothing for a few brief moments and then he made his decision.

"Remus, I am about to tell you something. And I want you to think about it, and if you decide to tell Dumbledore, then that is your prerogative. But if you decide to keep it a secret, then you will have a place to come to when he leaves you to rot…because he will do that." Harry said.

Remus blanched at the cool, matter of fact tone, but then the young man who stood before him, was not the one he'd left nearly two years ago. He was proud of him, and somewhat wary as well. Harry didn't hide any longer; he stood tall, strong, and confident. Intelligence flickered in his eyes and that emerald gaze was steady and penetrating. Remus nodded and spoke carefully, "I understand."

"I am Lord Nicodemus." Harry revealed to him. Remus paled; what was he doing? "Tom invented this character for me to play. It is the reason why I was able to work with him while I was still in school. I still use the alias from time to time, when Tom and I feel that Lord Harry Malfoy-Potter should stay in the background."

Remus stood in shocked silence.

"You now have in your hands, enough ammunition…to in essence ruin me, and everything that I have done so far." Harry said quietly. "Hopefully I will see you soon. Good day Remus." And then Harry turned and went back into the house, closing the door behind him.

Remus stood for brief moments, staring blindly at the closed door. And then he turned and walked away.

"Are you sure you did the right thing?" Draco asked standing next to Harry as they watched Remus walk away. Harry swallowed against the fear lodged in his throat. He took a gamble; he hoped it paid off.

"I hope so." He said with finality. Draco nodded and said nothing else, just stood by his side in support.

And for that and many other things, Harry was very grateful for it.

3rd of November – Two days later…

It was so cold.

And he was in so much pain. What had happened to him?

Tell me Remus, what Harry told you! Tell me NOW!

Remus shuddered from the cold sleet that rained down on him and in the memory of that anger that had been unleashed upon him. He crawled painstakingly through the dirt and mud to a nearby tree. He was shivering so hard, and he was still bleeding.

But he still held onto Harry's secret.

His mind was nearly in shreds, but Harry's secret was still safe.

That was all that mattered to him.

Hermione knew for a fact, that Harry was going to toss her out on her ears. She fought her way through the sleet and snow and pounded, frantically, on the doors to Malfoy Manor. The door was thrown open and she swallowed heavily at the sight of Thomas Riddle standing before her. His crimson eyes flashed and he frowned in puzzlement.

"Miss Granger, what is - ?"

"Dumbledore threw Remus out!" Hermione shouted at him. "I don't know where he is, but he's hurt, and Harry said—" Hermione started crying, "Harry said—"

"When?" Riddle interrupted.

"Maybe an hour ago? I'm not sure. I couldn't leave right after, so it may have been longer! Please you have to help me find him!" Hermione told him. Riddle looked at her, then turned and opened the door wider and Hermione paled at the sight of Harry standing there.

"What did Dumbledore do to him?" Harry asked slowly. His voice was measured, but Hermione could feel the hair on the back of her neck standing on end. Harry's control of his magick was tenuous at best as his anger mounted.

"Careful Harry," Tom murmured. He turned back to Hermione and nodded. "Very well, we are coming with you. Let's go, because I feel that we are running out of time."

By the time they found Remus, they were nearly too late. Harry found him slumped over underneath a tree close the entrance into the Forbidden Forest. His lips were blue, his eyes glassy, and his body felt like death. Tom watched the pain and rage that Harry tried to hold in at seeing his adopted godfather in such condition.

When the young man had told him the information he'd given to Remus, Tom had wanted to throttle him. Questions had entered his mind so quickly, the primary one though had been, *after everything, how could this boy be so foolish?* Now Tom could see that the faith he had in this man wasn't unfounded. When given the choice, it looked like Remus had stood by Harry, if the condition he was in was any insight to what had happened.

Tom apparated them all back to the Manor, calling out for Severus and Draco the minute they appeared. As the two younger men quickly and efficiently divested Remus of all his robes and hurried him to a room close by, he and Harry both turned to Hermione Granger who was standing, shivering, behind them; watching them with wary yet intelligent brown eyes. Tom turned to Harry, "What should we do with her?"

Harry said nothing, just stared at Hermione for several long, silent minutes. When he spoke it was quietly, "Why should I trust you?" He whispered. Hermione opened her mouth to speak but Harry spoke again and she fell silent. "I gave you everything that I could, *everything.* Ron loved you," Tom stiffened at that but said nothing, "He loved you so much Hermione and you spit it back in his face." Harry's unrelenting gaze forced Hermione to either look him in the eye or turn away from him; she turned away. "I thank you for warning us about Remus, but I can't trust you. On behalf of Lucius Malfoy, I ask that you leave the Manor." Harry said with a note of finality in his voice. Then, with a brief nod to Tom he walked away.

Hermione began to go after him, but her face paled as she stared at something behind Tom. Tom turned and saw that Ron was coming down the stairs toward him. He held Tom's heaviest robe in his arms and a worried look on his face. "Tom, are you alright? Remus was in such bad shape I…." Ron trailed off and Tom knew he had spotted Hermione behind him. The warmth in his deep blue eyes faded and he gave a curt nod in her direction. "Hermione." He said quietly.

"R-Black," Hermione whispered back. Ron wasn't paying her the slightest bit of attention. He clucked in disapproval that Tom hadn't taken off his soggy outer cloak yet and Tom let himself be coddled; reveled in it in fact. Ron handed the wet cloak to one of the house elves that was standing not too far away and then helped Tom into his other robe.

"Thank you my dear." Tom murmured lifting Ron's chin slightly and kissing him softly. Ron hummed in pleasure, melting into Tom's solid frame willingly. Tom watched Hermione's face contort with envy, and he could feel nothing but pleasure that he could be so relaxed with his ex-girlfriend in the room. Tom turned to Hermione and arched a brow, "I do believe you are supposed to be leaving?" Hermione huffed a bit but she said nothing as she opened the door and stepped out into the night. Tom made sure that she was passed the wards before turning to Ron

and kissing him hotly. Ron moaned, his fingers biting into Tom's lower back as Ron greedily pulled his body closer. "Bed, pet." Tom growled.

"Yes." Ron gasped.

Harry held one of Remus' hands in his as he kept vigil over the older man. Severus had told him that most of Remus wounds were superficial, but the worst damage had been done to his mind.

"*It seems that someone tried to get to specific memories in his mind. Remus fought them, and whatever he hid from them is still hidden. I must say that it looks like Dumbledore was the one who did this."*

"Fucking Dumbledore." Harry muttered. Remus shifted in the bed, moaning in pain. Harry hushed him and began to think more about the things Severus told him.

"*His mind is in fragments, think of a full mirror that was shattered, and now it's trying to piece all the shards together again. That is what his mind is doing; it's healing on its own. There is nothing more that we can do but wait and a keep him comfortable. He'll wake on his own."*

Harry placed his head on Remus' covered thigh; his eyes burning with unshed tears. He'd never meant for this to happen. He hadn't thought that Dumbledore would be so desperate as to practically rape someone's mind to get to the answers he sought. It made Harry wonder, what else Dumbledore would do, to stop them from making the changes that they were spearheading.

4th of November – The next day…

He felt Draco's presence before he saw him and he reached out for him. Draco took his hand, and crouched down beside his seat, laying his head on Harry's shoulder. "It's morning Harry. Come to bed." Draco murmured.

"I have to stay with him." Harry said quietly.

"It's not your fault that this was done to him. Remus made his choice. And he chose right. He protected you," The respect in Draco's voice made Harry smile. It seemed that Remus risking his life for Harry's put him in high standing with Draco. "He wouldn't want you torturing yourself will all these maudlin thoughts. Enough is enough. Come to bed." Draco repeated. Harry fiddled with Draco's robe before sighing and nodding. Draco stood, and then Harry did as well before following him back to their suite of rooms.

Tom stood and watched the sunrise from his guestroom window. Many things were on his mind, between what had happened with Remus last night and then Hermione, Dumbledore, and the meeting at the Ministry today that he had to attend. Tom sighed heavily and then he turned and

looked down at Ron. He was still deeply asleep, on his back, dark blood red hair a startling contrast against the white sheets of their bed.

Tom stared at him, feeling his heart double in its rhythm. Ron shifted and his eyes opened sleepily. His gaze landed on Tom's lithe form and a smile slowly appeared. Tom felt himself smiling in response and it was in that moment that he knew that he was in deep trouble. Because the young man in his bed had become more important to him, then anything else.

And he couldn't do anything about it.

Severus eyed Lucius with a frown. "You want me to go to the Ministry early? Whatever for?"

"Just to make sure that all the people that should be at this conference are there." Lucius said, "Tom and I will be there as soon as we can, but we have to have someone representing us just in case people show up early. Who better to do that then you and Ron?"

"I thought Harry was going to be coming?" Lucius shook his head as he scribbled out a correspondence.

"Harry was adamant that he be here when Remus is awake, and I actually agree that this is the best course of action. I have a feeling something is going to happen today, and I want Harry to be out of the way." Lucius' eyes flashed as he looked at his mate. "He is the one true key we have to recreating the structure of the Ministry as we see fit. If anything were to happen to him then it's almost as if we forfeit all that we've already done."

"That may be true but you and Tom are also an integral part," Severus countered.

"As are Draco, Ron, and yourself." Lucius came back, "You are our consorts and therefore hold the same sway that we do. Granted you aren't present at many of our meetings, but when we go out people associate the three of you with the three of us. Ron is becoming a brilliant strategist and that will do well when we restructure the Ministry, which is slowly happening as we speak. Soon he will be a force to be reckoned with on his own, without the support of Tom. You and Draco have always excelled and flourished with Potions, and are largely respected in that field and both of you don't need Harry or I to back you. All of you have your own strengths that people see and can respect." Lucius finished and then kissed Severus quickly. "So will you please go ahead of Tom and I, and please bring Ron with you?"

"Of course." Severus said as he watched Lucius walk out of the room. He shrugged and left behind his lover. He had to go and find Ron.

"You want me to go early?" Ron asked incredulously, "with Severus?"

"Yes, will that be a problem?" Tom asked. Ron frowned as he thought, helping to smooth Tom's

dress robes as he did.

"No, I just…never mind. It will only be for a little while and then you and Lucius will be right behind us yes?"

"Absolutely, you are merely there to make sure that everything is running as it should." Tom told him gently. Ron nodded and smiled.

"Very well. I'll tell Blaise and Neville to meet me there. I am sure there are some people that Blaise would love to debate with and that should keep me easily amused for the most part." Ron said with a chuckle. Tom rolled his eyes and watched his young lover prepare to depart. "I'll see you soon." Ron smiled and kissed Tom good-bye.

"Yes." Tom said and then Ron was gone.

"So are all the representatives here?" Severus asked Ron as the both made rounds in the large conference hall. Ron nodded.

"Yes, all here and accounted for. The main people that Tom is hoping to talk with are the French, German, and Spanish Ministers of Magick. They are definitely thinking about following our example and revamping their Ministries as well." Ron said. Severus eyed the young man with an appraising look. Ronald Black was much that Ronald Weasely was not. It was quite a good change from where Severus was standing.

"Do you suppose that they will face as much oppositions as we are?" Severus asked him and Ron shook his head.

"No, the only person really opposing us is Dumbledore, and the people who follow him, but he's losing his sway with them." Ron said frowning as he felt some slight tremors shaking the floor. Severus paused too, looking around. Many hadn't even known what happened. "I wonder what that was…" Ron trailed off as another set of tremors, stronger this time, shook the room.

Conversation died down and the various representatives looked around themselves and then down at the floor. Rattling of various objects along the wall and sitting on tables began to steadily vibrate, as the tremors grew stronger and stronger. Severus made his way towards the doors and frowned as he felt wards there, he pushed the door; it wouldn't budge. The room was trembling steadily now and Severus, with more force, pushed at the door again. The wards didn't budge. "Merlin," Severus growled. "What is…?"

"Severus!" Ron called out as the room began to groan, as if put under tremendous pressure. Severus turned towards Ron and then looked up and pushed away from the door as one of the many wood panels crashed into the place that he once stood. Severus scrambled to his feet. The room abruptly became chaotic as people pushed against the various chamber doors, panic rising and rising, as they realized that there was no escaping.

"We have to get them out of here!" Severus growled in Ron's ear as the room shook with earnest.

"What's happening?" Ron asked, his voice steady but his eyes filled with fear and worry.

"Let's not worry about it, we have to get all the representatives out of here." Severus said as calmly as he could. Ron looked him in the eyes and then he whispered.

"Okay, let's do that. The floo system are still working, we have to hurry." Severus nodded and they set to work. As the room caved in around them, and people started screaming in terror, Severus and Ron worked diligently to get as many people through the floo as possible.

Slabs of marble crashed to the floors, wood beams splintered and tumbled, destroying furniture. Dust clouded the air, and blood splattered everywhere as some unsuspecting people met their fate. Ron coughed as dust entered his lungs. He looked around him and quickly grabbed the wizard in front of him as a large marble slab crashed in the spot they hand been standing. Ron looked at the destroyed fireplace in dismay. He grunted as the wizard shoved him into the ground as he crawled to the fireplace moving the pieces of marble carefully with his wand. Ron rolled and looked up and saw a beam falling. "Watch out!" He cried, the wizard looked up and Ron shut his eyes to the horrifying sight of the beam falling directly onto him. Hands pulled him up and stared into Severus' determined face.

"The wards around this room had been triggered to fail." Severus said grimly. "And the wards on the door are still holding."

"Is anything…?"

"Nothing is working, I can't break them." Severus said. Ron looked up and pushed them both against a wall as the room continued to shake apart, and the ceiling continued to rain down on them.

"What are we going to do?" Ron asked, and he blinked, trying to look around but there were only a few people standing any longer. "The fireplace is destroyed, there is no way in or out and it's suicidal to use much magick here to move anything, when everything is falling around our ears!" Severus began to reply but Ron looked over his shoulder to see part of the wall that they were standing by begin to cave under the pressure of the ceiling crushing it and the floor beneath their feet giving way as well. He pushed Severus underneath pieces of the oak table that were still standing and followed him under.

The older wizard curled him into his own body and Ron held on for dear life. Screams of the dying rose to an unbearable pitch and Ron tried to cover his ears to block it out. Severus snatched his hands and put them between their bodies. "Keep your hands close to your body." He said softly, his voice trembling. Ron choked on the dust and pushed his head closer into Severus' neck. He looked up and saw the ceiling finally giving way.

There was pain…

And then nothing.

Lucius had been talking with him. Telling him about the Ministers that were meeting them, and just what they were interested in. It was a standard meeting, and they were nearly ready to go, when Lucius stopped speaking.

Tom had looked up from his notes and he'd seen pain etch itself onto his face, before the man had collapsed before him. Tom vaguely remembered rushing to his feet and calling for one of the house elves. He rolled Lucius' body over and swallowed heavily. Something was really wrong.

Lucius was as limp as a doll. He eyes were open and he was staring unblinkingly at the ceiling. "Lucius? Lucius!" The man remained unresponsive.

The door to the office crashed open and he blinked in surprise as Blaise and Neville ran in. "What the hell are you doing here? You're suppose to be at the Ministry!" He roared. Neville's eyes were red; Blaise's face was ashen.

"Part the of Ministry collapsed." Blaise said tonelessly. Tom stared at him; he felt this sinking sensation travel from his gut to his limbs as he stared at Blaise.

"Where are Ron and Severus?" He heard himself ask. Blaise swallowed heavily and then said thickly.

"They were in that part of the building that collapsed."

Tom stopped breathing. He didn't hear anything Blaise said after that. He looked down at his right hand's unresponsive form and he felt bile in the back of his throat.

"Are there any survivors?" Tom heard the question…had he asked it? He couldn't be sure anymore, nothing was sure to him anymore. The answer that was given haunted him.

"They haven't found them."

R/R! Remember: Don't kill me, I'm already working on the next chapter!

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 15

Disclaimer: I own nothing.

Author's Note: Beta read chapter

Beta: LeeLee

Chapter Fourteen

November 5th

Draco held the cold compress to his father's face and dabbed gently. He straightened the comforter around his waist and then took his hand in his own again. He could feel the tears that wanted to come, but he didn't let them. What was the point? It wouldn't change anything.

News of the Ministry's partial collapse had rung throughout the country like wildfire. People thought it had been a simple mistake, some thought it was an attack against them, and others were just as shocked as Draco that it had happened at all. The death toll was staggering; fingers were beginning to point in every direction, but none of it mattered to him. He just wanted to see his father alive once more and not in this coma-like state.

The Veela doctor that they had rushed over here had looked defeated when he left. There was nothing they could do he'd told them, except wait. Wait for Severus to be found and then bring him here to his mate's side, so that they could both heal. The doctor had explained how lucky they were that Severus was still alive somewhere, but Draco didn't feel that lucky.

The air in the room shifted and Draco felt his mate's presence at his side. "Draco, you must rest." Harry said quietly. Draco shook his head, his throat closed at the thought of leaving his father here, so fragile and vulnerable while he took his rest. "You must, it does Lucius no good for you to tire yourself and – "

"I'm not leaving him!" Draco snapped; a sharp wind knifed through the room, billowing around them with deadly intent. Harry said nothing, but his pain was palpable. Draco stared at him and could feel himself weakening already. Veela hated to hurt their mates, and even though he wasn't full Veela it was still the same for him. He pushed into Harry's arms and held him tightly. "I'm sorry," he whispered, "I didn't mean to hurt you."

"It's alright Draco, I know you didn't mean it. I just want you to be well rested, you have more than yourself or I to think about." Harry told him sadly. Draco could feel him touch his stomach and he winced in guilt. He hadn't been thinking and he knew stress and fatigue played havoc on what he needed to care for his child.

"Take me to our room?" Draco asked quietly and Harry obliged him. Draco barely felt his robes slipping off his shoulders or the gentleness that Harry laid him down into the bed. But he did feel

it when Harry came behind him and wrapped him in his arms. One hand laid on his stomach the other across his chest, Harry kissed his neck, nuzzling him there, and he opened their bond to its capacity and let Draco fall into it's warmth.

"We will find them, do not worry darling, we will find them." Harry's voice was strong and sure. Draco felt the tears come then, as he curled into his mate's body.

"Thank you." He choked out.

"You are most welcome."

Remus opened his eyes and closed them immediately at the brightness of the room seared them. He heard someone move around and a hand clasped his shoulder. "Try again," The voice sounded weary but amused. Remus tried once more and was surprised to see tired crimson eyes gazing back at him. He blinked and sat up, relishing in the pain free movements. His head slightly ached but nothing else was wrong with him.

He watched the man fall into the chair beside his bed with a weary sigh. The man's eyes were sunken as if he hadn't slept in a long time. Black hair fell in a disarray around his pale face and his fine clothes were wrinkled badly. "Who are you?" Remus asked, grimacing at the hoarseness of his voice. The man leaned over and held a glass of water out to him. Remus nodded gratefully and drank half the water in a few hurried gulps.

"We haven't met before? I suppose not. I am Thomas Riddle." Tom said his voice tired and devoid of all emotion. Remus, who had been drinking, choked on the water and began coughing to clear out his lungs. Tom's eyes widened and he reached over and slapped Remus' back. Remus looked at him with wide eyes.

"You look…so different than what was described, I mean what was described before." Remus whispered. He saw flashes of memories in his mind and he narrowed his eyes. "You helped get me here."

"I did, Harry was with me so was Miss Granger." He said softly. Remus nodded and then looked around. Tom read the question in his mind and answered. "You are at Malfoy Manor."

"Where is Harry?" Remus asked. Tom grimaced and paled a bit more. Remus reached for him in concern. "Is everything alright?"

"Harry is comforting Draco. While you have been healing, part of the Ministry building has collapsed." Tom swallowed and continued hoarsely, "Severus and R-Ron were in the part of the building that collapsed; no one can find them underneath the rubble."

Remus watched the man everyone had feared, almost break down in tears. He placed a hand on the nightstand and then slowly swung his legs over the side of the bed. Tom blinked in

confusion. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to help." Remus said in his most stubborn voice. Tom arched an eyebrow.

"You just woke up from having your brains nearly scrambled. You can't go gallivanting off to help people, you need to heal." He said. Remus smiled at him.

"Thank you for saving my life, but if you are here than that means you are unable to go to the site correct? I have a feeling that someone you love is lost in the wreckage and since I know for a fact that Lucius and Severus are mated, then that leaves Ron, am I correct?" Tom slowly nodded. Remus stood up slowly and waited to get his equilibrium before he turned to face Tom again, this time standing on his own. "Let me repay my debt to you and Harry." Remus said in soothing tones. Tom glanced his way before snapping his fingers. A House-elf appeared by his side.

"Get Master Lupin some sturdy clothes and boots and go and gather Lord Harry as well. They will be going to the Ministry."

"Yes, L-Lord Riddle." The House-elf squeaked before vanishing with a loud '*crack'*.

Tom turned to Remus and then reached into his pocket and revealed two vials of potion. "One is a potion to keep you standing, and the other is the nutrients you need."

"How long have you been taking them?"

"The last day and a half." Tom said with a smile. "Find them." Remus nodded.

"We will."

November 6th

He woke up in pain.

Ron coughed as the dust in the air strangled his lungs. It took a few tries to open his eyes, but when he did he was greeted with a vague grey world. Ron bit his lips as he painstakingly turned his body to lie flat on his back. He stared at the massacred table that now pinned him to the ground. "Severus?" He choked out.

Silence.

Ron turned his head and nearly shouted as he met glazed dark eyes, staring unseeingly at him. Blood was caked along Severus' scalp, his arm clearly broken, bone was protruding from his elbow. Ron winced in sympathy and then he hesitantly reached and grasped one of the man's limp wrists. When he felt a sluggish pulse he then closed his hand around the wrist and closed his eyes, leaning slightly against the catatonic figure. Severus had a pulse and his magick was

thrumming inside him in a very fast rate. Ron had heard of instances where magick alone could keep a person alive until proper care could be administered, however he knew there was something else at play.

The Veela bond between Lucius and Severus was keeping them both alive, for how long, Ron didn't even want to guess. Ron gritted his teeth as he tried to shuffle his legs from underneath the heavy wood table. His right leg was moving fine, his left…

Ron cried out as pain knifed through him. He curled as much as he could into a ball and tried not to move until the pain dissipated. By the time the red haze left his eyes he was panting in agony. He looked down at the leg and bile rose in his throat. Muscles and bone protruded at his knee and lower around his ankle. He turned as much as he could before vomiting at the sight. He grimaced at the nasty taste in his mouth and tried to clear the light-headedness that had come over him.

"Okay, okay, we're alive, and they'll find us, they have to." Ron muttered to himself. He got his bearings back and then returned his attention to Severus. He began examining the other wizard's body as best he could without moving his legs too much, but he couldn't find any other wounds except for the head wound. He noticed that there was even more blood underneath Severus black matted locks, so he checked there as well. Severus had hit his head, hard, on the ground when the ceiling had collapsed on top of them. It was probably the reason he was comatose now. The wound wasn't bleeding any longer, but that didn't lessen Ron's worry in the least.

"Hello? Is there anyone else here?" Ron shouted, he waited and he waited but there was no answer. His throat closed and tears burned his eyes as he thought of all the people that hadn't been able to get out. He knew for sure that all the other Ministers of Magick were safe, because he and Severus had been adamant about them being the first to leave, but the others…

"They'll find us," Ron whispered, "They will." He squeezed Severus' shoulder and was relieved to still feel the magick coursing through the man like wildfire. There was nothing more he could do for him. Ron straightened his shoulders and let his eyes track the debris around them. He was afraid to move too much of the splinters of wood beams and marble but he could shift some. He felt around in his robes and pulled out his wand, " *Lumos*." The light was dim but it was enough for him to see bit more than light and dark grey shadows.

He took a steadying breath and set to work.

Harry helped Remus lift another large slab of stone, before they let it crash to the ground at least thirty feet away. Remus was shaking with exertion, and Harry wanted to tell the damn werewolf to rest, but he bit his tongue. Remus would glare him into silence and set back to work. People around them worked in teams of twos and threes, each person taking turns using their magick to slowly move the largest pieces of debris, before manually picking through pieces that they thought could collapse even more on the victims still caught within the lower levels of the Ministry.

Two days. It had been two days since Harry and Remus had joined the search for survivors. It had been three days since the collapse. Blaise and Neville had come back to join them in the search a little while ago. They had been the first volunteers to help try and locate people. The young men were silently working a few feet a way from Harry and Remus; all the other wizards and witches gave them a wide berth.

Everyone knew that Severus Snape and Ronald Black were still unaccounted for and they had been two of nearly twenty more dignitaries that may be dead on one of the lower floors that they had yet uncovered. Harry wiped the sweat from his brow and grimaced as he used his wand to gather up more debris and slowly dump it. He could have moved a lot faster, but the population still didn't know he could use wandless magick and this was clearly not the time to show them.

"Harry," Remus said softly. Harry turned to him and smiled gratefully at the water that was being handed to him.

"Thanks." He said and passed it off to Blaise. Harry turned back to Remus, "Do you sense anything?" Remus shook his head sadly.

"No, nothing but pain and I can smell a lot of blood." Remus murmured. "How is Lucius?"

"No change, but he is still alive." Harry said. He and Draco remained in constant communication through there telepathy. It was spotty, because the distance between them now was so great, but whenever he got even a simple broke message from Draco, Harry was more at ease. Tom was watching over them both, but Harry was worried about him. He hadn't said a word since he'd told the news to Harry and Draco. Harry didn't remember seeing him so despondent before and the way he was acting was the confirmation of the depth of feeling Tom felt for Ron.

Harry shied away from the thoughts of what Tom may do if Ron ended up dead. He shook his head and stared at Remus who had been watching him. "They are still alive. Both of them are too stubborn to die like this." Harry chuckled wearily.

"It's been three days."

"They'll make it. *We* will make it to them in time. There is only one more level to go before we reach the room where they were. One more level Harry." Remus said harshly. Harry nodded and rolled his shoulders. They screamed in exhaustion as did the rest of Harry's body, but he wasn't going to stop.

He couldn't.

Malfoy Manor – Same day…

Narcissa swept up the front stairs of the Manor and knocked on the door. She waited with impatience. When she'd heard of the Ministry catastrophe she'd immediately gone to

Dumbledore, who had reassured her that Lucius was just fine.

"He wasn't even there Lady Malfoy. I assured you that your husband would be well taken care of." Dumbledore had said. Narcissa had glared back at him and replied.

"But Severus is hurt enough not to come looking for him so soon right?" Her words brought an enigmatic smile to Dumbledore's face and he had nodded.

"Of course, a bargain struck is as good as a galleon earned. You will have nothing to worry about."

Now, standing here, Narcissa couldn't wait. With Severus out of the picture for the time being, she could prove to Lucius how indispensable she was. The door finally was opened by a squeaking House elf. Narcissa brushed past her as she made her way to the tall staircase that led to the Master Suite.

"Is there a reason that you are here Lady Malfoy? I was under the impression that Lucius forbid you to come back after you had voluntarily left." Narcissa's spine stiffened as she turned and met the cold crimson gaze of Lord Riddle. He watched her like a snake, poised and ready to pounce.

"I have heard about the Ministry, and I want to make sure Lucius is okay what with Severus so severely hurt and all." She said, her voice dripping with insincere sympathy. Riddle said nothing and Narcissa curtseyed and then continued up the stairs. She saw the double doors leading to Lucius' suite were open so she stepped in and stopped dead in her tracks. "What's wrong with him?" She gasped.

"What does it look like Lady Malfoy?" Riddle's voice was smooth as silk, but it ended in a growl of supreme anger. Narcissa rushed to Lucius' side and a shiver of foreboding ran down her spine. She placed a hand on his forehead and gasped at the heat that emanated from him. His face was ghastly pale, his platinum blond hair was matted and in tangles. His eyes were open but glassy and unseeing. His lips moved silently, no sound seeped from his mouth, but Narcissa watched him and she knew, that he was saying 'Severus', over and over again.

"Why? Why is he like this?" She choked out as she found the basin of ice-cold water sitting on the nightstand, wrung out the cloth, and began dabbing Lucius' brow. Riddle slowly walked up beside her and stared her down. Narcissa swallowed and then she whispered hoarsely, "I had nothing to do with this, if that's what you're thinking!"

Riddle laughed and then replied, "Really? That's interesting; tell me, if you had nothing to do with this, then how did you know that Severus was severely injured? How could you possibly know that when we haven't been able to find Severus or Ron since the collapse?"

Narcissa paled; she'd made a misstep, a large one. "The Headmaster asked me to do him a favor, and in return he said he'd do something for me." She relented after a few moments.

"And what *favor* did you do for Dumbledore?" Riddle asked menacingly. Narcissa slowly backed away, her eyes everywhere but on Riddle. The carpet beneath her feet began to tremble, as did the basing with the water, the nightstand, *everything* was trembling more and more…except where Riddle stood.

"The letters, I sent the letters to all of you." She said. "And I may have told the Headmaster who he need to bribe to get information from you all at your club." She hedged. Riddle said nothing for a few moments and when he was about to reply the door behind them opened and Draco slipped in quietly. "Ah Draconis how are -" She stopped as Draco neared her.

"What the *hell* are you doing here?" Draco snarled, "I should've have known when you came to talk with me in the garden that you were up to something. I shouldn't have even listened to you."

"Draco, you can't think that I had anything to do with this?" Narcissa said aghast. Draco and Riddle snorted; her face flushed in anger. "Draconis -"

"Stop Mother." He narrowed his eyes, looking first at his father and then at her. "What did you think would happen? Did you just think that Severus would be hurt and father would shrug off the pain? Severus is his *mate*! I don't know if I can stress that enough. Severus is *dying* somewhere under the damn bloody Ministry building and he's taking father with him and it's all because of your inability to realize that he will never love you like his mate and Dumbledore's incessant need to be in control of *everything.*"

Narcissa swallowed and looked down at Lucius. Her bottom lip trembled. "I was just tired of everything…" She whispered, but her resolve came back and she looked at her son and replied coolly, "Lucius is my husband and therefore I should be awarded all his attention. Is it so unreasonable what I ask for?"

"Only when you knew from the start that he could never love you like he does Severus." Draco told her. Nothing was said for a moment and then he continued, "I think it is time for you to leave." Narcissa frowned and then Draco bit out, "*Now!*" Riddle put a hand on Draco's arm.

"Calm down Draco, you must think about your child." He reminded him gently. Draco took a deep breath and his eyes narrowed into slits as he stared at his mother. Wind began to pick up around him again and Riddle sighed irritably. "Woman, leave! I will not have you endangering anyone else with your nonsense. You knew what would happen when you married Lucius and you still married him regardless. He's told you time and again as has everyone else. I understand that you feel you've been shortchanged but please believe me when I tell you that Lucius has the utmost respect for you and loves you in his own way. You will just never have his heart and it's best that you stop this foolishness while you can."

Narcissa blinked and looked down at her husband and then back at Riddle and Draco watching her. She understood what they were saying; it was the same thing they'd been telling her for years. She had been a fool to think that anything would changed after the first few years of their marriage and she'd been content with it for a time, but with all the changes that had been going

on, she'd thought that this may change as well. She leaned over Lucius and kissed his brow. "Good bye Lucius." She murmured against his skin. She straightened and smoothed out her dress robed before facing the two other men in the room. "I will be requesting a divorce and I'll have the papers drawn up and signed. They will be brought here in a few days time." She said briskly almost impatiently, but neither Riddle nor Draco was fooled.

"Good day Lady Malfoy." Riddle said softly. She smiled tightly.

"It will be Lady Black shortly; you may as well use it now." She said, "Good day." She kissed Draco's cheek and then left.

Late November 6th

He was so tired. Ron could barley keep his eyes open anymore. He'd moved as many slabs of marble, stone, and wood as he could without moving his leg. The excess energy expended from moving things with his body plus his magick had hit him hard when he stopped. He transfigured some bandages to place around his leg to staunch the flow of blood, as well as Severus' wounds; at least the ones he could see. The older wizard was still alive, but his pulse was getting faint.

Ron closed his eyes and sluggishly opened them again. He knew he had to stay awake. With the blood he'd lost he was lucky to still be aware. He hummed underneath his breath trying to stay awake but it seemed like he was fighting a losing battle. Time passed, and as he drifted he began to hear voices and the grinding of large stones being shifted. Ron turned his head and frowned, pulling his eyes open just the barest inch.

He must be dreaming. Lack of oxygen and blood was making him hallucinate. So tired…

"Ron!" Who was that?

"Ron!" Piercing light cut through his eyelashes and Ron winced. "Ron, don't you dare fall asleep, do you hear me!" Hands grabbed him and that more than anything jarred him into a lucid state.

Emerald green eyes bore into his and Ron blinked slowly up at his friend and said, "It's about time you got here." He heard Harry choke on his laughter and then everything went black.

Harry watched as the Healers laid Severus gently beside Lucius. The Veela doctor hovered over them making doubly sure that they didn't touch Lucius in his state. He then shooed the Healers from the room as he carefully clasped Severus' right hand with Lucius' left. The effect was instantaneous. Lucius let out a keening wail that sounded much like a hawk, before rolling over on top of Severus as wings sprouted from his back and cocooned them both.

Harry said nothing until the Veela doctor left the room with him. "Will they be okay?" He asked. The Veela, Mark, nodded a bit hesitantly.

"They should be Lord Malfoy-Potter; leave plenty of water and food outside their door and just let them be on their own for a few days. Due to the stress of the bond and how long they were apart, it will probably take days, weeks even before they will be able to let each other from their sight."

"Thank you for coming so quickly and for all that you've done." Harry said with a tired smile. Mark smiled back.

"It is of no consequence. Tell your mate not to worry so much; the stress is bad for the baby. I will see you both at Draco's checkup next month. Till then," he waved and disappeared down the hall towards the main doors to the house.

Tom sat beside Ron's still figure. He had said nothing since the Healers had left. Blaise and Neville were sitting in one corner and Draco sat in another, reading over a potions book in silence. Tom laid a hand along Ron's pale face and then he watched as Ron's eyelashes fluttered against his skin before he opened his eyes. Tom held his breath as Ron turned to him.

Ron smiled tenderly at him and placed a shaking hand on top of Tom's as the older man stroked his face. "Welcome back," Tom said hoarsely before leaning down to kiss him gently.

"Mm, love you." Ron whispered and Tom blinked and then he took a deep shuddering breath as Ron fell back to sleep almost immediately. The silence in the room was deafening. He heard the door open and then close softly behind him and yet he didn't move.

"Mm, love you." Ron's words played over and over again in his mind. Tom stretched out beside his…beloved, and clasped his hand. He watched Ron sleep until he too let his exhaustion finally drag him into a deep sleep.

Draco watched Harry read and sign one document after another. He shifted in bed, and immediately Harry turned his attention to him. Draco smiled slyly and sat up, letting the comforter fall into his lap. Harry's eyes widened slightly and then they darkened as they took in his mate.

"Yes Harry?" Draco asked smugly. Harry took off his shirt and then began to unbutton his trousers. He still said nothing but the arousal between them both spiked to new heights. "Would you like something?" Draco asked innocently as he let his gaze boldly roam over Harry's body.

Harry smirked. "You and I want the same thing, don't we dear?" Draco laughed huskily as he reached out and gripped Harry's cock tightly; Harry hissed in pleasure.

"That we do darling, that we do." Draco murmured. Harry pushed Draco back down on the bed, crawled on top of him, holding his weight off the Veela as he kissed him breathless.

That night, their coupling was fast and furious. Harry devoured him and Draco reveled in that fact. He understood that Harry was afraid of losing him, after what had happened the last few days. He couldn't fault his husband in that fear, because he feared for Harry as well.

When Harry climbed off of him, his limp cock sliding from within Draco's body, he held Draco in his arms tightly. Harry didn't let him go the rest of the night and Draco didn't complain.

November 7th

Remus curled up in the Malfoy's massive library, sipping on tea. The house was quiet, but it was a restful quiet now that everyone was where they should be. He was just about to pick up a book when a House elf popped in front of him.

"F-for Master Lu-Lupin!" It squeaked and then was gone. He held the letter in his hand, not wanting to open it, but knowing that if he didn't perhaps something else would go wrong. Remus opened the letter and read its contents. He frowned at the missive and then set it down by his side. He tilted his head to the side in thought and then he smiled.

He knew what he had to do.

R/R!

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 16

Disclaimer: I own nothing.

Author's Note: MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Desolate

Chapter Fifteen

November 8th

Remus stared up at Hogwarts with trepidation, but he knew he had to do this. The missive had been vague, but then again, Dumbledore was always vague when he was trying to get

information out of you. Remus grimaced; he really didn't want to be here. He was still shaky from –whatever- the Headmaster had done to him before. It had only been a few days, but the fact of the matter was, this had to stop.

Dumbledore was wrong; Harry and Tom were actually doing what was right for the population and that was that. Remus pushed open the doors to Hogwarts and let himself in. The halls were deserted for once; the disaster at the Ministry had halted everything and classes had been cancelled. He walked slowly towards the Great Hall; Dumbledore said he'd wanted to meet him there.

"Ah Remus, welcome my boy." Dumbledore's jovial voice grated like nails on a chalkboard. Remus swallowed the nasty retort growing in his mind and simply nodded. He left the door open at his side and made his way over towards the table closest to the door on his left and sat down. Dumbledore tried to approach him but Remus held up his wand, his eyes narrowing.

"As you were Albus," He said respectfully but with force. "I don't know what you did to me last time; however, I am not going to take the chance again."

"I do apologize for that, but you see, I really do need that information that you have." Dumbledore said in a solemn tone. His eyes had yet to lose their spark, but his entire demeanor was more subdued.

Remus didn't believe it for a second. He kept his wand pointed at Dumbledore, his eyes roaming the hall carefully, finding nothing else amiss. "You are looking for information to discredit Harry, isn't that right?"

"Not discredit, merely make him look, weaker, than he truly is. Lesson the impact of his stance so that I may fully gain control of the Ministry like I had planned to do. With Harry backing me, we could do marvelous things for our people." Dumbledore said with a smile. Remus shook his head.

"Harry is not your puppet, nor your weapon. One would think that you would begin to realize to what lengths he would go in order to get away from you. Now that he has a taste of freedom, he will not likely come back."

"And that is why I move against him in different ways."

"You wish to weaken him by discrediting him Dumbledore; him and Thomas Riddle. They have the good graces of the wizards here; people are beginning to see the changes that they have wanted for so long and Harry and Tom are the one who are brining them to fruition. Just because it is not you at the helm, doesn't mean that it will not work." Remus narrowed his eyes, "You are power hungry, and you wish to be ruler here and that is the *only* reason you are pushing Harry so harshly."

Dumbledore said nothing, his eyes began to darken and his expression turned cold. "Well done,

Remus. I would think that after following me so eagerly all these years that you would again just hand me what I want. It seems you have grown a backbone in your absence away from me. I will remember never to let that happen again." Remus swallowed the angry denials. He knew he'd been played for a fool the moment Dumbledore had started questioning him the last time he set foot in the man's office.

"I don't think that you will have to worry about any followers leaving your side with the way you're headed." Remus said quietly. Dumbledore stiffened but said nothing to refute the statement. Remus eyed him warily and with sadness; he would've died for this man once, but after the stories he'd heard in the last year, and the torture he experienced first hand, he didn't think he'd ever be able to respect him again. "Tell me Dumbledore, did you cause the Ministry collapse?"

Silence spread between them from untold amount of time before Dumbledore spoke succinctly, "Yes, I did."

"Why?" Remus asked brokenly, "The death toll is close to over a hundred! And for what, your stupid little games for power! You were messing with people's lives Dumbledore, *good* people, and *innocent* people!" Dumbledore grimaced slightly and he nodded.

"I knew that before I thought up the plan. With Lady Malfoy's help, I was able to deduce that Harry, Lucius, Severus, and Tom were not taking my threat seriously enough. I was also able to find out where and at what time all the other Ministers of Magick were going to be meeting with Tom and Harry to discuss their plans and how to implement them abroad. I couldn't let that happen. My plans would've been ruined. *I* was supposed to implement all these resounding changes, and *I* was to lead this nation; not Harry and certainly not Tom Riddle."

"How does Hermione fit into all of this?" Remus asked, briefly remembering that the girl had been here when Dumbledore had been questioning him.

"Ah yes, Miss Granger has been quite a bit of help. She's been the one relaying messages between Lady Malfoy and myself. She was also the one who was my spy within the Ministry and who locked wards that I had specifically created to make sure most of the damage done was in the room where Tom and Harry's meting was going to take place." He sighed sadly, "It is a shame about what happened to Severus and Ron. I was expecting Tom and Harry, but it all worked out in the end, I guess. Lady Malfoy got what she wanted, which was Severus out of the picture. The meeting that was scheduled to take place can no longer be done because of the demise of the foreign Ministers and due to the seriousness of the accident, the Malfoy's, Harry, and Tom will no longer be an obstacle for me to move at this moment, which leaves me time to do what I do best; clean up the mess."

Remus stared at him, amazed that he'd go to such lengths. "Why did you want to see me?"

"I was hoping that you would tell me what I need to know." Dumbledore said calmly. Remus shook his head.

"The Malfoys, Harry, and Tom, have been good to me. I will not betray their trust in me by telling you what I know. And I have already sent a message to Tom to let him know where I've gone. You don't have time to 'persuade' me to tell you the information you want." Remus said, "Our conversation is over." Remus edged toward the door and walked out of the Great Hall. He made sure that he wasn't followed but he didn't feel safe until he saw the tall figure of Tom waiting for him on the edge of Hogsmeade.

"How did everything go?" Tom asked him, his crimson gaze noticing his every mood.

"He caused the collapse." Remus said, his voice shaking. "I can't believe it but he caused the collapse. He used Lady Malfoy's jealousy and Hermione's willingness to do anything for him, against them. I just -" Remus sighed tiredly, "I just don't want to believe it."

"Would it be easier if we put your memories in a pensive?" Tom asked gently. "Then I can go back and watch it myself." Remus gave him a shaky smile in relief.

"That would be best I think, thank you."

"No worries, come, let's get out of here and get you home. Harry is worried about you and I am not going to be the one to tell him that you went off and talked with Dumbledore without anyone going with you." Tom told him. Remus chuckled and they walked back in companionable silence.

November 10th – Two days later…

Severus curled into the body holding his. He opened his eyes and met the silver gaze of his mate. "Hey," Severus said; his voice was hoarse, and he felt like someone tossed him between a few Beaters, but he was alive.

"Welcome back love." Lucius said softly before kissing him gently. Severus let his eyes rake of Lucius, noticing the he too had been hurt.

"What happened to you?" Severus asked and Lucius didn't pretend not to know what he was talking about.

"I felt your pain, and then there was nothing, but trying to get you back and keep our connection alive." Lucius said thickly. "I almost lost you; I am not letting you out of my sight again." Severus chuckled tiredly but nodded.

"For now," Severus said. He looked at the large white wings that cocooned them from the world and he gently ran a finger down a few. Lucius hissed with pleasure and then moaned. "Your wings were always very sensitive." They chuckled together and then Lucius sighed and kissed Severus' forehead.

"I love you." Lucius breathed. Severus leaned forward, pressing his lips against Lucius' gently.

"And I love you." He murmured against his mate's lips. "Are you ready to greet the world again?" Lucius shook his head. "Can we go back to sleep now?" Severus was exhausted and he wasn't ready to put on his façade again and neither was his love.

Perhaps tomorrow they'd be ready; but not now.

Ron shifted and sighed. He opened his eyes with sheer willpower and then blinked slowly gazing around the dimly lit room. He was home – well, in his and Tom's appointed room in Malfoy Manor. He turned his head slowly and couldn't help but smile as Tom came into view. He was sitting at Ron's side on the bed, his usually groomed hair disheveled; as if he'd run his fingers through it countless times. His crimson eyes glowed in the dim lightly, but it didn't detract from the dark smudges underneath the older man's eyes, nor the grey pallor of his skin. They stared at each other without speaking or moving, until Tom reached out and cupped Ron's face in his hand, thumb caressing his cheek.

"How do you feel?" Tom asked him. Ron sighed.

"As good as anyone would after having a building collapse on top of them." He said. Tom's lips quirked into a small smile, but then faded again.

"The entire building didn't collapse; only part of it. Re-construction has already begun. Most departments were left unscathed."

"How many died?" Ron asked. Tom winced and turned his gaze toward the wall. "Tom, please, how many?"

"The death toll is around two hundred, but there are survivors." Tom told him. "Officials are questioning people as we speak. They wanted to speak with you and Severus a day ago, but Harry turned them away." Ron frowned.

"Harry turned them away? Where were you?" He asked confused.

"I was here, with you." Tom answered. He bowed his head and then looked deep into Ron's dark blue eyes. "I couldn't leave your side until I knew you were safe. I left to help Remus with something two days before and I haven't left since. I – I don't know what I would've done if you had died."

Ron was speechless. Tom wasn't one to speak about his feelings, and this was the closest Ron had ever seen him to bearing his soul. "Tom, I -" Tom looked at him, his eyes filled with shadows, but to Ron, he had never looked more beautiful than he did now.

"When I heard, that you couldn't be found, I nearly regressed to what I was before. I had to force myself to calm down, before I undid all the hard work Severus, Draco, and others put into making this body." Ron looked at him in confusion.

"What are you talking about? You mean you can change back – into you what you were before?" Tom nodded and Ron paled. "How is that possible, I thought Severus told you this solution was permanent?"

"It *is* permanent, Ron, but it's only been a year and a lot of magick was used in setting my ravaged visage right again. I think it will be another year or so before there is no threat of me reverting back at all."

"So this is why you try to keep yourself as calm as possible?" Ron asked, "And when you heard-," Tom nodded and said nothing. Ron moved his hand to rest on Tom's thigh and stroked. "I wish the collapse had never happened. I hate to put you at risk of becoming Voldemort again." Tom snorted.

"I am still that man, just made over. I did terrible things in those years of insanity, that I am not likely to forget and I don't want you to know." Tom said, "I know you've heard the stories, but the reality is a lot worse. I don't want you to know about those times."

"But I want to know everything about you." Ron whispered. "The good, the bad, and the ugly; it won't change what we have." They sat in companionable silence for awhile until Ron spoke up again, "Severus and I were able to get the other Ministers out of the room before it collapsed. I am sure that they would still meet with you and Harry, but not here."

Tom shook his head, "That can wait; I want you well again first." He leaned over and kissed Ron, "Rest and get your strength back up."

"Will you rest with me?" Ron asked. Tom said nothing but stretched out beside Ron in the bed, tucking the young man's body around his and they were both asleep in minutes.

"What were you thinking going there alone?" Harry exclaimed angrily. "After what he did to you- ... I-" Remus held up a hand and sighed.

"Harry nothing happened. We spoke, and I now have all the information you need to bring him down for good." Remus said calmly. The dark scowl on Harry's face didn't fade and Remus sighed heavily; he should've just waited to tell Harry when Tom was with him.

"I don't care about the bloody information; I am more concerned about you! Not only did Dumbledore scramble your brain only a few days ago, you just got back from helping to find Severus and Ron under the remains of part of the Ministry building. You were in no condition to go and confront him, summons or not!" Remus narrowed his eyes at Harry.

"I understand your fear, but I have been old enough to think for myself well before you were even thought of. It was risk, I took it, and I succeeded in what I wanted to get accomplished. Now take the memories that I have stored in this Pensive with better grace than this and let me go back to sleep. As you've just pointed out, I've had a few trying days." Harry blinked and took the Pensive that Remus handed to him. He blushed and ducked his head and then spoke up quietly.

"Sorry for yelling, I just- I don't want anyone else to get hurt."

"I know Harry, don't worry, it's nearly over." Remus said quietly. "Make sure Tom get's those memories and then you can make all of your plans like I know you will."

Harry chuckled and walked away, Pensive in hand.

November 21st – Eleven days later…

Draco helped Severus pour the healing potion they'd been working on into the many vials in front of them. The last week and a half had been relatively quiet. Severus and Ron were fully healed and well again. However Lucius and Tom kept them confined to the house. Draco chuckled quietly to himself, remembering the various 'over-protective bastard' comments Severus had been mumbling under his breath for the last few days.

His pregnancy was progressing well. He was already four months along and just beginning to show. Severus had already restricted which potions he'd be able to work on as he got further along. By next January, Draco wouldn't be able to work on potions at all. He was savoring his freedom for as long as he had it. He had a feeling Harry would become difficult to deal with as he progressed.

"All done," Draco told Severus quietly. The older man nodded absently as he measured dry dragon scales and mixed them into another potion he was brewing. "Is there anything else I can assist you with?"

"Nothing dealing with the Potions, but you could help me sneak out of this palatal estate." Severus sniffed, "Your father is taking this 'not out of my sight' nonsense way too far." Draco smiled.

"There is nothing I can do about that. I am sure it will stop sooner or later."

"I am hoping for the former, not the latter." Severus said dryly. "How is Harry?"

"He is well. Father, Tom, and he are plotting the destruction of Dumbledore to their hearts content in the office." Draco rolled his eyes and Severus arched an eyebrow.

"His destruction now is it?"

"Not really; they are trying to figure out the best way to use the information that they received from looking at Remus' memories. Those memories are damning evidence of how far Dumbledore will go in order to get what he wants. They will hold a lot of sway when brought up to the Ministry." Draco said. Severus nodded but then frowned.

"And do we have enough sway in the Ministry to get this passed directly to the Minister of Magick?" Draco paused as he thought before he nodded slowly.

"I believe we do. You forget that Blaise has his own contacts in the Ministry as do Father and Tom. Harry lost a lot of support siding with us; however his name still holds a lot of sway in what goes on in the Wizarding World. Even Ron is beginning to have a following in the Ministry." Draco said with a soft smile. "I can't be certain, but I am sure it will be enough to at least get Dumbledore to resign from his seat at Hogwarts and in the Ministry."

Severus nodded, "I agree, the memories are damning evidence, but having someone to corroborate everything that he's done to date, would be even better. The Minister of Magick wouldn't be able to turn a blind eye to it all." Draco frowned.

"The only one that would be able to do that is Granger, and I doubt she has the spine to turn against her *precious* Headmaster." Draco said coolly. Severus eyed him thoughtfully.

"She may yet prove useful. After all, if Harry Potter and the former Ronald Weasely could be persuaded to our side, then Granger can be persuaded as well; those three are the most stubborn lot of people I've ever met." Severus sniffed. Draco eyed Severus and then smirked.

"Is that so? Then I am assuming that you haven't counted you, Father, or me in that estimate, because this family happens to be pretty stubborn too." Severus snorted.

"Impudent little brat." He snapped but the warmth in his eyes contradicted his words. Draco chuckled and they went back to work.

Lucius took a healthy swallow of his brandy before turning back towards his desk and to the papers that lay scattered across it. He sat back behind his desk and reread the document that he now knew by heart.

Narcissa had sent over divorce papers.

They were straightforward and to the point. She wanted the dowry that she brought into the family back, which was acceptable. She made no claim on any of the rest of the substantial Malfoy fortune. The only thing she wanted was their summer house in France, which had always been her favorite. It wasn't the divorce that made Lucius uneasy but the fact that she barely asked for anything in return for the twenty years they'd been together. He felt responsible for some of her unhappiness, and if he signed this he'd feel guilty about it for some time to come. However, if

he made his own stipulations, such as a monthly allowance, he knew Narcissa would turn it down flat. She had too much damn pride sometimes – Lucius smiled, but then again so did he.

The smile faded when he thought of what she'd done recently to him and his mate. Watching Remus' memories and hearing Dumbledore wax on and on about all the things he, Granger, and Narcissa had done made Lucius' blood boil. Draco had told him how she had come to the house while he'd be in his coma-like state and then how she'd disappeared again afterwards. If she thought that her asking, and begin granted, the divorce would save her from his wrath, she had another thing coming.

He wrote her a missive and gave it to the House Elf that he'd summoned sometime before. He turned towards the Malfoy garden and smirked. Knowing Narcissa as he did, he knew that she would come. She had far too much more at stake then what she wrote in the divorce papers she had given him.

Harry sipped his hot chocolate quietly as he and Ron sat together in front of the fireplace. For the first time in weeks Ron had been able to come back to the Black Manor and finish up some work that he'd had not gotten to before the Ministry incident. Harry smiled in memory of Ron kissing Tom in the middle of the Malfoy foyer and then stating that he was leaving with Harry to go to the Black Manor. Tom had just nodded with a dazed look on his face and Ron hadn't waited to see if he'd change his mind.

"Did you get all of your work done?" Harry asked. Ron looked over at him and nodded, chuckling to himself.

"It wasn't anything really important; I just really wanted to get out of the house." Ron told him, "Tom was getting a bit too over protective, and I needed a chance to be alone."

"Don't tell Severus, he's been trying to figure out a way to leave as well." Harry said with a smirk.

"Well, Tom doesn't have me bound to him like Lucius does with Sev. We are two ordinary wizards; not a Veela pair." Ron laughed. Harry arched an eyebrow.

"You and Tom are anything but ordinary. You do yourself a discredit. You're a strategist through and through Ron; some of the plans we've implemented wouldn't have gone nearly as well if you hadn't been a part of them." Ron said nothing, but Harry could see him flush with embarrassment. "It is the simple truth, no flattery in sight."

"Speaking of plans; what is the plan to force Dumbledore to concede defeat?" Ron asked him, "I've been in contact with a few other Ministers of Magick outside of Britain; they still want to talk with you and Tom. However, from the discussions, it is a unanimous agreement between those wanting to do business with us, that their safety must be insured." Ron frowned, "we can't have a repeat of last time."

"No we can't." Harry agreed. "We've talked about it. There is a very important meeting coming up where Minister Fudge will be there. That is where we will give our evidence against Dumbledore. It would be better if we had someone corroborate the memories in the pensive; however we will make our justification based on those alone." Ron said nothing but he nodded. The situation was growing steadily out of control.

"When is the exact date of the meeting?" Ron asked softly.

"I believe December 20th, or somewhere around that time."

"I see," Ron murmured. "Harry?"

"What is it Ron?" Harry asked.

"Do you ever wonder, what would've been if we hadn't made the decision that we did?" Ron asked. Harry blinked and him and then frowned.

"I guess, but then again is it really worth thinking about? I have Draco and a child on the way. I have people who care for me, who value my opinion, and I am happy. I'd like to think that if I had stayed the way I was, I would be miserable now, still underneath Dumbledore's thumb." Harry smiled at Ron, "I have everything that I have ever needed, so I don't truly think about it all the time." He turned to Ron again, "do you think about it?"

"Sometimes," Ron murmured, "but like you, I like who I am today, I don't have any regrets."

"That's very good to hear." Harry said bewildered. "What brought that question out?" Ron shrugged.

"Just something I've been thinking about. Based on our choices, our lives are different than what people would think them to be. However to us, the sacrifices that we've made have made our lives better. I wonder if someone set in their ways now would be willing to change."

"It depends on the person, I would guess." Harry shrugged.

"Yes, I guess it does." Ron murmured.

November 28th – One week later…

Hermione had bitten her nails to the quick. She hadn't been responding to Dumbledore's summons, nor had she really been anywhere but at the Ministry, helping to right a wrong that she was ultimately responsible for.

Well, Dumbledore made the wards but she had been the one to cast them.

There was a knock at her door and she quickly placed her hands in her lap and cleared her throat, "It's open." The person that stood in the doorway made her breath hitch in her throat and heart stop in her chest.

Ron Black shrugged effortlessly out of his tailored cloak and bowed his head slightly. "Granger," he said, "I think we have something to discuss."

"Black," Hermione murmured, "And what do we have to talk about?"

"I know what you did to help Dumbledore." Ron told her quietly. "And I want you to defend the evidence that we have against Dumbledore to the Minister of Magick."

Hermione looked at him, her face paling. "H-how did you find out?"

"That's not the point. The point is that this can be over and done with a lot sooner if you help us end it. Dumbledore is a loose cannon; we've seen what he will do in order to get his way. Do you really want to be a part of that anymore than you already are?" He asked coolly.

"No," Hermione said.

"Well then, perhaps we can work together after all. So will you help us?" Ron asked again. Hermione looked up at him, taking a deep breath as she did so.

"Yes. Yes I'll help you and yours."

Ron smiled, "Excellent choice."

R/R!

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 17

Disclaimer: I own nothing.

Author's Note: Last chapter of Nico. MERRY CHRISTMAS! Epilogue coming in a few days.

Desolate

Chapter Sixteen

December 12th – Two weeks later…

The wind curled around him like a lover and Draco smiled minutely before arching his back as much as he could, turning the current of wind into a funnel around him. His robes whipped around him and he gasped when he felt someone touch his shoulder. The soothing hum of the bond told him who it was before he could be alarmed. "Harry, you are home early." He said as his husband kissed him. Harry's eyes were glowing.

"You've learned to control it." Draco grimaced.

"At least partly," Draco retorted, "Sometimes it still gets out of control. Father and Severus think that when I finally give birth everything will right itself." Draco shrugged as he placed a hand to his stomach a small, gentle smile flitting across his lips. "I told them that I should still learn just it case it is needed." Harry arched an eyebrow.

"Needed for what? You aren't moving a muscle without me knowing it." Harry said calmly as if he were stating a fact. Draco chuckled and kissed him gently before nipping Harry's lips.

"I'm the one who's supposed to be all possessive and ultra protective." Harry laughed.

"We'll share the responsibility." He said placing his hand on Draco stomach. His eyes widened when he felt the slight kick of the baby. "Draco," Harry breathed and Draco smiled at him. "When did the baby start moving?"

"Just recently, you'll be able to feel him or her more often now. I'm about five months pregnant; right on schedule," Harry rolled his eyes but he couldn't stop form grinning like a fool.

"Whatever you say Draco." Harry said softly. He walked Draco back towards their home and into his study. Draco felt the change in the air and he frowned.

"Is there some news that I should be aware of?" Draco asked. Harry sighed and ran his fingers through his hair, a sure sign of his agitation.

"We'll be meeting with the Minister of Magick at the end of next week. The charges that we brought up against Dumbledore were taken seriously, which surprises me."

"You thought that we'd face some opposition?" Draco asked. "The times are changing; you and Tom have many allies now."

"I know, but I was sure it wouldn't be so easy." Harry said.

"You think he has something planned." Draco stated. Harry shook his head.

"Not really, it's a little late for playing any games and the Ministry is watching his movements. No, I am more worried about the fact that the Weasely family will be there." Draco frowned.

"What for? Are you worried that Ron will turn back to them?"

"No, as soon as they figure out that Ron is Tom's lover, they will sever ties."

"Darling, they've already done that. They disowned him publicly." Draco said gently, "The only way they can hurt him now is if he allows it. Ron's grown up just as much as you and I have during this last year. He will not fall so easily again. Have Blaise and Neville stand by him when we go to court, that will give him confidence if you think it may wane. You shouldn't be thinking about things like this; what's more important is you being ready to testify. Let me handle everything else."

Harry smiled at the note of disapproval in Draco's voice. Harry had learned that Draco was very subtle in his thinking. He was a grand manipulator and he did it so well that Harry let him be. As long as Draco was safe, Harry let him do whatever he wanted. Half of the machinations Tom, Lucius, and he came up with were fine tuned by Draco or Ron or both of them. Tom and he joked that if they turned their backs, Ron and Draco would take over the world. "Very well Draco."

"You have nothing to worry about," Draco said haughtily, "you'll be just fine, we all will."

"I love your confidence." Harry said teasingly. Draco arched an eyebrow and then smirked.

"Thank you, I love that you let me do what I wish. I couldn't ask for more from a spouse." They stared at each other; their deeper feelings felt between their bond, but never said. Draco had known he loved Harry for many months now and he felt that his feelings were reciprocated. Why could neither of them speak the words? Who knew? They surely didn't, but it was there, it was known and for now, that is just how it would have to be.

"Would you like to hear a few of the items we plan to discuss?" Harry asked him after a moment. Draco patted the spot beside him and Harry sprawled out, laying his head in Draco's lap, and began to speak about their plans.

Ron stood in front of the twins' joke shop, wanting to go in, but not wanting a confrontation. He'd seen his Moth—Molly and Arthur Weasely walk into the shop a few moments before and he really didn't want to fight with them. It had been months since his disownment and then his adoption into the Black family. He shouldn't still feel like this but, it was what it was.

Ron sighed heavily, squaring his shoulders before he stepped into the shop. Fred turned towards him, his eyes widening and then he just grinned. "Hey Black, what can I do for you today?" He said cheerfully. Molly and Arthur stiffened and turned toward him. They looked older to him, a bit more grayed around the edges, stress and tension lining their bodies.

"Mr. and Mrs. Weasely," He said calmly, a fist clenching his heart as he did. This was not his choice; Molly had made the first move and he'd done his best to make good choices afterwards.

"Lord Black," Arthur said hesitantly, his blue eyes becoming glassy with unshed tears. "Um h-how a-are you?"

"I am doing well, just checking on my investment." He said smoothly. "How's business Fred and where is George?"

"Ah he's in the back cooking up something!" Fred cackled and Ron grinned. They conversed for a bit and then Fred went to join his brother. The silence in the wake of Fred was deafening. Ron couldn't think of a single thing to say to his former parents. He thought that he'd have so much anger to spew at them, so much bitterness, but all he felt was pity for them and joy in his changed circumstances.

"You will not win in court." Molly said coldly. Ron smiled.

"We will see." He said as he bowed slightly to both of them, and left.

December 18th – Zabini Manor

Neville double-checked that everyone had a drink before sitting down next to Ron. The Malfoy's including Tom, Ron and Remus, all came to their house to have dinner and have a relaxing evening before the trial tomorrow. It was good to see Ron so well after the building collapse. "How are you enjoying your evening?" Neville asked. Ron blinked out of his reverie and smiled.

"Dinner was fantastic Nev, thank you for inviting us." Ron told him. Neville grinned.

"It's nothing for our extended family." Neville said graciously. Ron blinked and Neville frowned in concern. "What is it?"

"You both consider all of us family?" He asked incredulously. Neville smiled.

"Of course we do, after all we've been through this year, I'd say this groups is probably closer than most. Especially since all of us are from Slytherin. It makes it quite a sight to see so many from that House in one place acting cordially." Ron laughed at that.

"Yes that is true, but I thought that you and Blaise would be, I guess a little upset after -," Neville placed a hand on Ron's arm to stop him from speaking.

"Blaise and I aren't upset at all. It was always your choice Ron and we would've been happy to include you in our lives as a lover. You chose differently," Neville said. "We were hurt a little that you didn't choose us, but it's all in the past. You're happy. Blaise and I can see that, and we're

happy for you and Tom." Ron swallowed but he gave Neville a smile.

"Thank you for being there for me, I don't think I've told you how much you and Blaise helped me through those last months of school." Neville shook his head.

"There is no need to thank us Ron, we did it because we wanted to. Now, go and see to your lover, he's shooting daggers at me." Ron looked up to see a frown marring Tom's face as he watched them. Ron sighed in exasperation but patted Neville's thigh as he stood and went to Tom. Neville watched Tom immediately place an arm around Ron's waist, dragging him close to his body. He watched as Ron relaxed completely into his lover and smile at him. Instantly Tom's entire demeanor changed and Neville shook his head, laughed quietly.

"What's so funny beloved?" Blaise murmured. Neville tilted his head in the couple's general direction. Blaise followed the movement and then grinned. "I wonder when Tom will realize that Ron has him wrapped around his little finger."

"I think he knows already, he just chooses not to admit to anyone." Neville murmured. Blaise kissed him and went to talk with Lucius and Neville went to talk with Harry and Draco.

"It was good seeing them." Ron murmured as Tom stepped out of the flames into their sitting room at Riddle Manor. Tom said nothing but he nodded, taking Ron's cloak and his own handing them both to the waiting House Elf. Ron watched Tom pour them both a glass of wine, silently. Ron frowned in concern. There was a tension in his lover that hadn't been there before they left Zabini Manor. Ron was perplexed as to what could've caused it in such a short span of time.

"Do you believe in fate, Ron?" Tom asked him quietly. Ron frowned, putting his wineglass down and joining Tom as the older man stared out across the black expanse of their garden.

"I do; everything happens for a reason." Ron grimaced. "I may not always like it, but then again, things usually turn around in the end. Why do you ask?" Tom didn't say anything for a few minutes but he finally replied.

"I wonder sometimes, what would've become of me if I hadn't come back from the madness I was stuck in. I think about how far Harry has come and wonder if we'd still been enemies would he be as ready to handle the burden that rests on his shoulders, as he is now from being under my tutelage."

"What do you think would've happened?" Ron asked. "Many of the changes in Harry began with him being the mate of Draco Malfoy. So what do you think would happen if none of that happened?"

"I would've died." Tom said bluntly, "Harry would've killed me, the Malfoy family would be ruined probably, and you—you would be married to Granger with your own brood of children. That is my best guess." Tom sighed heavily, "Fate is such a fickle mistress. One simple thought, one simple change, and your fate has changed with it. Who's to say which fate would've been

better, we play the hand we are dealt."

"If you know that, then why are you worrying over it so?" Ron asked him. "Yes—life is built on our choices, once we make a choice for right or wrong our fate has changed. Harry chose to not let Draco die and become his mate. I chose to follow Harry for right or wrong and I lost everything that I had held dear." Tom winced and jerked away, but Ron cupped his face in his hands. "And then I was given a new name, a new family, and a lover who understands me and never underestimates me. I have a life I could only dream about and I wouldn't trade it for the world." Ron whispered.

"Do you regret choosing me?" Tom asked.

"No," Ron said vehemently. "I don't regret any decision I've made this year, especially that one. Blaise and Neville had something that I thought I wanted, but it pales in comparison to what we've built together. Don't ever doubt what I feel for you!" Ron said angrily. Tom's crimson eyes glowed fiercely at that.

"And what do you feel for me?"

"I love you." Ron said simply. He kissed Tom, and walked out of the room, saying nothing more. He didn't get far before Tom whirled him around and kissed him passionately. Ron wrapped his arms around the man and gasped as Tom wrenched away.

"I love you too." Tom said raggedly. Ron felt himself smile as he yanked Tom's head back down and kissed him again.

December 19th – Ministry of Magick

"I thought you said that you wanted me to come to the Manor." Narcissa said coolly. Lucius smiled and shook his head.

"I changed my mind." He said. "This is an excellent place to meet anyway. Come you must sit with us while Dumbledore's trial takes place." Narcissa was wary of him, he could tell, but it didn't stop her from taking a seat close to the trial floor with the rest of them. Lucius, Severus, and Remus all sat side by side on the first bench lining the floor. Harry, Draco, Blaise and Neville, sat behind them one bench higher. Tom and Ron were sitting on the other side of Narcissa. Both had inclined their heads toward her, but said nothing. Draco murmured a greeting and then the Minister of Magick, Minister Fudge, strode through the doors, effectively cutting off anything else anyone could say.

Dumbledore was brought in after Minister Fudge and he took the stand, his jovial attitude fully in place, talking and laughing with certain people who were still aligned with him. A pensive sat before Minister Fudge and he placed it slightly to his right, the audience's left, before asking for silence.

"This is a most unusual case, however, after seeing some of the evidence I am concerned." Minister Fudge said haughtily. Lucius fought a sneer; the man was a pompous idiot. He was reading from a script that Lucius and Draco had prepared themselves. If they hadn't done that, he'd make a fool of himself on the podium. "It has been brought to my attention, by the Lords Lucius Malfoy, Thomas Riddle, and Harry Malfoy-Potter, that Headmaster Dumbledore is responsible for the collapse of the southern corridor of our Ministry."

The crowd roared, some with surprise, other with indignations, but still some people sat quietly and murmured amongst themselves and said nothing more. Once the audience had calmed down Fudge went onto say, "It is quite a surprise however there is evidence of his confession, from the memories of Remus Lupin, who everyone here knows was a staunch supporter of Dumbledore for years." Fudge turned to Dumbledore, "but first we'd like to hear what you have to say against these charges."

"I thought you'd never ask." Dumbledore said with a smile. Lucius felt Severus squeeze his thigh in warning. Dumbledore spoke of all his trials and tribulations trying to make the Wizarding world come back from the brink of disaster. He explained his reasoning for keeping Harry in the dark, backing the Weasely's in their decision to disown Ron and reimburse them their money. The only thing that he really couldn't talk his way out of was the Ministry collapse; it was the one thing he never touched on.

Draco and Lucius had thought he would try to gloss over it and Lucius smiled minutely as their plans came to fruition. "Dumbledore, you have forgotten to discuss the part that you played in the Ministry collapsing." Fudge said. Dumbledore paused and then smiled.

"Well, I'm sure you've all seen the memories in the Pensive; but are you sure the memories have been unaltered. I mean, I've known Tom and Lucius for a long time and they are not above a few tricks of their own to get their way." Dumbledore murmured. A murmur of agreement flowed through the room. Lucius and Tom both frowned but said nothing.

Dumbledore had them; he knew it. All he had to do was put a seed of doubt in the minds of the people and he would win. There was a knock on the door and Hermione Granger appeared in the doorway. Dumbledore's eyes widened but nothing else gave away his surprise. Fudge looked at Hermione with open surprise.

"Is there a reason you are present Ms. Granger?" Fudge asked. Ron chuckled softly at Tom's side and Lucius looked at him curiously.

"I am here to testify against Headmaster Dumbledore. He planned for the deaths of Harry Potter and Lucius Malfoy when he told me to initiate the sequence of spells and wards to cause the Ministry collapse."

The silence was deafening.

Narcissa watched in awe as Hermione Granger actually went against Dumbledore. She gave Fudge her memories and her statements, all the while Dumbledore watched her and then watched the crowd. Narcissa watched as the crowd became horrified at the lengths that Dumbledore had gone through. When her name came up in the discussion, she paled in horror as all those eyes swung in her direction.

Narcissa sat, her head held high as Hermione also listed her transgressions as well. The turmoil that was always churning within her fell quiet and her mind became at ease. She should've expected something like this from Lucius; she had known that he would not let her go so lightly after all the pain she'd put him…and Severus through.

It seemed this was her time to reap what she'd sown for many years. A hand squeezed her own and she looked to her side and saw Lucius give her a slow wink. She smirked herself; his manipulations were one of the reasons she'd wanted him so badly, a Slytherin through and through. She could appreciate this humiliating experience just keeping that in mind, however, it didn't mean that she wouldn't get him back in other ways, of course.

December 20th

Dumbledore was sentenced to serve time in Azkaban.

Hermione Granger was stripped of her current job, including her access to the Ministry. She too, was sentenced to serve time in Azkaban.

Narcissa Malfoy didn't receive an Azkaban sentence, but she was sent to a center that dealt specifically with Veela mates who had lost or were separated from their life mates. It seemed fitting that she was sent there; in order to see the pain and agony most of the people were in and how what she had done, could've destroyed Lucius and Severus.

Harry walked through the Ministry, Ron by his side, after hearing the verdict. It was anticlimactic in his mind, but the weight of relief in his mind, said otherwise. "It's over," Ron murmured as they walked down the street.

"Didn't feel like it would ever happen, did it?" Harry said with a smirk. Ron laughed and shook his head.

"Of course it didn't." Ron said with a smile. "I wonder how long Dumbledore will be there."

"The minimum sentence in Azkaban is 5 years. We'll see what happens after that point. Regardless, he will not be allowed to go back to Hogwarts and be Headmaster. Minerva has been made acting Headmistress and Remus is there now acting as her Deputy; it will all work out in the end."

"And you, what will you do now?" Ron asked; Harry shrugged but then grinned.

"Well, I'm sure Lucius and Tom will keep me plenty busy, as will Draco when the baby arrives." Harry eyed Ron, "And what are you going to do?"

"I don't know really, learn more about the Black estate, and help Tom in any way I can, and of course spoil my godchild." Ron finished with a laugh and Harry smiled.

December 24th – Malfoy Manor

Draco looked at the Christmas tree that dominated the family room. The smell of pine surrounded him and the lights made the room glow. He smiled to himself as he watched his family. Harry was trying – and failing- to beat Ron at a chess game. Lucius and Severus were talking with each other in low tones together. Remus was in discussion with Tom about something or other, but Draco really couldn't be bothered by it. Christmas was the next day, Dumbledore was taken care of, and he had his mate and child with him by his side.

Nothing could be better than this.

December 25th – Christmas Day

Ron blinked at the rays of sunshine filtered through the heavy curtains. He felt a kiss on his nape and he smiled, turning to face his lover. "Happy Christmas, love." Ron murmured. Tom smiled and kissed him gently.

"Happy Christmas," He said and then grinned, "Now, close your eyes." Ron blinked but did as he was bid. Whatever Tom did, he did it quickly. "Open your eyes." Ron opened them and he looked around them before lifting his hand to run through his hair; it was then he saw the ring. It was gorgeous; a platinum band with an onyx and ruby stone embedded in it. "Don't take it off; we're engaged now." Tom said haughtily.

Ron fell back on the bed and laughed.

Harry turned to his husband and smiled. "What are you so happy about?"

"What do you mean?" Draco asked frowning slightly.

"You were humming." Harry said chuckling. Draco blinked and blushed slightly.

"I'm just happy." Draco said and then looked around the room until he found Tom and Ron standing together beside the dining room table. "It's been a long journey for all of us. Just last year we weren't even sure if we'd still be together, let alone happy. And now Thomas Riddle and

your best mate are getting married, Remus Lupin is a permanent resident at Malfoy Manor, and my father and Severus are together as they should be." Draco snorted, "What else could you do for me or tell me that could beat this?" Harry smirked and then leaned forward, placing a hand on Draco's gently protruding stomach as he kissed him.

"I love you." Harry said simply and then chuckled, "Never change, Draco, never change." Draco was speechless. "Well, how did that rate?"

"Off the charts," Draco murmured and then pulled Harry down to him and kissed him. "I love you too, you cheeky bastard." Harry laughed and tugged him off the couch.

"Happy Christmas Draco," He said in his ear. Draco leaned against him.

"Happy Christmas."

R/R!

#####
#####
#####

Chapter: 18

Disclaimer: I own nothing.

Author's Note: I am so sorry for the long wait. Work pretty much consumed all of my time this past month and I've been neglecting a lot of things that should have been done ages ago. So here it is, the final chapter. I'm very happy with those of you who continue to put up with me! It's great hearing all of the varied feedback! I have one more HP fic that I will be posting at the end of February and then I'm going to take a break and work on my original novel. I hope to be a published author by the end of this year!

Please enjoy and thanks again for reading!

This has been beta read by the lovely LeeLee.

Desolate

Epilogue

Malfoy-Potter Manor – Six ½ years later…

"Papa, when is Daddy coming home?"

"He will be home in an hour, darling."

"Papa, when will Uncle Ron and Uncle Tom be coming over?"

"They will be here in thirty minutes."

"Papa, will Grandpa Luc and Grandpa Sev be coming too?"

"Yes, sweetie they will."

"And Grandpa Remus too?"

"Yes, darling Grandpa Remus too."

"Papa, how come Grandpa Luc and Grandpa Sev and Grandpa Remus all sleep together all the time? Do they have big boy sleepovers every day?" Draco coughed, and set his teacup down and turned to his son; his very inquisitive, bright, and *nosy* son. Innocent green eyes looked back at him, and while Damian waited for his response, he began to tug at Draco's hair.

"Damian, where did you get that idea?" Draco asked.

"I saw them one time." He said cheerfully. Draco rolled his eyes and chuckled; he'd have to tell his father to be a bit more discreet.

"Well, they love each other, so it's acceptable for them to sleep together all the time."

"Oh, are they married, like you and Daddy?" Damian asked. Draco blinked and then smiled hesitantly. He wondered how he could explain his father's complex relationship to a six year old, but he settled for the complex truth of the matter. He and Harry tried to treat Damian like a little adult instead of a child. It seemed to be working—a little too well.

"Grandpa Lucius and Grandpa Severus are married. And Grandpa Remus is their lover. I'm not sure if they can marry Grandpa Remus, but they are happy all the same."

"Oh, okay!" Damian said. There was a knock at their front door and Damian started his usual mad dash to the door. Draco arched an eyebrow and lifted his hand; a gentle gust of wind slammed the family room door shut before Damian could bulldoze his way through. The little boy stopped and turned to his father.

"What have I told you about running in this house?" Draco asked coolly. Damian hung his head and began shuffling his feet.

"It is not becoming of a young man to run through the house. He must walk at all times." Damian

quoted with a sheepish smile that reminded Draco very much of his husband. Harry and Damian were going to be the death of him; Draco was sure of it. With a flick of his wrist Draco let the doors open again. This time, Damian walked to the front door. "It's Uncle Tom and Uncle Ron!" Damian yelled. Draco paused before taking a sip of his tea.

They were going to have to work a bit harder on using 'indoor' voices.

Harry heard his son before he saw him and a gentle smile spread across his face. "Daddy!" Damian barreled into him and Harry laughed as he picked him up, hugging him tightly.

"How is my little man?" Harry said and Damian puffed out his little chest his emerald eyes gleaming.

"Good, Uncle Tom and Uncle Ron are here. Grandpa Remus is here, but not Grandpa Luc and Grandpa Sev." Damian pouted. Harry sighed; Lucius and Severus had to be the boy's favorite adults, Remus came a very close second. They spoiled him rotten.

"I am sure that they are late for a very good reason. Now don't pout, Grandpa Remus will take very good care of you I'm sure." Harry said soothingly. Damian beamed.

"Grandpa Remus gave me candy!" Harry rolled his eyes as he set Damian on his feet and watched him run back towards the family room. Lucius, Severus, and Remus were going to undo just about every rule he and Draco had put in place. It would be amusing if it weren't so annoying at the same time. He followed his son at a more sedate pace into the family room and smiled in greetings at everyone present, before he did a double take in Ron's direction.

"How…?" Ron's deep blue eyes flashed in amusement and Tom laughed as he placed a hand along Ron's slightly protruding stomach. "I thought wizards couldn't become pregnant?"

"I did as well." Ron said rolling his eyes and then he turned to his husband. "But I shouldn't be surprised, considering who I am married to."

"I don't think this has ever happened before." Remus murmured. "I am sure that Medi-Wizards around the world would want to discuss it with you. Congratulations, Ron and Tom, I'm sure you both are delighted."

"We are very delighted. Although it took some time to get use to the idea." Tom said, "I was quite worried about him for a while."

"Congratulations," Draco murmured and then he grinned in Ron's direction. "If you need help with anything just let me know." Ron flushed but he nodded. Harry had finally sat down next to his husband and was still looking shocked. "Don't worry dear heart, you won't get pregnant. At least I don't think so." Draco said slyly.

Harry glared at everyone as they laughed.

The Next Day…

"I need that paperwork by tomorrow Miss Granger, and then you can start on the other tasks I have for you." Tom said without looking up from his scrolls in front of him. Hermione nodded as she scribbled another notation.

"Yes Lord Riddle. You and Ron are scheduled to talk with Minister Gonzalez two days from now, will you still be keeping that or does it need to be pushed back?"

"Keep it, and book us a room close to the Spanish Ministry."

"Yes milord." Hermione said; he waved a dismissive hand in her direction and she turned promptly closing the door behind her. It had been a year since she began work as Lord Riddle's secretary; a year and a half since she was let out of Azkaban. While serving her time, she had been able to think long and hard about what she'd done and the best way to atone for the mistakes she'd made.

However, it was hard to find anyone to hire her when she got out and that was when Tom Riddle had approached her with an offer she would have been a fool to refuse. She'd work for him as his secretary, a job he knew that she'd excel at. After a few years he'd put in a good word for her to have her records expunged so that she could get a job anywhere, except the Ministry.

So far, Hermione didn't think she'd leave his services ever. He was a hard taskmaster, but he rewarded her as any other employer would. She was happy and content. As she passed the foyer a knock at the main doors made her pause. The knocking continued, and Hermione went and opened the door. She blinked in shock as she stared at Mr. and Mrs. Weasely.

"Hermione," Arthur said surprised, "what are you doing here?"

"I work for Lord Riddle." Hermione said and she frowned. "What are you doing here?"

"W-we want to see our son." Molly Weasely sniffed. Hermione scowled and turned to face her.

"He isn't your son anymore or have you conveniently forgotten that you disowned him?" Hermione said coolly. Molly and Arthur both had the grace to blush, but Hermione still didn't let them inside. "What do you want to see him for?"

"We just -," Arthur's eyes widened at something behind her; Hermione turned and saw Ron standing there.

"Mr. and Mrs. Weasely," Ron said coolly.

"Hello, Ron." Arthur said with a nervous smile. Ron didn't smile back; he took a step forward and Hermione opened the door wider so that he could talk to them face to face. Molly's face paled a bit as she took in Ron's condition.

"H-how far along are you?"

"Four months." Ron said. "What do you want?"

"Just to see you," Arthur said hastily. Ron narrowed his eyes.

"Why? It's been nearly 7 years since we've seen each other, why come now? What do you want from me?" He snapped. Hermione placed a hand on his arm in warning. The Medi-Wizard had told Tom and Ron both that Ron needed to stay relaxed and well rested throughout the pregnancy. "I'm fine." Ron told Hermione. He turned to face the Weasely's; his jaw tight. "Please leave," He said with quiet finality and closed the door in their faces. Hermione watched the emotion flit across his face before it disappeared entirely. "Please don't tell Tom." He murmured before walking towards the gardens.

Hermione looked back down the hall from where she'd come from and stared at the man who stood as still as stone but rage filled his crimson gaze. "L-Lord Riddle?"

"Go one your way. And do not let him know I saw." Tom murmured. Hermione turned smartly and walked back to her office. She heard the front door open, but she didn't stay long enough to hear what was said.

Tom watched the Weasely's, his eyes glowing softly. "Never darken my doorstep again." He said. "You've done enough damage to last a lifetime." Molly said nothing but she glared at him. Arthur took a step forward and swallowed hard before he spoke.

"We just wanted to see Ron that's all. Tell him he can come back to the f-family," Arthur didn't get a chance to finish before Tom laughed.

"He has his family right here; at Malfoy Manor, at Malfoy-Potter Manor, at Zabini Manor. He even has his twin brothers Fred and George, but he will never have you again, because you disowned him." Tom said coldly. "Or did you conveniently forget that minute detail?"

Arthur flushed and lowered his gaze. Molly swallowed heavily and she wouldn't meet Tom's steady gaze at all. Tom turned and opened the door to his home once more and said over his shoulder, "You made your bed, so lie in it."

The door slammed shut behind him and this time it didn't open again.

Malfoy Manor

"Damian missed you both yesterday." Remus murmured. Lucius hummed as he finished a notation in whatever document he was working on. Severus chuckled as he flicked Remus' nose before turning back to his book.

"I am sure," Lucius said with a smile, "However, Severus and I went to talk with Narcissa."

"Oh? And how is she doing?"

"Very well apparently; she has found a lover and is happily following him to France." Lucius smirked, "If working at the facility softened her heart any in the matter of mated Veela pairs, I could not tell the difference. Could you Sev?"

"No, she seemed her normal bitchy self." Severus said scathingly.

Remus laughed out loud and then shook his head. "Sadly Lucius, I doubt Severus cares a bit one way or another."

Severus snorted. "Of course not, I have the two of you and she's gone, what else could I possibly need?"

Remus laid his head on Severus shoulder and smiled as Severus took his hand and gave it a squeeze. Lucius looked on with a quiet smile, before turning back to the work in front of him.

Malfoy-Potter Manor

"Have you told Lucius about what Damian said?" Harry asked with a chuckle. Draco smirked and shook his head.

"No, I've decided to wait a few days. It will be worth it to see the look on his face. Remus and Sev are going to be thoroughly embarrassed that Damian caught them." Draco murmured beside him. "Blaise and Neville will be coming by sometime this weekend for a visit."

"Blaise finally pried Neville away from his beloved plants?" Harry asked with a laugh. "Ever since he became a Herbology professor he's been in that greenhouse day and night."

"Well Blaise, has been very busy in the Ministry lately."

"True, Dumbledore's been resentenced to serve another 10 years in Azkaban." Harry said, "Blaise updated me today. Apparently he still believes his way was the right way all along. He hasn't changed."

"Did you really think he would?" Draco asked with a raised brow. Harry shrugged.

"I had hoped; he wasn't all bad Draco."

"No; but then who really is? Some would say that Tom is all bad and we know that's not the case."

"Yeah, but he *could've* been." Harry pointed out and Draco nodded.

"Yes, he could have, but then again everyone has the *potential* to be truly a lost cause. No one was created perfectly." Draco murmured. "But there is no point to worry about it; what's done is done. And we have to make plans to spoil our god-child." Draco smiled and Harry rolled his eyes.

"I still can't believe Ron is pregnant."

"Like he said, look at who he is married to and you shouldn't be all that surprised." Draco said with a laugh and then he turned to Harry and kissed him soundly on the lips. "I am very pleased I married you Harry Malfoy-Potter."

"And I am very pleased I married you Draco Malfoy-Potter." Harry smiled, tangling their fingers together as he followed his husband back into their home. He *was* very pleased he'd married Draco.

In fact, he thought it was the best decision he'd ever make.

The End.

R/R!